
Judgment on the Stubborn People

Amos 4:1-13

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Sometimes, prophets have to say hard things. Stubborn, hard hearted people need the hammer. Amos 4 is not politically correct; in fact, it is brutal. To give you that sense of strong words that make us cringe, I am going to be reading our text from the New Living Translation.

This prophetic preaching is... a song. It is poetry. Whether Amos sang it or chanted it, we don't know. But he entered their carnal, self-absorbed world and preached to them through this poem. It will not feel like that to us. But it was done with powerful effect.

The Recitation of God's Charges (v.1-5)

God has had enough of all the social and religious vices of those claiming to be His people.

Against their Luxury (v.1-3)

¹ Listen to me, you fat cows living in Samaria,
you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy,
and who are always calling to your husbands,
"Bring us another drink!"

² The Sovereign Lord has sworn this by his holiness:
"The time will come when you will be led away
with hooks in your noses.

Every last one of you will be dragged away
like a fish on a hook!

³ You will be led out through the ruins of the wall;
you will be thrown from your fortresses,"
says the Lord.

Their Description (v.1)

This is a very ugly picture. These women are described as fat cows living in Samaria. The ESV adds, "of Bashan". The cows of Bashan were known for being aggressive and dangerous. They are even alluded to in a couple of David's Psalms where he is pleading for safety. So here you have fat, aggressive, drunken women wallowing in luxury and ordering their husbands to get them another drink.

For us this is a revolting picture. It is too easy for some of us to think, Rosanne Barr. But their culture, wealth, luxury, and ease were associated with being heavy. The Bible sometimes obscures it by using the word, "sleek". If this were addressed to our congregation, it would say something more like, "Listen to me, you thin, pampered, over-exercised, fresh faced women having no cares in the world and spending your money like water who treat your husbands with disdain..."

But why was this luxurious, self-focused life so egregious? Because they oppressed the poor and crushed the needy. These women had the opportunity and wealth to help others among God's people and did not. Rather, they went even further and used their position and power to make the conditions of the poor and needy worse.

The application is not for us to look at the poor and needy out in the world. That once again is confusing the Old Testament types. This is oppressing and crushing the poor and needy in the church. It begins with our own congregation, but it is more than that. It is taking what God has blessed us with and seeking out those who we can help. Thankfully, God has graced us to do much, for people in our own congregation, for churches near to us, for Haiti, for Romania, for Namibia. Oh, may God help us to have a heart, not just for own, but for those we can seek out so that our riches may be used relieve their difficulties.

Don't shy away from the piercing point of this. The way women are among God's people is an indicator of the state of God's people. The New Testament picks this up. The unruly women in Corinth, the fighting women in Philippi, the weak and silly women in Ephesus and in the churches Jude and Peter were writing to. I am not saying this to attack women. But we also must listen to what the Scriptures tell us. Ladies, how you respond to God's Word is very important to the health of the church.

Their Destruction (v.2-3)

The church is not Israel. Israel is a picture of the church but sometimes, Israel as a nation is a picture of Christendom. What God does with Israel here is related to her national reality. God will take their wealthy, wanton, drunken women as well as their husbands and carry them away into captivity. They will have hooks put in their noses like cattle being led to slaughter. They will be caught like fish, flopping on the ground. They will be thrown down from the high walls of their fortresses. The graphic description of their destruction is simply God's revulsion at their wickedness.

We think often of sin as clean, nice, attractive... God thinks of sin as slimy, smelly, stinking pile of putrefying waste. Maybe, we should think about that a little more...

Against their Hypocrisy (v.4-5)

Having effectively destroyed their culture, God now turns against their religion.

⁴ "Go ahead and offer sacrifices to the idols at Bethel.

Keep on disobeying at Gilgal.

Offer sacrifices each morning,
and bring your tithes every three days.

⁵ Present your bread made with yeast
as an offering of thanksgiving.

Then give your extra voluntary offerings

so you can brag about it everywhere!
This is the kind of thing you Israelites love to do,”
says the Sovereign Lord.

The parallels to what is going on in the church today are pretty obvious.

Their Pagan Idols (v.4)

Bethel and Gilgal were originally established as places for sacrifice and for the teaching of the Scriptures. Authorized alters were built there. But they had become corrupted. Just as often, sacrifices to pagan gods were being offered on the very same altars. The places where God ought to be worshipped had become a place of idol worship. Please don't tell me that this is not happening in churches today. It happened in Corinth. Heart idols are regularly accepted, if not promoted, in the church.

Their Meaningless Rituals (v.4b-5a)

But notice, they are still going through the outward forms. They bring their sacrifices. They bring their, well, yeast tainted bread offerings. I mean, these folks are regular tithers. Even more, they went beyond and gave to special projects. These are the same people described earlier in the book and in the stanza above. Their enthusiasm for the outward forms of their religion masks the poverty, the terrible state of their inner spirituality.

Their Prideful Religion (v.5b)

How do we know that? Look at the reason for their religious enthusiasm. They are going through all these religious exercises *so that they can boast about them*.

But notice the sarcastic opening. “Go ahead and...” the Lord says. Why? Because God has done all He is willing to do to bring the people back, to cause them to repent.

The Rehearsal of God's Chastening (v.6-11)

God has sought over and over again to turn their stubborn obstinacy. But they will not return. God has chastened them repeatedly. How has God chastened them?

Through Famine (v.6)

⁶“I brought hunger to every city
and famine to every town.
But still you would not return to me,”
says the Lord.

God had brought famine into the land to chasten them. Every city suffered from having no food. God uses famine to judge the nations and to chasten His people. Often this is physical, but sometimes it is spiritual. There have been periods of a famine of the Word of God in history and in places. When this happens, we may well be experiencing the hand of God's chastening just as Israel had. God's covenant promised bumper crops if the people obeyed the Lord, but famine if

they disobeyed (Leviticus. 26:27-31; Deuteronomy 28:1-11). When food is scarce, food prices go up, and people suffer and die.

Yet, they stubbornly refused to repent.

Through Drought (v.7-8)

⁷ “I kept the rain from falling
when your crops needed it the most.
I sent rain on one town
but withheld it from another.
Rain fell on one field,
while another field withered away.
⁸ People staggered from town to town looking for water,
but there was never enough.
But still you would not return to me,”
says the Lord.

A lack of food is one thing. But a lack of water is an entirely different thing. God did not send a drought over all of Israel. Instead, God withheld the rain in different places from time to time and sent rain on other places. It should have been clear that this was God’s doing and that He was in control. Look at the language here. People stagger from town to town seeking water. God’s hand was heavy in Israel. There are terrible pictures of the droughts in the sub-Sahara and in some parts of China. They are predicting the worst drought in California than has been experienced for 40 years. Israel went through periods of having sporadic rain, a little here and little there but mostly none at all.

Yet, they stubbornly refused to repent.

Through Blight (v.9)

⁹ “I struck your farms and vineyards with blight and mildew.
Locusts devoured all your fig and olive trees.
But still you would not return to me,”
says the Lord.

God chastened Israel through the destruction of her agriculture. The farms, vineyards and groves were destroyed. God sent... notice this were not just “natural” occurrences... God sent blight, mildew, and locusts all to destroy and devour their harvests. This led to the collapse of their agrarian economy.

Yet, they stubbornly refused to repent.

Through Plagues and War (v.10)

¹⁰ “I sent plagues on you
like the plagues I sent on Egypt long ago.
I killed your young men in war
and led all your horses away.
The stench of death filled the air!

But still you would not return to me,"
says the Lord.

God chastened them through sicknesses and through war. God had protected them when they were in Egypt from the plagues that God had sent upon the Egyptians. They should have recognized the diseases and plagues. They should have associated them with God's judgment on Egypt for her wealth and her idolatry. God had promised that His people would not experience the dreadful diseases they saw in Egypt if they were faithful to obey the Mosaic Law (Exodus 15:26). He also had promised that if they rebelled, God would send upon them all the diseases of Egypt (Leviticus. 26:23-26; Deuteronomy. 28:21-22, 27-29, 35, 59-62).

Israel suffered great defeats and loss in wars with her neighboring nations. Amos had already preached about how God had used the nations around Israel to punish them. God kept His promise: the Assyrians conquered Israel and the Babylonians took Judah into captivity. But the point here is the death and disease that arose from the battlefields strewn with the rotting corpses of the prime of the nation's youth. God was cutting off the hopes of their future.

Yet, they stubbornly refused to repent.

Through Catastrophes (v.11)

¹¹ "I destroyed some of your cities,
as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.
Those of you who survived
were like charred sticks pulled from a fire.
But still you would not return to me,"
says the Lord.

God chastened them by destroying their cities. God had sent fire down on Sodom and Gomorrah and consumed the whole city. Was this exactly the same? Was this an asteroid God sent? Was this similar in that the cities were burned completely down by fire? And the few that survived are described as being like a stick pulled out of the fire and charcoaled. Were the survivors horribly burned? Frankly, we don't know. We just know that this happened. God is referring to something in their past, seemingly not recorded in Scripture. Whatever it was, it destroyed multiple cities, leaving them in ruins with survivors terribly scarred.

Yet, they stubbornly refused to repent.

The Response of God's Condemnation (v.12-13)

What do you think is going to be the consequence of this? How is this going to work out for them?

¹² "Therefore, I will bring upon you all the disasters I have announced.
Prepare to meet your God in judgment, you people of Israel!"

¹³ For the Lord is the one who shaped the mountains,

stirs up the winds, and reveals his thoughts to mankind.
He turns the light of dawn into darkness
and treads on the heights of the earth.
The Lord God of Heaven's Armies is his name!

God's Promise (v.12)

Since they stubbornly refused to repent, God will bring upon all the disasters He has promised through Amos' (and others') preaching. So, prepare to meet your God. Prepare to meet your holy, consuming fire, the God of judgment.

This is not a wonderful, fluffy, emotional, worship song kind of meeting. No, this is Jesus on a white charger, the sword of the Word flickering like fire through the tares, the fake Christinas and false churches.

God's Power (v.13)

But even in this kind of threatening lightening, God is sovereign in His power. We are this age, the age of grace. We have now in our hands the revelation of God's thoughts in Scripture. God is moving through time and space, in creation and in the world of men and angels to accomplish His hidden and revealed purposes. Amos' message of doom and destruction had a near fulfillment in the invasions of Assyria and Babylon. But there will be another invasion of the Son of Man, who came and destroyed sin and death by dying on the cross. While we may experience the effects of living in a fallen world (Romans 8) and the chastening hand of God (Hebrews 12), while our heavenly Father is still a consuming fire to be worshipped with fear and awe (Hebrews 11), we can still never ever be separated from His love for us in Christ (Romans 8).

God's Praise (v.13b)

But there is also praise for the Lord God who is the God of heaven's armies. His Name is the Lord of Hosts. Warren Wiersbe wrote, "In this doxology, he reminds us that our God is the Creator who can do anything, including making the earth out of nothing. He can turn dawn into darkness; He can tread upon the mountains, and nobody can hinder Him. He is also the omniscient God who knows what we are thinking. Thus, there's nothing we can hide from Him (Ps. 139:1-6). He is the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of heaven and earth!" (Wiersbe, p. 42).

Reflect and Respond

May I exhort you? Keep a heart tender toward needy believers.

Rejoice when we can supply needs, pay bills, and support people in our church who need it.

Rejoice when God allows us to support impoverished Gypsy pastors across Romania. Rejoice when we can give to help churches pay bills, repair equipment, and sustain

their ministries. Rejoice when we can provide so that poor church leaders can attend a conference without cost.

Rejoice when you see how God continues to abundantly supply for us, not so that we hoard it for ourselves, but so that we can strategically provide for others and prepare for future issues.

Do not turn texts like this into support for the Marxist and socialist agendas of the social justice and critical race theory. This is not addressing the dreadful way people have been treated out in the world. Yes, racism and oppression and exploitation are a part of the past and present in our country and in the world. But this is speaking to us, to Christians, to what goes on in churches.

So, listen to James as he picks up and admonished the church of his day and our day... James 2:1-7

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?

²For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. ³If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor" – well, ⁴doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?

⁵Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? ⁶But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? ⁷Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?