

Dr. Robert Chisholm, Amos, Session 4, (B) Salvation History Comes Unraveled-Am 3-6 6-min. Video Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Today, we're jumping back thousands of years to unpack a prophecy from a guy named Amos. And let me tell you, what we're going to find is not at all what you'd expect. This is a story of divine sarcasm, of warnings that were totally ignored, and a famous salvation story that gets turned completely on its head.

So it all kicks off with this wild command supposedly from God to his people: go to Bethel and sin. Now, you have to understand, Bethel was a huge worship site. It literally means house of God.

So this is kind of like saying, hey, go to church and go commit a crime. It just, it doesn't make any sense. It's so bizarre and contradictory, and it forces you to ask a really big question.

I mean, really, why would God command his own people to sin? This is the central mystery we're going to unravel today. And the answer to this one question reveals everything about the conflict at the very heart of this ancient book. Okay, so here's the first big reveal.

This isn't a literal command at all. It's actually a form of divine sarcasm. God isn't actually telling them to sin.

Nope. He's using some serious irony to make a powerful point about what they're already doing. Dr. Robert Chisholm has this fantastic analogy that just makes it all click.

Imagine a mother, right? She's warned her son over and over not to climb this really dangerous tree. Finally, she's just had it. She throws up her hands and says, you know what, go ahead, climb the tree, fall and break your neck.

Now, obviously, she doesn't actually want him to get hurt. She's using sarcasm to show him just how foolish he's being and what the inevitable consequences are going to be. That is exactly what God is doing here with Israel.

And this slide, this really gets to the core of the problem. You see, on one hand, Israel thought they were nailing it. They were bringing sacrifices every morning, paying their tithes, even bragging about how religious they were.

But on the other hand, God just wasn't interested in any of that. What he actually demanded was moral justice. He wanted righteousness.

They were just going through the motions, substituting empty rituals for a truly just society. And in God's eyes, that made their worship itself a sin. And you know, this wasn't happening in a vacuum.

Before God got to the point of sarcasm, he had already sent a whole series of escalating warnings to try and get their attention. But as we're about to see, they just completely missed the memo. He sent five distinct disasters, and each one got worse than the last.

First up, famine. The text calls it empty stomachs. When that didn't work, he sent a drought.

Still nothing. So then came blight and swarms of locusts that just destroyed their crops. After that, plagues and defeat in war.

And finally, a destruction so total it was compared to the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah. Every single one of these was meant to be a signal, a wake-up call. And after describing each of these terrible calamities, God adds this, just haunting line, yet you have not returned to me.

He says it five times. It's this heartbreaking refrain. Despite disaster after disaster, the people refused to connect the dots.

They wouldn't repent. They just didn't seem to get that their relationship with God was completely broken. So you can feel it building, right? The sarcasm didn't work.

The warnings were ignored. God's patience finally runs out, and he delivers a final, chilling ultimatum. Prepare to meet your God.

Wow. You know, that almost sounds like an invitation to a worship service. But it is the exact opposite.

This is not a friendly get-together. This is a summons. Israel is about to face their God, not as a savior, but as their judge.

And just in case they've forgotten who exactly they're dealing with, the prophet gives them a little reminder. We're talking about the God who forms mountains, who creates the wind, who can turn dawn into pitch-black darkness, and who treads on the heights of the earth. The power mismatch here is just, it's absolutely terrifying.

But just when it seems like judgment is a done deal, the story pivots again. Chapter 5 opens up, and it sounds like, well, it sounds like a funeral is already in progress. Yeah, the prophet starts a kinah, which is basically a formal funeral song, a lament for the dead.

He's already talking about virgin Israel as if she's fallen, never to rise again. It's like the nation's destruction is a foregone conclusion. The time for warnings is over.

Now it's just time to mourn. And the prophecy gets brutally specific. It predicts these catastrophic military losses.

A city that sends out a thousand soldiers, only a hundred will be left. Think about that. That's 90% casualties.

The situation seems completely and utterly hopeless. But then, right in the middle of this funeral song, this dirge of hopelessness, an offer just appears out of nowhere. Seek me and live.

After all the doom, after all the judgment, a path to life is suddenly on the table. A tiny glimmer of hope. So okay, what does it actually mean to seek God? The prophet is really clear about what it doesn't mean.

It's not about going to more religious services at places like Bethel or Gilgal. I mean, come on, they've been doing that all along, and that was a huge part of the problem. Nope.

Seeking God is something totally different. It means this. Seek good, not evil.

Hate evil, love good. And maintain justice in the courts. See, repentance isn't about more religion.

It's about a complete and total transformation of the ethics of their entire society. And this all leads us to the final section, where the prophet uses this brilliant literary technique to deliver the ultimate, shocking reversal. It's a punchline that would have been absolutely unforgettable to the people who first heard it.

The technique is called a chiasm. The easiest way to think about it is like a literary mirror or a sandwich. An author presents a series of ideas, let's say A, B, C, then gets to a central point, and then reflects those ideas in the reverse order, C, B, A. It's this really clever way to draw all of your attention to that central point and to create this powerful, satisfying structure.

And this is exactly what Amos does in chapter 5. It's beautiful. He starts with a lament, that's A, then a call to repent, to seek me, that's B, then an accusation of injustice, C, and right at the center, the pivot of the whole thing, is the identity of God as the all-powerful divine judge, that's D. And then he just mirrors his way back out. Another accusation of injustice, another call to repent, but this time it's to find a seeking good.

And he ends right back where he started, with lamentation. And the final line of this perfectly crafted argument is this: for I will pass through your midst. Now, to us today, that might not sound super scary, but for an ancient Israelite, those specific words would have triggered a deep, powerful, foundational memory.

And here it is. This is the shocking twist. The phrase, pass through, is the exact language used back in the book of Exodus to describe the Passover.

Remember that story? God passed through Egypt to judge the Egyptians, and in doing so, he saved Israel. It was their founding story of salvation. But now, God is using that same language to announce that he's going to pass through their land.

He's casting them in the role of Egypt. Their greatest story of salvation has been completely flipped on its head. It has been weaponized and turned back on them to announce their own judgment.

It's just a stunning, terrifying reversal, showing them that their special status as God's people wasn't going to protect them from the consequences of their own injustice. And all of this leaves us with a provocative question, one that just echoes through the centuries. Is this ancient story really a timeless warning about the profound and, let's be honest, often

dangerous difference between just the outward performance of religion and the actual practice of genuine justice?