

# “All the Prophets Testify”: Amos 4:1-13

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 April 22

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<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions?

Outline (the following is from *TLSB* p.1457; we are expanding/collapsing the major divisions as we proceed through them; specifically on 4:1-13, compare Keil-Delitzsch’s breakdown on p.266):

- I. Judgment against the Nations (1:3-2:16)
- II. Declarations concerning Israel (3:1-6:14)
  - A. Accusations Lodged against Israel (3:1-4:13)
    - 1. Yahweh’s exclusive relationship with Israel (3:1-2)
    - 2. Prophecy verified (3:3-8)
    - 3. Proclamation concerning Israel’s guilt and punishment (3:9-15)
    - 4. Condemnation of the rich women of Israel (4:1-3)**
    - 5. Indictment of sacrificial sins (4:4-5)**
    - 6. Failure to respond to Yahweh’s rebuke (4:6-13)**
  - B. Lamentation for Israel (5:1-3)
  - C. Exhortation to Seek Yahweh (5:4-17)
  - D. Judgment on the Day of Yahweh (5:18-6:14)
- III. Visions (7:1-9:15)

Condemnation of the rich women of Israel (4:1-3):

4:1 *Hear this word*: in 3:13, those addressed with “hear” were also actively to “testify”, but in this case those addressed passively will suffer the condemnation described by the Lord through His prophet Amos; confer “declares the Lord” in 4:3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11, which expression ends the oracle in 4:3 and 5 but forms a recurring refrain of a sort in 4:5, 8, 9, 10, and 11.

*you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountains of Samaria*: The destruction of the wealthy’s multiple homes was prophesied in 3:15, and Lessing says the movement is from general sins to specific sins. *TLSB* says the prominent women of Samaria were likened to fat cows because of their insatiable appetites. *CSSB* comments, “Upper-class women, directly addressed, are compared with the best-breed of cattle in ancient Canaan, which were raised (and pampered) in the pastures of northern Transjordan ... Whether the metaphor was intended as an insult or as ironic flattery is uncertain.” That the women are addressed is clear in the feminine grammatical gender of the Hebrew word for “cows” (in contrast to bulls?), as well as the use of other feminine forms oppressing the poor and crushing the needy, not to mention the reference to their husbands. *TLSB* notes that “Bashan was a fertile plain known for its rich pasture and large, healthy livestock”, but it does not explain the seemingly parallel but phrase of a different elevation “mountains of Samaria” (but see Mount Hermon in Bashan in 4:3?). Keil-Delitzsch says, “The mountain

of Samaria is mentioned in the place of the city built upon the mountain”. Lessing discusses how modern society generally prefers thin women but how in the ancient Near East the rich took pride in being able to make themselves fat.

*who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘Bring that we may drink!’*: Lessing notes the similar charges against the men of Israel in 2:6-7. Citing an Amos commentator whose last name is Paul, Lessing notes the use of the Hebrew *adown* for husband may intentionally contrast with the true “Lord” in 4:2. *TLSB* comments, “Rich women goaded their husbands to acquire more, even at the expense and suffering of the poor.” More descriptively, Roehrs-Franzmann says, “They luxuriate in bovine thoughtlessness on the profits of their successful husbands and prod them on, as good wives of successful men do, to greater efforts. They drink their cocktails with no thought and no heart for the poor, and so share in the guilt of their husbands.” (“Prod” is a nice “cattle” reference!) Lessing says the women may not have had any direct contact with the peasants nor grasped that their lavish lives were made possible by the poor’s sweat and toil, but he says members of privileged classes that profit from structural evil are just as guilty before God and that structural evil is just as damaging as personal evil.

4:2 *The Lord God has sworn by his holiness*: *TLSB* explains, “God has issued His verdict in the form of a legal oath, swearing by the highest referent possible, His own holiness”. *CSSB* says that the swearing “Stresses the solemnity of the situation and the certainty of the events” and that doing so by His holiness “Contrasts with Israel’s sin, reminding them of what they could have been (Ex 19:6) if they had faithfully kept their side of the covenant—as God had his.”

*that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks*: Citing Paul, Lessing says “days are coming” denotes a new period of time. The first two “you-alls” are masculine, which can include the women, and only the third “even the last of you” is feminine, which arguably could exclude the men. Laetsch says both forms are used to show that the “cows” are primarily women but also included men. “They” that shall take the people away in the Hebrew is a singular “he”, either arguably of the Lord or of the enemy that is His instrument, as Laetsch notes. Roehrs-Franzmann notes that the women who shared in the sins of their husbands also share in their punishment but refers to being caught like fish but also sees it as literal. Lessing mentions Jesus’s positive use of His disciples’ being fishers of men in Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:17. *TLSB* comments, “Slaves and prisoners were hooked in order to control them.” *CSSB* says, “According to Assyrian reliefs (pictures engraved on stone), prisoners of war were led away with a rope fastened to a hook that pierced the nose or lower lip ... The Hebrew word here may, in fact, refer to ropes.” The Hebrew word *tšen* is used in the Old Testament only here and in Job 5:5 and Proverbs 22:5, in both of which instances the ESV translates “thorns”; a standard reference says the meaning is “dubious”.

4:3 *And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead*: *TLSB* says, “Fortress walls will be breached, and lines of prisoners will march out.” Keil-Delitzsch says the gates of the stormed city will have been destroyed or choked up with rubbish. Oddly Lessing in one place describes invaders coming in the breaches and people exiting through the gates and then later reverses it. Roehrs-Franzmann continues the previous reference “as driven cattle” (confer Luther). The earlier Kretzmann, drawing on the even

earlier Keil-Delitzsch, does likewise, commenting, “every one before her, anxious to get away, looking neither to the right nor to the left”. Laetsch elaborates, “No longer as in her heyday does she look around to see whether she and her fineries are duly observed. No, bowed down in shame, she looks neither to the right nor left, stares straight ahead, hoping no one will see her.” Citing Andersen and Freedman, Lessing says the imagery may be that of animals escaping from a pen whose fence has broken down, adding :”further irony and insult to the women.”

*and you shall be cast out into Harmon: TLSB* suggests, “Possibly Mount Hermon in Bashan” (confer the mention of Bashan and mountains in 4:1). Even though Lessing notes that would be “back to their pasture”, he agrees that the idea is exile, as Keil-Delitzsch notes, and takes the reference as “the name of a land or district, though we have no means of determining it more precisely.” Laetsch sees the place’s not being named as appropriate since the enemy is not named. Luther refers to the women’s being sacrificed as fat cows by the King of Assyria.

*declares the Lord:* confer the comment above at 4:1.

#### Indictment of sacrificial sins (4:4-5):

4:4 *Come to Bethel ... to Gilgal:* The Lord through Amos seems to indict the people of the northern kingdom of their sacrificial sins by sarcastically calling on them to commit more of them. Lessing notes the use of seven commands in two verses. The movement in 4:3 does not seem to be related to the movement in 4:4. Bethel north of Jerusalem and Gilgal north of Jericho were main sanctuaries of the idolatrous and syncretistic false worship that rightly would have been directed to the Lord in Jerusalem.

*and transgress ... and multiply transgression:* Lessing discusses the shock value of the surprise pairing with come of transgress. *TLSB* comments, “Amos heightens the sarcasm by urging the people to sacrifice more frequently”. Apparently plagiarizing Keil-Delitzsch, Kretzmann restates, “Even if you should offer burn offerings every morning and tithes every three days it would only increase your guilt before Jehovah”, and later Kretzmann adds, “The more zeal the hypocrites show in imitating the outward worship of the true believers, the more guilt they heap upon themselves in the sight of God, whose all-seeing eye penetrates their flimsy pretexts and causes Him to emphasize His threats of punishment.”.

*bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days:* presumably these would not be offered so frequently. Lessing says, “The offering of voluntary sacrifice every morning and of a tithe every three days is far in excess of what is required by Israel’s worship regulations.” *CSSB* says a special tithe was to be brought every three years. Lessing notes the use of “your” instead of “His referring to God’s. Roehrs-Franzmann seems to think the Israelites, like the Pharisees of Jesus’s day, went beyond the requirements of the Law but neglected their weightier matters (Matthew 23:23).

4:5 *offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel!:* *CSSB* notes that burning of leavened bread was strictly forbidden but that it could accompany a fellowship offering (confer Roehrs-Franzmann). And, *CSSB* comments, “They loved the forms and rituals of religion but did not love what God loves—goodness, mercy, kindness, justice”.

Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “In their worship they sought themselves, their own security, the continuation of the present rotten order of things.” Lessing says, “Worship was fulfilling Israel’s felt needs”. The Lord’s indictment through Amos seems to anticipate the Lord’s in-person criticism of the Jews of His day, not only in worship without faith but also in its being done for show. A similar indictment might apply to our “high church/liturgics” contemporaries in other religious traditions or our own. We might reflect on our own coming to receive the forgiveness of sins and offering tithes and thank-offerings in response.

*declares the Lord God:* confer the comment above at 4:1, although in this case the expanded divine title is used. Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “Israel has not sought the Lord, but the Lord has been seeking Israel. His love spoke a stern language when it cried, Return to me” (confer Keil-Delitzsch). And, Roehrs-Franzmann connects Jesus’s cry of Matthew 23:37 regarding His gathering Jerusalem but its residents were not willing to be gathered.

Failure to respond to Yahweh’s rebuke (4:6-13):

4:6 *I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places:*

Lessing notes the emphatic “I Myself” in 4:6 and 4:7, and he points out this is the first of seven curses. *TLSB* comments, “Hunger and famine make an empty mouth”. Roehrs-Franzmann comment, “The teeth are clean because they have nothing to bite on.” Lessing says all cities and all places indicate the famine covered all Israel. With the phrase “Feast amid Famine” in its chapter title, “*GWfT* juxtaposes well-fattened cows with hungry people, and we can reflect on richer rich and poorer poor in our country nowadays. Unclear is when the Lord did these and the following things to the people of the northern kingdom (confer and compare the future tense at 4:12). Kretzmann refers to “famines sent at various times”, and Laetsch comments, “The events may have been separated by decades and centuries” and suggests the sequence is from lesser to greater. In contrast, Lessing suggests the plagues “might have happened in a relatively short period of time.” *CSSB* says, “In the past, God had used natural disasters to discipline and warn his people but those lessons were soon forgotten”, and then *CSSB* goes on to say that what is described in these verses “were not simply natural disasters; they were direct acts of God”, and we can discuss “natural” and “unnatural” and God’s causative and permissive wills.

*yet you did not return to me:* Lessing comments, “Yahweh’s voice is that of a jilted lover who attempted to get his beloved’s attention, but all in vain.” *TLSB* explains, “In repentance. ... Afflictions sent by the Lord were intended to make Israel despair, so that out of their misery they would return to their covenant God, who abounds in compassion, forgiveness, and salvation (Ex 34:6-7)” We can reflect on how our afflictions can lead us to repent and draw us closer to God, purifying our faith, if we only let them do so.

*declares the Lord:* confer the comment above at 4:1.

4:7 *I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest:* *TLSB* comments, “Withholding the latter rains (those coming in Mar/Apr) inevitably resulted in a massive crop failure by the harvest season (May).” *CSSB* explains that the lack of rain at that point “would prevent full development of the grain.”

*I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city; one field would have rain, and the field on which it did not rain would wither:* Laetsch says, “In order to prove that He had not lost His power”. Keil-Delitzsch comments, “in order to show the people more clearly that the sending and withholding of rain belonged to Him, God caused it to rain here and there, upon one town and one field, and not upon others”. Kretzmann comments, “this is, in spite of spurious claims of scientists concerning reasonable causes for everything, the only explanation which suffices for the fact that moisture in a given locality is often found in definite strips only.” Jesus refers to rain’s falling on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), so we might not necessarily think that those who got rain were better people than those who did not (some faithful people from Israel apparently relocated to Judah). Lessing likens selective raining to other plagues that had impacted only the Egyptians and not the Israelites. Perhaps the Lord simply did not want to starve anyone to death but to afflict everyone in this way. In that vein, Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “The partial character of the visitation made it plain that the Lord was not minded to destroy His people but was seeking to rouse their conscience and recall them to Himself. Cf. the partial visitations (one fourth, one third) in the Book of Revelation.”

4:8 *so two or three cities would wander to another city to drink water, and would not be satisfied:* presumably there would not be enough water to go around.

*yet you did not return to me,” declares the Lord:* confer comments above at 4:6 and 4:1.

4:9 *I struck you with blight and mildew:* We might be inclined to think of mold and mildew in our homes, but here they are, as Kretzmann notes, “a blight upon the cereal grains”. Several commentators, including Lessing, think of a blasting wind instead of blight as a fungi or bacteria, though Lessing still translates “blight”, apparently seeing it as a result of the wind. Keil-Delitzsch rules out the idea that the blight and mildew occurred at the same time or one as a consequence of the other or as a result of the drought. “*TLSB* comments, “These diseases destroyed both garden and vineyard. Crop devastations were evidence that Israel had broken the covenant and forfeited the Lord’s care and blessing.” *your many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees the locust devoured:* we read of locusts in Revelation and in Joel.

*yet you did not return to me,” declares the Lord:* confer comments above at 4:6 and 4:1.

4:10 *I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt:* the Hebrew word *deber* translated “pestilence” (close to the Hebrew word *dabar* for “word”) can be pestilence, plague, murrain, cattle disease, or cattle-plague. Murrain refers to a highly-infectious high-mortality outbreak particularly affecting cattle and sheep, such as anthrax or foot-and-mouth disease (hoof?). We might think of the fifth plague, that on the Egyptian livestock (Exodus 9:1-7) as such an epidemic of disease, and, though the Lord through Moses in Deuteronomy 28:58-61 seems to promise to send those same plagues and other diseases not previously described if the people do not keep His teaching, Keil-Delitzsch nevertheless rules out an allusion to that plague because he thinks that is only murrain, but compare, for example, Lessing. Several commentators note the similarity between Egypt and Israel in that Israel is now the Lord’s chief enemy.

*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:* the young men presumably would be soldiers; Lessing translates “best soldiers” and thinks of “elite combat troops”.

Kretzmann notes, “especially when the Israelites suffered defeats at the hand of the Syrians”. Regarding the horses, *TLSB* comments, “Signs of military strength are removed”, and we might say that the horses would be more than “signs” but actual implements of military might. Regarding the stench, *TLSB* comments, “Unbearable smell of unburned corpses”, perhaps the young men killed with the sword or others dying from drought, famine, and disease, though Kretzmann thinks the horses were slaughtered in battle and so he also thinks, following Keil-Delitzsch, that the stench could be from the dead men and beasts (confer also Laetsch and Lessing, who seems to think the horses that died did so because of injury or disease). Lessing also notes that the stench of death would go up into the survivors’ nostrils particularly if they were engaging in cannibalism. *yet you did not return to me,” declares the Lord: confer comments above at 4:6 and 4:1.*

4:11 *I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah: “I” and “God” seem to be an odd combination of first-person and third-person reference in what is thought to be a record of direct speech (confer and compare 4:12), though Lessing notes the redundant reference in Genesis 19:24 and says it makes clear the destruction was not an accident of nature. Regarding “some of you”, *TLSB* comments, “Afflictions, plagues, warfare, and death described here are doled out selectively, though the “some” could just refer to those suffering in this particular fashion, but, regardless, the precise basis for any selectivity is not explicit. Regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, we may remember from Genesis 18:20-21 and 19:4-11 and 23-29 that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with sulfur and fire from heaven for the cities’ apparent sin related to homosexuality. *TLSB* comments, “prototypical examples of God’s wrath and judgment” (Lessing says cited some twenty times, more than any other Genesis narrative, in the rest of the Bible), and we might add prototypical also of impenitence (for example, Matthew 11:23-24). The “as” in this case may not require that Israel’s sin was related to homosexuality or even that God rained sulfur and fire from heaven on Israel, though confer the “burning” in the next part of the verse. Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “great disasters comparable to the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah”. Keil-Delitzsch refers to the desolation of wars and other calamities that have undermined the kingdom, with the words taken from Deuteronomy 29:22-28 where the destruction of the land after an exile is compared to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (with being burned out brimstone and salt mentioned). We might reflect on the Promised Land as God’s gift and the people’s sin as bring consequences upon it, but not as many want to do with the United States.*

*and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning: Presumably the brand is heated in a fire in order to be impressed but is not consumed by the fire. Some commentators take it as a “stick”, for example, Lessing, who refers back to the pieces rescued in 3:12. Regardless, Roehrs-Franzmann says, “Figurative for a last-minute unexpected deliverance from a desperate situation.” *TLSB* comments, “They should not feel vindicated but should seriously consider what consequences might follow if they continue despising the Lord.” Keil-Delitzsch refers back to 3:12 and the prophecy of a few who might escape.*

*yet you did not return to me,” declares the Lord: confer comments above at 4:6 and 4:1. In this case, *TLSB* comments, “Yet even those preserved from sickness and death will fail to recognize God’s judgment in the afflictions and will not return to Him.” So, the judgment follows, as Keil-Delitzsch notes.*

4:12 *Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel:* the future tense is used here (confer and compare the past tense in 4:6). Perhaps the past actions now will be followed-up by future ones that will presumably destroy at least some of those who previously survived. In that vein, Roehrs-Franzmann comments regarding “Therefore”, “hints mysteriously at the terror of the ultimate judgment to come; God’s previous visitations have given Israel a hint of it, but only a hint. What the people of God must face when they meet the God whose love they have repeatedly rejected is indescribable.” Keil-Delitzsch says “thus I will do” refers to what follows, which is not all that explicit in detail at this point in Amos. Lessing remarks, “Not knowing what it is makes the threat all the more ominous.”

*Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel:* time for repentance certainly seems to be up (note the lack of the recurring refrain). *TLSB* comments, “A day of judgment looms. God met with Israel at Sinai amid such terrifying sights and sounds that the people begged to be spared hearing the thunder of God’s voice and beholding the brilliance of His nearby presence (Ex 2:18-21). And that was when God was giving the covenant, not calling people to account for breaking it!” Lessing notes the use of “prepare” in covenant settings, often gracious, though this is not covenant renewal but judgment. Laetsch sees hope in the use of the names “Israel” and “your” God, but compare Lessing. Lessing notes the shift from the plural “you” in earlier verses to the singular in 4:12 and suggests it is addressed to each individual in Israel, but it could simply be agreeing with the Israel taken as a singular collective nation. *GWfT* mentions “Prepare to meet your God/maker” bumper stickers and asks whether they do any good and how they might be explained to a non-Christian and how we might provide opportunities to tell people about Jesus. God is further described in the next verse as capable of carrying the judgment of this versed and the preceding verses.

4:13 *For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name!* *TLSB* calls the verse a “Doxology of judgment.” Perhaps behind *TLSB*’s comment, Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “The closing doxology praises the God of Israel as Creator, Revealer, Lord of all happening, exalted over the earth”. We might think of the First Article of the Apostolic Creed and God the Father, even though creation can be predicated also of both the Son and the Holy Spirit properly. The present tense of “forming the mountains” that we might think of as being completed in the past is interesting, though the mountains in some sense are ever being formed (*TLSB* quotes Gregory of Nazianzus regarding the action always being continuous). Lessing sees mountains as the most stable element and wind as the most moveable and so as taking in everything in between. “Declaring to man what is his (that is, perhaps man’s, not God’s) thought” is perhaps most relevant in the context of repentance or impenitence. Keil-Delitzsch comments, “God is the searcher of the heart...and reveals to men by prophets the state of their heart, since He judges not only the outward actions, but inmost emotions of the heart”. Of the “morning darkness”, *TLSB* comments, “Deepest darkness is said to come just before dawn breaks. As Creator and Sustainer of all things, the Lord is responsible for both the brilliance of the noontime sun and for the deepest darkness of the night.” Keil-Delitzsch thinks morning and darkness are mentioned “which is more suitable to a description of the creative omnipotence of God”. Luther thinks turn the day to darkness, and Lessing takes it that way, too, supporting his argument with the gloomy context. *CSSB* comments, “The God of such power and majesty is easily able to execute

the judgment announced in v.12.” Roehrs-Franzmann asks, “who can escape the omniscience of the Lord who innumerable hosts of heavenly servitors as His command?” Kretzmann comments, “The entire creation proclaims the one true God, and it is a matter of wisdom for man to stand before Him in a relation which will cause Him to show mercy rather than stern justice.” And, Lessing finds a “ray of light” in this verse’s “hymn celebrating the goodness and justice of Yahweh” and says Amos may even have sung it. We might discuss natural knowledge of God gleaned from creation as law and revealed knowledge of God proclaimed in His Word as Gospel.

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

*TLSB’s Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:1-4:5* says, “Wealth, compromise of confession, and indifference suffering tempt the ‘new Israel’, the Church, still today. Recognizing such failures in ourselves should move us to repentance and increased gratitude for Christ, who was rich, yet became poor for our sakes, so that through His poverty we might become eternally rich (2Co 8:9).”

*TLSB’s Law and Gospel Application Note for 4:6-13* says, “God’s reasons for allowing calamities to enter our lives are ultimately for our good, but people nonetheless refuse to respond in humility and faith. True repentance is always His work, wrought through the Law [presumably repentance understood narrowly as contrition]. Forgiveness is His greatest work. Praise God that all sins, including our slowness to repent, are fully forgiven by Christ’s sacrificial death [when we repent].”

Next time, April 29, Amos 5:1-17

Closing Prayer & Benediction