



SESSION OBJECTIVE: AMOS 4:1-13

To learn more about the judgments of God against Israel for her sin.

The Endgame

In all of the countless comic book inspired movies, none created more of a splash than *Avengers: Endgame*. I remember sitting in the theater the night it came out, and the room was teeming with excitement and wonder. Marvel had taken us on a years-long ride, and ripped our hearts out at the end of *Avengers: Infinity War*. *Endgame* was the culmination of stories woven together, and the final showdown between good versus evil, heroes versus Thanos, the mad Titan. There is one scene near the end of the movie, where after successfully procuring the Infinity stones from different times using quantum physics, they all end up fighting Thanos anyway. As he put his helmet on, facing down a team of heroes he said one of the more iconic lines of the franchise: “I am inevitable.” It certainly seemed that way. How could they escape him? They could’t!

God’s judgments against Israel were, if anything, inevitable. They had been enraptured in their sin, living out a hedonistic existence with no sign of remorse or repentance. And yet, they had no chance of surviving what was coming for them. God said, “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” (Amos 4:13). This the God of Israel, and yet more, the God of all creation. None can hide from Him; He is inevitable.

The Land of Plenty

Chapter 4 opens with some descriptions of the kind of lavish lives the Israelites were living. Below is a brief outline of such descriptions.

COWS OF BASHAN

Chapter 4 begins with what could only be described as a, “not PC” way of addressing the women in Israel. God calls them, “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!'" (Amos 4:1) Certainly it is not the most proper thing to call a woman a cow, and yet God addresses them as such. While it may feel like God is taking a cheap shot at the women with harsh language, there is actual some context to the phrase. Bashan was a fertile plain and mountain range on both sides of the upper and middle Yarmuk River, and notable for its cattle. The so-called, "cows of Bashan" were well-known, and not easy to come by; only good money could afford them. The idea here is that the women were wealthy, and notably so. But notice their behavior: they, "oppress the poor," and, "crush the needy" (Amos 4:1). The word for "crush" means, "to smash up, ill-treat, or abuse."

The treatment of the poor in the Scripture is always indicative of the inward spiritual condition of a person or a people group. Proverbs 28:27 says, "Whoever gives to the poor will not want." Isaiah 58:10 says, "If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday." The beloved apostle, John, writes, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn. 3:17-18). James adds, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27). The problem being highlighted in these first verses is not merely the enjoyment of riches, but the enjoyment of riches at the expense of the poor and oppressed.

WHAT KIND OF HOOKS?

Verse 2 is puzzling in the original language. The idea of being taken away with, "meat hooks," and, "fish hooks," is confusing because the words here for hooks are actually words that when in plural form mean something like, "thorns." Translators have made several attempts at explaining what this refers to. The most convincing is that it is a barbed tool that would collect up the corpses on the ground after battle for clean up. With this in mind, God's judgment will come in the form of battle, a battle Israel will decisively lose, and nothing, not even their remains, will be left.

WHERE IS HARMON?

Verse 3 is also difficult to interpret because of the mysterious location, "Harmon." What location does God have in mind here? Several suggestions have been made but no one is more convincing than the other. Some scholars have argued it should be translated as something like, "a dung pit." The location is really of less consequence than the point of the verse; again, the judgment of God will result in the taking away for Israelites to a place that is not as ideal as where they were prior to the judgment.

Idolatry

Verses 4 and 5 center around the raging practices of idolatry. The temples in Bethel and Gilgal were the places in which many sacrifices were brought and made. The Mosaic law demanded and described daily offerings to be given (Lev. 6:8-13). There was also a special tithe to be given every three years for the benefit of the Levites (Deut. 14:28-29). Both leavened and unleavened were to be brought with the thank offering (Lev. 7:11-13). There is nothing necessarily wrong with the offerings described here. The clue to the wrongdoing lies in the phrase, "make them known" (Amos 4:5). They were making offerings very publicly for the attention, not for the point of the sacrifice, and apparently this was a habit of theirs: "'For so you clove to do, you sons of Israel,' Declares the Lord GOD" (Amos 4:5). Jesus warned of practicing righteousness to be seen by others: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 6:1). This, along with the aforementioned sin, indicates that their hearts were far from the Father (Matt. 15:8).

God's Judgments

The remainder of the chapter is a list of some of the things that God did to them out of judgment. Below is an outline of these sins.

CLEANNES OF TEETH

The first thing mentioned is that God gave them, “cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places” (Amos 4:6). The idea of clean teeth seems strange until you consider why their teeth are clean: they have no food! The first judgment is a withholding of food supply, a judgment that would obviously be crippling to a large group of people. It, however, is not effective: “Yet, you have not returned to Me” (Amos 4:6).

DROUGHT

Secondly, God said, “I withheld the rain from you while there were still three months until harvest” (Amos 4:7). God is the one who controls the ecosystem, and thus, He can decide to, “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.” The storms obey Him, just as Jesus demonstrated (Matt. 8:23-27; Mk. 4:35-41). This lack of rain caused a stir up from city to city. Some from the cities in drought would rush to the other cities where there was rain, and yet nothing satisfied them. Remarkably, however, they still did not repent (Amos 4:8).

CROP FAILURE

“Scorching wind and mildew” are both conditions that would cause crop failure, as would the, “devouring caterpillar” (Amos 4:9). God is not only sovereign over the weather, but He decides when crops flourish and when they are overtaken by calamity. Because of their hardness of hearts, God destroyed their, “many gardens and vineyards, fig trees and olive trees” (Amos 4:9). This had no effect either: “‘Yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares the LORD.”

PLAGUE

Next, God sent a plague on the actual inhabitants of Israel, “in the manner of Egypt” (Amos 4:10). The mentioning of Egypt connects them to Egypt in the Exodus. Egypt was callous and in full rebellion against the One True God, and thus they received a number of judgment leading up to the Passover. This is exactly what God promised He would do to Israel in rebellion once before. In Deuteronomy 28:1-14, God promises the people of God immense blessing and military success if they listen to God, obey His commandments, and live righteously before Him. Verse 15 changes the tone, however: “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you” (Deut. 28:15). It goes on to describe essentially everything that God is doing to them in Amos 4. Why? They didn’t obey Him! They have become no different than the haughty and arrogantly sinful Egyptians, and now God is doing exactly what He promised them, including Deuteronomy 28:27: “The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch, of which you cannot be healed.”

OVERTHROWN

The final judgment mentioned is overthrow akin to Sodom and Gomorrah. This is, of course, figurative; God didn’t do to them exactly what He did to Sodom and Gomorrah. The point is that the judgment they faced was complete and total destruction, and removal from their land. The end of the war that will be brought to them will leave their beloved land in flames and ruin.

Prepare!

God closes with a stark warning: "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (Amos 4:12). Just to be clear they understood who God really is, He tells them: "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." God has already demonstrated His power over creation, but to be sure, He drives it home with this closing verse. It is God who forms the highest mountains. It is God who is the source of wind, the unseen and yet powerful force of nature. It is God who controls light. It is God who treads the untreadable places of the earth. No one is like Him, and no one can stand against Him. *That God* is the one who is about to bring judgment to them. There is no preparation for such an event as this.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Amos 4:1. What does God call the wives in Israel? What sins were they guilty of according to this text? According to the notes, what was the real issue?

2. Read Amos 4:2. By what has the Lord sworn? According to the notes, what are the fish hooks and the meat hooks spoken of? What does this verse describe?

Day Two

1. Read Amos 4:3. In your own words, describe what is happening in this verse.

2. Read Amos 4:4-5. What is the big idea of these two verses? What kind of offerings are mentioned here? What is the main problem with the way these offerings are being made?

Day Three

1. Read Amos 4:6-8. What judgments are described here in these three verses? What does it mean to have, "cleanness of teeth?" Were these judgments effective in turning Israel away from their sin?

2. Read Amos 4:9-10. What are the next two judgments mentioned in these two verses? What do these judgments cause? Why would this have been so difficult to live through? Were these judgments effective in turning Israel away from their sin?

Day Four

1. Read Amos 4:11. What other nation is mentioned in this verse? Why is this significant? What connection is being made here according to the notes?
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2. Read Amos 4:12-13. What does God tell Israel to prepare for in verse 12? How does He describe Himself in verse 13?
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Week 5 Discussion: Public Praise

One of the big issues that Israel is guilty of is not *what* they sacrifice (Amos 4:4), but *how* they do it (Amos 4:5). The manner is all wrong. The position of their hearts is off. They do it to be *seen*. Jesus warns His followers of this kind of behavior in Matthew chapter 6, verse 1: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” Talk as a group about the danger of seeking public approval for your actions, and when it is appropriate to let people know what you’ve done.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever sought attention or public praise for your good deeds or religious affections?
2. Read Matthew 6:16-18. Is it always wrong to let others know when you are fasting? Read Acts 13:2 and 14:23. How do these verses inform Matthew 6:16-18?
3. Is it wrong to raise your hands or be jubilant while worshipping in the corporate assembly? When would it be appropriate to do so, and when would it be wrong? What is the core issue at play?
4. If someone compliments you for doing a good thing, how should you respond?
5. Is there a time when it is a good thing to publicly acknowledge the good actions and deeds of other believers? Why or why not?
6. Is it possible to have bad motives when praying publicly? Give some examples.

Takeaways:

1. God’s judgment began in smaller ways, and Israel did not repent.
2. There is no one above God, or more powerful than Him.

PRAYER REQUESTS: