

Amos 4:1-13

'Waiting for the Son'

An imminent coming

It had been three momentous years.

The eleven men had been gathered together by Jesus.

They had followed him everywhere.

They had seen him heading inexorably toward death.

And then that death came.

It had thrown them into confusion and dismay.

But then his body disappeared and he began to appear in various locations and to various people.

And Acts 1 tells us that 40 days after his death, he appeared to them again.

He gave them instructions.

And then he was taken up into heaven.

And as they stood looking into the sky two men stood beside them and said:

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

[Acts 1:10-11, NIV]

Jesus is clear.

God is clear.

The New Testament writers are agreed.

The first coming of Jesus is to be succeeded by a second coming.

Jesus is going to return to earth.

And he is coming soon.

His second coming will be a universally evident event (Matthew 24:27).

It will be a coming in power and glory (Matthew 24:30).

And when Jesus comes he will destroy all anti-God and evil forces (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

He will gather his people, both those who are living and those who are dead (Matthew 24:31; 1

Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:1).

And he will judge the world (Matthew 25:31; James 5:9).

The imminent second coming of Jesus is a fact agreed upon and stated throughout the New Testament.

But you and I know that it has been two thousand years since the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

But he has still not come.

And the questions that sit in our minds are multiple.

But tonight, as we look at Amos 4, I want three particular questions to linger in our minds.

1. Why is God taking so long to send Jesus again?
2. What can I expect when Jesus finally comes?
3. What should I do while I wait?

Let me repeat those questions:

1. Why is God taking so long to send Jesus again?
2. What can I expect when Jesus finally comes?
3. What should I do while I wait?

Let's turn to Amos 4.

We will return to these questions after we have seen what Amos has to say to us.
For in my view, Amos helps us understand how the New Testament answers our questions.

Amos 4

Hear this! (Amos 4:1-3)

Bashan is a fertile plain in the transjordan.

The Yarmuk river flows through it.

And the lush pastures make it a great place for grazing cattle.

And so the cattle of Bashan were renowned throughout Israel.

They were plump, healthy, and well fed.

And these plump, healthy, well fed cows are therefore a great image for the wealthy upper class women of the northern kingdom.

Listen to Amos prophesy against them:

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, "Bring us some drinks!"

The word that is used in this verse for 'husbands' is literally 'lords'.

The image is striking and clear.

Here are the women who have grown fat by oppressing the poor, by crushing the needy, and by lording it over their husbands.

They sit there in their wealth demanding that their pleasures are met and presumably their demands result in their husbands having to extort and oppress the poor even more.

It is a picture of self-satisfied, self-gratifying indulgence.

And in verse 2 Amos tells us:

The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness:

"The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks.

You will each go straight out through breaks in the wall, and you will be cast out toward Harmon," declares the LORD. [Amos 4:1-3, NIV]

This verse is unusual.

It is unusual in that it talks about God swearing an oath.

But is even more unusual in that it is only one of the few times in the Old Testament where God swears by an attribute of his very own being – in this case, his own holiness (cf. Psalm 89:36).

When God swears an oath he is saying that something is definitely going to happen.

When God swears by an attribute of his character, then he is putting his own character at stake.

There can be no stronger way of saying that something is going to happen.

What is going to happen is irrevocable and irrefutable.

It is the unalterable will of God and will surely happen.

And what will happen is clear.

In the 'coming days' (against the NIV's 'time') a very different scenario will unfold.

Instead of making demands upon their lords, the real Lord will act.

And he will act in destruction and exile.

Although the exact details of the Hebrew of this verse are difficult, the general thought of Amos is overwhelmingly clear.

God is surely going to act in judgment in the coming days.

That judgment will be strong and severe and deserved.

So, keep heading the way you are (Amos 4:4-5)

With this we read verses 4 and 5.

Bethel and Gilgal were ancient sacred sites and places of worship.

Amos uses words and phrases that sound like an ancient call to worship.
But he twists it.
Instead of these places being places of forgiveness, they have become places of sin.
The people of God are sacrificing repeatedly and more often than required.
They are tithing more often than required.
But their lives and attitudes are lies.
And their religious practices are therefore simply an opportunity for displaying their arrogance.
Listen to the deep irony and sarcasm of the prophet:

*“Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more.
Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three ‘days’ (NIV footnote).
Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings—
boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,”
declares the Sovereign LORD. [Amos 4:4-5, NIV]*

The religious practices of the people of God have little to do with God and his glory.
They are filled with the same self-centredness that characterises so much of Israelite life.
It may be what they love to do.
But it is not what God loves.
In fact, such emptiness is what God hates.

But remember

- Past opportunities (Amos 4:6-11)

Let’s now take a look at verses 6 to 11.

Now to get some perspective on these verses, I want you to come with me to Leviticus 26.
This chapter tells us about God’s covenant with his people.
It makes clear that obedience to God’s covenant brings blessing and disobedience brings curse.
[Quickly run through the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26]

Now, let’s go back to Amos.

You see, I think Amos is deliberately interacting with the curses of Leviticus and Deuteronomy 27-28.

And what he is saying is that Israel has a long track record of breaking the covenant.

And God has a long track record of judging Israel for breaches in covenant.

Israel sinned and God brought the covenant curse of famine.

His intention in judging was to bring them to repentance.

But they still did not return to God.

At another time in their history of sinfulness, God acted upon them the covenant curse of drought.

Verses 7 and 8 tell us that God acted in such a way that it would be clear that he was behind the drought.

He caused very unusual patterns of rain and drought.

And his intention was to bring them to repentance.

But they still did not return to God.

The third covenant curse was agricultural blight and mildew.

The fourth was locusts.

God acted in judgment to bring them to repentance.

But still they did not return to him.

At other times he sent the fifth covenant curse of pestilence.

Plagues like those that came upon Egypt came upon the people of God.

And the sixth covenant curse was the sword.

The nation’s elite troops fared no better than captured horses.

God acted in judgment with repentance in mind.

But still they did not return to him.
Verse 11 spells out the seventh and most disastrous covenant curse.
God acts as he did on the grossly sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.
He overthrows them.
And he does so to bring them to repentance.
But still they refused to return to God.
These verses are clear.
God has been longsuffering and patient.
He has seen his people sinning.
Repeatedly he has acted to turn them from their sinfulness.
He has given them endless opportunities for repentance.
But they have simply gone on sinning.

- The inevitable future (Amos 4:12-13)

In verse 12, Amos therefore tells them about the inevitable future towards which they are headed.

“Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.”

Amos has outlined seven great acts of God in the past.

Now he promises a great final act of God.

This time God will not send some natural disaster to be his agent.

This time he will come himself.

And as he does, Israel should remember who it is that they are dealing with.

They are dealing with God the creator.

They are dealing with the God outlined in verse 13.

This God is the God...

He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth—the LORD God Almighty is his name. [Amos 4:11-13, NIV]

Summary

So, there we have the chapter.

Let me see if I can summarise the message of this chapter.

I think it goes something like this.

- Hear this ... you are sinful and will be judged.
- You can go on practicing your empty and boastful religion but it won't help.
- Remember that God has already given you plenty of opportunities to repent (which you have refused).
- And so God is going to come in imminent and assured judgment.

Two things to think about

Longsuffering

So, there is Amos 4.

Now let's see what we can make of this in terms of our own context.

And the way I'd like to look at this is by looking at a New Testament book that talks about the second coming of Jesus.

Let's take a look at 2 Peter 3:1-11.

¹*Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. ²I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles. ³First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ¹⁴So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. [2 Peter 3:1-15, NIV]*

I want you to notice a few things that Peter says.

First, he talks about God the creator in verse 5.

Just as Amos does, Peter indicates that God being the creator guarantees that he will also be the judge.

Just as Amos said, God's coming to judge is sure and certain.

Second, I want you to notice what we can expect when Jesus comes again.

Peter makes clear that the coming of Jesus will be accompanied by terrifying judgment.

Third, I want you to notice what Peter says about why Jesus has not come yet.

Peter is saying that the coming of Jesus has been delayed because God wants to give everyone a chance to repent.

God is patient and longsuffering.

He does not want to come in judgment.

He would prefer everyone comes to repentance.

However, his longsuffering has a definite end.

There is a coming day when opportunities for repentance will have run out and an accounting will have to be made for how we have lived.

Finally, Peter makes clear what we should be doing while we wait for Jesus.

We should be leading lives of godliness.

Since God is coming in judgment, we should make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with God.

Morality

Friends, it is this last issue that I want to take up with you.

But before I do, I want to reiterate what I've been saying in our previous talks.

Amos has often spoken about judgment.

And as he does, I want to tell you that there is only one way to be blameless before God on the last day.

And that way is to be trusting in Jesus alone.

It is only through the work of Jesus that we can be right with God.

And we can call upon what Jesus has done time after time after time.

The sacrifice of Jesus is enough to save us from God's coming wrath.

Having said this, I want to take up the issue of Christian morality.

You see, the past few years have made it clear that Christian leadership in our country and around the world has been far from blameless and spotless.

But they are not alone.

My own impression is that Christians of all shapes and sizes are increasingly accepting lower and lower standards of morality.

We soak up the forgiveness that God has given us in Christ and yet we are so like God's ancient people of God.

There is immorality in our financial dealings, in our ethics, in our sexual practices, in our use of our tongues, in our lack of compassion and generosity, and in our dealings with each other.

Things that were once not named as fitting amongst Christians are now considered quite okay.

We so easily justify our slander, our gossip, our theft, and our covetousness.

We practice a form of religion but deny its impact upon our ethical and moral lives.

Friends, the word of Amos to the people of God of his day is as true today as it was then.

There is a coming judgment.

And God will want to know how we have lived.

And he will call us to account.

So, as we look to his coming judgment on the world and his creation of a new heaven and a new earth which will be the home of righteousness, let's decide to be people of righteousness.

Since we look forward to these things, let's make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with God.