

Amos 5:14-15

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-5/amos-514-15/>

While pronouncing judgment on the kingdom of Israel, Amos tells individuals that the possibility for repentance is still available. They are to set themselves apart from their wicked nation to seek good so that they may live.

Although judgment on the nation Israel was imminent, the prophet still reminded Israel that the possibility to repent from their wicked ways was still available. He urged them to *seek good and not evil*. By seeking *good* rather than *evil* they provided the chance to *live*. God had promised in the covenant with Israel that if they adopted the exploitive ways of the nations they had dispossessed, then God will take them out of the land (Deuteronomy 4:25-27). If Israel continues in *evil*, then God makes clear that He will fulfill this disciplinary provision of the covenant.

God's covenant with Israel followed the ancient format of what is called a Suzerain-vassal treaty. God, as the Suzerain, or superior ruler, agrees to reward His vassals for faithful service. But He also promised cursings rather than blessings for unfaithfulness. The primary thing God required of Israel was to follow His command to treat one another with respect. To tell the truth. To care for the welfare of others as if it was their own. Earlier in this chapter, the Israelites were commanded to "seek God." Amos makes clear that seeking God meant changing their way of treating one another. To *seek good* for others, rather than *evil*. To seek justice rather than bribes. To lift up and provide opportunity for the poor, rather than exploit them. If they do so, then they might *live*. God is about to invoke the promise in Deuteronomy 4:25-27, to exile them from the land, if they don't seek God and repent.

To *seek good* is to seek that which is pleasing to the LORD. To treat others justly, as commanded in God's covenant law with Israel. In this context, it specifically means to treat the poor justly, and to practice justice with equality for all (v. 15). God's covenant law required everyone in Israel to be treated the same under the law. There was to be no preference to either rich or poor.

These two commands—seek God and seek *good*—sum up the essence of the Ten Commandments: love God and love our neighbor (Matt. 22:36–40; Mark 12:30–31). A society in which people manifest love for God and love for their neighbors will be strong at every level because people will care for one another and will live in perfect harmony. "Righteousness" can be defined as "harmony of all the pieces fitting together according to their design." When each person does what they do best to serve others, it results in the maximum benefit for all.

Amos then explained the purpose for seeking *good*. He said, *And thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you, Just as you have said!* While practicing injustice and offering false worship to the LORD, the Israelites kept saying that the *LORD God of hosts* was *with* them. This was likely a result of their empty religious observance spoken of in Chapter 4. God made it clear He did not accept their worship and was not with them. They were not worshipping to seek God. If they did, then they would do *good* rather than *evil*. Amos makes clear that if they will actually *seek good*

and not evil, then the LORD will be with them *just as they have said*. By their deeds, they could make this saying become reality.

Likely they thought their religious practice appeased God. They probably believed that the LORD would never judge them because they were His covenant people. But that means they were not paying attention to all of God's covenant; they were listening selectively. Although God promised that Israel would always be His covenant people, and that His love for them was unending, He also made it clear that He would only bless them if they walked in His ways.

Amos reminded Israel that the LORD would only bless those seeking *good*, not *evil*, according to the provisions in His covenant with Israel. Amos continued his admonition and said, *Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate!* This was the way to get the LORD to bless them, to support and be with them. Amos called the people to *hate evil* and embrace *good*. Injustice is *evil*, and God hates *evil* (Proverbs 6:16–19). In this case, God defines *good* and *evil* based on how people treat one another.

Therefore, Amos commanded the people to refrain from practicing injustice; to *establish justice in the gate*, where “court sessions” were held. In verse 12, Amos told us that it had become common practice to accept bribes, and deny justice to the poor. Amos exhorts them to do the opposite, and see that justice is done for all. To *establish justice in the gate* meant that those in Israel in leadership, those with political power would begin to use their authority to do justice rather than to line their own pockets. To serve rather than to exploit.

Amos concluded by spelling out what might result from repenting, and beginning to maintain justice in the land of Canaan. He declared, *Perhaps the Lord God of hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph*. In Deuteronomy 30 (and many other places in His covenant law) God made clear that God's blessing on Israel depended upon their obedience to His commands. A significant part of that was the practical cause-effect relationship for societies. If people treat one another with dignity and honor, they naturally function better and prosper more. But God added that He would add extra blessings for obedience, and extra discipline for disobedience. Israel has broken the covenant. They deserve the discipline God promised. But Amos holds out hope that *perhaps* it is not too late. He makes clear that the people need to have a sense of urgency, and repent.

The particle *perhaps* is used here to express the reality that the LORD cannot be obligated. He alone governs the world, and He cannot be compelled to do anything. It is likely that the religious observance we saw in Chapter 4 was intended to appease and control God. This emphasizes that God is the LORD God, and cannot be manipulated.

The verb *to be gracious* can be used when a superior person bestows pardon and favor upon an inferior person (2 Samuel 12:22). This is the sense of the verb here in Amos. The prophet hoped that true repentance might cause the LORD to have mercy on the *remnant of Joseph* to spare their lives. As in verse 6, the phrase *remnant of Joseph* is used to refer to the ten northern tribes of Israel. It is possible, but conditional on obedience. Israel is and always will be God's chosen people, that is unconditional, and irrevocable (Romans 11:26-28). The same is true for all who

believe upon Jesus and become a part of God's family through faith in Christ (John 3:14-16). They are God's children, and have God's inheritance without condition (Romans 8:17a).

However, in both cases, for God's people then and now, gaining the blessings, the rewards available for the people of God depends upon obedience. We cannot gain the blessings of His ways without following His ways. God's way is to seek the benefit of others, while standing for what is true and just, even if the world around us is evil. This is what God seeks to reward. Even now, Amos holds out hope that God will restore them if they repent. God's presence is to bless, to be *gracious*. But God will uphold His word, and fulfill His covenant.

Biblical Text

**¹⁴ Seek good and not evil, that you may live;
And thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you,
Just as you have said!
¹⁵ Hate evil, love good,
And establish justice in the gate!
Perhaps the Lord God of hosts
May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.**