

The Day of the Lord in Amos 5:18-20: A historical interpretation and its relevance to social justice in the Indonesian and India context



Jelfy L. Hursepunya^{a,1,*}, K. Chongloi^{b,2}

^a Faculty of Theology, Indonesian Christian University in the Moluccas, Jl. Ot Pattimaipauw, Ambon, 97115, Indonesia

^b India Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS), Kotayam, Kerala, 686501, India

¹ jelfyholland@gmail.com; ² minlunchongloi@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the meaning of the 'Day of the Lord' in Amos 5:18-20 through a historical-critical interpretation, emphasizing its profound relevance to social justice in Indonesia and India context. Both Indonesia and India share a history of socio-economic disparities and religious pluralism, making Amos's critique of hypocritical worship and societal injustice particularly relevant. The prophetic call for justice challenges religious communities in both nations to integrate social justice into their theological frameworks and practical actions. Contrary to popular eschatological interpretations that often project the 'Day of the Lord' solely into the future, this study argues that Amos consistently links this concept to the prophet's present time, serving as a potent critique of contemporary societal injustices. The findings reveal that the 'Day of the Lord' in this passage signifies a call for the urgent renewal of social justice within society. The prophetic spirit of Amos compels Christians, the Church, and society to internalize and continuously practice social justice as a fundamental calling of faith. This interpretation underscores the imperative for churches in Indonesia and India to integrate social justice issues into the core of their theological discourse and practical engagement.

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Introduction

At its 13th General Assembly in Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan (2000), the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) adopted the theme: "Seek the Lord, and you will live," derived from Amos 5:6a (Singgih, 2016). The Book of Amos has consistently served as a foundational biblical text for understanding justice from a theological perspective. The concept of justice, while ancient and integral to human civilization, has historically faced neglect, as evidenced by various societal contexts (Hursepuny J.L. 2017). In recent years, social justice has re-emerged as a critical focus within the *Dokumen Keesaan Gereja* (Document on Church Unity) by PGI for the period 2024-2029. The contemporary socio-ecological landscape in Indonesia, characterized by pervasive injustice, poverty, corruption, transactional politics, identity politics, religious fundamentalism, and ecological degradation, presents a formidable challenge to all segments of society, including the Church. Consequently, the proclamation of the Gospel is increasingly manifesting through socio-ecological service, complementing verbal proclamation, with a particular emphasis on advocating for victims of injustice, human dignity violations, the impoverished, the oppressed, and the restoration of damaged ecosystems.

The issue of social justice is also a significant concern faced by the church and society in India. India's social justice landscape is complex and multifaceted, with various groups struggling for equality and rights. The issue of social justice in India can also be described in several forms, namely discrimination based on caste and economic inequality, which have given rise to various social movements and critical thoughts on this reality. Caste-based discrimination remains a significant obstacle to social justice in India. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continue to face exclusion and violence, with many being forced into manual scavenging and other forms of exploitative labor (Babu D. Shiyam, 2020). The stigma of untouchability perpetuates these inequalities, limiting access to education, employment, and healthcare. Economic inequalities exacerbate social injustices in India. The country's labor market remains highly segmented, with marginalized groups facing significant barriers to employment and economic mobility. Women, in particular, are disproportionately affected, with many relegated to informal and exploitative labor arrangements.

Despite these challenges, social justice movements in India continue to push for change. Activists and organizations are working to address caste-based discrimination, promote economic equality, and advocate for the rights of marginalized communities. Recent developments, such as the Supreme Court's ruling on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, highlight the ongoing struggle for social justice in India. While progress has been made, much work remains to be done to address the deep-seated inequalities and injustices faced by marginalized communities (Abinash 2023). Overall, India's social justice landscape is characterized by ongoing struggles for equality and rights. Addressing these challenges will require sustained efforts from activists, organizations, and policymakers to promote greater inclusivity, equality, and justice for all.

This article aims to contribute to this ongoing discourse by offering a critical historical interpretation of Amos 5:18-20, a passage central to the biblical theme of the 'Day of the Lord.' This concept is frequently misconstrued as an exclusively eschatological event, referring to a distant future judgment or the second coming of Jesus Christ. However, a rigorous exegetical analysis reveals that Amos consistently situates the 'Day of the Lord' within the immediate socio-historical context of his audience, functioning as a direct indictment of their present-day moral and social failings (Mulzac, K. D. 2002). By examining the significance of Amos's message within its original context and its implications for justice, this study aims to highlight that issues of justice and social concern are not new but rather deeply rooted in the theological struggles of the Old Testament, remaining profoundly relevant today. As Jacky Manuputty aptly states, "Amid global capitalism that reduces human beings to mere statistical figures in the free market, the Church challenges the logic of mammonism by presenting a moral imagination -- justice as the highest form of life (Manuputty, 2025). The Church not only speaks of an eschatological heaven but also fights for a possible heaven here on earth: welfare, equality, and social harmony in Indonesia, as well as in India, and worldwide.

Interpretations of the concept of the Day of the Lord in the Bible have been extensively explored before. First, Yofan Hioe, who researched the meaning of the Concept of the Day of the Lord in Zephaniah 1 and Its Implications for Contemporary Christian Worship (Hioe, 2023, pp. 85-100). Second, Yudi Santos, who also wrote about the Day of the Lord and Its Implications for Believers Today, adopts a theological approach that seeks to comprehensively read the topic of the Day of the Lord in the Bible (Santoso, 2023, pp. 94-110). Third, Sipahutar, who interpreted the idea of Amos 8:4-8 by emphasizing the meaning of Worship and Social Justice for church ministry today (Sipahutar, 2021, p. 13-21). This research distinguishes itself by focusing specifically on Amos 5:18-20, examining the meaning of the 'Day of the Lord' within Amos's socio-historical context, and directly correlating it with contemporary issues of social justice pertinent to the modern Church. This nuanced approach provides a fresh perspective on a foundational text, highlighting its enduring prophetic call for righteousness and equity.

Research Method

This article employs the critical-historical method for biblical interpretation. This methodology operates on the premise that a text is historical in two primary senses: 'history in the text' and 'history of the text'. 'History in the text' refers to the narrative content of the text itself, encompassing the persons, events, social conditions, or ideas it describes. 'History of the text,' conversely, investigates the origins of the text, including its authorship, date of composition, original audience, and the processes of its writing, editing, and preservation (Hayes, J. H., & Holladay, C. R., 1987). [By applying this dual approach, the study aims to uncover the original meaning and intent of Amos 5:18-20 within its specific historical and cultural context. Furthermore, the insights derived from examining the perspectives of various Old Testament scholars are integrated to illuminate the contemporary significance of the text for present-day social justice concerns. This method enables a robust analysis that bridges the ancient prophetic message with contemporary theological and societal challenges.

Results and Discussion

The Development of The Day of The Lord in The Old Testament

The concept of the Day of the Lord (*yôm YHWH*) in the Old Testament is multifaceted and has been a subject of extensive scholarly debate for decades (von Rad, 1959). Its complexity is evident in the diverse expressions and interpretations found across prophetic literature. Scholars such as Gerhard von Rad have noted the centrality of this concept, prompting significant research into its origins and meaning (Barton, 2004). While some, like Barton, suggest that its prominence in scholarly discourse has waned in recent years, its theological significance remains undeniable (Hoffmann, 1969). Several key understandings regarding the concept of the Day of the Lord and its origins have emerged among Old Testament scholars:

1. Popular Expectation (R. H. Charles): R. H. Charles, as cited by Hoffmann, argued that the Day of the Lord originated as a popular expectation predating the writing prophets. This popular belief was often non-ethical and nationalistic, assuming that Yahweh would always protect Israel. Amos is often credited as the first prophet to transform this popular, often complacent, belief into a concept with ethical and cosmic implications (Hoffmann, 1969, p. 8). However, critics, including Hoffmann, point to a lack of conclusive biblical evidence to fully support this view (Hoffmann, 1969, p. 8).
2. Cultic Origins (Sigmund Mowinckel): Sigmund Mowinckel proposed that the Day of the Lord had its roots in cultic celebrations, particularly the New Year festival, where Yahweh's kingship was celebrated (Hoffmann, 1969, p. 8). In this view, the festival symbolized Yahweh's triumph over chaos and His recreation of the earth, bringing fertility and hope. Mowinckel suggested that during Amos's time, people associated hope with this festival, believing Yahweh would defeat their enemies (Mowinckel, 2005, p. 142). However, this theory has faced criticism, notably from De Vaux, who, as quoted by Hoffmann, argued that strong historical evidence for a New Year festival in Israel, as suggested by Mowinckel, is lacking, and the Babylonian New Year festival occurred much later than Amos (Hoffmann, 1969, p. 27-28).
3. Holy War Tradition (Gerhard von Rad): Gerhard von Rad, after analyzing prophetic texts including Amos 5:18-20, concluded that the concept of the Day of the Lord originated from ancient Israel's holy war (*herem*) tradition (von Rad, 1959, p. 104; Hoffmann, 1969, p. 49). In this tradition, Yahweh personally manifested to defeat His enemies. Von Rad argued that prophets adopted this existing concept, using it to convey an eschatological message rooted in past salvific actions, in which God fought for His people (von Rad, 1959, p. 105; Hoffmann, 1969, p. 48). While influential, von Rad's perspective has also been critiqued. Hoffmann, for instance, found von Rad's

assertions regarding Amos's use of popular understanding alongside complex concepts difficult to fully grasp (Hoffmann, 1969, p. 49). Preuss, a student of von Rad, chose to view the concept thematically within prophetic texts rather than attempting to determine its historical roots, aligning with his broader thesis of God's historical action in choosing Israel and demanding obedience (Preuss, 1995, p. 23).

4. **Semitic Psychology and Collective Thinking (Cerny):** Cerny, as explained by Hoffmann, suggested that the ideological source of the Day of the Lord lies in Semitic psychology, specifically. First, the ideological source of the day of the Lord must be sought in Semitic psychology about "collective thinking". An explanation of the spatial and temporal aspects of the day of the Lord, specifically regarding its future orientation, where the Israelites see God acting, must be referred back to the pre-monarchic era or the nomadic memories of the Hebrews. However, its eschatological character developed later. Second, Yahweh plays the principal role in the concept of the day of the Lord. He acts as a furious God, but a God of justice, where both concepts are not characteristic of the Hebrews but are part of the ancient Hebrew tradition. Third, the accompanying horror phenomena are coincidental and not characteristic of Hebrew. These phenomena originate from ancient Hebrew tradition but are also commonly found in the ancient Near East, where each nation developed this concept within its own specific context. Although there were criticisms of Cerny's opinion, van Leeuwen responded positively to Cerny's views (Hoffmann, 1969, p. 35-36).

The Darkness of The Day of The Lord (Amos 5:18)

Amos 5:18 opens with a stark warning: "Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD! Why do you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light" (NRSV). The particle *hoy* (alas), which initiates this verse, is a distinctive stylistic feature predominantly found in prophetic literature, appearing fewer than 45 times in the Old Testament, primarily in books from Isaiah to Zechariah (Isa. 1:4, 24, 5:8, 10:1, Jer. 22:13, 30:7, Ez. 13:3, 34:2, Am. 5:18, 6:1, Mi. 2:1, Nah. 3:1, Hab. 2:16, Zeph. 2:5). Scholars like Udoekpo interpret this particle as signifying misfortune, consistently preceding negative consequences such as disasters, calamities, wars, or conquests for the recipients of the prophetic message (Udoekpo, 2010, p. 203). The Prophet Isaiah prophesied that Jerusalem and Judah would be doomed because they were burdened with sin and had forsaken the Lord (Isa. 1:6). A similar context appears in the preaching of Micah, who prophesied that Judah and Jerusalem would be doomed for plotting evil (Mi. 2:1). Not only Judah and Jerusalem but Nineveh also would be doomed (Na. 3:1). The scope of these threats extends beyond Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem to include other nations, underscoring the universal reach of divine judgment.

Historically, the *hoy* particle is recognized as an ancient form of lamentation, with similar expressions found in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and ancient Arabian literature (van Leeuwen, 1974, p. 115). Notably, Amos is credited as the first prophet to employ this particle in direct relation to the Day of the Lord, and he is also among the earliest pre-exilic prophets to prophesy about this concept (Preuss, 1996, p. 272; van Leeuwen, 1974, p. 133). In this context, Amos directs his "alas" towards those who desire (*hammith'awim*) the Day of the Lord. The Hebrew term *hammith'awim* translates to "those who want" or "those who crave," emphasizing a strong, often misguided, longing. Mueller and Levin are quoted by Eidevall, who explain that the historical context of this prophecy originates from the final decades of the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Hosea (731-722 BC), but before the siege of Samaria by Assyria (Eidevall, 2017, p. 163). Mulzac highlights that this group is not Israel in general, but a more specific, limited segment—likely those with a false sense of security who have defied their covenant obligations, particularly concerning the poor and needy (Mulzac, 2002). Their craving for the Day of the Lord is presented as a defiance of God, drawing a parallel to Israel's craving for meat

in Numbers 11:34, which also signified a rebellious attitude against God's provision and covenant (Mulzac, 2002).

Coote said "the forced commercial agricultural system during the reigns of Jeroboam and Uzziah had terrible consequences for the Palestinian villagers, especially those living in the highlands. Forced by the taxes imposed in barley to the fast-growing green plant processing, such as grapes and olives, farmers could no longer practice crop rotation on their fields. Meanwhile, rural residents were forced to mortgage their land as collateral for loans with high interest rates (Coote and Coote, 2004, p. 61). Because the land has fallen into the hands of creditors, the people have to use marginal and low-quality land to produce barley while the state gets maximum returns from wheat, grapes, and oil through taxes (Coote and Coote, 2004, p. 61).

What is the day of the Lord, such that the Israelites who for it will be doomed? The term "the day of the Lord" (yom yhwh) is a key term in nine prophetic texts (Isa. 13:6-13, Jl. 1:15, 2:1, 3:4, 4:14, Am. 5:18-20, Ob. 1:5, Zeph. 1:17-18, Mal. 3:23) (Skolnik, 2007, p. 98). In the context of Amos, this term appears not purely using the Hebrew term "yom yhwh" but is expressed in various forms such as "day of battle" or "day of whirlwind" (Am. 1:14), "that day" (Am. 2:16, 8:3,9,13), "day" (Am. 3:14), "the coming day" (Am. 4:2, 8:11), "the day of the Lord" (Am. 5:18-20), and "day of doom" (Am. 6:3) (King, 2021, p. 102; Barstad, 1974, p. 94).

By referring to the day of the Lord as darkness (khosyekh) and not light ('or), it indicates that there seems to be an understanding held by the Israelites regarding the tradition of the day of the Lord. The scholars previously mentioned have attempted to find the *sitz im leben* (setting in life) of the intended day of the Lord, but ended with sharp disagreements among them regarding the historical origins of this concept. Including Mowinckel, who based this concept on its cultic setting and von Rad, who based it on its holy war setting. The understanding of the origins of the day of the Lord itself must be understood within the literary context of the Book of Amos as a whole.

The people to whom Amos prophesied apparently understood the tradition of the day of the Lord in several important past events in Israel's history. These events became past faith events that still resonate until now in the time of Amos and even in the times after, where the God of Israel remains the God who saves them from their enemies. The God of Israel is understood as the God who saves them when imperial powers press against them. However, their story, based on their past faith experiences, always ends with a happy ending, where Israel triumphs over its enemies due to the intervention of its God. The faith events are:

1. Exodus from Egypt. This event is noted in the Book of Amos twice. First, in Amos 2:10a, "Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt". Second, in Amos 9:7 "'Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?" says the LORD. "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?". This faith event is explained with very clear in the book of Exodus. This collective memory not only remembered by Amos but also the prophet of Hosea "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son". This story is well remembered in the Psalms such as Ps. 77:16 and 106:10. In the time of exile and afterwards, this faith tradition was believed anew by seeing the return from Babylon as a New Exodus for the people of Israel as evident in the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 43:1, 44:22-23, 48:20, 51:10, 52:9) (Preuss, 1995, p. 47).
2. The events of the Journey in the Desert. This event is one of the important themes in the Torah, specifically in the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, which is collectively remembered by the Israelites for hundreds of years afterwards. Amos 2:9, for example, emphasised this event where God is believed to have guided them through the desert for 40 years. It is also remembered in the Deuteronomistic History in Josh. 5:6 "For the Israelites travelled forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the warriors who came out of Egypt, perished, not having listened to the voice of the LORD. To them the LORD swore that he would not let them see the land that he

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- had sworn to their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey". Also in the book of Psalms (95:10) and Nehemiah 9:21 (Preuss, 1995, p. 293).
3. The people of Israel are the chosen people. This event is also known in the Book of Amos in chapter 3:2: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth...". This act of faith is also one of the important themes in the OT and recounted to the generations of Israel through time. Preus notes that in the OT, where God chooses Israel as His people, it appeared no less than 99 times. And the term "*bakhar*" (to choose) itself appeared 146 times in the OT, directly relating to the chosen people of Israel, such as Moses (Ps 106:23), David (Ps 89:4), and the Servant of the Lord (Isa 42:1) (Preuss, 1995, p. 27-28).
 4. The tradition of Zion as the Centre. This tradition in the time of Amos was interpreted as referring to two possible places, namely Zion in Judah and the mountain of Samaria in Israel (Am. 6:1). This tradition has already explained that wherever the Lord is praised or worshipped, whether in Zion or on the mountain of Samaria, there is protection that they always receive because the Lord indeed reigns there. The Southern tradition, for example, mentions Jerusalem as the place chosen by the Lord as an abiding place among His people (Dtr. 12). Or in the prophecy of Isaiah about Zion as the centre of a peaceful kingdom (Isa. 2:1-4).

At least through these four traditions that are alive in the popular beliefs of the Israelites in the 8th century BC, where they understood it as a historical fact and a matter of faith that God would always act and save them from the oppressions of other nations. The concept of the day of the Lord, which was believed by the Israelites to be a day of light, was not seen that way by Amos. But the question that then arises why the day of the Lord, which was originally a day of great victory for the people of Israel, has turned into a dark day (*khosyekh*)? Why did Amos feel the need to turn the understanding of the day of the Lord, which previously had a positive connotation (the four moments of faith mentioned in the history of Israel), into a negative connotation, where previously on the day of the Lord, the people of Israel would be safe and at peace because they felt the protection of the Lord as He intervened in their lives, fought for them, and kept them safe from their enemies, but now it has become darkness (*khosyekh*)?

This question can be answered by looking at the context that underlies the proclamation of the prophet Amos itself. As argued by Udoekpo, who frequently cites Heschel and also discusses the historical context surrounding Amos's proclamation. It has been established that Amos prophesied in the 8th century BC in the North during the reign of King Jeroboam II (788-747 BC) and in the South during the reign of King Uzziah (785-733 BC). This period was marked by political stability. Israel during this time experienced material prosperity, political power, and economic wealth, which allowed Israel to extend its territories to the far North and far South to Hamath and Damascus, almost aligning with the borders that existed during the reign of King David (I Kings 14:23-29). Assyria was still weak, and Syria experienced political and commercial decline in relation to Israel (Udoekpo, 2010, p. 58).

The era of progress in the fields of economy, politics, and military turned out to be inversely proportional to the appreciation of the rights of poor people, marked by a sharp divide between the rich and the poor. Material abundance is only enjoyed by the upper class, as recounted in Am. 6:4-6, where their beds are made of ivory. Their food consisted of young lambs and fattened calves. Their celebrations were always lavish, accompanied by the sounds of lute music. And wine is drunk from bowls with high-quality oil. Merchants and market players have acted dishonestly by manipulating weights on the scales (Am. 8:5). Am. 5:7-13, one of the well-known texts by Amos about justice, explained that the Israelites who turned justice into bitter poison, where legal matters could be reversed to become unjust at the city gates and where high taxes were levied on the poor. The price of the poor was the same as the price of a pair of shoes (Am. 2:6). Older scholars have said that Amos was the first prophet to articulate what is called "ethical

monotheism”, meaning a prophet who articulated God’s governance over all people. The one God who has a moral goal of justice for the whole world (Brueggemann, 2012, p. 255).

Quoting Udoekpo’s opinion, the message from Amos 5:18-20 cannot be separated from the setting of injustice and the hypocritical practice of faith in Israel (Udoekpo, 2010, p. 200; Heschel, 1962, p. 201)). The Expansion of the royal land during the reign of King Jeroboam II, as recorded in II Kings 14:25-27, emphasised that God truly blessed Israel by giving them vast land. The expansion of land that even matches the size of the royal land during King David’s reign is a testament of faith where God appears as the God who defeated other gods around them that always emerged as threatening powers for Israel.

How is it possible that political, military, and economic prosperity is felt as evidence of God’s presence for Israel, where God intervenes to protect them while injustice runs rampant, creating a sharp divide between the rich and the poor? Here we find an ethical demand from a true understanding of the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord, as a popular understanding that lived among the people of Israel in the 8th century BC, where Amos lived and worked, is laden with its ethical demands. The demand is to balance wealth with justice. Here we find the social setting of a true understanding of the concept of the day of the Lord, where if people of Israel wish for the day of the Lord, then God’s intervention in Israel’s history is inherent with ethical-religious demands. God will certainly punish the people of Israel who believe that God will save them because of their political and military advancements in their time. Am. 6:1, for example, mentions “woe” to those who feel secure in Zion and those who feel at ease on Mount Samaria.

Contrary to the popular expectation of a day of light, vindication, and salvation, Amos unequivocally declares that the Day of the Lord will be a day of “darkness, not light” (v. 18b, 20). This reversal of expectation is powerfully illustrated through vivid imagery in verse 19: “[It is] just like a man who escapes from the face of a lion, but a bear meets him. When he comes into the house and leans his hand on the wall, a snake bites him.” This analogy underscores the inescapable nature of the impending judgment. For those who have lived in injustice and hypocrisy, the Day of the Lord will not bring the hoped-for deliverance but rather an inevitable encounter with divine wrath (Mulzac, 2002). The darkness signifies not merely the absence of light, but a profound judgment, a lack of divine favor, and the dire consequences of their unrighteous actions.

The Day of the Lord as a Day of Judgment (Amos 5:19)

Amos 5:19 further elaborates on the nature of the Day of the Lord, portraying it not as a day of salvation, but as an inescapable judgment for those who have strayed from God’s covenant and justice. The verse employs a powerful and vivid triple analogy to convey this message: “[It is] just like a man who escapes from the face of a lion, but a bear meets him. When he comes into the house and leans his hand on the wall, a snake bites him.” This imagery serves to dismantle any lingering illusions of security or escape that the people might harbor.

Amos uses a metaphor to describe the situation in which, when the day of the Lord comes, that is the day of judgement for the people of Israel, nothing escapes the day of the Lord. No matter how far one runs, calamity or punishment will follow. Amos uses metaphorical language to illustrate this condition. Whether it is outside the house, even if one escapes from a lion (*‘ari*), a bear (*dobh*) will pursue them. The home is always seen as a safe place, a sanctuary and a resting place. But in the context of the coming of the day of the Lord, even hiding in the house, calamity or punishment still awaits, as the prophet Amos has described it using the metaphor of a snake (*nakhas*) that bites when a hand leans against a wall. There is no such thing as protection or escape for the people of Israel when the day of the Lord, the day of judgement, arrives. Whether outside the house or inside, all the people of Israel will face the consequences.

The metaphor used by Amos is the same style that he has used in his book. Mays notes that the use of metaphorical language, which comes from life in the field and in the villages, is a

technique to heat up the situation that is temporal, as used by Amos (Mays, 1969, p. 103). In Am. 3:4-5, Amos used the metaphor about "Does a lion roar in the forest, when it has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from its den, if it has caught nothing? Does a bird fall into a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? The situation like this has shown that the prophecies of Amos for Israel, with the consequences, are the prophecies that come from the Lord. In Am. 6:12 also, "Do horses run on rocks? Does one plough the sea with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood". With the same literary device, Amos has explained that justice has been turned into poison by the people of Israel. We can find the same depiction in Am. 2:13, 3:12, 9:9 (Mays, 1969, p.103).

There are two meaning of these metaphors. Firstly, the scenario of escaping a lion only to encounter a bear highlights the inevitability and pervasiveness of the impending judgment. The people of Israel, in their false sense of security derived from economic prosperity and religious rituals devoid of true righteousness, believed they were safe from divine retribution. Amos shatters this illusion by demonstrating that even if they manage to evade one form of disaster (the lion), another, equally formidable threat (the bear) awaits them. This signifies that God's judgment is comprehensive and inescapable; there is no hiding place or avenue for evasion for those who persist in injustice (Mulzac, 2002). Secondly, the image of a man seeking refuge in his own home, only to be bitten by a snake, further intensifies the message of inescapable doom. The home, typically a sanctuary and a place of safety, becomes a source of danger. This illustrates that the very structures and institutions in which the people placed their trust – perhaps their religious practices, their wealth, or their political alliances – would ultimately betray them and become instruments of their downfall. It underscores the idea that divine judgment penetrates every aspect of life, leaving no sphere untouched.

Mulzac emphasizes that this verse, with its exclusive use of perfect verbs, stresses the completed action of the person in their futile attempt to escape. This grammatical nuance reinforces the idea that the people's actions have already sealed their fate, and the judgment is a direct consequence of their unrighteous living. Adegboyega's analysis of Amos 5 further supports this, highlighting that any unjust act and its perpetrator will not go unpunished, and that the Lord demands righteousness, love, and justice (Adegboyega, 2022). The prosperity enjoyed by Israel during Jeroboam II's reign, while outwardly impressive, masked deep moral decay and social injustice, making them ripe for this inevitable judgment. Thus, the Day of the Lord, as depicted in Amos 5:19, is a stark warning that divine justice will prevail, and those who ignore the prophetic call for righteousness will face its full, inescapable force.

The Day of the Lord as a Day of Darkness (Amos 5:20)

Amos 5:20 serves as a powerful rhetorical question that reinforces the prophet's central message regarding the true nature of the Day of the Lord: "Is not the Day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?" This verse, with its parallel structure in the Hebrew (*hālo' -hōšek... wēlo' -'ōr*, "Is not [the Day of the Lord] darkness, not light," and *wē'āpēl wēlo' -nōgah*, "and thick darkness with no brightness in it"), emphasizes the absolute absence of light and hope for those who face divine judgment (Mays, 1969, p.103).

As noted by Stuart, both "darkness" (*khosyekh*) and "gloom" (*'appel*) are two words in the OT that are often used as metaphors for difficulties, hardships, and even death (Stuart, 1988, p. 530). Hannah in the context of her praises to God, praises God as the one who destroys the wicked into darkness (*khosyekh*) (1 Sam. 2:9). The psalmist in the context of calling for help against enemies hopes that the paths of his enemies are filled with darkness (*khosyekh*) (Ps. 35:6). Ps. 91:6 which praise God as the Highest who provides refuge can save His people from the persistence that stealthily lurks in gloom (*'appel*). The emergence of these words in the

context of the Old Testament highlights the adverse conditions faced by both Israel's enemies and the Israelites themselves during the Day of the Lord, the primary focus of this verse.

Amos and other pre-exilic prophets reacted by proclaiming that the day of the Lord would be a day of judgment for the sins committed by Israel (Am. 5, Isa. 2, Zeph. 1, Ez. 7) (van Leeuwen, 1974, pp. 130-133). During the exile and the time of restoration when punishment had already occurred, there was another opportunity for the day of the Lord to be a day of judgment for Israel's enemies and salvation for Israel (Isa. 13, Jer. 46, Ezek. 30). At the final stage of its development, the day of the Lord is seen as a day of universal judgment (Jl. 4, Zech. 14). In the context of Zech. 14, the day of the Lord has been understood within the framework of apocalyptic tradition (van Leeuwen, 1974, p.133-134).

The question that then arises is whether the day of the Lord is eschatological. Or does the day of the Lord, in the context of Amos as a prophet of the 8th century BC who first prophesied it in his time, have a similar understanding to the NT legacies regarding the day of the Lord? The answer to this question is provided very well by van Leeuwen, that if we take eschatology in the narrow sense of the word, as referring to the end of the world and history. The beginning of a completely new one (van Leeuwen, 1974, p. 133-134), we cannot speak of eschatology before the exile. If we may take it in a broader sense, as relating to the end of the present world order and the breaking in of a new divinely created order, even though the events were to take place within history and not beyond it (Hoelscher is quoted by van Leeuwen, 1974, p. 134). Then, the pre-exilic prophets did have an eschatology of doom (Clements is quoted by van Leeuwen, 1974, p. 134) and expected an intervention of God to bring about an entirely new order. In that sense, our text belongs to the eschatological preaching of the prophets (Klein and Rudolph are quoted by van Leeuwen, 1974, p.134).

The repetition and rhetorical framing of the question are designed to challenge the deeply ingrained, yet misguided, popular expectation among the Israelites that the Day of the Lord would be a day of triumph and vindication for them. Instead, Amos unequivocally declares it to be a day of profound darkness and gloom. This darkness is not merely a physical absence of light but a theological metaphor for divine disfavor, judgment, and the catastrophic consequences of their unrighteousness (Mulzac, 2002). It signifies the complete reversal of their expectations, where their presumed salvation turns into condemnation, and their anticipated victory transforms into defeat. Mulzac highlights that this verse functions as a "second, reinforcing answer" to the initial woe oracle in Amos 5:18, solidifying the prophet's grim prognosis (Mulzac, 2002). The darkness symbolizes the spiritual and moral decay that has permeated Israelite society, a decay that has alienated them from God's righteous standards. Adegboyega's analysis further underscores this by noting that the prosperity of Jeroboam II's reign masked severe moral decline, hypocrisy, and social injustice, leading to a situation where religious activities were abundant but devoid of genuine righteousness [16]. For such a society, the Day of the Lord could only be a day of darkness, reflecting the spiritual state of a people who had turned justice into wormwood (Amos 5:7) and embraced oppression (Amos 5:12).

Therefore, Amos 5:20 serves as a climactic statement, leaving no room for misinterpretation. The Day of the Lord, far from being a cause for celebration for the unrighteous, is a terrifying prospect—a day of unmitigated darkness and judgment, directly proportional to the extent of their social and religious transgressions. It is a stark reminder that God's justice is unwavering and that true worship necessitates a commitment to righteousness and equity in all aspects of life.

Relevance to Social Justice

The interpretation of Amos 5:18-20, particularly the prophet's redefinition of the 'Day of the Lord' from a day of anticipated triumph to one of inescapable judgment, holds profound

implications for understanding social justice. Amos's message is not merely a theological pronouncement but a direct indictment of the socio-economic and religious injustices prevalent in Israel during his time. The prosperity under Jeroboam II had led to a stark division between the rich and the poor, with the wealthy indulging in luxury while exploiting the vulnerable [16]. This context is crucial for grasping the essence of Amos's prophetic critique.

Amos consistently links the impending judgment of the 'Day of the Lord' to the people's failure to uphold justice and righteousness. He condemns their hypocritical worship, where elaborate religious rituals coexisted with widespread oppression and corruption. As Adegboyega highlights, true worship, according to Amos, is not found in superficial ceremonies but in the practice of righteousness and justice among people [16]. The prophet's famous cry in Amos 5:24, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," encapsulates this demand for a fundamental shift from ritualistic piety to ethical living.

The 'darkness' of the Day of the Lord, as depicted in Amos 5:18-20, is a direct consequence of these social injustices. It signifies the divine displeasure with a society that has perverted justice, oppressed the needy, and engaged in bribery and deceit in their courts [16]. The analogies of escaping a lion only to meet a bear, or finding a snake in one's own home, powerfully illustrate that there is no escape from the consequences of systemic injustice. God's judgment will penetrate every aspect of their lives, dismantle their false sense of security, and expose their moral decay.

Theology of Social Justice: From Amos to the Indonesian and India context

The interpretation of Amos 5:18-20, particularly the prophet's redefinition of the 'Day of the Lord' as a day of judgment against injustice, holds profound implications for understanding social justice not only in Indonesia but also in India. Both nations share socio-economic challenges, including poverty, corruption, inequality, and ecological degradation, which resonate with the societal issues addressed by Amos.

In Indonesia, the socio-ecological landscape is marked by pervasive injustice, poverty, transactional politics, identity politics, religious fundamentalism, and environmental degradation. The Church in Indonesia has increasingly recognized these issues as theological imperatives, integrating them into its discourse and practical engagement. The Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) has emphasized the need for socio-ecological service, advocating for victims of injustice, violations of human dignity, and ecological restoration. Amos's prophetic call for justice serves as a powerful reminder for Indonesian churches to prioritize righteousness and equity in their mission, challenging the logic of global capitalism and mammonism.

Similarly, India faces significant social justice challenges, including caste-based discrimination, gender inequality, religious intolerance, and widespread poverty. The caste system, deeply entrenched in Indian society, perpetuates systemic oppression and exclusion, particularly of Dalits and other marginalized communities. Gender-based violence and inequality further exacerbate social disparities. Religious fundamentalism and communal tensions often lead to violence and discrimination, undermining the principles of justice and harmony. Additionally, environmental degradation and exploitation of natural resources disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.

Amos's message of the 'Day of the Lord' as a day of judgment against societal injustices is equally relevant in the Indian context. It challenges religious institutions and communities to move beyond ritualistic practices and actively address systemic injustices. The prophetic call to "let justice roll down like waters" resonates with the need for equitable treatment of all individuals, irrespective of caste, gender, or religion. Churches and faith-based organizations in India can draw inspiration from Amos to advocate for social justice, human dignity, and ecological sustainability, aligning their mission with the biblical mandate for righteousness.

For contemporary society, particularly for churches in Indonesia and India, as highlighted in the original article, the message of Amos 5:18-20 serves as a powerful call to action. It challenges the notion that religious observance can be divorced from social responsibility. The prophetic spirit of Amos urges a continuous internalization and practice of social justice as a core tenet of faith. This involves actively addressing issues such as poverty, corruption, political injustice, and ecological degradation, which mirror the societal ills of ancient Israel [3]. The 'Day of the Lord' in Amos, therefore, serves as a timeless reminder that divine favor is contingent upon a commitment to justice and righteousness, rendering social justice not merely a social concern but a theological imperative.

Conclusion

The critical historical interpretation of Amos 5:18-20 reveals a profound and challenging message regarding the 'Day of the Lord.' Far from being a distant, solely eschatological event of triumph and vindication, Amos redefines this concept as an imminent and inescapable day of judgment for those who have embraced injustice and hypocrisy. The prophet's use of the 'woe oracle' and vivid analogies of inescapable peril underscore the severity of divine retribution against a society that has neglected its covenantal obligations, particularly in the realm of social justice. The core of Amos's message in this passage is a powerful indictment of the socioeconomic disparities and moral decay prevalent in ancient Israel. The 'darkness' of the Day of the Lord symbolizes the divine disfavor and the catastrophic consequences that await those who prioritize ritualistic piety over genuine righteousness and the equitable treatment of their fellow human beings. This interpretation highlights that true worship, in the eyes of Yahweh, is inextricably linked to the pursuit of justice and the care for the marginalized.

For contemporary churches and societies, particularly in contexts such as Indonesia and India, the message of Amos 5:18-20 remains profoundly relevant. It serves as a timeless prophetic call to integrate social justice into the very fabric of theological understanding and practical action. The article affirms that issues such as poverty, corruption, and violations of human dignity are not merely secular concerns but fundamental theological imperatives. By embracing the spirit of Amos, Christians and the Church are challenged to continuously internalize and practice social justice, transforming their faith into tangible actions that reflect God's righteous character and bring about a more just and humane society.

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