

# Turn to God

God seeks His people, holding them accountable for how they respond to Him.

AMOS 4:1-13



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e Amorite.  
s for proph-  
'Nazarites,  
dren of Israel?

rites wine to drink;  
prophets, saying,

## ISRAEL'S SINS

I am pressed under you, as a  
ed *that is* full of sheaves.  
ore the flight shall perish from  
and the strong shall not strength-  
force, "neither shall the mighty de-  
himself:

Neither shall he stand that handleth  
e bow; and *he that is* swift of foot shall  
not deliver *himself*; "neither shall he that  
rideth the horse deliver himself.

<sup>16</sup>And *he that is* courageous among the  
mighty shall flee away naked in that day,  
saith the LORD.

## GOD HAS SPOKEN

**3** Hear this word that the LORD hath spo-  
ken against you, O children of Israel,  
against the whole family which I brought  
up from the land of Egypt, saying,

<sup>2</sup>"You only have I known of all the fam-  
ilies of the earth: "therefore I will punish  
you for all your iniquities.

<sup>3</sup>Can two walk together, except they be  
agreed?

<sup>4</sup>Will a lion roar in the forest, when he  
hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of  
his den, if he have taken nothing?

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ery altar, and  
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## FAITHFULNESS

the "Amorite before  
ight *was* like the height of  
ne *was* strong as the oaks;  
ed his fruit from above, and  
n beneath.

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**On a scale of zero to ten, how important is accountability in deterring bad behavior? Is it possible to have justice without accountability? Explain.**

Courtrooms can be intimidating places. They are places of accountability, and most of us believe people need to be held accountable for their actions. Amos spoke to Israel as one who was witnessing Israel's consequences for their actions. God seeks His people, and there are consequences for how they respond to Him—both in the present and in the future.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

This week's focal passage is set in a series of oracles that began at Amos 3:1. Amos answered those who claimed he had no right to prophesy against Israel because they were the chosen people of God. To this charge, Amos argued that Israel's selection ensured God's judgment against them rather than excusing their sinful behavior (Amos 3:1-3). He further argued that his words were not his own but God's; he was only the messenger (3:4-8). Amos painted a picture of destruction in Israel, including images such as the horns falling off the altar in Bethel and the winter and summer houses of luxury being destroyed (3:12-15). It is probably the latter reference to luxury that led to the second oracle (4:1-13). Amos began the oracle speaking to those who profited the most from that luxury.

In the time of Amos (783-746 BC), Samaria had a wealthy and indulgent upper class. They built this wealth on the backs of the common people by oppressing them and exploiting the middle and lower classes. Amos knew God would hold the leaders accountable for that type of disregard of the poor.

The beginning of the eighth century BC had brought great hope to Israel and Judah. Damascus's domination of Israel had ended abruptly when the Assyrians crushed Damascus in 802 BC. In Judah, Uzziah ascended the throne in 792 BC and solved some of the internal struggles in the nation. At the same time, Jeroboam II took control in Israel and restored much of the territory that had fallen to Damascus (2 Kings 14:28). It was a rare time of peace at the same time for Judah and Israel. But it also inspired a time of corruption, when those who lived in luxury oppressed those who were poor. This caused the rise of the eighth-century prophets—Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah—though the messages of these prophets were largely ignored by both Judah and Israel (2 Kings 17:13-14).

# AMOS 4:1-13

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

## Key Words

- A. God was describing their hearts; no matter the place, they were inclined to “multiply transgression” (ESV, NKJV) or “sin” (NIV).
- B. The issue was the heart and attitude of the worshiper. They believed doing the rituals was enough and that faithfulness to God in their lives was optional.
- C. Jesus warned against such practices (Matthew 6:1-18).
- D. God lovingly disciplines His covenant people so they will repent and walk in faithfulness (Proverbs 3:11-12).
- E. A reference to the ten plagues that God sent upon Pharaoh and Egypt in Exodus. God was now punishing Israel in a similar way as he did Egypt, showing how far Israel had fallen in their covenant faithfulness.
- F. God commands His heavenly hosts (angels). It was the Lord who once aided Israel in their conquest of Jericho (Joshua 5), and now He would strike Israel.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## 1. INDULGE (AMOS 4:1-3)

Believers are to be champions of the poor and oppressed, not oppressors of them.

**How does a person's treatment of others, especially those in need, indicate their spiritual condition?**

## 2. WORSHIP (AMOS 4:4-5)

Believers are to worship God with humility and repentance.

**How can the self-indulgent practices of people like those mentioned in verses 1-3 also affect the way that they worship in verses 4-5? How can a person's worship practices be a cover up for their sins?**

## 3. REFUSE (AMOS 4:6-11)

Believers should look to God in repentance when facing His discipline.

**Why might two people experience the same sets of calamities and one turn to God while the other refuses to turn to God?**

## 4. PREPARE (AMOS 4:12-13)

All believers should live knowing that God will hold them accountable.

**How should the promise of standing before God impact how one lives?**

**How does a person's understanding of God impact how a person lives his or her life?**

## APPLY THE TEXT

Discuss as a group ways of reminding each other of your accountability to God.

**How can this be done with humility and transparency? What principles from today's study should the group follow in holding each other accountable?**

### **KEY DOCTRINE:** The Christian and Social Order

We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. (See Deuteronomy 10:18; James 1:27.)

### **BIBLE SKILL:** Use a Bible dictionary to better understand a word.

Read articles about "judgment" in a Bible dictionary. Review Bible passages identified in the articles. What was the significance of God's pronouncement of judgment on Israel through His prophet Amos? How do these pronouncements of God's judgment help us understand what God did for us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross?

# TALK IT OUT

**Focus on Amos 4:12. How would this meeting be compared to an intervention?**

The confrontation would be conducted by God Himself. He gave seven vivid first-person verbs in Amos 4:6-11: *gave, withheld, sent, struck, killed, caused, and overthrew*. Each described God's covenant curse on His people. Now, the Lord challenged Israel to get ready for His discipline.

**What preparations might a person make knowing they will be confronted by God about an issue or action?**

The Hebrew word Amos used for “to meet” (*liqrat*) is also found in Numbers 21:23 when Sihon approached Israel as an enemy. The idea behind the word is to confront, oppose, or stand against someone. Exodus 19:10-19 pairs the words translated prepare and meet. Twice in Exodus, God warned Israel to be prepared. Then, in Exodus 10:17, He brought the people out of the camp to meet Him. Once again, this included no call to repentance. It is an announcement of judgment.

**Discuss what this verse tells us about the importance of remaining faithful to God. How can we hold each other accountable as an expression of being accountable to God?**

Review Amos 4:12 in various translations and create a paraphrase of the verse.

## Prayer Requests

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# DAILY EXPLORATION

## Day 1: Amos 4:1-3

***Consider the negative behavior God was calling out.***

Bashan was located east of the Sea of Galilee and known for its lush pastureland and prime livestock (Deuteronomy 32:14). Like the cows in Bashan, the upper class women in Israel were well-fed and pampered. All their indulgences were satisfied. The women of luxury had indirect ways of getting what they wanted—oppressing the poor, crushing the needy, and imploring their husbands to bring them more, which probably drove their husbands to even greater injustices against the poor. The oppressors in Israel were not accountable to Amos alone. God Himself had *sworn by his holiness* to take this assignment. As a judge pronouncing a verdict, God described the days when those living in luxury would be taken *away with hooks*. It is probably in the sense of a hook designed to drag cattle that Amos intended. This was a clear prophecy of the coming invasion of the Assyrians during the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. Amos saw the corruption of a society that was insensitive to the plight of the poor and needy. Those with the power and authority to change that plight cared little about the ones being oppressed. God called this indulgent society to accountability for its sins against Him and against one another. He had desired that they be the champions of the oppressed, not their oppressors.

**How does your treatment of others, especially those in need, indicate your spiritual condition?**

## Day 2: Amos 4:4-5

***Contemplate worship practices that may have false motives.***

Not only did Israel fail in the way they treated one another, but they also neglected to demonstrate love for God through worship in the way He prescribed. As worshipers made their way to the places of worship, they would expect a priest or prophet to pronounce a benediction on the pilgrim worshipers. One might expect this blessing to say, “Come and worship.” However, Amos issued a surprising invitation—*Come to Bethel, and transgress*. What priest would invite worshipers to the temple to rebel? The sarcasm is thick in this passage, as the hearts of the worshipers were not right with God. Though the people were offering sacrifices to God, their lives were not obedient to Him. Like King Saul, they faced God’s judgment. One gets a glimpse of the worshipers’ motives when Amos declared that they *proclaim* and *publish* their offerings because that is what they *love to do*. The ritual was not at fault as much as the motives. Offerings, sacrifices, and tithes were good things, but the boastfulness of the worshipers in doing those things was the issue. The outward motions of worship were not enough to please God.

**How can self-indulgent practices get in the way when you worship?**

## Day 3: Amos 4:6-11

*Identify the calamities faced in this passage.*

In these verses, Amos listed five calamities that should have turned the hearts of Israel back to God but did not. In verse 6, the prophet described times of famine that should have awakened Israel from its rebellion. They literally had no food to get stuck in their teeth. In verses 7-8, Amos described how God sent a shortage of water at the worst possible time in the agricultural year. A third calamity was the failure of the crops (v. 9). Disease in the form of a *blight and mildew* caused by warm, damp rains affected the harvest. Then, locusts came and destroyed what was left. Such a catastrophic event in an agricultural society should have caused the Israelites to be on their knees before God, but they *did not return* to God. A fourth calamity involved disease and death (v. 10). Young men unexpectedly died. Even their horses perished and the smell of death was all around Israel. Still Israel did not repent. Finally, some of the prominent cities of Israel were overthrown like *Sodom and Gomorrah*, yet God had plucked them from the fire. The nation had just come out of a period of domination by Damascus. But when that ended with Jeroboam II, they still did not repent and turn to God. God's involvement in the events of verses 6-11 was redemptive in nature. He orchestrated the events in Israel to give them the opportunity to repent, but they refused.

**Why might you experience the same set of calamities as someone else and turn to God while the other person refuses to turn to God?**

## Day 4: Amos 4:12

*Notice the call to judgment.*

The time of accountability had come. The God who was a consuming fire and a jealous God was prepared to bring the nation to accountability. The calamities God had sent to Israel in the past as discipline would now face them in destruction. Food shortage, water shortage, failure of crops, disease and death, and the falling of cities would characterize the upcoming Assyrian invasion of Israel that resulted in the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. What God had first sent as warning signs that were ignored would now be the judgments Israel faced. With a note of finality, God said: *prepare to meet your God, O Israel!* They had relied on themselves and their religious performances. Their unwillingness to return to God would result in Him coming to them in judgment. All who are outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ can expect that they will one day be called to accountability for their refusal to repent and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

**How does the promise of standing before God impact how you live?**

## Day 5: Amos 4:13

### *Pay attention to the details around God's power.*

What kind of God could Israel expect to meet? He is the God who was there at the moment of creation in Genesis 1–2. He is the God who *forms the mountains and creates the wind*. If God was their Creator, He was the One to hold them accountable. God is also the one who *declares to man what is his thought*. He had revealed Himself through the Law, and He would soon reveal Himself through Jesus Christ the living Word and through the Bible, the written Word. Israel had no excuse for not knowing God and loving Him. Finally, Amos revealed God as the One who commands the *hosts* of the heavens. The God that Israel faced was formidable, and He alone had the power to bring judgment against them for their rejection of His grace.

**How does your understanding of God impact how you live your life?**

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### APPLY THE TEXT

Evaluate your attitudes toward people with need, toward the oppressed, and toward worship. How does your attitude in these areas compare with the attitudes Amos addressed? What adjustments do you need to make in these areas to align more with God's desires?





# Turn to God

## ENGAGE

**INTRODUCE:** Hold up a gavel or display a picture of a judge in a courtroom. Ask: ***What comes to your mind when you picture a courtroom? Why does our court system allow for evidence to be presented before a verdict is determined? How would you describe the role of the judge?***

**FOCUS:** The courtroom is a place of accountability, and most of us believe people need to be held accountable for their actions. (p. 21)

**DISCUSS:** ***On a scale of zero to ten, how important is accountability in deterring bad behavior? Is it possible to have justice without accountability? Explain.*** (p. 21)

**TRANSITION:** *In today's study, we will examine the evidence against Israel and learn the consequences they faced due to their continued disobedience. We will see the character of God revealed as both redeemer and judge.*

## EXPLORE

**REVIEW:** Display **Pack Item 1** (Map: *Prophets of the Eighth Century*) and **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outlines of Amos; Jonah; Hosea; Micah*), and utilize each to review the context for the book of Amos. Explain that Amos is considered a

Minor Prophet due to the length of the book, not because it is of lesser importance. Use *Understand the Context* (p. 21) to provide background for the session.

**READ:** **Call on a volunteer to read aloud Amos 4:1-3**, directing the group to focus on specific evidence presented by Amos.

- **(4:1)** From our modern cultural perspective, it is surprising, maybe even shocking, that Amos began this message by addressing the wealthy women in Samaria, Israel's capital city, as *you cows of Bashan*. Amos depicted these divas as overbearing housewives commanding their husbands to bring them what they desired—no matter what the expense or means of getting it. While these women may not have been the ones physically taking money and possessions from the poor, they were just as guilty as their husbands.

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to the first words of Amos 4, "Listen to this message."

**DISCUSS:** ***Why is it important to listen or heed the evidence? How does failure to listen create problems?***

**EXPLAIN:** Share with the group that Bashan was located east of the Sea of Galilee and was known for its lush pastureland and prime livestock. Ask: ***What did "cows of Bashan"***

**really refer to? How does this image relate to indulgence?** Use the content related to verse 1 in the Day 1 Daily Exploration on page 25 if needed.

**DIRECT:** Guide the group to pair up with another person and read the content related to verses 2-3 (p. 25) and then address the question: ***What is the verdict God issues for the oppression of others while indulging self?***

**TRANSITION:** *Amos mocked the worship of the Israelites at the sites they considered to be places for worship. In doing so, Amos was declaring that God detested their insincere sacrifices and false worship.*

**READ:** As you read aloud Amos 4:4-5, call the group to listen for the accusations made about the worship practices in Israel.

- **(4:4-5)** Amos turned his attention to a second offense before the Lord. Israel's worship had become superficial and self-exalting. The requirement was for the sacrifices to be made only once or at most three times a year (Lev. 1-5). The people were required to bring their tithes from the produce of their land every three years (Deut. 14:28-29). Yet they were bringing tithes *every three days*. For them, acts of worship were about drawing attention and glory to themselves, not to God.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Highlight the statement: *Offerings, sacrifices, and tithes were good things, but the boastfulness of the worshipers in doing those things was the issue. The outward motions of worship were not enough to please God.* (p. 25) Guide the group to consider outwardly positive religious actions done with the wrong attitude or

motive. The ritual was not at fault as much as the motives.

**DISCUSS:** ***How can the self-indulgent practices of people like those mentioned in verses 1-3, also affect the way that they worship in verses 4-5? How can a person's worship practices be a cover-up for their sins?*** (p. 23)

**TRANSITION:** *Amos recounted numerous different ways God sought to get the Israelites' attention so they would return to Him. But they refused.*

**READ:** Direct the group to read Amos 4:6-11, guiding them to watch for the numerous ways God sought to get His people's attention.

- **(4:6-8)** Amos revealed seven ways God had responded to Israel's unfaithfulness. The Lord had given them every opportunity to return to Him. The purpose of the Lord's actions were two-fold: to serve as (1) God's discipline of His people, and (2) calls to repentance. Yet the Israelites refused to turn back to God.
- **(4:11)** The seventh and climactic calamity involved *fire*. Many scholars believe Amos was describing the results of Israel's military defeats, given verse 10 along with Amos's prolific use of the word *fire* to denote military defeat. It probably refers to Israel's near extinction at the hands of the Syrians prior to Jeroboam's taking the throne of Israel.

**IDENTIFY:** Using a board or large sheet of paper, guide the group to list the seven calamities that should have turned the people's hearts back to God.

**ASK:** *Why might two people experience the same sets of calamities and one turn to God while the other refuses to turn to God?* (p. 23)

**TRANSITION:** *Amos challenged the Israelites to prepare to meet God to give an accounting. The prophet reminded the people of God's power and sovereignty to emphasize the seriousness of this meeting.*

**READ:** Call on a volunteer to read aloud Amos 4:12-13, guiding the group to identify a key word or phrase that stands out to them.

- **(4:12-13)** Because of their self-centeredness and refusal to return to the Lord, there would be no more warnings and no more opportunities to return to God. They had relied on themselves and their own religious performances, now they could continue to rely on themselves as they prepared to meet the Lord.

**SHARE:** Invite volunteers to share the key word or phrase they chose. Write their responses on the board or a large sheet of paper.

**EXAMINE:** As a group, answer the question, *“What kind of God could Israel expect to meet?”* Guide the group to review the comments for verse 13 in the Day 5 Daily Exploration on page 27 for additional insight. Add to the responses on the board.

**ASK:** *How does a person's understanding of God impact how they live their life?* (p. 23)

**TRANSITION:** *The Israelites failed to recognize God's loving discipline and the verdict of guilty was confirmed. As we examine our lives, we must recognize the sovereignty of God. He will hold all believers accountable for their actions.*

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## CHALLENGE

**SHARE:** It may be easy to be critical of the Israelites without examining our own lives against the same charges.

**REINFORCE:** Lead the group to silently respond to the question set under Apply the Text (p. 27): ***Evaluate your attitudes toward people with need, toward the oppressed, and toward worship. How does your attitude in these areas compare with the attitudes Amos addressed? What adjustments do you need to make in these areas to align more with God's desires?*** Encourage them to reflect on their responses this week.

**MEMORIZE:** Read aloud Amos 4:12, highlighting that this is the memory verse for the session. Distribute **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*) to anyone in the group who didn't receive a copy during the last session.

**DISCUSS:** *What are some ways we can remind each other of our accountability to God?*

**PRAY:** Call on a pre-enlisted person to close the group time in prayer, thanking God for holding us accountable for our attitudes and actions and for being a God of mercy and grace when we come to Him with repentant hearts.

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## AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the study by creating an online prayer community for the group to use during the study. Encourage the group to participate regularly by both praying for others and sharing personal requests on the site.