

“All the Prophets Testify”: Amos 5:18-27

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 May 20

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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 adapted from *TLSB* p.1457; we are expanding/collapsing the major divisions as we proceed through them):

- 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)
 - 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)
 - 1. The day of Yahweh (5:18-20)**
 - 2. Detestable ritual practices (5:21-27)**
 - 3. Warning to the secure and complacent (6:1-7)
 - 4. Certain destruction for the prideful house of Israel (6:8-14)
- III. Visions (7:1-9:15)

Note both that Amos 5:25-27 seems to “cited” by Stephen in Acts 7:42-43 and that Amos 5:18-24 is the Old Testament Reading for *Lutheran Service Book* Proper 27 A.

The day of Yahweh (5:18-20):

5:18 *Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord*: Laetsch describes Amos’s joining the preceding lamentation over destruction but also sorrowing for its cause and calling the people back to the Lord. The interjection translated “Woe” can be “Ah”, “Alas”, “Ha”, “Ho”, or “O” and is used here for the first time in Amos (confer Amos 6:1, and Laetsch goes on to talk about these two “woes”). Lessing cites Andersen and Freedman’s saying that the woe is a promise, even an oath, and he likens the word to the tolling of a church bell at a funeral. Unclear is exactly who is desiring the day of the Lord. “The day of the Lord” is used in Amos only here twice and in 5:20 once, though we heard the expression in Joel. In this context, *TLSB* suggests the reference likely is to “the day in which God will allow Israel’s enemies to attack and destroy the northern tribes and then take them into exile.” The *CSSB*’s CPH editors comment, “The time when God will show himself victor over the world, vindicating his claims to be the Lord over all the earth” but ultimately says, “Amos speaks primarily of an imminent and decisive judgment on Israel, not exclusively of the last day.” Any lesser day of the Lord points forward to the ultimate day of the Lord, and we remember that for believers the judgment brings vindication.

Why would you have the day of the Lord: More literally, Lessing translates “What good is the Day of Yahweh for you?” Given that Amos argues that the day of the Lord would bring worse conditions, those desiring the day of the Lord presumably expected it would bring better conditions. With reference back to 5:14, Keil-Delitzsch refers to the people of Israel’s being confident of deliverance from every hostile oppression on the basis of their outward connection to the covenant, misreading what the Lord said through Joel about the day of the Lord and that only those would be saved then who called on the Name of the Lord and were called by the Lord as His own (confer Kretzmann).

It is darkness, and not light: confer 5:20, where this statement is essentially repeated as a rhetorical question. Lessing points back to Genesis 1:2-5’s use of “day”, “darkness”, and “light”, noting the reversal of creation in this verse (as if a return to chaos) and mentioning the ninth plague of darkness, and Lessing cites Stuart’s examples of reversed expectations, such as an employee who thinks he or she is doing excellent work and then suddenly gets fired. *TLSB* comments, “There will be disaster, not salvation, for Israel.”

5:19 *as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into a house and leaned his hand against the wall and a serpent bit him:* Lessing notes the previous references to the Lord as a “lion”, either with the same Hebrew verb used here or its synonym (Amos 3:4, 8, 12), and Lessing notes the serpent’s connection to passages such as Genesis 3, Numbers 21, Romans 16:20, and Revelation 12:9 and 20:2, recognizing all three creatures as instruments of Divine judgment. *TLSB* says, “A pair of similes portrays things going from bad to worse, like ‘jumping out of the frying pan into the fire.’ Israel’s condemnation is now inevitable” (confer Lessing on the pan/fire). Similar is *CSSB*, “The two pictures emphasize vividly the inescapability of God’s coming judgment.” Although maybe not as clear to us as the frying pan and the fire, the bear is perhaps in some sense worse than the lion, or the fleeing from the lion only to be met by the bear may be ironically worse, and the seeming safety of the house is disrupted by the serpent. Roehrs-Franzmann connects the two and sees the man eluding the bear somehow and running home, panting against the wall, and then being bitten by a serpent dropping from the rafters (confer Keil-Delitzsch of three disasters; also confer Laetsch and Lessing). Though a bit tangential, Lessing refers to Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 10:12 to take heed lest one fall.

5:20 *Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?* In 5:18, Amos just said the day of the Lord was darkness and not light, and here the rhetorical question expecting the answer “yes” includes not a contrasting pair but a double restatement of the darkness as “gloom with no brightness in it”. *TLSB* refers to the reinforcement of the “woe” from v.18 and the leaving “no doubt about Israel’s sad outcome.” Lessing points to the warning of Deuteronomy 28:29 that at noon one will grope as if blind. Keil-Delitzsch says the Israelites cannot count upon grace on the basis of their heartless worship (confer Kretzmann).

Detestable ritual practices (5:21-27):

5:21 *I hate, I despise ... I take no delight*: Note the ESV's quotation marks, suggesting a change from the Divinely-inspired Amos's speaking and a more-direct quotation from the Lord (see the "attribution" finally in 5:27). Lessing notes the unique syntax of the verbs that increases the emotion and could be paraphrased, "I reject with utter hatred" (Lessing also points back to the hate in 5:10 and 5:15). The *CSSB* says that the Hebrew translated "I take no delight" is more-literally "I do not inhale with delight", and Keil-Delitzsch refers to smelling as an expression of satisfaction with reference to the aroma in Leviticus 26:31. The three verbs are, as *TLSB* comments, "Forceful denunciations of Israel's insincere worship" (confer on 5:23) Confer "not accept", "not look", "not listen" in the two verses that follow. Of course, what *TLSB* calls the "insincerity" of Israel's worship is not explicitly expressed in this verse or in the two verses that follow, but in 5:24 the Lord through Amos indicates that the problem is the lack of good deeds, and so a lack of repentance and faith that should lead to such good works is deduced. On 5:22, *TLSB* comments, "The Lord rejects all sacrifices offered by those acting righteous but lacking a sincere faith".

your feasts ... your solemn assemblies: Lessing recalls the criticisms of the people's sacrifices and tithes back in 4:4-5 and notes the adulteration of the proper feasts. Here, the people's feasts may refer to the three major festivals that God's law required: Passover, Pentecost, and Booths. *TLSB* suggests that their solemn assemblies are the prayers and sacrifices offered on a daily and weekly basis." Keil-Delitzsch connects the solemn assemblies with the feasts. Regardless, Roehrs-Franzmann comments, "This cultus was ordained by the Law and was among the good gifts of God to His people".

5:22 *Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings ... and the peace offerings of your fattened animals*: various offerings of various kinds were presented in connection with feasts and solemn assemblies and at other times. Keil-Delitzsch sees the offerings connected with the feasts and says, "God did not like the feasts, because He had no pleasure in the sacrifices" (confer Lessing, who sees the movement from the whole to the parts, including God's smell, sight, and hearing). With seemingly solid reasons, Lessing comments, "The use of the different terms together suggests that the prophets have the entire corrupted worship service in view."

I will not accept them ... I will not look upon them: some times the Lord's acceptance of an offering was incontrovertibly evident (for example, Elijah versus the prophets of Baal), though arguably most other times the people would not have an outward sign indicating the Lord's acceptance. In this case, the Lord's speaking through Amos indicates the Lord's rejection of their offerings. On 5:21-23, *TLSB* comments, "Though Israel may continue to offer the worship described in these verses, it will do no good." Of course, the offerings themselves were to flow from repentance and faith in God to forgive the people for the sake of the Messiah to Whom the other offerings pointed. Ultimately, in some sense only the Messiah's sacrifice atoned for their sins, not the sacrifices they made, even from a repentant and believing heart. On 5:25, *TLSB* comments, "Sacrifice from Israel had never been the basis of its relationship to the Lord. From day one, God's chosen people enjoyed His gifts and protection as a free gift of His grace." (confer an almost identical statement in *CSSB*).

5:23 *Takw away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen:* Lessing notes the use of the second-person plural in 5:21-22 (confer 5:18) and 5:25-27 with the second-person singular in verse, and, with reference to Andersen and Freedman, suggests that the singular forms in this verse may indicate an address to an individual such as Israel's priest or king (presumably not singling out especially bad singers). The psalms, for example, were sung to accompaniment, but, as Lessing points out, the word translated "harps" can refer to harps, lutes, and lyres, and not necessarily as we think of those instruments. The "joyful noise" of Psalm 95:1, 2 and other such passages is a different Hebrew expression for noise, and Lessing contrasts the songs with the laments in the preceding verses. Keil-Delitzsch translates "I do not like to hear" the harps. *TLSB* comments, "Israel's insincere religiosity and its consequent sham worship have become repugnant to God. The nation's supposedly sacred music is nothing more than noise to Him. Without a right relationship to the Lord, attempting to worship is futile." Keil-Delitzsch says that the worship at Bethel imitated that in Jerusalem and that, in view of 6:1, both are addressed. Similarly, on 5:21-23, *TLSB* comments, "Where simple justice and humility are lacking, even the most orthodox ritual and the finest of music is nothing more than a hypocritical sham." We might discuss how even when justice and humility are present, liturgy and hymns still can be done in a rote, thoughtless fashion that displeases God.

5:24 *But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream:* "justice" (*mishpat*) and "righteousness" (*tsadaqah*) are related in concept, if not in the etymology of their Hebrew words. Both are to flow un abundance from the people's repentance and faith. *CSSB* contrasts the ever-flowing stream to "stream beds that are dry much of the year", and Lessing thinks of re-creation (he ultimately links the flow to the temple and baptism). *TLSB* comments, "God's people are to produce justice continually and swiftly, like the flow of a river. Just as plants and animals need a steady supply of water to survive, so also human communities can flourish only when justice and righteousness prevail." Alternatively, Keil-Delitzsch sees the Lord's "judgment" pouring like a flood over the land because He has no pleasure in the people's hypocritical worship, as Kretzmann adds to that just punishment also the Lord's "justice". Luther thinks Amos is speaking about the Gospel to be revealed through Christ, but Keil-Delitzsch says "righteousness" is not righteousness by faith in Jesus, though *GWFT* definitely finds Gospel in this verse. The precise flow into what follows is somewhat puzzling, though we might think of God's gifts of water to the people in the wilderness.

5:25 *Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel:* Somewhat unclearly, *TLSB* comments, “Only after Israel was delivered from Egypt and received the covenant did the people begin to offer God regular sacrifices. Amos insists repentance and a right relationship with God are the only basis for worship.” The forty years began after the deliverance from Egypt, and the covenant was given early in that period. Amos does not explicitly mention repentance and a right relationship with God as the basis for worship. The answer to the rhetorical question is “no”. But, Amos’s bringing the wilderness up can be taken as suggesting that the people have long been idolatrous (confer Kretzmann, with reference to Stephen’s use of the passage in Acts 7). *CSSB* refers to Numbers 14:32-35, which includes part of the Lord’s judgment upon the generation that came out of Egypt but would not receive the Promised Land. Laetsch connects the golden calf Aaron was asked to make with the calves set up by the Northern Kingdom. On the other hand, Roehrs-Franzmann refers to a time in the wilderness when the cultus flourished and says there will be a time again in the exile when it does so. However, something as basic as circumcision was not practiced for some 38 years in the wilderness (see Joshua 5:5-7).

5:26 *You shall take up Sikkuth your king, and Kiyyun, your star god—your images that you made for yourselves:* The Hebrew text has a conjunction that Laetsch argues should be included and translated as “But”. Taking up is said by *TLSB* to allude “to the practice of carrying these deities aloft while marching in religious procession”. The NIV translates as past action, “you have lifted up”, and *CSSB* comments, “The obscure language of this verse speaks of Israelite idolatry, but whether it was in the desert long ago or more recently in the promised land, or both, is not clear.” Sikkuth and Kiyyun are identified by *TLSB* as “Deities of Mesopotamia”; Lessing discusses the names being vocalized to make fun of them as “fecal idol” and “detested thing”. These “star” idols the people created, in contrast to God’s creating the actual stars. *TLSB* comments, “What folly to worship an imaginary star-god rather than the Creator of ‘the Pleiades and Orion’ (v 8).” The NIV test translates the names and puts the names in a text note. *CSSB* notes a Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint, abbreviated LXX) “represents a somewhat different text, which is followed by Acts 7:42-43.” Roehrs-Franzmann says the idols’ being taking up “is a grim commentary” on their “impotence” in contrast to the almighty God of hosts. The commentators say a great deal attempting to trace out the false worship to which the Divinely-inspired Amos refers.

5:27 *and I will send you into exile beyond Damascus:* the text almost reads as if the people of Israel will carry the pagan images with them into exile, but Keil-Delitzsch says that idea is not right, especially since “the gods of a vanquished nation are carried away by the conquerors” (but compare Lessing, who also contrasts the processions with the ark of the covenant). Lessing translates the conjunction “So”. *TLSB* comments, “The punishment for such pagan practice will fit the crime, when Israel is forced to march ‘into exile beyond Damascus’ (v 27).” Kretzmann refers to “a mighty Eastern nation”. *TLSB* notes that the promise was fulfilled by the Assyrians in 722 BC and comments, “God’s long-suffering is coming to an end. He will send Israel into exile in a foreign land, never to return.” Lessing explains the reference to Babylon in Acts 7:43 as subsuming the northern kingdom’s exile under the southern kingdom’s exile and heightening the offense to the Jews.

says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts: Confer the quotation that began in 5:21. *TLSB* comments that the “God of hosts” Name “appears repeatedly in this chapter (vv 14-16). At a minimum, the particular Name would be well suited to this context given the mention of Sikkuth and Kiyyun. Lessing refers to God’s being able to carry out the exile because He is the commander of all the armies in heaven and on earth. Laetsch refers to Amos’s proclamation as “a call to repentance, a call to return in faith and loving loyalty to the Lord”.

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB’s Law and Gospel Application Note for 5:18-12 says, “Amos teaches us that grace and faith are the true basis for worship and a right relationship to the Lord. His invitation ever stands: ‘Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’ (Mt 11:28).”

Next time, May 27, Amos 6:1-7

Closing Prayer & Benediction