

Dr. Robert Chisholm, Amos, Session 3, (A) Salvation History Comes Unraveled-Am 3-6 6-min. Video Overview

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Today, we're jumping into an ancient text that asks a question so sharp, so challenging, it honestly feels like it could have been written yesterday. We're talking about a question of disaster, of responsibility, and of God's role in it all. And it comes from a prophet named Amos, nearly 3,000 years ago.

And let me tell you, Amos does not waste any time. He opens with this powerful image: a lion's roar. Think about that.

It's a sound that demands a response, right? It signals immediate, unavoidable danger. And for Amos, God's word is exactly like that. Just as urgent.

Just as impossible to ignore. A prophecy that has to be spoken. And this leads us to the central, really shocking question of his book.

Amos asks, point blank, if a disaster hits a city, is God the one behind it? Now that is a heavy question. And frankly, one that has been dangerously twisted for centuries. So to really get what he's saying, we first have to understand the way he thinks.

We have to follow his logic. Amos doesn't just drop this heavy idea on people. He builds his case, piece by piece, with a series of questions, and each one is designed to be a no-brainer to get his audience nodding along, establishing this undeniable pattern of cause and effect.

He starts simple, and then builds to his stunning point. So let's follow him. Okay, first, something super simple about relationships.

Do two people walk together unless they've agreed to? Well, no. It's an obvious truth. You've got a cause, the agreement, and an effect: walking together.

Simple. Then he ramps it up a notch. Does a lion roar when it doesn't have any prey? Of course not.

A roar means it's on the hunt, that it's found its target. The sound is directly tied to the danger. You can feel the tension starting to build here, right? And finally, this one.

A bird isn't going to fly into a trap unless there's bait. The action is a direct response to a cause. So by now, Amos has his audience exactly where he wants them.

Having agreed with him three times in a row. So what's the big takeaway from all this? It's simple, really. Amos has established this unbreakable rule.

Things don't just happen randomly. Every effect, every action, every sound is connected to a direct cause. Nothing happens in a vacuum.

He then brings this logic home with a sound that his listeners would have instantly recognized. The shofar, or the trumpet. Back then, when a watchman blew that horn from the city walls, it wasn't a call to a party.

It was a clear signal that an enemy was coming. The sound caused fear because it pointed to a very real, approaching disaster. Okay, and this is where we have to slow down and be really, really careful.

Because for centuries, people have taken Amos's question about disaster and twisted it into a universal law. They use it to explain every tragedy, everywhere. And that is a profound and, honestly, a harmful misreading of what's going on here.

To get this right, the scholar Robert Chisholm gives us this brilliant tool. He calls it a contextualized generalization. It's just a fancy way of saying that a statement can be absolutely true for a specific audience.

In this case, Israel around 760 BC. But it was never meant to be a blanket explanation for all suffering, for all time. And this slide just lays it out perfectly.

The wrong way to read this is to say any disaster, anywhere, anytime is God's doing. The correct way is to see that Amos is saying something much more specific. This coming disaster, for this group of people, at this moment in history, is a direct warning from God because of their specific actions.

Think about it like this. You know, back in the 1950s, saying buy American for a quality car might have been a pretty fair generalization. But if you said that today, it's not a universal truth anymore.

The context has totally changed. Or think about the trumpet. If a trumpet plays on a college campus today, nobody runs for the hills.

The meaning of the signal depends entirely on the context. And look, we're not just making this up. Scholar Frederick Lindstrom totally backs this up.

He says the text is laser-focused on one thing, forcing northern Israel to see the connection between their actions and God's warning. It's not trying to explain every hurricane or earthquake in history. So if the warning was so specific, what exactly had Israel done to deserve it? Well, Amos basically reads out the charges, and it's a shocking list that paints a picture of a society that had completely lost its way.

And this is where things get, well, kind of weird in a brilliant way. To make his case in a move that is just dripping with sarcasm, Amos calls on Israel's biggest historical enemies- we're talking Egypt and Philistia- to come and watch the show. He says, hey, come on over to the mountains of Samaria and just watch the chaos and oppression.

Which, you know, begs the question: why on earth would you invite your worst enemies, the very people who enslaved and fought you for centuries, to come and pass judgment on your own society? It seems crazy. Because as Amos implies, they are expert witnesses. Egypt and Philistia, they know oppression when they see it.

The point is that the injustice in Israel had gotten so bad, so obvious that even its most brutal enemies would look at it and say, wow, yep, that's oppression. That's kind of the stuff we do. It is such a devastating critique.

So what's on the charge sheet? The wealthy were literally storing up goods they had plundered from the poor. They were building lavish winter houses and summer houses, decked out with expensive ivory, all funded by exploitation. Even their worship at the sacred site of Bethel was corrupt.

And Amos even calls out the wealthy wives, calling them cows of Bashan, for pushing their husbands to crush the needy just so they could drink and live in luxury. And the consequence for all this systemic injustice? It was going to be total destruction. Amos uses this gut-wrenching image.

He says the coming judgment will be like a lion attacking a sheep, and all the shepherd will be able to get back is maybe two leg bones, or a piece of an ear, just enough scraps to prove the animal is gone. That's all that would be left of their rich, opulent society. But wait, even in this incredibly stark warning, there's actually a glimmer of hope hiding in here.

Because you see, the main point of a prophecy like this isn't just to announce a sealed fate; it's to sound an alarm. This is so crucial to understand. Prophecy often works as a final warning, not a final sentence.

It's God laying out the natural consequences of the path people are on, basically giving them a chance to see where they're headed and turn back before it's too late. And the classic example of this in action has to be the story of Jonah. He goes to the city of Nineveh and declares, in 40 days, this place is going down.

But what happens? The people actually listen. From the king all the way down, they repent. They change their ways.

And because they responded to the warning, God relents, and the city is spared. And this gets to the very heart of God's character, at least as Amos presents it. The verse right before the lion's roar says this: the Lord doesn't do anything without first revealing His plan to His prophets.

He warns before He acts. The roar of the lion is the prophecy itself. It's a merciful alarm clock designed to wake people up.

And all this leaves us with one last pretty sobering question. We've seen that Amos' prophecy wasn't some universal law, but a specific, urgent warning for a specific people. So, if a prophecy is a final chance to change course, what happens when that warning is ignored?