

an essay:

GOD'S JUDGEMENT UPON OPPRESSORS OF THE POOR & NEEDY IN AMOS 4

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I. A PROPOSITION

Therefore, o vain man, do not think that you may mock GOD and crush the widow and orphan without being seen by The eyes of The LORD! For the proud oppressor of the poor shall be humbled in Divine judgement, and the doer of iniquity against the needy shall be brought low in Divine retribution!

II. THE TEXT: AMOS 4:1-5

1 Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink.
2 The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.
3 And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith the LORD.
4 Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years:
5 And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD. ¹

III. THE PURPOSE IRONY AND SARCASM IN PROPHETIC SPEECH

Why does The LORD cause irony and sarcasm to be employed in prophetic speech in The Scriptures? We may discern several reasons: First, to reveal the absurdity of sin and rebellion against His Laws. Second, in bringing to naught the foolish plans of men's iniquity, to teach that He is sovereign. Third, in pronouncing judgement upon the folly of men's iniquity, to assure the righteous that they will be vindicated in glory, and to warn the wicked that they will be recompensed in judgement.

IV. IRONY AND SARCASM IN AMOS 4:1

Amos was himself a shepherd, sent by GOD as a prophet mostly to Israel and preaching mainly at Bethel. AMOS 4:1 opens with the insulting address to the corrupt wealthy of that day, "Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria!"² Here the prophet, as Matthew Henry observes, "...comparing the rich and great men [of Israel], that lived in luxury and wantonness, to the kine of Bashan, which were wanton and unruly, would not be kept within the bounds of their own pasture, But

¹ 1, KJV, AMOS 4:1-5.

broke through the hedges, broke down all the fences, and trespassed upon the neighboring grounds; and not only so, but pushed and gored the smaller cattle that were not a match for them.”³

These twisted wealthy men not only preyed upon the poor and needy, but celebrated their evil with those to whom the unfortunate were in bondage! So the words of Amos are rich in derogatory sarcasm in the comparison of these corrupt wealthy of his day with these unruly beasts, for they as AMOS 4:1 declares, “...oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink!”⁴ Such men not only squeeze and abuse the unfortunate and vulnerable for their own worldly gain and glory, but here Amos observes that they revel and rejoice with those to whom the poor and needy are indebted! Our Lord declares in MATTHEW 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.”⁵ The bent man forgets that, with what mercy he shows his fellow man, it shall be given out to him by The Father in Heaven!

V. IRONY AND SARCASM IN AMOS 4:2-3

These ancient Israelites, as many Christians down through the ages, often fell into a superficial external ritualism, claiming to desire to see the coming of GOD’s justice and judgement upon the earth, that His righteousness might be established over all men. Even so, their inward hearts were often cold and their souls turned to stone, not truly loving GOD and their neighbour. It is ironic that these wealthy and corrupt Israelites, whose fathers were once oppressed in bitter enslavement to cruel masters in Egypt, now turn around and oppress their weaker fellow countrymen.

Such men do not really desire to see GOD’s Kingdom come fully upon the earth – nor are they in fact earnestly thankful for the many rich pastures of blessing which The Creator places them in - though they may feign such a desire before men, hoping within themselves to never actually see such a Day that would separate them from their idols of

² 1, KJV, AMOS 4:1a.

³ 2, Matthew Henry, AMOS 4:1-5, I, 1.

⁴ 1, KJV, AMOS 4:1b.

⁵ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 5:7.

the world, the flesh and the devil. Matthew Henry observes, “Those to whom GOD has given a good pasture, if they are wanton in it, will justly be turned out of it; and those who will not be kept within the hedge of GOD's precept forfeit the benefit of the hedge of GOD's protection, and will be forced in vain to flee through the breaches they have themselves fearfully made in that hedge.”⁶

So here Amos prophecies of GOD's coming judgement in words of irony in AMOS 4:2 that “...the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks!”⁷ Though it seems impossible to draw out such great cows of Beshan from the sea with a mere fishing hooks, even so The LORD swears by His holiness that he will draw out these corrupt Israelites from Samaria by great judgement, and their posterity with succeeding great punishment. So the northern Kingdom of Israel fell in 722 B.C. to the Assyrian hosts, whom The Almighty employed as a tool of His wrath against these corrupt people. They trusted in their worldly wealth, their false gods and the sharp cunning, but all to no avail. They discovered the painful truth that GOD is not mocked!

It is further ironic that these men of iniquity, having themselves made the breaches in the hedges of GOD's protection about them and their children by their own hands, would soon be fleeing to the false hope of safety in the palaces of their corrupt princes and rulers. So we read in AMOS 4:3, “And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith the LORD.”⁸ There they hoped to save themselves and their posterity from the invading Assyrian hosts, but to no avail! As David wrote in PSALM 62:10, “Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them!”⁹ The wicked man might think he is safe and secure by the vain works of his hands and imaginations of his mind, but The LORD shall find him out!

⁶ 2, Matthew Henry, AMOS 4:1-5, I, 2.

⁷ 1, KJV, AMOS 4:2.

⁸ 1, KJV, AMOS 4:3.

⁹ 1, KJV, PSALM 62:10.

VI. IRONY AND SARCASM IN AMOS 4:4-5

In AMOS 4:4 we read, “Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years!”

¹⁰ The people of Israel had become corrupted by idolatry, but still clung externally to their mechanical worship of The LORD according to The Law of Moses; they retained their false gods, faith in their own works and confidence in their earthly wealth, power and wisdom. To JEHOVAH they sought for a blessing just in case their true first loves failed them! Amos with bitter sarcastic irony records the Word of The Almighty to these Covenant breaking idolaters: “Bring Me your worship at Bethel, and then go and worship your false gods at Gilgal! Offer up to Me your daily sacrifices and yearly tithes, then bow low before your false gods to pay them homage!”

In AMOS 4:5 we read more of The LORD’s complaint against Israel, “...offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD!” ¹¹ Here also The LORD complains of the impure bread offered at His Table by the unfaithful Priests, in that they retained leaven in the bread against GOD’s precepts, that it would be pleasing to them when they consumed it! For their first concern was, not in keeping The Law of GOD, but in pleasing themselves. We may hear The Creator in sarcastic irony against unfaithful Israel, “Announce to the ears of men your great offerings of self- righteousness and then come before Me with your prayers! You have your reward already in the praises of men! Sacrifice even your live infants in the flames to your false gods, as Baal requires, and then seek My face for My protection and deliverance! Indeed, I will come among you, but it will be as a fire of judgement!”

The Lord JESUS CHRIST warns of the fate of the indifferent and cruel oppressors of the poor and needy in MATTHEW 25:44, where such men object to the righteous judgement of GOD against their souls: “Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or

¹⁰ 1, KJV, AMOS 4:4.

¹¹ 1, KJV, AMOS 4:5

in prison, and did not minister unto Thee?”¹² All men’s lives are made in The Image of GOD, and are precious in His sight. And the cries of the unfortunate and afflicted are ever before The LORD. These wealthy corrupt Israelites, now taking the place of their own former oppressors in Egypt, could not see that in their oppression of their fellow man, they were condemning themselves to earthly death and everlasting punishment! So The Saviour answers them in MATTHEW 25:45, “...Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me!”¹³

VII. IN CONCLUSION

Perhaps irony and sarcasm in prophetic Scripture is a tool that He uses, coupled with the penetrating conviction of The Holy Spirit acting upon the souls of men, to show forth the absurd foolishness of sin and the utter insanity of rebellion against His Laws. Man in his fallen sinful state naturally tends to elevate his flawed and foolish wisdom, in the haughty hardness of his heart, as idols to which he holds up to Heaven in vain boasting and blasphemous elevation of his soul before The Throne of The Almighty. As David recorded under The hand of The Holy Spirit in PSALM 34:15-16, “The eyes of The LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of The LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.”¹⁴

For when men cry out, “There is no GOD,” they are but fools! And when men say, “The LORD does not see our wicked deeds,” they are but self-deceivers! And when men whisper, “Come, let us overtake the righteous,” they forget that The LORD delivers His saints. But The Almighty holds the proud and boastful sinner in derision, heaping upon his soul chastising words of irony and sarcasm designed to bite deep into his soul, that he might be jarred to his knees in humble repentance! David writes in this way of such men in PSALM 59:6-7, “...they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. Behold, they belch out with their mouth: swords are in their lips: for who, say they, doth hear?”¹⁵ But The LORD, Creator of all that is seen and unseen, hears and knows

¹² 1, KJV, MATTHEW 25:44.

¹³ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 25:45.

¹⁴ 1, KJV, PSALM 34:15-16.

¹⁵ 1, KJV, PSALM 59:6-7.

their iniquity! Thus David writes further in PSALM 59:8, “But Thou, O LORD, shalt laugh at them; Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision!”¹⁶

Saint Paul warns in GALATIANS 6:7-8, “Be not deceived; GOD is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to The Spirit shall of The Spirit reap life everlasting!”¹⁷ Therefore, o vain man, do not think that you may mock GOD and crush the widow and orphan without being seen by The eyes of The LORD! For the proud oppressor of the poor shall be humbled in Divine judgement, and the doer of iniquity against the needy shall be brought low in Divine retribution! What then does our Lord JESUS CHRIST call His saints to offer up? He commands us to love GOD and love our neighbour, to “...do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD!”¹⁸ In The Name of GOD The Father, and of The Son and of The Holy Spirit, AMEN!

¹⁶ 1, KJV, PSALM 59:8.

¹⁷ 1, KJV, GALATIANS 6:7-8.

¹⁸ 1, KJV, MICAH 6:8.

VIII. REFERENCES

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