

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 7, Amos, Religious Sins

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 7 on the book of Amos, Religious Sins.

As we are studying the book of Amos, one of the things that I wanted to do was to help us to understand, before we worked even chapter by chapter through the book, was to understand some of the major themes that are there and the concerns of the prophet and the specific reasons why God is going to bring the judgment of the Assyrian invasion and military defeat and exile on the people.

In our last lesson, we talked about the social sins that were prevalent and prominent in eighth century Israel. We saw that Amos is preaching a warning to people that have become complacent in their wealth. That's become the focus, the goal, the God of their lives even.

We talked about the fact that this materialism and greed had led them to practice oppression and social injustice. And so, Amos gives a warning to those who are not taking care of their neighbors. Between the sessions, Dr. Hildebrandt and I were talking, and it's probably good most of the time that that's not being recorded, but he reminded me of a very good example from church history of how we combine both preaching of the gospel and social concern.

George Whitefield is a great example of that. There was probably no one that was more passionate about sharing the gospel and who had the opportunity in many ways to preach the gospel. He did that in numerous contexts, but yet he was also a prominent part of his ministry was raising money for orphans in Georgia.

And I think that gives us a model. There's a tendency in the church either to put an emphasis entirely upon social ministry and taking care of the needs of the poor, but ultimately that is abandoning in our responsibility to take care of people's spiritual needs. But I think the other side of that is that sometimes we want to preach the gospel and talk to people about their lost souls, but we need to care about their bodies and their physical needs and their social needs.

And God calls us to holistic ministry, and the mission of the church is both to preach the gospel and to love their neighbors. And the specifics of how we do that, the word of God, I think gives us the principles. And then we, as individual Christians and as Christian communities, make the decisions about how we'll be involved in that.

But the Old Testament informs our ethic and our ethos. It informs our values. And I think that's part of the reason why preaching and teaching the Torah and teaching and preaching the prophets is very important for our culture today.

Those social sins are important. There's a third theme, and there's a third emphasis in the book of Amos. And it's more the focus on Israel's religious sins.

And that's where I would like us to turn our attention today. Amos is going to confront the fact that they have a false understanding of what worship involves, and they also have a defective understanding of who God is and what God is like. Again, the social sins and the religious sins are not separate from each other.

In fact, they're interrelated and connected because it's their social injustice. It's their greed and their materialism that, in many ways, leads to a defective view of worship and also a defective understanding of God. Amos not only gives a warning to people who have become complacent in their wealth, he not only gives a warning to people who are practicing injustice toward their neighbors and the poor and the needy, he also gives a warning to people who are going through the motions of worship.

And so, I think that's a third theme and a third emphasis, the religious sins of eighth-century Israel. The people of Israel at this stage in their history have become people who are going through the motions of worship. A key passage that I think emphasizes this in the book of Amos is found again in Amos chapter 5, and we spent some time in that chapter in the last lesson.

But I would like to look at Amos chapter 5, verses 21 to 24. The Lord is going to say this about the worship of his people, and what the Lord actually says here is somewhat shocking and surprising. He says, I hate, and I despise your feast.

I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them. And the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them.

Take away from me the noise of your songs. To the melody of your harps, I will not listen. The people of Israel were actively involved in worship.

We're going to find that their sanctuaries at places like Dan and Bethel and Beersheba and Gilgal were important to them as a nation. But as they were going through all of this activity, they were worshiping God in a way that was insincere and a way that was not pleasing to God. I think the extent of their religious activity is reflected in the fact that the prophet specifically mentions seven different things that they do here.

And so, kind of the number of seven, kind of the idea of a complete listing. They do everything that you could possibly do in terms of religious ritual and worship, but the Lord says, I hate it. And I hate your music.

I hate your feast. I don't take delight in the solemn assemblies. You think that you're gathering to worship the Lord.

I don't want any part of it. And God is even going to say, take away the noise of your songs. This is not because they've had some bad Christmas cantatas.

It's because God is deeply displeased with the worship that is going on there. What's going on? As we look at the broader history of the Old Testament and gain a broader understanding of Israelite worship, Israelite worship in the North was corrupted for several different reasons. And there's a long history that goes in this.

Jeroboam I was the king who had established the northern kingdom of Israel. He broke away from Rehoboam. He broke away from the house of David and established his own kingdom.

In the process of doing that, rather than trusting God to establish the kingdom in the way that he had promised, Jeroboam essentially established his own system of worship as a way of trying to maintain the loyalty of the people in the northern kingdom. To prevent them from going to Jerusalem and worship and perhaps being drawn back into the sphere of the Davidic kings, he came up with his own religious system. This was something that ultimately displeased God significantly.

God had promised him at the beginning that if you'll obey me, I'll bless you. God would have set this up as kind of a counter kingdom. But because of these religious innovations, God ultimately pronounces judgment on the house of Jeroboam, and God warns that in the future, there's even going to be a king by the name of Josiah who will destroy and burn the altars and the sanctuaries that Jeroboam has created.

Jeroboam did several things. These were his own religious innovations. They directly violated things that God had told the Israelites to do.

The first thing that Jeroboam did is that he established two separate places of worship. One of them was at Dan in the northern part of his kingdom. The other part was in Bethel.

Worship was made convenient for the people. You don't need to go down to Israel. You don't need to leave your homes.

You can stay in the land. Those of you that are in the north, you can worship at Dan. Those of you that are in the south, you can worship at Bethel.

This was a violation of what God had established as the right way to worship in Deuteronomy 12 where the people were only to worship at the place where God had placed his name. That did not necessarily mean in the context of Deuteronomy 12 there's only going to be one place, but God specifically had to be the one that initiated where that was to be. Ultimately for the people of Israel, the place where God had put his name was Jerusalem.

That had been established by the time of Solomon. Solomon had built the temple. God dwelled in a special way with his people there.

Jeroboam violates that. He sets up his own sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel. Again, that's inconsistent with what God had instructed the people to do in Deuteronomy 12.

A second innovation on the part of Jeroboam was that Jeroboam had placed in both of these sanctuaries a golden calf as an image of God. Again, this was not a false god. This was not an idol.

This was not a foreign god, but this was an idolatrous image of God himself. Probably the iconography; what this conveys is either the strength of God or the fertility of God. The imagery may even convey that God is the invisible rider on the calf.

We don't know exactly what this conveys, but using this image in a way that again was not sanctioned by God, any type of image that is used to represent the invisible God, ultimately detracts and demeans his glory. It opens the way to other types of idolatry that are going to happen in Israel's history, and the Lord was displeased with this. Jeroboam, in a sense, becomes like Aaron, who created the golden calf in Exodus 32.

That was not one of the great moments in Israel's history, and for some reason, Jeroboam, because he doesn't fully and truly know the Lord in the right way, he believes that this is an acceptable form of worship. This violates the principles of Deuteronomy 13, which says that Israel was not to worship images, they were not to worship idols, false gods, or not, and they were not to make images of God himself. Again, the only image that had been approved by God was the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the footstool of God's throne.

But there is a resistance in Israel to any type of representation by God in the form of an idol or an image. Jeroboam corrupted Israel's worship right at the very beginning by introducing that. Because of these religious innovations, one of the critiques of all of the kings in the northern kingdom, zero of them in the book of Kings do what is acceptable and right in the eyes of God.

Even Jehu, who carried out the purge of Baal worship later on, did evil in the eyes of the Lord because they continued in the sins of their father, Jeroboam. The things that we're talking about are the sins of Jeroboam. Jeroboam did a couple of other things.

He appointed priests that were not Levites. Again, violation of the worship principles in the book of Deuteronomy. He established holy days that were not established or sanctioned by God.

I think we have a great example in the life of Jeroboam of a man who believes that he can worship God on his own terms. God always demanded of the people of Israel they were to worship him on his terms. I think we have a great example of that going all the way back to the book of Exodus when God establishes the tabernacle.

That is to be the place of worship. That's the place where God's glory is going to dwell. Right in the midst of those instructions, we have Aaron creating the golden calf.

We're going to worship God in our way and on our terms. That brings judgment and God's anger to the people. The sins of Jeroboam the first did exactly the same for the northern kingdom.

Amos, as he's a prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah and goes to the north, he understands that apostasy. That apostasy was ingrained into the worship of Israel from the very beginning. There's a problem with Israel's worship.

A second problem, again from the history of Israel as Amos steps into the context of ministry in the northern kingdom, was the idolatry of Ahab and Jezebel that actually made Baal worship an acceptable part of Israelites' worship. Jezebel, because she is from Tyre and from the area where the Canaanites worship Baal, her father is a king there, Ahab likely marrying her for political reasons. She is going to promote Baal worship as the official state religion of the northern kingdom of Israel.

1 Kings chapter 16 is going to say that Ahab was the worst king that Israel ever had. He did more evil than any of the other kings. That's the primary focus of kings.

In many ways, Ahab was probably militarily, politically an effective leader. Economically, things went well for Israel, at least for a time in his kingdom. But the primary thing that Kings wants us to understand is that he was the worst king that Israel ever had because he advanced apostasy and he advanced the worship of Baal.

As we work through the history of Israel, even though Elijah and Elisha and King Jehu came along in many ways had done things that had specifically attempted to purge Baal worship from Israel, the practice of Baal worship, the introduction of pagan fertility rites, the worship of the Asherahs, the female fertility goddesses, that had

become a part of Israelite worship. By the time of Amos and as we move to the 8th century, there was Baal worship. There were those who worshiped Baal.

There were those that worshiped Yahweh. But probably what we have in most of the sanctuaries in the northern kingdom is that there were a syncretistic mix of elements of Yahweh worship combined with Baal worship. We'll talk about this more when we get to the book of Hosea and what Hosea has to say about all of this.

But Amos from the southern kingdom of Judah, a worshiper of God who understands the importance of the Jerusalem temple, who has an orthodox understanding of God, he steps into this mess where there's this syncretistic mix. There are elements of Yahweh worship. There's Baal worship.

There's pagan fertility rites. There's the worship of the golden calf. As Amos makes repeated references to the various sanctuaries and the things that are going on there, there are many aspects of the worship itself that were not pleasing to God.

However, in Amos chapter 5, what Amos is focusing on is not the problem of the worship of the golden calves. That's going to be mentioned in a couple of other places. It's not going to be the worship of Baal.

But the real problem in Amos chapter 5 is the insincerity of the hearts of the people as they worship God. You're doing all of these religious feasts and festivals and observances and rites. Seven of them are mentioned to give us kind of a complete number.

But the reason that God hates them, again, is not just the syncretistic elements. The reason that God specifically hates them in this passage is that their lifestyle does not match up with their religious practices. So, when we talk about going through the motions of worship, as Christians, we might think of it in this way.

I've done this in my own life. I go to church on Sunday morning and I sing the songs, but I don't really sing them with much heart. I don't sing them with much enthusiasm.

I put my money in the offering plate, I listen to the sermon, or at least I sort of listen, and I kind of go out and it doesn't seem like the service has really affected me. That's not the primary thing that Amos is focusing on here. That is an issue.

That is a problem that we have to address here. But the insincerity of worship that he's dealing with here is that they are not living the kind of life as they live their lives, as they do their business practices, as they treat their neighbors. They are not living the kind of life that is consistent with the confession and the observances and the rites and their claims to be the people of Yahweh who love Him.

And so when the Lord says, take away from me the noise of your songs to the melody of your harps, I will not listen. I hate your music, I hate your observances, I hate your sacrifices. It's not simply that they're just sort of doing this in a half-hearted way.

What the Lord says, let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. So, as we're looking at the religious sins that Amos is confronting, we're right back to the social issues that we talked about. God is displeased with their worship because they have thought that the way to please God, living in covenant with Him, is simply keeping the rituals.

God wants to remind them that when you live in covenant with me, I am a holy and righteous God. I am a God of justice. I am a God who cares about the poor and the needy.

I am a God who rescued you from your slavery in Egypt. If you are going to worship me, there has to be a lifestyle behind that that matches what you're confessing. And so, the reason that the Lord does not like their music and does not like their songs is they may even be using orthodox words, but they are not living an orthodox lifestyle.

The Torah said that if you are going to love God with all of your heart, the corollary to that is that you're also going to love your neighbor as yourself. So as long as they were not practicing justice, there was nothing about Israel's worship that was pleasing to God. They had neglected the ethical dimensions of the covenant and their relationship with God.

John Walton talks about religion in the ancient Near East and the ways that the pagan people fulfilled their religious obligations and met the responsibilities that their gods had placed on them, and he makes this comment. He says in the ancient Near East at large, the primary obligation of a person in terms of worship and their relationship to God, their primary obligation was seen to be in the cultic realm. A person's ethical or moral goodness was not as highly valued by the deity as their cultic consciousness.

Now, that doesn't mean that ancient Near Eastern religions or that the gods of the other people of the ancient Near East did not care about ethics. We can look at ancient Near Eastern literature and see that concern. But what it does mean is that that concern was not as primary in these other cultures as it was for Israel as they lived in covenant with Yahweh, their God.

What Walton is conveying to us here is that the people in the ancient Near East believed that as long as they met their obligations, they offered their sacrifices, they did their rituals, they performed their rites, they gave their gods enough food and

meat and beer to drink, as long as the gods were kept happy and satisfied, those gods were content with what the people offered them. Often, when ancient Near Eastern people, when a disaster happened in their culture, would try to determine which gods did get angry with us. What did we do? Often, they don't really have a way of knowing that, but the way that they will try to appease their gods is let's find the god that we made angry and let's give him plenty of meat, let's give him an extra dose of beer this time and maybe those gods will be happy with us. Israel had bought into the lie that they could do the same thing with God.

They had bought into the idea that as long as we do our rites, as long as we do our rituals, we can then go out into our society, into our culture, into our daily lives, and we can do whatever we want. And we go back to that passage in Amos chapter 2. You are coming into the sanctuary to worship God, and you're making a pallet out of the cloak that you have taken from your poor neighbor that Exodus says you were supposed to return to him every night, or you're pouring out drink offerings to God from wine that you've exacted as a fine from your neighbor and something that you've ripped him off doing. You can't please God by doing that.

And so, this is the theme. Amos, the religious sin of Israel that Amos is specifically focusing on, is not just the apostasy, it's not just the idolatry, it's not just the golden calf, it's not the Baal elements that have been brought into this. Ultimately, it is the dichotomy between their worship, their rituals, and their lifestyle.

Now, this is a theme and this is a motif that works itself out in a number of the Old Testament prophets. And the older sort of evolutionary model and understanding of Israel's history was that the prophets were trying to do away with the ritualism of earlier religion. Some critical scholars referred to the prophets as these innovators who brought into Israel this idea of ethical monotheism.

I think a more accurate understanding is that the prophets realized the value and the importance of the rituals. I mean, the Torah commanded the practice of those rituals. Those rituals were a legitimate way of worshiping God.

They were a legitimate way of expressing love and devotion and commitment and the value of God. When I gave a sacrifice and I took an animal from my livestock and it was a valuable piece of property and it offered to God, that was a significant act of devotion. When I remembered the Passover and I followed those rituals, when I kept the Sabbath, that was a way of reminding myself of God's value and honoring God.

The Lord wanted that. The Lord wanted those things. But what the prophets object to is that ritual without lifestyle is something that is not pleasing to God.

And so there are a number of passages that are going to draw this issue. Again, they're not rejecting the rituals. They're not telling people to abandon the worship practices.

They are reminding the people the worship practices are not enough. We read something in Isaiah chapter 1, verses 10 to 15 that I think goes along very well with what Amos says in Amos chapter 5, verses 21 to 24. Listen to this.

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, and give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah. Imagine how the leaders of Judah would have felt about being called Sodom and Gomorrah, the epitome of wickedness in the Old Testament. Here's what Isaiah says.

What is to me the multitude of your sacrifices? I have had enough of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of your well-fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. So again, it's just like in Amos.

A long list of all the things they're doing for God, and God's saying, I despise these things, and I hate them. Not because he hates the ritual but because he hates the hypocrisy. Verse 13.

When you come to appear before me, who has required this of you, this trampling of my courts? And the people might have said, well, you have, Lord. You're the one who told us to do these things, but God is displeased with the way they're carrying this out. Verse 13.

Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations.

I cannot endure iniquity in solemn assembly. All right, these things were important to God. There are people when God establishes the law of the Sabbath in the Torah that are punished severely when they disobey that, but God doesn't just want Sabbath observance.

And in verse 15, here's the issue. When you spread out your hands to me, I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen because your hands are full of blood.

Okay. They are raising their hands up to God and sacrifice and prayer and worship. They're expressing their devotion to God.

God doesn't see their devotion. What he sees is the blood of their neighbors that they have taken advantage of. And I think, you know, the people in Isaiah's day might have protested.

The leaders would have said, hey, we're respectable members of the community. We're not murderers. We have never done that.

But by depriving the poor of their livelihood, by taking advantage of them, by ripping off their property, by stealing from them the opportunity to enjoy the inheritance and the heritage that God had given to them, they were, in God's eyes, no better than murderers. And so, as they're doing all these rituals, God doesn't see the rituals. God sees the disobedience and the disregard for his commandments that are behind that.

Jeremiah, in his temple sermon, where he warns the people that judgment is going to come upon them. Here's why. Jeremiah chapter 7, verse 21 to 26.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat the flesh. Okay. Keep offering me all these sacrifices, but unless you change your ways, it's not going to do any good.

Verse 22. For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. God says I didn't even tell you to do this.

And I think Jeremiah, in an extreme rhetorical way, is saying that when God gave you the law, it's as if you're going to think about the value and the priority of obedience versus rituals. God didn't even talk about this. God told you to obey his specific commandments.

And he says, but this commandment I gave them. Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people and walk in the way that I command you so that it might be well with you. But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts and went backward and not forward.

From the day that your fathers came out of the land to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants, the prophets, and you haven't listened to them. Okay. God says I didn't even command you about these things.

Relatively speaking, this was the unimportant part of God's covenant with the people of Israel. In the ancient Near East at large, cultic observances, cultic obligations, giving the gods their offerings, their sacrifices, their food, their drink. That was the key thing.

The God of Israel was different. There's an ethical dimension to this covenant that is different from anything else in the ancient Near East. And then probably in what is

one of the best and most well-known passages in the minor prophets, in the book of Micah, Micah is going to raise the same issue for the people of Judah.

Micah chapter 6 verses 1 to 8. Again, this is another passage that lines up very well with what we have in Amos chapter 5, verses 21 to 24. Micah raises the question, well, what does God expect of his people? And he says, what does God really want from you? Micah imagines a worshipper who comes to God and says in verse 6, what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come with him with burnt offerings or calves a year old? Would the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil? I mean, if I gave this lavish offering and sacrifice, is that really what God wants? Should I give my firstborn for my transgression the fruit of my body for the salt? What if I offered my own child as a sacrifice? That would be the supreme sacrifice. The answer is that's not the primary thing that God wants from his people.

The primary thing he has told you, old man, is what is good, what the Lord requires of you to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. And so that's the ethos. That's the concern of the prophets.

They are not innovators who are introducing religious or ethical monotheism into Israel. They are people who are reminding the people of Israel and the people of Judah that covenant obligation to God doesn't just involve your religious activity. It also involves concern and care for your neighbor.

And all of those things, all of those things are part of what God expects from his people. There are going to be other passages in Amos where Amos is going to point out to the people of Israel the futility of continuing to carry out their religious practices, the futility of going through the motions of their religious observances when they're not doing what God has commanded them to do. So Amos will talk about their sanctuaries and how more ritual, more observance, more religion, more practices, that's not what's going to save them.

Amos chapter 4, verses 4 and 5. And we get a pretty heavy dose of prophetic sarcasm here. Amos says, come to Bethel and transgress. Go to Gilgal and multiply transgression.

The prophet is commanding them to continue sinning. That obviously should tell us there's something going on here. There's something that the prophet's trying to say.

What the prophet is saying is, look, you can come to Bethel and the sanctuary that's there, this place that's remembered as the house of God because God appeared to Jacob there in the book of Genesis. You can come there and do all your rituals, but all you're really doing is continuing to transgress. You can come to Gilgal and multiply your transgressions.

What they were really doing when they came to these places they were multiplying their offerings. They were multiplying their sacrifices. God says, ultimately, you're just adding to your sins by all the things that you're doing there, the end of the verse.

Bring your sacrifices every morning. Bring your tithes every three days. Surely God has got to be pleased if they're offering to him their tithes and giving them from their livestock and their finances and their produce.

That's not what God wants. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened and proclaim freewill offerings. Publish them for so you love to do, O people of Israel declares the Lord God.

So, we have another passage here, just like chapter five, a number of religious activities that are mentioned here, but in Amos's perspective and in God's perspective, all they are doing by increasing their religious observances is adding to the number of their transgressions. Amos chapter five, verses five and six, thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, seek me and live. Okay? And the idea of seeking God in the Old Testament prophets goes along with the idea of the word to turn or to repent, to shew.

They are to turn away from their sin and they are to passionately seek God. They are to love him with all their heart, mind and strength. They're to remove him from the back burner and put him back on the front burner.

But the contrast to that, seek me and live, the contrast in verse five is, but do not seek Bethel. Do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba. So again, there's three different sanctuaries that are mentioned, but seeking God is not the same thing as seeking out your sanctuaries.

And I think that would have been a disconnect for these people as they're like, those two things are so interrelated. How can you say that? And then here's the judgment that is going to fall on Israel. And that judgment is going to fall specifically on the cities and the towns where these sanctuaries are.

The prophet says, Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing. They looked at these sanctuaries as being the places that would protect them. They looked at Gilgal, Bethel, and Beersheba the same way that the people of Judah in the South looked at Jerusalem.

Hey, this is where God is. This is God's house. God is going to protect us.

And the sanctuaries themselves ended up becoming like good luck rituals. God had become a rabbit's foot. Jeremiah says you've turned the temple into a den of thieves.

It's a hideout for criminals. And you think God's going to protect you. When Jesus cleansed the temple, he quoted Jeremiah's temple sermon and said, you have turned my house into a den of thieves.

Amos is saying the same thing about Gilgal, Bethel, and Beersheba. And there in verse five, he says this, he says, Gilgal shall surely go into exile. Listen to the way that sounds in Hebrew.

In a wordplay here, prophets are known and famous for their wordplays, often as a way of making the message clear. The prophet says this, Gilgal will surely go into exile. Ha-Gilgal-galo-yigle.

The word to go into exile, galah, Gilgal, the interrelationship of those words. Ha-Gilgal, the name of the town, galo, the infinitive, yigle, will go into exile. And as they hear that, they have this shocking, unbelievable idea.

Wow, the places that we've trusted yet to deliver us are ultimately going to be the places that are going to be the target of God's judgment. I think the cure for this type of defective view of God and this kind of understanding is that we can manipulate God through our rituals and our practices. And ultimately that's what all human religion is.

It's an attempt to manipulate God into doing for us what we want God to do rather than honoring God and giving him the glory and worship that he deserves. And it's a constant temptation in worship. I believe the system that was set up at the Tower of Babel is going to create this tower as a way of bringing God down to us, meeting God, and worshipping God on our terms.

That's what the worship of all of the false gods in the ancient Near East was. It was an attempt to manipulate the gods into doing what ultimately they wanted God to do for them. The message of the Old Testament is God will not be manipulated.

God will not, and God cannot be taken advantage of. And so, to correct this defective view of God and to give a warning to these people who were going through the motions of worship, who thought that their religious sacrifices and their worship at places like Bethel and Gilgal were all that they were needed, Amos doesn't just need to change their understanding of worship. Amos ultimately needs to change and needs to revise their understanding of God.

And so, the message of Amos begins, and we've seen the major themes that are there, the warning to the people that are complacent in wealth, warning to the people that are practicing injustice, warning to the people that are going through the motions of worship. When Amos begins his message, remember that we have a very

concentrated anthology of Amos's words, nine chapters that may represent several years of ministry and what he was saying to the people. Amos begins in this way: the Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem.

The pastors of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers. If they believe that they can enjoy their wealth and ignore God and simply pretend as if God is there as their talisman to bless them, if they can go through the motions of worship and bring their offerings and sacrifices and think that God will be pleased with that, they need to see God as a roaring lion and a thundering storm. And I can't think of a message that would have been more practical and more beneficial for these people as they've enjoyed this time of incredible prosperity, as they think that things are right in their relationship with God because of their religious devotion.

Amos confronts them at the very beginning with a powerful image of God. This picture of God, these people who have taken God for granted. Wow, what a confrontation where we see this idea, the Lord is like a roaring lion and the Lord is like a thundering storm.

That is the introduction to the message and the theology of the book of Amos. One of the unifying features of the book of Amos is that we are going to see the prophet constantly come back to this idea of God as a roaring lion and God as a thundering storm. I told you in the first video one of the things that has drawn me to the minor prophets is that there's a desire, I think, that the Lord ignites in your heart when you study these books, not just to know the books, not just to know their message and theology, but to know and to worship and to love the God of the prophets.

When prophets talk about God, one of the reasons why I think it's so refreshing and enjoyable to study them is that the prophets do not use the philosophical categories of systematic theology to talk about God. Let's be honest, it's important and there are some people that love it, devote their lives. Systematic theology can tend to be dry, philosophical, and routine in the way that it looks at God.

The prophets do not talk about the attributes of God in some philosophical way and all of the omnis and the omnipresence and the omniscience and the omnipotence and all these ideas and the categories that we use. Those categories are important and they have a place, but the prophets are more going to speak of God using images and metaphors. Those images and metaphors if we imaginatively let those soak into our lives or if we allow the spirit of God to use those metaphors and impress them upon our hearts, I believe that we have the opportunity to come to know God in a deeper and fuller way.

I think this is something that is true of the Old Testament in general. There are some incredible metaphors of God throughout the Old Testament it's a different way of

looking at God from what we have in the New Testament. God is primarily portrayed in the Old Testament.

God is a king, and the people of Israel who lived under a king, the people of the ancient Near East who knew what kingship was like, could understand that image. God met them where they were at. He used a metaphor from their experience and from their lives, something that they were very familiar with, something that was a necessary and essential part of their lives.

And he says, God relates to his people in the way that a king relates to his subject. And it's our job as Christians, we may not live in that kind of culture, to go back and understand what that meant. What does it mean to live under the sovereignty of God? What does it mean to live under a God as in Psalm 115? He does whatever he pleases.

How do we live under that? How do we respond to that? How do we worship God in light of the fact that he's a king? One of the other metaphors of God in the Old Testament is that God is a warrior. We don't often think of God in that way. As we deal with the ethical issues and the moral issues of holy war and those kinds of things in the Old Testament, this has often been something that either liberal Christians or atheist Christians have used to sort of disparage the Old Testament.

The ethic of the Old Testament, the God of the Old Testament, we don't want to know him. But God is a warrior. If we accept this as God's word, we have to bow before that and think about what are the implications of that.

Can we even handle the reality of the fact that God does portray himself in that way? God is a judge, and God is a shepherd. We talked about in Amos 40 as the Lord's bringing his people back from exile, the Lord's going to carry them in his arms. Even the most fragile of the lambs, he's going to carry.

There are these tender images and metaphors of God. God is a father who loves the people of Israel. God is a husband who is married to Israel.

The covenant that God has with his people is an exclusive relationship. Hosea is going to emphasize to us that God relates to his people and God loves them in spite of the fact that they've been unfaithful to that marriage relationship. In the book of Amos, the metaphors of God as lion and storm are going to work their way through the entire book.

We see this in chapter one, the Lord roars from Zion. Notice what it says in Amos chapter three, verse four. Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from his den if he has taken nothing? You have taken God for granted.

You need to think about God in this context right now as a God who could potentially consume you the way that a lion consumes his prey. In chapter three, verse eight, the lion has roared. Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken.

Who can but prophesy? If they were wondering, why is Amos here? Why did Amos come to Israel from the south to talk to us? He says the warnings of the prophet are like the roar of a lion. As I am telling you about the exile that's coming, you should hear the echo of God roaring as a lion. And if he breaks out against you, this judgment is going to be swift and severe.

Chapter three, verse 12, what is this judgment going to be like? And this is, I think to me, one of the most terrifying passages in the book of Amos. Thus says the Lord, as the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued with the corner of a couch and the part of a bed. Yeah, there's going to be survivors that come from this judgment, but Israel, when God is through with them, is going to be like a lamb that has been ripped out of the mouth of a lion.

All that's going to be left is two legs or a piece of an ear. Or you've put your trust in your lavish houses, all that's going to be rescued out of Samaria, the corner of a couch and the part of a bed. God is a roaring lion.

Deal with it. Chapter five, verse 19, when the day of the Lord comes, and they thought it was going to be a time when God would deliver them and God would rescue them from their enemies, it was going to be a day of light. Amos says, no, it's going to be a day of darkness.

Why? Because the judgment that God brings on you will be as if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him. Or he went into his house after he got away from the lion and the bear, leaned his house on the wall, and was bitten by a serpent. That image of God as a roaring lion runs throughout the book of Amos.

And it takes these, it takes this image and puts it in front of this just complacent, sort of taking God for granted kind of people. I think it speaks to our culture, a culture that says, hey, God, take him for granted. Or Christians who simply believe that you know, God's a God of love.

God's a God of mercy. Let's focus on that. Let's not talk about his justice.

Let's not talk about his holiness. Let's not talk about the eternal punishment of hell. These are realities about God that we have to face up to.

And I value the Old Testament because it reminds me whether I feel comfortable with this or not, this is the reality of who God is. I'm reminded of the Chronicles of Narnia, the question about Aslan: is he safe? Of course, he's not safe. He's a lion and he's not safe, but he is good.

And I think the God of the Old Testament reveals himself in that way. He is not a God who is safe. He is not a God that we can take advantage of.

He's not a God that we can manipulate. He's not a God that we can take for granted. He's a roaring lion.

The other image that's used for God is that, again, he is a thundering storm. And for people who had worshiped Baal and viewed him as the storm God, the Old Testament is going to correct that understanding and is going to say it's not Baal who is the storm God. It's not Baal who rides on the clouds.

It's Yahweh. But again, this idea of a storm and of the storm that God is about to bring to his people, that is one of the prevailing metaphors for God in the book of Amos. Chapter 4, verse 13.

For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what is in his thought, who makes the morning darkness and treads on the heights of the earth, the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name. The God of armies is about to come on you like a storm. And he's the one who created the winds and all the things that are associated with that.

Chapter 5, verses 8 and 9. He who makes the Pleiades in Orion, who turns the deep darkness into morning and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord, Yahweh, is his name, who makes destruction flash forth against the strong so that destruction comes upon the fortress. I don't want to meet a God like that. I don't want to meet that raging storm.

Chapter 9, verses 5 and 6. The Lord God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile and sinks again like the Nile of Egypt, who builds his upper chambers in the heavens, who founds his vault upon the seas, who calls upon the waters of the sea and pours them upon the surface of the earth, Yahweh is his name. That's the God that Israel knows. And that's the God that Israel will have to deal with.

The final judgment of Israel in Amos, chapter 9, verses 1 to 4, is going to be described as an earthquake that will wipe out the nation. And remember, Amos preached in Israel two years before the earthquake. Amos confronts a society that is going through the motions of worship.

To correct that, he provides them with a proper understanding of God: God is a roaring lion. God is a thundering storm.

God is someone to whom we are accountable and whom we must take seriously. I just hope that picture and image of God will stay with us as we study all of the minor prophets and will be a constant reminder of who God really is and what he's really like.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 7 on the book of Amos, Religious Sins.