



CENTRAL truth

God holds us accountable when we don't follow His call to obedience.

02 session 2 TOO LATE TO REPENT



EXPLORE scripture AMOS 4:1-13

AMOS 4:1-3

1 Listen to this message, you cows of Bashan who are on the hill of Samaria, women who oppress the poor and crush the needy, who say to their husbands, "Bring us something to drink." **2** The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness: Look, the days are coming when you will

be taken away with hooks, every last one of you with fishhooks. **3** You will go through breaches in the wall, each woman straight ahead, and you will be driven along toward Harmon. This is the LORD's declaration.

AMOS 4:4-5

4 Come to Bethel and rebel; rebel even more at Gilgal! Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tenths every three days. **5** Offer leavened bread as a thanksgiving

sacrifice, and loudly proclaim your freewill offerings, for that is what you Israelites love to do! This is the declaration of the Lord GOD.

AMOS 4:6-13

6 I gave you absolutely nothing to eat in all your cities, a shortage of food in all your communities, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD's declaration. **7** I also withheld the rain from you while there were still three months until harvest. I sent rain on one city but no rain on another. One field received rain while a field with no rain withered. **8** Two or three cities staggered to another city to drink water but were not satisfied, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD's declaration. **9** I struck you with blight and mildew; the locust devoured your many gardens and vineyards, your fig trees and olive trees, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD's declaration. **10** I sent plagues like those of Egypt; I killed your young

men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I caused the stench of your camp to fill your nostrils, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD's declaration. **11** I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a burning stick snatched from a fire, yet you did not return to me — This is the LORD's declaration. **12** Therefore, Israel, that is what I will do to you, and since I will do that to you, Israel, prepare to meet your God! **13** He is here: the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, the one who makes the dawn out of darkness and strides on the heights of the earth. The LORD, the God of Armies, is his name.



EXPLORE options

1. Reverse Simon Says

Inform students that you'll be playing Simon Says with a twist. Tell them that "up" now means "down" and "down" means "up." Once they get the hang of these changes, add more, such as "right" means "left" and "left" means "right." Next, "front" means "back" and "back" means "front." Explain that God expects us to obey the things we know He has told us to do. Unlike "Simon" in this game, God is patient with us and gives us second chances to get it right when we don't obey. Today, we'll talk about what happened to the Israelites when they ignored the second chances God gave them. God calls us to obedience and holds us accountable when we don't respond properly.

2. Ulterior Motives

When your group meets, have them come up with a list of "good deeds" students might perform for selfish reasons (e.g., babysit so you can eat the good snacks at someone else's house). Ask them to give a better motive for doing each good deed. Explain that a person's motive for doing something is often just as important as what they do. Some things, if done for the wrong reason, don't really count as "good." This is certainly true of worship. God wants us to worship Him to show people how good He is, not to make ourselves look good. Today, we'll talk about Israel's insincere worship and what God did about it when they refused to change. It's important for us to respond to God in obedience—He holds us accountable when we don't.



LET'S talk

What is the most difficult rule for you to follow at home? Why?

How do you typically respond to discipline? Why?



THIS WEEK'S focus

When life is good for us, we sometimes get a bit lazy. Instead of using what we have to bless others, we spend our money and energy on our own pleasure, comfort, or entertainment. However, God wants more from us. We are His representatives in the world, and people will form their opinion of Him based on our behavior. Therefore, we must be sure that we are representing Him well. We do this by taking care of people in need and worshiping Him the way He deserves. The Israelites didn't do this, and when God tried to correct them, they ignored Him. If we want to avoid the punishment they eventually suffered, we must do better. We must stay focused and submissive before God.



CONVERSATION questions

READ AMOS 4:1-3.

1 Listen to this message, you cows of Bashan who are on the hill of Samaria, women who oppress the poor and crush the needy, who say to their husbands, “Bring us something to drink.”

2 The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness: Look,

the days are coming when you will be taken away with hooks, every last one of you with fishhooks.

3 You will go through breaches in the wall, each woman straight ahead, and you will be driven along toward Harmon. This is the LORD’s declaration.

In chapter 3, Amos reminded God’s people that they were chosen by God and invited Israel’s allies to witness God’s judgment on His people. Here in chapter 4, Amos zeroed in on the women of Israel, using the phrase “cows of Bashan” to describe them. Bashan was a land of lush pasture, so the cows of Bashan would have been well-fed and lazy. Amos was basically calling the wealthy women of Israel spoiled and lazy.



BE VULNERABLE

Because this world is full of injustice—and always has been—we are used to seeing people in need. But often we choose to do nothing about it. Consider telling your group about a time you either helped a person in need or could have helped, but didn’t. What was the result of your choice? How did this choice impact your relationship with God? How did it impact the person in need? How might it have impacted their impression of God?

According to Amos, these women of Israel were active participants in the oppression of the poor and the crushing of the needy. If they were aware of what their husbands were doing, they certainly didn’t do anything to stop it. Instead, they indulged their own desire for alcohol and enjoyed the ill-gotten gains of systemic oppression in the form of possessions, leisure, and power.

KEY QUESTION

.01 What should the women of Israel have done about the condition of the poor and needy? Why do you think they chose not to?

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SCRIPTURE commentary

.02 In what ways do people take advantage of the poor and those in need today? Who benefits when this happens?

In response to this behavior, God swore by His own holiness that He would punish the women of Israel along with the men. God is holy (morally perfect). He cannot lie, and He always keeps His promises. God didn't need to swear to be believed, but the fact that He did proves He could no longer be persuaded to change His mind. God had already given Israel ample time and opportunity to repent, and they hadn't. For this reason, they would be led away violently by their captors, the way fish are taken out of the water with hooks through their flesh.

.03 What does the severity of this punishment tell us about God's love for the poor? What does this tell us about how God should be worshiped?



LEADER PACK

ITEM 7 | Amos was an obedient prophet. See the poster **Role of Prophets in the Old Testament** to a list of the prophetic tasks that Amos and other prophets performed



LEADER PACK

ITEM 2 | For a look at some key locations in the ministry of Amos and other prophets of the eighth century BC, see the **Prophets of the Eighth Century BC** map poster.

AMOS 4:1-3

4:1. The expression *cows of Bashan* derisively refers to the upper-class *women* of Samaria. Bashan, located east of the Sea of Galilee, was famous for its lush pasture and fine livestock (see Deut. 32:14; Ezek. 39:18). Like the cattle of that region, these aristocratic women were well fed and pampered. The word “cows” is not necessarily an insult in every case. Being a pastoral people, the Israelites often described beauty using imagery related to things that were valued in their culture. For instance, Song of Songs 4:1 compares a beautiful woman's hair to a flock of goats. But the women spoken of by Amos were cruel and unfeeling, as shown by their indifference to the suffering of the poor. Their arrogance was apparent in how they treated even their husbands as household slaves.

4:2. The Hebrew of this verse is difficult. The word translated as *taken away* literally means to “lift up,” and the words translated as *hooks* and *fishhooks* are obscure and may not refer to hooks at all. But if “hooks” is correct, the metaphor may describe the bodies of the “cows” being hoisted on meat hooks.

4:3. The location of *Harmon* is unknown, and it may be that a scribal error has garbled the text. Still, the main point is clear: many people will be slaughtered, and those who survive will file out of the ruined walls of the city into exile.



CONVERSATION questions

READ AMOS 4:4-5.

4 Come to Bethel and rebel; rebel even more at Gilgal! Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tenths every three days. **5** Offer leavened bread as a thanksgiving sacrifice, and loudly proclaim your freewill offerings, for that is what you Israelites love to do! This is the declaration of the Lord GOD.

Next, Amos mocked the worship practices of the Israelites on God's behalf because they had made a mockery of worship. Bethel and Gilgal were important cities in Israel's history. The historically significant events and ongoing practices that occurred at both places served to set Israel apart as God's chosen people. If the Israelites were going to live for God's glory anywhere, they should have done it there. Instead, they went through the motions of worship for their own glory. They still tithed (gave ten percent of their earnings), made sacrifices, and presented offerings, but they perverted these practices to make themselves look good. They made sure other people saw them give, but neglected the details of worship that were only discernible to them and to God (such as repentance, gratitude, and private prayer). They did not offer God the kind of bread He asked for (i.e., without yeast, in remembrance of God's deliverance during the Passover; see Lev. 7:12; Ex. 12:14-15), and they did not come to God with repentant hearts (see Ps. 51:17).

.04 How could we twist the way we worship to glorify ourselves rather than God?

When Israel walked away after participating in this false worship, they proved their insincerity by continuing to ignore, oppress, and abuse the poor, who could have benefited greatly from the extra goods the Israelites had given in false worship. Because the Israelites behaved no differently than their pagan neighbors, God planned to judge them like those pagan neighbors, only more severely. God had given the Israelites much, so He expected much from them in return.

.05 What does your behavior outside of church say about the sincerity of your worship?

The tone of this direct message from God was ironic. The modern equivalent would sound something like, “Yeah, go ahead and keep pretending to worship Me so people will think you’re great, and we’ll see if you still think it’s a good idea when I’m finished with you.”



CULTURE | What are thank offerings and free will offerings, and why were these offerings specifically mentioned in this passage?

Thank offerings and free will offerings both involved the sacrifice of animals to God and involved public proclamation and celebration. After each was given, a portion was eaten by the worshipers and their guests. The time they spent enjoying it was intended to be a time of communion with God, who had, in effect, shared His offering with them. These offerings were specifically mentioned in this passage because the Israelites had abused them. Neither was required by law, but the Israelites brought these offerings often. Because the Israelites paid little attention to the requirements of these offerings (see Amos 4:5), we can assume they didn’t bring them to express thanks, celebrate God, or enjoy communion with Him, but to draw attention to themselves, look generous, and enjoy time with their friends instead.



LEADER PACK

ITEM 4 | The Israelites definitely worshiped someone. See the **10 Words in Hosea, Amos, Jonah, & Micah** poster to determine whether or not you think they were guilty of idolatry.

AMOS 4:4-5

4:4. Normally pilgrims gathered at a worship site expected to hear a priest invite them to enter the sanctuary to worship. Since Bethel had been a revered worship center from patriarchal times (see Gen. 12:8; 28:19), the command to enter Bethel implied a religious pilgrimage. *Rebel* is the direct opposite of the purpose of entering a sacred shrine. To find restored relationship with God and thus to find life is the usual direction issued by a priest. Ordering pilgrims to enter the sanctuary to break with the Lord is the point of the prophet’s command. Amos ironically invited Israel to go to Bethel and *rebel* and go to Gilgal and *rebel even more*. He was not calling them to do something new but ironically to continue their sinful worship. The ritual itself was not at fault; they were bringing the prescribed sacrifices, even freewill offerings and tithes (see v. 5). Where they were at fault was in making their rituals an end in themselves when they were meant to be a means toward and an expression of fellowship with God.

4:5. The law prescribed daily *offerings* (see Lev. 6:8-13) and a special tithe every three years for the benefit of the Levites (see Deut. 14:28-29). *Leavened bread* as well as unleavened was to be brought with the thank offering (see Lev. 7:11-13), which along with the *freewill offerings* was voluntary. The thank offering was brought either in anticipation of or gratitude for a deliverance of some kind. The freewill offering was to be an expression of gratitude for God’s goodness more generally. These were both types of peace offerings, unique in that the worshiper was to share in the sacred meal.



CONVERSATION questions

READ AMOS 4:6-13.

6 I gave you absolutely nothing to eat in all your cities, a shortage of food in all your communities, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD's declaration. **7** I also withheld the rain from you while there were still three months until harvest. I sent rain on one city but no rain on another. One field received rain while a field with no rain withered. **8** Two or three cities staggered to another city to drink water but were not satisfied, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD's declaration. **9** I struck you with blight and mildew; the locust devoured your many gardens and vineyards, your fig trees and olive trees, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD's declaration. **10** I sent plagues like those of Egypt; I

killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I caused the stench of your camp to fill your nostrils, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD's declaration. **11** I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a burning stick snatched from a fire, yet you did not return to me — This is the LORD's declaration. **12** Therefore, Israel, that is what I will do to you, and since I will do that to you, Israel, prepare to meet your God! **13** He is here: the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, the one who makes the dawn out of darkness and strides on the heights of the earth. The LORD, the God of Armies, is his name.

Next, Amos reminded Israel of ways God had disciplined them toward repentance. Amos outlined each situation God had created, how it had affected them, and what they had failed to do in response: return to God. After each description, Amos used the words “this is the LORD’s declaration” (vv. 6,8-10) to indicate that the words he spoke were God’s exact words—Amos was not paraphrasing. The memories were God’s, the observations were God’s, and any emotions expressed in the choice of words were God’s. Amos was simply the messenger.

First, God recalled a time He had withheld water. The Canaanites believed that Baal controlled everything having to do with weather and crop production. By withholding water, God was proving His power over Baal. But instead of recognizing God’s discipline and repenting, the Israelites tried to solve the problem themselves and went in search of water. Next, God destroyed Israel’s food, but they still didn’t repent. Israel’s stubbornness was like Pharaoh’s during the Hebrew enslavement in Egypt, so God sent plagues like the ones He had sent then (see Ex. 7–11). He killed their young men and horses, the things they depended on for safety. Still, they ignored God. Lastly, God sent destruction similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah, cities known for their culture of sexual perversion (see Gen. 19:1-29). This was Israel’s last chance to repent, but they didn’t take it.

.06 What does the fact that God tried so many times to get Israel’s attention teach us about Him?

KEY QUESTION

.07 What kinds of events and situations can God use to get our attention today? How should we respond? Why?

After recounting this detailed list, Amos told Israel to prepare to meet their God. The Israelites had ignored God's disciplinary judgment, and their opportunity to repent had passed. All that remained was final judgment in the form of punishment, and God wasn't interested in making them feel better about it. Instead, God reminded them of who He was and what He could do.

.08 What miraculous things have you seen God do? How should we respond to miracles?



HISTORY | What is the historical significance of the four cities listed in today's passage?

Bethel was the site of an important military victory for Joshua (see Josh. 8:9,11,17) and where the judge Deborah sat to receive God's people (Judg. 4:5). Gilgal was the location of the first worship site in the promised land (see Josh. 4:19-20). The Israelites celebrated their first Passover there, and all of Israel's males went there to be circumcised (see Josh. 5:2-12). These cities represented the consecration of God's chosen people. To participate in false worship here was to demonstrate a profound lack of reverence for God and His covenant with Israel. In stark contrast, Sodom and Gomorrah were centers of perversion. The people there were known for their pride, gluttony, sexual immorality, and apathy toward the poor (see Ezek. 16:49). Because the Israelites of Amos's day were guilty of the same things, it is fitting that God sent the same kind of destruction on them that He sent on Sodom and Gomorrah (see Gen. 19:24-25).



SCRIPTURE commentary

AMOS 4:6-13

4:6-12. Behind this passage stand the warnings of Deuteronomy 28:15-68, which told the Israelites that if they refused to obey the laws of the covenant, they would be beset with diseases, droughts, crop failures, and military defeats.

4:6. Famine was a common event in the ancient Near East. Here the famine is brought by God as a warning to the people.

4:7-8. Drought was a chief cause of famine in Israel and a major concern for the economy. Thus two verses are used to describe its effect on crops (see v. 7) and on people (see v. 8).

4:9. Two additional categories of calamities affecting food production in Israel were plant diseases and insects.

4:10. *Plagues* of various sorts often accompanied war.

4:11. Total destruction was conveyed by the reference to *Sodom and Gomorrah*. Israel, like Lot and his family, was like a brand *snatched from a fire*, fortunate to be alive. But even Israel's narrow escape did not turn them toward God.

4:12-13. *Therefore* in Amos usually introduces a message of judgment from God. *Prepare* and *meet* describe an awesome face-to-face encounter with God in Exodus 19:10-19. The circumstance here, however, is one of covenant breaking rather than covenant making. The reason Israel should be shaken to their senses by this summons to judgment is offered in verse 13.



NOW What?

CENTRAL truth

God holds us accountable when we don't follow His call to obedience.

.09 What can we do to make sure we are not contributing to the oppression, use, and abuse of the poor? How can we love and serve them instead?

KEY QUESTION

.10 How can we guard our hearts against insincere worship?

.11 How should we respond to the difficult events and situations that God allows to come into our lives?

.12 What can we do to make sure that God is recognized for who He is and what He has done?



THE STUDENT LEADER PACK is available for purchase on lifeway.com/explorethebiblestudents. It includes valuable posters that are referenced throughout the *Leader Guide*, Family Connection guides that equip families to discuss the Bible on the go, a Midweek study of a complementary book of the Bible, a link to training audio to help leaders prepare for each session, and PowerPoint templates with graphics from the quarter study to help prepare slides for teaching.



DAILY devotions

The Bible is no ordinary book—it is God’s powerful Word and it is given to us for our good (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12-13). So we should read the Bible more carefully and thoughtfully than any other book. This is where the 7 Arrows of Bible Reading come in—these 7 questions will train you and your students to get more out of your time in the Bible and experience its life-transforming power. Your students’ *Daily Discipleship Guide* (item 005646504) contains five days of Daily Devotions built on the 7 Arrows. Here is a summary of the texts they will be studying. We encourage you to follow along and use the 7 Arrows questions to guide your own study of God’s Word.

7 ARROWS FOR BIBLE reading



What does this passage say?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



What does this passage tell us about man?



How does this passage prompt me to pray?



What does this passage demand of me?

LEADER challenge

MEMORIZE

Amos 4:12

CONNECT

Send a group email or group message to your students, encouraging them to complete their daily devotions. You might also consider sharing your own insights from the daily readings as a means of encouraging them.

DAY 1 AMOS 4:1-3

DAY 2 AMOS 4:4-5

DAY 3 AMOS 4:6-10

DAY 4 AMOS 4:11-13

DAY 5 JAMES 5:1-6