

“All the Prophets Testify”: Amos 5:1-17

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 April 29

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<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions?

Outline (the following is from *TLSB* p.1457; we are expanding/collapsing the major divisions as we proceed through them; in this case, confer and compare the divisions in Keil-Delitzsch, p.277, and Lessing’s presentation of De Waard’s analysis, p.297):

- I. Judgment against the Nations (1:3-2:16)
- II. Declarations concerning Israel (3:1-6:14)
 - A. Accusations Lodged against Israel (3:1-4:13)
 - 1. Yahweh’s exclusive relationship with Israel (3:1-2)
 - 2. Prophecy verified (3:3-8)
 - 3. Proclamation concerning Israel’s guilt and punishment (3:9-15)
 - 4. Condemnation of the rich women of Israel (4:1-3)
 - 5. Indictment of sacrificial sins (4:4-5)
 - 6. Failure to respond to Yahweh’s rebuke (4:6-13)
 - B. Lamentation for Israel (5:1-3)**
 - C. Exhortation to Seek Yahweh (5:4-17)**
 - D. Judgment on the Day of Yahweh (5:18-6:14)
- III. Visions (7:1-9:15)

Lamentation for Israel (5:1-3):

5:1 *Hear this word*: confer 4:1, where the Lord through Amos called the cows of Bashan to hear what He said. “Word” is singular but does not refer to a single “word” but to a “speech” or “utterance”. Keil-Delitzsch refers to a progression of the intensity of the judgment that is described.

that I take up: “I” could be Amos, as the Lord is spoken of in the third person in 5:3, 4, 16, and 17, though ultimately there is no essential difference between the Lord’s direct speech and the inspired Amos’s direct speech (the ESV’s quotation marks may suggest its view that Amos is quoting the Lord, compared to 5:6-15).

over you ... O house of Israel: “You” is masculine plural for all of those addressed, male and female. The “house of Israel” in this case is usually taken as the northern Kingdom, Samaria, or whatever else it might be called. Confer 5:2, 3, and 4. Keil-Delitzsch says the house of Israel in this case is synonymous with the house of Joseph in 5:6. Lessing differs, seeing both the northern and southern Kingdoms as being addressed.

in lamentation: *TLSB* says “lamentation” is “a rhythmic dirge” (a mournful song) especially associated with death and sometimes sung by professional mourners (for example, 5:16, though a different Hebrew word is used there; maybe also in John 11). Laetsch describes the rhythm in terms of accents and feet (confer Lessing), and Laetsch comments, “While Israel was at the zenith of its power, Amos by divine inspiration

chants the nation's death song, 'as if a living man in the midst of his pride and luxury and buoyant recklessness could see his own funeral procession ...'" (citing Pusey; I thought of Mark Twain and P.T. Barnum's comments about their own obituaries). *CSSB* says, "Amos sorrowfully fashioned a lament as if all Israel were already dead," and we might add the Holy Spirit's inspiration. *TLSB* comments, "Remarkably, Amos is mourning the death of his listeners themselves! By intoning this dirge in their hearing, the prophet effectively tells the people of the Northern Kingdom that their nation is doomed." Lessing says, "Amos summons his Israelite audience to listen to their own funeral, ironically while they are still alive!" Lessing distinguishes physical life from spiritual life.

5:2 *Fallen, no more to rise*: To fall can be to fall prostrate as in worship but here the fall seems to be more that of a violent death (confer Keil-Delitzsch), and Lessing adds "usually in battle". (We remember "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great" in Revelation 14:8; 18:2, a use building on such as this one [confer Lessing]) To rise can be literally to rise up or perhaps more figuratively to endure (confer the use in the second half of the verse though with a different conjugation). Kretzmann says, "not return to her former powerful and prosperous state". *TLSB* comments, "Assyrians will attack and finally conquer Israel in 722 BC. Once deported by the victors, the survivors of Israel will never return and thus become the famous 10 lost tribes of Israel."

is the virgin Israel: we should not think of "virginal" in this case as a good thing, for Israel had been anything but faithful in what should have been its relationship to God as her husband (confer Kretzmann; confer/compare the Church and Christ in the New Testament). "Israel" again would be the northern Kingdom, as in 5:1, 3, and 4. The Hebrew word used here is *bâthwlah*, as opposed to *'almah*, which is used in passages such as Isaiah 7:14. Laetsch refers to "the virgin" as "one that has not yet submitted to anyone, unconquered" (at least in the way that Israel would be conquered). Roehrs-Franzmann says the term "suggests the untimeliness of her death; she dies before her life is crowned with motherhood." *TLSB* comments, "Though the nation ought to be the flower of its youth and vitality, it is destined to remain unfulfilled, separated from the bridegroom by tragedy." We might think of Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11:29-40 (confer Lessing).

forsaken on her land, with none to raise her up: specifically who has forsaken Israel is not explicitly said, though "all" could be imagined, especially given the "none" in the parallel portion of the verse, or perhaps more specifically she is forsaken by her Bridegroom. The "land" was never Israel's but God's, though *TLSB* at 5:5 oddly seems to take this statement as ruling out a defeat while defending its borders. Roehrs-Franzmann comments, "The land in which the Lord promised to give her rest (Dt 12:10) will be her grace, her resting place in a tragically different sense." The "raise up" in this portion of the verse is the same verb as in the earlier portion but here with a different conjugation that includes the idea of someone acting upon her to raise her up. *CSSB* comments, "Left like a dead body on the open field." We can think of Who is capable of raising the dead (as in Ezekiel's valley of dry bones), and Lessing says that in Amos only Yahweh is able to do so. Laetsch comments, "No one, neither she herself, nor another human deliverer, nor God, will ever restore her to her former glory." Laetsch would perhaps admit that the true Israel of the Church ultimately receives greater glory.

5:3 *For thus says the Lord God*: compare “I take up” in 5:1 and confer the Lord’s speaking in 5:4, though here with a fuller name; confer and compare also the different fuller name in 5:16 and the simpler form in 5:17.

The city what went out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went out a hundred shall have ten left: *CSSB* says, “The Hebrew expression denotes communities of varying size, all of which would suffer.” The communities of varying size are presumably going out to war, and so the number may be only those men engaging in battle (confer Keil-Delitzsch, Kretzmann, Roehrs-Franzmann, Lessing). The reduction is 90% in both cases. *TLSB* comments, “Israel will suffer overwhelming defeat and be left shattered. Here is the reason for the condition described in v 2.” Luther also goes back to 3:12 and the pieces snatched from the mouth, etc. Lessing comments, “Remnants of such people served to bear witness to the destruction of the majority. Their witness was not one of joy but of dread”. Lessing also reads 5:3 in light of 3:6, about the Lord’s responsibility for a city’s disaster.

to the house of Israel: Lessing suggests “of” the house of Israel, again the northern Kingdom, as in 5:1, 2, and 4. *TLSB* comments, “Phrase both begins and ends the dirge in vv 1-3, a device to round out the lament.” Keil-Delitzsch refers to what follows in 5:4-12 as proof that Israel deserved to be destroyed (confer Laetsch).

Exhortation to Seek Yahweh (5:4-17):

(We note at this point that Amos 5:6-7, 10-15 is appointed as the Old Testament Reading for Proper 23 B, the Sunday that falls between October 9-15, with the Gospel Reading of Mark 10:17-22 about the rich man who asks Jesus what to do to inherit eternal life but, after Jesus tells him to sell all that he has and give to the poor, goes away sorrowful.)

5:4 *For thus says the Lord*: confer 5:3 and compare 5:1. Note that at least the ESV takes the Lord’s speech only through 5:5 and makes 5:6-15 Amos’s speech, returning to the Lord’s speech in 5:16-17 (perhaps confer or compare the quotation marks for 5:2).

to the house of Israel: confer 5:1, 2, and 3.

Seek me and live: confer 5:6’s “Seek the Lord and live” and 5:14’s “Seek good ... that you may live”. Note that the first is essentially a condition and the second is the consequence or result. Kretzmann says, “in sincere worship of the one true God”, which we would further note is the seeking and receiving of the forgiveness of sins. Keil-Delitzsch says, “God can only be sought, however, in His revelation, or in the manner in which He wishes to be sought and worshipped,” pointing out the indictment of the false worship that follows. Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “Seek is here used in a comprehensive sense to describe the way of repentance and faith”, referring also to Jesus’s use of the word in Matthew 6:33, for example. *TLSB* comments, “Further tragedy can still be averted through repentance, which is why this refrain is repeated in vv 6, 14.” (After the end of chapter 4, we might have thought that a line had been crossed, but presumably God would not call the people to repent if He was not genuinely willing to spare them at least in some way, perhaps just the “remnant” of 5:15 [confer *CSSB*].) The commands we might say are enabling invitations, in that unconverted people cannot seek the Lord on their own.

5:5 *but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter Gilgal, or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing*: *TLSB* explains that the locations were centers of blasphemous worship in Amos's day, and *TLSB* notes the arrangement beginning and ending with Bethel, which *TLSB* says emphasizes it as a prime target of the Lord's wrath (confer 5:6). No disposition is given for the outcome of Beersheba at the center of that "chiasm", Keil-Delitzsch says "because the primary intention of Amos is simply to predict the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes.". *CSSB* says Beersheba was in the south of Judah (thus the "cross over") and had become a place of pilgrimage and idolatry (perhaps Judah's tolerance of it reflects Judah's being somewhat of a vassal kingdom under Israel at the time). Roerhs-Franzmann comments, "a pilgrimage to it would indicate a strenuous religious zeal, ready to do extra work for extra credit, as it were." Laetsch notes Hebrew wordplay: *Gilgal galoh yigleh* (in general, confer Lessing, who gives Paul's attempts to replicate the pun). Kretzmann says Gilgal's idols would be "unable to save it". Regarding the mention of "exile", *TLSB* refers back to 5:2 and says "Israel would not go down to defeat while defending its borders. Rather the people ended up fallen and forsaken on their own land (v 2), with the survivors shamefully departed to foreign lands." Bethel's "coming to nothing", as a house of nothing (the god whose shrine was there is nothing), may be detailed further in what follows. Again we note that the ESV ends the Lord's direct speech with this verse.

5:6 *Seek the Lord and live*: confer at 5:4.

lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel: fire breaking out might take us back to Amos 1-2, though we may remember that there fire was not mentioned in regards to Israel. In this case "the house of Joseph" is mentioned, but still referring to the northern Kingdom, as two of its tribes were Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph; Keil-Delitzsch (confer Kretzmann) says Ephraim was the mightiest tribe of the northern Kingdom; *CSSB* says Ephraim dominated the northern Kingdom; and Lessing recalls that Ephraim, the younger, got the "predominant" blessing from his grandfather Jacob/Israel. (Confer 5:15's "remnant of Joseph", which arguably "bookends" this "word" from Amos.) On "devour", *TLSB* comments, "Nothing will be able to extinguish the fiery judgment coming upon Israel, for it comes from the Lord Himself." We noted the emphasis on Bethel at 5:5, and here we can note *CSSB*'s comment that the god the Israelites worshiped there would not be able to save the place, because that false god does not really exist, and the true God was bringing judgment. Keil-Delitzsch take "Bethel" in this case as the kingdom itself, essentially parallel with the house of Joseph. Luther gives other titles such as "Mount Ephraim" and "house of Ephraim".

5:7 *O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth!*: the ones are plural in number, though Keil-Delitzsch concludes they are not being addressed directly but referred to in the third person. They are turning justice to what *TLSB* calls a "Bitter plant with a repulsive taste" that so "represents sorrow", and they are casting down righteousness to the earth (confer the cognate in 5:12), where Keil-Delitzsch says it is trampled under foot (perhaps a reference to 5:11). *CSSB* comments, "They corrupted the procedures and institutions of justice (the courts), making them instruments of injustice ('bitterness'). Turning God's order upside down is inevitable in a society that ignores his law and despises true religion". *TLSB* comments, "Once again, Amos rails at

the prevalent injustice of his day, esp[ecially] the abuse of the poor”. Lessing connects our righteousness through faith with our practice of righteousness in relationship with one another. What follows in 5:8-9 *TLSB* calls a “Doxology of judgment”, as we referred to 4:13, and we note both share similar sentiments; confer Laetsch and *CSSB*, which notes the contrast between the people’s turning good into bad and God’s turning night into day, governing the order of the universe, and having power to smash the walls behind which His people are hiding.

5:8 *He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night*: Pleiades and Orion are said to be a pair of well-known constellations, used for keeping time, with Pleiades, part of Taurus, said to announce the vernal equinox. Confer 4:13 on turning the morning into darkness. A cataclysm akin to an undoing of creation may be in view, though Keil-Delitzsch and *CSSB* see the orderly sequence of day and night (apparently even if in the opposite order than might be expected), and Keil-Delitzsch also see reference “to the judicial rule of the Almighty in the world”, turning misery into prosperity and prosperity into adversity.

who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth: we might think of the regular daily rise and fall of the sea level with tides, of a storm surge, or of something more like a more-permanent sea level rise, the overall increase in the ocean’s volume and height, said to be driven by climate change. Keil-Delitzsch comments, “The words suggest the thought of terrible inundations of the earth by the swelling of the sea, and the allusion to the judgment of the flood can hardly be overlooked.” Kretzmann refers to “fearful tidal waves and floods”. *CSSB* refers to the waters above the expanse or waters evaporated from the sea and condensed as rain. *TLSB* comments that the Lord “creates the seas, and pours them out whenever He wishes.” Lessing thinks especially of the flood in the days of Noah that saved eight souls.

the Lord is his name: confer the end of 4:13 (and perhaps compare that in this Doxology the Name is somewhat in the middle). Only the Lord does the kind of things Amos is describing, He is the one true God (confer Kretzmann), and so He is able to carry out the judgment being discussed.

5:9 *who makes destruction flash forth against the strong*: *TLSB* comments, “As suddenly and powerfully as lightning bursts forth in the heavens, so also the Lord can send destruction against those who oppose Him and His will. Lightning was associated with God’s holiness as revealed at Sinai (Ex 20:18).” In this case, the destruction targets the strong (confer what follows in this verse).

so that destruction comes upon the fortress: the result is that destruction comes upon the fortress (confer the destruction flashing forth against the strong in what precedes in this verse). The fortresses of various fortified cities have been mentioned so far in Amos. Keil-Delitzsch comment, “The two clauses of this verse point to the fate which awaits the Israelites who trust in their strength and their fortifications”.

5:10 *They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth*: there is not a clear antecedent for the third-person plural subject of the verbs for hate and abhor (“the strong” in 5:9 was singular), though the people of the house of Israel are directly addressed again in 5:11 (this “they” *TLSB* considers “indefinite”). The NIV 84 has “You”, and *CSSB* refers to the sentence continuing from 5:7, but the subject of the Hebrew verbs in v.10 are not second person, and *CSSB*’s analysis seems flawed. The one doing the

reproving and speaking the truth is doing what God would have him do (confer 5:15). *CSSB* refers to “Those who are concerned the courts uphold justice.” Keil-Delitzsch rules out a reference to the prophets. The gate of the city is where the community conducted court, with the elders sitting on benches and wearing garments distinguishing their service, and the plaintiffs and defendants approaching them (confer also 5:12). *TLSB* comments, “Dishonest oppressors naturally loathed those who dared contradict or expose them.” Lessing connects to Jesus as a faithful arbiter or mediator.

5:11 *Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him:* “Therefore” is setting up the consequences that follow in this and subsequent verses. “You” is masculine plural again, arguably for all of the people of Israel, shifting from the “they” of 5:10, in what *TLSB* calls “a pointed, personal rebuke”. While treatment of the poor has been targeted already in Amos, this is the only place in the Hebrew of the Old Testament where this particular verb translated “trample” is used (compare and confer 2:7 with a different Hebrew verb translated the same way). The people of Israel were supposed to support a brother who became poor not take interest or profit from him (Leviticus 25:35-37; confer Deuteronomy 23:19). *TLSB* comments, “The unrighteous wealthy not only profited from their labor but also imposed unjust taxes on the poor.” Laetsch suggests that they did not call it usury or interest but received it as a gift.

you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards but you shall not drink their wine: recurring motifs of judgment and, when reversed, of restoration. We recall the homes discussed in 3:15 and note that, regarding the “houses of hewn stone”, Keil-Delitzsch says, “Houses built of square stones are splendid buildings”, and *TLSB* comments, “Expensive homes, associated with royal households. However, Israel will not enjoy the fruit of these ill-gotten gains.”

5:12 *For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins:* Kretzmann refers to their iniquities as “outstanding even in the midst of a nation steeped in wickedness”. Are they thinking that they are getting away with something? Are we? Luther paraphrases God as saying, “Nothing of all the things you do is hidden from Me, much as I may temporarily make believe [I don’t see]. This is what blinds you.”

you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate: confer 5:10 and compare 5:15. *TLSB* seems to think that the mentions of the gate in 5:10 and this verse “bookend” these verses. *TLSB* comments, “The poor bring lawsuits in order to protect their rights and so secure justice”, but clearly bribes are denying the needy their rights and afflicting them as “righteous” (confer the cognate in 5:7).

5:13 *Therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time:* perhaps confer 5:10. Lessing says the silence could be from grief or could meaning sighing in grief or imply both. *CSSB* says the prudent man “knows he cannot change the state of affairs, and therefore only awaits judgment.” (An argument for the so-called “Serenity Prayer”?) *TLSB* comments, “Unbridled wickedness forced the wise into resigned silence. Pressing for justice seemed futile and even dangerous.” Do we think that there is ever a time that we can keep quiet with a clear properly-formed conscience? With some precedent in Keil-Delitzsch, Kretzmann comments, “when things have reached such extremities as here pictured, all admonitions are futile. Still the love of the prophet for his people and his desire to further their welfare in every possible way causes him to address them once more”, and again we would mention the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

5:14 *Seek good, and not evil, that you may live*: confer above at 5:4 and 5:6, and compare below at 5:15. Lessing notes 5:14-15 as the center of the book by words and message. *and so the Lord, the God of hosts*: confer the uses in 5:15 and 5:16. *TLSB* refers to its becoming “a refrain”.

will be with you: *CSSB* comments, “As your security and source of blessing.” Instead of what God was promising to do, which was to pass through their midst to destroy them (confer 5:17). Lessing seems to connect the promise of God’s presence with Beersheba.

as you have said: *TLSB* explains, “During the days of the patriarchs, the Lord had made promises to be with people at both Beersheba (Gn 26:24; 46:1-4) and Bethel (Gn 28:15, 19). Incredibly, those showing utter contempt for the Lord and His covenant during Amos’s time were still claiming this promise as their own.” Of course, God’s command to worship only where the ark was in Jerusalem came after those promises during the days of the patriarchs and before Amos’s time. Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “What is now a groundless boast can become, if Israel will repent, a living reality.”

5:15 *Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate*: initially a reversal of 5:14, in a chiasm, as *TLSB* notes. Regarding establishing justice, *TLSB* comments, “Stark contrast to what was happening in Israel”, and we recall 5:7’s mention of justice being turned to wormwood.

it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph: as we saw with Joel, “it may be” need not necessarily indicate doubt but simply be a way of not presuming to tell God what to do. *CSSB* comments, “Emphasizes the danger of presuming on God’s grace. Even a widespread change of attitude would need the test of time to prove its genuineness.” Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “In the light of that stubborn disobedience the prophet can utter the promise only as ‘perhaps’”. “The God of hosts” as mentioned in 5:14 and 5:16. On “remnant”, Roehrs-Franzmann notes that the term is used “here for the first time in prophecy”, though “the idea itself is older (cf. 1 K 19:18).” Lessing notes aspects of the term relating to both law/judgment and also Gospel/promise. *CSSB* comments, “Implies that a change now would benefit the individual survivors of the disaster, though the nation as a whole would perish. The remnant “of Joseph” can go back to 5:6’s mention of the house of Joseph (with the intervening reduction from house to remnant), bookending the enclosed “word” of Amos. Confer also above at 5:4 regarding what kind of escape from judgment might be available. Lessing recalls Joseph’s life of affliction and ultimate vindication. *TLSB* comments, “These words look beyond the impending destruction of the Northern Kingdom at the hands of the Assyrians and see that a faithful few will be preserved and restored, leaving a mere remnant.” We might discuss the faithful Church as the continuation of that remnant.

5:16 *Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord*: confer and compare 5:3, 4, and 17. Perhaps compare 5:1 where Amos was arguably speaking, as he seems to have been doing in 5:6-15, though note the ESV’s use of quotation marks for 5:2 and not 5:6-15. In this introduction, the double use of “the Lord” is interesting, in one case the Name of the Lord and in the other the word for “Lord”.

5:16-17 *In all the squares ... and in all the streets ... They shall call the farmers ... those who are skilled in lamentation ... and in all vineyards:* Destruction and death in plazas and streets of fortified cities and destruction and death outside of the cities in the fields and vineyards will bring forth grieving from amateurs and professional mourners (confer 5:1, where the Hebrew word translated “lamentation” is different). *CSSB* comments, “Even farmers, usually too busy for such things, would join the professional mourners in lament”. *Laetsch* mentions the plazas as places where people of all ages met for pleasure. *Keil-Delitzsch* suggests the farmers come in from the field to weep for the dead in their homes (confer *Laetsch*), and *Keil-Delitzsch* notes that vineyards are “the places where rejoicing is generally looked for”. Quoting *Paul, Lessing* says the farmhands “were the ones accustomed to raise their voices in joy”.

there shall be wailing ... they shall say, ‘Alas! Alas!’ ... to mourning and to wailing ... there shall be wailing: three uses of the same Hebrew word translated “wailing” are piled up with two uses of the interjection “Alas” and the verb translated mourning. With reference to lamentation in this verse, *TLSB* refers also to “beating the breast as a sign of grief, especially for the dead” We might also think of sackcloth and ashes (confer *Lessing*).

5:17 *for I will pass through your midst:* *TLSB* comments, “Echoes a portion of the Passover account” of Exodus 12:12 and notes the irony that in that account God was punishing Israel’s enemy Egypt and in this account God is promising to treat His own people that same way (confer 4:10). *Laetsch* comments, “The angel of death passes through the land (Ex. 12:12) and spares no house, for Israel rejects the atoning blood of the Redeeming Lamb (Ex. 12:7; 23:20, 21).”

says the Lord: confer and compare above at 5:3, 4, and 16. *Keil-Delitzsch* notes the threat is “carried out still further in the next two sections”.

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB’s Law and Gospel Application Note for 5:1-17 says, “The Lord’s judgment still threatens all that would place anyone or anything above Him. At the same time, God remains merciful and long-suffering. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather wishes to see the wicked turn from his evil way and live (Ezk 33:11).”

Lessing points to Jesus’s call to repentance as in Matthew 4:17, and *Lessing* refers to the Baptized’s daily dying in contrition and rising in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, which continues in the Church as She awaits the final coming of Christ, Judge and Savior..

Next time, May 13 (note no class on May 6), Amos 5:18-27

Closing Prayer & Benediction