

# Amos 4:4-5

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-4/amos-44-5/>

*Amos sarcastically invites the Israelites to enter Bethel and Gilgal to continue their devout worship practices, which are transgressions against God. Their worship is not creating a heart of obedience; it is self-justifying and self-serving. This makes it into another transgression that God will judge.*

As the prophet continued his denunciations of injustice among the Israelites, he uses sarcasm; irony to mock. He adopts the language of a priest calling people to worship as he says, *Enter Bethel and transgress, in Gilgal multiply transgression*. This irony makes it clear that their religious worship has become a form of sin.

The prophet singled out two sites for corporate worship in the northern kingdom of Israel: *Bethel* and *Gilgal*. The former, located about ten miles north of Jerusalem, had been a center for religious activity since the time of Abraham (Genesis 12:8). It was there that Jacob saw God in his dream when God promised to be with him wherever he would go (Genesis 28:10–22). God later said to Jacob “I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me” (Genesis 31:13). So it had a history of being a place where the people of Abraham met God.

*Bethel* was established as a place of worship for the northern kingdom of Israel by its first king Jeroboam, immediately after he became king. Jeroboam made two golden calves and put one at Bethel, and said to his people “behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 12:28). He did this to provide a false alternative for worship in Jerusalem, to prevent his people from rejoining Judah and uniting the kingdom under the throne of David (1 Kings 12:27.) It was for this sin Jeroboam’s kingly line was ended (1 Kings 13:34). *Bethel* may have been included because of its history as a place of worship, a place for Israel to meet God.

*Gilgal* was a site near Jericho. It was the first place where the Israelites encamped in Palestine after they had miraculously crossed the Jordan River (Joshua 4:19). It was there that Joshua set up the twelve stones taken from Jordan after crossing over into the land of Canaan (Josh. 4:19). It was also the place where Saul, the first king of Israel was anointed, on which occasion sacrifices were made to the Lord (1 Samuel 11:14-15). It could be included here as a symbol of political power under the Lord’s authority.

Amos’ instruction to the people to *enter Bethel and transgress, and in Gilgal multiply transgression* is a sarcastic admonition to “keep on doing what you are doing, and see what happens.” The transgressions that Amos will now list might come as a surprise, because they appear so devout. But they are instances of religious worship apart from obedience to God’s commands, and are therefore *transgressions*. The Israelites were living as though their religious activities would appease God, which means they had a mental model that they could control God through their practice. The essence of Amos’ message here is, “Just keep thinking that, and get ready to find out how disastrous a decision you have made when your judgement comes.”

Amos now lists the transgressions:

- *Bring your sacrifices every morning,*
- *your tithes every three days.*
- *Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened, and*
- *proclaim freewill offerings, make them known.*

One of Jesus' main points in His teaching was that God cares about the heart, and desires that His people have a heart of love toward Him as well as toward others. The purpose of religious practice is to train our hearts toward obedience to God and His ways. They are not a path to manipulate the Almighty God, creator and sustainer of all. They are a path to bring genuine and lasting benefit to ourselves as well as to others.

This list indicates that the Israelites of Amos' time were quite consistent and observant in their religious activities. But it was apparently motivated by a heart desiring to appease God and justify themselves. Because the religious activities were not resulting in obedience to God's commands on how to treat others, they would be rejected. Jesus castigated the Pharisees for this sort of behavior, condemning them for their outward show of religious practice while exploiting the people whom they were appointed to serve (Matthew 23).

The term *sacrifice* ("zevah," in Hebrew) in the phrase *bring your sacrifices every morning* refers to an offering in which an animal was killed and eaten as part of a sacred meal (1 Samuel 1:3–5). These sacrifices were generally offerings of thanksgiving which served to restore fellowship between God and the worshiper (Leviticus 7:16; 22:18; Deuteronomy 12:4–6). It appears the corrupt leaders of Israel were very observant in their religious activities; they sacrificed *every morning*. God makes it clear they can keep doing that all they like, and it won't spare them from judgement, because it is not resulting in the kind of self-governing behavior and love toward others God commanded in His covenant law.

The word *tithe* means "tenth." The sarcastic command to bring their *tithes every three days* was a command to bring a gift of ten percent of any agricultural products such as grain, wine, and oil (Deuteronomy 12:4–6). It is notable that they brought their *tithes* to God *every three days*. Again, they were very diligent in their adherence to religious practice. This sarcasm implies that their motive was to appease God, to control Him, to keep Him at bay so they could continue their exploitation and indulgence. God would have no part of it.

Amos condemns Israel's wealthy exploiters for worshipping for the purpose of being seen by others. The sarcastic "keep doing your transgressions and watch what happens" command ends with *make them known*. Apparently these worshippers wanted to make sure everyone saw how pious they were. Which of course means they were not pious, they were proud. Amos commands them to bring their *thank offering*, which was a gift the worshiper was supposed to bring to God as a way of expressing gratitude. Such an *offering* was often made *from that which is leavened*, meaning that the bread was to be made with yeast (Leviticus 7:13). It appears that their real motive was not gratitude toward the Lord. Rather it was to be seen and exalted by others.

Amos ironically exhorts them to *proclaim freewill offerings*. *Freewill offerings* were supposed to be voluntarily, and could include any sacrifices (Leviticus 7:16). In this case, it seems the wealthy's primary motive was to *proclaim* to others how wonderfully pious they were. Again, a completely self-centered motive. Amos wraps up this section by saying as much, declaring: *For so you love to do, you sons of Israel*.

So it seems Israel's religious activities were merely a self-seeking exercise. It is common for humans who are behaving corruptly to wrap themselves in a form of morality in order to justify themselves. It appears that this list of transgressions consisted of religious activities motivated by self-justification and a desire to be seen as pious by others in public religious observance.

Amos ends this section with the assertion: *Declares the Lord GOD*.

GOD here is "Yahweh," the I AM, the Existent One, and *Lord* is "Adonai" which means "lord or master." The emphasis here seems to be to remind Israel that God is actually the true God, Creator and Sustainer of all. And He is the true master. The Israelites are living like they are their own masters, as well as master over others whom they exploit. They are not living in their proper station. For this they will be judged. God always seeks sincere worshipers, those who worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23–24).

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>4</sup> "Enter Bethel and transgress;  
In Gilgal multiply transgression!  
Bring your sacrifices every morning,  
Your tithes every three days.  
<sup>5</sup> "Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened,  
And proclaim freewill offerings, make them known.  
For so you love *to do*, you sons of Israel,"**