

Explore the Bible: September 11

Turn to God • Amos 4:1-13

By Don Hicks



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For example, “Listen, you cows of the Mississippi Delta (or Mississippi Hill Country)!” That would be about the same as, “Listen to this message, you cows of Bashan who are on the hill of Samaria” (Amos 4:1a CSB).

I hope this example causes you to understand how brave Amos was in the 8th Century B.C. Look at the next phrase of Amos’ opening statement to see why he was so upset about the behavior of these women. Amos bluntly accused them of being “women who oppress the poor and crush the needy.”

Jesus would have us understand God’s goal for treatment of the poor and needy in Matthew 25:37, 40 (CSB): *Then the righteous will answer him (Jesus). ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ...And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.*

Again in another brave statement of honesty, Amos (still in his introduction) describes those cows of Bashan as women “who say to their husbands, ‘Bring us something to drink’” (Amos 4:1d CSB). Amos was probably not referring to a glass of iced tea.

This is a moral question in the prophet’s mind. He clearly prophesied, “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” (Amos 4:2 CSB).

Hooks were a common way of keeping prisoners together after they were captured in war. Large hooks similar to fish hooks were used to control the captives putting them in their mouths or cheeks.

Amos clearly saw the insensitivity and corruption in the treatment of Israel’s poor and needy. This greatly disturbed him and he realized that God was unhappy with it, too. James 1:27 gives a good summery of both Old and New Testament teaching on what God considers pure religion:

“Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27 CSB).

This matches the same concept taught in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy: “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.” (Deuteronomy 10:17-18 NIV).

In Amos 4:4-5, the prophet teaches about worship with some sarcasm: “Come to Bethel and rebel” (Amos 4:4a). Bethel was an ancient worship site from the time of Patriarchs and once housed the Ark of the Covenant, but it had been abused by corrupt King Jeroboam I of the Northern Kingdom of Israel when he erected pagan calves there and at Dan for worship of those false gods.

In Amos’ time the people claimed to be worshiping the one true God but they “loudly proclaim... freewill offerings, for that is what you Israelites love to do! This is the declaration of the Lord GOD” (Amos 4:5).

Jesus tells us the whole law is fulfilled in the way we love

God and others (Matthew 22:34-40). This New Testament teaching was equally true throughout all of history including the era of Amos' ministry. In his usual way, Amos clearly taught these truths regardless of who accepted or rejected them.

The prophet closed our focal passage for today by boldly explaining the powerful statement "Israel, prepare to meet your God" (Amos 4:12 CSB). The God you are going to meet is the one who is here. He is the Lord who formed all the mountains great and small. God created the winds of the mighty storms and the gentle cool breezes of the beautiful, peaceful evening.

Beyond creating everything that was made, this God knows and reveals all of the thoughts of men. He makes the dawn out of darkness. He is "the LORD, the God of Armies" (Amos 4:13 CSB) – more powerful than all the armies of the world, even much more powerful than the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines.

Powerful enough to save us from all of our SINS!

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