

<sup>18</sup>Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why do you want the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, not light;

<sup>19</sup> as if someone fled from a lion,

and was met by a bear;

or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,

and was bitten by a snake.

<sup>20</sup>Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,

and gloom with no brightness in it?

<sup>21</sup>I hate, I despise your festivals,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

<sup>22</sup>Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings,

I will not accept them;

and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals

I will not look upon.

<sup>23</sup>Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

<sup>24</sup>But let justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

<sup>25</sup> Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? <sup>26</sup>You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images that you made for yourselves; <sup>27</sup>therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.

## Discussion Questions

1. Sakkuth and Kaiwan were obscure deities associated with the Assyrians. The prophet anticipates that in the future the Israelites will take up the worship of these deities. Restate the meaning and impact of verses 25-7.
2. Henry Mahler has penned a version of Amos that is contemporary and directed at American culture. Part of his text reads:

*I hate, I despise your Christmas and Easter  
celebrations,  
And take no delight in your solemn morning worship.  
Even though you tithe and give large memorial gifts  
I will not approve them.  
Take away from me your hymns and anthems  
And the sonorous tones of your organ—I will not  
listen;  
But let justice in the laws and courts cascade like  
waters,  
And a will for right living like an ever-flowing  
stream.*

On a feeling level, what is it like to hear these words directed to our situation? Is Mahler's effort legitimate. Can Amos really be usefully translated into a contemporary critique of our own culture?

3. Amos appears to be stressing here that the worth of worship is not a constant, but dependent on moral living or living in fairness. Without justice, worship is detestable. Is this true today for Christians?
4. How important would you say the rites and rituals of ancient peoples—especially those of Israel--were? Imagine altars where sacred fires burned. Imagine the pilgrims on the roads, pageantries in sacred places and animals being offered to the glory of the gods. How important did the ancient person deem these activities? By comparison what is our regard for our own worship services? In other words, just how deeply is Amos confronting the "sacred cows" of his culture?
5. What is implied about God when the prophets, God's voice in the world, give priority to justice over pageantry and spectacle? What is implied about the world?

6. Isn't this kind of religion advocated by Amos and the other prophets—this emphasis on the condition of the world—the death of religion?
7. Martin Luther King wrote: *In deep disappointment I have wept over the laxity of the church. But be assured that my tears have been tears of love. There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love. Yes, I love the church. How could I do otherwise? I am in a rather unique position of being the son, the grandson and the great grandson of preachers. Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists.* Do these words capture and extend the spirit of the prophets in the Old Testament, notably Amos?
8. Presbyterian Mark Labberton has said in his recent book, The Dangerous Act of Worship, that something has gone wrong with worship. Too often, worship has become a place of safety and complacency. It can be a narrowly private experience in which solitary individuals express their personal adoration. Even when we gather corporately, we often close our eyes to those around us, focusing on God but ignoring our neighbor. Because of this there is deep falseness and counter-productive element in what goes on at 11:00 a.m. on Sundays across America. Is this assertion biblically based? Is it valid? Is it in the spirit of Amos and the other prophets? Do we have to pay attention to it?