

Dr. Robert Chisholm, Amos, Session 7, Judgment is Inescapable, Amos 8:4-9:10

Podcast Audio Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to the Deep Dive. Today, we're embarking on an exploration into a really fascinating text. Yeah, the biblical book of Amos.

It's ancient, but you'll find the insights are surprisingly relevant. Absolutely. We're going to be looking at judgment, justice, and, well, how we understand the divine character itself.

Exactly. And this isn't just history. We're drawing heavily on Dr. Robert Chisholm's work on Amos, particularly his focus on this challenging idea that judgment is inescapable.

Yeah, it really challenges your perspective. It does. It pushes us to see reality maybe a bit differently.

So our mission today is to unpack these ancient messages, really dig into the layers, and see why understanding this stuff is still important for you. Get ready for some challenging ideas. And some pretty neat linguistic twists, too.

Definitely. Okay, so where do we kick this off? Amos starts with these, well, these incredibly vivid visions. Right.

First, you get what feel like motion pictures, you know, locusts, then fire. And Amos cries out both times, Lord, forgive, or stop. And the Lord actually listens.

He relents. He does. But then there's a shift.

It moves to more of a snapshot. The plumb line vision. God holding a plumb line next to a wall.

And the wall's clearly crooked. What's fascinating here is how God seems to be adjusting Amos' perspective. Ah, so it's not just showing Amos what will happen.

No, it's showing him why. Yeah. Why judgment is becoming necessary.

And this viewpoint, it really gets cemented for Amos after that run-in he has with Amaziah, the priest at Bethel. Right, where he sees firsthand just how corrupt the elite are. He realizes they are just, well, way beyond the line, as Chisholm puts it.

Okay. And that leads into chapter eight with another vision. Yes, the symbolic still life.

You could call it a basket of ripe summer fruit. Amos sees it, identifies it using the Hebrew word *kaiyetz*. And then the Lord delivers the punchline.

The keitz, the end has come for my people, Israel. I will spare them no longer. So wait, the word for the fruit is the same word God uses for the end.

Exactly the same sound. kaiyetz, summer fruit harvested right at the very end of the agricultural cycle. It's often listed last in old calendars like the geyser calendar.

Wow. So it's a brilliant, stark wordplay. The sight of the end-of-season fruit means the end has come.

That's incredibly powerful. So the big takeaway from these visions for you listening is what? I think it's that to really get a handle on God's judgment, which can seem harsh, we have to try and see things from his perspective, his plumb line, his standing. Which forces us to hold seemingly opposite things together, doesn't it? It really does.

God's sovereignty and justice on one hand and his goodness on the other. Dr. Chisholm notes how, emotionally, that's just hard for us to reconcile. Yeah.

But when God holds up that plumb line, metaphorically speaking, we are crooked walls. And because he's holy, judgment becomes, well, necessary. It reminds me of the struggle students have in that knowing God through the Old Testament course you mentioned.

Exactly. They often wrestle with God appearing too severe sometimes. It's a real tension.

Maybe bringing in Hosea here could help. He was a contemporary of Amos, right? Yeah. Good idea.

Hosea offers this incredible, almost contradictory view sometimes. It adds another layer. Because he has some really harsh images too.

God acting like, what, lions and bears. Oh, absolutely terrifying predator imagery and judgment involving military invasion, taking away children. It's brutal.

And that's linked to their idolatry. Directly. It's a consequence of their Baal worship.

They credited Baal for their crops, their kids, their prosperity, completely rejecting God as the source. So God basically says, okay, you think Baal gives these? Let's see what happens when I withdraw them. Oof.

But then you get these incredibly tender moments. Completely. Like Hosea's own life story, having to go and buy back his unfaithful wife, Gomer.

It's just this picture of relentless love. Or God saying he'll take Israel into the wilderness, into exile, but... But to speak tenderly to her, to woo her back like a first love, not just to punish. So how on earth do you hold those together? The lion and the loving husband? Well, Hosea 11 gives us maybe the best glimpse inside God's own heart.

He's wrestling. How can I give you up, Ephraim? My heart recoils within me. My compassion grows warm and tender.

Wow. And the key reason he gives. For I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

He can hold that tension. Righteous anger, justice, and overwhelming mercy and compassion, perfectly balanced because he's God. It's not like human anger that just lashes out.

Exactly. It's different. And think about what this means for you.

God doesn't just decree judgment from some safe distance. Right. He doesn't shield himself from sin's consequences.

No. Ultimately, the God-man, Jesus, takes the hit. He suffers the penalty.

It's this profound mystery showing God cares so much. He endures the suffering himself to make redemption possible. That really shifts the perspective on judgment.

OK, let's bring that understanding back to Amos now. Chapter 8 gets really specific about why this judgment is coming. Yes, it zooms in on the societal rot, those who trample the needy and do away with the poor.

And the details of the economic cheating are just stark. They really are. It shows their mindset.

They're itching for the Sabbath and the religious festivals to be over so they can get back to cheating people. How were they doing it specifically? Well, Amos lists it out. They skimmed on the measure, used a small ephah container, so they gave less grain than they charged for.

OK. They boosted the price by using heavy shekel weights on their side of the scale, making the buyer pay more silver than was fair. So cheating on both ends: the quantity and the payment.

Exactly. Plus dishonest scales. Yeah.

And maybe the worst, selling the sweepings or the chaff mixed in with the wheat. Ugh, like finding moldy berries under the perfect ones on top. Precisely that kind of deception.

And it makes you think, doesn't it? Even though this is ancient. The principle feels universal. God hates it when people exploit others economically.

Absolutely. He values fairness. And the text implies that trusting him, doing business his way, might actually lead to unexpected blessings.

Counterintuitive, as that might seem. But these people weren't doing that. And God notices.

Oh, he notices. There's that chilling line where the Lord swears by the pride of Jacob. Which is pure sarcasm, referring to their arrogance.

What does he swear? Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. Without repentance, without turning back. God doesn't just forget injustice.

And the judgment fits the crime in a way. The land itself reacts. Yeah, the land will tremble, rise and fall like the Nile.

It's this amazing personification showing how sin has collateral damage, affecting everything. And then the sky. The sun goes down at noon.

Yeah. Dark on the earth and broad daylight. People would have immediately thought of an eclipse.

A major, terrifying divine omen back then. It would absolutely get your attention. But you're not ignoring that.

No. And their joyful religious festivals, they'll turn into funerals. Singing becomes weaving.

Sackcloth and shaved heads. Signs of the deepest mourning. Like mourning for an only son, Amos says.

The absolute bitterest grief imaginable. But maybe the most haunting judgment is the famine. But not a normal famine.

No, not a famine of bread or water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Think about that. The very people who told Amos and other prophets to shut up, who didn't want to hear God's word.

Now they'll be desperate for it. Desperate. Staggering around, searching everywhere from sea to sea, north to east, looking for a word from the Lord.

But they will not find it. That's chillingly appropriate. It really is.

And it raises the question: what about their idols? What happens to those who trusted in false gods? Amos mentions them, doesn't he? He does. Those who swear by the guilt of Samaria, probably referring to their calf idol or maybe a share of worship. Or by the God of Dan, that other golden calf Jeroboam set up.

Or even the way of Beersheba, some kind of illicit worship down south. What's the verdict on them? Simple and final. They shall fall and never rise again.

False hopes lead to ultimate collapse. Which brings us to the final vision, chapter nine. It feels like a culmination.

It really does. Amos sees the Lord Himself standing right by the altar in the sanctuary at Bethel. Not protecting it, but... Commanding its destruction.

Strike the captors until the thresholds shake and shatter them on the heads of all the people. It hammers home that theme. Judgment is inescapable.

There's no hiding, not even in the holy place, if it's corrupted. So this is where that phrase comes in: God always wins at hide-and-seek. Exactly.

The Lord spells it out. If they dig down to Sheol, the underworld... He'll pull them out. If they climb up to heaven... He'll bring them down.

It's that literary device of Merism. Using the extremes, heights and depths, to mean absolutely everywhere in between. There is literally nowhere to run.

Nope. Hide on Mount Carmel. He'll find you.

Flee to the bottom of the sea. A serpent will bite you. Even exile won't save them.

No. If they go into exile before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them. God says, I will fix my eyes upon them.

For evil and not for good. That's stark disaster, calamity. Absolutely.

And just in case anyone doubts God has the power to do all this, Amos drops in this incredible little hymn. Right at the end of that section. Yeah.

Describing God's cosmic power. He's the Lord God Almighty. He just touches the earth, and it melts.

He builds his palace in the heavens, commands the seas. The Lord is his name. It's the ultimate mic drop.

Don't doubt his sovereignty or his ability to execute judgment. Wow. Okay.

That was intense. A really deep dive into Amos's message. From summer fruit to inescapable judgment.

Yeah. Driven by that societal injustice, that spiritual rejection. We've really seen how judgment isn't just one thing.

Right. It's part of this complex balance in God's character: holiness, justice, but also mercy and compassion, as we saw in Hosea. It really forces you, listening, to think about how our actions connect to God's response.

And the real consequences of turning away from him and from basic justice. So thinking about what this means for you today, as we look ahead in Amos, there's this image of God using a sieve. Right.

He's going to shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve. Still judgment, still scattering. But it's also presented as somehow good news for the righteous remnant, which makes you wonder: how can that kind of sifting, that shaking, also be good news? And what does it tell us about God that he uses a sieve? What's he trying to achieve through that? Definitely something to ponder.

Indeed. Something to reflect on.