

The God who won't leave His people alone

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[0 : 00] Well friends, let's turn in our Bibles to the prophet Amos, and you'll find him on page 766, 766 in our Bibles.

While you're finding that, just a reminder that Amos takes as one of his leading themes or pictures of God the roaring of a lion. And he says in chapter 3, verse 7, the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets.

The lion has roared, that's God himself pictured there, who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy? In other words, if God has said something to the prophet, the prophet must pass this on to others.

So let's bear that in mind as we listen now to Amos chapter 4. 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 that we may drink.

The Lord God has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fish hooks.

[1 : 21] And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead, and you shall be cast out into Harmon, declares the Lord. Come to Bethel and transgress, to Gilgal and multiply transgression.

Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. 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, declares the Lord God.

I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord.

I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest. 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.

So two or three cities would wander to another city to drink water, and would not be satisfied. Yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord.

[2 : 27] I struck you with blight and mildew, your many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees the locusts devoured. Yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord.

I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt. 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.

Yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. I overthrew some of you as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning.

Yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel. Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.

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.

[3 : 34] Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us this evening. Well, friends, do let's turn up Amos chapter 4 again, page 766 in our big Bibles.

And my title for this evening is The God Who Won't Leave His People Alone. In my first two years as a university student, I guess when I was about 18 or 19 years old, I was a backsliding Christian.

I was a Christian. I had indeed, by the grace of God, put my trust in the Lord Jesus when I was about 16. But suddenly, many of you have been through this experience, suddenly I found myself as a university student, and there were glorious freedoms in front of me.

The iron chains of boarding school life had been cast off at last. It was the era, I should tell you, of flower power and hippieism and bell-bottom jeans.

And my mind was filled with all manner of nonsense. So I found myself at that stage in my life wriggling away from the claims of Christ on my life.

[4 : 57] But it just so happened that I had two friends who were both young Christian ministers, a bit older than me, I guess they were in their late 20s. Their names were Jonathan and Peter. And these two men kept in very close touch with me.

So, for example, they would knock on the door of my student room and put their head round the door. Hello, Edward. They would take me out to lunch.

They would go for walks with me. In fact, they were very patient with me, and they were prepared to listen to me spouting my nonsense at some length. They were persistent Christian friends.

And sure enough, after 18 months or so, I began to see that if I did indeed belong to Christ, I'd better start living the Christian life. And by the grace of God, that is what started to happen.

And as I look back, I'm so grateful to those two men. I'm still in touch with them. They're still my friends. But I'm so grateful to them for persevering with me and for refusing to take no for an answer.

[5 : 57] Now, in their persistence with me, they were reflecting a quality of the Lord God himself. I say that because right through the Old Testament period, there was a great deal of backsliding going on in the people of Israel.

But God had made a covenant with them, and he was not going to abandon them. He had adopted them as his family. He had saved them from their slavery in Egypt, and he had chosen them of all the people in the earth to enjoy a special relationship of blessing.

So if they were to turn away from him, he was not in a hurry to turn away from them because he had committed himself to them. Now, as we're seeing in this book of Amos, the backslidings of the people of Israel were very great.

Israel had reached a low point in their relationship with the Lord by the middle of the 8th century BC, when Amos was sent to them. But the very fact that the Lord God sent Amos to them demonstrated that he had not abandoned them.

He had a message for them. The message was, my beloved Israel, come back to me. You're in a very dangerous state. If you don't turn back to me, I must punish you, and I will punish you.

[7 : 13] But let's notice with gratitude how persistent the Lord is with his wayward Israel. He is the God who won't leave his people alone. Look at the opening verses of chapter 3 and chapter 4 and chapter 5.

And you'll see that they all begin with the same three words. Chapter 3, verse 1, Now probably each of these three chapters represents a single sermon.

Almost certainly, a book like this book of Amos is the notes of a series of sermons that Amos preached in Israel over a period of perhaps a few months.

And probably chapter 3 and chapter 4 and chapter 5 are each a single sermon in shorthand form. I guess each sermon would have been rather longer than what we have here.

This is the notes, really. Amos wouldn't have spoken for only three or four minutes if he could have kept his audience's attention for a longer period. But in each of these chapters, we have the heart of his message, the core ingredients.

[8 : 32] But Amos is persistent because the Lord is persistent. Hear this word. Hear this word. Now hear this word. God the Father is calling out to his wayward children through Amos in the hope that at least some of them will have ears to hear.

That opening summons, hear this word, is a command to the ear that the ear should tune itself to the Father's voice and listen carefully. Now if you've belonged to this congregation for more than a few years, you may remember that on our old church building in Buchanan Street a few years ago, it must have been about 2007 or 8, we had a poster up on the outside wall of the building which showed a photograph of a human ear.

Remember that ear? I know whose ear it was. In fact, I saw the ear and its owner just yesterday. I know also who took the photograph, which was a different person.

Well, it would have to be, wouldn't it, I guess? The ear, you may remember, looked clean and fresh and very well washed. But the caption underneath it said, listen to what God has to say.

God has always had a particular interest in the human ear because the human ear is the way to the human heart. And if the ear is closed to the Lord, he will keep speaking to it, at least for a while.

[9 : 58] Now, how can we, in our generation, respond to this message of Amos? After all, it's not addressed directly to us. It was addressed to the people of Israel in 760 BC.

But it is still very instructive for us because it shows us what a great potential the people of God have for going astray. The sin, the disloyalty, the desertion, the fickleness that Israel was showing 2700 years ago shows us painfully how we can behave in our own day.

These sermons of Amos need to be read by us as loving warnings. It is the persistent love of God that lies behind these scorching messages from the prophet Amos. So if we can use this Bible book to build up our knowledge of the traps and snares into which the people of God can stumble in any generation, we shall do well.

Well, let's turn to the text and I'd like to take it in three sections. First of all, we'll take verses 1 to 5 in chapter 4 where Amos urges Israel to face up to their inner corruption.

Verse 1 must be one of the most vivid verses in the whole of the Old Testament. 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 that we may drink.

[11 : 26] Clearly it's not tea or iron brew that they have in view, I think. If we think, we look at this, if we think, dear, dear, this is a bit rough on the women, is it not? Do bear in mind that Amos is going to have some strong words for the men of Israel in chapter 6.

God is probing both the men and the women of Israel, but he starts with the women, at least with some of them. Not the poor women, but the wealthy and self-indulgent women of the capital city, the city of Samaria, where no doubt, as with most capital cities, the wealth tended to accumulate.

Amos calls them cows. Now, in our culture, as we know, to call a woman a cow is a very unpleasant thing and is likely to lead to a smacked face. But in Old Testament Israel, the word may not have carried quite the same abusive force.

It just happened a few days ago to be discussing this phrase with Bob File. Bob knows Amos well. You may know that Bob has written a very useful preacher's guide to the book of Amos. So he studied the Hebrew words carefully and he told me that the word translated cow was much more neutral in those days than it would be to us today.

Cows, after all, are beneficial animals, aren't they? They provide us with milk and meat and leather. And the cows of Bashan apparently were the very best cattle in all Israel.

[12 : 48] Bashan was quite a large area across the River Jordan from Samaria on the east side of the Jordan and it was rich in good pasture. So when Amos called these women cows of Bashan, he may only have meant that like prime cattle, they were content with a purely animal existence.

As long as they were well supplied with food and drink, they were happy. They didn't care what happened to other people as long as they were comfortable themselves. But that was their sin.

The law of Moses often emphasizes how important it is to look after the poor in the land. But these women don't seem to care if the poor go to the wall. They oppress the poor, says Amos in verse 1.

They crush the needy. The poor can go whistle as far as they're concerned. They're not concerned for the poor, but they're very concerned about their next gin and tonic. Doesn't Amos convey so much just in that one verse?

Pleasure-seeking women with too much money and too much leisure and too many bottles per week going into the recycling wheelie bin and hen-pecked husbands.

[14 : 02] George, fetch me another and make sure it's a double. It is an ugly picture, isn't it, of what can happen to a woman over time if she turns away from the word of God.

And if we ask, why should Amos particularly address the women at this point? Why not just speak to all the Israelites together? The answer is that the Bible quite often addresses men and women separately because their roles are not identical and their weaknesses are not identical either.

And the Lord addresses the women of Israel because women have always been so influential in all human societies. The old saying has so much truth in it, the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

We didn't have to wait for the arrival of modern feminism for women to become influential. Think of Proverbs chapter 31 with its portrait of the noble and godly woman.

She's a strong woman who loves the Lord and fears the Lord and she is such a blessing to her husband and her children and to wider society. And it's God's will that she should carry great influence because it's an influence for good.

[15 : 17] But when she turns away from the Lord like these women of Samaria, her powerful influence begins to corrupt society she henpecks her husband, she blocks her ears to the cries of the poor and she becomes concerned only for her own comforts and indulgences.

And how does the Lord respond to her? With great severity. Look at verse 2. He takes an oath the Lord God has sworn by his holiness.

That's very strong. And what does he swear? That these pampered self-indulgent women when the day of reckoning comes will be taken away with hooks like fish caught.

In other words, bound around tightly with ropes by the enemy and then a big hook will be thrust down into the rope and they'll be dragged away by the enemy soldiers like cattle of Bashan being taken off to the butcher to be slaughtered.

It is a brutal picture and the Lord uses such a brutal picture because he wants the Israelite women to see how dreadful it will be for them if they don't repent and turn back to him.

[16 : 27] Now, never forget it is his love for Israel that lies behind these threats of judgment. The prophecies of judgment always arise from God's mercy. But these threats are not idle threats.

In this instance, Israel did not repent. And if you want to read later on of what happened, you'll find the whole sad tale of the end of Israel in 2 Kings, chapter 17.

the sack of Samaria, the deportation of all the people of Israel to the Assyrian Empire. Well, now verses 4 and 5. They show a different aspect of Israel's corruption and that is corruption at the shrines, at the places of worship, corruption in the rituals of Israel's religion.

Now, we noticed last week in the section beginning at chapter 3, verse 3, do you remember that? Do two walk together unless they've agreed to meet? We noticed that we might have had a glimpse there of Amos's open-air preaching style, how he fires out these questions about lions roaring and birds falling into snares and trumpets blowing to arrest the attention of passers-by.

And it could be a rather similar thing in chapter 4, verse 4, another preacher's ploy or preacher's method. It's possible that Amos here is imitating or sending up, mimicking, a public call to worship.

[17 : 50] Now, we know about public calls to worship. In Britain, the traditional public call to worship is to ring a bell. Remember our bell down the road that we used to ring? Somebody used to stand there, doink, doink, doink.

Islam gets a man to get up the top of a minaret and he makes a great singing call right across the city. I was in Istanbul once and I remember being woken up very early by the call of Amosin across the city.

Now, it's just possible that here in our verse 4, come to Bethel and come to Gilgal were traditional public calls that might have been more or less chanted by a male singer across the town to get the worshippers out of bed and to come to the shrine.

Come all ye to Bethel and bring your sacrifices, for example. Come to Gilgal, bring your tithes, come join our worship.

Amos, I think, is chanting possibly a shocking parody here. Come all ye to Bethel and transgress the law of God. Come to Gilgal, multiply many, many, many transgressions.

[18 : 59] Amos is perhaps shocking his listeners here. It's the only way he can get under their skin and make them listen. And he tells them in verses 4 and 5 what is wrong with all their acts of worship.

First of all, they're simply repetitive ritual. Verse 4, bring your sacrifices every morning. Bring your tithes every three days. Keep going through all the motions so every week you can cross off worship from your to-do list.

Pay the butcher, tick. Buy the carrots, tick. Visit Aunt Gertrude, tick. Get the poodle clipped, tick. Do church, tick. repetitive ritual.

But it's also disobedient ritual. Look at verse 5. Offer leavened bread as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Now that was specifically forbidden in the law of Moses.

But the law of Moses had become in Israel like a fairy tale, no more than a national myth. Israel hadn't been serious about Moses for nearly 200 years, ever since Jeroboam I had made metal calves for the people of Israel to worship.

[20 : 07] So we have repetitive ritual, disobedient ritual, and look-at-me ritual. Verse 5. Proclaim freewill offerings. Publish them.

That's what you love to do, O people of Israel. They so enjoyed their gatherings for their rituals. It was all such fun. You could dress up. You could see each other. You could be seen. But God hated it.

It wasn't about him. It was all about them. Is it possible for a Bible-believing congregation to fall into the traps of repetitive ritual, disobedient ritual, or look-at-me ritual?

Well, there's a question just to hang in our minds. We'll think perhaps more about that next week in chapter 5. But Amos urges Israel to face up to their inner corruption in the first five verses.

Well, now, secondly, Amos urges Israel to understand their recent history. And that is the subject of verses 6 to 11.

[21 : 11] This section looks back over recent decades in Israel's history, and these verses record a number of disasters. Some of them national, some of them perhaps a bit more local.

But verse 6, let's work our way through quickly. Verse 6 records famine. I gave you cleanness of teeth. That's not talking, of course, about a new brand of toothpaste. What it means is there was virtually no food available.

So you were never going to have to floss your teeth to get the stray bits of food out of the cracks. There wasn't any food. And it was a famine right across the nation. Cleanness of teeth in all your cities.

Lack of bread in all your places. Then verses 7 and 8 record drought. I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest.

I would send rain on one city and no rain on another. One field would have rain and the field on which it didn't rain would wither. So two or three cities, I guess he means the inhabitants of two or three cities, would wander to another city to drink water and would not be satisfied.

[22 : 14] Yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. So three months before the harvest, roughly March or April, that's when you need a good dose of rain to swell the growing crops.

If you have drought in the spring, it means a meager harvest in the summer. And there wasn't even enough water to drink. People would wander from city to city and only find half a liter or half a cup.

Then verse 9 speaks of crop diseases, blight and mildew in your gardens and your vineyards and pests, the dreaded locust in verse 9.

Joseph dear, pop down the garden and fetch me half a dozen figs and a pound of olives. Oh mother, mother, there's a hundred thousand locusts all over the orchard, not a green leaf left.

Verse 10 records plague, pestilence, like the manner of Egypt. Egypt was notorious for its diseases in those days and some of them had made their way northwards up into Israel.

[23 : 15] And verse 10 also vividly describes the aftermath of some recent military encounter. It paints a horrible picture there, an army camp with the dead bodies of young soldiers lying all around it.

The horses have all been captured and what you notice most is the stink of rotting flesh as you pick your way through the camp. And verse 11 probably describes an earthquake.

I overthrew some of you as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. So in these verses we have a list of dreadful, truly dreadful catastrophes and they're exactly the same catastrophes that happen in the modern world.

Now the question is what causes these catastrophes? Verses 6 to 8 describe famine and drought. What would we say creates these things in the modern world?

Is it climate change? Is it the heating up of the world's oceans? Perhaps the felling of great rainforests in Asia or South America? And what might the answer be to these problems?

[24 : 22] Would it be better science? A better understanding of how to combat rising global temperatures? Oh and better politics too as international leaders develop the political will to work together to cut toxic emissions and so on.

What about verse 9? Diseases on food producing crops. What causes them? Infections transmitted by beetles and bugs that arrive from different parts of the world?

How do we stop these things? We legislate. Ban the import of all vegetable matter from countries where these diseases originate. Verse 10. Pestilence.

Plague. Fatal infections. Think of the terrible sad loss of life since HIV arrived in the 1980s. Think of the thousands lost in Western Africa to Ebola just in this last year.

What causes these things? Are they transmitted from animals to human beings? For example, from chimpanzees in the forests of Central and Western Africa? Verse 11.

[25 : 27] Earthquakes. Can we perhaps limit their effect by developing better seismic early warning systems? Well now, for the last couple of minutes, I've been giving you a little slice of the world's thinking about these things.

Events of this kind are often called natural disasters, as though their origin can be fully explained in terms of physics, biology, and an understanding of weather and climate.

And many Christians have bought into this way of thinking, as though the Lord's operations have nothing to do with what happens on our planet. But Amos, in tune with the whole Bible, teaches something very different.

Look at the first phrase in each of these little sections. I gave you cleanness of teeth. I withheld the rain from you. I struck you with blight and mildew.

I sent among you a pestilence. I overthrew you. It was my doing, God is saying. Now, that is not to deny, of course, that God uses means or secondary causes.

[26 : 37] The blight and the mildew, for example, were transferred from one piece of vegetation to another. The plagues would have been transferred in traded goods or by person-to-person infection.

But whereas today's world thinks of these means as the prime causes of disaster, Amos and the whole Bible ascribes disasters to God as the prime cause.

It is he who activates the secondary causes. Physics and chemistry and biology are his sciences. He rules the viruses. He rules the tectonic plates of the earth.

Now, Christians can find it difficult to accept that the Lord God causes this kind of disaster to happen. We sometimes take refuge in talking about the Lord's permissive will as opposed to the Lord's directive will.

That is to say, he permits something without necessarily causing it. And sometimes that talk is right. So, for example, the sufferings of Job, we know, are caused by Satan but permitted by the Lord.

[27 : 46] But very often, as here in Amos chapter 4, it's quite clear that the Lord himself causes the famines and droughts and diseases. And we can find it difficult to accept this for two reasons.

First, because we have been listening for long years to the world and worldly thinking has seeped deeply into our brains. The world's view is that everything that goes on in the world has its origin in the world.

So, for example, the tectonic plates shift because of various fault lines. Diseases are spread for reasons that can be clearly explained in terms of biology.

In the world's view, the world is a sealed system. The idea that a divine purpose operating from outside the world should cause these things to happen within the world, that's thought to be rather bizarre.

And that thinking has sunk rather deeply into our systems. And yet, it is not the thinking of the Bible. But the second reason why we can find it hard to accept that God causes these disasters is that it seems to show God up in a bad light.

[28 : 59] It seems to present him as cruel and vindictive. We think to ourselves, how could the loving God of the Bible send a famine or a plague or a swarm of locusts?

And yet, this passage surely answers that question. It is because he loves his people so much that he sends them these calamities. Look at verse six.

Why did the Lord God give Israel cleanness of teeth and lack of bread? It was to bring them to their senses so that they should return to him. This is not a vindictive tyrant speaking.

This is a loving and frustrated father whose children have turned away from him. Verse six. I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities. It was meant to be a blessing to you and lack of bread in all your places.

Yet, you did not return to me, declares the Lord. I sent you famine and hunger as a wake-up call so that you should look at each other and say, why is this happening to us?

[29 : 58] And somebody should have said, it's because we've turned away from the Lord our God. Let's turn back to him and repent of our faithlessness. But nobody spoke up like that. Nobody stopped to consider why famine had come to the land.

You didn't return to me. Your ears were deaf and your hearts were calloused. You had so little thought of me that you never made the connection between your suffering and your godlessness.

This is the voice of the father who loves his children. If they won't turn to him and love him in the good times, he will send the bad times to wake them up. But they haven't woken up.

Amos is teaching them to interpret their recent history, but they're not willing to learn the lesson. I remember when that dreadful Hillsborough football stadium disaster happened back in 1989.

Remember that terrible thing? Over 90 football fans were killed and there was great pain and heart-searching. It's still with us today. It's not fully resolved as we know. At the time, there was one Christian minister in Sheffield, a fine evangelical pastor, who was brave enough to write in the local newspaper that the disaster should be viewed as a call to repentance.

[31 : 13] He did not make himself popular by saying that, but he was in line with Amos and he was in line with Jesus in writing like that to the people of Sheffield.

It was a faithful word from him. So Amos is teaching the people to interpret their recent history and to use these disasters to come back to the Lord.

Then third and last, Amos urges Israel in verses 12 and 13 to respond to the God that they belong to. Verse 12 is a verse of great power.

Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel, because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel. Now there is still mercy in that verse.

There is still a chance. If someone out there in Israel has the ears to hear, they can still repent. The curtain has not dropped yet. God in his mercy is extending the time and the opportunity for repentance.

[32 : 16] In fact, it was another 40 years before the Assyrians came in and invaded Israel and crushed Samaria. But Amos is pressing the people here to listen to their God. Now at first sight, there is one thing in this verse which is rather hard to understand.

And that is, what is God threatening to do to Israel? He says, thus I will do, and I will do this. But he doesn't say in that verse precisely what he's threatening.

So I think we're meant to look back into chapter 3. Look back to chapter 3, verse 11. Therefore thus says the Lord God, an adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you and your strongholds shall be plundered.

And look on to verse 14 in chapter 3. On the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground.

I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end, declares the Lord. So that adversary of verse 11, who surrounds the land, chapter 3, verse 11, that adversary is going to bring your whole society down around your heads.

[33 : 31] Everything is to be destroyed, and that is exactly what happened some 40 years later. But it's a merciful call, because there is still opportunity. Years ago, when I was living in England, I used to drive up and down the M1 and the M6 motorways quite regularly from the north of England to the south for family holidays and other purposes.

And some of you may remember this, if you regularly did those motorways, but across one of the concrete bridges, I think it was on the M1, which spanned the motorway, somebody had written up in large letters in spray paint, prepare to meet your God.

Tell me afterwards if you saw that 20 odd years ago. Now that was a merciful thing for someone to do. It probably broke some law concerning graffiti. But I guess that the person who painted up those words was an evangelistically minded Christian who thought to himself, that message is probably going to be disregarded by most motorists as they hurtle down the motorway, but it might just be the thing to bring somebody to repentance.

It is a riveting command, isn't it? Prepare to meet your God. And when you range around the whole Bible, you realize that meeting God will either be a meeting of anguish and terror, or a meeting of joy and delight.

King David, for example, longed to meet him. He wrote in one of the Psalms, as the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

[35 : 03] My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? The Apostle Paul also looked forward greatly to the day of judgment.

He speaks in 2 Timothy chapter 4 of the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Isn't that a great phrase? Loved his appearing. Looked forward to it, longed for it. The saved Christian, the believer, longs for that meeting because the Christian knows that he has been taken out of the sphere of condemnation and placed into the realm of love and acceptance.

To meet God at the end, if you're a Christian, will be pure joy. But let's be clear about this. We will either meet him as our saviour or as our judge.

And Amos is warning the Israelites to repent and turn back to him while they can, to learn the lessons of their history, to understand their famines and droughts and plagues as a merciful call from heaven, a megaphone to a heedless world, as I think C.S.

[36 : 11] Lewis used to put it. And friends, we too will meet him either as our saviour or as our judge. There is time, there is opportunity, but maybe not much.

We dare not presume upon him, prepare to meet your God, O Israel. And then we have verse 13, which is an extraordinary verse that comes like a shaft of lightning from heaven.

Look at verse 13. What has this verse to do with verses 1 to 12? The answer is it has everything to do with verses 1 to 12. Amos brings it here at the end of his sermon to add enormous weight to the call of verse 12 to prepare to meet God.

The force of verse 13 is to say to the Israelites, have you forgotten who the God of Israel is, the God who is speaking to you in the words of my prophecy? You have forgotten Israel and you are trifling with him, so let me remind you of who your God is.

He is the God, verse 13, who forms the mountains. Who forms the mountains. Now friends, we are here in this gentle valley of the river Clyde, but we do have some idea of the strength and weight of the great mountain ranges of the earth.

[37 : 28] I haven't traveled a great deal in the course of my life, but I do remember once flying across Afghanistan and Pakistan into India, and as I looked out through the plane window, I caught a glimpse there of the Himalayas.

It was a crystal clear day, you could see everything. The Himalayas, the greatest mountain range on earth, they are simply enormous. They just rise up out of the northern end of India, the Indian subcontinent, range upon range, hundreds and hundreds of miles, going back into Tibet and then into China.

They are enormous, the rooftop of the earth, but the God of Israel made them. Amos goes on, he creates the wind, the gentle wind that we enjoy fanning our faces on a hot day, and the fearsome hurricanes and typhoons and tornadoes.

And then Amos goes on, he declares to man what is his thought, which means he reveals to man what man is thinking.

That is to say, he opens up to the human heart. What goes on in the human heart? It's only the Bible that does that. It's only the Bible that opens up to us the nooks and crannies and the highways and byways of our inner selves.

[38 : 42] The Bible helps us to face ourselves and to recognize the truth about ourselves. It's the Bible that shows us our sinful rebellious natures, and it's the Bible that teaches us to see how much we are loved by the Lord and how much we are longed for by him.

Then Amos goes on to show us how closely involved the Lord is with the world he has made. He makes the morning darkness. Daytime and night time, evening and morning, they don't just happen by clockwork.

The Lord makes them happen. It's he who darkens the sky at evening and brightens it in the morning. And as for the earth, has he simply started it all off and then retired far off to some remote region?

Not at all. He's so close to the earth and its life that he treads on the very heights of it. And Israel, Amos is saying, who is this mighty and magnificent and wonderful creator?

He is your God, the Lord, Yahweh, your covenanted God, the God to whom you rightly belong. And he is the God of hosts, he ends up, the God of the armies of heaven, his mighty angels through whom he will ultimately crush all the forces of the evil one.

[39 : 54] But Israel, Amos is saying, you have forgotten him. You're treating him as if he were nothing. And I am reminding you of who he is. Don't trifle with him a moment longer. Leave behind your decadent pleasure-seeking and your self-indulgent worship.

Learn to read your history. If God sends you hard times, take warning from them and return to your father. Prepare to meet your God, O Israel. And friends, doesn't our country, doesn't Britain, need this same message?

God has greatly blessed this nation in the past. But we have become self-indulgent and deeply godless. Our nation has forgotten him.

But Amos reminds us of who God is. 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. This is the true God, the only God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So let's trust him and fear him and obey him and thank him and love him.

[41 : 16] Let us pray. Dear God, our great creator and father, we thank you so much for sending these prophets who loved the people.

And we thank you that you yourself loved them so much and that is why you sent these men to speak to them, to call them back. And we pray that you will give us something of the spirit of Amos as we look at our own nation, that you'll help us lovingly to call back our fellows, our contemporaries, those that we love and care about, so that they too should come to kneel before the cross of Jesus, so that they too should come to love him and trust him and serve him.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.