

The Second Sermon of Judgment to the Northern Kingdom

Amos 4

Amos 4: 1-5 – *“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 wine, let us drink!’”* ² *The Lord God has sworn by His holiness: ‘Behold, the days shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.* ³ *You will go out through broken walls, each one straight ahead of her, and you will be cast into Harmon,”* says the Lord. ⁴ *“Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. ⁵ Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven. Proclaim and announce the freewill offerings; for this you love, you children of Israel!”* says the Lord God.”

Background Notes

After the death of King Solomon, the United Kingdom of Israel divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The first king of the northern kingdom was Jeroboam I (not the same King Jeroboam who reigned at the time of Amos.) Jeroboam I was not a good king. In fact, there were **no** good kings in the entire existence of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Scripture described Jeroboam I as “the king who made Israel to sin,” because he set up a new system of idolatrous worship in the northern kingdom. The Temple of the Lord was located in Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah, but Jeroboam didn’t want his people going to the southern kingdom. To prevent them from going south to worship at the Temple, Jeroboam I set up two shrines - one at Dan (in the far north of Israel), and one at Bethel (near the southern border with Judah). In each shrine, he placed a golden calf as the focus of worship, and he set up his own priesthood to attend to these shrines. (Read about this in 1 Kings 12:28-29.)

How was it possible that this gross idolatry could happen in so short a time? The answer: idolatry had already begun to creep into the United Kingdom when King Solomon had married many foreign wives. Solomon allowed his foreign wives to bring their gods into the country with them - and he actually worshiped these foreign gods (1 Kings 11).

When King Jeroboam I set up the idolatrous shrines, many of the godly people in the northern ten tribes of Israel migrated to live in the south, to worship the Lord God of Israel at His Temple in Jerusalem. That’s why, in a previous Talk, I said that all twelve tribes are represented in the Jewish people today. There are no “Lost Tribes” of Israel.

Amos and Jeroboam II lived about 175 years after the reign of Jeroboam I. The times were prosperous in Israel, but social injustice is rampant and idolatry continued. Note the irony in verses 4 -5: *“Come to Bethel and transgress* [one of the

golden calves was located at Bethel]. *At Gilgal multiply transgression* [another shrine was set up at Gilgal]. *Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days.* ⁵ *Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven. Proclaim and announce the freewill offerings, for this you love, you children of Israel!" says the Lord God."*

In other words, the people were going through the motions of religion, but true worship of the Lord was not in it (just like a lot of people today). Therefore their false worship was transgression and sin, and the idolatrous altars at Bethel would be destroyed. Look back at Amos 3:14: *"I will also visit destruction on the altars of Bethel..."*

God called the prophet Amos to expose all these sins of the northern kingdom, and to pronounce God's judgment. He did so in eight prophecies, three sermons, and six visions.

Doctrinal Points

1. God expects men and women to be informed and concerned about the poor and needy.

Can you imagine Amos beginning his sermon with the opening lines of verse 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 wine, let us drink!"*

That certainly was **no** compliment for the wealthy and pleasure-loving women of Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom! The *"cows of Bashan"* were well fed and well-tended cattle from the lush area in northeast Israel, the Golan Heights today. These women's sin was not that they were wealthy. Their sin was that their wealth was obtained by oppressing the poor and crushing the needy - and these selfish, luxury-loving women didn't care! Even though they had plenty of time and money on their hands and they could have helped the needy people, they were more interested in preserving their own selfish and luxurious lifestyle.

Notice – Amos 3:15 says that they had big houses and vacation homes, but no concern for the poor and needy! And Amos 3:12 says, *"In the corner of a bed and on the edge of a couch!"* Because of their prosperity, Amos implied that the people in the north could sleep on just a little corner of their luxuriously oversized furniture - but they had no concern for the poor and needy. How true that is today - even for many Christians!

Well, God held them accountable. They were about to be judged. When the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, about 40 years after this prophecy, the captives were literally led away with hooks through their noses. The cruel Assyrian practice of dragging captives away with hooks is well documented by archaeology.

Through the book of Amos, God's Word is teaching us that God expects women – and men! - to be ***informed and concerned about the poor and needy***. Although the Bible teaches that the primary responsibility for wives and mothers is to care for their homes and families, women should not ignore or be unconcerned about the plight of the poor and

needy. If a woman has time on her hands (for example, when her children are grown), and if she has the means (as was certainly the case of the wealthy women of Samaria), then God expects women (and men, too!) to be concerned and involved in helping needy people. God expects **all believers** - not just the women, and not just the church leaders - to be informed and concerned about the poor and needy.

Margie and I were really pleased when we heard that two of our young grandchildren, Callie and Connor, were painting up a lot of pictures so they could put on an art show. They explained that they wanted to sell the pictures and give the money to the poor people who had no houses. Fantastic idea! If only we all could have that attitude - not just at ages 7 and 4 years, but all the way through our lives. God expects all of us - men and women, and children as well - to be informed and concerned about the poor and needy.

2. God expects backsliders to return, as a result of hard times.

Amos 4:6-13 - *“Also I gave you 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. ⁷ “I also withheld rain from you. When there were still three months to the harvest I made it rain on one city, but I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. 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. ⁹ “I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locust devoured them - yet you have not returned to Me,” says the Lord. ¹⁰ “I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt. Your young men I killed with a sword, 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. ¹¹ “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. ¹² “Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel. Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!” ¹³ For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind, who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, who treads the high places of the earth - The Lord God of hosts is His name.”*

Although Israel was experiencing times of great prosperity when Amos gave this sermon, this was not always the norm in their past. During the over-200-year existence of the northern kingdom of Israel, God had periodically allowed hard times to come upon them. God wanted the hard times to turn the people around, and bring them back to Him.

Over the years, God had sent famines: “*cleanness of teeth*” and “*empty stomachs*” and

“*lack of bread*” (v6). Over the years, God had sent droughts (v7-8). Think of the long drought during King Ahab’s day. Sometimes God sent rain only on certain cities to show that He was the One who controlled the situation. Over the years, Israel had experienced natural disasters and plagues and military defeat – yet they didn’t realize that only by God’s mercy they were not consumed (v9-11). They were like “*brands plucked from the fire*”- the fire that would have devoured them had the Lord, in His patience and mercy, not preserved them by plucking them from the flames (v11).

Those hard times should certainly have reminded Israel of the plagues in Egypt. The hard times should have reminded them of the warnings God included in His Law. God declared that if His people followed Him, they would be blessed, but if they forsook Him and His Law, they would experience hard times. (Read Deuteronomy 28-29.)

God expected that those hard times would prompt His backsliding people to return to Him, but they did not return. Notice the phrase, *“Yet you have not returned to Me, says the Lord”* was repeated five times (v6, 8, 9, 10, and 11)! Because they would not return, they would face God’s judgment: *“Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”*

Do you see the teaching of this portion of God’s Word? As God used hard times to speak to backslidden Israel, so He can use hard times to speak to backslidden believers today. Proverbs 13:15 says, *“The way of the transgressor [or unfaithful person] is hard.”*

Are you in a backslidden condition right now? Is God possibly allowing hard times to come into your life to turn you around? Don’t ignore God’s warning message! God uses hard times to prompt the backslider to return to Him.

Practical Application

Are you prepared to meet your God?

“Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!” (v12). God’s warning to Israel certainly applies us today. There’s no question about it - **you will** stand before your Maker someday. In fact, we **all** will stand before God - the God who created all and knows all (v13). Hebrews 9:27: *“As it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”*

Are you prepared to meet your God? If you’re not a true believer in Jesus Christ, you are not prepared. You must acknowledge that you a sinner and trust in the Savior, Jesus Christ. He is your only hope of salvation. There’s no other way!

Christians - are you prepared to meet your God? Not in regard to salvation - praise the Lord, that is settled forever. But Romans 14 says that our lives will be reviewed before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and each one of us will give an account of himself to God. What will you say when you give your account? Are you prepared to meet your God?

I used to think that we would just stand there and the Lord would do all the talking, but that’s not what Romans 14:10-12 says. *“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So each of us shall give account of himself to God.”*

Is your account ready? Are you prepared to meet your God?