

• Amos' analysis of Israel

Amos 3:9–4:5 is presenting Amos' analysis of Israel:

- the nation was full of violence (3:9–12);
- its religion was powerless (3:13–15);
- its upper-class citizens were arrogant (4:1–3);
- its pilgrimages were useless (4:4–5).

• Society and religion

We can see that Amos mixes his criticism of society ^{☐1} with his criticism of the nation's religion ^{☐2}.

1. Israel's leading citizens were lazy and arrogant

1. **Israel's leading citizens were lazy and arrogant.** Amos has a special word for them. Many scholars take 4:1–3 to be an attack on upper-class women in Israel, but actually that interpretation is quite doubtful. Many of the Hebrew pronouns in this section are masculine plural in form ('Hear this', 'their' lords; the days are coming upon 'you'). It is not likely that women would be addressed with Hebrew masculine plurals. The 'cow' is a feminine word and this is enough to explain for some feminine pronouns in the Hebrew. But it is more difficult to explain why women should be spoken of with masculine plural pronouns. Admittedly, the use of a masculine for a feminine can be found in Hebrew, but a mixture of masculine and feminine forms needs more precise explanation. The picture is best taken as a metaphor in which men who think they are brave and bold in their sins are ridiculed by the prophet as being like animals. The Hebrew pronouns make it difficult to think that women are being specially addressed.

• Sinners behaving like animals!

Hear [masc.] this word, you cows [fem.] of Bashan who live in the highlands of Samaria, cows who [fem.] oppress the poor and crush the needy, cows who [fem.] say to their [masc.] lord,¹ "Bring in provisions that we may drink!" ^{☐1}

• Drinking sessions

The drinking-sessions took place in the sanctuaries of the pagan gods. The leaders of Samaria are like animals, living only for physical comfort and bodily pleasures. They care nothing of how others in their own land are suffering. The poor have to suffer in order that the rich may have their physical comforts.

• Degenerate religion

These upper-class leaders of the land rather liked the degenerate religion of Israel; they liked the idea of a god who provided for all their greeds!

• Like cows..

Like animals they live; and like cows – says Amos – they will be led away with hooks in their noses!

'My sovereign Yahweh has sworn by His holiness, "Behold, the days are coming upon you [masc.], when they will take you [masc.] away with meat hooks, and your [fem.] rear guard with fishhooks. ☐1 Through the breaches in the walls you [fem.] will go out, Each one [fem.] straight before her [fem.]. And you [fem.] will be sent beyond Harmon." ^{☐2}

^{☐1} 3:9–12; 4:1–3
^{☐2} 3:13–15; 4:4–5

^{☐1} 4:1

^{☐1} 4:2

^{☐2} 4:3

• *God's oath - unchangeable*

'Harmon' is the name of an unknown town, somewhere beyond Damascus. We must notice the reference to the oath of God. 'My sovereign Yahweh has sworn by his holiness'. When God takes an oath, it means that a decision has been made, and it will not be able to be changed.

2. Religious matters

• *Useless pilgrimages*

2. **Again Amos turns from social matters to religious matter.** The pilgrimages of the people were useless. It is obvious that the people of Amos's day loved visiting the famous sanctuaries at Bethel and Gilgal, just as today people might like to visit Mecca or Jerusalem or Canterbury Cathedral (in Britain).

*"Come to Bethel – and sin!
Come to Gilgal – and rebel! Rebel repeatedly!
Bring your sacrifices for the morning,
your tithes every three days. ^{☞1}
Burn thanksgiving-offerings with leaven!" ^{☞2}*

^{☞1} 4:4
^{☞2} 4:5

• *Forbidden sacrifices*

We remember that the law forbade sacrifices with leaven. ^{☞1}

^{☞1} Exod. 34:25;
Leviticus 2:11

*"Proclaim freewill offerings!
Announce them well!
For that is what you love, you people of Israel."
Oracle of my sovereign Yahweh!' ^{☞1}*

^{☞1} 4:5

• *Bethel – but no meetings with God and no changed lives*

Bethel and Gilgal were famous for two events in the story of Israel. Bethel was the place where Jacob – the ancestor of Israel – first met with God. He was running away from a situation where he had brought much trouble upon himself, and suddenly God stepped into his life. Then, again, later in his life Jacob was taken back to Bethel, the place where he had met God. After many trials in his life God took him again to Bethel, and he was asked to build an altar there ^{☞1}. Bethel was a reminder of the possibility of meeting with God. But later in Israel's history, Jeroboam I built an idolatrous shrine there and it became the place of wickedness.

^{☞1} Genesis 35:1

The people loved going to Bethel, but they were not meeting with the God of Bethel, the God who disturbs those who are fugitives from righteousness, the God who turns their lives around.

• *Gilgal – but no remembrance of spiritual history*

Gilgal was famous too. It was the place where there was a monument commemorating the crossing of the river Jordan (Joshua 4:19–24). God did amazing things in bringing Israel to the land of Canaan. Idols are dead but the God of the Bible is the living God! Joshua wanted people to remember their spiritual history, so he built a pile of stones at Gilgal to remind the people of what God had done. A nation came into being

because 'the hand of the Lord is mighty' ^{☞1}. Joshua said, 'I am doing this so that you may fear Yahweh your God for ever' ^{☞2}. Gilgal was the place where the Israelites were first circumcised after coming into the land of Canaan.

^{☞1} Joshua 24:4

^{☞2} Joshua 24:4

But now in Amos' day the people go to Gilgal on pilgrimage but they forget that 'The hand of Yahweh is mighty'. They go to Gilgal on pilgrimage but they forget that Gilgal was a place where the male Israelites symbolized their dedication and purity for God.

• **What does God want of us?**

The people went to Bethel but did not meet God. They went to Gilgal but did not purify their hearts. They had plenty of religion – especially freewill offerings – but their religion did not involve contact with the living God because it was displeasing to Him.

What does God want of us? First a meeting with Him in faith. Trust in Jesus. He wants us to be like Jacob and say ‘The God of the Bible will be my God’. Then He wants dedication, discipline, social concern, righteousness. People love religion; but the same people do not always love righteousness.

Footnote

1 The Hebrew for ‘their lord’ is not the common word for husband. ‘Their lord’ seems to refer to a god. Like the Hebrew word for ‘God’ it is plural in form but singular in meaning. The phrase is similar to ‘their god’ in 2:8.



	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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