

Amos
“He Who Forms the Mountains”
Amos 4:1-13

Good evening. Please open with me in your Bibles to the prophet Amos, chapter four, verses one through 13.

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 that we may drink. The Lord God has sworn by his holiness, that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall lead you away, they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead, and you shall be cast out into Haman, declares the Lord, come to Bethel, and transgress to Gilgal, and multiply transgressions. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim free will offerings. Publish them. And so as for so you love to do, O people of Israel, declares the Lord, I gave you cleanness of teeth, and all of your cities, and lack of bread, and all of your places, and yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. I also withheld the rain from you. When there were yet three months to the harvest. I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city. One field would have rain, and the field on which it did not rain would wither. So 2 or 3 cities would wander to another city to drink water and would not be satisfied. And yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. I struck you with blight and mildew, your many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees. The locusts devoured, yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, and carried away your horses. I made the stench of your camp go up in your nostrils, and yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. I overthrew some of you as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning, and yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. Therefore, thus will I do to you, O Israel, because I will do this to you. Prepare to meet your God, O Israel, for behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought? Who makes the morning darkness and treads on the heights of the earth? The Lord of hosts, is his name.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, as we come to this ancient text that speaks in ways, it alludes to things, it uses terms and styles of thought, styles of writing that are not familiar to us. And yet we also know that it is your word to us, just as it is your word to the northern Kingdom of Israel. Sometime

around the middle of the eighth century BC. Dear Lord, I pray that as we hear these words, we would indeed hear the voice of the word, the logos. Jesus Christ, that we would see how the spirit is speaking to us through these words, that we would hear the words of the father calling us, as with the northern Kingdom, to learn by faith and not by experience. Dear Lord, we pray for that grace as well. In Christ's name,

Amen.

Well, as we've mentioned before, as we're going through Amos, we are reading, a series of sermons that we're given probably over the course of many years in the Northern Kingdom. We don't know exactly how long, Amos was ministering, but we know that it was for multiple periods of time, multiple years. And so each one of these sermons is kind of like condensing someone's teaching over their lifetime or over a season of their ministry into just a small book. And so we'll see that there is some repetition here as we go. So it's important for us to remember he's saying things over and over again, because the audience who is hearing what he's saying is not listening. And so he's having to remind them again, you remember how I said this? Okay, I'm gonna say it in a slightly different way. And sometimes people say, well, the prophets are so repetitive. Well, that's what it's like if you take a sermon that's taught maybe every week or every two weeks or maybe every month, and then you put them into an anthology altogether and read them over a short period of time.

So as we go through the prophets, what I want to do is just draw our attention to a couple of theological ideas that inform how we understand and read what we're seeing here. And last week I talked a little bit about that idea of progressive eschatology. You know, remember the guy with the projector who's strapped to his chest and as he's walking through redemptive history, the image on the screen in front of him is shaping and changing and becoming more detailed as he goes. And so early on, all we know is that the Lord is going to fill the earth and subdue it. That's all we get from Genesis one. But as we move forward, we get more and more information. Oh, because of the fall, there's going to be a battle between, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Okay, then we learn more. Oh, so there will be a blessing on earth. A theater in which redemption could happen when the destruction being done to the earth is quelled after the flood and Noah. And finally we get daytime and nighttime seed time and harvest hot and cold seasonal changes. And that provides a theater in which redemption can happen.

And then Abraham comes, we go, oh, now we see how the seed of the woman will conquer, and the people of God will fill the earth and subdue. It'll be through this family, the descendants of Abraham. And we can just keep doing that all the way up to the end of revelation, where it all comes to completion. I want to draw attention to something else that's going on here in the Old Testament.

And there's something that that Paul tells us about in his letter to the Galatians, and he's trying to answer this question, what do we do with all of this? What do we do with all these stories, like the stories of Amos? What do we do with the fact that we have this long, millennia long account of redemptive history leading up to Jesus? What was it for? And Paul says this. He says this the law. And sometimes when Paul says the law, he means the Ten Commandments. Sometimes when Paul says the law, he means Deuteronomy six. Sometimes when he says the law, he means Deuteronomy. Sometimes when he says the law, he means the Pentateuch. And sometimes when he says the law, he means the whole Old Testament.

Okay. Just sorry. It's how it is. And they can break it up in a variety of different ways. You can say the law and the prophets and you mean the whole Old Testament. You can say the law of the prophets and the Psalms, and you made the whole Old Testament. What we see Paul say here is he's talking about the law.

But I would argue he's talking about the whole of the Old Testament says this. So then this is Galatians 3: 24 to 25. So then the law was our guardian. Now the word there is this word idea, and it means something like a guardian or okay, or tutor, okay. Earlier translations like the King James will often say tutor. He was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under the guardian. For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God. Through faith. There's no news of Paul saying here. He's saying, when you were children, and he often says it this way, you were children before, now you are adults. You were servants before, now you are sons. You were people being taught before, guarded, watched over their guardians. It's not just a protector, it's a guardian. Like an au pair. Right? You're taking them around. You're helping them make the right decisions in life. Okay? You're teaching them, you know, you're like Maria, right in in Sound of Music. You know, you're teaching them things and you're helping them out. And Paul says that's what the Old Testament does. It is helping us out. It's training us so that we know how to think and what to look for, because otherwise, otherwise we might not know what to look for, and we might not understand what Jesus is doing when he comes to earth, when he's made incarnate, taking on the form of a man, being humiliated by living out a human life, being ultimately humiliated on the cross, rising from the dead on the third day, ascending into heaven. Sending of the spirit. Why does he do all of this? Go read the Old Testament. It'll show you why. Well, let me put it another way. Why isn't after the fall of God's got this plan to redeem us, why not have Abel be the second person of the Trinity incarnate? Why not let Abel die and then rise again in three days?

He's died for our sins. We now are enabled by faith, and then we can just start getting saved, right? Why not have it that way? And I think what Paul is telling us is this. You wouldn't have

understood what had to happen to fix the problem of the fall. You might have thought you might have been tempted because of how humans are to think.

Well, the fall wasn't that big of a deal. It was easy to fix. As a matter of fact, maybe we could have fixed it if we had just tried hard. God, if you just revealed a law to us after the fall, then we would have known what to do and we would have done it and wouldn't have been able to save ourselves right?

So what does the Lord do instead? I can give you the Bible. Bible only hints at these things, but I think Paul is hinting at this here. What does the Bible do instead? What does the Lord do? He gives the people everything they could possibly need to save themselves. He gives them the spirit. He gives them the word. He gives them prophets. He gives them kings. He gives them priests. He gives them a means of fixing the situation. When they ruin it. And what do they do? As Amos and all the other prophets remind us over and over and over again, even though they've been given everything. If you don't learn anything by the end of the Old Testament, you learned this.

Israel did not have what it takes. Or rather, we never got to find the true Israelite who could live out the law, who could run the race, who could get the inheritance. The Old Testament doesn't have him. John. It's not until Christ walks on the earth. It's not until the true Israelite fulfills the law. He comes. He runs the race. He does the thing that Moses couldn't do. Abraham couldn't do that. The prophets couldn't do. David couldn't do it. Hezekiah couldn't do it. Josiah, Zerubbabel, Yeshua the high priest who comes back in the in the restoration.

None of them could do it until Jesus comes and then he doesn't. And that's why we need to remember this. There's a sense in which the Old Testament people of God can be called Israel, and the New Testament people of God can be called the church. But we should remember this. It's not that. Or the Old Testament was Plan A but it failed. And so now God started plan B. That was never the case. Plan A succeeded, but it did not succeed. An Old Testament. Israel succeeded in the righteous Israelite who ran the race. Who went into the Holy of Holies. Who tore down the temple curtain on our behalf. And you get to be in righteous Israel. Two if you are in him by faith.

You see, Paul is telling us this Old Testament is preparing us to receive and understand who Jesus is. So when you go back and you read in the Old Testament, as we're going to read tonight about God cursing and blessing his people, depending on how they respond to him in faith, in places like warfare and in nature. And that's really kind of takes up all of the judgments that you get in the Old Testament.

You're either going to be judged. Judgments and blessings come in warfare and in nature. Either you're losing battles or you're winning battles. Either you're having famines and droughts and

pestilence, or you're not having famine and droughts and pestilence. You're having abundance. Oh, and having babies too. That's another one that would be a part of nature. Okay, when you read that, if you think, well, that's what the Bible is all about, then whether or not I win wars and whether or not I get sick and whether or not I have babies, if you read it that way, then you misunderstand what the Old Testament is doing.

The Old Testament is using those things as a tutor, as a guardian, to help you understand the much greater blessings and the much worse curses that await us in light of the spiritual realities of how God is redeeming us. The curse is much worse than anything you see in the Old Testament the final judgment, eternal damnation. It's much worse than anything you see happen to Amalekites.

Okay? And yet the blessings are much greater. They're much greater than having an abundant crop. One year we're getting to have one more baby. Okay, that is a tutor. It's a guardian. It's a trainer. I think of it like this. I think about when I played football growing up. And what do we do during football practice? Okay, there was a brief period of time when I was a wide receiver, very brief because I was not fast enough to be a wide receiver, but we would go out and we would often run into high leg exercises right where they would have either tires or bungee cords laid out. And you do high leg exercises, right, to try to get your agility up. Okay. It would be odd though, if then in a game on Saturday or on Friday night, someone were to go out for a pass, catch the pass turn. And in between him and the end zone was a set of tires that he had to do high leg exercises to right. That would be weird. That would be inappropriate. Think of the Old Testament that way. It's like the exercise. It's like the bungee cords. It's getting you ready. So when the real thing comes, you'll understand. When the real one comes, you'll go, oh, that's. That's why he died. That's what he was doing when he did the when he did the Beatitudes.

That's why he had to ascend to heaven and sit at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, and send the spirit. That's what it means when you think about it. We don't even know what Jesus Christ means in the New Testament unless we go back to the old. Now we're in the New Testament. Does it define Messiah or Christ?

We have to go back to the tutor said to help me tutor, help me understand. And that's how we find out how Jesus is Christ. You see, when we're reading these things as we read tonight, don't just read. This is like, oh, look at these harsh things that were said long ago. These are for you. You should think, what?

What does this mean for me? So look at how Amos talks of the Northern Kingdom. He's dealing with really four different issues in this chapter. Today's dealing with the faithlessness of the women and the sin, verses one through three, the faithlessness of the women. Secondly, with

the flagrant see of false worship, that's in verses four through five. Then the forbearance of the Lord, verses six through 11, and then finally the finality of judgment.

So the faithlessness of the women, the flagrant see of false worship, the forbearance of the Lord and the finality of judgment. Let's start with the faithlessness of the women. Verses one through three. You're going to have to take my word on it. And this is just a cultural difference. Okay? You want to hear this is kind of a missional thing that's happened.

This is what happens when you go on a mission. Missionary work. Same thing happens when you're reading the Bible. There are things in Scripture that do not make sense. They're offensive to our cultural sensibilities. And we have to get outside of our cultural sensibilities to recognize this. Can you believe this? That phrase "cows of Bashan" is not a slur. That is not a slur, that is not calling them ugly and fat or something like that. The point here, and we know it because we read the rest of this chapter. The point here is this the cows of Bashan have been given everything, the women of Bashan, because they live in Bashan in this. And this is really pronounced Bashan.

They live in the northern kingdom, up around Samaria, in the high country, where there's fertile fields. Okay? As a result, the cows there are quite large, and they're plump, and that's a sign of the Lord's blessing to them. As a matter of fact, the fruitfulness of Bashan is mentioned in elsewhere Deuteronomy 32:14. Look how the Lord blesses Bashan.

Ezekiel 39:18. Psalm 22:12. All different places where the mountains of Bashan are seen as a blessed place. What he's saying is this to these women, he's saying, you've been given everything. I look at you. Look at how healthy you are. Look at how abundant your life is. And yet, even though the Lord has given you every good thing, you've used it only over and over again to turn towards more and more corruption.

You might say, hey, prophet of the Lord, why are you coming down so hard on the girls? Okay, let me just point something out. You have different places in the given the prophets where they will pass. Another example would be in Isaiah chapter three verse 16 to 40, where he stops for a moment and he says, let me tell you about the women in the city of Jerusalem, because they're just as bad as the guys are.

But that also reminds us of this. Most of the time they're talking about the guys. Okay, this is a weird part where the patriarchy kind of helps you out here. Ladies, you don't get as much judgment as the guys get in the Old Testament prophets. You get a little bit. They will pause every once in a while. So now let me just tell you something.

It's not as if the women were doing it right while the men were blowing it. It's not. It's not as if the women were righteous. Sometimes that's the case. You have those Abigail and neighbor, all

types that happen. But oftentimes the sin of the men is shared by the women. Notice that their rebellion here is both beneath them and it's over them.

They are both abusing those who are beneath them. The poor, they're kind of stomping on them. Remember we read last week how they trot over the bones of the poor. We see that the women are doing the same, but notice they're also then going to their husbands and they're commanding them to help them in their own self-indulgence.

They're saying, bring come so that we might drink. Okay? The prophets will often put the sin in the mouth of the person who they're bringing the judgment against, and we're left to kind of discern what's happening. Well, what are they? They're bossing around everyone. They are they are, exploiting everyone around them, both the poor and the more powerful.

All are victims around their kind of flagrant self-indulgence.

But he says in verse two, the days are coming. Beware, beware. Are you women who have received every blessing and yet you still oppress? The days are coming.

This is drawing attention to that thing that the prophets will come back to, and Amos will put in fine relief in a later chapter that there is this idea with all of the prophets. Remember that projector that this projected ahead of us, that screen, that one thing that's going to happen when the Lord returns, when his day happens.

Remember I said, you can call it that day, the latter day, the last days, the Yoma deny the day of the Lord. Notice when he says, your days are coming. There's a time that is coming when the Lord will bring justice. That future day when the exploiter, the oppressor, will be judged. It's a matter of fact. There's three things that happen in that day.

The wicked will be judged. The righteous remnant. Okay. The righteous remnant will be blessed. They will be preserved. And the nations. This is always the day of the Lord is always a global event. The nations will also come and watch and they will be winnowed out. The remnant that are amongst the nations will be brought in, and the rest will be left out.

Here we're getting a highlight of the judgment of the wicked of Israel. The days are coming when these women themselves will be led away with hooks. Okay, now this again, this kind of idea of led away with hooks, with fishing hooks may be connected to this idea that oftentimes when you take someone into slavery, it could either be the hook that is put around their, their handcuffs, their shackles as they are dragged out in a straight line.

You notice that they're being taken through the breaches in the wall that has been torn down by the army. They're being taken out in handcuffs, perhaps, or elsewhere. And we just know this because it's described. They'll also sometimes hook the nose through or put a hook through the nose and take you that way. And of course, you don't resist, right?

Your hands are bound and there's a hook in your nose, okay. You're just going to walk very obediently wherever that person on the other end of that hook is guiding you. And he says that that to these women you've been given so much, but you still oppressed days are coming. He says. These are coming when you will be led away with hooks.

You'll be frog marched out of Jerusalem in a single final line. The walls of the city of Samaria will be brought low and will be destroyed. So he starts with the faithlessness of the women in verses one through three. But then he moves on to the flagrant see of false worship. Now notice he begins a new oracle, a new series of oracles here, as he goes along, and it's oracles at all end with this phrase.

And you did not return to me. Okay. Excuse me. I know the ends with this phrase, declares the Lord rather. Okay. So notice what he's beginning. Now is this kind of oracle drawing his attention to the false worship that's happening in Bethel is the one that he mentions here. Bethel and then later Gilgal, which are these high places.

And we talked about them last week. These are places where the Lord is being worshiped. Perhaps, though not always, usually there's some kind of synchronistic worship going on there. They're worshiping the Lord plus another deity. But it's a place that is not Jerusalem. Okay, now, by the way, there's nothing wrong with Bethel. If we go back and we read the Old Testament, we see that Bethel is a place of national importance.

As a matter of fact, Jacob is there and he anoints a stone in Bethel and he says, this is a special place. He says, this seems to be a gate of the gods, okay. A Bible, that's what Bible means. Gate of the gods. It's a it's a kind of, it's a kind of place where you might meet God.

It commemorates a place, commemorates a work that God had done for his people. We see in judges that they gather together at Bethel to seek the Lord. We find out later in Samuel that Samuel used Bethel as a place where he would judge. He would go there and he would hear cases. It's also interesting there that he didn't just go to Bethel.

He also went to Gilgal and Mizpah and other cities up in the north where he would judge. And what seems to have happened is that when the northern kingdom was separated from the southern kingdom, and Jeroboam had to shore up support for the northern kingdom, he said, don't you? He knew that if everybody for three times a year had to go back down to Jerusalem to do their festivals, he knew that if that happened, that would hurt their political solidarity.

So what did he do? He said, I'm going to build Little Jerusalem's in these important places of Israelite history. And so he goes to Bethel and he goes to Gilgal, and he goes to Dan, and he builds little, little temples. There are altars there. He tells the people, he said, you can come and you can worship here, just like you would if you were in Jerusalem.

Now I'd actually point out before the temple is established in Jerusalem, before, David brings the tabernacle up to Jerusalem, there's nothing inappropriate about worshipping the Lord in these places. And that's why you see Israelites doing that. But what happens is that just as the Lord tells us in the book of Deuteronomy, when I get you into the land, I'm going to put your I'm going to put my presence.

I'm going to put my name in a particular city. And when I put my name there, that's where you will come and worship me as one people, right? You'll be united around my presence in Jerusalem. Now, he doesn't say the name Jerusalem. He just says, the place where I put my name.

So think about what's going on here. There's a change that happens when the cultic center that when the religious center, the worship center, is brought to Jerusalem, it means that's where we must worship. That's why it's important for Solomon to finish the temple in quick time. Problem that he slows down and he doesn't finish it, but rather his heart is drawn after his wives, shows us that he's no longer searching after the Lord because he doesn't realize the importance of completing the temple.

So the people can come and worship their. But once the temple is built, you can't go back to the high places. You can't go establish a separate cult there, a separate sect there, because the Lord has said where his name is, and that's where they are to worship. You see the sin, the false worship that is taking place in Gilgal and Bethel in Indian.

It's not just about the object of their worship that we're going to find out that it is that too. They are worshipping the bails there. But it's not just about the object of their worship, it's about the manner of their worship. As a matter of fact, they're committing a similar sin. I would argue to assume that Christians were committing early on in church history, and still do from time to time, where they misunderstand the redemptive history is changed.

Okay, once the temple is in Jerusalem, you don't worship at the high places. Once Jesus has come and fulfilled the old covenant, you don't make people go through the covenant sacraments of the Old Covenant, right? This is what Paul is calling out Peter for by associating and teaching alongside the Judaizers. He's saying, don't you understand? For us to go back to the Old covenant is for us to reject the progressive order of the covenants that the Lord is establishing.

Once we have Christ the High Priest, we don't want to go back to the old circumcision. Now we have baptism. A similar thing is happening here because the Lord has placed his name in Jerusalem. It's inappropriate. It's even sinful to offer up sacrifices no matter how many you offer up. And notice what he says here they are offering quite a lot of sacrifices.

They're doing, all of the regular sacrifices. One needs to do on any given day. What does he say? The guy in this call to worship. It's a mockery of a call to worship. Come to Bethel and transgress. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days, and sacrifice of thanksgiving of that of which is leavened and proclaimed. Freewill offerings. Publish them. Right. What are they doing? They're saying, come up here and offer all of your sacrifices. Do it just like you're in Jerusalem, but you're not in Jerusalem. And so these sacrifices are not going to profit you anything, rather, they are.

Okay, this is a common theme amongst the prophets. It goes all the way back to Samuel confronting Saul in first Samuel 15 of Saul is coming back, having taken the hoard of the plunder from the Amalekites of the while the Lord said, no, you must destroy them all. And he still has the plunder.

And he goes, oh, I was going to sacrifice it anyways. And that's where Samuel calls him out and says, do you think the Lord wants your sacrifices? Do you think he wants the fat of rams? Do you think he cares about rams?

He wants you to believe what you have faith. When Samuel says that, I just want to hold this. This is the thesis argument. Just let me put this out there. When Samuel says that line in first Samuel, chapter 15, verses 22 to 23 says, has the Lord has great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as the is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you've rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you soul from being king. When Samuel says that to Saul, okay, he is laying out what will become the job description of every single other prophet that we see in the Old Testament.

This is their main point. Don't magnify religiosity to cover over a lack of faith. Don't go up to the high places and offer every kind of sacrifice just to cover over the fact that you're doing false worship. Okay, don't go into the temple and pray loudly, right? Says our prophet Jesus Christ. And pray loudly, but rather go in and humbly with very few words in private, not even looking like you're.

If you're fasting, don't even look like it. Like clean yourself up, put some makeup on, look nice. Okay? Why? Because it's about what's going on in your heart. Don't be a hypocrite. As Paul says, when you take the Lord's Supper, don't go in there and make a show of it, but not be able to discern the body of Christ.

What does he say? Many of you are doing that, and that's why many of you are sick, even unto death, says Paul. Notice this is not just an Old Testament idea. When you are using the religiosity of the covenants to cover over a lack of faith, when you come in here and you say, in

Christ alone, and you sing those songs and you think about those things and you think, well, because I went through the motions, because I did my Christian thing on Sunday morning, I can now go out and do whatever I want the rest of the week.

When you do that, your worship is not a blessing to you. It becomes a judgment on you. See why it's important. We come in on Sunday morning and we say, prepare your hearts. We don't want this to be a place of hypocrisy. We don't want this to be a place where whitewashed tombs are repainted, even though they cover over dead men's bones.

That's not what we're here for. So? So what is he saying? He's saying you come in, you're saying let's do all the sacrifices. Let's do all the things we're supposed to do. And as you do, you increase your transgression. So the faithfulness of faithlessness, rather of the women gives rise to or rather leads us into this oracle against the flagrant sin of the false worship.

Finally, in verses 6 to 11, we see the forbearance of the Lord. Now I know if you read this quickly, it sounds like the Lord is just laying out judgments against Israel. Okay, but we're going to get four, five or oracles between 6 and 11. These are five oracles of how the Lord has actually been merciful. Okay. I want you to be able to make sure you see the logic here.

The first one is this he said you had cleanness of teeth, and of course, all of us who are raised and modern in a world of modern dentistry, with the cleanness of teeth, that's a good thing. No, it's not a good thing if you're talking about food, right? You're talking about getting nourishment. Okay? You want your teeth to have food stuck in it, because it means that you've been eating.

If you have clean teeth in the ancient world, it means you're not eating. Said I gave you cleanness of teeth. That's a famine. But I did not destroy you. But you still do not return to me. So each one of these lines ends this way. I gave you clean this of teeth and all of your cities, and lack of bread and all of your places.

Yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. We have these five oracles that all end with, yet you did not return to me. I put drought in the cities, rationing out water for the harvest time so that many of your harvest were wrecked. You had enough. I didn't give you total drought. I'd give you rain in this city or in that city.

You could still go March 1st city to another and ask for more water. So you could drink. But you're not satisfied because you're just getting a little rationing of it. Because that city has to feed and water its own people. Okay, I didn't destroy you, but I made you struggle. And yet, even though you had the law, even though you had the prophets, even though you had Moses telling you that this is exactly how it's going to be, you still did not return to me.

I put blight and disease and swarm on your crops. I gave you warfare and disease. They always go hand in hand, losing battles, losing your young men to war, losing them also to pestilence. They always go hand in hand from the battle of Car Commission, 605 BCE to the Battle of Hastings in 1066 AD, from the battle of the Somme to the war in Vietnam.

Disease has always attended to warfare. The Lord says, I took some of your young men away. Not all of them. I'll let you taste what it's like to lose in battle. And yet you did not return to me. He finally reaches his culmination here when he says, I even treated some of you like Sodom and Gomorrah. Now you have to understand for the prophets, Sodom and Gomorrah.

They fill the space that in modern day Nazis fill. Okay? Kind of like they're the worst of the worst. They're evil. If you have a movie and Nazis get killed, nobody feels bad about them. That's how Sodom and Gomorrah is in the Old Testament, okay? They are the epitome of evil. They're the worst there can be, can be.

And so, Amos, perhaps first, perhaps before Isaiah is one of the first to liken the people of God to Sodom and Gomorrah. Later on in Isaiah one, Isaiah will do the same. You'll say, if the Lord hadn't left a few survivors, a few remnant, then you would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah. And then he goes on to say, come to think of it, you are Sodom and Gomorrah.

The idea being this, don't think that the worst of them are the ones who are out there.

It's worse to have received the law. It's worse to receive the prophets. It's worse to have received the priests and the priestly covenantal arrangements that we have in the law, and still to reject the Lord. That's even worse than if you were Sodom and Gomorrah. Notice how Jesus applies this. And interestingly, he applies this to villages who hear the gospel, who are given the gift of evangelism.

Do you know that when you're doing evangelism, you're giving a gift to your neighbor? But it's a dangerous gift because if they reject it, as Christ says, it'll be worse for them than it was for Sodom and Gomorrah. He's using Isaiah and he's using Amos to apply it to us today.

He says, some of you were treated like Sodom and Gomorrah, and some of you were plucked up like a brand out of the fire. In other words, some of you were like Lotte, you're the righteous remnant who I preserved. And yet what we're now used to, the phrase we know where he's going, and yet you still did not return to me, declares the Lord.

And so he says, the judgment that Moses warned you about in Deuteronomy 28:29 and 30. In Leviticus 26, that judgment is coming. I've been disciplining you like a loving father. I've been trying to draw you out so that you would return to me, that you would come back because I love to show you mercy. I love like the father receiving back the prodigal son.

I love to bless Israel. And yet at each time I disciplined you, you turned further and further away. Therefore, he says, prepare to meet your God. Now we have to be careful here, because this word meet doesn't just mean, you know, prepare to kind of get to know your God or to become acquainted with your God. This is a very specific word that we find throughout the Old Testament, always talking about a confrontation.

If you want to use older language like the King James, you'd say something like this. It's not prepare to meet your God, okay? It's prepared to be provoked by your God. Actually, referencing back to Leviticus 26, where this passage is used over and over and over again to talk about the coming judgment of exile. Okay. In Leviticus 26, verse 21, 23 and 24, 27, 28, 40 and 41, it means something more like provoke or to use the modern parlance, okay, to meet your God means to step up to your God.

You stepping up to God be careful. I'm going to step up to you. If you step up to me, says the Lord. I think about this in Leviticus. If you step up to me and will not listen to me, I will continue striking you sevenfold for your sins. You can translate it. Get in your face, right? If by this discipline you are not turned to me, but continue to get in my face, says the Lord, then I will walk.

I will get in your face, and I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins. But if in spite of this, this is verse 27 and 28 of 26, if in spite of this you will not listen to me, but you continue to step up to me, then I will step up to you in fury, and I will discipline you sevenfold for your sins.

You understand what's going on here? He says. I've tried to warn you. I've tried to give you every off ramp you could take. You could possibly have, and you keep coming up and getting in my face with your sins, with your transgressions, with your wickedness, with your oppression and your exploitation. And so I will turn around now, as I warned you I would.

And now I'm going to provoke you. I'm now going to step up to you. I offered you the opportunity to learn by faith, but now you're going to learn by experience. And that's where the chapter goes. The Lord is telling us through Amos, learn by faith. Don't wait to learn by experience. Don't wait to get caught right. Don't wait to destroy your life with sin and turning away from the Lord.

But rather learn by faith. Read the word, hear it, respond. Okay, that's the lesson of Amos this evening. Now, we will pick up next week, and we're going to see, because he's now going to start unpacking a grand, redemptive historical picture of what the Lord has in store for Israel, both the blessings and the curses that are to come.

But let's close in prayer.

Heavenly father, we do lift up this time to you as we consider these things. Help us, Lord, to understand. I pray that we would be quickened by them, that we would find ourselves chastened in the teachings of your word, that we would find ourselves being drawn to you irrevocably by repentance and faith. Dear Lord, you are a God of mercy. You give us chances over and over and over again. We thank you that you do not bring us severe judgment and wrath upon us each time, but that you are merciful and gentle. You discipline us like a loving father. We pray, Lord, that we would hear and respond to that discipline with obedience and faith. In Christ's name. Amen.