The Book of Amos

Zanesville, OH | Sunday AM Bible Study

**Chapter 4**

* **4:1-5– God’s Holiness demands action**
* Amos continues in chapter 4 to denounce the sin and wickedness of the Israelites. The text begins in v. 1 as it did in 3:1 calling attention to the word of the LORD.
* Amos particular calls out a specific audience in v. 1 as He levels condemnation. The *“cows of Bashan”* are singled out for oppressing the poor. This is, of course, figurative language to speak of the rich Israelite women seeking more and more pleasure. Shalom Paul says of this: “*…the uppity upper-class women of northern Israel (Samaria), who, by their incessant demand upon their husbands to provide for their gluttonous needs to carouse and feast, are responsible for goading them on to impoverish even further the poor.”*
* Bashan was a fertile plain in the region of Jordan known for its plush pastures and fat, well-fed cattle (Deut. 32:14; Ezek. 39:18; Jer. 50:19; Mic. 7:14). This description of Bashan allows for an almost perfect metaphor with the women of Samaria. They have no problem oppressing the poor, so they can get their fill and live it up.
* V. 2 speaks of the impending judgment that will befall the nation of Israel. The irrevocability and irrefutability of the judgment is emphasized by God Himself swearing an oath by His own holiness. God swearing by His own holiness is recorded in only one other place (Psa. 89:35). This suggests that it is without a doubt an absolute reality that will come to pass. It is as if God says, *“And you can take that to the bank.”* God holiness demands that sin must be dealt with for He cannot deal with sin.
* *“The days are coming”* is common phraseology that is used repeatedly to speak of future judgment to befall the people and their nations (1Sam. 2:31; Isa. 39:6; Jer. 7:32; 9:25; 19:6).
* The exact meaning of *“meat hooks”* and *“fish hooks”* are argued by some, but it is clear that the people will be carried away violently as they experience judgement (2 Kings 19:28; 2 Chron. 33:11; Isa. 37:29; Ezek. 19:4; 29:4-5; Ezek. 38:4; Hab. 1:15).
* Guzik says of this picture: *“When the Assyrians depopulated and exiled a conquered community, they led the captives away on journeys of hundreds of miles, with the captives naked and attached together with a system of strings and fishhooks pierced through their lower lip.”*
* V. 3 clarifies that their defenses indeed will be broken and shattered, and the people will be carried away into captivity effortlessly. When the walls of Jericho fell (Josh. 6:5, 20) the same language of verse 3 was used there to refer to the enemies of the Israelites and now it’s being used of the Israelites themselves who have become enemies of God.
* *“Harmon”* may refer Hermal which is in the region of Syria around Kadesh. It may also refer to the *“throwing out of corpses”* (Paul).
* vv. 4-5 heightens the irony and satirical language employed at times in the Hebrew language for a specific purpose. Some have argued that here, God is encouraging the people to sin since they have already sunk so low and have no way out. To argue such a thing couldn’t be further from the truth and it stands contrary to the nature of God Himself.
* Kaiser in speaking concerning this verse says: *“The prophet Amos speaks with real irony and sarcasm to an audience that has grown somewhat deaf and tired of hearing his calls for repentance. In an attempt to startle an otherwise recalcitrant nation, Amos spoke in a dissimulating way to see if that would bring any reaction.”*
* These two verses are no more than a cleverly devised means to get the people to abruptly consider their actions if in fact they do have any consciences remaining.
* Bethel, of course, as discussed previously was a center for idolatry (1Kings 12:28-33; Hos. 4:15; 5:8). Gilgal is named alongside it and would indicate that it too was also a center for idolatrous worship.
* Gilgal was the site of the first camp of Israel when they had crossed over the Jordan enroute to the promised land. There, they were told to set up 12 stones as a memorial (Josh. 4:1-7; 19-20). Here they also celebrated the Passover (Josh. 5:10). It was also a site where Samuel judged Israel (1 Sam. 7:16) and Saul was made King (1 Sam. 11:15).
* Bethel and Gilgal were once places closely associated with the LORD God, but now they are no more than important centers for the people’s wicked and idolatrous nature.
* Attention is called to their sacrifices and tithes. Both were common and required of God’s people as a part of their covenant with Him (Deut. 14:22-29). In these verses, however, it isn’t the LORD they are offering it to.
* There seems to be nothing wrong with the sacrifices being offered by the people (Lev. 7:11-13), only that their hearts are misplaced. Free will offerings were not commanded but was usually offered alongside a vow (Lev. 7:16; 22:18-21).
* Much like the language of 2:9-11, here Amos emphasizes the actions of the people using demonstrative pronouns that will then be starkly contrasted with the emphatic use of the personal pronoun *“I”* referring to God.
* *“For so you love to do…”* this is not what God wants but it is what the people love doing.
* **4:6-13– *“Yet you have not returned to Me”***
* The next section in chapter 4 is relatively frightening and overwhelming for some as they read the message of the prophet from God. The section of 4:6-13 begins with a contrast, noted well by the use of the conjunction *“but”* as it concludes the previous section discussing the people rebelling and committing sin and wickedness against God.
* This section focuses keenly on God’s wrath and judgment upon the people by a multitude of actions He sends and does in order to try and bring them back to their senses.
* As previously mentioned, this section stresses the use of the pronoun “I” suggesting a stark contrast between the actions of the people and those of God. Smith says, *“The emphatic personal pronoun ‘I myself’ constructs a strong contrast between the unacceptable worship of the nation (4:4-5), the acts of God (4:6-11), and the unwillingness of Israel”* (Smith).
* It must be understood that the actions taken by God in vv. 6-11 are solely to persuade the people to return to God.
* V. 6 initiates the description of horrors previously experienced. *“Cleanness of teeth…”* speaks of famineand lack of food (Lev. 26:26; Deut. 28:38). The purpose of this famine from God was so that the people could return to Him. God was forced according to His justice to punish the people for their iniquities and evil deeds and He did so out of love. The LORD longed for His people who had forsaken Him and who had departed from His ways.
* Even though they experienced judgment they would not return to their Husband (Isa. 9:13; 26:11; Jer. 5:3; Rev. 9:20-21).
* vv. 7-8 are closely tied to the previous judgment of famine. God’s act of withholding the rain is closely related to the previous action of sending famine because the rain would be necessary for the crops of the land to come forth.
* God withholding the rain also makes an argument for His deity and nature since Baal was thought to control weather. It is the LORD who controls all.
* God warned of judgment to come in the Old Testament in the form of drought (Lev. 26:18-21, 23-24; 1 Kings 8:35-36; 2 Chron. 7:13-14; Jer. 3:3; 5:24-25). The time period which God withheld the rain, three months until the harvest, was a vital time for the heads of the grain and crops to fill out. This was no mistake as it was intentional by God.
* V. 7 continues by saying God would allow it to rain on one part and on another he wouldn’t send rain (Isa. 41:17-18; Jer. 14:3).
* In v. 8, the parts that was rained on are those which the people sought after for water and in a very real sense survival.
* Keil & Delitzsch in their commentary of this part of Amos says, *“This occasioned such distress, that the inhabitants of the places in which it had not rained were obliged to go to a great distance for the necessary supply of water to drink, and yet could not get enough to satisfy them. To stagger, to totter, expresses the insecure and trembling walk of a man almost fainting with thirst.”*
* God made it so difficult for the people to have food and water, so they could seek His face, His mercy and His love but despite this act, they still did not return to God.
* V. 9 describes God taking away their treasured crops. Olive trees, vineyards and fig trees was of utmost importance for many in the ancient near east. Not only was it important for food and drink but it was important for sales and business.
* This particular act is similar to the curses in Deuteronomy 28:22 and 1 Kings 8:37. God continues to push the people to consider their actions and their ways by sending them these devastating punishments to their land (Hag. 2:17). Even trees that found their depths in the soil of the earth that would be able to provide food in times of lack of rain were destroyed by the blight God sent. What was left was sure to be consumed by the caterpillar or locusts (Joel 1:4, 7).
* The idea is that there was nothing that could be saved and spared by the oncoming judgement from God. Food and crops and trees are of utmost importance to the people especially during this time and they have endured much already but yet even in this time of distress and lack of much things they fail to return to the LORD.
* In v. 10, this fourth act of God is really striking. God as He speaks in this emphatic first-person manner, comes right out and says He sent a plague to the people like He did to the Egyptians (Ex. 12:29-30; Lev. 26:25; Psa. 78:49-50). It is incredibly ironic that the plagues He used to deliver His people from the Egyptians, He is now inflicting on the very people He brought out of the land of oppression and slavery.
* This probably is the description of an act occurring at the hands of enemies of Israel during war (2 Kings 10:32).
* Concerning the stench (Deut. 28:26; Jer. 9:22) rising up to the nostrils of the people Smith says, *“Because of the unburied corpses of men and animals, a terrible stench of decaying bodies filled the air. The seriousness of the chastening and the presence of that unavoidable and sickening smell of death should have caused a change in heart, but Israel remained unwilling.”*
* This act was so horrific and brutal in many ways that it should have caused the people to consider their actions and turn away from their sin, yet they did not obey the LORD and they did not return to Him (Ex. 8:19; 9:12).
* V. 11 points out the final act God conducted in order to stir up the people and turn them back to Him. The overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-25) is spoken of here in reference to what God has done to his people (Jer. 49:19; Hos. 11:8).
* This act is sort of a climactic one that demonstrates the devastation God brings upon the nation seeking to humble them and cause them to turn to Him. Very often in the Old Testament the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their plains is used as an example of the greatness and severity of God’s judgment as stated above (Isa. 13:19).
* One should take keen notice here that the judgments have intensified as we have gone along yet the people do not budge in terms of returning to God. It is not clear as to what the actual *“overthrow”* of these cities were. Some suggest it may have been an earthquake and or a fire.
* The latter part of v. 11 that states the idea of the firebrand being snatched from the blaze (Zech. 3:2) may suggest that it indeed was a fire but whatever the case may be, it is absolutely clear that there were dire consequences in order because the people had forsaken the LORD. Being snatched as a firebrand suggest they are barely escaping.
* While all the acts of judgment on the part of God have grown more devastating and dire as the passages go on, the sad and rebellious state of the people is repeated once more in that they did not return to the LORD.
* V. 12 may be somewhat difficult to interpret because of the verbs used; nevertheless, it seems to point toward a future meeting with the LORD. While they have experienced all these judgments they will yet meet the LORD and it will not be a cause for joy but for fear (Isa. 47:3; Amos 9:1-4).
* God has given them multiple opportunities to repent but they were not wiling and now they must prepare to meet God.
* A chapter that began with the pronunciation of judgment and was plagued with horrors ends with a statement of doxology to God that is intended to bring fear and not joy.
* In v. 13, it’s sort of a guarantee that the God who made everything (Psa. 65:6; Isa. 40:12), He who controls the storms and who in control of all (Job 38:4-11) and knows all and sees all and goes where He wishes will give the people their just recompense according to their deeds (Rom. 2:6).
* Mays says of this statement of praise, *“They depict the majestic might of Yahweh upon which earth and its inhabitants utterly depend–He is Creator and establisher of earth’s order–and the one whose power can shake the world to recall its subjection to His sovereignty.”*
* God’s power and might is singled out and emphasized in this verse to suggest that if He formed the earth and controls all things, how much more will He be able to do to those who don’t fear Him?