

• *The stark alternatives – seeking God or hearing the funeral song*

Amos comes back to the alternatives: seeking God ¹ or hearing the funeral-song ².

¹ 5:14–15

² 5:16–17

¹⁴ “Seek good and not evil, in order that you may live, and so that Yahweh, God Almighty will be with you, as you say.
¹⁵ Hate evil; and love what is good, and establish righteousness in the gate. Perhaps Yahweh, God Almighty, will be gracious to a remnant of Joseph.”

The alternative is to continue the funeral song. Amos returns in 5:16–17 to where he started in 5:1–5.

A time to seek God

The key idea here is ‘seeking’. It implies that at the moment in Israel’s history, God is not immediately to be found. Experiencing His blessing will require ‘seeking’ – taking time and effort to request God to come back into the life of the nation. ‘Seek me’, said God ¹. ‘Seek Yahweh’ said Amos 5:6. ‘Seek the good’ or ‘Seek the Good One’ says Amos 5:14. ‘It is time to seek Yahweh’ said Amos’ contemporary Hosea ².

¹ Amos 5:4

² Hosea 10:12

• *Seeking God involves*

What is involved in seeking God?

(i) *Giving God time*

(i) It means that we give God time. We do not let the pressure of life be so great that we take God for granted and rush into everything else that interests us without considering God.

(ii) *Talking to God*

(ii) It means that we talk to God. ‘Take with you words’, said Hosea 14:2. We ask His forgiveness. We admit what has happened in the life of the nation.

(iii) *Living God’s way*

(iii) It means that we turn away from the kind of life God hates; and we start living the kind of life that God approves of. ‘Hate evil’ says God, through Amos. It requires a passionate resistance to everything we know is wicked. ‘Love what is good’; it requires an aggressive and determined commitment to what we know God likes. ‘Establish righteousness in the gate’ says Amos. The ‘gate’ is the town gate where courts met for decisions on controversies. When righteousness is established in the law-courts and the poor can get justice, God will be pleased.

• *The consequence – newness of life*

What will happen if they seek God in this way is that the life of the nation will be restored. ‘Seek good... in order that you may live’, says God. Newness of life will flow into the people of God, if they establish justice for the needy people of the land.

• *The funeral song has started*

It is almost too late. God is just about to exterminate the nation. The funeral song has commenced. But a last-minute repentance might bring last-minute rescue. ‘Perhaps Yahweh, God Almighty, will be gracious to a remnant of Joseph’. Maybe a small section of the nation will be allowed to survive if they seek Yahweh now before it is too late. Otherwise the funeral song must continue.

• *Almost too late – last minute repentance might bring last minute rescue*

¹⁶ ‘Therefore, this is what Yahweh, God Almighty, the sovereign, says:
 “In all the streets there will be lamentation, in the squares they will be saying, ‘Alas! Alas!’ They will summon the farm-workers to mourning and the professional mourners to wailing.

¹⁷ And in all the vineyards there will be lamentation, for I will pass through in the midst of you.” Yahweh has spoken.’

The alternative is extermination by Assyria

If Israel will not seek God, soon the nation will be exterminated. In the streets and squares of the towns there will be distress. And in the rural areas also people will turn to mourning. When God comes in judgement – in the form of Assyrian invasion – it will be a funeral, and Israel will be found no more. Seeking God is the only hope. The alternative is extermination.

• *Style - to and from a central point*

Amos seems to like the style in which one moves through topics to a central point and then works backwards through the same topics in reverse order. He does it again in Amos 5:18–27:

- A. Inescapable judgement in the day of Yahweh (5:18–20)
- B. Rejection of worship: festivals, offerings and singing (5:21–23)
- C. Let justice rule (5:24)
- B. Rejection of idolatry (5:25–26)
- A. Inescapable exile (5:27)

Amos says:

• *God's warning - inescapable judgement in the Day of Yahweh*

¹⁸ *Woe to you who long for the Day of Yahweh! What will that day be for you? It will be darkness rather than light.*
¹⁹ *It will be as if a man were escaping from a lion, and a bear meets him. Then he goes home and rests his hand on a wall, and a snake bites him.*
²⁰ *Will not the day of Yahweh be darkness rather than light, deep darkness with no brightness in it?'*

• *The Day of the Lord – an interesting discussion point!*

Amos has spoken to the people of the coming anger of God which will exterminate the land. But actually the people were a very religious people, and even a very theological people. They loved discussing the Day of the Lord. The coming of God was a most interesting teaching! When the people gathered in their great meeting-places at Bethel and Gilgal and Beersheba, the 'Day of Yahweh' was a favourite topic for discussion! It was so interesting!

• *But Amos asks – “What will that day be like for you?”*

People are the same today. Teaching about prophecy and 'the end-times' rouses a lot of interest. How people love to discuss the millennium, and the 'last days'. What excitement is generated when some prophet stands up to tell us what is about to happen in Israel, or how Armageddon is getting close. How eagerly placards and texts about 'the rapture' are bought in the Christian bookshops! But Amos has to ask the nation, 'What will that day be for you?' Only for those living for the approval of God will that day be a blessing. Soon 'the Day of the Lord' will come near to Israel. Assyrian invasion will be a foretaste of the end of the world. Yet for most of Israel it will be a day of inescapable judgement – like a man escaping from a lion. He runs for his life but when he turns a corner he meets a bear! He dashes away in another direction, and finally gets home. But when he rests his hand on a wall, a snake bites him. Inescapable punishment. If it does not come in one form it will come in another. For all who are not living for God – no matter how religious they are – the day of Yahweh will be darkness rather than light.

• *For those not living for God – darkness rather than light!*



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