

Return to Me

Amos 4-5

Intro

In 1958, the singer Dean Martin released a song called ***Return to Me...***

Here are a few of the lyrics...

***Return to me
Oh my dear I'm so lonely
Hurry back, hurry back
Oh my love hurry back I'm yours***

***Return to me
For my heart wants you only
Hurry home, hurry home
Won't you please hurry home to my heart***

***My darling, if I hurt you I'm sorry
Forgive me and please say you are mine***

Now, these lyrics are pretty standard for this sort of song...

The singer is trying to get his loved one back and is ***willing to take the blame for the break-up...***

*This reminds me of a similar song called **Baby Come Back...***

Here are a few lyrics that may be familiar to you...

***Baby come back, any kind of fool could see
There was something in everything about you
Baby come back, yeah, you can blame it all on me
'Cause I was wrong, and I just can't live without you***

Now, it is clear that both of these songs follow the familiar pattern of ***accepting blame*** in hopes that the lost love will ***return and be reconciled...***

- And while these sort of songs will likely be *written* and *sung* until the end of time, ***these are not the sort of songs that the Lord can sing...***

While it is true that the Lord desires to be reconciled to fallen humanity...

- And while it is also true that ***the Lord desires a loving and fruitful relationship with every person on the planet, the Lord can never take the blame for the break-up...***

The Lord can never sing ***if I hurt you I'm sorry forgive me and please say you are mine...***

- The Lord can never sing ***yeah, you can blame it all on me 'Cause I was wrong, and I just can't live without you...***

The Lord cannot sing these songs because the Lord is ***never the offending party — He is always the offended party...***

The Lord is *never the One who deserves the blame for our estranged relationship with Him* — *we are the ones who bring trouble into the relationship...*

And that's the *bad news* — that *we are the ones who bear the blame...*

- But there is good news — even though we are fallen and flawed, the Lord continues to sing out — *“Return to Me”...*

God the Father has made a way for us to be reconciled through the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ...

- And that way of reconciliation is not simply good for our *first* approach to God — it is not a ticket for *a single appearance* before God...

Instead, it is a *lifetime pass* for believers — it is a *continual open door* to come before our Creator — to come before the *One who loves us most...*

- Through the Lord Jesus we can come boldly to God's throne of grace and find mercy to help us in our time of need...

And it is this sort of offer that God continually made to the Israelites throughout their history...

- The Lord was calling out to people who were lost in sin, saying *“Return to Me”...*

And I am convinced that this is the Creator's daily cry to the lost and loveless people of this sick and dying world — God cries out, "**Return to Me**"...

With this subject in mind, let's move into...

Amos 4 (NKJV)

**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!"**

Yikes! Amos is referring to these *wives* as **cows of Bashan**...

- And why is Amos using this sort of language?...

Well, the region of **Bashan** was a fertile land and the cattle of that area lived a lush life growing fat on the abundant vegetation...

- And the women that Amos is speaking against are women who are living lives of luxury that are made possible by the oppression of the **poor** and **needy**...

Notice that Amos tells us that these women **oppress the poor** and **crush the needy**...

- And it is likely that they carried this mistreatment out through the agency of their husbands — of whom they demanded wine for drinking...

Were these ladies the original “wine moms”? — Were they the “Real Housewives of Israel”?

Well, whether or not these women had their own reality show — we know that these ladies were ***self-centered and abusive***...

- And in light of their bad example, I believe it would be a good opportunity to remind ourselves of the **Proverbs 31** woman...

Please turn to Proverbs 31 as we pick up in vs 10...

Proverbs 31:10-31 (NKJV)

10 Who can find a virtuous wife?

For her worth is far above rubies.

A virtuous (excellent) wife is worth more than material riches...

**11 The heart of her husband safely trusts her;
So he will have no lack of gain.**

**12 She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life.**

A virtuous wife is trusted by her husband and she enriches his life...

**13 She seeks wool and flax,
And willingly works with her hands.**

**14 She is like the merchant ships,
She brings her food from afar.**

**15 She also rises while it is yet night,
And provides food for her household,
And a portion for her maidservants.**

**16 She considers a field and buys it;
From her profits she plants a vineyard.**

**17 She girds herself with strength,
And strengthens her arms.**

**18 She perceives that her merchandise is good,
And her lamp does not go out by night.**

**19 She stretches out her hands to the distaff,
And her hand holds the spindle.**

The virtuous wife is hard-working, industrious and makes wise decisions...

**20 She extends her hand to the poor,
Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.**

**21 She is not afraid of snow for her household,
For all her household is clothed with scarlet.**

**22 She makes tapestry for herself;
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.**

The virtuous wife cares about the needs of the poor as well as providing for the needs of her household and of herself...

**23 Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land.**

The faithfulness of the virtuous wife frees her husband to serve in the community and her moral excellence reflects well on him...

**24 She makes linen garments and sells them,
And supplies sashes for the merchants.**

25 Strength and honor are her clothing;

She shall rejoice in time to come.

**26 She opens her mouth with wisdom,
And on her tongue is the law of kindness.**

**27 She watches over the ways of her household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.**

The outward acts of the virtuous wife are not hypocrisy — they flow out of who she is on the inside — she is a woman of strength, honor, wisdom, and kindness...

**28 Her children rise up and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praises her:**

**29 "Many daughters have done well,
But you excel them all."**

**30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,
But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.**

**31 Give her of the fruit of her hands,
And let her own works praise her in the gates.**

Beautifully and deservedly, the virtuous wife will be praised...

Now, ***she should be praised by her husband and by her children — but even if she is neglected by them she will be praised by the Lord...***

- So, as we turn back to **Amos 4** I want to bring out what I believe to be the central distinction between the ungodly women of Israel and the virtuous wife of **Proverbs 31**...

*I believe the distinction is between **getting** and **giving**...*

You see, the women of **Amos 4:1** are all about **getting** — their lives are consumed by the desire to get more and more and more...

- But the woman of **Proverbs 31** lives a life of **giving** — her concern is **others-centered** instead of **self-centered**...

And this principle is key for anyone — man, woman or child — who wants to live a God-honoring life...

- If we want to live a God-honoring life then we must choose to live lives that are about **giving** and not about **getting**...

Of course God has set the example for us — He is the ultimate giver...

God so loved the world that He **gave** His One and Only Son so that we might be saved...

- James reminds us that every good gift that we have ever received has been from God...

Our very lives — every breath we have ever breathed — has been a gift from God...

- And in light of these truths, we are called to do the only reasonable thing — to **give** our lives back to Him so that He may spend our lives as He pleases...

We are to **give** ourselves to Him as living sacrifices which is our reasonable response of worship...

*Let's move on in **Amos 4** to vs 2-3...*

**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.**

**3 You will go out through broken walls,
Each one straight ahead of her,
And you will be cast into Harmon,"
Says the LORD.**

- [explain — picture of the women being taken captive by the Assyrians...]

REMINDER — The luxurious lifestyle of the ungodly is a temporary illusion...[expand]

We read these words regarding the judgment of the ungodly rich in...

Psalm 73:18-19 (NKJV)

**18 Surely You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to destruction.**

**19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation,
as in a moment!
They are utterly consumed with terrors.**

The scriptures make it clear that material riches are no safeguard against the judgment of God...

Matthew 16:26 (NKJV)

“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

*Moving on in **Amos 4** to vs 4-5 the Lord sarcastically encourages the Israelites to continue in their false worship...*

**4 "Come to Bethel and transgress,
At Gilgal multiply transgression;
Bring your sacrifices every morning,
Your tithes every three days.**

**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.**

Here the Lord is highlighting the hypocrisy of the Israelites' worship
— *their worship wasn't about the Lord and the Lord hated it...*

APPLICATION — There's no point in pretending to worship the Lord — there's no point in coming to church or praying or reading the Bible or singing worship songs if it's not real...

- We might as well just stay home and be honest than to come to church and pretend...

*And we will see more on this topic in **Amos 5**...*

*For now, let's move on in this next section where we see that God takes extreme measures in an effort to get people to **repent and return...***

**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.**

The Lord caused famine in the land so that the people might **repent and return to the Lord** but the people refused to respond in the way that God desired...

- And this is a reminder that the Lord will bring difficult circumstances into our lives in order to draw us back to Himself...[expand]

**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.**

**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.**

The Lord withheld the rain in an effort to get the people to **repent and return...**

**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.**

The Lord caused destruction to plants and crops in an effort to get the people to *repent and return*...

**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 a plague and enemy forces in an effort to get the people to repent and return but even the stench of decaying bodies did not cause the people to turn back to the Lord...

**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.**

God completely destroyed certain cities, delivering some individuals as He had delivered Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah — and yet the people ***failed to repent and return...***

**12 "Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel;
Because I will do this to you,
Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"**

The continual failure to ***repent and return*** set the people of Israel on a collision course with their Maker and Judge...

Hebrews 10:31 (NKJV)

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

*Now to the last vs of **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 the God to whom all men, women and children owe their allegiance — He is their Maker...

- And a failure to submit to Him will lead to destruction...

Let's move now to...

Amos 5 (NKJV)

1 Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel:

Amos shares another message from the Lord — and this one is a lamentation — an obituary written ahead of time...

**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.**

**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."**

The N Kingdom of Israel would be utterly defeated and would never again hold the prominence that it once held...

- The vast majority of Israel's forces would be killed in battle, leading to the defeat of the nation...

Continuing on in vs 4-7...

**4 For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel:
"Seek Me and live;**

**5 But do not seek Bethel,
Nor enter Gilgal,
Nor pass over to Beersheba;
For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity,**

And Bethel shall come to nothing.

**6 Seek the LORD and live,
Lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph,
And devour it,
With no one to quench it in Bethel—**

**7 You who turn justice to wormwood,
And lay righteousness to rest in the earth!”**

Though the *nation* of Israel would fall into judgment, God was calling on *individuals* to seek Him and live...

REMINDER — Though society as a whole may be speeding toward judgment, individuals are still able to seek the Lord and live — they are still able to repent and return...[expand]

Moving on to vs 8-9...

**8 He made the Pleiades and Orion;
He turns the shadow of death into morning
And makes the day dark as night;
He calls for the waters of the sea
And pours them out on the face of the earth;
The LORD is His name.**

**9 He rains ruin upon the strong,
So that fury comes upon the fortress.**

The LORD — Yahweh — is the sovereign Creator and Ruler of the Universe and He can bring judgment when He chooses...

- And no one can stop Him — ***no one can beat Him so all would be wise to join Him*...**

As we move into verses 10-13, Amos lists some of the charges against the Israelites...

**10 They hate the one who rebukes in the gate,
And they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.**

The Israelites hated leaders who rebuked evil and they abhorred people who spoke the truth...

- No society can continue indefinitely under those conditions...

**11 Therefore, because you tread down the poor
And take grain taxes from him,
Though you have built houses of hewn stone,
Yet you shall not dwell in them;
You have planted pleasant vineyards,
But you shall not drink wine from them.**

**12 For I know your manifold transgressions
And your mighty sins:
Afflicting the just and taking bribes;
Diverting the poor from justice at the gate.**

**13 Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time,
For it is an evil time.**

The ungodly were enriching themselves by taking advantage of the poor and the Lord was going to bring judgment for this mistreatment...

The ungodly rich were not going to enjoy their ill-gotten gains...

Now we move on to vs 14-15...

**14 Seek good and not evil,
That you may live;
So the LORD God of hosts will be with you,
As you have spoken.**

**15 Hate evil, love good;
Establish justice in the gate.
It may be that the LORD God of hosts
Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.**

Amos calls on the people of Israel to ***repent and return*** — to turn away from their evil ways and do what God wants them to do...

And this holds tremendous application for the believer...

As believers we understand that the New Heavens and the New Earth — our future home — is going to be a place where ***only good is done*** — ***so why not practice doing only good now?...***

- ***Why wait? — As believers we are already citizens of the Kingdom of God — Why not live like it now?...***

Why live for your own kingdom — a kingdom that God will judge and destroy and from which you will receive no reward?...

Live for His Kingdom and His Kingdom ONLY...

- [ex. “Don’t dress for the job you have — dress for the job you want”...]

Paul put it this way in...

Romans 13:12-14 (NKJV)

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

If you and I want to have a place of usefulness — a place of trust — in God's Eternal Kingdom — shouldn't we act like it — shouldn't we dress like it — shouldn't we live that out today?...

*As we continue on in **Amos 5** to vs 16-17, we read of further warnings of God's coming judgment...*

16 Therefore the LORD God of hosts, the Lord, says this:
"There shall be wailing in all streets,
And they shall say in all the highways,
'Alas! Alas!'
They shall call the farmer to mourning,
And skillful lamenters to wailing.

17 In all vineyards there shall be wailing,
For I will pass through you,"
Says the LORD.

The judgment of God will result in **wailing** throughout the land — both in the city and in the country there will be **mourning**...

**18 Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!
For what good is the day of the LORD to you?
It will be darkness, and not light.**

It seems that the people of Israel had been looking forward to the **day of the LORD** as the time when God would bring judgment on their enemies...

“Go get ‘em, God!” ...

But in reality, the **day of the LORD** was coming and it was going to be a day judgment ***for them...***

- [ex. People calling for God to judge the world but they themselves are not in right relationship with the Lord...]

Amos continues in vs 19-20...

**19 It will be as though a man fled from a lion,
And a bear met him!
Or as though he went into the house,
Leaned his hand on the wall,
And a serpent bit him!**

**20 Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light?
Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?**

- [expand on fearful imagery — no escape except to ***repent and return...***]

As we move into vs 21-23, God tells the Israelites what He thinks of their false worship...

21 "I hate, I despise your feast days,
And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.

22 Though you offer Me burnt offerings
and your grain offerings,
I will not accept them,
Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.

23 Take away from Me the noise of your songs,
For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.

It is important to note here that the word **your** is singular in the Hebrew — which tells us that God is speaking to **individual Israelites...**

- In other words, God **despised** the false worship of the **individual Israelites** — He absolutely **hated** it...

And this is a vital concern — because even as believers we can offer false worship to the Lord...

- [ex. When your kids were little they brought you pretend food and you pretended to eat it — As adults they invite you over for dinner and they feed you pretend food (and they know it is pretend) but they think that they can convince you that it is real...]

Be honest — you would be incredibly insulted — this would create a serious breach between you and your children...

- **So how can you and I think to offer false worship to the Lord and convince ourselves that He is fooled by it or that He should just be happy with what we give Him?...**

He is not going to accept false worship...

And could this be the reason that we lack spiritual strength — is our weakness as believers directly related to our lack of true worship?...

If you and I are lukewarm in giving the Lord the worship that He deserves — if we fail to welcome Him into our midst with our whole hearts — what kind of relationship will we have with Him?...

Now, as we move into vs 24, we see that instead of false worship, the Lord wanted good works to be carried out in the land...

**24 But let justice run down like water,
And righteousness like a mighty stream.**

Instead of *false worship*, God was calling for *true action* — for the people of Israel to live *justly* and *righteously* — for justice and righteousness to flood the land...

This water imagery reminds me of what we read in...

John 7:37-39 (NKJV)

37 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

[expand — allowing the Person of the Holy Spirit to run freely **in us** and **through us** — refreshing both us and those in our sphere of influence — the Holy Spirit will bring justice and righteousness...]

*Continuing on in **Amos 5** to vs 25-26...*

**25 "Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings
In the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?**

**26 You also carried Sikkuth your king
And Chiun, your idols,
The star of your gods,
Which you made for yourselves.**

In other words, false worship was nothing new to the Israelites — they had been engaged in it since early days...

And the end of false worship is always the same — captivity...

**27 Therefore I will send you into captivity
beyond Damascus,"
Says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.**

This is always how it goes — false worship promises freedom but it always delivers bondage...

- Freedom is found only in the genuine worship of the true and living God...

Conclusion

We will stop here for today...

And as we close our time together let's remind ourselves that the Lord continually calls out to fallen humanity with these words — “Return to Me”...

- ***And the blame for the damaged relationship is never on the Lord's side...***

If there is a problem in our relationship with the Lord then we are the ones to blame...

- ***But even so, the Lord graciously calls on us to repent and return, assuring us that if anyone seeks Him with their whole heart, they will find Him...***

Let's pray...