

# CHAPTER 4

In this chapter,

**I.** The oppressors in Israel are threatened for their oppression of the poor (v. 1-3).

**II.** The idolaters in Israel, being joined to idols, are given up to their own heart's lusts (v. 4, 5).

**III.** All the sins of Israel are aggravated from their incorrigibility in them, and their refusal to return and reform, notwithstanding the various rebukes of Providence which they had been under (v. 6-11).

**IV.** They are invited yet at length to humble themselves before God, since it is impossible for them to make their part good against him (v. 12, 13).

## <del>300</del> AMOS 4:1-5

### THREATENINGS AGAINST OPPRESSORS

It is here foretold, in the name of God, that oppressors shall be humbled and idolaters shall be hardened.

**I.** That proud oppressors shall be humbled for their oppressions: for *he that does wrong shall receive according to the wrong that he has done*. Now observe,

**1.** How their sin is described, v. 1. They are compared to the *kine of Bashan*, which were a breed of cattle very large and strong, especially if, though bred there, they were fed upon *the mountain of Samaria*, where the pastures were extraordinarily fat. Amos had been a herdsman, and he speaks in a dialect of his calling, comparing the rich and great men, that lived in luxury and wantonness, to the *kine of Bashan*, which were wanton and unruly, would not be kept within the bounds of their own pasture, But broke through the hedges, broke down all the fences, and trespassed upon the neighboring grounds; and not only so, but pushed and gored the smaller cattle that were not a match for them. Those that had their

summer-houses upon the mountains of Samaria when they went thither for fresh air were as mischievous as the kine upon the mountains of Bashan and as injurious to those about them.

(1.) They oppress the poor and needy themselves; they *crush* them, to squeeze something to themselves out of them. They took advantage of their poverty, and necessity, and inability to help themselves, to make them poorer and more necessitous than they were. They made use of their power as judges and magistrates for the invading of men's rights and properties, the poor not excepted; for they made no conscience of robbing even the hospital.

(2.) They are in confederacy with those that do so. They *say to their masters* (to the masters of the poor, that abuse them and violently take from them what they have, when they ought to relieve them), "*Bring, and let us drink*; let us feast with you upon the gains of our oppression, and then we will protect you, and stand by you in it, and reject the appeals of the poor against you." Note, What is got by extortion is commonly made use of as *provisions for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*; and therefore men are tyrants to the poor because they are slaves to their appetites. *Bring, and let us drink*, is the language of those that *crush the needy*, as if the *tears of the oppressed*, mingled with their wine, made it drink the better. And by their associations for drinking and reveling, and an excess of riot, they strengthen their combinations for persecution and oppression, and harden the hearts of one another in it.

2. How their punishment is described, v. 2, 3. God will *take them away with hooks, and their posterity with fish-hooks*; he will send the Assyrian army upon them, that shall make a prey of them, shall not only enclose the body of the nation in their net, but shall angle for particular persons, and take them prisoners and captives as with hooks and fish-hooks, shall draw them out of their own land as fish are drawn out of the water, which is their element, them and their children with them, or, They in their day shall be drawn out by one victorious enemy, and their posterity in their day by another, so that by a succession of destroying judgments they shall at length be wholly extirpated. These *kine of Bashan* thought they could no more be drawn out with a hook and a cord than the Leviathan can, <sup><841></sup>Job 41:1, 2. But God will make them know that he has a *hook for their nose* and a *bridle for their jaws*, <sup><2929></sup>Isaiah 37:29. The enemy shall take them away as easily as the fisherman takes away the little fish, and shall make it

their sport and recreation. When the enemy has made himself master of Samaria, then,

**(1.)** Some shall attempt to escape by flight: *You shall go out at the breaches* made in the wall of the city, *every cow at that which is before her*, to shift for her own safety, and make the best of her way; and now the unruly kine of Bashan are tamed, and are themselves crushed, as they crushed the poor and needy. Note, Those to whom God has given a good pasture, if they are wanton in it, will justly be turned out of it; and those who will not be kept within the hedge of God's precept forfeit the benefit of the hedge of God's protection, and will be forced in vain to flee through the breaches they have themselves fearfully made in that hedge.

**(2.)** Others shall think to shelter themselves, or at least their best effects, in the palace, because it is a castle well fortified and a garrison well manned: *You shall throw yourselves* (so some read it), or *throw them* (that is, your posterity, your children, or whatever is dear to you), *into the palace*, where the enemy will find it ready to be seized. Note, What is got by oppression cannot long be enjoyed with satisfaction.

**3.** How their sentence to this punishment is ratified: *The Lord God has sworn it by his holiness*. He had often said it, and they regarded it not; they thought God and his prophets did but jest with them; therefore he *swears it in his wrath*, and what he has sworn he will not revoke. He swears by *his holiness*, that attribute of his which is so much his glory, and which is so much glorified in the punishment of wicked people; for, as sure as God is a holy God, those that *plough iniquity and sow wickedness shall reap the same*.

**II.** That obstinate idolaters shall be hardened in their idolatries (v. 4, 5): *Come to Bethel, and transgress*. It is spoken ironically: "Do so; take your course; *multiply your transgressions* by multiplying your sacrifices, *for this liketh you*; but what will you do in the end hereof?" Here we see,

**1.** How intent they were upon the service of their idols, and how willing they were to be at cost upon them; they *brought their sacrifices*, and their *tithes*, and their *free-will offerings*, hoping that therein they should be accepted of God, but it was all an abomination to him. The profuseness of idolaters in the service of their false gods may shame our strait-handedness in the service of the true and living God.

2. How they mimicked God's institutions. They had their *daily sacrifice* at the altar of Bethel, as God had at his altar; they had their *thank-offerings* as God had, only they allowed *leaven* in them, which God had forbidden, because their priests did not like to have the bread to heavy and tasteless as it would be if it had not leaven in it, for something to ferment it. Holy bread would not serve them, unless it were pleasant bread.

3. How well pleased they were with these services themselves: *This liketh you, O you children of Israel! So you love.* What was their own invention they were fond of and wedded to, and thought it must be pleasing to God because it was agreeable to their own fancy.

4. How they upbraided with it: “*Come to Bethel, to Gilgal; bring the sacrifices and tithes yourselves; proclaim and publish to the nation the free-offerings, pressing them to bring in abundance of such; go on in this way;*” that is,

(1.) “It is plain that you are resolved to do it, whatever God and conscience say to the contrary.”

(2.) “Your prophets shall let you alone in it, and not admonish you as they have done, for it is to no purpose. *Let no man strive nor rebuke his neighbour.*”

(3.) “Your foolish hearts shall be more and more darkened and besotted, and you shall be quite *given up to these strong delusions, to believe a lie.*”

(4.) “What will you get by it? *Come to Bethel and multiply your sacrifices,* and see what the better you will be, what returns you will have to your sacrifices, what stead they will stand you in in the day of distress. *You shall be ashamed of Bethel your confidence,*” <sup><483></sup>Jeremiah 48:13.

(5.) “*Come, and transgress, come, and multiply your transgression,* that you may *fill up the measure* of your iniquity and be ripened for ruin.” Thus Christ said to Judas, *What thou doest do quickly;* and to the Jews, *Fill you up the measure of your fathers,* <sup><483></sup>Matthew 23:32.

## AMOS 4:6-13

### INCORRIGIBLENESS OF ISRAEL

Here,

**I.** God complains of his people's incorrigibility under the judgments which he had brought upon them in order to their humiliation and reformation. He had by several tokens intimated to them his displeasure, with this design, that they might by repentance make their peace with him; but it had not that effect.

**1.** It is five times repeated in these verses, as the burden of the charge, “*Yet have you not returned unto me, saith the Lord; you have been several times corrected, but in vain; you are not reclaimed, there is no sign of amendment. You have been sent for by one messenger after another, but you have not come back, you have not come home.*”

**(1.)** This intimates that that which God designed in all his providential rebukes was to reduce them to their allegiance, to influence them to return to him.

**(2.)** That, if they had returned to their God, they would have been accepted, he would have bidden them welcome, and the troubles they were in would have been removed.

**(3.)** That the reason why God sent further troubles was because former troubles had not done the work, otherwise it is *no pleasure to the Almighty that he should afflict.*

**(4.)** That God was grieved at their obstinacy, and took it unkindly that they should force him to do that which he did so unwillingly: “*You have not returned to me from whom you have revolted, to me with whom you are in covenant, to me who stands ready to receive you, to me who have so often called you.*” Now,

**2.** To aggravate their incorrigibility, and to justify himself in inflicting greater judgments, he recounts the less judgments with which he had tried to bring them to repentance.

**(1.)** There had sometimes been a scarcity of provisions, though there was no visible cause of it (v. 6): “*I have given you cleanness of teeth in all*

*your cities*, for you had no meat to chew, whereby your teeth might be fouled,” especially no flesh, which dirties the teeth. Or, *I have given you emptiness of teeth*, nothing to fill your mouths with. “*Bread*, the staff of life, has been wanting, for you have *sown much* and *brought in little*,” as <sup><300></sup>Haggai 1:9. Some think this refers to that *seven years' famine* that was in Elisha's time, which we read of <sup><400></sup>2 Kings 8:1. Now when God thus *took away their corn in the season thereof*, because they had prepared it for Baal, they should have said, *We will go and return to our first husband*, having paid dearly for leaving him; but it had not that effect. *They have not returned to me*, saith the Lord.

(2.) Sometimes they had wanted rain, and then of course they wanted the fruits of the earth. This evil was of the Lord: *I have withholden the rain from you*. God has the key of the clouds, and, if he shut up, who can open? v. 7. The rain was withheld *when there were yet three months to the harvest*, at the time when they used to have it, and therefore the withholding of it was an extraordinary thing, and, if the course of nature was altered, they must therein own the hand of the God of nature; and it was at a time when they most needed it, and therefore the want of it was a very sore judgment, and blasted their expectations of a crop at harvest. And one circumstance which made this very remarkable was that when there were some places that wanted rain, and withered for want of it, there were other places near adjoining that had it in abundance. God *caused it to rain upon one city, and not upon another*, in the same country; nay, he caused it to rain *upon one field, one piece* of a field, and it was thereby made fruitful and flourishing, but on the next field, on the other side of the hedge, nay, on another part of the same field, *it rained not* at all, and it was so long without rain that all the products of it *withered*. No doubt this was literally true, and there were many instances of it which were generally taken notice of. Now,

[1.] By this it appeared that the withholding of the rain was not casual, but by a divine direction and disposal, and that the cloud which waters the earth is *turned round about by the counsels of God, to do whatsoever he commands it, whether for correction, or for his land, or for his mercy*, <sup><350></sup>Job 37:12-18. Rain does not go by planets (as common people speak), but as God sends it by his winds.

[2.] We have reason to think that those cities on which it rained not were the most infamous for wickedness, such as Bethel and Gilgal (v. 4), and

that those on which it rained were such as retained something of religion and virtue among them. And so in the town-fields it rained or rained not, upon the piece, according as the owner was; for we are sure *the curse of the Lord is in the house, and upon the ground, of the wicked, but he blesses the habitation of the just, and his field is a field that the Lord has blessed.*

[3.] It would be the greater grief and vexation to those whose fields withered for want of rain to see their neighbours' fields well watered and flourishing. *My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry,* <sup><25B></sup>Isaiah 65:13. *The wicked shall see it, and be grieved.* Probably those that were oppressed were rained upon, and so they recovered their losses, while the oppressors withered, and so lost their gains.

[4.] Yet, as to the nation in general, it was a mixture of mercy with the judgment, and, consequently, strengthened the call to repentance and reformation, and encouraged them to hope for all mercy, in their returns to God, since there was so much mercy even in God's rebukes of them. But, because they did not make good use of this gracious allay to the extremity of the judgment, they had not the benefit of it, which otherwise they might have had, for (v. 8) *two or three cities wandered at uncertainty, as beggars, unto one city, to drink water, and, if possible, to have some to carry home with them, but they were not satisfied;* it was but here and there one city that had water, while many wanted, and then it was not, as usual, *Usus communis aquarum — Water is free to all.* Those that had it had occasion for it, or knew not how soon they might, and therefore could afford but little to those that wanted, saying, *Lest there be not enough for us and you.* Those that came *drank water, but they were not satisfied,* because they drank it *by measure, and with astonishment;* and those that *drink of this water shall thirst again,* <sup><40B></sup>John 4:13. They were not satisfied, because their desires were greedy, and what they had God did not bless to them, <sup><30B></sup>Haggai 1:6. And now, one would think, when they met with all this disappointment, they should have considered their ways and repented; but it had not that effect: *“Yet have you not returned to me, no, not so much as to pray in a right manner for the former and latter rain,”* <sup><30B></sup>Zechariah 10:1. See the folly of carnal hearts; they will wander from city to city, from one creature to another, in pursuit of satisfaction, and still they miss of it; they *labour for that which satisfies not* (<sup><25B></sup>Isaiah 55:2), and yet, after all, they *will not return to God,* will not incline their ear to him in whom they might have satisfaction. The preaching of the gospel is as rain; God

sometimes blesses one place with it more than another; some countries, some cities, are, like Gideon's fleece, wet with this dew, while the ground about is dry; all withers where this rain is wanting. But it were well if people were but as wise for their souls as they are for their bodies, and, when they have not this rain near them, would go and seek it where it is to be had; and, if they seek aright, they shall not seek in vain.

**(3.)** Sometimes the fruits of their ground were eaten up by caterpillars, or blasted with mildew, v. 9. Heaven and earth are armed against those who have made God their enemy. When God pleased, that is, when he was displeased,

**[1.]** They suffered by a malignant air, the influence of which, either too hot or too cold, blasted their fruits, with a force that could be neither discerned nor resisted, and against which there was no defence.

**[2.]** They suffered by malignant animals. Their *vineyards* and *gardens* yielded their increase in great abundance, so did their *fig-trees* and *olive-trees*; but the *palmer-worm devoured them* before the fruits were ripe, and fit to be gathered in. This was either the same judgment with that which we read of ~~200~~ Joel 1:4-6, or a less judgment of the same nature, sent before to give warning of that. But they did not take warning: *Yet have you not returned unto me.*

**(4.)** Sometimes the plague had raged among them, and the sword of war had cut off multitudes, v. 10. *The pestilence* is God's messenger; this he *sent among* them, with directions whom to strike dead, and it was done. It was a *pestilence after the manner of Egypt*; deaths were scattered among them by the hand of a *destroying angel at midnight*. And perhaps this pestilence, as that of Egypt, fastened upon the first-born. *In the way of Egypt* (so the margin); when they were making their escape to Egypt, or going thither to seek for aid, the pestilence seized them by the way and stopped their journey. The sword of war is likewise *the sword of the Lord*; this was drawn among them with commission; and then it *slew their young men*, the strength of the present generation and the seed of the next. God says, *I have slain them*; he avows the execution. *The slain of the Lord are many*. The enemy *took away their horses*, and converted them to their own use; and the dead carcasses of those that were slain either with sword or pestilence were so many, and for want of surviving friends were left so long unburied, that the *stench of their camps came up into their nostrils*, and was both noisome and dangerous, and might put them in mind of the

offensiveness of their sin to God. And yet this did not prevail to humble and reclaim them: *You have not returned to him that smites you.* Such a rueful woeful sight as this prevailed not to make them religious.

**(5.)** In these and other judgments some were remarkably cut off, and made monuments of justice, others were remarkably spared, and made monuments of mercy, the setting of which the one over against the other one would have thought likely to work upon them, but it had not its effect, v. 11.

**[1.]** Some were quite ruined, their families destroyed, and themselves in them: *I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.* Perhaps they were consumed with lightning, as Sodom was, or the houses were, in some other way, burnt to the ground, and the inhabitants in them. Sodom and Gomorrah are said to be *condemned with an overthrow, and so made an example,* <sup><6126></sup>2 Peter 2:6. God had threatened to destroy the whole land with such an overthrow as that of Sodom, <sup><6223></sup>Deuteronomy 29:23. But he began with some particular places first, to give them warning, or perhaps with some particular persons, whose *sins went beforehand to judgment.*

**[2.]** Others very narrowly escaped: “*You were many of you as a firebrand plucked out of the burning, like Lot out of Sodom, when the fire had already kindled upon you; and yet you hate sin never the more for the danger it has brought you to, nor love God ever the more for the deliverance he wrought for you. You that have been so signally delivered, and in such a distinguishing way, have not returned unto me.*”

**II.** God, in the close, calls upon his people, now at length, in this their day, to understand the things that belong to their peace, before they were hidden from their eyes, v. 12, 13. Observe here,

**1.** How God threatens them with sorer judgments than any they had yet been under: “*Therefore, seeing you have not been wrought upon by correction hitherto, thus will I do unto thee, O Israel!*” He does not say how he will do, but it shall be something worse than had come yet, <sup><6314></sup>John 5:14. Or, “*Thus I will go on to do unto thee, following one judgment with another, like the plagues of Egypt, till I have made a full end.*” Nothing but reformation will prevent the ruin of a sinful people. If they turn not to him, his anger is not *turned away*, but *his hand is*

*stretched out still. I will punish you yet seven times more, if you will not be reformed;* so it was written in the law, <sup><R63></sup>Leviticus 26:23, 24.

**2.** How he awakens them therefore to think of making their peace with God: “*Seeing I will do this unto thee, and there is no remedy, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!*” that is,

**(1.)** “Consider how unable thou art to meet him as a combatant.” Some make it to be spoken by way of irony or challenge: “Prepare to meet God, who is coming forth to contend with thee. What armour of proof canst thou put on? What courage canst thou steel thyself with? Alas! it is but putting *briers and thorns* before a consuming fire, <sup><2704></sup>Isaiah 27:4, 5. Art thou able with less than 10,000 to meet him that comes forth against thee with more than 20,000?” <sup><4143></sup>Luke 14:31.

**(2.)** “Resolve therefore to meet him as a penitent, as a humble suppliant, to meet him as *thy God*, in covenant with thee, to submit, and stand it out no longer.” We must prepare to *meet God in the way of his judgments* (<sup><2368></sup>Isaiah 26:8), to *take hold on his strength, that we may make peace*. Note, Since we cannot flee from God we are concerned to prepare to meet him; and therefore he gives us warning, that we may prepare. When we are to meet him in his ordinances we must prepare to meet him, prepare to seek him.

**3.** How he sets forth the greatness and power of God as a reason why we should prepare to meet him, v. 13. If he be such a God as he is here described to be, it is folly to contend with him, and our duty and interest to make our peace with him; it is good having him our friend and bad having him our enemy.

**(1.)** He *formed the mountains*, made the earth, the strongest stateliest parts of it, and by the word of his power still upholds it and them. Whatever are the products of the everlasting mountains, he formed them; whatever *salvation is hoped for from hills and mountains*, he is the founder of it, <sup><4811></sup>Psalms 89:11, 12. He that formed the *great mountains* can *make them plain*, when they stand in the way of his people's salvation.

**(2.)** He *creates the wind*. The power of the air is derived from him, and directed by him; he brings the wind out of his treasures, and orders from what point of the compass it shall blow; and he that made it rules it; even *the winds and the seas obey him*.

(3.) He *declares unto man what is his thought*. He makes known his counsel by his servants the prophets to the children of men, the thought of his justice against impenitent sinners, and the thought of good he thinks towards those that repent. He can also make known, for he perfectly knows, the thought that is in man's heart; he *understands it afar off*, and in the day of conviction will set the evil thoughts among the other sins of sinners *in order before them*.

(4.) He often *makes the morning darkness*, by thick clouds overspreading the sky immediately after the sun rose bright and glorious; so when we look for prosperity and joy he can dash our expectations with some unlooked-for calamity.

(5.) He *treads upon the high places of the earth*, is not only higher than the highest, but has dominion over all, tramples upon proud men, and upon the idols that were worshipped in the highest places.

(6.) *Jehovah the God of hosts is his name*, for he has his being of himself, and is the fountain of all being, and all the hosts of heaven and earth are at his command. Let us humble ourselves before this God, prepare to meet him, and give all diligence to make him our God, for happy are the people whose God he is, who have all this power engaged for them.