

1. God despises useless religion

• Offerings disgusting to God

• Justice ignored in favour of self-centred pietism

2. God will only accept a faith that leads to abundant righteousness

• The protection of the weak and poor

• Let righteousness roll at Gilgal

3. God despises religion invented by human preference

• A question

• In the wilderness - was it nothing more than religious ritual?

• Was this what God ordained on

The people of northern Israel loved their religion but it did them no good.

1. **God despises useless religion.** They liked the meetings, the sacrifices and the singing. Their 'worship' imitated the worship at Jerusalem, but it was corrupt and idolatrous. God says:

²¹"I hate, I detest your festivals,
I do not take any delight in your solemn assemblies.
²²When you bring me burnt offerings and cereal offerings I will not accept them.
And I will not take notice of the peace offerings of your fattened animals.
²³Take away from me the noise of your songs.
I will not listen to the melody of your harps."

Festivals, sacrifices and musical worship were all involved in the worship of northern Israel but God hated all of it! The 'burnt offerings' symbolising consecration, the cereal offerings symbolising dedication of one's work to God, the peace offerings which spoke of the joys of reconciliation with God – all of them were disgusting to God. What was wrong with such 'worship'? It was offered to perverted 'gods' who were not the Redeemer-God of burning holiness. And it was a religion that ignored God's demand for justice, preferring self-centred pietism.

2. **God will accept only a faith that leads to abundant righteousness.** Religious routines that produce no abundance of righteousness are abominations to God, however lively and interesting they might be. Amos says:

²⁴"But let righteousness roll down like a flood of waters,
let justice flow like a river that never stops flowing."

Amos is specially thinking of the protection of the weak and poor, and the preservation of honesty in the law courts. God is looking for righteousness and justice.

It is interesting that Amos says 'Let righteousness roll down like a flood of waters...'. It is the Hebrew word galal. It is closely linked to the name of the town Gilgal. 'I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you', said God, back in the days when the people of God were circumcised at Gilgal after coming to the promised land ¹. The disgrace of being displeasing to God had been 'rolled away', so the place became known as Gilgal – 'Rolling' ². Now in Amos's time the people love to visit Gilgal, as a famous religious centre, but there is no 'rolling away' of the reproach of sin. Amos says 'Let righteousness roll down...'. ¹ Josh. 5:9
² Josh. 5:9b

3. **God despises religion invented by human preference.** Amos comes back to God's rejection of their religion. Amos 5:25–26 corresponds to 5:21–23.

²⁵Was it sacrifices and offerings that you brought to Me during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?.

Of course Israel did bring sacrifices and offerings to God during the forty years in the wilderness! Exodus 18:12 refers to sacrifices brought by Jethro. Exodus 24:4,6 shows us how Moses offered sacrifices in the wilderness. Leviticus 9:8–24 refers to sacrifices administered by Aaron. Numbers 7:19 tells us of offerings given to God in the wilderness period. The Passover was an obligatory sacrifice in the nation's life from the very day they first were redeemed from Egypt.

Amos's question means: is this all it was? Was it sacrifices and offerings that you brought to Me – and nothing more than that? Religious ritual that has no effect on one's attitude to the needy? And perhaps Amos's words also mean: Was it **these** sacrifices and offerings that you brought Me? Because verse 26 moves from the wilderness period to Amos' own time.

²⁶You have carried around Sakkuth¹ your king [an Assyrian god], and Kaiwan² your divine star [the planet Saturn] – these images of yours!.

God ordained on Sinai?

• *Religious ideas from Assyria and Babylon – ritual with no concern for the poor*

• *But Yahweh the true God of Israel is holy and righteous*

4. A corrupted version of Israel's faith will be punished with inescapable exile

• *The day of Yahweh will bring exile and extermination unless there is an immediate end to self-centred religion*

• *The focus – He wants justice to flow abundantly – like a river that never dries up*

Was this what God ordained on Sinai?

It was the custom in the ancient world to carry around man-made 'gods', especially in religious ceremonies and in battles with other nations. The gods that Israel were now worshipping had little resemblance to Yahweh, the God who had saved the nation in the days of Moses, by the blood of the passover lamb. But they did not think that different ideas about God mattered very much! They had recently got their religious ideas from Assyria and Babylon! They now used the word 'Yahweh' in their 'new theology' from abroad! Their enthusiasm for their own revised edition of Israel's religion did not affect their attitudes to the poor, but that did not worry them.

Amos's preaching was entirely different. Amos knew Yahweh – the Redeemer God of Israel – as the God of holiness and righteousness. The people of Israel were careless about justice in society. They worshipped immoral gods. Amos holds to faith in the God who revealed Himself in the original Passover and who had spoken from Mount Sinai.

4. A corrupted version of Israel's faith will be punished with inescapable exile ¹. Amos has warned them that God's judgement will not show favouritism to Israel. Now verse 27 (corresponding to 5:18–19) comes back to his same warning of inescapable judgement if Israel will not change.

²⁷*'And I will send you into banishment beyond Damascus – says He whose name is Yahweh, the Almighty God'.*

The people of Israel loved to think about 'the last things'. Religious people everywhere like to claim that their religion enables them to make predictions concerning the future. Such 'prophecies' are generally flattering to the people that make them. 'God is going to bless us', they say. 'The Day of Yahweh will be wonderful; God will exalt Israel above the nations'. The people loved talk about predictive prophecy, just as they loved the wonderful worship-services at Bethel and Gilgal and Beersheba. Their society was corrupt; their religion was self-pleasing and self-centred.

Amos says 'No! The Day of Yahweh for you will be an exile that will never be reversed and that will lead to the extermination of northern Israel' – unless you change immediately and drastically.

Amos 5:24 is the central focus of this unit of the prophecy. Amos is looking for an abundance of righteousness. It is not a little trickle he wants or a dribble or a splash. He wants their justice to be like the streams that pour down an abundance of water after the coming of the rains. He wants the people of God to be flooded with ever-flowing righteousness like those few rivers in Israel which continue to flow throughout the year even in the times of summer drought. Any other kind of 'religion' will come under his eternal banishment.

¹ 5:27

Footnotes

1 The Hebrew has sikkuth – the consonants of Sakkuth plus the vowels of shiqquts ('abomination').

2 The Hebrew has kiyyun – the consonants of Kaiwan plus the vowels of shiqquts ('abomination')

	<p>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 <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> 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.</p>	
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