

Amos: The Lion Has Roared, Who Will Not Fear?

Session 4: Salvation History Comes Unraveled (Amos 3–6 / Amos 4:4–5:17)

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Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Amos, Bethel, Gilgal, repentance, judgment, chiasmus, justice, covenant, lamentation, sarcasm

Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Robert Chisholm analyzes Amos 4:4–5:17, explaining how God uses sarcastic imperatives and historical discipline to expose Israel's persistent rebellion. Rather than returning to God, the Israelites substituted genuine covenant obedience and moral justice with hypocritical religious rituals at sacral centers like Bethel and Gilgal. Dr. Chisholm demonstrates how Amos structures chapter 5 as an intricate chiasmus (A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A'), pivoting on God's supreme sovereignty as Creator and Judge. Ultimately, Israel is warned that true devotion requires seeking good and establishing justice rather than performing superficial religious ceremonies, lest God pass through them in destructive judgment.

Outline

I. Introduction and Context: Divine Warning and Hypocrisy (Amos 4:4–13)

A. Sarcastic Imperatives and Religious Hypocrisy (Amos 4:4–5)

1. Command to 'go to Bethel and sin' as an ironic, sarcastic rebuke
2. Mother and tree-climbing illustration: employment of sarcasm when direct warnings fail
3. Substituting superficial religious rituals (sacrifices, tithes, freewill offerings) for moral reality and justice
4. Historical and cultural significance of sacred sites: Bethel (Jacob) and Gilgal (Jordan crossing & land possession)

B. Divine Signals of Displeasure and Unheeded Discipline (Amos 4:6–11)

1. Famine and empty stomachs ('clean teeth in every city')
2. Withheld rain and selective drought across neighboring towns
3. Agricultural devastation through blight, mildew, and swarms of locusts
4. Plagues and military defeat ('youths killed with the sword')
5. Severe overthrow comparable to Sodom and Gomorrah
6. The repeated refrain of rejection: 'Yet you have not returned to me' (shuv)

C. Confrontation and the Nature of the Divine Judge (Amos 4:12–13)

1. The solemn summons: 'Prepare to meet your God' in personal judgment
2. Doxology celebrating God's creative sovereignty: Creator of mountains and wind, revealer of thoughts, controller of dawn and darkness, treader on the heights
3. Core Principle: God patiently uses drastic measures to bring rebellious people to repentance

II. Salvation History Comes Unravelling: The Chiastic Structure of Amos 5:1–17

A. Overview of Oral Literature, Chiasmus, and Literary Artistry

1. Characteristics of biblical oral preaching: repetition, paneling (A-B-A-B), and chiasmus/concentric structure (A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A')
2. Psycholinguistics and structural memory patterns in ancient prophetic literature

B. Outer Frame [A & A']: Announcement of Death and Lamentation (Amos 5:1–3, 16–17)

1. Initial lament (qinah) over 'virgin Israel,' fallen with 90% military casualties (5:1–3)
2. Corresponding closing lamentation: wailing in public squares, vineyards, and fields (5:16–17)
3. Allusion to the 10th Plague of Egypt: God 'passing through' in judgment rather than protection

C. Second Layer [B & B']: Call to Seek God vs. Condemnation of False Shrines (Amos 5:4–6, 14–15)

1. Exhortation to 'seek me and live' rather than trusting Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba (5:4–6)
2. Hebrew wordplay and alliteration: Ha Gilgal, Galo Yigle ('Gilgal will surely go into exile')
3. Redefinition of 'seeking God': seeking good, loving justice, and hating evil rather than offering ritual sacrifices (5:14–15)
4. Possibility of divine mercy for the remnant of Joseph

D. Third Layer [C & C']: Accusation of Social Injustice and Oppression (Amos 5:7, 10–13)

1. Turning justice into bitterness and casting righteousness to the ground (5:7)
2. Specific indictments: hating truth-tellers in court, imposing straw/grain taxes on the poor, taking bribes (5:10–12)
3. Futility of ill-gotten wealth: stone mansions un-lived in, lush vineyards un-drunk (5:11)
4. The prudent keeping silent in evil times (5:13)

E. Center Pivot [D]: The Sovereign Lord of Creation and Cosmic Judgment (Amos 5:8–9)

1. Creator of the celestial constellations (Pleiades and Orion)
2. Sovereign over night, day, sea waters, and human fortresses
3. The Divine Judge who confronts systemic human rebellion

III. Theological Application and Modern Relevance

A. Israel as a Microcosm of Human Rebellion

1. Universality of human rejection of God's warnings and grace
2. Danger of substituting spiritual formalism and religious security for genuine heart transformation

B. Final Warning and Moral Accountability

1. God's ultimate end to history and execution of final judgment
2. The necessity of active repentance (shuv) and pursuit of covenant righteousness