

Amos 5:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light?
even very dark, and no brightness in it?

Analysis

Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? (halo-choshekh yom-YHWH velo-or, —תְּלָאֵץ־חֹשֶׁךְ יוֹם־יְהוָה וְלֹא־אֹור—) the rhetorical question expects "yes." Israel anticipated the Day of the LORD as light (or, אֹור)—deliverance, vindication, blessing. Amos declares it will be darkness (choshekh, חֹשֶׁךְ)—judgment, calamity, destruction. The phrase **even very dark, and no brightness in it** (va'afel velo-nogah lo, וְאַפְלָל וְלֹא־נוֹגָה לוּ) intensifies the image: not just darkness but thick darkness (afel, אַפְלָל), with absolutely no brightness (nogah, נֹגָה, no glimmer of light).

"The day of the LORD" is a major prophetic theme—God's intervention in history to judge evil and vindicate His people (Isaiah 13:6-13; Joel 1:15, 2:1-11, 31; Zephaniah 1:14-18). Israel assumed they were the vindicated, not the judged. Amos reverses this: because of covenant violation, Israel will experience the Day of the LORD as darkness, not light. This prophetic theme culminates in Christ's second coming—for believers, a day of redemption (Luke 21:28); for unbelievers, a day of wrath (Revelation 6:15-17). The question isn't whether the Day comes but how we'll experience it.

Historical Context

In Amos's context (760-750 BC), Israel enjoyed prosperity and military success under Jeroboam II. They assumed God's favor and looked forward to His eschatological intervention against their enemies. Amos shocks them: God's intervention will target Israel for covenant unfaithfulness. Within 30 years,

Assyria's conquest (722 BC) brought exactly this darkness—death, exile, devastation. The Day they anticipated as triumph became their nightmare.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does presuming God's favor while living in unrepentant sin set people up for devastating judgment?
2. In what ways does the New Testament's teaching on Christ's return as both hope (for believers) and terror (for unbelievers) echo Amos 5:20?

Interlinear Text

בָּלָא חַשְׁךְ מִי יְהוָה אַלְאַתְּ אֲוֹרֶת
H3808 be darkness Shall not the day of the LORD H3808 and not light
H2822 H3117 H3068 H216

לֹא יְאַפֵּל כַּגָּה לֹא
H651 H3808 and no brightness H0

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 13:10 (Light): For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

Ezekiel 34:12 (Darkness): As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

Zephaniah 1:15 (Darkness): That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

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