

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO AMOS 4

In this chapter, the great ones, or the people of Israel, are threatened with calamities for their oppression of the poor, (^{<3001>}Amos 4:1-3); and in an ironic manner are reproved for their idolatry, (^{<3005>}Amos 4:4,5); then follows an enumeration of several judgments that had been upon them, yet had had no effect on them, to bring them to repentance, nor even mercies, (^{<3006>}Amos 4:6-11); and notwithstanding all this, in a wonderful gracious manner, they are called upon to prepare to meet their God, who is described by his power, greatness, and goodness, (^{<3012>}Amos 4:12,13).

Ver. 1. *Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan*, etc.] Or “cows of Bashan”^{f109}; a country beyond Jordan, inhabited by the tribes of Gad and Reuben, and the half tribe of Manasseh, very fruitful of pasturage, and where abundance of fat cattle were brought up; to whom persons of distinction, and of the first rank, are here compared. Aben Ezra, Jarchi, and Kimchi, interpret them of the wives of the king, princes, ministers of state, and great men; and so it may be thought that Amos, a herdsman, in his rustic manner, compliments the court ladies with this epithet, for their plumpness, wantonness, and petulancy. Though it may be the princes and great men themselves may be rather intended, and be so called for their effeminacy, and perhaps with some regard to the calves they worshipped; and chiefly because being fat and flourishing, and abounding with wealth and riches, they became wanton and mischievous; like fat cattle, broke down their fences, and would be under no restraint of the laws of God and man; entered into their neighbours’ fields, seized on their property, and spoiled them of it. So the Targum paraphrases it,

“ye rich of substance.”

In like manner the principal men among the Jews, in the times of Christ, are called bulls of Bashan, (^{<3022>}Psalms 22:12);

that [are] in the mountains of Samaria; like cattle grazing on a mountain; the metaphor is still continued: Samaria was the principal city of Ephraim, the metropolis of the ten tribes, (^{<3009>}Isaiah 7:9); situated on a mountain;

Mr. Maundrell^{f110} says, upon a long mount, of an oval figure, having first a fruitful valley, and then a ring of hills running about it. Here the kings of Israel had their palace, and kept their court, and where their princes and nobles resided. Ahab is said to be king of Samaria, (<120>1 Kings 21:1);

which oppress the poor, which crush the needy; by laying heavy taxes upon them; exacting more of them than they are able to pay; lessening their wages for work done, or withholding it from them; or by taking from them that little they have, and so reducing them to the utmost extremity, and refusing to do them justice in courts of judicature:

which say to their masters, bring, and let us drink; Kimchi, who interprets these words of the wives of great men, supposes their husbands are here addressed, who are, and acknowledged to be, their masters or lords; (see <100>1 Peter 3:6); whom they call upon to bring them money taken from the poor, or for which they have sold them, that they may have wherewith to eat and drink, fare sumptuously, and live in a grand manner, feasting themselves and their visitors: or these are the words of inferior officers to superior ones, desiring they might have leave to pillage the poor, that so they might live in a more gay and splendid manner, and in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness. So the Targum,

“give us power, that we may spoil it.”

Or rather these words are directed to the masters of the poor, who had power over them, had them in their clutches, in whose debt they were; or they had something against them, and therefore these corrupt judges, and wicked magistrates, desire they might be brought before them; who for a bribe would give the cause against them, right or wrong, so long as they got something to feast themselves with; or they are spoken by the rich, to the masters of the poor, to whom they had sold them, to bring them the purchase money, that they might indulge and gratify their sensual appetites; (see <100>Amos 2:6,7 <100>Micah 3:1-3).

Ver. 2. *The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness*, etc.] That is, by himself, holiness being his nature, and an essential attribute of his; this is done to ascertain the truth of what is after said, and that men may be assured of the certain performance of it. Some render it, “by his holy place”; and interpret it of heaven; so Aben Ezra and Kimchi; which is not likely; (see <100>Matthew 5:34 <100>James 5:12). The Targum is,

“the Lord God hath sworn by his word in his holiness;”

that, lo, the days shall come upon you; speedily, swiftly, and at an unawares:

that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fish hooks; the enemy, the king of Assyria, or God by him, would take them out of their own land, as fish out of water, out of their own element, and carry them captive into a strange land, both them and their posterity; and which should be as easily done as fish are taken with the hook, even though they were as the kine of Bashan. The word for fish hooks signifies “thorns”^{f111}, and is by some so rendered; these perhaps being used in angling, before iron hooks were invented. The Targum is,

“that people shall take you away on their shields, and your daughters in fishermen’s^{f112} boats;”

(see ²⁴¹⁶⁶Jeremiah 16:16).

Ver. 3. *And ye shall go out at the breaches,* etc.] Not at the gates of the city, as they had used to do at pleasure; but at the breaches of the walls of it, made by the enemy, in order to make their escape, if possible; they who had broke down the fences of law and justice, and injured the poor and needy, shall now have the walls of their city broken down and they themselves exposed to the most imminent danger, and glad to get out of them to save their lives:

every [cow] at that [which is] before her; every woman, as Jarchi and Kimchi; or every great person, compared to the kine of Bashan, shall make up as fast as he can to the breach before him, to get out; shall follow one another as quick as they can, and clamber on one another’s backs, as such cattle do, to get out first; which shows the hurry and confusion they should be in, upon the taking of their city Samaria:

and ye shall cast [them] into the palace, saith the Lord; either their children, or their substance, which they shall cast into the royal palace, or fort, or citadel, for safety. Some render it, “ye shall cast yourselves”; so Abarbanel; that is, such as could not get out at the breaches should betake themselves to the palace or fort for their security. The Targum of the whole is,

“and they shall break down the wall upon you, and bring you out, gathered everyone before him, and carry you beyond the mountains of Armenia.”

And so some others, taking it to be the name of a place, render it, “ye shall be cast into Armon”, or Mona; which Bochart^{f113} suspects to be the same with Minni, mentioned with Ararat, a mountain in Armenia, (^{<2612>}Jeremiah 51:27).

Ver. 4. *Come to Bethel and transgress*, etc.] and what follows, are ironic and sarcastic speeches, not giving liberty to sin, but in this way reproofing for it: Bethel was one of the places where the calves were placed and worshipped: and here they are bid to go thither, and go on with and continue in their idolatrous worship, by which they transgressed the law of God, and mark what would be the issue of it. The sense is the same with (^{<2119>}Ecclesiastes 11:9); (see ^{<3519>}Ezekiel 20:29);

at Gilgal multiply transgression; that is, multiply acts of idolatry: Gilgal was a place where high places and altars were erected, and idols worshipped; as it had formerly been a place of religious worship of the true God, the ten tribes made use of it in the times of their apostasy for idolatrous worship; (see ^{<3045>}Hosea 4:15 ^{<3095>}9:15 ^{<3211>}12:11);

and bring your sacrifices every morning; and offer them to your idols, as you were wont formerly to offer them unto the true God, according to the law of Moses, (^{<10238>}Exodus 29:38,39);

[and] your tithes after three years; the third year after the sabbatical year was the year of tithing; and after the tithing of the increase of the fruits of the earth, there was “maaser sheni”, the second tithe, the same with “maaser ani”, the poor’s tithe, which was given to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless; and the widow, to eat with them, (^{<1542>}Deuteronomy 14:22-28 ^{<1632>}26:12); and this they are sarcastically bid to observe in their idolatrous way. It is, in the Hebrew text, “after three days”; and so the Targum,

“your tithes in three days;”

days being put for years, as Kimchi and Ben Melech observe. It may be rendered, “after three years of days”^{f114}; three complete years.

Ver. 5. *And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven*, etc.] Which some observe was contrary to the law, which forbids all leaven in a meat offering; or “burning” it in any offering, (^{<10211>}Leviticus 2:11); which the word^{f115} here used suggests was done by these idolaters, as well as eaten by them, their priests not liking to eat unleavened bread; but, though it was forbidden in the meat offering, was allowed, yea, ordered, with the

sacrifice of thanksgiving, (^{<1173>}Leviticus 7:13). So Abarbinel understands it here, as what was according, to law, but ironically commanded to be offered to idols:

and proclaim [and] publish the free offerings; let all know of them when you make your freewill offerings, and invite them to partake of them:

for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God; or ye love to offer such sacrifices to your idols, rather than to the Lord God; preferring these to him, and delighting more in the worship of them than of him.

Ver. 6. *And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities*, etc.] Meaning a famine, having no food to foul them with, or to stick in them. This was not the famine in Samaria, (^{<1165>}2 Kings 6:25); for that was only in that city, and for a short time, while besieged; whereas this was in all the cities in Israel; rather therefore it designs the famine predicted by Elisha, which should be upon the land for seven years, (^{<1181>}2 Kings 8:1);

and want of bread in all your places: this is the same with the former clause, and explains it, and still makes the famine more general, not only in their cities, but in all their places of abode, their towns and villages:

yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord; this judgment had no influence upon them, to bring them to a sense of their evils, particularly their idolatry, and to repentance them, and to reclaim them from them, and return them to the Lord, and to his worship, as the Targum paraphrases it.

Ver. 7. *And also I have withholden the rain from you*, etc.] As he did for the space of three years successively in the days of Ahab, as predicted by Elijah, (^{<1170>}1 Kings 17:1 ^{<1180>}18:1); the consequences of which are very bad to men and beast, and bring on a scarcity of food for both, and a famine if long withheld:

when [there were] yet three months to the harvest; that is, three months before the harvest, as Jarchi; when, as Kimchi observes, there was need of rain: this was the latter rain which was usually given and expected about this time, and on which the goodness of the crop, and so of the harvest, greatly depended; these three months before barley harvest were December, January, and February, that being in March; and before the wheat harvest, February, March, and April, that being in May usually:

and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city; so that it might appear to be not by the course of nature, or through the influence of the planets, or by chance; but was according to the direction of divine Providence, the hand of God was manifestly in it: yea,

one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered; one piece of ground or field had a plentiful shower on it, whereby it became fruitful; and another field or close on the other side of the hedge or partition had none, whereby what did spring up withered away and came to nothing: or “one inheritance”^{f116}, or farm, as some render it; one man’s estate was well watered with rain from heaven, and brought forth much fruit; and another man’s estate, for want of it, was barren, and brought forth nothing: thus God was pleased to do in his providence, to show his sovereignty, and to chastise men for their sins; and in such a manner as that they might, if not blind easily perceive his hand in it.

Ver. 8. *So two [or] three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water*, etc.] Two or three cities, that is, the inhabitants of them, being without water, went up and down in quest of any city or place where they could find water for themselves and cattle to drink:

but they were not satisfied; could not get enough for their present use and much less to carry back with them to supply them for any length of time; such a scarcity there was of it in other parts; (see ^{<HKB>}1 Kings 18:5,6);

yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord; this had no more effect upon them than the other to relinquish their former courses, and return unto the Lord by humiliation and repentance.

Ver. 9. *I have smitten you with blasting and mildew*, etc.] “Blasting” is what we commonly call “blights”, generally occasioned by an east wind; and so Kimchi interprets the word here used; and the Vulgate Latin version renders it, “a burning wind”; which causes the buds and leaves of trees to shrivel up as if they were burnt with fire. “Mildew” is a kind of clammy dew, which falling upon corn, etc. corrupts and destroys by its moisture; and is a kind of jaundice to the fruits of the earth; and has its name as that, from yellowness, in the Hebrew language: when the Lord is said to smite them with these the sense is, that he sent these upon the fruits of their gardens, fields and vineyards, which consumed them:

when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmer worm devoured [them]; just when they were budding and blossoming, and bringing forth fruit; and so what the blasting and mildew did not consume, that the palmer worm, a kind of locust, did; which has its name from its biting and cutting off the leaves and branches of trees, as of those mentioned vines, olives and fig trees, with which the land of Canaan abounded, the cutting off which was a great calamity. The Targum is,

“the multitude of your gardens, etc. the palmer worm hath eaten:”

yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord; this dispensation of Providence was also without its desired fruit and effect; (see Gill on “³⁰⁰⁶Amos 4:6”).

Ver. 10. *I have sent among you the pestilence, after the manner of Egypt,* etc.] Like that which was sent among the firstborn of Egypt, and cut them off in one night; or when in the way of Egypt, as the Targum; either as in the wilderness, when they came out of Egypt, so Jarchi interprets it; (see ⁰¹⁶⁶Numbers 16:46-49); or the Lord sent the pestilence as they went in the way to Egypt for help and assistance, or for shelter, for food in time of famine; for they went thither, as Kimchi says, because of the famine, to fetch food, from thence; and this was displeasing to the Lord, and he sent the plague among them, which cut them off in the way:

your young men have I slain with the sword; of the enemy in battle; or as they were in the way to Egypt, being sent there to fetch food, but were intercepted by the enemy:

and have taken away your horses; on which they rode to Egypt on the above errand; or rather which they brought up from thence, contrary to the command of God:

and have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils; such numbers of their armies being slain, and these lying unburied, the smell of them was very noisome:

yet have ye not returned unto me saith the Lord; still they continued obstinate and impenitent; (see Gill on “³⁰⁰⁶Amos 4:6”).

Ver. 11. *I have overthrown [some] of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,* etc.] Either their houses were burnt, or their bodies consumed

by fire from heaven, with lightning; not whole cities, but the habitations of some particular persons, or they themselves:

and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning; some escaped such an awful calamity, their houses were not consumed, while others were; and their persons were safe, while others, just by them, were struck dead at once:

yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord; neither the judgments of God on themselves and others had any effect upon them to humble and reclaim them: such dispensations, without the grace of God is exerted, rather harden than soften; and, instead of bringing men to repentance, cause them to blaspheme; (see ^{<6618>}Revelation 16:8-11); nor will the mercy and goodness of God, which should lead persons to repentance, attain that end, unless accompanied with the Spirit and grace of God; who, notwithstanding such mercies and deliverances, will remain senseless, stupid obdurate, and impenitent; (see ^{<6620>}Revelation 9:20,21).

Ver. 12. *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel*, etc.] What he would do is not expressly and particularly said; it is commonly understood to be something in a way of judgment, and worse than what he had done, since they had no effect upon them; or these things should be done over again, until an utter end was made of them; or the reference is to (^{<3111>}Amos 3:11-15 ^{<3112>}4:2,3); and the following words are usually interpreted, either, ironically, since the Lord was coming forth as an enemy to issue the controversy with them; they are called upon to meet, him in a hostile way, and muster up all their forces, exert all their power and strength, and make use of their best weapons and military skill, and see what would be the consequence of all this; feeble worms set in opposition to the mighty God; thorns and briers he can easily go through, and burn up quickly: or else they are seriously addressed, and exhorted to meet the Lord in the way of his judgments, by humiliation, repentance, and reformation; not knowing but that after all he may be gracious and merciful to them, and turn away the fierceness of his anger from them; (see ^{<3115>}Amos 5:15); but I rather think the words are a promise or intimation of doing something to Israel in a way of special grace and kindness, notwithstanding their conduct and behaviour, and the ineffectualness both of judgments and providential mercies; for the words may be rendered, as the same particle should be in (^{<3124>}Hosea 2:14); “notwithstanding”, or “nevertheless, thus will I do unto thee”^{f117}; what I have from all eternity purposed and resolved to do, and

what I have promised again and again, by the mouth of all the holy prophets, from the beginning of the world, I would do; namely, send my Son to be thy Saviour and Redeemer:

[and] because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel; the Messiah that was then to come was God, and so equal to the work of redemption and salvation he was to do; and the God of spiritual and mystical Israel, even all the elect, Jews and Gentiles, to be redeemed by him; was to be their Immanuel, God in their nature, and therefore to be met with the utmost joy and pleasure; (see ^{<300>}Zechariah 9:9); for this meeting him is not to be understood in a hostile way, and as spoken ironically to the enemies of Christ to oppose him, encounter with him, and mark the issue of it, who in time would cause them to be brought before him and slain, as some interpret the words; but in a friendly manner, as he was met by those that were waiting for his coming, such as Simeon and others; and by those John the Baptist called upon to prepare the way of the Lord; and as he was by his own disciples, who embraced him by faith, received him with joy, and left all and followed him; and as all such are prepared to meet him who are made truly sensible of sin, and of their own righteousness as insufficient to justify from it, and have seen the glory, fulness, and suitableness of his salvation. Christ is to be met with in his house and ordinances; and men are prepared for it when the desires of their hearts are towards him, and their graces are exercised on him; which preparation is from himself: he will be met at his second coming by his spiritual Israel; and they will be prepared for it who believe it, love it, and long for it; have their loins girt, and their lights burning, and they waiting for their Lord's coming; (see ^{<120>}Matthew 25:1-10 ^{<125>}Luke 12:35,56); and so at the hour of death, which is the day of the Lord; a preparation and readiness for which lies not in external humiliation, outward reformation, a moral righteousness, or a bare profession of religion, and submission to ordinances; but in regeneration, in faith in Christ, and spiritual knowledge of him; in a being washed in his blood, and clothed with his righteousness; for which readiness all truly sensible sinners will be concerned, and which is all from the grace of God; see (^{<143>}Matthew 24:43,44). The Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, read it, "prepare to call upon thy God"; and the Targum paraphrases it,

"to receive the doctrine of the law of thy God;"

rather the doctrine of the Gospel; but the former sense is best; for the confirmation of which it may be observed, that when God is said to do a

thing to any, it is usually in a way of grace; and that when preparation is made to meet a divine Person, it is always meant of the Son of God; and that it is a common thing in prophecy, that when the Lord is threatening men with his judgments, to throw in a promise or prophecy of the Messiah, for the comfort of his people.

Ver. 13. *For, lo, he that formeth the mountains*, etc.] These words are a description of the glorious Person, “thy God” and Saviour, to be met; he is the Creator of all things, that formed the mountains, and so was before them, as in (^{<4085>}Proverbs 8:25,26); and able to surmount and remove all mountains of difficulties that lay in his way of working out salvation for his people:

and createth the wind; or “spirit”; not the Holy Spirit, which is uncreated; but either angels, whom he makes spirits; or the spirit and soul of man he is the Creator of; or rather the natural wind is meant, which is his creature, he holds in his fists, restrains and commands, at his pleasure, (^{<4085>}Matthew 8:26,27);

and declareth unto man what [is] his thought; not what is man’s thought, though he knows what is in man without any information, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and can reveal them to men, and convince them that he knows them, (^{<4084>}Matthew 9:4); but rather the thought of God, the meditation of his heart, concerning the salvation of men; his thoughts of peace, which are the deep things of God, and which Christ, lying in the bosom of his Father, was privy to, and has declared, (^{<4083>}John 1:18). The Septuagint and Arabic versions, reading the words wrong, render them, “declaring to men his Christ”; which, though true of God, is not the sense of this clause. The Targum is,

“what are his works^{f118}?”

his works of creation, providence, redemption, and grace:

that maketh the morning darkness; or “darkness morning”, or “the morning [out of] darkness”^{f119}; being the dayspring from on high, the morning star, the sun of righteousness, that, rising, made the Gospel day, after a long night of Jewish and Gentile darkness; and who made the same dispensation a morning to one, and darkness to another, (^{<4083>}John 9:39). The Septuagint version is, “making the morning and the cloud”; the Vulgate Latin version, “making the morning cloud”; his coming was as the morning, (^{<2083>}Hosea 6:3);

and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; the land of Israel, which is Immanuel's land, is said by the Jews to be higher than other lands; Jerusalem higher than any part of Judea, and the mountain the temple was built on higher than Jerusalem: here Christ trod in the days of his flesh, and from the mount of Olives ascended to heaven, after he had trampled upon and spoiled principalities and powers, spiritual wickednesses in high places, and when he led captivity captive. Jarchi interprets it of humbling the mighty and proud, who are compared to the high places of the earth. The Targum is,

“to declared to men what are his works, to prepare light for the righteous as the morning light, who goes and prepares darkness for earth;”

the Lord, the God of hosts, [is] his name; he is the Jehovah, the Lord our righteousness, the God and Governor of the armies of heaven the hosts of angels, and to whom all creatures on earth are subject; all power in heaven and earth belongs unto him; this is Israel's God, his Redeemer and Saviour he is called upon to prepare to meet.