

A Study of the Minor Prophets  
The Book of Amos ~ Chapter 3-4  
Lesson 3

- I. Chapter 3:9-15: Although God's people Israel were meant to be a beacon of light and a testimony to the nations, now the nations are called to testify against her, for she, who had received the law of God and knew what was right, seemed incapable of putting it into practice. The irony of the indictment should not be missed, yet the judgment is equally striking. Those who stored up the plunder of violent oppression in their citadels (would have those same citadels plundered by a violent foreign enemy).
- II. Chapter 4: Among the prophets, Amos has no equal in the use of biting sarcasm. This literary feature is on full display in Amos 4:1-5. Amos begins by addressing the wealthy women of Samaria as "cows of Bashan". These were the wives of the rich who fattened themselves off the backs of the poor. Bashan was a fertile grazing region in the northeast of Israel, and Amos's audience knew that he was essentially calling these women "fat cows." While such shock value was fully in-line with the prophet's rhetoric, there may have been a secondary function behind these words. With the certainty of judgment on the horizon, Amos may have been suggesting that these wealthy women were being fattened for the slaughter.
- III. One must continue to appreciate the sarcasm introduced in 4:1 to properly grasp the intention of Amos. He appears to be encouraging "rebellious" offerings. But again, the sarcasm should not be missed. The people had a misplaced trust in their cultic rituals of sacrifice, tithing, and freewill offerings (4:5b; 5:21-22). Although the people loved to display their outward affections, the Lord was disgusted by them. The invitation to rebel through sacrifice drips with sarcasm; but to intensify the effect, Amos also instructs them to bring their "sacrifices every morning", their tenths every three days.
- IV. Amos 4:6-12 has clear distinguishing marks that set it apart within the book. Beginning in verse 6, the refrain, "Yet you did not return to Me," is repeated five times (vs. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11), followed in each case with the name of Yahweh. In Deuteronomy, Israel had been warned of suffering that would come as a result of national disobedience to the law; the curses were now warning Israel of the coming exile that would manifest the capstone of divine judgment.
- V. Amos 4:13 is the first of three hymns found within the book (4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6). Thematically, all three exalt the power of Yahweh and celebrate his role over creation. It is critical to understand how these hymns function. While a hymn of praise may encourage heartfelt worship, in Amos 4:13 the hymn prompts awe and fear.
- VI. Chapter 5: Amos 5:1-17 comprises an oracle of judgment in the form of a lament. Picturing Israel as a "fallen virgin," perhaps to evoke the imagery of a maiden cut off before her prime, the lament opens by claiming that fallen Israel is "never to rise again." In the language of the prophets, such a proclamation expressed the severity of judgement. From a human vantage point, her judgment was not a matter of temporary discipline. To further the effect of the lament, Amos includes an example story to illustrate the severity of judgment. Through numerical de-escalation, Amos describes a 90 percent mortality rate among Israel's troops.
- VII. Interestingly mixed in with this lament, is a call to repentance. Either Israel would experience the impending death forecast, or she would seek God and live.