

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
June 14, 2015

Lesson Text: Amos 5:14-15, 18-27
Lesson Title: God Is Not Fooled

Introduction

The prophet Amos preached to Israel and Judah over 700 years before the time of Christ. He preached in a day of material prosperity and spiritual poverty. The spiritual life of both Israel and Judah had steadily spiraled downward with no end in sight. While political peace resulted from the leadership of king Uzziah (Judah, southern kingdom) and king Jeroboam II (Israel, northern kingdom), spiritual turmoil erupted in the society of God's chosen people. To quote the Psalmist, God is "*grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their hearts...*" (Psalm 95:10).

Amos was deeply moved by the sin that had divided his beloved nation and the Davidic dynasty. David's mighty house, the united kingdom of Israel had been reduced to nothing. Amos wrote, "*In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen...*" (Amos 9:11). The Hebrew word for "tabernacle" means "hut." It referred to a booth or shack made of flimsy materials used solely as a temporary dwelling. Sin had reduced a beautiful kingdom into an object of scorn.

The fifth chapter of Amos marks the beginning of the third in a series of five sermons on judgment preached by Amos. It records many of Israel's sins and transgressions. Keep in mind the conditions that were prevalent in Israel at this time: political and military power under King Jeroboam II, economic prosperity, outward religious prosperity, inward spiritual decline, poverty, and injustice.

Amos 5:11 is a key verse that sets the tone for the entire chapter. It describes both the sin and punishment of the rich. It is not sinful to be wealthy, but the Scripture warns ill-gotten riches and abuse of others through wealth is sin. Amos said the rich of his day were able to build houses and vineyards because they took advantage of the poor. When you read Amos' words it is a reminder of how much God cared about common people and everyday life. Buying, selling, borrowing money for homes, and simple business deals were noticed by God. It is also a reminder that God knows what occurs and He will not be fooled. Every person who engages in dishonest dealings with others will one day suffer under the righteous judgment of God.

God's Appeal to Israel (Amos 5:14-15)

God's exposure and rebuke of Israel's sins are combined with a gracious appeal to return to him. God is intolerant toward injustice and sin but He is also longsuffering because of His desire to see men repent and be saved. God will exact justice; he will not tolerate man's wickedness forever.

Verse 14

"Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken."

The very people who were committing the sins Amos cataloged were openly saying, "The LORD is with us." That was arrogant self-confidence on display. They were boasting the Lord was with them because of the economic prosperity and peace they enjoyed. Real blessing would cost more than simply mouthing pious phrases. If they wanted the real blessing of the Lord they must "seek good, and not evil."

"Seek good, and not evil" requires a radical change in the way God's people were living. The word "seek" is used five times in Amos 5 (vv.4, 5, 6, 8, 14). The word means "to inquire, ask, and search." The need for seeking the Lord was greater than their movement toward the religious shrines and altars in Bethel and Gilgal (Amos 5:5). If there was any hope, they needed to move toward God. God is saying in spite of where you are and what you have done, if you will "seek" me, you can "live."

Their "evil" ways must be stopped and the "good" ways of the Lord must be sought. The people were saying "the God of hosts," or "God of armies" was with them. That was just talk as far as Amos was concerned. Amos is saying, "You talk about God, the God of armies, being with you. Well, live like it and maybe he will be!"

It is evident from listening to people that they believe the Lord is with them while they are living in sin and condoning sin in others. Today, when a preacher, like Amos, denounces sin, or takes a stand for righteousness, he is often accused of hatred or bigotry. Such response is evidence of mankind's ultimate ignorance of the justice, holiness, and righteousness of God.

Verse 15

"Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph."

In this verse Amos lists three imperatives for the people. First, they must "hate the evil." To "hate the evil" means to put it out of sight or away (Isaiah 1:16-17). The Psalmist said, "*Ye that love the LORD, hate evil*" (Psalm 97:10). The Lord demands that his people hate evil. Second, they must "love the good." "Love"

means “have an affection for.” The Lord demands that his people have an affection for Him and His ways. How can we claim to “love the good” if we do not hate evil? Third, they must “establish judgment in the gate.” The city gate was the great meeting-place of the people. It was the center of business, the place where the elders sat to administer justice. If there was a change in the people’s attitudes and actions, it would be seen publicly in the “establishing” of “justice” in the center of their daily lives. Honest judges would be appointed and people would be dealt with fairly.

“It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.” Disaster and judgment were coming for Israel but it may be that the “LORD God of hosts,” or Lord of the armies may “be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.” Amos mentions “the remnant of Joseph” implying that only a few of them will survive the coming judgment.

Question: If you were told to “establish judgment” in your city, county, or your church, how would you go about it? What things would you change? How would you incorporate a witness to God’s love and Christ’s salvation in your plan?

The Coming Day of the Lord (Amos 5:18-20)

Amos was certain that the crop of injustice and sin sown by Israel was going to be reaped. He was convinced that a coming day of judgment would bring a great change in the nation.

Verse 18

“Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.”

By the time Amos preached his messages of coming judgment, a cliché had become very popular among the people. They were saying, “Just wait until the Day of the Lord arrives.” But Amos said, “Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD.” His words are directed toward those in Israel who believed that God’s intervention would be victorious for them and deadly for their enemies. They actually thought God’s coming, “the day of the LORD,” would bring blessings because they were God’s covenant people. Many of the people were saying they “desired” the “day of the LORD.” It was only natural the people would think that way since they were living in material prosperity and national peace.

The “day of the LORD” is a period of time in which God judges His enemies and establishes His kingdom on earth (Revelation 6-20). It truly would be a wonderful time for the Jewish people. However, Amos and other prophets such as Joel and Zephaniah realized the “day of the LORD” was also a time of purifying for Israel; when God’s people would go through tribulation before

entering the kingdom of God (Joel 3:9-17; Zephaniah 2:1-2). In that regard, the coming “day of the LORD” was nothing to “desire.”

Amos asked, “To what end is it for you?” He wanted to know why they desired a day of judgment to come. The answer is the people had become rather hypocritical. They were going through the motions religiously, but they were also worshipping idols. It was all just religion to them, just as churchgoing is too many people today. It looks good on the outside, however it has absolutely no effect on the inside. It is something revered in our tradition and history, but has no effect on how we conduct our lives at home or in the marketplace.

“The day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.” This means what was coming was contrary to their expectations. God had just warned them in verse 17 that He was about to pass through their midst. It was not going to be a time of “light” as many expected.

As we near the coming of our Lord in rapture for His church and the Second Coming of Christ to follow after the Tribulation, we must ask ourselves if this will be “light” or “darkness” for us. In reality, the answer to that question personally is in relation to one’s personal salvation; nationally it is in each nation’s relation to God’s righteousness and justice.

Verse 19

“As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.”

The coming “day of the LORD” would not only be a day of *darkness*, it would also be a day of *doom*. There would be no escaping God’s wrath because there were no hiding places! Trying to escape the “day of the LORD” would be like running “from a lion” and running into a “bear.” Or, finally getting into a “house” where you felt safe then when you put your “hand on the wall” a “snake” will bite you. To use an adage of our day...like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire!

Verse 20

“Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?”

Amos repeats the truth of the last part of verse 18. No matter how hard the people tried to convince themselves, the coming Day of Judgment will be a day of pitch-dark gloom. With “no brightness in it” is most likely a reference to the glory of God. There is no silver lining in the cloud of judgment that is coming.

Israel’s Phony Religion (Amos 5:21-26)

In general terms, Amos had previously denounced the type of ritualism the Israelites were practicing. In this section he becomes very specific in stating God's reactions to feast days, assemblies, offerings, songs, and instruments.

Verse 21

"I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies."

Amos' choice of words must have shocked his audience. "Hate" and "despise" are strong terms. These words denote a settled and complete attitude. God was not reacting to the moment but rather settled in His response. The "feast days" could refer to three specific annual festivals that were observed among the Israelites. It could also refer to their counterfeit worship in general at any "feast" or "solemn assembly." The "solemn assemblies" were where the people came together for the keeping of their special "feasts" and celebrations.

God said, "I will not smell in your solemn assemblies." "Smell" refers to God's acceptance of the sacrifice offered (Exodus 29:18, 25; Leviticus 26:31).

As you read the stern words of Amos, keep in mind that he is not seeking the removal of the feast days, ceremonies, assemblies, and offerings. He is seeking repentance and reformation. In Amos' day, the sacrificial system was still God's way of dealing with sin and continuing a personal loving relationship with His people. God wanted fellowship with His people but their hypocritical religious practices were a disgrace.

Verse 22

"Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts."

The people continued to follow the Mosaic Law in offering "burnt offerings" and "meat offerings" and "peace offerings." But behind their strict observance of going through the rituals were dishonest and sinful lives. The people of Israel were living lives of sin. They were engaged in idolatry and no amount of religious exercise could cover it. God said, "I will not accept them." The word "accept" means "to be pleased with, to satisfy."

Verse 23

"Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols."

Israel was a nation that worshipped God with songs and music (1 Samuel 10:5; 2 Samuel 6:5, 15). Somewhere along the way their singing and music had lost its sincerity and purpose. Although their worship was now hypocritical it had not stopped them from singing and producing beautiful music. Evidently, they thought their singing and music was pleasing to God. God knew the difference. God had heard about all the singing He could stand and He did not want to hear any more music from their instruments. God will not be fooled by our great singing and music. It does not matter how enthusiastic our worship services are or how many people clap their hands and pat their feet. A great entertainer and a great orchestra cannot make up for absent hearts!

Verse 24

“But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.”

This is one of the most convicting words in Amos’ preaching. God wants His people to worship Him, not certain days or events. The words “judgment” and “righteousness” refer to the covenant relationship of God’s people to be lived out every day. Amos is saying, “Let your relationship with God flow like a spring that never dries up.” The words “run down as waters” and “as a mighty stream” are powerful metaphors of a life of active and vibrant faith.

Amos tells the people God wants rivers of justice and streams of righteousness to flow from His people. Instead of a ritual performance, God wanted a day-to-day life of integrity and goodness to flow from His people. He was looking for outward evidence of inward life.

Verse 25

“Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?”

God returned to His denunciation of Israel’s religious hypocrisy by reminding them that this was not the first time they had offended Him. From the beginning of their national history they had a bad record of false worship. It was “in the wilderness” where they made a molten calf and worshipped it (Exodus 32). They were guilty of worshipping the sun, moon, stars, and other false gods. They actually brought “sacrifices and offerings” to these gods during their forty years in the wilderness (Acts 7:39-43).

Verse 26

“But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves.”

Since their days in the wilderness, Israel's worship had further degenerated as they honored "the tabernacle of you Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves." "Moloch" was the great idol of the Ammonites. "Chiun" could possibly be a reference to Saturn. The "images" could be anything they decided to worship. The "stars" were most likely different "stars" in the heavens they picked out and decided to worship.

Everything Israel worshipped and all the deities to which they bowed were "made to yourselves." They made and established them on their own, and carried them everywhere they went. How sad. Israel had a God who promised to carry them, but now they had gods they carried themselves!

Israel's Punishment Coming (Amos 5:27)

Verse 27

"Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts."

The "captivity beyond Damascus" is a reference to Assyrian captivity and exile in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:7, 24). The consequences of their alienation from God was to be deported to a foreign land, "beyond Damascus," far away from their homeland.

The "LORD, whose name is The God of host," or "Lord of armies" is in control of Israel's future. God said, "Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity..." This was the judgment of their sovereign Lord, the God whose commandments they had disobeyed.

Conclusion

Amos' message is straight and to the point. It told Israel what she needed to hear and Amos' message tells us what we need. First, any people or nation that cares more for themselves than for God, is headed for judgment. Second, no amount of religious activity and enthusiastic worship can substitute for simple obedience to God. Third, all this religious stuff that we have made ourselves and carry with us is only leading to judgment. Fourth, Amos wants everyone to know that God is not fooled! God will have the last laugh, not us (Psalm 2:4).

Amen.