

Amos 5:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.

Analysis

Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs (haser me'alai hamon shirekha, הָסֵר מֵעָלַי הָמוֹן שִׁירֶיךָ)—God commands Israel to remove their worship music because He finds it unbearable. The word hamon (הָמוֹן) means "noise, tumult, uproar"—God doesn't hear their songs (shir, שִׁיר, formal worship hymns) as beautiful music but as grating noise. This is devastating: worship meant to honor God instead offends Him.

For I will not hear the melody of thy viols (vezimirat nevalekha lo eshma', וְזִמְרַת נְבֻלֶיךָ לֹא אֶשְׁמָע)—the nevel (נְבֻלָּה, "lyre/harp") was a primary worship instrument (Psalm 33:2, 57:8, 144:9). God refuses to hear (shama', שָׁמַע, "listen/give attention to") their instrumental music. The verb choice is significant: God doesn't merely dislike it; He actively refuses to listen—like covering His ears against cacophony.

Why such strong language? Because worship divorced from justice is hypocrisy, and hypocritical worship is worse than no worship at all. Verse 24 provides the alternative: **But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream**—God wants justice (mishpat, מִשְׁפָּט) and righteousness (tzedaqah, צְדָקָה), not empty ceremony. Proverbs 21:3 states: "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice." Jesus applied this principle when He cleansed the temple (Matthew 21:12-13)—God's house must be a house of prayer, not a marketplace or performance theater.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite worship included singing and instrumental music—psalms were sung with lyre, harp, and other instruments (Psalm 150). Israel's worship at Bethel and Dan was musically elaborate and liturgically impressive (Amos 4:4-5). Yet God declares He will not listen because the worshipers oppressed the poor while singing praises. This exposes a perennial temptation: substituting aesthetic excellence or emotional experience for ethical obedience. Music, however skillful, cannot substitute for righteousness.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How might contemporary worship services prioritize musical excellence or emotional experience while tolerating injustice or unrighteousness?
2. What does it mean that God refuses to listen to worship from those who neglect justice and righteousness?

Interlinear Text

הָסֵר	מֵעָלַי	הַמִּן	שִׁירֵי	זִמְרָת	נִבְלֵי
Take thou away	H5921	from me the noise	of thy songs	the melody	of thy viols
H5493		H1995	H7892	H2172	H5035
לֹא	אֶשְׁמַע:				
H3808	H8085				
	for I will not hear				

Additional Cross-References

Amos 6:5 (Parallel theme): That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David;

Amos 8:10 (Parallel theme): And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.

Amos 8:3 (Parallel theme): And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord GOD: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence.

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