

## Amos 4:4-13 • “Yet You Have Not Returned To Me”

### Introduction

Here we get to the heart of the real problem where God’s people are concerned in the shadow of the last days of Israel leading up to the Babylonian Captivity, which is replayed in the Last Days for God’s people leading up to Babylon the Great: apostasy—a spiritual falling away from the faith. Although Amos began with a series of indictments of Israel’s neighbors, God’s people are held even more accountable by the fact of having the truth of God’s Word and ways to begin with and His messengers affirming the truth and meaning of His Word. The situation for us is particularly precarious because, as in this example of the final stages of Israel, God sends not only messengers but the working of His signs in an effort to direct His people back to Him, back to putting into practice that which they have been aware of through His Word all along. This chapter will conclude with the same thing which will inevitably take place at the end of this age which originally occurred in literal Israel historically.

<sup>4</sup>“Enter Bethel and transgress;  
In Gilgal multiply transgression!  
Bring your sacrifices every morning,  
Your tithes every three days.  
<sup>5</sup>Offer a thank offering also from that  
which is leavened,  
And proclaim freewill offerings,  
make them known.  
For so you love to do, you sons of  
Israel,  
Declares the Lord GOD .

### [Read v.4-5]

#### **Q: What is historically significant about Bethel and Gilgal?**

A: Bethel is the site where Jacob worshiped God when God’s promise to Abraham was passed down to him (Gen. 28:10-22; 35:1-15), and Gilgal is where Joshua set up the monument of twelve stones upon entering the Promised Land (Josh. 4:19-20; 5:1-10). Both are representations of God’s covenant relationship with Israel, places where God’s Word was confirmed for the whole of Israel.

#### **Q: What is being addressed here? Why is that which is being described particularly egregious?**

A: Bethel and Gilgal have become centers of false worship in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. What is especially egregious is that they are doing what the Law says can only be performed in the Temple in Jerusalem alone, and under the supervision of the authentic priesthood alone, in this false place of worship with a false priesthood. They are misusing the things of God not just in direct conflict with God’s express Word, but twisted according to their own desires.

#### **Q: Why might the people who have heard God’s Word through Amos be doing the things listed here?**

A: Having heard the Word, they would be responding to it incorrectly by going to the false places of worship and offering what they think is the appropriate worship and sacrifices based on their false practices. This may be why God through Amos sarcastically tells them not just to transgress, but to transgress even more (“multiply transgression”).

#### **Q: How do we know for sure that what the people are doing is actually only pleasing themselves?**

A: From the statement in v.5, “For so you love to do”.

#### **Q: Why does the enticement for “sacrifices every morning” and “tithes every three days” also betray sarcasm for both the people’s corruption of proper worship and observance of the Law?**

A: The sacrifices were usually performed just once a year and the tithe every three years. They seem to think by doing something more often it will make up for it being ill-performed in the first place.

**Point:** Rather than doing these things from the heart, they are merely going through the motions with greater repetition so as to render the rituals meaningless.

**Q: What is wrong with a thank offering “which is leavened”?**

A: According to the Law it was supposed to be **unleavened**. This is most likely referring to the fact that Scripture associates leaven with both sin and false teaching. This a way of stating that what they are doing is not just coming from a sinful heart which is not right with God, but based on error conflicting with the Law.

**Q: What is wrong with proclaiming their offerings and making them known?**

A: They are making a public show of their activities in order to honor themselves instead of God.

**Application:** A sure sign of the **corruption** of God’s people is when what they call **worship** not only strays from the requirements of God’s Word, but is pursued for their own **pleasure** alone.

**[Read v.6]**

**Q: What is the first act of discipline mentioned by which God attempted to get them to repent and return to Him?**

A: This is describing a famine.

**Q: Why should a famine have been interpreted as an act of God with this greater spiritual purpose in mind?**

A: It is specifically documented in God’s Word that He will work in this way when His people have violated the terms of the Covenant. (Lev. 26:26; Dt. 28:17, 38-40; 1 Ki. 8:37)

**Q: Of what greater spiritual condition might this also be alluding to?**

A: Food, and particularly bread, are biblical metaphors for the Word of God.

**[Read v.7-8]**

**Q: What is the second act of discipline mentioned by which God attempted to get them to repent and return to Him?**

A: Withholding the rain.

**Q: Why should this have been interpreted as an act of God with this greater spiritual purpose in mind?**

A: It is specifically documented in God’s Word that He will work this way when His people have violated the terms of the Covenant. (Dt. 25:24)

**Q: Why would this be particularly devastating “three months until harvest”?**

A: That is the most crucial time when the heads of grain are beginning to sprout, a direct connection to the “*lack of bread*” referenced in the first sign of discipline.

**Q: But did this affect the crops alone?**

A: No, this extended to the supply of drinking water, essential to life. Death from thirst comes even quicker than death by starvation.

**Q: Of what greater spiritual condition might this be alluding to?**

A: Water is a biblical metaphor for the working of the Spirit by the washing of the Word.

**[Read v.9]**

**Q: What is the third act of discipline mentioned by which God attempted to get them to repent and return to Him?**

A: Pestilence which compounded the effects of the famine and withholding of rain.

<sup>6</sup>“But I gave you also cleanness of teeth in all your cities  
And lack of bread in all your places,  
Yet you have not returned to Me,”  
declares the LORD.

<sup>7</sup>“Furthermore, I withheld the rain from you  
While there were still three months until harvest.  
Then I would send rain on one city  
And on another city I would not send rain;  
One part would be rained on,  
While the part not rained on would dry up.  
<sup>8</sup>So two or three cities would stagger to another city to drink water,  
But would not be satisfied;  
Yet you have not returned to Me,”  
declares the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>“I smote you with scorching wind and mildew;  
And the caterpillar was devouring Your many gardens and vineyards,  
fig trees and olive trees;  
Yet you have not returned to Me,”  
declares the LORD.

<sup>10</sup>"I sent a plague among you after the manner of Egypt; I slew your young men by the sword along with your captured horses, And I made the stench of your camp rise up in your nostrils; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

<sup>11</sup>"I overthrew you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, And you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.

**Q: Why should such things have been interpreted as an act of God with this greater spiritual purpose in mind?**

A: It is specifically documented in God's Word that He will work in this way when His people have violated the terms of the Covenant. (Lev. 26:20; Dt. 28:22; 1 Ki. 8:37)

**Q: How does this combine with the previous conditions to multiply the effect of what is taking place?**

A: All the types of agricultural products on which both man and livestock depend on are affected so as to corrupt the entire food supply—vegetables, fruit, grains, and ultimately even the meat supply dependent on them.

**[Read v.10]**

**Q: What is the fourth act of discipline mentioned by which God attempted to get them to repent and return to Him?**

A: A plague in the form of a military defeat.

**Observation:** Israel did not maintain a standing army, calling everyone up when needed. When armed conflict required the men to go to battle, they were taken away from working the land. The past acts affected the land, but this one takes everyone away from even working it.

**Q: How did this literally and historically take place?**

A: There have been many wars involving the Northern Kingdom of Israel to this point which have cost the nation dearly.

**Q: How did this sign become more palpable, even more tangible?**

A: By the experience of "the stench".

**Q: Why should such things have been interpreted as an act of God with this greater spiritual purpose in mind?**

A: It is specifically documented in God's Word that He will work in this way when His people have violated the terms of the Covenant. (Lev. 26:17, 25, 33; Dt. 28:36-39)

**[Read v.11]**

**Q: What is the fifth act of discipline mentioned by which God attempted to get them to repent and return to Him?**

A: Near destruction.

**Observation:** Not just during the time of the existence of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but during the protracted cycle of the judges for the whole of Israel before it, there were times when various enemies were used as a tool of God's judgment to overwhelm Israel, God being the only reason they were brought back from the brink each and every time.

**Application for v.6-11:**

Notice the progression of God's working and how things proceed to get worse and worse as hearts become harder with each round of resistance:

- **Famine** (v.6)
- **Withholding of Rain** (v.7-8)
- **Pestilence** (v.9)
- **War** (v.10)
- **Supernatural Acts of God** (v.11)

All the things which God stipulated in His Word would come about as a result of spiritual disobedience materialized exactly as stated in His Word.

**Q: What does this reveal about these people? Why were they unwilling to acknowledge any of these efforts of God to get them to repent and return to Him?**

A: The chief reason cited for their spiritual condition is elevation of and concern for self at the expense of others. They were more concerned with the comforts of this life than the consequences for the next life.

**Application:** A **false** love of others inevitably produces a **false** love of God; the oppression and advancement at the expense of **others** inevitably produces the **judgment** of God.

<sup>12</sup>“Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel;  
Because I will do this to you,  
Prepare to meet your God, O Israel.”  
<sup>13</sup>For behold, He who forms  
mountains and creates the wind  
And declares to man what are His  
thoughts,  
He who makes dawn into darkness  
And treads on the high places of the  
earth,  
The LORD God of hosts is His name.

**[Read v.12-13]**

**Q: What is this dramatically stating regarding the impending judgment of God where His people are concerned?**

A: Because of their steadfast refusal to properly respond at any point along God’s progressive escalation of discipline, the consequences of the destruction of the nation are inevitable. This is the final warning to repent and return to Him so that when they inevitably “*meet your God*”, they will not fail. However, the final judgment of destruction at this point is completely unavoidable meaning that the consequences are unavoidable.

**Q: Why might the insertion of v.13, a reference to God’s sovereignty and power, be appropriate to the overall discussion?**

A: Because the actions of man, regardless of how deluded they may make him personally, can never obviate the reality of God as the Creator and Author of His Word, both of these qualities affirm His ability to transform “*dawn into darkness*” both literally in creation and in mankind through His Word.

**Application:** When God’s people will not meet Author and Comforter of our faith in the course of right **worship**, **service** and **treatment** of **others**, all that is left is to meet the **Judge**.

## **Epilogue**

*It is no coincidence that the acts of war, famine, pestilence and disturbances presented through Amos mirror both the “birth pangs” Christ describes in the Olivet Discourse, and their culmination in the Seal judgments of Revelation 6 which define the End Times. That which is documented in Amos concerning the last days of Israel leading up to the Babylonian Captivity are a pattern and precursor to the Last Days leading up to Babylon the Great. And just like the repeated lack of response by God’s people in Amos’ time, so we are already witnessing the same to an even greater degree in the predicted apostasy which is already incipiently underway.*