

Amos: The Shepherd Prophet (Part V)

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[0 : 00] Amen. And then we'll get into his visions, what he saw in chapters 7 through 9, and that'll complete the book.

So we're moving along pretty good because we're going to get all the way up to chapter 5, not through chapter 5, but to the end of chapter 4 tonight. And so for me, that's record speed, okay? Of course, I'm telling people who already know that kind of thing. But we're looking at chapter 4 and the words of condemnation that we have there.

And that's going to take us all the way through the end of this chapter. In fact, you could say that most of the book of Amos contains words of condemnation. I keep wanting to say commendation. Not that at all. Condemnation. And last time, if you remember, we looked at Israel's women. And we're not going to go back over that because though we only have a few women here tonight, I don't want to rehash that very ugly stuff that we talked about last week about the cows of Bashan and so forth.

[1 : 40] So we're not going to do that again. So we finished that up and what God's judgment was going to be on not all the women of Israel, just a certain group, an elite group that He did call cows.

All right. But now, second, we have Israel's worship. Israel's worship. And the passage there, verses 4 through 5, let me go ahead and read it.

You've got it in your notes as well as up here on the screen. Come to Bethel. Bethel, you might remember, I said, I think last time, that Bethel was the center of worship.

And come to Bethel and transgress. Now, the language here is kind of strange. It's almost like an invitation to come to church and sin. That's kind of what it sounds like.

But don't be thrown by kind of the way it is articulated here. He says, At Gilgal, multiply transgression.

[2 : 42] Bring your sacrifice every morning. Your sacrifices every morning. Your tithes every three days. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven. Proclaim and announce the free will offerings.

For this you love, you children of Israel. And there's an exclamation mark at the end, though that doesn't appear in the Hebrew text. No punctuation in the Hebrew text.

In fact, if I were to put up here the Hebrew text, there wouldn't be even any separation of the words. No spaces between words.

No punctuation. No vowels or anything like that. So, what the translators are doing are getting the sense of what God is saying and the force of it.

And so, in a sense, it's almost a, you could say almost snide, almost, well, it's condemning for sure. And so, he's not inviting them to come to church and sin.

[3 : 42] He's saying, this is what you do. You come for worship and you transgress. And you multiply your transgressions. Alright, so obviously, then, Israel's worship was sin to God.

Not just that they were sinning. And they were, because we've already covered that part of Amos where Amos details, some very specifically, some of their sins.

But he's really even calling their worship sin. It was sin to God. But it was sin not because of their practice of worship.

It's important to note from this verse that he's not saying the things you're doing in worship. Those things are not sin.

The practice of worship. Because, you know, in the first place, you know, they are, he says that they are sacrificing. He says sacrifices.

[4 : 48] You're offering or bringing your sacrifices every morning. Anything wrong with that? Not really. Okay. Also, in that same verse, you're tithed.

You're bringing your tithes every three days. There's nothing sinful about doing that. Certainly. No preacher would ever admit that tithing was somehow sinful.

In the practice of it, okay. Now, we're going to get in more depth here in just a minute. And sacrifices of thanksgiving. That sounds like the same thing.

It's really talking about thank offerings, which was a part of their worship. And then also free will offerings.

So there's four things mentioned here about the practice of worship. And it's not their practice of worship that is sin.

[5 : 47] It is because these were prescribed by the law. As a matter of fact, scholars tell us, theologians tell us, those who know from the language here, that from this wording, they were performing these acts of worship, and they were doing so more frequently than the law even demanded.

And so they were not only fulfilling the specific laws concerning the practice of worship, but they were going way beyond that. Even more than what was expected, what was demanded in the law. So it's not the practice of worship, but the heart of their worship. The heart of their worship. And God pronounced it all transgression.

I use the word twice. This is, again, parallelism here. Come to Bethel and transgress. At Gilgal, multiply transgression. And so in a sense, what is he saying?

He's saying that you may be fulfilling the practice of worship. Doing the things that are prescribed by the law. The various elements of worship. But the certain duties in worship.

[7 : 01] And going through all of those steps that I have prescribed. But all of those are sin to me because of the sin that's in your own heart.

And that's the problem. You see, it's a transgression because the worshipers were making their offerings with sin in their lives.

And they were going through the various motions of worship. The practices of worship. And yet there was hypocrisy in their hearts.

And so God then pronounced judgment upon all their worship. In His view, in His judgment, and His is always correct, their worship was sin.

Even though they were doing everything right, at least by the law, again, they were practicing the right steps in worship. And, you know, this has great implications for us today, I think, clearly.

[8 : 03] In our worship. And we, you know, really ought to ask ourselves, what about our worship today? I'm not talking about the songs we sing. Or the order of service, you know, which is, you know, contrived by us.

There's not any prescription in Scripture for the New Testament church on how the order of service should be. You know, that's not what we're talking about.

How many times you pray, and what your prayers are like, and what Scriptures you use, and whether you take an offering or not. And all those various elements of worship.

We're not talking about that. What are we talking about? We're talking about the heart. Where we are before God. If there's hypocrisy in our hearts. And we're coming, going through the motions, and yet our hearts are far from God.

Maybe there's some sin that we've just allowed to go undealt with. Something that we are cherishing. Some point of disobedience. Whatever it may be.

[9 : 06] Some anger we have for a brother or sister, and it's unresolved. Some sin against someone, and we've not been reconciled. You know, we could go on and on with the possibilities.

If the heart is not right before God, then what is our worship to Him? Well, I think it becomes sin to Him. And so that's why it's so important that our relationship with God is something that stays up to date before Sunday rolls around.

Now, God can and does, and I'm grateful that He does, that when we worship, God does speak to our hearts. And identify particular areas in our heart and life that are not right before Him, that we were unaware of, or had a blind spot to, whatever.

God certainly does that when we come and worship. But if we are going to just live any way we want to through the week, and then show up on Sunday and think that our practice of worship is going to make everything all right with God, then we're highly mistaken.

And God views it as sin. Even our worship. Even those, quote, holy things that we may do if the heart is not right with God. And this was the problem here with Israel.

[10:23] So, their worship. And then we come to the third point of condemnation. And that was Israel's willful stubbornness. And this is going to take us all the way to the end of the chapter, chapter 4, verses 6 through 13.

Their willful stubbornness. And in this chapter, or this portion of the chapter, Amos is going to divide the section into five parts.

With each part followed by the phrase, Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord. So, this is kind of the formula. He points out certain aspects of what he is doing in response to their stubbornness, their willful sin toward him.

He's going to articulate the things that he has done to bring them back to himself. And all of it is intended for that.

And so, his purpose for sending all of these various calamities and plagues and whatever we want to call them, was to bring repentance.

[11:36] Return to me. And we understand that from the phrase that comes at the close of each point of God's judgment toward them.

He says, I did this, yet you did not return. And so, then we understand what his purpose was in allowing certain calamities to come into their lives.

It was so that they would come to the end of themselves. And so that they would repent. Have you ever really thought of that? Is that what we think of when we struggle with certain things, suffer in certain areas of our life?

I'm not saying that all suffering is attached to sin. It certainly is not. And God allows things to come into our lives that are pretty tough and hard.

Not always because we've sinned and he's trying to get our attention. But sometimes he does. In fact, quite often he does. And instead of us responding graciously and praising God that he would do that and turn back to him, we'd complain and think God's mad at us and God is unfair and whatever we may think.

[12:46] But God is allowing these calamities to come into their lives so that they would turn back to him. And yet they would not. They would not. Now, the first one that is mentioned here is famine.

He sent a famine. Again, remember he's judging a nation. Alright? This is not God's dealing with individual children of his.

God does that as well. And in fact, works in much the same way in the lives of his individual children as he did here with an entire nation.

And so he's judging a nation because of his covenant with them. And they have broken his covenant. And so he sends a famine. Not because he's mad at them. Not because he says, well, I'll teach you.

He's sending a famine so that they will repent and turn back to him. And so he sends a famine. Also, I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities.

[13:51] That's an interesting way of putting it. And obviously, he's talking about they're going to go hungry. I'm talking about empty stomachs here.

Cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places. Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord. So there's the statement at the end of it. The statement of intent.

He sent this so that they would repent. And also a statement of really reality. And that is they did not repent. So first he sends a famine.

Which results in empty stomachs. Second, God sent a drought. He sent a drought.

Verse 7. I also withheld rain from you. When there were still three months to harvest. I made it rain on one city. I withheld rain from another city.

[14:50] One part was rained upon. And where it did not rain, the part withered. This is kind of interesting. The way this is put here in verse 7. The phrase, when there were still three months to harvest.

Not really hard to figure out, is it? It just means that there was no rain when they needed it the most. So God timed the drought for His purposes.

There's sometimes when we could probably get by without rain. Well, God didn't withhold the rain at those times. He withheld the rain in a very strategic way. It was exactly the time when they needed the rain the most.

And so, again, this points to His sovereignty, His sovereign control over this. And then you have the phrase, one part was rained upon and another part was not.

Or another city was not. And I think that means that this is pointing us to the sovereignty of God in this whole thing. He's sovereignly in control or sovereignly controlled the drought.

[15:51] And, you know, He just allowed it to rain one place and not another. And it was all controlled by God.

And His point was to bring them to repentance, His purpose. And then He says in verse 8, So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied.

Yet you have not returned to Me, says the Lord. That's also kind of an interesting phrase. The word wandered actually means to stagger.

Not kind of staggering along. I mean, and it's a picture of weakness, weakness from the drought and thirst.

But it also can picture a panic in the lives of people because they have no food. So here are some cities where rain has been withheld.

[16:53] And people in that city kind of make their way, struggle their way, stagger their way to another city that supposedly has enough water, but there's not enough water there.

So no one is satisfied. And it's just part of God's, not specifically His judgment in this particular case, but His, I guess you could call it judgment, but it's for a purpose that they would repent. And they would not, the Lord said. Third, God sent plant disease and locusts. He said, I blasted you with blight and mildew.

I struck you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locusts. And I put a little insert there, the NASB translates to caterpillar. But most translations have locusts there. Devoured them, yet you have not returned to me. So here is another point of judgment.

[18:03] The blight and mildew is talking about disease. It's specifically plant disease. And so God sent a disease to kill a lot of their crops and so forth.

And yet they would not repent. Fourth, He sent a plague and war.

He places these two together. And it could be, though, it's not really known exactly, because the passage doesn't really detail any of this.

It doesn't spell it out. But somehow the two were related. That the plague was related to war or caused war. Maybe it was the result even of war. We don't really know.

But He said, I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt. So something similar to the plagues that were sent on Egypt when God delivered Israel out of that land.

[19:00] Your young men I killed with a sword. That's certainly speaking of warfare and some military engagement. Along with your captive horses. I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils.

Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord. That's why some have thought that maybe the plague or disease or whatever it was, was a result of rotting corpses or the result of a devastating war.

And so He puts those two together. And yet He said they did not return. You would not return to me. I mentioned the plague.

Probably some kind of epidemic. Lethal epidemic. Fifth, God sent a devastating calamity. And it's just very general terms because really, again, it's not spelled out here in any kind of specifics.

He said, I overthrew some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. Now there's a key, at least one clue as to at least how devastating this particular calamity was, whatever it was.

[20:20] Because we know a little something about what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, though we really don't even know exactly what it was God did there. He rained down fire and brimstone.

And some have tried to see a comparison with an atomic bomb or nuclear bomb of some kind. But God didn't have to have bombs. But certainly it was devastating for Sodom and Gomorrah.

It destroyed them completely. Annihilated them. Now, He does say here that I overthrew some of you. As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

And you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning. Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord. It's just an interesting verse. Overthrew describes, again, and I mentioned this, but the same word is used to describe what God did to Sodom and Gomorrah.

A little excerpt there from Genesis 19:25. He overthrew those cities. Same word. That doesn't mean that He did exactly the same thing. It's not a word meaning to be descriptive of a specific thing.

[21 : 30] A specific kind of calamity. I'm sure they were different. But apparently just as devastating for some of the people. Not all of the nation.

It could refer to earthquakes, volcanoes, or tornadoes. And we're just kind of grasping for straws there because we don't really have any idea.

But it was something devastating. And God allowed that to happen to some of the people. And devastated their lives. I think took many lives. And yet the nation would not return.

It makes me think, you know, in our own country. And though I know we kind of criticize the voices out there sometimes when a major cataclysm happens in our country.

Whether it's an earthquake or hurricane or tornadoes. We kind of criticize those who want to say this is God's judgment. And maybe there's room to criticize that. Maybe not. Because God does allow those things to happen to get the attention of people so that they would return to Him.

[22 : 39] And so it could be something devastating like that. I did say that, and I think this is interesting, like Lot.

Of course, he's using the comparison of Sodom and Gomorrah. Remember, Lot and his family were removed out just in time. His wife didn't make it.

But that's another story. You know that story. They're, as it were, plucked out of Sodom and Gomorrah. Or Sodom.

Just before God overthrew them and destroyed them. I think some have even seen an image of the rapture there. And maybe it's valid to do that. But the point of it is that he plucked them out.

So some were preserved, a remnant were preserved of the nation. Because God's not annihilating His people. He is just destroying a nation, the people as a nation.

[23 : 38] And there will always be God's people, a remnant of God's people. And so they're kind of, as it were, plucked out like firebrands from a burning fire. They got singed a little bit, but they were still saved.

All right, now, instead of repentance, all right, so he's listed these or pronounced these, stated these, several things that God has done, has allowed to happen, so that Israel would repent, but they did not repent.

And instead of repentance, I think we can assume from the language here, kind of the context, the flow of thought here, that Israel instead responded with more sin.

And therefore, God would respond with more judgment. And so he says there in verse 12,

Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel, because I will do this to you.

Prepare to meet your God, O Israel. That's one of those statements in Scripture that is intended to strike fear. Prepare to meet your God, O Israel.

[24 : 47] And I have heard preachers use that in sermons in relation to America. Prepare to meet your God, O America. And maybe it's a valid application.

But this is God going to judge. They did not repent. And God says, all right, you've crossed the line. Here, prepare to meet your God. Interesting that prepare and meet in Hebrew writing, way of writing represents a theophany.

Now, a theophany, remember there are several kinds of theophanies. We're talking about appearances of God, manifestations of deity. Theophanies where it's visual, where God visits people, so forth.

There's a theophany. There are also a theophany of acts of God. And so that's what this is. It is another example of a theophany.

And the point being that there would be an encounter with God. Now, Amos then describes God's power.

[25 : 59] This encounter, by the way, and I don't think I put this in your notes. I left this a little bit vague. The encounter would be for them to come face to face with the awesome power of God.

Now, in reality, each time God allowed certain calamities and plagues and so forth to come into their lives, they were coming face to face with the awesome power of God.

And so they didn't see God there. And so God is now going to, through Amos, going to make a very profound statement about His awesome power.

The power of Almighty God. And He's going to describe it in five statements there in this verse. In fact, did I not put the verse?

I guess I didn't. Let me go ahead and read it. Read it and then we'll pick it apart. I'll just say something about each part of it.

[27 : 03] But in verse 13 of chapter 4, This is interesting because if God's people will not respond to the acts of God in their lives, acts of judgment, where He either sins certain calamities or allows certain calamities, if God's people will not respond to the visible, experienced acts of God in their life, then they better respond to who He is.

And that's the idea behind that very last phrase there, the last part of that verse, The Lord God of hosts is His name. The name of God is a reference to who He is and His attributes, His greatness. And so He's saying, I'm the one you have to deal with. Prepare to meet me. And here's who I am. And He uses five statements.

He says, One, He who forms mountains. That's a metaphor of the awesome power of God. Who but God can form mountains? You know, Of course, The scientists today would say, Well, God didn't do that. Time did that.

[28 : 50] You know, And billions of years, And different cataclysmic events, You know, Stars colliding with the planet, And all these things, You know, Upheavals, And they all formed those mountains.

But, God is saying, I'm the one that formed those mountains. I heaped up the mountains, And scooped out the oceans. And it's a statement about the awesome power of God. Number two, He who creates the wind. Wind. The wind blows nearly all the time here in Oklahoma. God created that wind.

Let's not ever forget that. Even though we may complain about it sometimes, You know. But, God is the creator of wind. I mean, The questions been asked in scripture, You don't even know, Jesus asked Nicodemus, You don't even know where the wind comes from.

You know. God is the creator of wind. It's a picture of His awesome power. And then three, Of course, The first two really speak of His creative power. And then, The third one, He who declares or reveals to man what his thought is.

[30 : 06] Now, There are a couple of ideas about what that means. And sometimes you can get a clue about that from your particular Bible translation. For example, In mine, New American, Excuse me, The New King James.

New King James has a habit of capitalizing names for God and personal pronouns for God. And I just noticed that I went ahead and capitalized it here.

But in the New King James, The word His is not capitalized. So there is one thought, One interpretation says that God declares or reveals to man what his thoughts are.

What our thoughts are. That is, He reveals what's going on in our thought life. And that's true, Isn't it? But really, I don't think this is in keeping with the context.

God is declaring certain features of His almighty power. And the first two speak of the creation of all things. And then this third one, I think, Is a statement about His word.

[31 : 16] Which is a mighty thing for God to do. To express all of His thoughts in His word. He's the one who reveals to us His thoughts, His word.

And that is a statement of the might of God, The almighty God. Number four, He who makes the morning dawn, Or the dawn darkness.

The dawning darkness. And these last two, Four and five, Speak to His judgment. And that's what this is talking about.

The word translated darkness, That we have here in the text, Only appears one other place in all of the Old Testament. All of the Hebrew Bible. It's in Job 11.22.

And the context there is death. So we know the idea here is judgment. So it's kind of symbolic. Where God will turn, What looks like a positive thing in the dawn.

[32 : 15] You know, The dawning is usually thought of as a positive thing. You know, When we struggle the most, You know, Fears and so forth, It's usually at night time, isn't it?

And, you know, Have you ever experienced this feeling, I can't wait until the sun comes up. And there's just something about the sun coming up, That makes everything different.

And your thinking is different about things. And when the day finally comes, Kind of the depression, Or cloud of darkness kind of lifts. You know what I'm talking about.

There's just something about the morning. The sun up. Of course, Some of us might think, Well, I wish it wouldn't come up so early, So I can sleep a little later. But you know what I'm talking about.

The idea. And so God is saying, I'm the one who can make even the sun coming up, To be a display of my judgment.

[33 : 15] When you think all is well, All is right. Because, you know, Certain physical things have changed. And, you know, Well, It's another day, And a new day.

And yet, Maybe you've not dealt with the things that stand between you and God. Then even the daylight can be his judgment.

Will be the time when he sends his judgment. Number five, He who treads the high places of the earth, The Lord God of hosts is his name.

And this too is a statement of judgment. High places very likely points to Israel's idolatry. They were always called the high places.

Where their idols would be erected. Certain temples would be erected. Certain other devices that they used in pagan, idolatrous worship.

[34 : 13] The high places. In several places in scripture, You'll have the Bible speaking of those high places being torn down. In fact, in Micah, Excuse me, I already had it there, didn't I? Go back.

Micah 1, 3-4. For behold, The Lord is coming out of his place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under him, And the valleys will split like wax before the fire, Like waters poured down a steep place.

I know it may seem he's speaking of physical things, And certainly God is mighty enough to, When he steps upon the earth, The mountains can crumble, And the earth one day will melt.

But the context here in Micah is idolatry. And God is mighty over all of the idols that men have erected for themselves In those, quote, High places.

And God will tear those places down. There will be a day when there will be no more idols. Because right now, God in his forbearance, In his perseverance, Long suffering that is, Allows idolatry to persist.

[35 : 22] But one day Jesus is coming, And all things will be said right, And he will sit upon the throne, And all will be in subjection to him. There will be no more idolatry then.

And so, God is just saying, Really here, That Israel is going to, Needs to be prepared to meet God. Because he's coming.

And their nation is going to be pulled down. And then all those high places, All those idols they had erected, And were trusting and praying to, And sacrificing to, They're going to be destroyed.

And they're going to be, Actually taken away captive.