

Two Choices
Amos 5:1-15

March 19, 2006

A. Choices - what are the choices that the people in Israel faced

- 1. between a F_____ and a F_____?
- 2. a person would make the first of these by

- 3. a person would make the second of these by

B. God's Message to Israel

- 1. A Funeral Song for Israel Amos 5:1-3
- 2. The Two Choices Given Amos 5:4-7
- 3. The Awesome God Amos 5:8-9
- 4. Punishment of the Unjust Nation Amos 5:10-13
- 5. Plea to make the Right Choice Amos 5:14-15

C. Conclusion - some people making the right choice; and ... ?

- a. Joshua 24:15
- b. Ruth 1:16
- c. John 6:66-69
- d. What about me?

A. Choices

1. in life, we are constantly faced with choices
 - a. some of the choices are easy
 - (A) do we have a piece of pie or not?
 - (B) with ice cream or not?
 - (C) do we have a second piece of pie?
 - (D) do we have ice cream on that second piece?
 - b. but the mere number of choices makes this difficult; and, it seems that the number is increasing: about 10 years ago this description was given, and is probably even more true today —{2}.
 - (A) Time was when you could run into the grocery store and pick up a gallon of milk and a loaf of bread and not give the matter a lot of thought. Not anymore! Now you must decide between whole milk, 2%, or 1%; and whether you want white or wheat, thin-sliced or regular, stone-crushed, whole-grain, or even mixed whole-grain!
 - (B) Everywhere we look, choices are proliferating! For example, the typical supermarket in 1975 had 9,000 products; today 30,000+! Produce selections (in 1975, 65; in 1992, 285). Kiwi fruit (once unheard of) has hit the top 20. The average household in 1975 got 6 TV stations; in 1993(?) more than 30.
 - (C) A new religious denomination forms EVERY WEEK!
 - c. and while many choices are minor, some have a lasting impact: A man was reminiscing at his 50th wedding anniversary about their courtship and marriage. "We didn't have much money," he said, "and I had to decide whether to buy a new tire for the car or a marriage license." After a pause he continued, "I think I made a good investment, because the tire wouldn't have lasted 50 years." —{3}.
 - d. and which is the right choice, though that may at first glance look difficult, can in fact be very obvious.
 - (A) This was true of the young man who was chosen out of 200 others who all had to answer the following question in their job applications —{4}.

(1) "You are driving along on a wild stormy night. You pass by a bus stop and you see three people waiting for the bus:

- (a) 1. An old lady who is about to die
- (b) 2. An old friend who once saved your life
- (c) 3. The perfect man/woman of your dreams

(2) "Which one would you choose, knowing that there could only be one passenger in your car?"

(B) you will have to wait to find out his answer!

2. In today's passage from the book of Amos, the people in Israel are brought face to face with two choices, and which is the right one is very obvious

a. the choice is between a future and a funeral

b. the positive choice given to each Israelite

(A) is repeated three times in this passage

(B) verse 4: "Seek Me that you may live"

(C) verse 6: "Seek the Lord that you may live"

(D) verse 14: "Seek good and not evil, that you may live"

(E) that they might be part of the surviving remnant, verse 15: "Perhaps the Lord God of hosts May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph"

(F) choosing the future

c. and the negative choice is also given

(A) the choice to continue just as they had been doing

(B) make any other choice, or make no choice

(C) and you are choosing to seek evil

(D) and you will receive evil

(E) choosing the funeral

3. let us look then, at this passage, from the perspective of its being

B. God's Message to Israel

1. Here is a short outline of these 15 verses in Amos 5

- a. 1–3: A Funeral Song for Israel
- b. 4–7: The Two Choices Given
- c. 8–9: The Awesome God
- d. 10–13: Punishment of the Unjust Nation
- e. 14–15: Plea to Make the Right Choice

2. Amos 5:1–3: A Funeral Song for Israel

- a. this is called a 'dirge' or a 'lament' and is used of the song of wailing that is sung at a funeral, at a bereavement
- b. now there is no question here about Israel being spared
 - (A) God has pronounced His judgement on the nation
 - (B) and there is no turning back
 - (C) just as God later pronounced His judgement on Judah
 - (D) and as later in Matthew 23–25 Jesus pronounced God's judgement on the Jewish nation
- c. and these verses show that this coming judgement to Israel is a fait accompli – they are in the past tense – in God's will, they have already taken place: verse 2: "Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no-one to lift her up." (NIV)
- d. and the effect is to be devastating – this nation will be nine times worse than being decimated – not one in ten being taken, but rather, only one in ten remaining
- e. into which group will a person choose to be put?

3. Amos 5:4–7: The Two Choices Given

- a. This is what the Lord says to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing. Seek the Lord and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no-one to quench it." NIV

- b. you can, says God, choose Me, the one True God, and with that choice, you will live, or
- c. you can continue in your false worships – in a few weeks, we will be speaking, Lord willing, about worship that displeases God; here is a little preview
 - (A) Rev. Simon Scott in “Religion God Hates,” ^{5} calls Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba, ‘places with names in bold capital letters on the spiritual map of Israel.’
 - (1) Bethel was where Jacob had met with God and had his vision of a ladder let down from heaven.
 - (2) Gilgal was the point at which the Israelites first crossed the Jordan into the land.
 - (3) Beersheba -- Abraham had given it that name specifically to commemorate that God was with him’ – “The Well of Oath”
 - (B) but, these had become places where the worship of the One True God was corrupted with graven images attempting to represent that God and with every form of corruption imported from the surrounding nations
 - (C) Daniel Defoe (“Robinson Crusoe”) gives expression to how man can pervert true religion into false:
‘When God erects a house of prayer.
The devil always builds a chapel there.
And 'twill be found upon examination.
The latter has the largest congregation.’ ^{6}.
- d. Choose God, and life; choose otherwise, and death; for...

4. Amos 5:8–9: The Awesome God

- a. Amos breaks into his message with a sharp reminder
 - (A) the God with whom Israel is dealing
 - (B) is not a piece of stone, a bit of wood, a pillar or post
 - (C) He is the God of creation – Amos, the herdsman, had looked up and seen this small part of His power in the star cluster Pleiades in the Orion constellation – of course, Amos used their Hebrew (Arabic?) names
 - (D) and He is the God who brings great storms on the earth and the sea which wreak destruction
 - (E) Amos, the shepherd who had looked after his flock on many such a night could remember this

vividly and describe the power of his God in these verses

(F) "...who turns blackness into dawn and darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land — the Lord is his name — He flashes destruction on the stronghold..." (8b-9a NIV)

b. so, when it comes to dealing with sin, we must remember the awesome, majestic, holy nature of our God, as the writer to Hebrews warns us all, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31 NAS)

c. therefore, should it come as a surprise to Israel, or to any one of us, that such a God is will dispense...

5. Amos 5:10–13: Punishment of the Unjust Nation

a. the unjustness of this society – and the indication is that this was not restricted to a few but was a pandemic, that it permeated most levels of the society, is revealed in a number of ways ... some will sound familiar to us today

b. they violently reacted against anyone who would tell the truth and reprove those who were committing wrong: "you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth." (Amos 5:10 NIV)

c. they were indifferent to the cause, the need for justice, of the righteous and the poor in their midst

(A) they taxed the poor to further impoverish them

(B) they took bribes to decide cases against the innocent

(C) they refused to hear the cause of the poor

(1) NAS: "...you turn aside the poor in the gate"

(2) the gates of the city was where the elders were to meet and decide the cases brought before them

(3) NIV: "...you deprive the poor of justice in the courts."

(4) the very people who had the greatest need of having someone hear their case are denied

d. instead, this affluent people, were only concerned with their own comfort, their own residences and wealth

(A) "...you have built stone mansions, ...you have planted lush vineyards" (Amos 5:11 NIV)

(B) well, says God, through Amos' lips

- (1) you are not going to live in those mansion
- (2) you are not going to drink the wine from your vineyards
- (C) when we say that our God is a righteous God, one thing that means is that God hates injustice; think of Jesus' care for the poor and needy of his day, and of his anger against the hypocritical rulers, as found, to give just one example, in Luke 20:46–47: "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation." (NAS)
- e. and this people had no sense of justice; but God patiently makes a ...

6. Amos 5:14–15: Plea to Make the Right Choice

- a. is there anyone to listen?
 - (A) "Seek good ... love good"
 - (B) "Hate evil"
 - (C) "Establish justice"
- b. why?
 - (A) "that you may live"
 - (B) "...Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph." (NIV)
 - (C) Joseph was the father of Ephraim and Manasseh and these were the most numerous of the tribes making up the northern kingdom, Samaria or Israel
- c. repent, says Amos, that you may be part of a remnant, a small remnant of the people, upon whom God will desire to show His great mercy.
- d. two choices offered to those living in Israel
 - (A) a future or a funeral
 - (B) seeking God or continuing in their evil ways
 - (C) one obviously right; which would people take?

C. Conclusion

1. I know that some of you may still be wondering about how that applicant, who was chosen from the 200, answered
 - a. you can see the dilemma in the situation described:
 - (A) the driver could pick up the old lady, because she is going to die otherwise and thus he should save her first;
 - (B) He could take the old friend because he once saved his life and that would be the perfect chance to repay him;
 - (C) However, he may never be able to find his perfect dream love again.
 - b. What was the answer of the successful applicant? He simply answered: "I would give the car keys to my old friend and let him take the old lady to the hospital. I would stay behind and wait for the bus with the woman of my dreams." –{3 rest}

2. In the spiritual realm the correct choice can be obvious – difficult to choose, maybe, but obvious to determine
 - a. The first and most important is to answer the challenge given by Joshua to the people of Israel, "Choose you this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15) "but as for me and for my house, we will serve the Lord."
 - (A) this is a choice that Ruth, a pagan from Moab made when she said to Naomi her mother-in-law in those tender words, "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:" (Ruth 1:16 AV)
 - (B) and it is the choice that Peter made; Jesus had told His followers some hard sayings. Then we read, 'As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. Jesus said therefore to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.'" (John 6:66-69 NAS)
 - (C) it is the choice for Jesus Christ as one's own Saviour

- b. But that verse from Joshua does not stop applying when we have made that initial choice for Jesus Christ; it is a choice which we make 'this day,' and again when the next day comes, we make 'this day' and so on day by day, daily choosing to serve the Lord.
- c. I think that the advice, given originally to young people in their choice of music, is capable of wider application
 - (A) Avoid things that make Satan or evil look attractive.
 - (B) Avoid things that promote sin.
 - (C) Avoid things that blaspheme or debase God.
 - (D) Choose things that nurture your relationship with your Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. ^{-{7}}.
- d. So choose this day to live by the power of the Holy Spirit a life of righteousness – that is, a life in God's will, a life in a proper, redeemed relationship with Him, a life that is living praise to Him – through the righteousness of Christ
- e. chose this day as we close by singing "I Would Be True"

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NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
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2. ‘Abundance of Choices’ provided by Roddy Chestnut, Kerux Illustrations #5766.
3. ‘Marriage or a Tire’ from Wit And Wisdom at <http://www.witandwisdom.org> by Richard G. Wimer – Kerux Illustrations #473
4. ‘The Bus Stop Decision’ submitted by Mike Conroy, Ledgewood Baptist Church, Ledgewood, New Jersey, Kerux Illustration #4654
5. “Religion God Hates” by Rev. Simon Scott, The Round Church at St. Andrew the Great (Anglican); Cambridge, England – Kerux Sermons #20439
6. Daniel Defoe, quoted in sermon by Rev. Simon Scott
7. “On the Home Front, Rock Music” from Discipleship Journal 5/1/1995 – Kerux Illustration #3228