

• *God's changes have been reversed – a return to the pathways of sin*

Amos is singing Israel's funeral-song already ^{☞1}. 'Seek Yahweh', he says, but whatever you do don't go to the sanctuaries at Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba ^{☞2}. Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba were famous for bringing great changes into the life of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God is a God of new birth, of newness of life. He is the God who brings about mighty changes in the lives of men and women. At Bethel, Jacob's name was changed to Israel. The change of name represented the newness of life God was giving to Jacob. But men and women tend to reverse God's changes and go back into the pathways of sin.

^{☞1} 5:1-5

^{☞2} 5:4-5

• *The theme – turning one thing into another*

Turning one thing into another is the theme of the three inner units of Amos 5:1-16. Amos 5:6-7 is about making a change: 'You... turn justice into bitterness'. The song to God in Amos 5:8-9 is about the ability of God to make great changes. And Amos 5:10-13 spells out in detail how men and women change God-given righteousness into corruption of one kind or another.

1. Justice into bitterness

1. **You turn justice into bitterness** ^{☞1}. The people loved the national traditions of Israel, and were delighted when they could visit the famous worship-centres at Bethel. But Amos says, 'Don't just follow dead and corrupted traditional religion. Seek Yahweh himself'.

^{☞1} 5:7

*“Seek Yahweh that you may live!
Otherwise He will break out like a fire, O house of Joseph,
and devour with nothing to quench it in Bethel. (5:6)
You who turn justice into the bitter wormwood-plant,
and who throw down righteousness to the ground.” (5:7)*

• *Bethel – But their interest was the opposite of Jacob's*

Bethel was the place that was famous for bringing an immense change into the life of Jacob. Now the people of Israel are visiting the famous worship-centre, but they are reversing the very change that God brought into the life of Jacob. Jacob was changed from a man of deceit into a man of godliness and integrity. Now the people were admiring their national ancestor, and visiting the memorial of life at Bethel – but were not interested in having the same experience he had. Indeed they were undoing and reversing the very thing that had happened to Jacob. Unless they seek God Himself, He will exterminate northern Israel, as He did the pagan nations (note the similarity of 5:6 with 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2). There will be an annihilating, unquenchable fire if they do not repent.

• *Justice disregarded and despised*

They have turned the righteousness that God brought into Israel into '*the bitter wormwood-plant*' – a plant with a bitter and horrible taste. They have 'thrown down righteousness to the ground', disregarding justice and despising its claims.

2. Night into day

2. **God turns night into day** ^{☞1}. Amos inserts a song. It is a few lines from a hymn celebrating God as the one who brings about great changes.

^{☞1} 5:8-9

• *A song celebrating God who brings about great changes*

*“The One who one made the Pleiades and Orion, and changes deep darkness into daylight,
who darkens the day into night;
the One who calls into being the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth*

*them out on the surface of the earth.
Yahweh is His name!(5:8)
The One who causes destruction to burst upon the strong,
so that destruction comes upon the fortress.” (5:9)*

• *Seasons*

He changes the seasons of the year. ‘Pleiades and Orion’ are the names of groups of stars. They would be in different parts of the sky at different seasons of the year.

• *Night and Day*

He makes changes day by day, turning night into daytime and daytime into night.

• *Seas and waters*

He makes the changes necessary for the weather to do His will. He created the seas and waters of the earth in the first place, and now controls them so that they do His will. He ‘*calls into being the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth*’.

• *Saviour and redeemer*

He makes the changes involved in the salvation of men and women. ‘*Yahweh is His name!*’ says Amos’ song, reminding us that the Creator-God is also the Redeemer-God who ‘got Himself a name’ when He saved Israel by the blood of a lamb.

• *Judgements of history*

He makes the changes involved in the judgements of history when nations rise and fall, at the word of God’s power. He can take mighty warriors and bring instant destruction upon them. He ‘*causes destruction to burst upon the strong*’. Fortresses are nothing to Him.

• *But the people visit Bethel and remain unchanged!*

Each line of Amos’ song makes the point that the God of Israel is the God who brings about massive changes with the greatest of ease, whenever He wishes. The pilgrims come to Bethel, allegedly admiring a God who mightily changed Jacob’s life. They sing songs celebrating God’s power to bring about changes in history, in nature, and in His relationships with men and women. And then they go away unchanged themselves. The only change they make is to turn justice into the wormwood-plant!

3. Righteousness to bribery

3. **You turn righteousness to bribery** ^{□1}. Proceeding back along the same line of thought, Amos lists the characteristics of the unchanged life.

□1 5:10 –13

• *The unchanged life*

*“They hate the one who reproves the wicked in the gate,
and the one who speaks the truth. (5:10)
Therefore, because you trample upon the needy,
and extract levies of grain from them.
You built houses of hewn stone, you will not live in them.
The pleasant vineyards that you planted,
you shall not drink their wine. (5:11)
I know that your transgressions are many,
and your sins are numerous,
you who distress the upright, and accept bribes,
and turn aside the poor from the gate. (5:12)
Therefore at such a time the wise person keeps quiet,
for it is an evil time.” (5:13)*

• *Hating just judges*

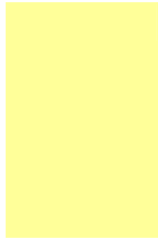
‘The gate’ was the gate of the city, the place where justice was administered. The people who loved to visit Bethel, hated a just judge (‘*one who reproves the wicked*’) and the truthful witness (‘*the one who speaks the truth*’). They were ill-treating the needy, and giving themselves to the life of luxury. They disregarded God’s estimate of their sins (‘*your transgressions are many . . . your sins are numerous*’). They allowed money to twist justice. They made life difficult for the honest person (‘*the wise person keeps quiet*’).

• *Ill-treating the needy*

• *Making life difficult for the honest person*

• **Judgement coming soon**

But soon exterminating judgement will come. Their luxurious homes will not be lived in. No one will be around to enjoy the wine of the vineyards. The Assyrians will come; northern Israel will cease to exist – unless they turn to the God who changed Jacob at Bethel and still ‘changes deep darkness into daylight’. Seeking God is their only hope.



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