

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

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Imagine this: you're standing out somewhere quiet, maybe a vast plain, and then bam, you hear it. This deep, like guttural sound that just vibrates right through you. The roar of a lion.

It's that sound that instantly gets your attention, right, makes you afraid, signals real unstoppable power. So the question is, what does that ancient roar have to tell us today? Welcome to the deep dive. This is where we take your sources, a whole stack of them, and we really pull out the most important nuggets of knowledge, the key insights.

And today we are diving deep into Dr. Robert Chisholm's really compelling teaching on the Book of Amos, specifically chapters three through six. A powerful section. Absolutely.

So our mission is to try to unravel some ancient prophecy, uncover maybe surprising truths about cause and effect, and really reflect on these timeless principles: justice, judgment, and, interestingly, divine mercy too. And Dr. Chisholm kicks things off with this really fundamental principle. It's right there in Amos three, verses one and two, to whom much is given, much is required.

Sets the stage. It totally sets the stage for everything else. You see, Israel, they were God's chosen people.

They had this incredible gift: his moral law, his direct communication, the covenant. They should have known better. But despite all that, they were deeply involved in sinning against the weak, the poor.

They were practicing syncretism, mixing religious beliefs. Blending things together. Exactly.

And widespread idolatry. So because they had this high level of privilege and they failed so badly to live up to it, Israel became the primary target for God's judgment. So that privilege comes with serious responsibility.

Precisely. Okay. So with that foundation laid, Dr. Chisholm then moves us to this really interesting concept he calls: every effect has its cause.

This is from Amos three, verses three through eight. And it starts with a series of, well, they seem like really logical, almost rhetorical questions. You can picture Amos just laying them out there.

He asks, "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" Seems obvious. Yeah. I mean, clearly, no.

You don't just randomly fall to step with someone unless there's some agreement, some understanding first. And the questions keep coming, and they start to get a bit more intense, a bit more ominous. Right.

Does a lion roar in the thicket when it has no prey? Well, no. A lion roars because it's found something or it's about to pounce. Makes sense.

Does it growl in its den when it's caught nothing? Again, no. The growl comes after the catch. And then does a bird swoop down to a trap on the ground when no bait is there? No bait, no bird.

Exactly. And does a trap spring up from the ground if it has not caught anything? All these questions are designed to show this basic logic. The fakes have causes.

Things don't just, you know, happen out of the blue. And what's really fascinating, I think, is how the questions progress. As you said, it starts peaceful enough, people walking together.

Yeah, an agreement. But then it shifts really quickly to these, frankly, terrifying scenarios. Lions roaring, growling, birds getting trapped.

It feels like a powerful mirror of Israel's own situation at the time. That's a great way to put it: a mirror. They were in this period of maybe relative peace and prosperity, but that was about to shatter.

It was about to give way to violence and judgment. A rude awakening was coming. Definitely.

And then Amos brings in another really critical sound, another signal. When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? The answer's got to be yes. Absolutely yes.

In that world, the ram's horn trumpet blown by watchmen on the city walls meant one thing. Danger. An enemy army was coming.

Battle was about to start. It was absolutely meant to cause fear, to make people prepare. Okay, so this logical buildup- walking together, the lion, the trap, the trumpet- it all leads to this really pivotal and maybe kind of challenging question in Amos 3, verse 6b.

Yeah, this is a big one. When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? Now, just reading that, it sounds like a sweeping statement, doesn't it? Like a universal truth. It does sound that way.

But the source, Dr. Chisholm, explains this is a really key point we need to unpack carefully. It absolutely is. And this is actually where Amos connects all this back to validate his own ministry.

He's using this cause-and-effect logic. In verse 7, he says, surely the sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants, the prophets. Okay, so he's saying, I'm not just making this up.

Exactly. He's not just throwing words around. The Lord is about to act.

That's the cause, and the effect will be judgment. And God has revealed these intentions to Amos, his prophet. Amos is just the messenger here.

Got it. So, connecting those dots, we circle back to that powerful image you mentioned from the very start. Amos 3.8, the lion has roared; who will not fear? So that lion's roar, it's not just some general metaphor for God's power.

It's specifically the Lord announcing this coming judgment through Amos. Yes, that's the link. The roar is the prophetic word of judgment.

And it demands a response: fear. Just like hearing that shofar blast from the walls, warning of an enemy army. Amos basically says he has no alternative but to prophesy.

It's like the Lord's roar compels him to speak. He's compelled. And this brings us back to really digging into that statement in 3.6b. When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? As you said, it sounds like a general truth, almost like a proverb, similar to those examples from nature he just gave.

Yeah, like lions roar when they have prey. Right. But here's the crucial nuance Dr. Chisholm stresses.

It is not a universal statement that applies to all disasters, everywhere, at all times. Okay, so that's important. If, say, a hurricane hits a city today, we can't just automatically point to this verse and say that was a direct judgment from God.

That's exactly the point. We have to be careful. Dr. Chisholm uses a really helpful analogy, actually.

Think about, like, years ago, the saying, if you want a good car, buy American. Okay, I remember that kind of thinking. Right.

Now, that might have been arguably true or at least widely believed within the parameters of the context, you know, a specific time, specific circumstances in the auto industry. But if you said that today as a blanket statement. People would definitely push back.

It's not universally true anymore, if it ever was. It was a contextualized generalization. It held weight within certain limits, but wasn't an eternal, unchanging truth.

Ah, I see. So Amos 3.6b is like that. It's a contextualized generalization for its time and place.

Precisely. Amos is speaking directly to Israel around 760 BC. And importantly, the Lord had already been sending them signals, warnings of coming judgment.

Things like drought, maybe even an earthquake mentioned elsewhere. So there was a buildup. There was a buildup and, crucially, direct communication through the prophet.

So in that specific context, for that specific audience, if disaster then struck an Israelite city, they could, as Chisholm puts it, bank on it that it was from the Lord. Why? Because he had explicitly told them he was going to act through Amos. So it's not teaching this idea.

Some people talk about pan-causality, where God is micromanaging and directly causing every single thing that happens. Correct. It's not teaching pan-causality.

And the source actually points to the work of scholar Friedrich Lindstrom, who studied this verse, and also Isaiah 45, which sometimes gets pulled into this discussion. Lindstrom concluded, after careful analysis, that neither Amos 3.6b nor Isaiah 45 is teaching that God generally assigns all disasters to his direct agency. So what was Amos' intent with 3.6b, according to Lindstrom? The intent was really specific.

To force his audience, northern Israel at that time, to recognize the direct link between Yahweh's specific actions and the specific catastrophes affecting them. It was about their situation, their covenant relationship, their impending judgment announced by God's prophet. Okay, that makes a huge difference in how you read it.

It really does. And the crucial lesson for you, the listener, from all this is that we have to be very, very careful, as Chisholm says, that we don't pull passages out of their context. Yeah, that seems to be a running theme.

It is. Because in our fallen world, sometimes things just happen. There are floods, natural disasters, accidents.

The Bible simply does not teach that every single calamity is a direct, specific judgment from God for a particular sin. That's a really important theological and practical takeaway for us today. Okay, but then, even amidst all this talk of judgment, which sounds pretty final, Dr. Chisholm brings out this element of hope, an opportunity for change.

Yes, absolutely. This is crucial. The force emphasizes that prophetic messages of judgment, actually, more often than not, were proclaimed with the underlying hope that the people would take it seriously and repent.

So the warning itself is an act of mercy, in a way. It often is. The hope is that repentance will lead to God actually relenting from sending the announced judgment.

It's not always set in stone. Is there a clear example of that in Scripture? Oh, the classic example, the go-to, is Jonah and Nineveh. Remember, Jonah marches in and delivers what sounds like a totally unconditional verdict.

In 40 more days, Nineveh will be destroyed. Seems final. Ray, end of story.

But it wasn't. The king of Nineveh hears this, and what does he say? Who knows? Maybe this God will relent. And they launch this massive, city-wide repentance campaign, fasting, sackcloth, even the animals.

Even the animals, right. And the text explicitly says, God saw their repentance, and he relents. He doesn't bring the destruction he announced through Jonah, which, of course, makes Jonah furious.

Yeah, Jonah's reaction is something else. He basically throws a tantrum. He does.

And he complains to God, saying, essentially, I knew it. I knew you were like this: gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love, and you relent from sending calamity. So Jonah himself knew that God's warnings often contained that possibility of relenting if people changed.

Exactly. Now, it's true that Nineveh was eventually judged much later, about 150 years later, as described in the Book of Nahum. But God's initial reprieve here, in Jonah's time, perfectly illustrates this principle.

Judgment announced through a prophet isn't always irrevocable. It often serves as a severe warning intended to provoke change. It shows God's patience.

So how does that connect to us today? We don't have prophets like Amos or Jonah walking around giving specific pronouncements like that. That's right. In ancient Israel, prophets were God's direct vehicles of communication, providing what theology calls special revelation.

Today we primarily derive principles and understanding from God's written word, the Bible. So while we can never tell exactly, as Chisholm notes, if a specific difficult event today is a direct judgment from God or not. We can't know for sure.

We can't know for sure. But the comforting principle still holds. God often warns before He acts, whether through historical examples in Scripture, the principles in His Word, or the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

That communication, however it comes, should always motivate us to examine ourselves and respond appropriately. Okay. That makes sense.

Now, Amos shifts gears again, doesn't he? He unleashes this section that Dr. Chisholm titles, Who Invited These Guys? It's Amos 3, verses 9 through 15, and it sounds like pure biting satire. Oh, it absolutely is. The Lord issues this incredibly sarcastic invitation.

He tells the pagan fortresses of Ashdod- that's Philistine territory- and the fortresses of Egypt, two nations who had historically oppressed Israel. Yeah, they're old enemies. Exactly.

He tells them to assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria. Come on over, gather around. Why? What are they supposed to do there? Get this.

They're invited to be expert witnesses. Experts in what? Experts in oppression and chaos. God is inviting Israel's former enslavers and adversaries to come and observe the great unrest and the oppression happening within Samaria, within God's own people.

Wow. That's harsh. It's incredibly harsh.

The implication is devastating. Israel's injustice, their internal oppression, is now so bad that it's comparable to, maybe even worse than, the injustice practiced by their pagan oppressors. These outsiders, the Egyptians and Philistines who knew oppression firsthand, are now being called to witness Israel's corruption.

It's a profound divine insult. That's a really powerful way to critique them, and the judgment that follows sounds equally severe. Amos talks about a futility judgment coming from the Assyrians.

Yes, and the imagery is stark. He uses this picture of a shepherd trying to rescue a sheep from a lion. What does he manage to save? Maybe two leg bones or a piece of an ear? Just scraps, basically.

Just enough to prove the sheep was killed by a predator, maybe for insurance purposes or something. Exactly. It proves the loss, but the valuable part is gone.

And Amos says, similarly, after the Assyrian judgment hits Samaria, all that will be left of their luxurious furnishings will be like the head of a bed and a piece of fabric from a couch, just worthless fragments. Utter devastation, nothing worth saving. Total futility.

And it gets even more pointed when he talks about the altars of Bethel being destroyed. Bethel. Wasn't that a really important place for Israel? Hugely important.

Bethel literally means house of God. It's where Jacob had his famous dream of the ladder to heaven, where he met God twice, where the covenant was sort of formalized. It was a special place, a major sanctuary.

So a place with deep spiritual roots and history for them. Absolutely. But despite that sacred history, Amos says Bethel's worship had become polluted and contaminated and corrupted by their idolatry and syncretism.

They were mixing pagan practices with the worship of Yahweh. So God says he's going to destroy even this sacred place. Yes.

He says he will destroy the altars of Bethel and, specifically, the horns of the altar, which were traditionally a place where someone could grab hold for asylum, for refuge. Like seeking sanctuary. Exactly.

Those horns would be cut off. The symbolism is brutal. No place to run, no way to plead for safety or mercy at the place that should have represented it.

Wow. And the judgment also hits their fancy houses, right? The winter house and summer house. He mentions tearing down the winter house, along with the summer house, and also the houses adorned with ivory.

This points directly at the excessive wealth that the rich elite in Samaria had accumulated. And the implication is that this wealth wasn't earned, honestly. That's the strong implication.

It was gained through exploitation, through dishonest and oppressive ways. So the destruction of these luxurious status symbols, the multiple houses, the ivory decorations powerfully reinforces this futility judgment. All that stuff they oppressed people for, all that ill-gotten gain, it's all going to be wiped out.

A complete undoing of their materialistic success. Okay, this leads us into chapter four, verses one to three. And Amos uses another really sharp metaphor here, doesn't he? The cows of Bishan.

Yes. Another incredibly cutting image. Hear this word, you cows of Bishan on Mount Samaria.

He's not talking about literal cattle, of course. No. Who's he referring to? It's a sarcastic, almost contemptuous reference to the wealthy women of Samaria, the wives of the powerful rich men.

Cows of Bishan. Why that specific image? What was Bishan known for? Bishan, east of the Jordan River, was famous for its lush pastures and consequently its strong, healthy, well-fed livestock. So there's an initial sense of portraying these women as pampered, sleek, living in luxury.

Okay, but there's got to be a twist knowing Amos. Oh, absolutely. The irony is thick.

While Bishan's livestock were healthy, these cows of Samaria are, in a grim sense, being fattened up for the slaughter. Their luxury and indifference are leading them directly to judgment. It drips with irony.

It's a harsh image, but maybe fitting for what he's describing. What exactly was their crime? Amos spells it out. These women oppressed the poor and crushed the needy.

And how? Partly by constantly demanding more from their husbands. Bring us some drinks. So demanding more luxury, more indulgence.

Yes. It implies they're driving their husbands to acquire even more wealth, fueling the cycle of oppression. Even if it means using unjust or dishonest methods.

Their desire for luxury contributes directly to the suffering of the poor. It speaks to a really deep spiritual and moral decay. And the consequences for them are just as stark as for the rest of Samaria.

Absolutely clear. God swears an oath by his holiness, which means this is serious, tied to his very nature, which demands justice, that their time is up. They will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fish hooks.

Hooks, like animals being led away. Exactly like that. It's an image of utter humiliation, being led away captive like animals caught on a hook.

No dignity, no choice. And they will go straight out through breaches in the wall, suggesting the city's defenses will be broken down and they'll be cast out into exile. A complete reversal of their pampered lives.

A total reversal. And this whole section, focusing on the cows of Eshan, really helps crystallize this powerful, overarching principle that runs through Amos 3 and 4. When God's covenant community fails to live out his principles regarding justice, grows complacent in its religious traditions, and greedily pursues the toys of this world, it invites divine discipline.

That seems to be the core message here, doesn't it? That failure has consequences, especially for those who should know better.

That's it in a nutshell. Privilege brings responsibility, and ignoring that responsibility leads to judgment. So, wrapping up our journey through Amos 3 to 6 for today, wow, we've really covered some ground.

We looked at the precise nature of God's judgment, how it connects to cause and effect. And that crucial idea of contextualized generalization. Right, that was key.

We also saw those surprising, maybe, opportunities for repentance, even within warnings of judgment. Like Jonah and Nineveh, yeah. Hope isn't entirely extinguished.

And then that really stark depiction of societal decay, the injustice, the luxury built on oppression, the corrupted worship that ultimately invited that divine discipline. We've really seen how vital understanding the specific context is for interpreting these messages correctly. It's absolutely essential.

Pulling verses out of context leads to all sorts of misunderstandings. So thinking about all this, it really leaves us, and you, the listener, with a pretty provocative thought to mull over, doesn't it? I think so. If Israel's winter houses and summer houses, all that excessive wealth, their corrupted worship at Bethel, if all that invited such profound judgment because they ignored God's justice and forgot their covenant, what does that mean for us today? How should we examine our own fortresses, our own lifestyles, our own forms of wealth and security? What are the horns of the altar- maybe false securities or even corrupted religious practices that we mistakenly cling to, thinking they offer safety, when true security actually lies somewhere else entirely? That's a question that cuts deep, well beyond ancient Israel.

It's about examining our own hearts, our own societies, our own relationship with God and justice today. Definitely something worth wrestling with. Well, make sure you join us next time as we continue this deep dive into Amos.

We'll be tackling the section headlined, Prepare to Meet Your God in Amos 4, verses 4 through 13, and then looking at the 10th plague revisited in chapter 5, where the Lord threatens an Egypt-like judgment upon his own people. Yeah, it gets even more intense. It certainly sounds like it.

You won't want to miss that.