

God Is Not Fooled

Printed Text · Amos 5:14-15, 18-27

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: ANALYZE how God establishes justice for the righteous and punishes deceivers; RECOGNIZE and REFLECT on actions of injustice within the community of faith; and IDENTIFY unjust practices, commit to stop our participation in them and help others do the same.

In Focus

The check engine light had been blinking in Regina's car for almost a week, so she finally took it in for service. While waiting, Regina noticed a young woman and her three children make their way into the auto shop from a nearby bus stop. The young woman attempted to make a payment toward the repair of her vehicle that was stored behind the shop. The shop owner told the woman, "Ma'am, I've held your car here as long as I can. I'm within my legal rights to sell that vehicle. If you don't pay your balance by tomorrow, I'm selling it." As the woman left the shop, Regina heard the shop owner mutter to himself, "It'll be hard to pay up without a bus to get you here." Regina realized tomorrow was a Sunday and the buses wouldn't be servicing this particular route. The woman would have no way to get her payment to the shop. On her way home, Regina saw the woman and her children walking a few blocks away from the shop. Regina pulled alongside them and offered to give the woman a ride back to the shop the next day.

God desires that we would pursue justice and oppose evil. In today's lesson, we will discuss how we can do this in our own lives.

Keep In Mind

"But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24, KJV).

Words You Should Know

- A. **Gracious** (Amos 5:15) *khanan* (Heb.) – To bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to be considerate; to show favor.
- B. **Righteousness** (v. 24) *tsedaqah* (Heb.) – Being in the right, justified, just.

Say It Correctly

Tabernacle. TA-ber-na-kul

Damascus. Da-MAS-kus

Moloch. MOE-lokh

Sikkuth. see-KOOTH

KJV

Amos 5:14 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.

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.

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.

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.

20 Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?

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

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.

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

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

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

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

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

NLT

Amos 5:14 Seek good and not evil, that you may live; And thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you, Just as you have said!

15 Hate evil, love good, And establish justice in the gate! Perhaps the Lord God of hosts May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

18 Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord, For what purpose will the day of the Lord be to you? It will be darkness and not light;

19 As when a man flees from a lion And a bear meets him, Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall And a snake bites him.

20 Will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light, Even gloom with no brightness in it?

21 "I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.

22 "Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings.

23 "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.

24 "But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

25 "Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel?

26 You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyyun, your images, [e]the star of your gods which you made for yourselves.

27 Therefore, I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.

The People, Places, and Times

Feast Days. There were three major feast days in the nation of Israel: the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Feast of Harvest (Pentecost), and the Feast of Ingathering (Tabernacles). These were pilgrimage festivals that required participation from the entire Israelite community. All work was to cease and travelers made their way from all over Israel to celebrate these festivals in Jerusalem.

Sikkuth (Moloch). Sikkuth is another name for the Mesopotamian astral deity Sakkut (Ninib). This god was also associated with the planet Saturn. It was commonly believed that this god was not introduced until after the Assyrian conquest, but recent scholarship has revealed that Aramean merchants and other foreign travelers helped to spread the worship of Sikkuth in Israel.

Kaiwan (Chiun). Kaiwan was the Babylonian Saturn god. The name actually means "the steadiest one" and is taken from the planet Saturn's slow-moving orbit. The differences in spelling are likely because when foreign gods were referenced, the original vowels were often replaced with the vowels

from the Hebrew word for “abomination.” The Phoenicians were thought to offer human sacrifices to this god.

Background

Amos begins chapter 5 as a eulogy for the “dead” nation of Israel. Israel was not yet dead, but the lament was meant to impress on the nation the severe danger it was in. The death of Israel is described as the death of a virgin (v. 2). The death of a virgin would have been considered particularly tragic because she had no children to carry on her memory. This type of death is distinctly permanent. Furthermore, the dead virgin is described as having been left lying in a field, unburied. To leave a body unburied would have been a shocking and appalling image to consider, yet this is how the demise of Israel is described. Its depraved moral climate and refusal to turn back to God had indeed set it on the path of destruction.

Israel could not trust in the power of its armies to defend them against the coming destruction. Amos declared that their armies will be systematically cut down in battle (v. 3). Their trust in false gods was misplaced. The Israelites were known to visit idol temples in Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. But Amos announced that each of these is set for destruction as well. Their only hope was to return to God. Amos repeatedly declared the way of escape for some. If they will seek after God, they will live (vv. 4, 6). Despite Amos’ lament, he presented God’s offer to save a remnant who will turn to Him.

At-A-Glance

1. Love Good, Hate Evil (Amos 5:14–15)
2. A Day of Darkness (vv. 18–20)
3. God Desires Justice, Not Empty Rituals (vv. 21–24)
4. Israel’s Idolatry Results in Exile (vv. 25–27)

In Depth

1. Love Good, Hate Evil (Amos 5:14–15)

Israel has become complacent in their presumption of God’s favor (v. 14). Israel has mistakenly believed that, despite their sinful ways and their worship of other gods, they can still count on God’s protection. However, Amos declared to them that their actions have displeased God and will result in the destruction of their nation. In order for some to be spared, they must both seek good and avoid evil. The twofold action of seeking and avoiding is emphasized in verse 15. They are to “hate” the evil and “love” the good. The terms “hate” and “love” indicate decisions that one must make. Seeking good is connected with choosing to love good. Avoiding evil is connected to choosing to hate evil.

2. A Day of Darkness (vv. 18–20)

Again, the prophet’s message seizes on Israel’s presumption of God’s favor. It was common in times of trouble for the Israelites to long for “the day of the LORD,” when God would rescue them from their enemies. But “the day of the LORD” will now be a day of reckoning. For those who have turned to idols and denied justice to the poor, there will be no rescue, but rather darkness and judgment waiting for them. This will be a jarring turn of events for Israel. It is described metaphorically like escaping a lion, only to find that you must escape a bear; then resting at home, only to find that a snake is waiting to bite you.

3. God Desires Justice, Not Empty Rituals (vv. 21–24)

The worship of other gods had seeped into Israel's religious practices, but the people still maintained their Israelite rituals and festivals too. However, God is not fooled by their empty worship. True worship flows out of the hearts of those who earnestly seek to follow God's will. A true worshiper's relationships and personal life will be consistent with his or her public worship. Israel's worship is hypocritical. They publicly give offerings to God and worship Him with their music, but they continue to reject justice and righteousness in their everyday lives. Their religious practices have become distasteful to God, and He refuses their show of piety. Rather than continued injustice and hypocrisy, the Lord desires a continual, daily flow of justice and righteousness.

4. Israel's Idolatry Results in Exile (vv. 25–27)

Israel's unfaithfulness is called out here. In addition to making offerings to Yahweh, they have begun worshiping foreign deities. Idol worship often included parades in which the people would carry handmade representations of their gods. Amos describes an image that depicts Israel, the chosen people of Yahweh the one true God, carrying around idols made to worship other gods (v. 26). It is a sad betrayal of the God who had redeemed them. Idolatry leads to injustice. It is at the root of their oppression of others and their choosing to love evil and not good. As a result, the Lord will send them into exile—what happens to all those who choose other gods.

Search the Scriptures

1. What do you think it would have looked like for an Israelite to love good and hate evil during this time in Israel's history (Amos 5:14–15)?
2. What were the attitudes and motives of the Israelite worshipers (vv. 21–23)? Why did God refuse their worship?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Amos declared that God desires justice and righteousness, not religious practices that have no impact on how we live. How does your public worship inform your desire for social justice in our society?
2. Amos instructed Israel to love good and hate evil. How might you love good and hate evil in your daily life? How would others know that you love good and hate evil?

Liberating Lesson

Most Christians have no problem determining the difference between good and evil. In fact, even non-believers often choose to do the right thing. But merely choosing not to do evil is different than actively opposing evil. Opposing evil requires a level of conviction that goes beyond a simple understanding of right and wrong. This concept has been examined in social experiments and hidden camera television shows. During these experiments, an unsuspecting participant is presented with a scenario that requires that he or she make a moral determination of what is right or wrong. Generally, participants will choose to do the right thing. The scenario is then changed slightly. Now the participant is presented with a scenario in which someone is doing wrong to another person. The participant must decide to either intervene or ignore the injustice they are witnessing. It is often the case that only certain individuals will go out of their way to oppose injustice. Most people are content to sit by while others are treated unfairly. It is God's desire that Christians would not only seek to do good but also oppose evil and injustice. We are charged with standing for justice in our communities and in our world.

Application For Activation

It is often difficult in the moment to choose to love good and hate evil. One way to be prepared for those times and situations where we have decisions to make is to determine what is good or evil. Get a piece of paper and on one side write "Love Good" and on the other side write "Hate Evil." On the

“Love Good” side, write all the ways you can seek good in your daily life. On the “Hate Evil” side, write all the ways you can hate evil in your daily life. Thinking about these things beforehand can help us not only avoid falling into sin but also move us forward in serving others in our community.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Amos 5:14–15, 18–27

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.

Amos continues with the refrain of seeking. The word seek (Heb. darash, dah-RASH) is used in verse 4 and 6 to refer to the people seeking the idol sanctuaries and then refer to seeking God. Now Amos uses it in reference to good as opposed to evil. The good that the people are to seek is justice for the poor. Amos holds out the promise of the Lord’s presence if they seek good. This highlights the fact that the Lord is not with them to begin with because of their injustice and oppression.

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.

This seeking of good is more than just an outward action. It must radiate from an attitude of the heart. Amos uses strong words here. Seeking good is spelled out as hating (Heb. sane’, sah-NAY) evil. In other passages of the Old Testament, this word is used to refer to an enemy. The Israelites had been friends with evil and stood on the side of injustice. By using this word, Amos confronts them and challenges them to choose sides. Being on the side of good means establishing “judgment in the gate.” The gates of the town were often used for courts of justice and centers of trade, and there the Israelites did most of their oppression of the poor. So this is where they could show that they love good and hate evil instead.

If the people would seek Him and seek good instead of seeking the sanctuaries at Bethel and Gilgal, then maybe He would be gracious (Heb. khaman, kahh-NAHN) to them. Amos is communicating that there is still the possibility of God showing favor and mercy to them. A remnant of Joseph is offered grace. After breaking away from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, the ten tribes were often referred to as Joseph. To refer to the remnant of Joseph is to appeal to those who will choose to seek good.

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.

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.

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

“The day of the LORD” is a term that refers to the Lord appearing and waging a holy war with His enemies. This is the first reference to the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament. Amos implies that those Israelites who are involved in oppressing the poor longed for this Day of Judgment. He lets them know it will not be a good time for them; it will be darkness and not light. The images of running from a lion only to meet a bear or running into a house only to be bitten by a serpent describe the Day of the Lord as a time when they will not be able to escape God’s judgment.

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

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.

Outwardly impressive religious acts of goodwill that are selfishly done do not move the heart of God. The phrase “your feast days” (Heb. khag, KHAG) refers to the three main festivals that God established in Israel: Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14–19; Deuteronomy 16:16–17). Israel was abusing all of these festivals at this time. God rejected what Israel did in these feasts, which had a form of godliness but lacked the power thereof. The implication is that God Himself may establish events, activities, or procedures, but His people can pervert, abuse, and misuse them to achieve their own selfish ends. The Lord says He will not smell in their assemblies (Heb. ‘atsarah, ahtsah-RAH). Amos is possibly referring to the solemn assembly on the seventh day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:8, 36). The Lord would not be pleased with any of the worship practiced on those days because of the absence of justice and right living.

None of the offerings prescribed in the law would please God. The Lord would not accept their burnt offerings (Heb. ‘olah, oh-LAH), in which the whole animal was consumed with fire. This was a symbol of the total commitment of the worshiper’s life to God. He would not accept their meat offerings (Heb. minkhah, min-KHAH). These were sacrifices devoid of blood and intended as gifts to the Lord. Lastly, He would not accept their peace offerings (Heb. shelem, SHEH-lehm), as these gifts were a sign of reconciliation or friendship, and this was not the state of their relationship with God. All of the worship rituals here were to be symbols of the people’s real-life walk with the Lord, and offering them without the true reality behind them was hypocritical. This made their offerings unacceptable to the Lord.

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

Celebrations and rejoicing in God’s presence played an important part in Israel’s temple worship, which God had established. The Israelites used many kinds of musical instruments to praise God for His goodness and faithfulness (2 Chronicles 7; Psalm 149). In this instance, the Lord actually calls their songs noise (Heb. hamon, hah-MONE). It is not the joyful noise of Psalm 100:1, but the noise and confusion of a host of people—noise that the Lord does not want to hear.

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

God illustrates the nature of judgment (justice) and righteousness by using the phrases “run down as waters” and “as a mighty stream,” which speak of the ongoing and unobstructed movement of an everflowing body of water. The word for stream, nakhal (Heb. NAH-khall), is the word for the desert wadi. These small narrow valleys laid dry and barren for much of the year until a torrent of rain

flooded them and made them into flowing streams. The Lord has already laid out the stipulations of justice in His covenant, and He is waiting for His people to fill the dry and barren land with justice and righteousness as the rains fill up a desert wadi.

**25 Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?
26 But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves.
27 Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.**

The Lord ends His pronouncement of judgment upon Israel's hypocritical worship with a rhetorical question. He asks if the Israelites have offered sacrifices to Him in the wilderness. While there were sacrifices made to the Lord in the wilderness, they were not a regular feature in Israel's religious life until after the conquest. The Lord is affirming that His relationship with them was not dependent on sacrifices and offerings. He had been with them in the wilderness without regular sacrifices.

Next, He confronts them on their worship of idols. They have paraded images of foreign gods through their streets to their shrines. Sacrifices, sacred dancing, and other perverse forms of worship followed this parade. Many translations say the "tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images." Other translations say "Sikkuth your king and Kaiwan your star god." Sikkuth is more probable as Sikkuth and Kaiwan were worshiped as astral deities in Mesopotamia, while Moloch was associated more with Syria-Palestine, and the worship practices here seem to be associated with Mesopotamia and the influences of the Assyrians. Since this is the only time Sikkuth is mentioned in the Bible but Moloch is mentioned numerous times, the Greek and Latin translators probably provided the more familiar name for the astral deity so that their audiences would understand. The meaning of the text does not change as either epithet refers to a deity associated with Saturn in the ancient world. In ancient times, Saturn was observed as being a star and influencing agriculture. This explains the reference to "the star of your god" (v. 26). In the next verse, Amos predicts that instead of them carrying their gods to the shrine to worship, they will be carried away captive. The phrase "beyond Damascus" points toward the coming Assyrian invasion that would take place and the resulting demise of the Northern Kingdom.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Psalm 14

Tuesday

Job 13:7-12

Wednesday

Matthew 23:23-28

Thursday

1 Samuel 15:17-23

Friday

Amos 5:1-6

Saturday

Amos 5:7-13

Sunday

Amos 5:14, 15, 18-27