

Amos 5:16-17

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-5/amos-516-17/>

Amos tells the people that God's judgment will bring widespread lamentation because many people will be dead when God passes through their land.

This section ends the series of oracles on the same funeral notes on which they began (vv. 1–3). Here the prophet began with the particle “therefore” to connect what follows with what has gone before. Amos now gives an announcement, and attributes it to *what the LORD God of hosts* has to say to Israel. The phrase *LORD God of hosts* describes God's majestic power to carry out His judgment. The sovereign God, Israel's master and ruler, is full of power and authority. He is not a genie in a bottle that can be manipulated with religious observance. He is not asleep at the wheel. He is the *LORD God of hosts*. He is about to send *hosts* (or armies) to invade Israel, to execute judgement upon them.

As Amos reported the words of the LORD to the people of Israel, he said, *There is wailing in all the plazas, and in all the streets they say, 'Alas! Alas!* This is likely Amos describing the impending doom of invasion. It is on their doorstep. This is their last warning. God is about to enforce His covenant, which promises that Israel will be dispossessed themselves if they fall into the exploitative ways of the nations they dispossessed (Deuteronomy 4:25-27). When the invasion of foreign *hosts* comes, there will be great *mourning*, and dread. These invading armies will be doing the bidding of the *LORD God of hosts*.

The term *mourning* refers to grief over someone's death. In the ancient world, the traditional ritual of mourning involved putting on sackcloth. A biblical example is found in the book of 2 Samuel, where David asked “Joab and all the people who were with him” to tear their clothes and put on sackcloth to “lament before Abner” (2 Samuel 3:31). The book of Jeremiah also tells us that those who mourned usually transformed their physical appearance by cutting off their hair and beard (Jeremiah 7:29) and rolling in ashes (Jeremiah 6:26). Mourning was thus part of the burial rite, a way of honoring the dead person. This mourning likely will be accompanied by a substantial amount of death at the hand of the invaders. We were told in verse 3 that ninety percent of the men of Israel sent into battle would be killed.

Amos told the Israelites that when God would judge them there would be widespread mourning *in all the plazas and in all the streets*. People would be shocked upon seeing all the dead bodies in the land and would only say: *Alas! Alas!* (literally, “Woe, woe!”). The term translated here is “hoy” in Hebrew. This term was used in ancient Israel as a mourning shout at funerals. This is exemplified in the book of Jeremiah where the prophet told King Zedekiah of Judah that he would die in peace and people would lament for him “Alas, lord!” (Jeremiah 34:5; cf. 1 Kings. 13:30; Jeremiah 22:18–19). Here in the book of Amos, the prophet told the people of God that their grief and sorrow would be so great that people would even *call the farmer to mourning*.

In ancient Israel, it was a custom to pay *professional mourners*, generally women, to lament during a funeral. For example, in proclaiming doom, Jeremiah states, “Thus says the Lord of

hosts, ‘Consider and call for the mourning women, that they may come; And send for the wailing women, that they may come! Let them make haste and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may shed tears and our eyelids flow with water’ (Jeremiah 9:17–18). Here Amos said that there would not be enough *professional mourners* because there would be *mourning* everywhere—in *all the plazas* and in *all the streets*. There would even be *wailing* (weeping and crying) *in all the vineyards*, the plots of land used for growing grapes. That is why they will need to *call the farmer to mourning*, because there are too many dead for the “mourning industry” to tend to.

In Bible times, *vineyards* were sound investments which provided sustenance to the owner (Proverbs 31:16; Nehemiah 5:1–5). They were normally regarded as places of joy as the farmers reaped their grapes, enjoying the fruits of their labor (Ecclesiastes 9:7). However, Israel’s disobedience would cause God to bring invading armies, *and in all the vineyards there is wailing, Because I will pass through the midst of you*. When God says *I will pass through the midst of you* He likely means the invading army will pass through, and ravage the vineyards. The *LORD God of armies* will execute judgement upon Israel through the agency of invading armies. The *LORD God of hosts* would *pass through* the land, bringing death and sorrow upon His disobedient people, as He had done to Egypt when He redeemed the Israelites (Exodus 11:4–7; 12:12–13).

Amos ends the section with *says the LORD*. This is a certainty, because the LORD has spoken.

Biblical Text

**16 Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, the Lord,
“There is wailing in all the plazas,
And in all the streets they say, ‘Alas! Alas!’
They also call the farmer to mourning
And professional mourners to lamentation.
17 “And in all the vineyards there is wailing,
Because I will pass through the midst of you,” says the Lord.**