



## Amos - Chapter Four

### II Amos 1:2-6:14 - Oracles of Judgement (continues)

#### II.c Amos 2:6-6:14 - Judgements on Israel (continues)

#### II.c.ii Amos 3:1-4:5 - Israel's Guilt and Punishment (continues/concludes)

#### Summary of Chapter Four

The oracle is composed of two parts: vv.1-5 and vv.6-13. In the first part, the prophet expands somewhat on the points made in Amos 3:14-15: the sins of self-indulgence built upon oppression (vv.1-3) and of false religion (vv.4-5).

In the second part, God details all the ways in which he had appealed to the Israelites to return to him, yet without response (vv.6-11). There is nothing left but that they must come face to face with the infinite Creator in all his power (vv.12-13).

- <sup>1</sup> Hear this word, you cows of Bashan  
who are on Mount Samaria,  
who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,  
who say to their husbands, 'Bring something to drink!'

#### Amos 4:1

Bashan was rich pastureland northeast of the Sea of Galilee. Cattle that grazed there tended to be plump and healthy. Amos compares the matrons of Samaria to those cattle. Not just the husbands, but even these wives oppress the poor and crush the needy.

Amos was not trained as a prophet, he was a simple herdsman and farmer. When he wanted to get the point across to the indulgent women of Israel, he

called them 'fat cows.' The livestock of Bashan, in the northern part of Israel, the modern-day Golan Heights, was known for being fat and healthy. Psalm 22:12 mentions the strong bulls of Bashan; Ezekiel 39:18 mentions the large livestock, the fatlings of Bashan. It is no exaggeration to say that Amos calls these women 'fat cows.' Although it is true that the very skinny ideal of female beauty is a modern phenomenon and especially in ancient times plumpness was a valued sign of affluence, it can be said that, at no time in human history, has a woman appreciated being called a 'fat cow.' It was not that these women were plump and affluent; it was that they gained their wealth and affluence by oppressing and crushing the less fortunate. God saw this and promised to hold them to account.

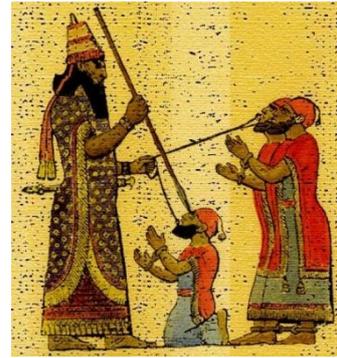
Who say to their husbands, 'Bring something to drink!' As previously stated, it was not that these women were plump and affluent; it was that they used their affluence in the pure, self-focused pursuit of pleasure: *<<they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink wine bought with fines they imposed>>* (Amos 2:8). God saw this and promised to hold them to account.

- <sup>2</sup> The Lord God has sworn by his holiness:  
The time is surely coming upon you,  
when they shall take you away with hooks,  
even the last of you with fish-hooks.
- <sup>3</sup> Through breaches in the wall you shall leave,  
each one straight ahead;  
and you shall be flung out into Harmon,  
says the Lord.

### Amos 4:2-3

The Lord God has sworn by his holiness. This is an exceedingly solemn and sure oath: *<<When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and multiply you'>>* (Hebrews 6:13-14). When God swears by his holiness he guarantees that the judgement would become a reality, because the holy God does not lie, nor can his holiness allow sin to go unpunished: *<<God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?>>* (Numbers 23:19).

Here is a description of what would happen to these wealthy and self-indulgent women when the city fell to the Assyrians: they would be dragged out through the broken-down walls, i.e. breaches, like a fisherman dragging a fish out of the water with fish-hooks. However, the reference may be literal as well. Some Assyrian illustrations seem to show captives being taken away with ropes attached to rings in the captives' noses or lips.



Assyrian Captives

Harmon. This location is unknown.

- <sup>4</sup> Come to Bethel – and transgress;  
to Gilgal – and multiply transgression;  
bring your sacrifices every morning,  
your tithes every three days;
- <sup>5</sup> bring a thank-offering of leavened bread,  
and proclaim freewill-offerings, publish them;  
for so you love to do, O people of Israel!  
says the Lord God.

#### Amos 4:4-5

The prophet denounces the religious activity at Bethel and also at the ancient site of Gilgal with bitter sarcasm: <<*Those twelve stones, which they had taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal*>> (Joshua 4:20), and: <<*Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal*>> (Joshua 10:43). Far from procuring forgiveness for transgression, this activity was itself transgression! The Israelites might love to engage in such worship, but it only disgusted God: <<*I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream*>> (Amos 5:21-24).

The prophets often seem to dismiss sacrificial worship, but careful attention to the context shows that they are concerned with faithful use of the divine ordinances and obedience from the heart. Hosea 6:6, Amos 4:4-5, and 5:21-25 are addressed to the northern kingdom, in which the worship practices blatantly defy the Mosaic prescriptions with golden calves, sanctuaries other than the one in Jerusalem, and priests who were not Levites; refer also to

1 Kings 12:26-33. Texts such as Isaiah 1:11-17, Jeremiah 6:20 and 7:21-23, and Micah 6:6-8 are addressed to Judah, where the external form of the sacrifices may be proper, but is not combined with genuine repentance and godly living. In such cases the worship is worse than empty; it is an attempt to manipulate God.

Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. There was a tithe that was to be brought every three years: <<**Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns**>> (Deuteronomy 14:28). Amos says, “even if you were to bring your tithes every three days it would not matter, because it is all just outward show.”

Although the people could claim that the thank-offering and the freewill-offerings were what God had specified in the Torah, refer to Leviticus 7:12-21, that meant nothing to God because the offerings were not being celebrated in the right place under the Levitical priests, nor were they accompanied by moral obedience: <<**Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph**>> (Amos 5:14-15).

For so you love to do, O people of Israel! The children of Israel loved their corrupted worship. It was disobedient both in heart and action, but they loved it. It is always wrong to measure worship by how it pleases the worshipper, because it is possible for corrupt and disobedient worship to be ‘wonderfully’ pleasing. Of course, the church does not want to get into the thinking that worship must ‘hurt’ or be ‘dour’ to be holy and acceptable. That is not the point. The point is that Christians do not first measure worship by how it makes them feel, they should measure it by how it honours God.

### II.c.iii Amos 4:6-13 - Israel Rejects Correction

Even though God had sent various natural and social calamities, the people would not turn back. The repeated refrain is <<**yet you did not return to me**>>. In short, the coming destruction of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians would not be a sudden unexpected outbreak by a short-tempered God. It was the final outcome of many patient appeals and warnings that the people should have heeded but did not: <<**The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance**>> (2 Peter 3:9).

<sup>6</sup> I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities,  
and lack of bread in all your places,  
yet you did not return to me,

says the Lord.

- 7 And I also withheld the rain from you  
when there were still three months to the harvest;  
I would send rain on one city,  
and send no rain on another city;  
one field would be rained upon,  
and the field on which it did not rain withered;
- 8 so two or three towns wandered to one town  
to drink water, and were not satisfied;  
yet you did not return to me,  
says the Lord.

#### Amos 4:6-8

I gave you cleanness of teeth. Because Israel seems have enjoyed financial prosperity when Amos preached, this is probably set in the ‘prophetic present’, future events spoken of in the present tense. God will so humble prosperous Israel that their clean teeth will not be made ‘dirty’ by food, because there will be no food to eat in the drought God will send.

Yet you did not return to me. This is the greatest tragedy. Anyone can stumble into sin and feel the correcting hand of God, but people are in far greater trouble when they feel God’s correction and still will not return to him. Stubbornness, like the stubbornness of Pharaoh in the exodus, increases guilt.

And I also withheld the rain from you when there were still three months to the harvest. After the summer dry season, the rains of November and December were absolutely necessary if the seeds of grain were to germinate in the ground and yield a harvest beginning in April.

I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city. God made the provision of rain so specific they would know it was from his hand. Yet the message did not get through to them. Many generations Paul quoted Isaiah when spoke to the Jews in Rome who would not receive his Gospel message: <<*Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them*>> (Acts 28:26-27).

- 9 I struck you with blight and mildew;  
I laid waste your gardens and your vineyards;  
the locust devoured your fig trees and your olive trees;  
yet you did not return to me,  
says the Lord.
- 10 I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt;  
I killed your young men with the sword;  
I carried away your horses;  
and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils;  
yet you did not return to me,  
says the Lord.
- 11 I overthrew some of you,  
as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,  
and you were like a brand snatched from the fire;  
yet you did not return to me,  
says the Lord.

#### Amos 4:9-11

I struck you with blight and mildew; the locust devoured; I sent among you a pestilence; I made the stench of your camp. Because Israel would not listen to the chastisement of the Lord, his hand grew more and more heavy upon them. This was not a demonstration of God's anger, but of his love. He starts his chastisement slowly and increases it incrementally, so that he can use the smallest amount of discipline necessary to turn hearts back to him. If people will not turn back the hand of chastisement grows heavier and heavier, out of loving desire to see repentance. Blight is the work of the east wind that dries and scorches the grain prematurely so that it turns brown. Mildew is the product of parasitic worms which turn pale the tips of green grain.

The Bible does not describe the pestilence after the manner of Egypt elsewhere. However, the reference in Exodus 15:26 supports the idea that the swampy areas of the northeast Nile delta where Israel lived in slavery must have been disease-ridden, probably with malaria among other diseases.

You were like a brand snatched from the fire; yet you did not return to me. God sees Israel as a glowing ember plucked from the fires of judgement, like the same judgement that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah. Even though God spared them, they did not respond in gratitude, they have not returned to God. The Christian is still called to offer help to people in such circumstances: *<<And have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies>>* (Jude 22-23).

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel;  
because I will do this to you,  
prepare to meet your God, O Israel!

### Amos 4:12

It seems apparent that the Israelites were asking God to appear on their behalf in a great day of vindication, making them the rulers of the world: *<<Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?>>* (Amos 5:18-20). Amos says they are about to meet God, but not at all in the way they expect. Although Jeremiah writes: *<<For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope>>* (Jeremiah 29:11), the plans of God were for the northern kingdom to be taken by the Assyrians and, in Jeremiah's day, for Judah to go to Babylon. God's plans are for the good of his people and do bring hope, but sometimes pain and hardship are required for the message to sink in!

Prepare to meet your God. This is a sober warning, appropriate for all men at all times, because they never know when they will meet God in eternity. Because they do not know when, they must always be prepared to meet with God, but this is especially true for those facing the judgement of God. This text can be applied in three ways:

- Prepare to meet your God as a challenge.
- Prepare to meet your God as an invitation.
- Prepare to meet your God as a summons.

As a challenge, God invites his enemies to prepare to meet him. A boxer prepares long and hard before stepping into the ring against a champion. When a person is going to step into the ring with God, they had better prepare! Charles Spurgeon commented on this, "The prophet may be understood as in irony challenging the proud rebels to meet in arms the God whom they have

despised. Let them prepare to fight it out with him whom they have made to be their enemy, and against whose laws they have so continually revolted.”

As an invitation, this is a blessing. The summons, ‘Prepare to meet your God’ was nothing but a blessing to Adam. Ever since the fall it is human nature to hide from God, so the call ‘Prepare to meet your God’ has a different sense entirely. Still, if people will come to God they must prepare themselves.

As a summons, it is recognised that one day all will stand before God and give account. Again Spurgeon stated: “Think awhile upon who it is that you have to meet! You must meet, your God, your God! That is, offended justice you must meet whose laws you have broken, whose penalties you have ridiculed; justice righteously indignant with its sword drawn you must confront. You must meet your God; that is, you must be examined, by unblinded omniscience. He who has seen your heart, and read your thoughts, and jotted down your affections, and remembered your idle words, you must meet him; and infinite discernment you must meet; those eyes that never yet were duped; the God who will see through the veils of hypocrisy and all the concealments of formality. There will be no making yourself out to be better than you are before him.” The warnings in Scripture are there, not to condemn or discourage, but to bring people back to God with repentant hearts: <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*>> (Daniel 12:2), and: <<*For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil*>> (2 Corinthians 5:10).

<sup>13</sup> For lo, the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind,  
reveals his thoughts to mortals,  
makes the morning darkness,  
and treads on the heights of the earth –  
the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name!

### Amos 4:13

Amos uses lyrical poetry to underline the seriousness of the situation. Israel is not dealing with some local mountain deity. They are about to come face to face with the Creator of the universe, the Lord, the God of hosts; refer to Amos 3:13, 5:8-9 and 9:5-6, and the associated comments. One of the ways God manifests his greatness over the false gods of the pagans is that he alone knows all thoughts and therefore he reveals his thoughts to mortals: <<*Daniel answered the king, ‘No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners can show to the king the mystery that the king is asking, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of*

*days*>> (Daniel 2:27-28a), <<*But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reprovved by all and called to account by all. After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, 'God is really among you'*>> (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

The Lord, the God of hosts, is his name! God emphasises the point by emphasising who makes the point, a God who should never be trifled with.

- He is the God of all creation, the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind.
- He is the God who is absolutely sovereign over man, who reveals his thoughts to mortals.
- He is the God with all power over nature, who makes the morning darkness.
- He is the God who rules above all, who treads on the heights of the earth.