

Amos 8:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?

Analysis

Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat—This verse exposes the merchants' hearts: they observe religious festivals outwardly while resenting them inwardly. **New moon** (חֹדֶשׁ, chodesh) marked monthly celebrations with rest from commerce (Numbers 10:10, 28:11-15; Isaiah 1:13-14). **Sabbath** (שַׁבָּת, shabbat) commanded weekly rest (Exodus 20:8-11). These oppressors endure religious obligations impatiently, eager to resume profit-making.

The commercial activities they anticipate reveal systematic fraud: **making the ephah small** (לְהַקְטִין אֵיפָה, lehaqtin eifah)—using undersized measures when selling grain, so customers pay full price for reduced quantity. **And the shekel great** (וּלְהַגְדִּיל שֶׁקֶל, ulehagdil shekel)—using heavy weights when collecting payment, so merchants receive inflated value. **Falsifying the balances by deceit** (וּלְעַוְבֹת מִאֲזֵנֵי מִרְמָה, ule'avvet moznei mirmah)—rigging scales to cheat customers. Every transaction involved calculated theft.

This triple fraud violated Leviticus 19:35-36: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have." God commanded commercial honesty because economics is worship—how we treat others in marketplace transactions reveals our view of God. These merchants kept Sabbath externally but violated its

spirit by viewing it as interruption to exploitation rather than sacred time honoring God and protecting workers. Jesus condemned similar hypocrisy: the Pharisees tithed herbs but neglected justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23).

Historical Context

Ancient commerce relied on standardized measures: the ephah (dry measure, ~22 liters) for grain, the shekel (weight, ~11.4 grams) for precious metals, and balance scales for weighing. Without modern enforcement, merchants could easily manipulate measures—keeping multiple sets of weights/measures, using worn scales, or employing sleight-of-hand. Archaeological discoveries include both honest and fraudulent weights, confirming such practices existed.

Sabbath and new moon festivals required cessation of commerce, protecting workers from exploitation and maintaining covenant rhythms. But Israel's merchants resented these restrictions, viewing them as lost profit opportunities rather than acts of worship. Their question "When will [the festival] be gone?" reveals hearts devoted to mammon, not God. They resembled the Pharisees who devoured widows' houses while making long prayers (Luke 20:47)—religious externalism masking greedy hearts.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do modern believers sometimes treat corporate worship as interruption to pursuits we really value, and what does this reveal about our true priorities?
2. What forms of "making the ephah small and the shekel great" exist in contemporary business practices, and how should Christians respond?

Interlinear Text

אָמַר	מָתַי	יָעָבֵר	הַחֹדֶשׁ	וְנִשְׁבַּע יָכֵה	שֶׁבֶר
Saying	H4970	be gone	When will the new moon	that we may sell	corn
H559		H5674	H2320	H7666	H7668
וְהַשַּׁבָּת	וְנִפְתָּחָהּ	בָּרֶ	לְהִקֵּט יֵין	אֵיפָה	
and the sabbath	that we may set forth	wheat	small	making the ephah	
H7676	H6605	H1250	H6994	H374	
וְלִהְגֹּד יֵל	שֶׁ קָל	וְלַעֲוֹת	מֵאֲזֵנֵי	בְּמֶרְמָה:	
great	and the shekel	and falsifying	the balances	by deceit	
H1431	H8255	H5791	H3976	H4820	

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 12:7 (Parallel theme): He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.

Isaiah 1:13 (Parallel theme): Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

Proverbs 20:23 (Parallel theme): Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance is not good.

Proverbs 11:1 (Parallel theme): A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.

Proverbs 16:11 (Parallel theme): A just weight and balance are the LORD'S: all the weights of the bag are his work.

Leviticus 19:36 (Parallel theme): Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.

2 Kings 4:23 (Parallel theme): And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well.

Numbers 10:10 (Parallel theme): Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God: I am the LORD your God.

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