

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
9-20-17

Amos 4

Israel Has Not Returned to God

¹ Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, "Bring us some drinks!"² The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness: "The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks,³ You will each go straight out through breaches in the wall, and you will be cast out toward Harmon," declares the LORD.⁴ "Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years.⁵ Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings—boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do," declares the Sovereign LORD.⁶ "I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.⁷ "I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up.⁸ People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.⁹ "Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, destroying them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.¹⁰ "I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.¹¹ "I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.¹² "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, Israel, prepare to meet your God."¹³ He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind, and who reveals his thoughts to mankind, who turns dawn to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the LORD God Almighty is his name.

4:1 Israel's wealthy women were called "cows of Bashan"—pampered, sleek, and well fed (see Psalm 22:12). These women selfishly pushed their husbands to oppress the helpless in order to support their lavish lifestyles. Be careful not to desire material possessions so much that you are willing to oppress others and displease God to get them.

4:4 Amos sarcastically invited the people to sin in Bethel and Gilgal, where they worshiped idols instead of God. Bethel was where God had renewed his covenant to Abraham with Jacob (Genesis 28:10-22). At this time, Bethel was the religious center of the northern kingdom, and Jeroboam had placed an idol there to discourage the people from traveling to Jerusalem in the southern kingdom to worship (1 Kings 12:26-29). Gilgal was Israel's first

campground after entering the Promised Land (Joshua 4:19). Here Joshua had renewed the covenant and the rite of circumcision, and the people had celebrated the Passover (Joshua 5:2-11). Saul was crowned Israel's first king in Gilgal (1 Samuel 11:15).

4:6-13 No matter how God warned the people—through famine, drought, blight, locusts, plagues, or war—they still ignored him. Because the Israelites didn't get the message, they would have to meet God face-to-face in judgment. No longer would they ignore God; they would have to face the One they had rejected, the One they had refused to obey when he commanded them to care for the poor. Oneday each of us will meet God face-to-face to give account for what we have done or refused to do. Are you prepared to meet him?

Amos 5

A Lament and Call to Repentance - Verses 1-17

¹ Hear this word, Israel, this lament I take up concerning you:² "Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up."³ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Israel: "Your city that marches out a thousand strong will have only a hundred left; your town that marches out a hundred strong will have only ten left."⁴ This is what the LORD says to Israel: "Seek me and live;⁵ do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing.⁶ Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire; it will devour them, and Bethel will have no one to quench it.⁷ There are those who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground.⁸ He who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns midnight into dawn and darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land—the LORD is his name.⁹ With a blinding flash he destroys the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin.¹⁰ There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth.¹¹ You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine.¹² For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.¹³ Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil.¹⁴ Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.¹⁵ Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.¹⁶ Therefore this is what the Lord, the LORD God Almighty, says: "There will be wailing in all the streets and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep and the mourners to wail.¹⁷ There will be wailing in all the vineyards, for I will pass through your midst," says the LORD.

5:1 Amos shocked his listeners by singing a lament or funeral song for them as though they had already been destroyed. The Israelites believed that their wealth and religious ritual made them secure, but Amos lamented their sure destruction.

5:6 There is one sure remedy for a world that is sick and dying in sin: "Seek the LORD and live." Sin seeks to destroy, but hope is found in seeking God. In times of difficulty, seek God. In personal discomfort and struggle, seek God. When others are struggling, encourage them to seek God, too.

5:7 The law courts should have been places of justice where the poor and oppressed could find relief. Instead, they had become places of greed and injustice.

5:10-12 A society is in trouble when those who try to do right are hated for their commitment to justice. Any society that exploits the poor and defenseless or hates the truth is bent on destroying itself.

5:12 Why does God put so much emphasis on the way we treat the poor and needy? How we treat the rich, or those of equal standing, often reflects what we hope to get from them. But because the poor can give us nothing, how we treat them reflects our true character. Do we, like Christ, give without thought of gain? We should treat the poor as we would like God to treat us.

5:12 Here are eight common excuses for not helping the poor and needy: (1) They don't deserve help. They got themselves into poverty; let them get themselves out. (2) God's call to help the poor applies to another time. (3) We don't know any people like this. (4) I have my own needs. (5) Any money I give will be wasted, stolen, or spent. The poor will never see it. (6) I may become a victim myself. (7) I don't know where to start, and I don't have time. (8) My little bit won't make any difference. Instead of making lame excuses, ask what can be done to help. Does your church have programs to help the needy? Could you volunteer to work with a community group that fights poverty? As one individual, you may not be able to accomplish much, but join up with similarly motivated people and watch mountains begin to move.

5:15 If Israel were to sweep away the corrupt system of false accusations, bribery, and corruption, and were to insist that only just decisions be given, this would show their change of heart. We dare not read this passage lightly or write it off simply as encouragement to be good. It is a command to reform our own legal and social system.

5:16 Failure to honor the dead was considered horrible in Israel, so loud weeping was common at funerals. Paid mourners, usually women, cried and mourned loudly with dirges and eulogies. Amos said there would be so many funerals that there would be a shortage of professional mourners, so farmers would be called from the fields to help (see also Jeremiah 9:17-20).

The Day of the LORD- Verses 18-27

¹⁸ Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light.¹⁹ It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him.²⁰ Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light—pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?²¹ “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me.²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them.²³ Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.²⁴ But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!²⁵ “Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?²⁶ You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god—which you made for yourselves.²⁷ Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,” says the LORD, whose name is God Almighty.

5:18 Here “the day of the LORD” means the imminent destruction by the Assyrian army, as well as the future day of God’s judgment. For the faithful, the day of the Lord will be glorious, but for the unfaithful it will be a day of darkness and doom. (See Joel 1:15 for more discussion of the day of the Lord.)

5:18-24 These people were calling for the day of the Lord, thinking it would bring an end to their troubles. But in effect, God responded, “You have no idea what you are asking for.” This “day of the LORD” would bring justice, and justice would bring the punishment the people deserved for their sins.

5:21-23 God hates false worship (“religious festivals” and “assemblies”) by people who go through the motions out of pretense or for show. If we are living sinful lives and using religious activities and traditions to make ourselves look good, God will despise our worship and will not accept what we offer. He wants sincere hearts, not words of praise from hypocrites. When you worship at church, are you more concerned about your image or your attitude toward God?

5:26 These pagan gods were associated with the stars and planets. Israel had turned from the Lord to worship these nature “gods,” preferring the creation over the Creator himself (2 Kings 23:4-5). Pagan religion allowed them to indulge in sexual immorality and to become wealthy through any means possible. Because they refused to worship and obey the one true God, they would cause their own destruction.

5:27 Israel’s captivity was indeed in a land beyond Damascus—the people were taken to Assyria. God’s punishment was more than defeat; it was complete exile from their homeland.