

Amos

3:1 – 5:3

Introduction

“Hear this word...” are the words that open chapters three, four, and five of Amos. As you read you realize that God is speaking as Father would to His disobedient children. In the first two verses of chapter three you read,

Amos 3:1 Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying:
Amos 3:2 “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

Of all the “families” of the earth, Israel is God’s uniquely chosen family. They are His “children” and God, as their Father, has the responsibility to “punish” them the way every diligent father must punish his disobedient children.

These two verses remind you of similar verses in the New Testament regarding God as Father and believers as His children. In Hebrews 12:5-6 you read,

Hebrews 12:5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: *“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;*
Hebrews 12:6 *For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”*

We’ll look at God’s fatherly discipline of Israel. As we do remember that God delights in being your Father and takes seriously but compassionately His duty to discipline you for your own good.

We’ll organize our thoughts about these three chapters around three points: #1 God Chose You And He Will Caution You, #2 God Cautions You And He Will Correct You, and #3 God Corrects You And He Will Chasten You.

#1 God Chose You And He Will Caution You (Chapter 3)

If you are new to our studies in the Book of Amos I'd like to briefly bring you up to speed. It was the eighth century BC. God's chosen nation, the Jews, were split into two separate kingdoms – called "Israel" in the North and "Judah" in the South. The Northern kingdom of Israel was enjoying peace and prosperity under the forty-one year reign of King Jeroboam. Spiritually, however, they were *despising* God's Word and *disobeying* God's commandments. Amos was by trade a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. God called upon Amos to preach a series of messages in the royal chapel at Bethel. With God's anointing upon him, he preached with authority against six Gentile nations surrounding Judah and Israel. Then he preached against Judah and Israel. Now Israel again is his subject as he called to them to "hear this word" from God, their Father.

Amos 3:1 Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying:
Amos 3:2 "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

God had specially chosen the Jews from among all the nations of the world. With this *relationship* there came a *responsibility*. It was their responsibility to obey God as children obey their fathers. By choosing *disobedience*, they were choosing *discipline*.

Chapter three is a word of caution. It reminds me of the many times when, as a parent, you caution your children that their disobedience will inevitably bring discipline. God was cautioning His children that their disobedience could not go unpunished. Indeed, it **should** not go unpunished! Only an unloving parent shirks his or her duty to discipline.

Verses three through eight seem to anticipate the objection the listeners would have to Amos. He was no seminary-trained prophet; he was no king-appointed priest. He was a common farmer. Why listen to him at all? **They should listen to him because God had sent him to preach.** His *preaching* was itself the *proof* God had sent him!

A series of seven illustrations are given. They illustrate, using everyday events, that you can usually deduce the reason for something that is happening. Amos is going to argue that the Jews in Israel should have been able to deduce that God had sent him to preach to them.

Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

Amos 3:4 Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?

Amos 3:5 Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it? Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all?

Amos 3:6 If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done *it*?

If you see two people taking a walk together, you can deduce that they agree on where they are going. If the lion roars, you can deduce that he has caught his prey. The trap only springs if something is caught in it. When the people in a city are afraid, you can deduce that the warning trumpet has sounded. If a calamity befalls a city, you can deduce that God knows all about it and has either allowed or caused it.

How does this relate to Amos and his preaching?

Amos 3:7 Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.

Amos 3:8 A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?

The very fact that Amos was preaching a message of warning and judgment was itself the proof God had sent him. When such men came to warn the people, you could deduce God was speaking!

By sending a prophet God was cautioning His children. Israel was blowing it. As God's dear children they were supposed to be witnessing about God to the surrounding nations. Instead the surrounding nations were about to witness Israel's destruction:

Amos 3:9 "Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say: 'Assemble on the mountains of Samaria; see great tumults in her midst, and the oppressed within her.

Amos 3:10 For they do not know to do right,' says the LORD, 'Who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.'"

Israel had become materialistic to the point of oppressing and robbing the poor in order to add to their wealth. Their sin ruined their testimony.

Amos 3:11 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “An adversary *shall be* all around the land; he shall sap your strength from you, and your palaces shall be plundered.”

In 722 BC Samaria, the capitol of the Northern kingdom of Israel, would be plundered by the invading Assyrian army.

Amos 3:12 Thus says the LORD: “As a shepherd takes from the mouth of a lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be taken out who dwell in Samaria - in the corner of a bed and on the edge of a couch!”

Amos borrowed an illustration from his experience as a sheepbreeder. If a lion took a sheep and tore it to pieces, the shepherd had to bring the remains to the owner to prove it was truly dead and not just stolen. By the time the Assyrians were through with Israel, only a remnant would be left. Israel’s posh “beds” and fancy “couches” – her luxuries – would be no help against such vicious adversaries.

Amos 3:13 Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,” says the Lord GOD, the God of hosts,
Amos 3:14 “That in the day I punish Israel for their transgressions, I will also visit *destruction* on the altars of Bethel; and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground.
Amos 3:15 I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house; the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end,” says the LORD.

When the Jews split into two kingdoms, King Jeroboam did not want his people in the North going to the South to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. He established shrines with golden calf idols; one was at Bethel, where Amos was preaching. Their man-made religion would be no help to them. No one would be able to claim “sanctuary” in the false sanctuary! In truth, their luxurious homes had become their true places of worship, and money was their god. All would perish.

“Hear this word,” God said. It’s like you saying to your kids, “Listen to me,” or “Pay attention,” or “I’m not going to say this twice.” They are words of caution that precede more serious consequences. God is a good Father Who would rather to caution than correct or chasten.

You should take His cautions to heart! God constantly cautions you – mostly in His Word. The wisdom, counsel, and instruction in the Bible serves to caution you against ruining your life.

Israel rejected His cautions, so He must correct.

#2 God Cautions You And He Will Correct You

(Chapter 4)

You will see how God attempted to correct them for their disobedience when we get to verse six. First He establishes that the people of Israel ignored His cautions.

Amos 4:1 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who *are* on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, "Bring *wine*, let us drink!"
Amos 4:2 The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness: "Behold, the days shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks, and your posterity with fishhooks."
Amos 4:3 You will go out *through* broken *walls*, each one straight ahead of her, and you will be cast into Harmon," says the LORD.

God called the wealthy women of Israel "cows." It's an insult (of course); but an appropriate one. It wasn't because they were fat that he called them cows! They were like cows in the sense that they were being fattened-up for slaughter. They were mindless of the poor and spent their wealth on lusts and luxuries while others went needy. They were concerned for their "posterity" – concerned to give their kids the very best the world could offer. Their houses would be broken and they and their kids would *literally* be led through the broken walls by fishhooks.

Amos 4:4 "Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days."
Amos 4:5 Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, proclaim *and* announce the freewill offerings; for this you love, *you* children of Israel!" says the Lord GOD.

The Jews in Israel were exceeding the law in terms of the frequency of offerings and sacrifices. But their religion was meaningless. You've just seen that it had no effect on their daily lives. They returned home from their worship to lives of luxury and lust while ignoring obvious needs around them.

Israel did not heed God's cautions. Now you see His attempted corrections.

Amos 4:6 "Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities. And lack of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD.

“Clean teeth” were not from good dental care! They were from lack of food. God had sent a famine to correct them. Yet they did not return to the Lord.

Amos 4:7 “I also withheld rain from you, when *there were* still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered.

Amos 4:8 So two *or* three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet you have not returned to Me,” says the LORD.

God sent a drought, and made it obvious that it was a divine correction by causing it to rain in odd geographic patterns. Yet they did not return to the Lord.

Amos 4:9 “I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locust devoured *them*; yet you have not returned to Me,” says the LORD.

God destroyed their gardens and their fields; still they did not return to Him.

Amos 4:10 “I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; your young men I killed with a sword, along with your captive horses; I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils; yet you have not returned to Me,” says the LORD.

God sent disease among them; yet they did not return to Him.

Amos 4:11 “I overthrew *some* of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning; yet you have not returned to Me,” says the LORD.

Some catastrophe – like an earthquake or fire from heaven – had come upon them. The Lord sent it, then intervened at the last minute to show His love for them. Still they did not return to Him.

These were all God’s attempts to correct them, as a loving Father correcting His children.

Amos 4:12 “Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”

God had corrected them by every method possible, except one: Allowing the Assyrians to destroy them. Having rejected His correction, they would face His chastening and should “prepare to meet... God” in death at the hands of His instrument.

Amos 4:13 For behold, He who forms mountains, and creates the wind, Who declares to man what his thought *is*, and makes the morning darkness, Who treads the high places of the earth - the LORD God of hosts *is* His name.

This is God's way of saying He would not and could not ignore their disobedience. As I suggested earlier, He **should not** ignore it! Discipline for disobedience is a sure sign of genuine love.

God corrects you. Everything that goes wrong in your life is not necessarily a correction! These people were living in open, obvious sin. If you live in sin, expect God to correct you.

When correction fails, chastening comes.

#3 God Will Correct You And He Will Chasten You (5:1-3)

Three short verses. Although chapter five goes on, there is a change of subject after these three verses. There's not much to say at this point about discipline. Once you decide to administer the spanking, not much more needs to be said. Unless Israel repented, the Assyrians were coming.

Amos 5:1 Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel:
Amos 5:2 The virgin of Israel has fallen; she will rise no more. She lies forsaken on her land; *there is* no one to raise her up.

God compares the Northern kingdom of Israel to a young Jewish maiden – a virgin. Think of this from the point of view of a parent. You never expect your children to die before you. It is indeed a tragedy when you see your young children die. How much worse still when your young, virgin daughter is brutally attacked and left for dead.

He says “she lies forsaken on her land” and “there is no one to raise her up.” History records the fulfillment of Amos' words. After the Assyrian invasion the kingdom of Israel ceased to exist. The remnant of Jews who remained in the land intermarried with Gentiles who settled there. The result was the Samaritans – a mixed ethnic people – despised by the Jews in the South.

Amos 5:3 For thus says the Lord GOD: "The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which goes out by a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel."

Israel's strong standing army would be decimated by ninety percent. Military might is no help against spiritual chastening.

As we press forward in our studies of the Minor Prophets we will discuss the barbaric brutality of the Assyrian invasion of Israel. It was a discipline from God.

God gave the Northern kingdom cautions and corrections for many, many, many years. There is a sense in which God is a more lenient Father than you ought to be! If you gave your kids the kind of chances God gives, they'd be incorrigible. So don't blame God for the horrors that befell His children. If anything, His longsuffering waited too long – although I add that God's timing is always perfect. Every good father disciplines out of love.

Conclusion

If you are a believer, God is your heavenly Father. He loves you; and whom the Lord loves, He chastens. He cautions... He corrects... He chastens.

I don't know about you, but I'd like to stay at the caution stage!