

Amos 5:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-5/amos-51-3/>

Amos laments the destruction of Israel and predicts a casualty rate of 90 percent. In the prime of her youthful vigor, the nation Israel will be devastated, and nobody will rescue her.

This chapter opens as the previous two did, with the statement, *hear this word* (3:1; 4:1). Here the prophet commanded the *house of Israel* to *hear this word* which he took up for them *as a dirge*. The term for *dirge* [Hebrew, “qinah”] refers to a lament that was sung at the funeral of a friend, relative, or well-known person (2 Samuel 1:17–27; 3:33–34). In ancient Israel, the announcement of death was often followed by lamentation. For instance, when Saul’s death was announced and reported to David, he “took hold of his clothes and tore them, and *so* also *did* all the men who *were* with him. They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan” (2 Samuel 1:11–12). The biblical prophets, however, often recited the *dirge* to predict the death of a city, people, or nation (Jeremiah 9:1–22; Lamentations; Ezekiel 19). Here Amos used the *dirge* to announce the death of the northern kingdom of Israel while at the peak of its prosperity under King Jeroboam II (793–753 BC).

In announcing the death of the nation Israel, Amos personified her as a *virgin*, a young woman who was at the prime of her youthful vigor and was ready to enter into full womanhood. Amos said, *she has fallen, she will not rise again*. The verb “to fall” is normally used to portray a violent death. Amos used the verb in the perfect tense, which indicates a completed action. He says *she has fallen* to indicate that Israel’s demise was as certain as though it had already occurred. This is appropriate, because when God says something will happen, it is as certain as though it has happened. We see this same approach in the book of Joel, where the prophet predicts the exile of Israel’s sister-kingdom Judah, the southern kingdom, by speaking of it as though it has already occurred.

While the nation Israel was enjoying a period of prosperity, peace, and territorial expansion under King Jeroboam II (793–753 BC), Amos announced her devastation: *She* (Israel) *lies neglected on her land; there is none to raise her up*. While in the prime of her life, the *virgin Israel* would be abandoned. She would become powerless and would come to a premature end, without achieving adult maturity. None would restore Israel. Amos continues to speak as though the event has already occurred.

To further clarify the motif for the *dirge*, the prophet reported what *the Lord GOD* said: *The city which goes forth a thousand strong will have a hundred left*. This means that ninety percent of those who *go forth* in battle from a city will die. Further, *the one which goes forth a hundred strong will have ten left to the house of Israel*. Repeating the same idea twice emphasizes the certainty that ninety percent of Israel’s military will be killed. Israel’s military defeat would considerably reduce her population. A thousand soldiers would go out to battle from a city, but only a hundred of them would survive. Similarly, a hundred soldiers would go out to battle, but only ten would come home alive. Israel would thus experience a casualty rate of ninety percent. The LORD would decimate the Israelite population.

This is all in keeping with what was clearly set forth in the covenant between God and the people, a covenant the people had “signed” by agreeing to comply fully with its terms. As we saw in Chapter 4, God had sent multiple difficulties upon Israel as “notice” of their default of the covenant, or contract. He had given them “time to cure” their faults. But they ignored the notice, and now God will execute the default provisions.

Biblical Text

¹Hear this word which I take up for you as a dirge, O house of Israel:

²She has fallen, she will not rise again—

The virgin Israel.

She *lies* neglected on her land;

There is none to raise her up.

³For thus says the Lord God,

“The city which goes forth a thousand *strong*

Will have a hundred left,

And the one which goes forth a hundred *strong*

Will have ten left to the house of Israel.”