

The Minor Prophets
Lesson 18: How To Avoid The Storm
(Amos 5:1-17)

Introduction: The prophet's third message (5:1—6:14) was a lamentation, a funeral dirge (a lament, or mournful song) over the death of the nation of Israel. (Israel is mentioned four times in 5:1-4.) "There will be wailing in all the streets," he declares (v.16 NIV), not just wailing in one or two houses where people have died. Since the people's grief will be so great that there won't be sufficient professional mourners available to express it, they'll call the farmers and workers in the vineyards to help them (vv. 16-17).

However, Amos weaves into his lamentation three pleas to the people urging them to return to the Lord.

1. "Hear God's Word!" (5:1-3)

This is the third time Amos has called the people to give attention to God's Word (3:1; 4:1). The way we treat God's Word is the way we treat God, and the way we treat God's messengers is the way we treat the Lord Himself (John 15:18-21). "God ...has in these last days spoken to us by His Son. ...See that you do not refuse Him who speaks" (Heb. 1:1-2; 12:25 NKJV).

The listeners must have wondered why Amos was wailing a funeral dirge when nobody in his family or circle of acquaintances had died. They were perplexed as to why he was grieving over the death of his nation when the nation seemed to be prosperous and religious. But the prosperity and "revival" were only cosmetics to make the sick and dying nation look healthier. Amos looked at the vital signs, and they were almost gone.

Amos compared the nation to a virgin daughter in the bloom of youth, ravaged and slain on the field of battle, her corpse left to rot. All hope was gone, and nobody could help her get up.

- a. After the Assyrian invasion, the kingdom of Israel ceased to exist and has never been restored. Some people were taken into exile, some were slain, and the rest were left to mingle with the Gentiles that were brought in to resettle the land. The result was a mixed race—the Samaritans—neither Jew nor Gentile.
- b. Israel had a strong standing army, but it would be defeated, and the population was decimated, just like the Lord had warned in His covenant.
- c. There can be no victory when the Lord has abandoned you to your fate, when you have abandoned Him.
- d. This was not the end of the Jews or His purposes for them in the world.

The first step toward revival and returning to the Lord is to hear what God has to say to us from His Word. See Ps. 85:6-8 NKJV.

2. "Seek The Lord!" (5:4-6)

This phrase is found in the scripture thirty-nine times. It applied to Israel in the ancient days, and it applies to God's children today. Even if the whole nation (or Church) doesn't respond to the message and return to the Lord, a remnant can return and receive the Lord's help and blessing. God was willing to save the evil city of Sodom if He had found ten righteous people in it (Gen.18:32); and in Jeremiah's day, the Lord would have been happy to find even one

righteous person in Jerusalem! God can work through many or the few (1 Sam. 14:6); we should never despise the day of the small things (Zech. 4:10).

- a. What does it mean to “seek the Lord”?** The prophet Isaiah answers this question: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near... (Isaiah 55:6-7 NIV)
- i. To seek the Lord means first of all to change our thinking and abandon our vain thoughts that are directing our wayward lives. Disobedient children of God are thinking wrongly about God, sin and life. They think that God will always be there for them to run to, but they forget that sinners reap what they sow. To walk in the counsel of the ungodly is folly indeed, for it leads to a fruitless and joyless life.
 - ii. When we return to the Lord, we also change our directions: We “turn around” and start to move in the right direction. It means forsaking sin and turning to the Lord for mercy and pardon. Until we realize how heinous our sins are in the sight of God, we will never repent and cry out for mercy. To seek the Lord doesn’t mean to simply run to Him in a time of trouble, although God will receive us if we’re sincere. It means to loathe and despise sin in our lives, turn from it, and seek the fellowship of God and His cleansing. “A broken and contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (Ps. 51:17 NKJV).
- b. Why should we seek the Lord?**
- i. The prophet gave three reasons, the first of which is that we might have life (Amos 5:4). The way of disobedience is the way of darkness and death. “Seek me and live” is God’s invitation and admonition (v.4 NIV). God disciplines His children in love so that they will repent and return; but, if we don’t change our ways, He may take our lives. See Hebrews 12:9 NIV, 1 John 5:16.
 - ii. The second reason we should seek God is because there is no other way to experience spiritual blessing (Amos 5:5). The people were going to the shrines in droves and coming home further from God than when they left. The writer Emerson said that a change in geography never overcomes a flaw in character, and he was right.
 - iii. The third reason for seeking God is because judgment is coming (v. 6). The phrase “lest he break out like fire” reminds us of God’s repeated warning in chapters 1 and 2. “I will send a fire” (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14, 2:2, 5); “for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29). Fear of judgment may not be the highest motive for obeying God, but the Lord will accept it. Animals and little children understand rewards and punishments, but we hope that the children will eventually mature and develop higher motives for obedience than receiving some candy or escaping a spanking.
 - iv. Israel never achieved that higher level of obedience, the kind of obedience that comes from a heart that loves God. What about us?

3. “Seek The Good!” (5:7-15)

To “seek the Lord” might appear difficult and distant for some people, an intangible experience they can’t get their hands on. Thus, Amos brought the challenge down to practical, everyday life. He spoke about justice, righteousness, and the importance of telling the truth. He named the sins the people needed to forsake: accepting bribes, charging the poor exorbitant rents,

living in luxury while the poor starved, and sustaining a crooked legal system. True repentance begins with naming sins and dealing with them one by one.

We must notice that verses 8-9 are a parenthesis in the prophet's message, but a very important parenthesis as he reminds the people of the greatness of their God. Jehovah is the God who created the heavens and the earth, who controls the seasons and the daily motions of the earth, and who is Lord of the heavens, sea, and the land. The pagan Gentiles worshipped the heavenly bodies, but the Jews were privileged to worship the God who made the heavens and the earth (Jonah 1:9).

But this God of creation is also a God of judgment! "He flashes destruction on the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin" (Amos 5:9 NIV).

Amos named just a few of their sins.

- a. **Promoting injustice (v. 7).** God established human government because of the sinfulness of the human heart. Without the authority of government in society, everything would fall apart and the strong would enslave the weak and the rich would exploit the poor. Justice is supposed to be "a river...a never-failing stream" (v. 24 NIV) that cleanses and refreshes society, but the leaders of Israel had turned that refreshing river into bitter poison (see 6:12).
 - i. Righteousness and justice should be the pillars that hold up society, but these selfish rulers had thrown the pillars to the ground. One of the evidences that the pillars of the national justice are shaking and ready to fall is the increase in lawsuits. Lawsuits were springing up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field (Hos.10:4 NIV).
 - ii. Instead of running to religious meetings, the people should have stayed home and seen to it that their leaders weren't poisoning the river of justice and knocking down the pillars of righteousness. Christians are the salt of the earth, and salt prevents corruption. They are the light of the world, and if there were more light, there would be less darkness (Matt. 5:13-16).
 - iii. The church must not abandon its marching orders and turn preachers into politicians, but it dare not ignore the problems of society—problems that can be solved by the application of the gospel and the truth of the Word of God.
- b. **Rejecting rebuke (vv. 10,13).**
 - i. The city gate was the place where the elders met and transacted city business (Ruth 4). When the dishonest leaders attempted to foist their lies on the people and manipulate the court, if someone rebuked them, they turned on that person and tried to silence him or her.
 - ii. It got to the place that the righteous wouldn't say anything because their interference did no good (Amos 5:13).
 - iii. Leaders will gladly listen to counsel and even to rebuke, but leaders bent on evil will seek to destroy those who stand in their way.
- c. **Oppressing the poor (vv. 11-12).**

- i. The prophet was the champion of the poor and oppressed (Amos 2:6-7; 4:1; 8:6) as he called for justice in the land.
- ii. He pictured the rich trampling the poor into the mud by claiming their crops for payment of the high rents they were charging. The rich were literally taking the food right out of the mouths of their tenants and their children.
- iii. So, what did the rich do with this ill-gotten wealth? They used it to build mansions for themselves and to plant luxurious vineyards. They anticipated lounging in their big houses and drinking wine, but the Lord had other plans.
- iv. He announced that they would neither live in their mansions nor drink their wine, because the Assyrians would destroy all their houses and vineyards.

d. Arrogant self-confidence (vv. 14-15).

- i. The people were boasting “The Lord God is with us!” After all, wasn’t the nation enjoying great prosperity? Certainly, that was a sign of God’s blessing.
- ii. And weren’t the people active in religious activities, bringing their sacrifices and offerings to the shrines?
- iii. Yes, these things were true, but they could not be used as evidence of the blessing of God. They were but a thin veneer of religious self-righteousness over the rotting corpse of the nation.
- iv. The only proof that God is with us is that we love Him and do His will. Religion without righteousness and justice in the land is hypocrisy. No matter how many people attend religious meetings, if the result is not obedience to God and concern for our neighbors, the meetings are a failure.
- v. How can we claim to love the good if we don’t hate the evil? We claim to love the Lord, but God commands, “You who love the Lord, have evil” (Ps 97:10 NKJV).

Seeking the good means rejecting the evil and not being ashamed to take our stand against what’s wrong.

Is there any hope for such a wicked society? Yes, as long as the grace of God is at work. “It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph” (Amos 5:15 NKJV). “So, I sought for a man among them who would make a wall and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one” (Ezek. 22:30 NKJV).

God is still looking for wall-builders, for intercessors who will plead with God to send revival and renewal to His church. For it’s only when God’s spirit is allowed to work among His people that the flood of evil can be stopped and righteousness and justice flourish in the land.

The saints want God to judge the wicked, but “the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17). If only the remnant will repent and turn to God, there is hope that He will send the revival that we desperately need.

“Hear God’s Word!” *Are we listening?*
 “Seek the Lord!” *Are we praying?*
 “Seek the Good!” *Do we hate that which is evil?*
 There is no other way.

Questions For Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. Has God ever pled with you to do something? If so, what?
2. What do you think of the author's (Wiersbe) statement "The way we treat God's Word is the way we treat God, and the way we treat God's messengers is the way we treat the Lord Himself?"
3. What do nations usually depend on? How would it make a difference if the current leaders of your state and nation prayed privately for God's wisdom?
4. In Amos 5:1-17, what does it mean to seek the Lord? What does it not mean?
5. Why should we seek the Lord? How do you respond to these reasons?
6. What are some practical ways in which you could seek the good?

Homework: Read Amos 5:18-6:14, "Woe To The Sinners!"