

Bethel is the temple of the Northern Kingdom. We know that it will be judged and defiled as its horns are removed. Their sacrifices on this altar are meaningless as they continue to sin without repentance.

AMOS 4:4 – 13

Come and
... sin!

4:4 “Come to Bethel, and transgress;

← 3.14

to Gilgal, and multiply transgression;

(Joshua 4:19 – 20,
1 Sam. 15:21-23)

bring your sacrifices every morning,

your tithes every three days

5 offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened,

(Lev. 7:11 – 18)

and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them;

for so you love to do, O people of Israel!”

declares the Lord God.

This section is filled with a list of ironic commands. God is mocking their worship!

There are 7 imperatives:

- * Come
- * Transgress
- * Multiply
- * Bring
- * Offer
- * Proclaim
- * Publish

Yet you
did not
return

6 “I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities,

(Lev 26:26,
Deut. 28:38)

and lack of bread in all your places,

yet you did not return to me,”

declares the Lord.

7 “I also withheld the rain from you

(Lev 26:18-28;
Deut. 28:23-24)

when there were yet three months to the harvest;

I would send rain on one city,

and send no rain on another city,

Where there were 7 imperatives above, now there are 7 plagues mentioned here!

- * famine
- * drought
- * blight and mildew
- * locust
- * pestilence
- * sword
- * defeat

All these things God has done and correspond to the covenant curses of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.

1 one field would have rain,

and the field on which it did not rain would wither;
← 1:2

→ 2 3 so two or three cities would wander to another city

to drink water, and would not be satisfied,

← yet you did not return to me,"

declares the Lord.

9 "I struck you with blight and mildew;
(Deut. 28:22)

your many gardens and your vineyards,

your fig trees and your olive trees the locust devoured;
(Deut. 28:42)

← yet you did not return to me,"

declares the Lord.

10 "I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt;
(Lev 26:16,25 Deut. 28:22, 27) E (Ex. 9:3-6; 12:29-30)

I killed your young men with the sword,

and carried away your horses,

and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils;

← yet you did not return to me,"

declares the Lord.

They have become like Egypt,
Sodom and Gomorrah and
experience the plagues and
judgement of these nations.

11 "I overthrew some of you,
 as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,
 (Gen 19:24-25)
 and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning;
 yet you did not return to me,"
 declares the Lord.

They barely survive this last catastrophe – similar to the shepherd who only rescues part of the lamb in 3:12.

12 "Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel;

because I will do this to you,

prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"
 (Ex. 19:11, 15, 17)

13 For behold! he who forms the mountains and creates the wind,

and declares to man what is his thought,

Lit. "reveals"

<-- 3:7-8

who makes the morning darkness,

and treads on the heights of the earth—

the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name!

<-- 3:13

God

- * is creator of both mountain and wind
- * understands the thoughts of humans/communicates his plans to man
- * controls time
- * treads/marches on the heights
- * the Lord of the angel army

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NOTES:

4:4 – 5

This passage echoes the language and structure of priestly instructions found in texts like Leviticus 7:11–18; 19:5–8 and Deuteronomy 14:3–8, 21, where God's commands for sacrifices are given in careful, reverent detail. These laws outline how offerings, thanksgivings, and food laws were to be observed in faithful worship. Amos mimics this style through a list of ironic imperatives, turning priestly instruction into a biting parody.

Bethel and **Gilgal** were major religious centers in the Northern Kingdom with deep historical roots. As noted in Amos 3:13–15, Bethel served as the kingdom’s central shrine, established by Jeroboam I with its own altar to discourage worship in Jerusalem. It was also the site where Jacob encountered God and received covenant promises (Genesis 28), making its corruption especially tragic. (For more detail on Bethel’s history and significance, see the background notes on Amos 3:13–15.) Gilgal, located in the Jordan Valley just north of Jericho, marked Israel’s first camp after crossing into the Promised Land. Joshua set up memorial stones there (Joshua 4:19–20) as a testimony to God’s deliverance. It was also where Saul was confirmed king (1 Samuel 11:15), but more ominously, where he disobeyed God’s command regarding sacrifices, leading to his rejection as king (1 Samuel 15:21–23).

In the Old Testament, **sacrifices**, **offerings**, and **tithes** were core expressions of covenant worship. Leviticus 1–7 gives detailed instructions: burnt offerings represented complete consecration to God; grain offerings expressed gratitude; sin and guilt offerings brought cleansing and restoration. The fellowship (or peace) offering celebrated communion with God and often included a shared meal—the worshiper consumed part of the sacrifice, symbolizing table fellowship with God, a powerful sign of peace and intimacy in the ancient Near East. As Leviticus 7:11–18 shows, the thanksgiving and freewill offerings were subtypes of the fellowship offering, brought in joyful response to God’s mercy. These included unleavened bread, offered with the sacrifice, and leavened bread, which was eaten but not burned. Tithes supported the Levites and the poor, reflecting trust in God’s provision and care for the vulnerable—and were also connected to Bethel itself, where Jacob vowed to give a tenth to God at the ancient shrine (Genesis 28:22). These practices were not merely ritual obligations; they were God-given means of drawing near to Him. The instructions to bring daily sacrifices and tithes every three days go beyond what the Law required, presenting the Israelites as exceptionally pious.

4:6 – 11

The many plagues referenced in this section echo the covenant curses outlined in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, which warned of escalating judgments if the people persisted in unfaithfulness. “Cleanliness of teeth”—literally “purity of teeth”—is an idiom for famine, likely emphasizing the contrast between outward purity and inner deprivation. A drought occurring three months before harvest—during the critical spring season when grains would be ripening—would have been agriculturally catastrophic. The terms translated as “blight and mildew” may refer to hot east winds, fungal infestations, or specific grain diseases such as smut and rust, all of which could destroy staple crops like wheat and barley. Locusts, a recurring threat in the ancient Near East, would decimate not only grain but also the leaves of trees, as attested in various ancient texts. The final judgment, described as an “overthrow,” is intentionally vague—possibly a military disaster, earthquake, or fire—but its effects are clearly catastrophic: only a few escape with their lives. Amos compares it to the historic destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Deut. 29:23; Isa. 13:19), evoking a total judgment from which only a remnant survives.

4:12 – 13

At three key points in Amos (4:13; 5:8; 9:5–6), the prophet breaks into brief **doxologies**—poetic praises of God’s majesty and power. Each is compact, shaped by participles describing God’s ongoing work in creation, and culminates in His divine name. Amos is unique among the prophets in weaving these doxologies directly into oracles of judgment. While other prophets certainly praise God, they rarely do so *in the very act* of announcing divine wrath. In Amos, this interweaving highlights a striking truth: the God who brings judgment is not just Israel’s God—He is the Creator and Sovereign of all. Rather than softening the warnings, these doxologies intensify them and ground them in the very nature and authority of God Himself.

For the second time in Amos, we encounter the title “**the God of hosts**”. As in 3:13, this name refers to God as the commander of heaven’s armies and the leader of the divine council who executes His will in the world. This is one of Amos’s favorite titles for God—he uses it nine times—emphasizing both God’s universal power and His ability to carry out justice through any means He chooses.

COMMENTARY:

¶1: COME AND... SIN! (4:4 – 5)

This next section begins with a call to worship that would sound familiar to ancient Israelites—echoing the tone of priestly summons or psalms of invitation (Psalm 95:1; 100:4). The “faithful” worshipers are urged to come to Bethel and Gilgal, the major religious sites of the northern kingdom. But the invitation is shocking: they are not called to honor God but to multiply transgressions—to be rebellious and to break the covenant. The word for “transgress” shares the same root as the word used in Amos 1–2 to describe the sins of the nations. Israel, despite its covenant privilege, is no different from the other families of the world.

Amos uses irony and satire throughout this passage. The people appear zealous: they bring sacrifices daily, tithes every three days, and offer leavened bread with thanksgiving offerings. Outwardly, their devotion looks impressive—perhaps even excessive. But inwardly, they are rebellious. The very acts meant to express gratitude and fellowship have become self-serving.

There’s even a subtle callback to the previous paragraph: as the cows of Bashan called their masters to “bring drinks,” so now the prophet calls the people to “bring sacrifices.” Both are grotesque images of table fellowship—one that ignores the neighbor, the other that dishonors God the Host.

This is the core tragedy of the passage: sacrifices were designed to draw the worshiper near to God and to transform them so they could carry out their calling in the world. The peace offering culminated in a shared meal—table fellowship with God Himself. But now, while they go through the motions, they continue to dishonor their Host. It is as if they sit at God’s table but spit in His face. Their rituals continue, but repentance is absent.

Notably, Amos doesn’t mention sin offerings or atonement. These worshipers do not seek forgiveness—they continue in sin. They assume that religious activity will cover over their rebellion. But God has already exposed the farce. They do all these things, not because they love God, but because “this is what you love to do” (4:5). The poetic structure highlights this final line with a deliberate disruption in cadence. It’s a stunning reversal: the sacrifices intended to express love for God now reveal only love for self. Whereas we would expect them to worship because God has been good to them and because they love Him, we are told instead that they worship because they love themselves. Their relationship with God—meant to shape them into a people who love Him, love their neighbor, and reflect His character and justice—has not transformed them at all.

Amos’s audience might have looked pious from the outside. With the seven imperatives in the text, they appear to be the perfect worshipers. But with satire as his scalpel, Amos reveals the rot underneath. Like Saul in Gilgal (1 Samuel 15), they disobey while worshiping. They offer generous sacrifices without listening to God’s voice. But, as Samuel declared to Saul: “To obey is better than sacrifice... For rebellion is as the sin of divination.” Their worship, mixed with rebellion, has become idolatry. They no longer worship the living God, but a god made in their image.

¶2: YET YOU DID NOT RETURN (4:6 – 11)

In Leviticus and Deuteronomy, as God entered into covenant with His people, He promised to bless them and their land when they listened to His voice and walked in His ways. The land would flourish—becoming like Eden itself. But He also warned them: if they were unfaithful, if they turned from His commandments and served other gods, then curses would come upon them. The land would suffer, their harvests would fail, their enemies would rise, and they would be driven to despair. This was not because God had forgotten them or broken His promise, but because they had forgotten Him. These covenant warnings weren’t threats—they were gracious calls to return whenever the people strayed.

What was spoken in the Law as a future warning is now declared by Amos as fulfilled reality. These events had already happened, and Amos is now interpreting their recent history through the covenant lens. What Israel experienced wasn’t bad luck or natural misfortune; it was the hand of God, acting in

history to call His people back. He sent famine, drought, disease, and war—not in vengeance, but in mercy. It would have been unkind for God to leave them undisturbed in their sin and self-deception. His judgment was a gracious interruption—an urgent summons to repent. And yet, the refrain that echoes again and again is devastating: “Yet you did not return to me.”

This paragraph is deliberately structured to parallel the previous one. Just as seven imperatives were used in 4:4–5—ironically calling people to empty religious rituals—so now there are seven judgments, each more intense than the last. Together, they form a complete case against Israel. The message is clear: your sin and false worship has not gone unnoticed, and God has responded. Israel has offered God unrepentant worship—and in return, He has sent not blessing, but curse. Their rituals, meant to draw them near, have become offenses that provoke Him to act.

The first four judgments fall upon the land—natural disasters that disrupt the basic rhythms of provision and harvest. God sends famine, described vividly as “clean teeth”—a poetic way of saying they had nothing to eat. Their mouths may be clean, but their hearts remain impure, hardened in unrepentance. Then comes drought: rain falls on one town and not another, a phenomenon unusual enough that it should have caught their attention. This wasn’t just bad weather—it was the hand of God. Still, they remained thirsty—both physically and spiritually. After that, blight and mildew strike their crops—diseases that scorch and rot the grain. And then, locusts devour whatever remains. Ironically, while Israel hungers, the locusts are satisfied. These judgments weren’t subtle. Their harvests were disrupted, their food diminished, their thank offerings—especially those tied to grain and wine—would have noticeably declined. This should have jolted them into reflection. The signs were clear: something was off, and God was calling. But they did not return.

The next three judgments strike not the land, but the people themselves. Pestilence spreads, echoing the plagues of Egypt—a nation remembered for its defiance and oppression. Then comes death through war, and the image turns grotesque: bodies lie unburied, their stench rising—a stark contrast to the “pleasing aroma” that was supposed to ascend from the altar. Finally, the people are “overthrown,” a word used elsewhere to describe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Amos isn’t simply referencing history—he’s making a comparison. Israel has become like Egypt, Sodom, and Gomorrah—iconic examples of rebellion, oppression, and judgment. They have not only forgotten who they are—they have become what they were meant to stand against. The covenant people now resemble the pagan nations they were called to stand apart from. Instead of being holy and distinct, they are indistinguishable from the godless. And so they are treated the same: struck down, judged, and left with only a few survivors—like sticks snatched from a fire.

This entire sequence of judgments reveals not randomness, but sovereignty. As in Amos 3:6, it is the Lord who brings calamity—not out of cruelty, but in the hope that His people would return to Him. God is not absent; He is actively at work, disciplining His people in love. Yet each act of mercy—each warning wrapped in suffering—has been ignored. The repeated refrain, “Yet you did not return to me,” is both heartbreaking and damning. Israel’s sin hasn’t just damaged their relationship with God—it has spilled out into the land itself. The natural world suffers under their rebellion: crops fail, fields rot, and locusts swarm. Those created to subdue the earth and care for it in partnership with God have instead brought disorder and curse. Rather than being a blessing to the nations, Israel now mirrors them in sin and shares in their judgment. They are not bearing God’s name with honor, and so God must act—not only for their sake, but for the sake of His name among the nations and all creation.

This makes Israel’s refusal all the more tragic when seen against the backdrop of Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple. Solomon foresaw a day when God’s people would sin and experience drought, famine, plague, or defeat in battle. But he prayed that if they turned their hearts back to God, stretched out their hands in repentance, and cried out for mercy, then God would hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal the land (1 Kings 8:33–51). God was pleased with that prayer. It reflected His heart—a desire not to destroy His people, but to restore them. And yet, despite experiencing nearly every one of those warnings—drought, mildew, pestilence, defeat—they have not

returned. They, like Saul before them, have chosen religious ritual without relational obedience. God waits for a broken heart—but finds only hardened ones.

¶3: THE GOD OF HOSTS IS HIS NAME (4:12 – 13)

God was in covenant relationship with His people. He was their Suzerain, promising to care for them, fight for them, and provide for them. In return, they were His vassal, pledging to obey Him and give Him honor. But when they broke that covenant—when they withheld obedience, ignored His voice, and dishonored His name—He sent warning after warning. Still, they did not return. In the ancient Near East, when a vassal defied their suzerain, war would follow. This was not simply political retaliation—it was covenant enforcement, justice demanded by the terms of their sworn allegiance.

Therefore, Amos is sent as God’s herald to declare what comes next: the Suzerain is on the move. He will bring war against His rebellious people. Amos has already hinted at this devastating climax in earlier passages: in 2:13–16, God crushes them, leaving their army defenseless; in 3:11–12, an enemy surrounds and plunders their land; in 4:3, the people are led away in shame. Now comes the chilling announcement: “Therefore... prepare to meet your God.” What He will do is left ominously vague. But one thing is clear: this meeting will not be one of friendship or covenant renewal. It will be judgment. They will meet God—not in worship, but in war.

There is irony here. The chapter began with false worship at Bethel and Gilgal—supposed “meetings” with God that were nothing more than hollow ritual. Now, they are truly called to meet Him. But not as they expected. The covenant relationship has been so thoroughly violated that the meeting becomes a confrontation. This language of “preparation” and “meeting” echoes Exodus 19, when God descended on Mount Sinai and Israel trembled before His holiness. Then, it was a covenant beginning. Now, it is a covenant reckoning. The blood once sprinkled to seal the promise will now be poured out in judgment for its violation.

To heighten the weight of this announcement, Amos ends the chapter with one of his signature doxologies—a sudden burst of praise for God’s power and glory. This is one of three doxologies in the book (see also 5:8; 9:5–6), each brief, poetic, and climactic. They describe God using participles that emphasize His ongoing activity in creation. They all end with His divine name. What’s unique in Amos is where these doxologies appear: in the middle of judgment oracles. While other prophets praise God, Amos places His praise alongside wrath. He wants his audience to know that the One coming in judgment is not a local deity or tribal god—He is the Maker of all things, the Lord of heaven and earth.

The first two participles in the hymn portray God as the Creator of both the mountains and the wind. From the strongest and most stable to the most delicate and invisible, all things come from His hand. This is a poetic merism—He made it all. And as Creator, He commands it all. The previous verses already showed this: drought, locusts, and famine respond to His voice. Now we see the One behind the signs—He is not only judging Israel; He is commanding creation to do it.

The third description is central: He reveals His thoughts to humankind. Unlike idols who remain silent, Israel’s God has spoken. He has sent His prophets. They know His character, His covenant, His expectations—and now, they also know what is coming. They are without excuse.

The final two images portray a divine warrior striding forward. He turns the morning into darkness—not by dimming the sun, but by arriving in cloud and storm. He treads the high places, likely evoking thunder, lightning, and the approach of His chariot.

He is the Lord of hosts—the Commander of the angelic armies—and He is marching toward them in judgment.

The God who once descended in cloud and thunder to make covenant now descends again, but not in peace. These five characteristics were known to Israel from Sinai—when He subdued creation to deliver them, appeared in glory, and revealed His purposes in covenant. Now, those same traits are

revealed again as He comes to meet them—but this time in war. This is the dreadful climax of covenant betrayal: to meet the God who saves—not as Redeemer, but as Judge.

SUMMARY OF AMOS 4:3 – 13

This passage forms the second movement in Amos's central oracle against Israel (chapters 3–6). In the previous section, God summoned His covenant people to court—and they were found guilty. Because of their unfaithfulness, their injustice toward the poor, and their indulgence in luxury, God announced judgment: their defenses would fail, their wealth would be plundered, and only a remnant would survive.

Now, Amos exposes their long-standing resistance to God's call. Judgment has not come suddenly or without warning. God has not remained silent. He has spoken—through prophets and through the language of history. One by one, the covenant curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 have unfolded: famine, drought, blight, pestilence, and defeat in battle. These were not random disasters. They were acts of mercy—warnings meant to awaken the people and draw them back. But again and again, the refrain rings out: “Yet you did not return to me.” Their hearts remained hard. They refused to acknowledge their sin. They closed their ears to the prophets and ignored the hand of God at work in their circumstances.

And all the while, they continued to worship. They brought sacrifices and tithes, made offerings with public precision, and even exaggerated their generosity. But it was all a show. Through biting irony, Amos exposes the farce: they love their worship, but not their God. What looks like piety is in fact self-love. They do not bring offerings out of gratitude—they do it to appease a god made in their own image. They assumed religious performance would earn God's favor or silence His judgment—that they could manipulate Him. But they weren't worshipping the true God. They were bowing to a god of their own making—one who required no obedience and ignored injustice. Like Saul before them, they brought sacrifices but refused to listen. Their worship, though outwardly devout, was inwardly idolatrous. They sat at God's table and spit in His face.

Now Amos delivers the terrible announcement: “Prepare to meet your God.” The time for repentance has passed. The God they have claimed to worship is now coming—not in blessing, but in judgment; not in the temple, but on the battlefield. The covenant is broken. The nation will be destroyed. He may use other nations to carry out His justice, but make no mistake—it is God Himself who is marching toward them. And they have no excuse. He has revealed everything to them.

To underscore the weight of this warning, Amos ends with one of his signature doxologies—a sudden burst of praise describing God's power and presence. He is the Maker of mountains and wind, the One who reveals His thoughts to humanity, who turns the dawn into darkness, and strides upon the heights of the earth. These five descriptions echo the five calls to repentance they rejected. And they are not new. These traits were known from Sinai. The God who once descended in cloud and thunder to form a covenant now descends again—but not in peace. He is the Lord of Hosts—the Commander of angel armies—and He is coming to enforce justice.

God will come in judgment because Israel has become indistinguishable from the nations they were meant to bless. They have not upheld the covenant. They have not reflected His justice or mercy. And now, as they face the consequences, they are without excuse. The God who saved them is the same God who will bring them down—for the sake of His name, for the sake of the nations, and for the sake of creation itself.

APPLICATION – IDEAS ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP AND SERVICE

This passage reminds us that God is not interested in outward worship that is disconnected from inward transformation. He will not tolerate or welcome religious activity that is void of repentance. If we are not growing in Christlikeness—believing that our rituals or public faithfulness will somehow

please God—we have misunderstood His heart. He desires relationship, obedience, and hearts that are soft toward Him. Worship without repentance is not just empty—it's offensive.

- Are there areas in your life where you are “performing” spiritually but resisting personal change?
- Are there practices or habits that need to be re-examined in light of God's desire for repentance and renewal?

Repentance is not a one-time act; it is the ongoing rhythm of the Christian life—a repeated turning from sin and a return to the heart of God. That requires honest reflection—both on what God desires and on how we are actually living. The good news is that in Christ, we are not left to repent alone. He not only forgives, but transforms those who turn to Him.

- What does it look like for you to cultivate a lifestyle of ongoing repentance?
- Are there rhythms in your life that help you regularly reflect on your heart, actions, and direction?

Amos also reminds us that God is too good to leave us in our sin. In this passage, He sends famine, drought, disease, and disruption—not out of cruelty, but in love, to wake His people up. While not every hardship is a sign of divine discipline, we should not ignore the possibility that God uses difficulty to get our attention. He still interrupts our lives today, and when He does, He invites us to listen.

- When disruptions or difficulties arise in your life, do you pause to ask what God might be saying?
- Are there recurring patterns or warning signs in your circumstances that might be invitations to return?

We too are in a covenant relationship with God—sealed not by sacrifices but by the blood of Jesus. As God's people, we are called to be faithful to His name, to reflect His mercy and justice, and to live as a blessing to the nations. His grace enables us to walk in obedience, not out of fear, but out of love and reverence.

- Does your life reflect the character of the One who has saved you?
- In what ways are you becoming a person who blesses others—especially those who are overlooked or vulnerable?

The closing words of the chapter—“Prepare to meet your God”—ought to sober us. There is a final day of reckoning. This is not a threat to those in Christ, but a reminder: our lives are moving toward a conclusion. Each day is an opportunity to walk in faithfulness, to live with integrity, and to meet with God—not just at the end, but here and now. Every act of worship and service is a preparation to see Him face to face.

- How would your life look different if you lived each day with the awareness that you will one day meet God?
- Are you creating space in your daily life to meet with Him now, in joy and dependence?

Finally, the doxology at the end of this passage gives us hope. The God who brings judgment is also the God who rules over creation, who speaks, and who walks among His people. He is not absent. He is not silent. He is not powerless. He is at work—purifying His people, judging evil, and preparing all things for redemption. We can trust Him. And we can partner with Him.

- Does the sovereignty of God give you confidence to trust Him even when things are uncertain or painful?
- Where is God calling you to join Him in His redemptive work—in your family, community, or the world?