

# The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos

## Lesson 9: You Only Have I Known: Privilege and Accountability -- Amos

### 3:1-4:13

There is a kind of love that is dangerous to receive carelessly. Israel had been chosen, set apart, brought up out of Egypt on eagles' wings, and she had come to treat that chosenness like a charm in her pocket, a guarantee that nothing bad could ever happen to her. She had turned the gift into a get-out-of-judgment card. And so the word of the Lord through Amos lands like a slap that wakes a sleepwalker on the edge of a cliff: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'

Read that again, because it does not say what we expect it to say. We expect, 'You only have I known, therefore you are safe.' Instead it says, 'therefore I will punish.' The very intimacy of the relationship is the reason for the stricter reckoning. To be known by God is the highest privilege a people can have, and it is also the most serious responsibility. The closer you stand to the fire, the more its heat is felt. The more light you are given, the more is required of how you walk in it.

Amos drives the point home with a string of homely questions from a shepherd's world. Do two walk together unless they have agreed to meet? Does a lion roar when it has no prey? Does a bird fall in a snare where there is no trap? Does a trumpet blow in a city and the people not tremble? Cause and effect, every one. And then the clincher: 'The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?' Amos cannot stay silent, and Israel cannot stay comfortable.

The most heartbreaking line in these two chapters is one God repeats five times like a tolling bell: 'yet have ye not returned unto me.' He had sent famine, drought, blight, plague, and overthrow, each a smaller mercy meant to turn them home before the great judgment fell. And five times the door of repentance stood open, and five times they walked past it. So at last He says the words that should make every heart in the room go still: 'Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.' Not as enemies, He still pleads. But meet Him they will. And so will we.

**Group Discussion:** God tells Israel, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities' (3:2). How does this turn our usual thinking about God's favor upside down, and what does it teach us about the relationship between being chosen and being accountable?

**Personal Reflection:** Five times God says, 'yet have ye not returned unto me' (4:6-11). As you look honestly at your own life, has God been sending smaller corrections, disappointments, or warnings meant to turn you back to Him? Have you been returning, or walking past the open door?

*Read Amos 3:1-4:13*

## Study Questions

1. God says to Israel, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities' (3:2). What does this verse teach about the purpose of God's choosing of Israel, and why does being known by God increase, rather than remove, accountability?
2. God's covenant with Israel was meant to carry responsibility and to bless the nations, not to guarantee that every Israelite was automatically and permanently saved no matter how they lived (Genesis 12:3; Amos 3:2). How does this protect us from presuming on God's grace in our own walk with Him?
3. Amos asks, 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' (3:3) and follows with a chain of cause-and-effect questions (3:3-8). What is Amos teaching about the certainty that God's word and God's actions are connected, and that His warnings are never empty?
4. Amos says, 'Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets' (3:7), and 'the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?' (3:8). When God makes His will clear to you through His word, do you feel a similar compulsion to respond and to speak, or do you find yourself making excuses for silence?
5. God commands the pagan nations to gather and witness the 'great tumults' and 'oppressed' within Israel (3:9-10), saying His people 'know not to do right.' What does it mean that God would expose His own people's injustice before the watching nations, and what does this say about His commitment to truth over reputation?

6. God announces that He will punish the altars of Bethel and tear down the winter and summer houses, the houses of ivory and the great houses (3:14–15). Where might you be placing your security in comfort, possessions, or religious routine rather than in a right relationship with God?
7. God rebukes the ‘cows of Bashan’ who oppress the poor and crush the needy while demanding luxury (4:1), and He condemns their corrupt, self-pleasing worship at Bethel and Gilgal (4:4–5). How can religious activity actually become an act of rebellion when it is divorced from justice and genuine obedience?
8. Five times God recalls the calamities He sent, famine, drought, blight, locust, plague, and overthrow, each followed by the refrain, ‘yet have ye not returned unto me’ (4:6–11). When God allows hardship into your life, how do you tend to respond, and what would it look like to read such moments as a call to return to Him?
9. After every warning is refused, God says, ‘Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel’ (4:12). Taking the whole of chapters 3 and 4 together, what does this passage teach about privilege, the genuine and repeated call to repent, and the certainty that every person must finally stand before God (compare 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12)?
10. Look back over these two chapters. God’s repeated plea, ‘yet have ye not returned unto me,’ is the aching heart of a Father who would rather forgive than punish. As you have studied the weight of privilege and the urgency of returning, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is calling you to come home to Him and forming His own heart of obedience in you.

## **Digging Deeper**

**Reflect on these passages:** Luke 12:47–48, the servant who knew his lord’s will is beaten with many stripes; Romans 11:20–22, behold the goodness and severity of God; 2 Corinthians 5:10–11, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; Hebrews 12:5–11, the Lord chastens those He loves to call them back; James 4:8–10, draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

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