ALLIANCE UNIVERSITY

Old Testament Exegetical Commentary of Amos 5

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OT655: Amos (Eng Text)

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Introduction to Amos 5

1 Historical Background

Most scholarship agree upon "that Amos delivered his oracles between 760 and 750 B.C."[1] This date is based off the contextual study of the book of Amos from 7:10-17 "and the superscription in 1:1"[2]. This puts Amos during the reign of Jeroboam II. Amos is marked by "a time of peace and prosperity"[3] that developed during this period. The downfall of Hazael who was "Israel's chief protagonist from Assyria"[4] is also present in Amos. Israel peaks in her power and prosperity during the successful and long rulings of Joash and Jeroboam II, his son[5]. The northern Davidic border in Syria is restored as Jeroboam is "able to defeat Damascus"[6].

2 Prevailing Conditions

"Amos is third (second in the LXX) in the Book of the Twelve or Dodekapropheton, a collection that was already in existence by the time of Ben Sira in the early second century B.C.E. (Sir. 49:10)"[7]. The book of Amos has many similarities with Joel. The themes of "a plague of locusts, drought represented as fire, ritual lamentation, the Day of Yahweh, cosmic disturbances, the promise of miraculous fertility"[8] are all found together. "The beginning of Amos (1:2) also occurs" in a slight different variation towards "the end of Joel (3:16 [MT 4:16])"[9]. God's presence in his temple also seems to be a connecting theme in each book. The book easily divides into three parts. After the first two verses, "there are eight sayings against various nations, the last being Israel, condemning them for different atrocities and crimes (1:3-2:16);"[10] The second part is the middle part of the book that "contains a collection of mostly short sayings attributed to Amos (3-6);"[11] The last three chapters of Amos "consists of five vision reports (7:1-3, 4-6, 7-9; 8:1-3; 9:1-4) with expansions and interpolations"[12]. Amos 5 falls in the central part of the book that is one of Amos' short sayings.

3 Main Characters

3.1 Israel

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[1] Rector, Larry J. "Israel's Rejected Worship: An Exegesis of Amos 5." Restoration Quarterly 21, no. 3 (1978): 161. https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001587993&site=eds-live&scope=site.

[2] Rector, 161.

[3] Ibid., 161.

[4] Ibid., 161.

[5] Ibid., 161.

[6] Ibid., 161.

[7] Blenkinsopp, Joseph. A History of Prophecy in Israel. Louisville Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999, 74.

[8] Blenkinsopp, 74.

[9] Ibid., 74.

[10] Ibid., 74.

[11] Ibid., 74.

[12] Ibid., 74.

"The opening apostrophe of the sayings source (3:1-2), of Deuteronomic character, applies the prophet's message to all Israel, not just the kingdom of Samaria, and therefore reinforces the point made by the insertion of the anti-Judah saying"[13].

3.2 Lord God

The Lord God is the main character in this chapter also referred to as "the Lord GOD" (Amos 5:3), "the LORD" (Amos 5:4,8), "He who made the Pleiades and Orion" (Amos 5:8), and "the God of hosts" (Amos 5:14,15,16,27).

3.3 Bethel

The reference to Bethel reflects "the extension of Josiah's reforms into the territory of the Northern Kingdom absorbed a century earlier into the Assyria empire (see 2 Kings 23:15-20)"[14].

3.4 Sikkuth/Kiyyun

The "images" and idols that Israel turned to instead of God (Amos 5:26).

4 Argument

If Israel does not repent, God will bring "the day of the LORD" which will be a day of judgment and darkness and definitely not blessing and God's favor.

5 Purpose

Chapter 5 of the book of Amos is both a word and rebuke to Israel due to its horrendous morality towards one another, religious hypocrisy (thinking they can appease God by merely going through the motions of sacrifice), and "seeking sanctuaries instead of Yahweh"[15].

6 Key Verse

"Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said." (Amos 5:14)

"But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24)

7 Major Themes

Some major themes of Amos are wealth and prosperity as it "prevailed in Israel at this time"[16]. There were families that lived in luxurious houses "with ivory furniture (6:4)"[17] during this period.

"Women urged their husbands on in oppression (4:1)"[18].

Dishonest business practices by merchants "to increase their prosperity, often giving small measures and charging inflated prices (8:5)"[19] occurred in Amos' time. Bribery was also common in law courts (Amos 5:12).

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[13] Ibid., 75.
[14] Ibid., 75.
[15] Rector, 162.
[16] Rector, 162.
[17] Ibid., 162.
[18] Ibid., 162.
[19] Ibid., 162.

Oppression of poor people and slaves by "a wealthy and powerful minority"[20] occurred too. "The rich sold the poor for a pair of sandals (2:6, 8:6)"[21].

Ironically, "religious zeal was at an all-time high"[22]. The words of Amos addressed these situations of "social injustice and false religion"[23]. "The resulting interplay between various genres, and the specific use and function of those genres, pushes the reader/listener to a reassessment of the nature of the theophanic Day of the Lord"[24]. These major themes come together to bring the true situation of superficial Israel during Amos' time.

Interpretation and Exposition

1 Proclamation of God's Words to the House of Israel 1-5

The first five verses of chapter 5 of Amos open with a direct word from God. "However here, Amos announced that what follows is "a song of mourning" (Heb. *Qinah*) against the house of Israel"[25]. To make things worse, Amos declares that the city of Israel will shrink from a thousand to a hundred and from a hundred to only ten (Amos 5:2). This is because Israel is not doing well, and God desires to grab her attention. "Amos announced Israel's death, the fall of the Northern Kingdom, at the height of its prosperity under Jeroboam II" [26].

Even though Israel was at the "prime of her beauty and glory"[27], the word "Fallen" is used in verse 2 that is related to funeral songs that "usually means fallen in battle (cf. 2 Sam. 1:19, 25, 27; 3:34; Lam. 2:21)"[28]. This was a declaration that Israel would never return to its powerful position again. She is going to lay forsaken. And not "even Yahweh (cf. Judg. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Isa. 2:6)"[29] would come to her help. The Assyrians were going to be Yahweh's pawn to accomplish this prophecy. "This pericope is also chiastic. Note the reverences to Bethel, Gilgal, Beersheba, Gilgal, and Bethel"[30]. In the midst of this harsh word, God still invites Israel to repentance in verse 4b: "…"Seek me and live;" There is still hope only if Israel would turn to God and away from their evil deeds. However, "The Israelites should not seek the LORD at the popular Israelite shrines at Bethel, Gilgal, or even at Beersheba in southern Judah (cf. 8:14; 2 Kings 23:8)"[31]. It is because these places of religious service to God have been defined by nothing but "heartless ritualism"[32].

2 Solution to God's prophecy against Israel 6-7

[20] Ibid., 162.
[21] Ibid., 162.
[22] Ibid., 162.
[23] Ibid., 162.
[24] Toffelmire, Colin M. "Cohesion and Genre Blending in Prophetic Literature, Using Amos 5 as a Case Study." The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures 21 (2021): 12. doi:10.5508/jhs29598.
[25] "Dr. Constable's Expository (Bible Study) Notes." Plano Bible Chapel. Accessed April 27, 2023: 49. https://planobiblechapel.org/constable-notes/.
[26] Dr. Constable, 49.
[27] Ibid., 49.
[28] Ibid., 49.
[29] Ibid., 49.
[30] Ibid., 50.
[31] Ibid., 50.
[32] Ibid., 50.

The solution to seeking God was by seeking Yahweh through their actions of goodness and avoiding, resisting evil. Times were so desperate that even though Israel's repentance may be forced and out of terror of fear, God will still receive it because it better than falling into God's wrath. It is sad to note, but Israel was turning God's "sweet justice into something bitter"[33] and were disrespecting God's righteousness. In this time, it is true that Israel fully fulfilled the biblical definition of a fool. A fool was not someone who was not smart, but someone who knew God and his ways and still utterly disregarded and went the other way. Israel despised both proper action and justice, and turned its judicial system from a place to administer medicine to poison.

3 Description of who God is 8-9

Now a sharp contrast from who Israel is to God's character is done in these next two verses. God is shown as someone who is above Pleiades and Orion. And even though Israel may have brought darkness and God's judgment, wrath, and destruction, God is able to turn darkness back to morning and bring destruction as he wishes. "God's transformation can be destructive (4:11), but it can also be the miracle of creation, converting total darkness into the light of morning (5:8)"[34]. Verses 8 and 9 have a chiastic structure going on, "but the verbs are different—perfect in v 8aC; imperfect in v 9b"[35]. There are many questions with these two verses because there are no sources for these quotations of verses. And the vocabulary is both unparalleled and obscure. Scholars wonder why these verses are here to begin with, if there is an unseen connection, a context that only Amos' audience knew of, or of intentional or unintentional connections being made here.

4 Response from Israel of who God is 10

A hateful response to the expression of God's character in the previous two verses is made here in verse 10. There is a chiastic structure going on as well where the objects are in the center and two verbs are at the end of the verse. They hate him who reproves is in line with they abhor him who speaks the truth, and the gate (object) is right in the middle. "They link the charges specified from the beginning against Israel (2:6-8, etc.) with the groups singled out in the "Woes" as the special objects of divine wrath, and they are among those who will be pursued to the end of the universe and finally annihilated by a just and retributive God"[36].

5 Consequence and knowledge of Israel's sins by God 11-12

"Therefore" is an important conjunction in chapter 5 of Amos. It leads to the announcement of judgment upon Israel. "But another description of conduct is inserted after the conjunction, which with its direct address style fastens on the audience in Amos' presence and uncovers the basis of the court's corruption"[37]. The court system of Israel is being exposed right now because it is being used for "economic exploitation of the weak (*dal*)"[38]. Land is being transferred from peasants to serfs. Small farmers no longer have ownership but must pay account

[33] Ibid., 51.
[34] Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman. Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, 487.
[35] Andersen and Freedman, 487.
[36] Ibid., 496.
[37] Mays, James Luther. Old Testament Library: Amos. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1969, 94.
[38] Mays, 94.

and follow the "urban class to whom he must pay a rental for the use of the land"[39] which is an unfair amount. During this time, people are greedy for wealth and land. At the cost of the suffering of the poor, houses of hewn stone are being built which only used to be possible for temples and palaces. Luxurious vineyards are planted that used to belong to the small farmers. "The accused take bribes and decide cases on the basis of profit instead of right (Ex. 23.8; cf. I Sam. 12.3)"[40]. The poor are therefore neglected because of their economic status and are deprived of justice.

6 Solution to Israel's sins 13-15

Verse 13 alludes to wisdom literature. "The style is that of an impersonal observation"[41]. When the courts are full of corruption and the powerful have their way with no accountability, "the man of wise judgment will keep quiet, knowing that to raise complaint or plead his case will only lead to trouble for him"[42]. Amos lives in such a time, and it is wisdom to trust "in waiting for the justice of God rather than in appealing to the judgment of men"[43]. God will judge the wicked, and all Amos needs to do is trust and wait upon God's justice.

The opening sentence of verse 14 is parallel to verse 6, but here, good replaces the LORD. "Verses 14 and 15 have a similar structure: exhortation followed by conditional promise"[44]. There is also a chiastic structure going on in these two verses with the words "good" and "evil". The word seek means to "be concerned about, devote yourselves to"[45]. And the promises following the exhortations in these verses are dependent on whether the exhortations are obeyed or not.

7 God's response 16-17

The reaction to everything so far is God passing through Israel's midst and causing intense wailing to occur. There will be wailing in the squares and streets. Wailing will occur in farmers to those who are skilled in wailing. This will happen in all vineyards because God will pass through their midst. "There is a sense of forsakenness with none to comfort, with a yearning for mercy, but only a yearning"[46]. Before joy, there must be grief. Because Amos only has "the hope that the *ache* of God could penetrate the *numbness* of history"[47]. At this point, the situation of Israel is so bad that only intense wailing can pierce the hardness of Israel.

8 Woe from the LORD 18-20

God now goes into a straight rebuke. He proclaims a "Woe" to those who would "desire the day of the LORD!" (Amos 5:18). The Israelites thought they were in right standing with God at this time, but God is here to tell them the exact opposite by his imposing questions regarding the day of the LORD as Israel would soon encounter. It is a day of darkness and not light, and God compares it to a man fleeing from a lion only to meet a bear. Or going into a house for

[39] Ibid., 94.
[40] Ibid., 97.
[41] Ibid., 98.
[42] Ibid., 98.
[43] Ibid., 98.
[44] Ibid., 99.
[45] Ibid., 100.
[46] Brueggemann, Walter. Prophetic Imagination: Revised Edition. Lanham: Fortress Press, 2001, 55.
[47] Brueggemann, 55.

protection but being bitten by a serpent. The description of the day of the LORD being darkness and not light is further repeated here. The usage of simile and metaphor is used to show the impact of the true day of the Lord. The "Woe" is necessary in these verses because "The hope announced is not a nice feeling or a new inner spiritual state. Rather, it is grounded in a radical discernment of Israel's worldly situation"[48]. Contrary to what the Israelites might see at this time, God is pronouncing true hope through his judgments. Because only when Israel wakes up from their sinful slumber, can they experience true success as God defines.

9 God's further discourse to Israel 21-24

God continues to show his true feelings towards everything Israel is doing and living. God despises their religious feasts and takes no joy in their gatherings because their burnt, grain, and peace offerings are not truly for God. The playing of their worship through songs and harps are hideous in God's ears because they are not truly playing for Him. God shows what will bring true joy to Him. "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). God wants justice and righteousness to be practiced in the midst of the Israelites. It is not that the Israelites' sacrifices and worship were displeasing to God in itself, but when it is not paired with a just and right lifestyle, it can only bear to be so.

10 Closing remarks by God 25-27

"The maintenance of good relations between gods and humans largely depended, in the ancient world, on the maintenance of the system of sacrificial offerings"[49]. But God at this time rebukes the Israelites by saying that it was not sacrifices and offerings in their past history and rescue from Egypt that pleased Him. Ironically, how God rescued the Israelites from exile in the past, God is going to throw them right back into exile if they do not repent. God will send the Israelites back into exile beyond Damascus because they are bringing meaningless sacrifices in the form of Sikkuth and Kiyyun. God is not like the pagan gods. He delights in just and righteous living with Him and with one's neighbors. Then God will forgive and restore Israel. God is not after the outward actions more than the inward intentions expressed through behavior.

Application

1 There is great application to be done from chapter 5 of Amos. The first being that God's words through obedience must never be neglected in one's life. This may sound cliché, but it is a truth that must be fully practiced in head, heart, and actions in us. The only thing that remained while Israel was stuck in their incalcitrant pride and disgusting behaviors was the declaration of God's words. It cannot be our feelings, thoughts, or personal judgments that measure the success of our faith, but we must always test ourselves against God's words. Just that we may think and feel we are going in the right direction, God's words must be the standard that determines those thoughts and feelings in our lives.

2 Second, the only way to constantly experience and make sure we are in right standing with God is not only through hearing and being attentive to God's words, but most importantly, obeying God's words fully. There are constant action verbs of seeking the LORD, seeking good

[48] Ibid., 69.

[49] Barton, John. The Theology of The Book of Amos. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012, 66.

and not evil, and hating evil and loving good that are repeated throughout this chapter. This shows that we can just as easily become like the Israelites if we do not take obedience to God's words seriously. We can go through the motions of hearing and receiving Gods words, doing whatever we want, and think we are well with God. But true faith is shown through our obedience. Our obedience must align with seeking God and practicing His goodness, justice, and righteousness. Without the fruit of actions through our obedience, we can be living opposite of God's words without knowing. That is how sinful we are.

3 Our relationships with another matter. That relationship does not only pertain to fellow believers but everyone. God was displeased with the Israelites at this time because they were doing all the right things outwardly, but the Israelites were treating their neighbors wickedly. The poor were being exploited. Women were using their husbands for sinful acts. The Israelites were practicing evil while offering God sacrifices and rituals. But God was not pleased because their relationships with one another mattered in His eyes. Many times, we think going to church, reading our Bibles, and doing religious good deeds please God. But, when those religious deeds are paired with sin, God does not accept those kinds of religious services.

4 God's judgment must be taken seriously. In today's culture, we think love is accepting everything and being tolerant of all things. But what if those things are breaking God's heart? Then, we must take a stand and not be afraid to live by and share, speak the truth. Even if costs temporary sadness, hopelessness, and breaking, it is a price we must pay to experience God's presence. God's judgment is a good day for those that are hearing and obeying God's words consistently in their lives, but God's judgment is to be feared for those that are not doing so.

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