

Preaching Through The Bible

Michael Eaton Amos

Part 11

Death or Life (5:1-5)

- The trend of thought*

The trend of thought in this section of Amos goes like this. Amos says that there is an enemy encircling the land of Israel. It is about to invade and destroy at any moment. The cause of the invasion is the sin of Israel.

- Israel's spiritual lunacy*

Amos has given a general sketch of Israel's spiritual lunacy (3:9–4:3):

- failure in the palaces of Samaria (3:9–12)
- powerless religion (3:13–15)
- arrogant leadership (4:1–3)
- useless pilgrimages (4:4–5).

- God's chastisements ignored*

And he has spoken of the failure of God's chastisements (4:6–13):

- famine (4:6)
- drought (4:7–8)
- ruin of crops (4:9)
- pestilence (4:10)
- earthquake (4:11)
- a last invitation (4:12–13).

- God's calls unheeded*

Amos sings a funeral song over Israel

Many calls from God have gone unheeded (4:6–11). God is giving Israel a last call to repentance (4:12–13).

^{¶1} 4:6-11
^{¶2} 4:12-13

Now Amos sings a song over Israel, and the song is a 'lamentation', a 'funeral song'. He says:

'Hear this word which I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel' (5:1).

'Listen to this funeral-song which I am going to sing'.

- Seek God or die as a nation*

The theme of the section is: Seek God or die as a nation. Heed God's last call or perish. (Actually Israel did 'perish' and die as a nation less than forty years after Amos' ministry. The Assyrians invaded Israel in the late 720s BC, and northern song is to be found in 5:1–3 and continues in 5:16–17. Seeking God is mentioned in 5:4–5 and 5:14–15. The sins of Israel are explained in 5:7 and 5:10–13. In the heart of the section is a song about the great power of God (5:8–9). This means that the sections of the poetry have an A-B-C-D-C-B-A structure.

- Poetic structure*

- A. The death-song (5:1–3)
- B. Seeking God but not at the sanctuaries (5:4–5)
- C. You... turn justice into bitterness (5:7)
- D. He ..The God who makes changes (5:8–9)
- C. You... turn righteousness to bribery (5:10–13)
- B. Seeking God (5:14–15)
- A. The death-song (5:16–17)

Amos sings a funeral son ^{¶1}. It is the kind of song you might sing when someone has died.

^{¶1} 5:3

*'The virgin Israel has fallen;
she will never stand up again;
she has been left lying on her land;*

- **Total destruction at the hands of the Assyrians**

'no one raises her up.' (5:2)

The Assyrians have not come yet but Amos is already singing the funeral-song! Israel is about to face destruction in a way that is so terrible the nation will go out of existence, and will never be raised up again in the same form as she was before.

- **Military invasion**

*"The city that went out a thousand strong
shall have only a hundred left;
and the one that went out a hundred strong
shall have only ten left –
O house of Israel."* (5:3)

The only hope for Israel is to seek God – but not at the idolatrous sanctuaries ^{¶1}.

^{¶1} 5:4-5

- **Israel's only hope is to seek God but not at the idolatrous sanctuaries**

*'For thus says Yahweh,
"O house of Israel:
Seek Me and live!" (5:4).
But do not seek Me at Bethel,
and do not come to Gilgal,
and do not cross over to Beersheba.
Because Gilgal will certainly go into exile,
and Bethel will become nothing."* (5:5)

- **Three famous places that had become shrines of idolatry**

Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba were three famous places in Israel's history, but in Amos' time they had become places of idolatry. All three of them were famous as places where God gave newness of life to His people. Bethel was famous as the place where meeting God changed Jacob's life. Gilgal was famous as the place where Israel crossed the Jordan and started a new life in Israel. Beersheba was famous as the place where God told Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that He would be with them. Amos was singing a song about death. The people were making pilgrimages to shrines which earlier in Israel's history spoke about life! Life or death? Which way would Israel go? God was giving them a last warning. The sin of Israel was bringing about its death. The wages of sin is death. The soul that sins shall die. 'Death' in Hebrew thinking is something progressive. Every sin is a fatal blow. Those who sow to the flesh reap corruption, because every wickedness corrupts and destroys. Only those who do the will of God abide.

- **A final warning that their sin was leading to death**

1. **Bethel was famous as a life-changing place**

1. Bethel was famous as a life-changing place. Jacob ^{¶1} was running away from home because his sins had got him into trouble. There God spoke to him. There the angels came down upon him. And a few years later ^{¶2} in the same place, he became a new man and was given the name Israel.

^{¶1} see Genesis 28:10-22

^{¶2} see Genesis 35:1-15

But now in Amos's time Bethel was a place of spiritual death. The life-giving God was no longer to be found there. It was a place of sin and wickedness. It did not impart any newness of life.

2. Gilgal was famous as a place of renewal and purification

2. Gilgal was famous as a place of renewal and purification. God had done great things for them. A memorial was built there reminding them that ‘the hand of the Lord is mighty’ ^{¶1}. There the passover was celebrated and the men were circumcised. It all spoke of newness of life, redemption by the blood of the lamb, consecration to God.

^{¶1} Joshua 4:1-24

3. Beersheba was famous as the place where God spoke of His companionship with His people

3. Beersheba was famous as the place where God spoke of His companionship with His people. Abraham built altars at Shechem and Bethel and Hebron, but it was at Beersheba that it became obvious God was planning to bless Abraham with newness of life. It was there that a pagan king could see that God was with Abraham and said to him ‘God is with you’ ^{¶1}. It was there that God said to Isaac ‘I am with you’ ^{¶2}. It was there that God said to Jacob ‘I will go with you’ ^{¶3}.

^{¶1} Genesis 21:23

^{¶2} Genesis 26:24

^{¶3} Genesis 46:1,4

But the famous sanctuaries were useless; it was necessary to seek God afresh. ‘Seek God’, says Amos, but don’t go the sanctuaries that have died. Seek God afresh!



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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