

Autopsy of a Dead Faith
Amos 5:1-17

When we reach Amos chapter 5 we find that things are becoming more serious for Israel. There is something more frightening about the urgency and fervor of these opening verses in chapter 5. Some have called Amos 5:1-3 a funeral dirge. Thoughtfully **read** these verses out loud.

As we study the important middle chapters of Amos they do not merely say God hates empty religion—they also tell us why. In this respect they can be viewed as an autopsy of Israel's dead faith.

Points to Ponder:

- How would you define “dead faith?”
- What were the primary causes of Israel's dead faith?

We will revisit these questions later in the lesson.

Open Your Heart: Come to God with a teachable, humble spirit—eager to be changed.

1. Once again, Amos thunders out: **Hear this word, O house of Israel** (Amos 5:1). Consider what the house of Israel is being called to *hear* in verses 1-3. What do the descriptive images used by Amos depict? What was the prophet seeing in his “mind's eye?”

Note: We must be careful not to misinterpret the declaration that Israel would “never rise again” (5:2). The statement is emphasizing the exile of Israel and not the future ages since this would stand in opposition to the restoration that is foretold in all of the prophetic writings as well as the rest of Scripture.

2. How is this prophecy from Amos different from the previous ones? (Compare Amos 3:11 and 4:3 with 5:1-3.)

In Amos 5:2 the northern kingdom is described as “Virgin Israel.”

3. In what sense do you think Israel was being called a “virgin?” Remember the context.

The death of a nation who is unrepentant is a horrifying thing to witness. Even though Amos is reading out God's "funeral service" over Israel, sadly she will still refuse to be humbled.

Unfortunately some churches today are in the same state of a "living" death. They continue to go through the motions of doing good works (in their own name).

4. In the book of Revelation Jesus speaks disparagingly about the church in Sardis. **Read** and comment on Revelation 3:1-3.

The next segment of Amos' prophecy is mixed together with warnings and wooing. God's great heart of love for His people is glimpsed at several points in this section.

5. Prayerfully **read** Amos 5:4-17 in the Amplified Version if possible. Record each verse that reveals some facet of God's loving kindness towards Israel. Note how you see God's mercy being expressed.

6. a. Discuss why Israel was not to seek Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba. Recall Amos' reference to Bethel and Gilgal in 4:4-5; now he adds Beersheba to the list.

- b. What personal applications can you make from question 6a?

Heart Check: The one simple need of every human being is to "seek God"—the one true God as He revealed Himself—for in Him is everything, without Him is nothing! What is it that you are seeking above all else in life? Be honest. Spend some time listening to God in prayer.

In the midst of prophecies that thunder out destruction and devastation God **still** pleads with His wayward people to seek His mercy and grace—even though it was clear that Israel wanted nothing to do with Him.

7. What do you learn about *God* and about *love* from these remarkable overtures?

The invitation to seek God, although gracious, was also coupled with a grave threat.

8. What crucial choice was given to Israel again in Amos 5:6? (Note: The house of Joseph was the kingdom of the ten tribes, the chief tribe being Ephraim, son of Joseph.)

In verse 7 Amos continues by giving startling evidence of the people's blatant sins and their lifeless faith. The LORD addresses them personally and shouts at them: "*You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground.*" (NIV) But before God continues with the catalog of their sins He focuses their eyes on Himself (Amos 5:8-9). **Reread** and reflect on Amos 5:7-9.

9. Contrast the enormous disparities of what the people do in verse 7 with what the LORD shows that He does in verses 8 and 9.

One of the most powerful themes in the book of Amos is the accusation that the people have corrupted justice and righteousness. Amos 5:10-13 continues the topic that began in verse 7.

Reread Amos 5:7 and 5:10-12 as one section. Notice that God is speaking to them in person.

10. In your own words state the evidence God lays out against Israel and the justice He will dispense.

11. Do you see our culture in any of the statements made in 5:7 and 5:10-12? Explain.

At first glance Amos 5:14-15 appears to be similar to Amos 5:4-6, but when we look more closely we see that there is a distinct change of emphasis. **Reread** both sections carefully.

12. *Who* is being addressed in 5:14-15? Notice the last phrase of verse 15.

13. *What* is being emphasized in Amos 5:14-15? How is this different from 5:4-6?

14. If Amos was prophesying today give some examples of what he would expect of us when he says “hate evil, love good.” Conclude by reading Proverbs 18:5 and 19:17.

For Thought and Discussion

15. At the beginning of the lesson you were given several “points to ponder.” Take time to review and consider those “points.” Record your insights and musings below.

- Describe the characteristics of a “dead faith” in the context of Amos’ prophecy.

- Summarize the causes of Israel’s “dead faith.”

Amos returns to the theme of the destruction of Israel in verses 16 and 17. With a prayerful heart **reread** the haunting words of the LORD, the LORD God Almighty!

16. Describe the scene that is depicted by God through Amos in verses 16-17. Contemplate the *meaning* of the final phrase from verse 17, “*for I will pass through your midst, says the Lord.*”

Also recall *how often God had dealt patiently with Israel—how often He raised up righteous men to lead them and teach them—how constantly He yearned over them as a loving parent yearns for their wayward children. But the great Father-God is powerless to bless while His children persist in sin. He is the God of Hosts—splendid in His holiness, so the consequences of Israel’s sin and folly must come upon them.*

17. As you try to absorb the profound nature of the events we have witnessed in Amos’ prophecy, what have you been shown about the vitality of your faith in God? Share one insight that you feel led to act on.