

Amos 5:18-20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-5/amos-518-20/>

Amos again announces judgment on the unrepentant Israel. The people of God will experience the day of the LORD and it will be a day of darkness, not of light; a day of judgment, not of rejoicing.

Having predicted widespread lamentation and pain in Israel (vv. 16–17), the prophet proceeded by crying, *Alas*. The term for *Alas* in Hebrew is “hoy” and can be translated as “woe” (Amos 6:1). The 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 people would cry at his funeral, “Alas, lord!” (Jeremiah 34:5; 1 Kings. 13:30). Here Amos used the term to announce the doom of Israel.

The Israelites in Amos’s days were living in sin against God. They were violating their covenant with God, their superior or suzerain ruler. The wealthy men of Israel along with their wives were so greedy that they continually oppressed the poor to get what little they had (4:1). Furthermore, the Israelites worshiped God in hypocrisy and plunged into idolatry while expecting God to be with them and to act in their favor (5:14).

Amos makes it clear that the Israelites were *longing for the day of the LORD*, the time when the LORD would restore the Davidic kingdom to Israel, and usher in a perpetual season of peace, as the Bible states will occur. The term *day of the LORD* refers to a time of divine intervention and judgement. Many in Israel hoped that God, their Suzerain (Ruler) was going to intervene to defeat the pagan nations surrounding them to give them peace and prosperity (Jeremiah 46:10). Indeed, in Amos’s days, Israel was prosperous because the LORD allowed King Jeroboam II to “restore the border of Israel” and save the people (2 Kings. 14:25–27). Israel appropriately hoped for more. They hoped for the fullness of biblical prophecy for Israel’s prosperity to become a reality (Amos 9:11-15).

Therefore, Amos told the Israelites that they would get the opposite of what they hoped to gain. There will, in fact, be a *day of the LORD*. But it will not be the hoped-for *day of the LORD*. God asked *For what purpose will the day of the Lord be to you?* Amos answers by describing this *day of the LORD*:

- *It will be darkness and not light;*
- *It will be As when a man flees from a lion And a bear meets him,*
- *It will be like a man who goes home, leans his hand against the wall
And a snake bites him.*
- *This day of the Lord will be darkness instead of light,
Even gloom with no brightness in it*

The *day of the LORD* that is coming would not be the hoped for day, when the LORD would come to judge Israel’s enemies (Isaiah 13:6, 9). On the contrary, the LORD would come to judge

His covenant people for their wrongdoings. So, Amos told them that *the day of the LORD* would be *darkness and not light*. This was Amos's answer to the question *What purpose will the day of the LORD be to you?*

The word *darkness* is used here metaphorically to portray the day of God's judgment, which would be a day of distress and trouble (Joel 2:2; Zephaniah 1:15). Contrary to the word *darkness*, the word *light* symbolizes what is pleasant, good, and uplifting. *Light* is the natural agent that enables sight and makes things visible (Genesis 1:3). It is usually associated with God (1 John 1:5), and symbolizes God's presence, which is the source of life and all blessings.

Here in Amos, we see that the Israelites expected *the day of the LORD* to be a day of divine blessing, a day of *light*. But Amos informed them that the *day of the LORD* they were about to experience would be a day of divine judgment, a time of *darkness*. God's people were to be judged for their wrongdoings before their Suzerain (Ruler). We have already been told there will be much death in Israel (verse 3). While the *light* represents life, the *darkness* likely represents death.

To illustrate his point regarding the terrible *day of the LORD*, Amos made two vivid comparisons. First, he said this day will be *As when a man flees from a lion And a bear meets him*. Someone who runs away from a ruthless and powerful *lion* may think that he has escaped a great danger. But he escapes the dangerous *lion* only to encounter an equally ruthless and dangerous *bear*. Whichever direction the man goes, his life is in great danger. The man thought he had escaped, only to find himself in a worse spot.

Second, Amos described *the day of the LORD* they are about to experience as when *a man goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him*. The phrase *leans his hand against the wall* is likely a picture of the man at rest in his home. This man who is resting inside his home after a day of work would never think a *snake* would bite him; he expects his home to be the place where he can feel secure. It is where people find relief from stress and can be at peace. One would expect to see a snake in the forest, but not in his own house. So, in addition to being the opposite of what is expected, as the example of running into a *bear* after having escaped from a *lion*, it will also be a complete surprise. You think you are safe, and find out you are not.

This would be a frightening and strange occasion for someone to be bitten by a snake while resting at home. But Amos used this illustration to make an important point, namely, if someone can be bitten by a poisonous snake while at home, then where in the world can one find safety and rest? These two comparisons were meant to tell Israel that *the day of the LORD* would be an inescapable day of disaster.

Amos concluded this section with a rhetorical question that has an expected answer of "yes"; *Will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light, Even gloom with no brightness in it?* The people are hoping for the *day of the LORD* where the full kingdom is restored to Israel. This would be a day full of *light*. But instead they will get the opposite, *darkness instead of light*, and *gloom with no brightness*. The Israelites would experience a day of terror, disaster, and calamity, because they rejected their covenant and their Suzerain ruler, Yahweh.

Interestingly, Jesus' disciples also looked for the day when the kingdom would be restored to Israel, asking Jesus "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6b). Jesus' answer makes it clear that there is still a "day of the LORD" in the future, where God will restore the kingdom to Israel, when He answered the disciples, saying "It is not for you to know times or epochs" (Acts 1:7). Jesus declined to tell them precisely when He will return to restore the kingdom. But the angels made it clear He would return to earth just as He departed (Acts 1:11), and many New Testament passages make clear that the *day of the LORD* hoped for in the days of Amos will in fact occur at some point in the future (1 Thessalonians 4:15; Revelation 19:11-19).

Biblical Text

¹⁸ **Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord,
For what purpose *will* the day of the Lord *be* to you?**

It *will be* darkness and not light;

¹⁹ **As when a man flees from a lion**

And a bear meets him,

Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall

And a snake bites him.

²⁰ ***Will* not the day of the Lord *be* darkness instead of light,
Even gloom with no brightness in it?**