

Lesson Plan: Amos 4

January 17, 2010

Course Goal: To introduce students to several major theological themes in the Old Testament prophets and to enable them to compare and contrast these themes in contemporary social commentators and critics.

Class Objective: To deepen students' insight into the insensitivity of people under God's judgment and the futility of light chastisement. Secondly, to help students see that simply being religious does not guarantee freedom from God's displeasure.

Teacher Preparation: Review this lesson plan. Review any commentary available on the assigned chapter. Print copies of Amos 4 so class members are using the same text.

Class Activities (45 minutes)

1. Read the assigned text: Amos chapter 4 (5 minutes)
2. Read and encourage discussion on the seven discussion questions (40 minutes)
3. Ask for feedback on how the class went and what students feel they are learning.

Discussion Questions: Amos 4

1. What is your sense of the meaning of the expression "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel?"
2. Bethel is the place name of the site where the Patriarch Jacob had his vision of the ladder leading to heaven. It is considered holy ground for the northern Kingdom of Israel and the site of a sanctuary. Gilgal was the site that the people under Joshua's leadership built a stone altar commemorating their successful crossing of the Jordan. A religious sanctuary was erected there. What is the prophet trying to convey in verses 4 and 5?
3. Bashan was high table-land suitable for cattle grazing. Cows of Bashan is a sarcastic way of describing the wealthy women of Samaria. Harmon is named only in Amos 4.3 and its location is uncertain. With this information restate the meaning of Amos 4.1-3.
4. The two staggering facts in the life of a prophet are: God's turning to humanity, and humanity's turning away from God. Where do we see this reality in Amos 4?
5. Hardness of heart is a human condition that the afflicted persons are unaware. The question then is how much intervention by God is necessary to awaken and transform the people. How is this theme played out in this text?
6. How is religious practice in our world used as a cover for behavior and attitudes that God detests? Is Christianity at risk as a cover for evil? Is our church?
7. Where might God be trying to get our attention and compel a change of heart and behavior in our own time? What huge spiritual issue are we oblivious of? If Amos lived today--attuned to God as he clearly was--what would he be seeing that would "drive him nuts"?

⁴Hear this word, you cows of Bashan
who are on Mount Samaria,
who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,
who say to their husbands, 'Bring something to drink!'

²The Lord God has sworn by his holiness:

The time is surely coming upon you,
when they shall take you away with hooks,
even the last of you with fish-hooks.

³Through breaches in the wall you shall leave,
each one straight ahead;
and you shall be flung out into Harmon,*
says the LORD.

⁴Come to Bethel—and transgress;
to Gilgal—and multiply transgression;
bring your sacrifices every morning,
your tithes every three days;

⁵bring a thank-offering of leavened bread,
and proclaim freewill-offerings, publish them;
for so you love to do, O people of Israel!
says the Lord God.

⁶I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities,
and lack of bread in all your places,
yet you did not return to me,
says the LORD.

⁷And I also withheld the rain from you
when there were still three months to the harvest;
I would send rain on one city,
and send no rain on another city;
one field would be rained upon,
and the field on which it did not rain withered;

⁸so two or three towns wandered to one town
to drink water, and were not satisfied;
yet you did not return to me,
says the LORD.

⁹I struck you with blight and mildew;
I laid waste* your gardens and your vineyards;
the locust devoured your fig trees and your olive trees;
yet you did not return to me,
says the LORD.

¹⁰I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt;
I killed your young men with the sword;

I carried away your horses;*
and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils;
yet you did not return to me,
says the LORD.

¹¹I overthrew some of you,
as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,
and you were like a brand snatched from the fire;
yet you did not return to me,
says the LORD.

¹²Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel;
because I will do this to you,
prepare to meet your God, O Israel!

¹³For lo, the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind,
reveals his thoughts to mortals,
makes the morning darkness,
and treads on the heights of the earth—
the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name!