

Dr. Robert Chisholm, Amos, Session 4, (B) Salvation History Comes Unravelled-Am 3-6 Podcast Audio Overview

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Welcome to the Deep Dive, where we plunge into a stack of fascinating sources to extract the most important nuggets of knowledge, custom-tailored just for you. Today, we are journeying back in time, deep into ancient wisdom that, remarkably, feels incredibly relevant for us right now. Our source for this Deep Dive is Dr. Robert Chisholm's insightful teaching on the Biblical Book of Amos, specifically Session 4b, covering Amos chapters 3-6.

The title Dr. Chisholm gives this section is Salvation History Comes Unraveled. Kind of ominous. Our central mission, really, for this Deep Dive is to unpack a powerful question.

What happens when a patient god uses what Dr. Chisholm calls drastic measures to get the attention of his people? We're going to try to uncover profound insights and maybe some surprising lessons tucked away in these ancient texts designed to illuminate your understanding of God's character and, well, how humans respond. Yeah, and we're going to peel back some truly fascinating layers. I mean, not only will we see the specifics of what was happening to ancient Israel, but we'll explore this incredible literary structure.

It just makes the text come alive. It shows us not just what was happening, but why it matters for us now and how God interacts with humanity more broadly. This isn't just ancient history.

It's a profound lens, really. Okay, let's dive in then. We open today's look at Amos with a really puzzling statement from God.

It sounds almost sarcastic. In Amos chapter 4, verses 4 and 5, he says, "Go to Bethel and sin. Go to Gilgal and sin yet more.

I mean, when I first read that, it really stopped me in my tracks. It's such an audacious thing to say. What are we supposed to make of God commanding sin here? Right.

It's what scholars call an ironic or even sarcastic imperative. It sounds strange, doesn't it? Think of it like a frustrated parent. Maybe their kid is absolutely determined to climb a shaky tree despite warnings.

The parent might finally throw up their hands and say, fine, go ahead, climb the tree, fall and break your arm, see if I care. Now, the parent clearly doesn't want the child to get hurt. But the sarcasm is meant to shock the kid, right? To highlight the inevitable painful consequence of their stubborn choice, hoping they'll finally see how foolish it is.

I see. So God's doing that with Israel. Exactly.

That's precisely what God is doing. Israel was so insistent on going to these worship sites, Bethel, Gilgal. They thought that, you know, by offering sacrifices, tithes, freewill offerings, all that stuff, they were going to gain God's favor, keep him happy, avoid judgment.

But they were completely substituting ritual for reality, for genuine moral justice. God saw their fancy religious ritual as actual sin because, fundamentally, they were being hypocrites. It's just like what we see in Isaiah chapter one.

God says there, essentially, I hate your festivals, your sacrifices; your hands are full of blood. He rejects offerings from people guilty of injustice. So here God's saying, you love going through these motions; fine, go do it.

But I see it as sin because your hearts aren't right and your actions towards others are corrupt. The core insight, God wants genuine repentance and justice, not just empty religious shows. So it wasn't just where they worshiped, but the heart behind it.

That changes everything about those verses for me. And these places, Bethel and Gilgal, they weren't just random spots on a map, were they? Tell us about their historical significance. Why call them out specifically? Oh, absolutely not random.

Bethel was hugely important. It means house of God, right? That's where Jacob had his famous dream, the ladder to heaven, a foundational place for their faith story. And Gilgal, well, Gilgal holds even deeper cultural and religious memory.

It was the Israelites' very first campsite when they crossed the Jordan River. After the miracle crossing, yeah. Exactly.

After that miracle, like the Red Sea parting, it's where they circumcised the new generation, marking them as God's people in the land. It was profoundly associated with possession of the promised land. They must've felt so secure there, thinking, " We're here; we made it.

But God says, nope, even your connection to these deeply sacred sites won't insulate you from my judgment. Their history, even their sacred history, couldn't act as a shield for their current hypocrisy. Wow.

Okay. So that cutting sarcasm wasn't enough, it seems. Because God then goes on to list a whole history of his previous attempts to get Israel's attention.

It feels almost like a desperate parent recounting all the warnings they gave. It's a powerful pattern in their story, isn't it? Let's get into that in Amos 4:6 to 11. Yeah.

He details these signals of his displeasure, which Dr. Chisholm points out were essentially the covenant curses. These were the specific consequences spelled out way back in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, part of their agreement with God. They weren't random disasters.

They were designed to make them stop and think, to prompt repentance. What kind of things? Well, he mentions empty stomachs and lack of bread, clearly famine. Okay.

Then, withheld rain, which means severe drought. So bad that people were staggering from town to town for water. Just imagine that desperation.

Terrible. He also sent blight and mildew, ruining crops, and locusts devoured your fig and olive trees. I mean, locust swarms are terrifying.

They just sweep in and strip everything bare in minutes. Total economic ruin. Right.

Then it gets even more severe: plagues among you, as I did to Egypt. That's a direct, chilling comparison. He killed your young men with the sword, likely in battle, and talks about the stench of your camps, maybe disease after sieges or defeats.

And perhaps most drastic, he says, he overthrew some of them as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. Just complete annihilation for some communities, leaving the survivors like a burning stick, snatched from the fire, barely saved. And after each one.

That's the crucial part. After listing each of these calamities, God repeats this heartbreaking refrain, yet you have not returned to me. That phrase strongly suggests these weren't just punishments.

They were meant to bring Israel to their senses, to prompt repentance. The Hebrew verb used there is *shove*. It literally means to return, to turn back.

God was sending signal after signal, consequences tied directly to their covenant breaking, but they just weren't getting it. They weren't returning. So after all these warnings, all these signals that went unheeded, where does that leave them? It builds up to that incredibly powerful, almost terrifying declaration in Amos 4.13. Therefore, prepare to meet your God.

What's the weight of that statement? Yeah, that sounds final, doesn't it? But Dr. Chisholm suggests it's not really a new threat, but an intensification. God's essentially saying Everything I've already been doing- the famine, the drought, the plagues- I'm going to continue and intensify them. It means meeting God up close and personal, but this time, specifically in his role as their judge.

He's coming to execute justice because they wouldn't listen to the corrective measures. It sounds terrifying, like it's game over, but maybe, just maybe, there's still an implicit, final, urgent call. Turn back before it's truly too late.

And then right after that stark warning, you get this almost jarring shift in tone, this majestic, almost psalm-like description of God in Amos 4.13. It's really beautiful, actually. It is, isn't it? It's like the camera pulls back to give this wide-angle view of who they're dealing with. It's a profound summary of God's power in nature.

He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind. He's the master of all nature, both the stable and solid things like mountains and the invisible, powerful things like the wind. He's the creator who reveals his thoughts to mankind.

That points directly to his communication through prophets like Amos himself. God doesn't leave them guessing. He tells them what he's thinking, what he requires.

And then it gets a bit ominous again. Who turns dawn to darkness? Yes, he controls the daily cycles, sun-ups, sun-downs. But it also means he has the power to turn light into dark, which is often symbolic language for judgment, death, and destruction.

And finally, he treads on the heights of the earth. This often means he appears in power, coming in storm clouds. It's imagery associated with his divine appearances, what theologians call theophanies in the Old Testament, like thunder and lightning announcing his arrival.

So, putting it all together. Putting it together, this God is the creator of everything, the controller of all forces, the communicator who speaks his mind through prophets, and ultimately the judge who holds people accountable. He is fully capable of shaking up their secure little world and turning it into something not so secure.

The core insight here is that the same God who made everything and keeps it going is also the one who demands justice. You can't escape that reality. And the best way to prepare? Well, implicitly, the best way- really, the only way- to truly prepare to meet your God in this context is to finally listen.

To heed that persistent call we heard earlier, return to me, repent, change. And you know, this whole section offers a brighter principle, something for all of us. Our patient God sometimes uses drastic measures, hardship, loss, difficulty, in an effort to bring his people, even today, to repentance.

God's dealings with ancient Israel, those specific to their time and covenant, really serve as a kind of microcosm of his dealings with the human race throughout history. Humanity often receives blessings, receives forgiveness, but then turns away, maybe gets caught up in religious formalism, like just going to church or doing religious things, while ignoring justice and mercy. And we somehow still think, oh, things are going to end up okay for me.

But Amos shows there are consequences for persistently ignoring God's calls to return, to live differently. That's a really powerful connection. It reminds us these ancient texts aren't just dusty history lessons.

Okay, so we've seen God's patience wearing thin, and these drastic measures. But what's truly remarkable now, as we move into chapter five, is how God delivers this message of impending judgment. Dr. Chisholm points out this incredible literary artistry, something called a chiasm.

Sounds fancy? It does sound a bit technical, maybe, but it's fascinating. A chiasm is basically a mirror structure or a concentric structure. Think of it like ABC, then the center D, then CBA.

It folds in on itself and then back out. Okay, like a reflection. Exactly, like a reflection.

It was especially effective in oral literature, which is how prophets like Amos mainly delivered their messages, right? They were spoken first. Unlike our written culture, where we try to avoid too much repetition. Right.

We edit it out. Yeah, we do. But in oral delivery, repetition is important.

It helps people hear and remember the key points. The structure itself emphasizes the central message. And the artistry here is just incredible.

Listen to this example. Dr. Chisholm gives it sound play or wordplay in the original Hebrew. In Amos 5.5, warning about a worship site, it says, ha-gil-gal, gal-o-yee-gal-ee.

Ha-gil-gal, gal-o-yee-gal-ee. Hear those repeating G and L sounds? It translates to: Gilgal will surely go into exile. It's memorable, punchy.

It just grabs your ear. This kind of artistry, for me anyway, feels like indirect evidence that the Bible isn't just a human book. There's a divine skill in how the message is shaped.

That's incredible, how literary depth can actually reinforce the theological punch. Okay, let's trace this chiasm in Amos 5 together. See how this mirroring works.

Where does it start? It sounds like a funeral song. Exactly right. The outer layer, the A part, verses one through three, is a lament for Israel.

Amos literally says, "Hear this word, Israel: this lament I take up concerning you. The Hebrew word for lament is qina. It's a mourning song, a dirge.

Using that word right at the start signals that death is imminent. He's singing their funeral song before they're even dead. Chilling.

It is. And he uses this devastating metaphor: fallen is virgin Israel, never to rise again. It pictures Israel as this vulnerable young woman, struck down with no one to lift her up, totally helpless, no defense.

And this sets the stage for the military devastation that follows. Your city that marches out 1,000 strong will only have 100 left. Your town that marches out 100 strong will have only 10 left.

Wow, 90% casualties. 90% casualties, utter destruction. That's the outer frame, the reason for the lament.

Okay, a devastating start. But then, almost immediately, the structure shifts to the B part, verses four through six. Amos gives a command: seek me, seek me, and live; hope.

But then it's followed by that really counterintuitive instruction again: do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. Why avoid these incredibly sacred historical sites if they're supposed to be seeking God? Yeah, it's that irony again, isn't it? These are the God places. Bethel means house of God, Jacob's spot.

Gilgal, the first camp after the Jordan miracle. And Beersheba, that's where patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob encountered God. These were the pilgrimage destinations, the places they thought God would be.

The obvious places to go. The obvious places. Yet God says, don't look for me there.

Why? Because those places themselves are going to be judged. He says Gilgal will surely go into exile and Bethel will be reduced to nothing, literally, become vanity or wickedness. Why? Because of the religious hypocrisy and syncretism happening there.

They were mixing worship of God with pagan practices or just going through empty motions. God's making it crystal clear. He is bigger than these shrines.

He can't be contained or manipulated by rituals at special locations. And judgment, symbolized by fire, will sweep through the tribes of Joseph- that's the northern kingdom- and it will engulf Bethel itself. So again, it's not the place; it's the heart, the practice.

And the reason for this judgment, this fire, is rooted in how they lived, specifically around justice, right? That's the next layer. That's the C layer, verse seven, the core accusation. Injustice, Amos declares, there are those who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground.

If you're asking why judgment is coming, this verse is the answer. Turning justice into bitterness. What does that mean, practically? Think about it.

Justice should be refreshing, like cool water. But they've twisted it so it tastes terrible, maybe even poisonous. They've corrupted the legal system.

And righteousness, God's standard of right living, they treat it like garbage. They hurl it onto the ground, despise it. You know, we all have this innate sense, don't we? We love it when justice is served.

Think of classic westerns like Shane or High Noon. We cheer when the bad guys get what's coming to them. Israel's leaders were the bad guys here, perverting justice.

And that kind of behavior demands justice from God himself. Justice is simply the implementation of God's just nature. And right at the very center of this whole structure, the pivot point, the D section, what do we find there? Right at the heart of the chiasm, verses eight to nine, we find this incredible hymn-like description of the divine judge and sovereign creator.

It pauses the accusations for a moment to remind Israel who they are dealing with. He who made the Pleiades and Orion, the constellations, turns midnight into dawn and darkens day into night. He controls time itself, calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land.

He commands the weather, the water cycle, and the punchline; the Lord is his name. This emphasizes God's absolute sovereignty as the creator of the cosmos, the master of everything. He's reminding them of his power.

Exactly. And the culmination of this central point, verse nine, is stark. With a blinding flash, he destroys the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin.

This is the pivot. This is the core message. Because you are guilty of injustice, you are going to encounter this powerful, sovereign divine judge who can and will bring destruction.

It's the ultimate reality check for people hiding behind rituals. Wow. Okay, so that's the center.

Now, as the chiasm mirrors back outwards, we return to the accusation of injustice, the sea layer, but maybe with more detail. Precisely. We move back out to sea, verses 10, 13, which is an expanded accusation of injustice.

Now, Amos gets really specific about what they were doing wrong. It's not vague anymore. Like what? He says they hate the one who upholds justice in court, the honest judge or witness.

They detest the one who tells the truth. Tells you something about the society, doesn't it? Yeah. They levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain, exploiting the vulnerable.

They oppress the innocent and, crucially, take bribes. And the result, they deprive the poor of justice in the courts. The whole system is rigged against the powerless.

And there are direct consequences mentioned. Yes, direct consequences linked to their ill-gotten gains. Though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them.

Though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. All their wealth, built on injustice, will be stripped away. There's even this sad little observation in verse 13: Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil.

Honest people knew it was pointless or even dangerous to speak out. That's how bad it was. This really spells out why that divine judgment at the center is coming.

It paints a really grim picture of society. But then, following the mere structure, we move back out to the B layer, verse 15, returning to that idea of seeking God. But maybe now it's clearer how they should do that.

Absolutely. This section tells them how to truly seek God. God clarifies through Amos: seek good, not evil, that you may live.

This defines what seek me actually means. It's not about going to a specific shrine. It's about actions.

It's about actions. It means repent. It means doing what's right.

And just as importantly, stop doing what's wrong. It's intensely practical. Hate evil, love good, maintain justice in the courts.

It's a call to active, moral transformation, getting their behavior aligned with God's character, not just going through religious motions. Is there any hope offered here? There is. It's a small glimmer, but it's there.

Verse 15 ends. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. Joseph refers to the Northern Kingdom.

It suggests that even now, facing this overwhelming judgment, genuine repentance, seeking good, and establishing justice could still lead to God showing mercy and preserving a remnant. The door isn't completely slammed shut. Perhaps implies it depends on their response.

Okay. A tiny sliver of hope. And finally, the chiasm brings us full circle back to the A layer, verses 16 to 17, returning to that theme of lamentation we heard right at the beginning.

Yes. The structure completes itself perfectly. Divine judgment will bring lamentation.

It echoes the opening verses. There will be wailing in all the streets and cries of anguish in every public square. Farmers will be called to weep, professional mourners hired.

It brings us right back to that initial mood of death and grief. And the final line. The final line of this section is incredibly powerful and chilling.

For I will pass through your midst, says the Lord. Dr. Chisholm highlights this as a direct allusion to the 10th plague back in Egypt, in Exodus. The Passover plague.

The Passover plague. Exactly. The angel of death passed through Egypt, killing the firstborn while passing over the houses of the Israelites marked with blood.

But here God says he will pass through Israel. It's a terrifying reversal. It's like Egypt repeated.

But this time the judgment falls on Israel itself. Their covenant status, their history won't shield them anymore. Their injustice and hypocrisy have put them in the path of God's judgment.

What an incredible deep dive. We've really seen how ancient Israel's story, even though it's, you know, deeply rooted in its own time and place, serves as such a powerful testament. It shows the devastating consequences of religious hypocrisy, of ignoring moral justice.

And it shows God's persistent, even drastic efforts to call his people back to genuine repentance. Right. And that microcosm idea is so important to grasp.

Just as God dealt with ancient Israel, blessing them, warning them, judging them, so too does he interact with humanity as a whole. He blesses us immensely, but he also allows us sometimes to experience the painful consequences of our rejection of his ways. The crucial lesson, I think, running through all of this is about moving beyond just, you know, religious formalism- just showing up, saying the right words to true repentance- to actively seeking genuine, good, real justice in our lives.

It's about aligning our actions and our hearts with God's character, not just checking off religious boxes. So as you, our listener, reflect on this deep dive into Amos, maybe consider this provocative thought for your own life. What might it look like for you to truly seek good, not evil? How can you actively prepare to meet your God, not just in some future sense, but right now, by aligning your daily actions with justice and truth? What stands out to you from this ancient prophet's message today?