

# Amos 4 - Samaria's Failure to Heed God's Chastening

III. Three sermons of judgment (Amos 3:1—6:14)

(2) Cause of Israel's destruction: depravity (4:1-13)

(A) Sin (4:1-11)

(a) Cows of Bashan (4:1-3)

(i) Sin (4:1)

(a) Oppressed the needy (4:1a)

(b) Preoccupation with their physical appetites (4:1b)

(ii) Captivity (4:2-3)

(a) With hooks (4:2)

(b) Through breaches in the walls (4:3a)

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(b) Sons of Israel (4:4-11)

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## Amos 4

(2) Cause of Israel's destruction: depravity (4:1-13)

(A) Sin (4:1-11)

(a) Cows of Bashan (4:1-3)

(i) Sin (4:1)

(a) Oppressed the needy (4:1a)

(b) Preoccupation with their physical appetites (4:1b)

**1** Hear this word, you **cowsofBashan** who are on the mountain of Samaria, Who exploit the poor, who oppress the needy, And say to their **husbands**, "Bring now, that we may

drink!"

1 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria, Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, Who say to your husbands, "Bring now, that we may drink!"

1 "Listen to this message, you fat cows from Bashan, who live on the Samaritan mountains, who oppress the poor, who rob the needy, and who constantly ask your husbands for one more drink!"

1 Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink.

- "...cows of Bashan" - spoiled women of luxury in Samaria, who oppressed the poor by making excessive demands on their husbands

— Bashan was a very luxuriant region of the Transjordan, NE of the Sea of Galilee, where the cattle had plenty to eat and grew fat

— These women, along with their men, were exploiting the poor and oppressing the needy. They were even ordering their own husbands to wait on them and bring them drinks.

- "...husbands" - *'adonim*, means "lords" or "masters." By using it, Amos was stressing the inappropriate role reversal that existed.

— The picture is of spoiled, lazy women ordering their husbands to provide them with luxuries, which the men had to oppress the poor in order to obtain (Cf. Deut 28:56-57; Is 32:9-13)

#### (ii) Captivity (4:2-3)

##### (a) With hooks (4:2)

2 The Lord GOD has **sworn** by His holiness, "For behold, the days are coming upon you When they will **take you away with meat hooks**, And the last of you with fish hooks.

2 The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness, "Behold, the days are coming upon you When they will take you away with meat hooks, And the last of you with fish hooks.

2 The Lord GOD has taken a sacred oath: "The day is coming when they will take you away on fishhooks, every last one of you on fishhooks.

2 The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.

- "...sword" - God did not just say what He would do, but He *swore* that He would do it

— An oath was a means of committing oneself irrevocably to a certain course of action

— Here, God provides an additional guarantee, in addition to His word: He made a solemn declaration in harmony with His holiness

— As surely as God is separate from humankind and cannot tolerate sin, these women would surely suffer His judgment one day.

- "...take you away with *meat* hooks" - an enemy would cart them off, like butchers carry beef with large meat hooks or like fishermen carry fish with hooks

(b) Through breaches in the walls (4:3a)

(c) To Harmon (4:3b)

3 "You will go out *throughholes* in the walls, One in front of the other, And you will be hurled to **Harmon**," declares the LORD.

3 "You will go out *through* breaches in the walls, Each one straight before her, And you will be cast to Harmon," declares the LORD.

3 Each of you will go out through the breaches of the walls straight to Mt. Hermon," declares the LORD.

3 And ye shall go out at the breaches, every one at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith the LORD.

- The women would be carried off without any impediments; each one would go straight into captivity or to burial through any one of the many passageways made through the broken walls

- "...Harmon" - probably a location around Mount Hermon, to the north of Bashan

— This is the direction the Assyrians took the Israelite captives as they deported them to Assyria

(b) Sons of Israel (4:4-11)

(i) Religious hypocrisy (4:4-5)

4 "Enter **Bethel** and **dowrong**; In Gilgal multiply wrongdoing! Bring your sacrifices every morning, Your tithes every three days.

4 "Enter Bethel and transgress; In Gilgal multiply transgression! Bring your sacrifices every morning, Your tithes every three days.

4 "Come to Bethel and sin, to Gilgal and sin even more! Bring along your morning sacrifices, and pay your tithes every other day.

4 Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years:

- "...Bethel" - the most popular religious site in the northern kingdom

— But the Lord looked at what the people did there as transgressing His law rather than worshipping Him

- "...do wrong" - *pasha'*, to break a covenant (2 Kings 1:1 Ex 20:4-5; Matt 23:3-4,14,23)

— God urged the Israelites to worship at these illegal sites the same way Israel's priests summoned people to the temple in Jerusalem to worship

— God—hyperbolically and ironically—urged the people to bring their sacrifices every morning, and their tithes every three days (rather than every three years as the Law required, Cf. Deut 14:28-29)

— Even if they sacrificed every morning and tithed every three days, they would only be rebelling against God

— The people were careful to worship regularly, but it was a ritual contrary to God's will, because their hearts were not right

5 "Offer a **thanksgiving offering** also from that which is leavened, And proclaim voluntary offerings, make them known. For so you love *to do*, you sons of Israel," Declares the Lord GOD.

5 "Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened, And proclaim freewill offerings, make them known. For so you love *to do*, you sons of Israel," Declares the Lord GOD.

5 While you're at it, present a thank offering with leaven, and publicize your freewill offerings, letting everyone hear about it, because this is what you really love to do, you Israelis," declares the Lord GOD.

5 And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

- "...thanksgiving offering" - expressed gratitude for blessings and answers to prayer (Lev 7:11-15). The Israelites made freewill offerings spontaneously out of gratitude to God (Lev 7:16; 22:17-19).

— The people loved to practice these acts of worship, but they did not love to obey sovereign God, or care for their poor, oppressed neighbors

— The LORD wanted their loving obedience, not their acts of worship. Loving religious activity is not the same as loving God.

(ii) Failure to heed the warnings of the covenant curses (4:6-11)

(a) Famine (4:6)

6 "But I gave you also **cleanness of teeth** in all your cities, And lack of bread in all your places; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

6 "But I gave you also cleanness of teeth in all your cities And lack of bread in all your places, Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

6 "I also have scheduled food shortages for you in all of your cities, and lack of bread in all of your settlements, but you haven't returned to me," declares the LORD.

6 And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

- "...cleanness of teeth" - famine, crop failures

— The LORD had brought famine throughout the land to warn His people about their disobedience and His displeasure, but this judgment did not move them to repent (Cf. 1 Kings 8:37-39)

— Famine was one of the curses that God said He might bring if His people proved unfaithful to His covenant (Lev 26:26,29; Deut 28:17,48)

(b) Drought (4:7-8)

7 "Furthermore, I **withheld the rain** from you While *there were* still three months until harvest. Then I would send rain on one city, But on another city I would not send rain; One part would be rained on, While the part not rained on would dry up.

7 "Furthermore, I withheld the rain from you While *there were* still three months until harvest. Then I would send rain on one city And on another city I would not send rain; One part would be rained on, While the part not rained on would dry up.

7 "I therefore have withheld the rain from you three months before the harvest, causing rain to come upon one city, but not upon another, and upon one field but not upon another, so that it would wither.

7 And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered.

- "...withheld the rain" - God also withheld the rain when the people needed rain the most (three months before harvest, March or April)

— Disastrous and deliberate, targeted, to serve as a God-sent warning

— God let rain fall on one town but not another, resulting in spotty productivity (1 Kings 8:35). This should have moved the Israelites to repent.

— Drought was also a divine punishment for covenant unfaithfulness (Lev 26:19; Deut 28:22-24,48)

8 "So *the people of two or three cities* would stagger to another city to drink water, But would not be satisfied; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

8 "So two or three cities would stagger to another city to drink water, But would not be satisfied; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

8 So the people of two or three cities staggered away to another city in order to obtain drinking water, but you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

8 So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

- Desperate, but not heeded as a warning...

(c) Locusts (4:9)

9 "I struck you with scorching *wind* and mildew; The caterpillar was devouring Your many gardens and vineyards, fig trees and olive trees; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

9 "I smote you with scorching *wind* and mildew; And the caterpillar was devouring Your many gardens and vineyards, fig trees and olive trees; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

9 "I afflicted you with blight and fungus; and the locust swarm devoured the harvest of your gardens, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, but you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

9 I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

- The crops were blasted by the scorching east wind from the desert, and the mildew was from excessive drought, not moisture

- God sent plant diseases and insects to blight their gardens, vineyards and fruit trees, yet the Israelites did not return to Him (Cf. 1 Kings 8:37-39)

(d) Plagues and warfare (4:10)

10 "I sent a plague among you as in Egypt; I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses, And I made the **stench of your camp** rise up in your nostrils; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

10 "I sent a plague among you after the manner of Egypt; I slew your young men by the sword along with your captured horses, And I made the stench of your camp rise up in your nostrils; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

10 "I sent plagues among you as I did with Egypt. I killed your choicest young men with the sword. I took your horses away from you. I filled your noses with the stench of your encampments, but you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

10 I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

- Wars had brought various plagues on the Israelites, and many of their soldiers had died (Cf. 1 Kings 8:33,37)

— The plagues on the Israelites should have made them conclude that God was now judging them

— God had plagued His people as He formerly had plagued the Egyptians

- "...stench of your camp" - the "stench" of dead bodies should have led the people to repent, but they did not (Cf. Lev 26:16-17,25,31-39; Deut 28:21-22,25-27,35,49-52,59-61; 29:23-28)

(e) Destruction (4:11)

11 "I overthrew you, as God overthrew **Sodom and Gomorrah**, And you were like a **log snatched from a fire**; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

11 "I overthrew you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, And you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

11 "I overthrew your cities, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You've become like a burning ember, snatched from the fire, but you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

11 I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

- "...Sodom and Gomorrah" - not in the same manner, but with the same thoroughness

- "...log snatched from a fire" - God had rescued His people like a burning log from a fire, as he had previously extracted Lot and his daughters from Sodom

— Zechariah applied this phrase to the rescue of Judah from the Babylonian captivity (Cf. Zech 3:2)

- Successive defeats: Syrians under Hazael

— Jehoram (841 BC) (2 Kings 8:28-29)

— Jehu (820 BC) (2 Kings 10:32-33)

— Hehoahaz (810 BC) (2 Kings 13:3-7,22)

- The victories God gave Jeroboam II to save Israel during Amos' day (2 Kings 14:23-27)

— Various disasters of limited scope were sent in hopes of bringing repentance

#### (B) Judgment (4:12-13)

##### (a) Exhortation to prepare to meet God (4:12)

12 "Therefore so I will do to you, Israel; Because I will do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, Israel."

12 "Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; Because I will do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, O Israel."

12 "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel. Because I am about to do this, prepare to be summoned to your God, Israel!"

12 Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

- The Israelites should prepare to meet their God because they failed to repent (Cf. Ex 19:10-19; 2 Cor 5:10)

Some interpreters believe that the prophet's call was primarily a summons to judgment for covenant unfaithfulness, not a call to repentance or an invitation to covenant renewal.

Others believe that every prophecy of coming judgment constitutes a call to repentance.

The absence of a stated punishment makes the summons even more foreboding.

##### (b) Reminder of God's sovereignty (4:13)

13 For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind, And declares to a person what are His thoughts, He who makes dawn into darkness And treads on the high places of the earth, The LORD God of armies is His name.

13 For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind And declares to man what are His thoughts, He who makes dawn into darkness And treads on the high places of the earth, The LORD God of hosts is His name.

13 Look! The one who crafts mountains, who creates the wind, who reveals what he is thinking to mankind, who darkens the morning light, who tramples down the high places of the land— the LORD, the God of the Heavenly Armies is his name.

13 For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, is his name.

- The Israelites' enemy was the most formidable one imaginable...The LORD God of armies
- It is He who forms mountains, creates the wind, reveals His thoughts to people, turns dawn into darkness, and steps on the hills of Israel like a giant approaching Samaria
- They will not return to Him, so He will come to them in a terrifying historical theophany, so inexorable that no Israelite can avoid it (Amos 9:1-4) and so awesome that none can mistake it (Amos 2:13-16)
- They could not escape His judgment, so they had better prepare for it (Cf. Micah 1:3-4)
- Not in a sanctuary, but in history. Not for covenant-making, but for *judgment*