

Exegetical Paper

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AMOS 5:1-10

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Introduction

This paper covers a passage from Amos 5. The passage is a good representative of the basic message of the book of Amos. It contains lamentation, admonition, accusation and a hymn. These are the basic elements of Amos' message.

Amos central theme is the judgment about the Israelites who are unfaithful to the covenant with Yahweh. He is the one warning them of what will happen if they do not listen and obey God and stop the misuse and emptiness of their perverted religion in the name of Yahweh.

He proclaims the message in a time of splendour and seeming safety. Yet there is a lack of ethic values and of sincere spiritual content. We now live in similar times and it seems that we have similar problems.

The best illustration for our own perversion of faith I experienced when I did some research in the Library. I tried to research some information on this passage in articles. All I found were speculation about the validity of certain words in the text and how to rearrange the text to make it comprehensible. The results of the search were basically useless¹. This text seems to be very hard to understand, especially for the people with no knowledge of God. Is there a famine of the word of God again ?

I finally found some books which hopefully will give me a good basis for the understanding of the text. Most of the good ones of them have more a devotional nature.

¹See also Eta Linnemann *HISTORICAL CRITICISM of the Bible* 1990, Baker Book House

The Text

Verse 1:

שָׁמְעוּ אֶת־הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי נוֹשֵׂא עֲלֵיכֶם קִינָה בַּיִת
יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Hear (G37) **this the word** (Or "this case", strongly indicated using definite article, object indicator and zeh) **which I am taking up** (G50 signifying ongoing action) **upon you for lament** (funeral hymn) **house of Israel.**

*This is a lamentation for the death for a fallen Nation. Hebrew lamentations were poetry and so this also is a composition*². *This is the introduction to the following lament.*

Remarkably he laments on the hearers of his message who are about to experience judgment thereby signifying that he already counts them as to be dead..

Verse 2:

נִפְלְהָ לֹא־תוֹסִיף קוֹם בְּתוֹלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל
נִשְׁעָה עַל־אֲדָמָתָהּ אֵין מְקִימָהּ:

She has fallen (G11) **not any more** (H21, could be H22 as in BDB but since we are dealing with she at the moment H21 is more likely) **to stand up** (G65 or arise) **the virgin of Israel.** **She was forsaken** (N11, completed action, other meaning she is loose) **from her land, there is no one to rise her** (H50+S1 also build) **up.**

*Israel is already seen as fallen (use of a perfect). There is nothing that can be done about it and no one is able to help her up again. She is loose from the Land, already implying exile. The prophet elaborates this further in a later passage.*³

*This is the actual beginning of the lament. This is generally assumed to be the earliest personification of cities or countries (Is this conclusion valid in light of the methods of the author?)*⁴. *See also Ezek 32:4 for another lament over a virgin. Yet another is found in Hosea 2:7.*

*The picture used here "virgin" depicts the vulnerability of Israel and may express the prior expectation of a fruitful life which was destroyed*⁵. *This implies that God looked upon Israel prior as a father caring for his daughter. Another explanation is that God as a husband has the right that the bride should belong to him alone. The term virgin might also be understood as self-indulgence as luxury (Calvin understood it like that)*⁶.

*"Fallen" usually has the notion of death by the sword. See also 2 Sam 1:19,25,27 2 Sam 3:34 Lam 2:21*⁷.

²Edghill p.48

³Edghill p.48, Hubbard p.165

⁴Edghill p.48

⁵Hubbard p.165

⁶Beeley p. 64

⁷Wolf p.236

Verse 3:

כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱדַבֵּר יְהוָה
הָעִיר הַיֹּצֵאת אֵלַי תִּשְׁאֵר מֵאָה
וְהַיֹּצֵאת מֵאָה תִּשְׁאֵר עֶשְׂרֵה לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל :

Because so speaks the Lord Yahweh (Standard Phrase): **The City who comes forth** (G51 or go out, NRSV march) **with a thousand shall have a rest** (H21 remainder, left over) **of a hundred**

And the one coming forth (G51 see above) **with a hundred shall have a rest** (H21 see above) **of ten**

for the house of Israel (Omitted in NRSV, Biblia Hebraica assumes scribal mistake, might be a duplication of the text at the end of the next line).

Catastrophe comes upon Israel authorized by the most high. This explains the urgency and directness of Amos message.

It has been suggested that the passage "for the house of Israel" belongs to the whole verse and should be placed after the standard phrase. Some insert another "The City" before the second "coming forth"⁸.

Verse 4:

כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל
דַּרְשׁוּנִי וְחִיוּ:

For so speaks Yahweh (Standard Phrase) **to the house of Israel: Seek me !** (G37 + S4, Imperative with Suffix !) **so that** (logical sequence through Waw+finite verb) **you live !** (Waw+G37)

Remarkable are the two last words which together form a short but powerful message.⁹

This is a call to repentance. Essence of repentance are not rituals or works but the attitude to a person. Our actions need to be evidence of our desire to find him¹⁰.

Some tread this passage as a reminder of what God has said in the past. "For so spoke Yahweh.." so the cause of the judgment is clearer. Israel will fall because she has disobeyed in the past. To seek implies religious desire, effort, obedience and worship.¹¹

Verse 5:

וְאַל-תִּדְרָשׁוּ בֵּית-אֱלֹהִים
וְהַגְלִנְלָה לֹא תִבְאוּ וּבְאֵר שִׁבְעָה לֹא תַעֲבְרוּ
כִּי הַגְלִנְלָה נִלְחָה וְנִלְחָה וּבֵית-אֱלֹהִים יִהְיֶה לְאֵנוּן:

But do not resort (G27 ! I take it as G25, The second person might indicate a urgency and directness of the message. Other meanings of verb: seek or inquire) **to Beth-El** (place of worship also meaning House of God)

⁸Wolf p. 227

⁹Robinson p.28

¹⁰Beeley p.68

¹¹Edghill p.49

and to Gilgal (Why is here a definite article ?) **do not enter** (again G27 !)

and to Beer-Sheba (Root of Sheba means Oath-Taking, Beer could mean well, pit) **do not transgress** (G27 ! or crossover).

Because the Gilgal (Wordplay with galah=go into exile) **will surely** (G50 of galah repetition of verb, does use masculine instead of usual feminine with towns!) **go into exile** (G20 of galah also meaning removed) **and Beth-El will become** (G20 verb to be) **like sorrow** (or trouble, wickedness, idolatry, NRSV with LXX nothing).

To seek Yahweh is not to go to Gilgal or Beersheba or Beth-El. Not some rite but search God himself is needed. Discard the empty religious shell. There is mocking going on with the wordplay about Gilgal. The shrines themselves will be the objects of judgment. Especially Beth-El seems to have an important point in Israel's religious life.¹²

Remarkable wordplays with transgress (sin against) and crossover to Beer-sheba, Gilgal and exile and finally Beth-El is connected to a word that also has the meaning of idolatry.

Salvation is not in the sanctuaries of corrupt worship. The devil loves to misuse the holy to profane it. There is a warning against searching salvation in institutions. Condemnation of syncretism and unbiblical practices.¹³

God is not as we would like him to be. A cult might blind for the reality of God. Beer-Sheba is in Judah, the Israelites would have to cross the border of Judah to get there. Hosea takes this passage and frequently refers to Beth-Aven (House of Idolatry) instead of Beth-El (House of God). Could this originate in this sentence of Amos ?¹⁴

Noteworthy is the artistic change Beth-El and Gilgal, Gilgal and Beth-El.

Verse 6:

דַּרְשׁוּ אֶת־יְהוָה וְחַיּוּ פֶן־יִצְלַח כְּאֵשׁ בַּיִת יוֹסֵף
וְאָכְלָה וְאֵין־מְכַפֶּה לְבַיִת־אֵל :

Seek (G37 see above, this time a different perspective) **Yahweh so that you live !** (see above V4) **lest he will rush** (G20 also advance, prosper) **like fire - house of Joseph - so that it** (the fire) **burns consuming** (G11 or eat, devour) - **with no one to extinguish** (D50 or quenching, D intensive !) **it - Beth-El.**

The verse begins with a repetition of the short two word call to repentance. A vivid picture of the destruction is painted. But the judgment seems to be restricted to the "house of Joseph" meaning the two main tribes of the northern kingdom. Or are they representatives of the whole kingdom? The picture includes helplessness like the picture of the virgin. This verse offers a remote chance of changing the judgment but apparently does not expect it to happen so that it is absolutely sure that judgment will come¹⁵.

¹²Hubbard p.166

¹³Beeley p.68

¹⁴Edghill p.49

¹⁵Hubbard p.166/7,169

*There can be no communion between holiness and uncleanness. This results in fire (holy wrath) burning to consume the uncleanness.*¹⁶

Edghill suggests emendation of "like fire" to "on fire" by changing the kaf into a bet. Then he is able to read "least he will set the house of Israel on fire"¹⁷.

Verse 7:

הַהֲפֹכִים לְלַעֲנָה מִשֹּׁפֵט וְצָדִיקָה לְאֶרֶץ הַנִּיחִיָּה:

They are turning (G55 also overturn, turn upside down¹⁸) **justice to wormwood while** (Circumstantial clause) **they brought righteousness to rest** (I assume H15 of Nuach but the Dagesh in the Nun does not fit, NRSV bring) **for the land.** (NRSV translates as ground, land fits better in context)

*The relocation of this verse has been suggested because it seems to be out of context. But this is pure conjecture. This can be taken as a dramatic address to the hearer. The combination of justice and righteousness is used repeatedly by Amos as a summary of the covenant responsibility to Yahweh. The sweetness of justice is taken to the bitterest thing possible. The taste of wormwood is comparable to the taste of poison.*¹⁹

*False Religion results in false social values. Self-will has become uncontrollable*²⁰.

Verse 8:

עֹשֶׂה כִּימָה וְכִסִּיל
וְהַפֵּךְ לְבֹקֵר צְלֻמוֹת וַיּוֹם לַיְלָה הַחֲשִׁיךְ
הַקּוֹרָא לְמִי-הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁפְּכֵם עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ
יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ:

The one making (G50) **the Pleiades** (dubious others suggest Sirius, Root could mean herd of camels would fit better to Amos) **and Orion** (dubious),

and the one turning (G50) **deep darkness** (death-shadow? See Psalm 23:4) **to morning** (light)

and he causes (H10) **the day to darken in the night.**

The one calling (H50 also proclaiming, naming usage here as in Genesis 1) **the waters of the sea**

and then pours them out (Gc20) **over the face of the earth. Yahweh is his name.**

*Some amend "death-shadow" to "darkness" by changing the pointing from MaWeT to MU(W)T.*²¹

This is a hymn reinforcing the threat by showing the power of the one making it. The meaning of the word "Pleiades" and "Orion" is unclear and taken over from ancient translations (LXX?). Another purpose

¹⁶Beeley p.69

¹⁷Edghill p.50

¹⁸Wolff p.229

¹⁹Hubbard p.167-169

²⁰Beeley p.69

²¹Robinson p.28/29

might be to counter pagan beliefs in star-gods and the power of them (common also nowadays). The two last words simply state who is this. This is Yahweh.²²

Amos is thinking of God as the creator of the universe. Petty Israelite Gods are no challenge. Are they stars? He made them!²³

Verse 9:

הַמְבֹלִיגִים שָׂדֵי עַל-עֵז : וְשָׂדֵי עַל-מִבְצָר יָבֹוא :

The one bringing devastation (ruin, NRSV destruction) **to burst forth** (H50) **against the mighty** (also strong, fierce).

This is another statement that Yahweh is able to deal with them. The LXX reads "stronghold" instead of "mighty". This is a final statement that God is able to deal with the human arrogance²⁴.

God shows his strength against the strong to protect the weak. Human defenses cannot withstand God.²⁵

Verse 10:

שָׂנְאוּ בַשָּׂעַר מוֹכֵיחַ : וְדִבְרֵי תִמְיִם יִתְעָבוּ :

They hate (G15) **the proving one** (H50 also decide, judge, correct) **in the Gate and the one speaking sound truth** (complete, with truth, whole) **they are abhorring** (G25 also reject).

Gate is the place where decisions of justice are made. In the gates there were usually rooms for court (Actually that is the root of the English word court!). This verse introduces another sequence of accusations by mentioning specific issues. The rich are apparently able to use the justice-system according to their needs²⁶. This is going on today again especially in the US.

This is an exposition of what the "strong" are doing. The strong are arrogant and cannot endure correction by others anymore. They have to be pleased all the time.²⁷

The Historical Setting

The contents of Amos suggest a date near to the end of Jeroboam II reigning together with his father Jehoash in 793-753 BC²⁸. Amos 1:1 names the Kings Uzziah and Jeroboam. Many scholars suggest a short period of Amos ministry. The conflict with Amaziah the high-priest (7:10-17) might have cut the ministry short.

Amos apparently was a shepherd from Tekoah (1:1) in Judah ministering to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The story of Jeroboam II son of Joash is told in 2 Kings 14:16f. In his reign the territory of Israel was expanded. This apparently was a time of prosperity and success. But just after him trouble began and his son was murdered. After two other changes of kings, Israel went into exile.

²²Hubbard p.170

²³Beeley p.69/70

²⁴Hubbard p.170/1

²⁵Beeley p.70

²⁶Hubbard p.172

²⁷Beeley p.71

²⁸Hubbard p.89

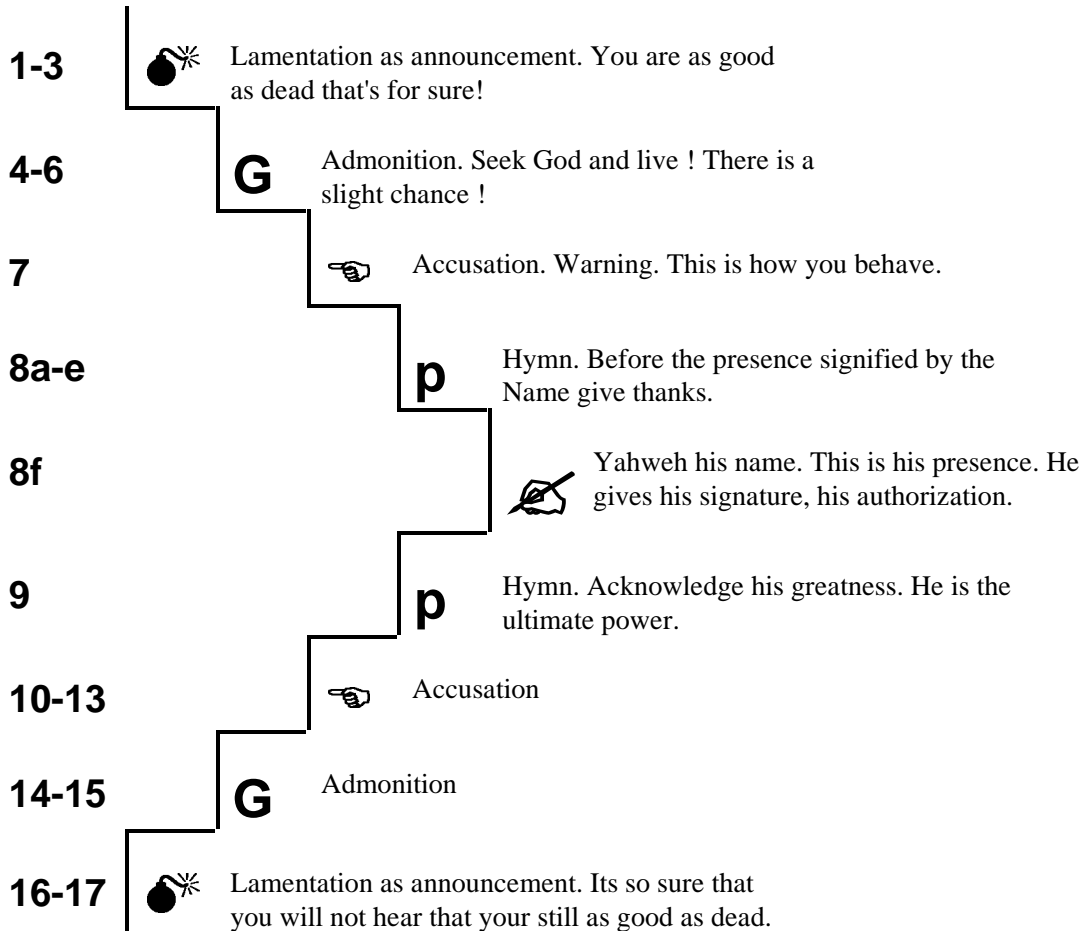
The text gives special attention to Beth-El and the worship there. Beth-El was judged before by another prophet in 1 Kings 13. Jeroboam I built Beth-El to prevent his people from going to Judah. A prophet condemned him for this and prophesied the destruction of Beth-El. The destruction took place after the exile of Israel under the Judaic King Josiah 2 Kings 23:15²⁹.

²⁹Wolff p. 111

Literary Form

The text here is written in a symmetric form. This form shows the artistic style in which the author handles his message to really make it stick with his hearers. Not only does he use puns locally in the sentences but he gives the hearer a global system to utilize the memorization of all of his message.

This device also allows him to express the passion Yahweh has for his people.



This whole structure focuses on the judgment. From both sides there is judgment coming. The only way out is through the one who is praised Yahweh his name.

The mentioning of Yahweh's name is not just a symbol but it is his divine presence. What he says is backed up. One better believes what he is saying. Calling on his name means being confronted with him. The name is him the name means "HE IS".³⁰

He is passionately concerned about his people and will not let this neglect of him continue any longer.

Meaning of the Text

³⁰Lecture notes

The text shows the fallen nature of Israel and announces God's judgment upon Israel. The existence of Israel is incompatible with his holy being. He cannot longer tolerate the severe sinning of Israel. There is a faint cry for repentance but it is no longer expected.

Relation to Context in the Book

This seems to be the central passage of the book where Amos messages reaches a climax in a form which easily allows the remembrance of this part. It summarizes the message of the whole book.

Its faint chance of repentance has led many scholars to "see" a later redaction in this passage³¹. Since the passage is clearly structured as shown before the work of these scholars is partly unusable for further interpretation of this passage.

Relation to larger Biblical Context

Amos announces the final judgment about Israel and its removal by God since its idolatry and sinfulness has become too great.

Possible contributions to Christian life

God brings judgment on a corrupt society

A corrupt society will not be tolerated by God (Verse 7) but stands under his judgment. The outward appearance of prosperity does not mean God will not judge it.

He is not a tame lion

God is not as we want him to be (Verse 5). He is unpredictable (C.S. Lewis : Aslan). Even if we preach for years about God's love, God is just and he will not tolerate a corrupt society without judgment.

No one will be able to help against God's wrath

God is (HE IS = YAHWEH) . Who can help against his wrath. We should not lightly speak of Yahweh or think matters of religion are unimportant. (Verse 2)

Are you lulled by the luxury of time and think you are untouchable?

Luxury and wealth can lead to think we are independent of God. We think we are autonomous. We even have developed our theology based solely on our own reasoning and not upon God's revelation on us. We built a tower of Babel in our own thought on how God must be.

God is not our picture of him HE IS !

Forsake empty rites and dead works. God will judge them.

He will judge empty rites (Verse 5). How do we practice "religion"? Is this an expression of something deep in us or is it a duty? Is there any expression of worship of God in our lives? How do we live Christianity? Are we honest and truthful about our beliefs?

False Religion results in corrupt society

The changing of religion (Verse 4+5) leads to a change in society (Verse 9+10). The practice of a corrupt religion leads to a corrupt society. Corrupt religion does hinder truth and hinders the hearing of God's

³¹Wolff p.231

voice. This becomes the nature of the people and this will also be practiced in social relationships and thereby affect the whole society.

Research the cause of the recent riots in L.A. in connection with the beliefs propagated on TV. The daily indoctrination of people.

Inability of the strong to endure correction

Everybody must allow truth to come to him to be able to develop as a human being and spiritually. If some are beyond correction (the strong in Verse 10) they will degenerate and become evil. Effectively they are still living but dead (NT Concept) (Zombies).

Even David was reproached when he was King. He was a good King because he still was open to correction.

You cannot play with God. You can be deadly sure of Gods judgment. Seek him !

God is there ! And he is capable in bringing destruction (Verse 2+3+6+9) especially against the ones feeling safe in their wealth.

God is holy. He created the starts should he be too weak to handle evil? Is it not grace that he withholds it?

Why look to the starts for your fate? It is in God's hand. He created the world and he is perfectly able to change you if you are willing against all wisdom of the fortune-tellers.

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