



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **A Survey of the Book of Amos, Part 5**

Amos 9:1-2, I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said:

“Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake,  
and shatter them on the heads of all the people;  
and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword;  
not one of them shall flee away;  
not one of them shall escape.

- <sup>2</sup> “If they dig into Sheol,  
from there shall my hand take them;  
if they climb up to heaven,  
from there I will bring them down. (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001)

When first we began our study of the prophets we looked at the book of Joel in which we were

introduced to the concept of “The Day of the Lord.” Recall, that the Day of the Lord references a future period of catastrophic judgment when God vindicates His name by unveiling His character and so terrifying His enemies. Truly on this earth Satan has and continues to have his day and the non-believer has and continues to have his day. Evil and cruel men and women have and continue to have their day. BUT the day is coming when God will have HIS day, and all who have rebelled against Him will be judged! For those trusting Christ it will be a day of vindication; for those trusting in themselves, it will be a day of condemnation.

Truly this day is set; it is all too real; and it is unavoidable. Someday all men will stand before the judgment seat of Christ!

Now as an act of mercy and grace, the Lord has deigned to give pictures and foretastes of this day in the here and now through the prophetic tool called telescoping. Just as a telescope is made up of two lenses which by themselves are pretty much worthless (to look through them individually blur’s one’s vision) but when the lenses are placed in a line such that the individual is able to look through the first lens at the image that appears in the second lens, our sight is empowered to see things that the natural eye normally could not see. So it is with the trials and tribulations of this life that when we look *AT* them, oft-times we are tempted to ask, “Why?” But when we look *THROUGH* them at the Day of the Lord, we see their purpose and meaning quite clearly.

The book of Amos concerns itself with the Day of the Lord as Israel at the time found itself longing for it (Amos 5:18-19). They wanted to see the surrounding nations judged. Yet what a shock it was to them to learn from Amos that this day would not result in their vindication, but their condemnation!

We now come to the climax of the book in which Amos explained the future judgment that awaited God’s people. We pick it up in Amos 9:1-4 when the Lord has His day.

### **When the Lord has His Day**

Amos 9:1, “I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and He said, ‘Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake, and break them on the heads of them all [this most likely is an allusion to Samson and his knocking down the Philistine pillars]! Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword; they will not have a fugitive who will flee, or a refugee who will escape.’”

I want you to notice four important elements to this verse, first the offended judge. The name used of the “Lord” in this passage is NOT Yahweh, BUT Adonai; the word we might use for a general. The focus of this verse was on the activity of a Sovereign, Unthwartable Commander who was executing judgment upon a rebellious people and land.

Secondly, the site of the judgment is the sanctuary of God. This is most notable for THE place where God had desired to meet His people in grace was NOW the site of His fierce and final judgment! What a turnaround! Yet such is the cost that accompanies apostasy!

Thirdly, the primary sign of judgment is earthquakes, “Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake...” When God created this world, the movement went from disorder to order. God began with a “formless and void” world, but with it brought about the beauty and glory of creation (Genesis 1:2, 31). It should not be a surprise to read that earthquakes mark the beginning of the unraveling of creation order (cf. Jeremiah 4:23-26). It is as C. S. Lewis pictured in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* when the snow began to thaw; speaking of Peter, Susan, and Lucy:

They had been just as surprised as Edmond when they saw the winter vanishing and the whole wood passing in a few hours or so from January to May. They hadn't even known for certain (as the Witch did) that this was what would happen when Aslan came to Narnia. But they all knew that it was her spells which had produced the endless winter; and therefore they all knew when this... spring began that something had gone wrong, and badly wrong, with the Witch's schemes. (Lewis, 2005, p. 120)

When natural disasters hit, understand the implication is that the hold that Satan has on this earth is being broken! The world-order is coming to an end. The final judgment is coming! Something has gone “badly wrong with [Satan's] schemes!”

The fourth element is the Biblical allusion to the judgment of Jehu (2 Kings 10:25). Recall that God raised this military leader about eighty years prior to Amos to root out the worship of Baal from Israel (2 Kings 10:28). How did the general do it? He acted like he wanted to worship Baal (2 Kings 10:18) and so he called upon the priests of Baal to gather for a service of worship. Any who did not attend were threatened with execution. When all the priests of Baal were in the temple participating in the false worship, Jehu sent in his army to slay them with the sword. There was not to be one survivor.

Amos 9:1 alludes to Jehu's judgment, “Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword; they will not have a fugitive who will flee, or a refugee who will escape.” The implication is that at the writing of Amos, God's people had become as corrupt as the followers of Baal and, thus, were doomed to the same fate!

With these four themes before us, the final message in this book is beginning to take shape. An offended Lord is soon to take vengeance on a people who had become servants of Baal. As a result, THE place associated with the grace and mercy of God would be the staging area from which judgment now would come. In the process, God would begin to undo creation order, rolling up the heavens and the earth as a scroll!

Amos 9:2-4, “Though they dig into Sheol [which of course is impossible, yet Amos is being hyperbolic], from there shall My hand take them; and though they ascend to heaven [another impossibility], from there will I bring them down. And though they hide on the summit of Carmel [Carmel was one of the more lofty regions in Palestine. Its slopes, with wooden thickets as well as caves and tombs, offered ample opportunity for hiding. And so, “though they hide on the summit of Carmel...”], I will search them out and take them from there; and though they conceal themselves from My sight on the floor of the sea [another impossibility, but for the sake of argument, let's say someone could attempt to hide there from God], from

there I will command the serpent [most likely Leviathan] and it will bite them. And though they go into captivity before their enemies [perhaps this was the best hiding place on earth at the time (it would be as it relates to man). To be taken by a foreign army and so a foreign god would be to place the Israelite beyond the reach of any in Israel and possibly God. Right?], from there I will command the sword that it slay them, and I will set My eyes against them for evil and not for good”

The word “evil” conveys the idea of calamity, failure, loss, turmoil, and death. It is the opposite of “good” which is a word associated with the Kingdom of God/the Covenant of God. Whatever you and I might properly identify as the end of God’s salvation- loving the Lord, serving the Lord, glorifying Christ, being transformed into His image, etc., would be placed in the category of “good.” The opposite would be considered “evil.” It is this that was behind the judgment planned for Israel at the writing of Amos.

Amos 9:8a, 9-10. “Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth [this is the exile that occurred in 722/21 B.C.]... For behold, I am commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as *grain* is shaken in a sieve, but not a kernel will fall to the ground [as the focus here is on the sinful nation, the idea here is that not one rebellious Israelite would escape]. All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, those who say, ‘The calamity will not overtake or confront us.’”

This was the judgment of God that was soon to come to apostate Israel! From this we conclude that God was not going to abandoned Israel, BUT remain present with them in the terror of judgment (there is an obvious allusion here to hell. Hell is not the absence of God, BUT the presence of God’s eternal wrath). Now lest there be any question as to the ONE who was going to judge, Amos turned his focus to identifying the judge.

## The Judge

Amos 9:5-6, “And the Lord God of hosts [here the proper name of God, Yahweh, is used], the One who touches the land so that it melts, and all those who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises up like the Nile and subsides like the Nile of Egypt; the One who builds His upper chambers in the heavens, and has founded His vaulted dome over the earth, He who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth, the Lord is His name.”

The Hebrew indicates that this is a hymn written to celebrate the sovereignty of God. Yet once again there is an element of mockery here. Israel was in the midst of a supposed “revival” many a song of praise had been written (Amos 5:23; 6:5). In fact one of the “best sellers” at the time included the lines, “And all those who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises up like the Nile and subsides like the Nile of Egypt” (Amos 8:8; 9:5). Amos wrote his own little song in which he utilized the words of the pop song and added his own.

What was the focus of the hymn? The glorious, unstoppable, unthwartable, dominion and power of Yahweh! What Israel sang in reference to God’s judgment against the nations on account of

their sin, Amos/God sang in reference to Israel on account of its sin. Who again is the one judging? Notice the six-fold description.

- The Lord God of hosts: the emphasis here is on the sovereignty of God who rules/commands the heavenly host/army.
- Who touches the land so that it melts: as God upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3), so the Lord need only touch the land, figuratively, and it will melt away.
- The waters of the Nile are bound by His command.
- God has built His upper chambers in the heavens [the emphasis here is on the transcendency of God] and has founded His vaulted dome over the earth [the heavens are a most amazing wonder; yet realize God is the one who created it.]
- He who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth: again, the One judging Israel is the One who determines the boundaries of the sea!
- The Lord is His name/character!

Amos describes the indescribable, transcendent Being who sovereignly reigns over creation. For a sinful man to behold Him would mean instant death (Exodus 33:20). He is the Great I Am before whom the sinless angels bow down in amazement continually saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3)! This is the one whose presence shook Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16, 18), whose thundering voice sounds like the rush of many waters (Revelation 14:2). This is the one with whom Israel was bound and against whom they had rebelled.

Why is Amos is laying so much stress on the transcendency of the “Judge” in this context?

Amos is stressing the transcendency of the Judge because the natural inclination of man is to assume that God is like them, and so not their judge but their contemporary.

Psalm 50:21a: “These things you have done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you...”

This is clearly what Israel had done. They believed that the purpose and focus of religion was their pleasure and enjoyment; certainly these things must be God’s will! They thought life was about getting, possessing, and owning things; after all, didn’t God want them to be happy? And just as “to err is human but to forgive is divine” God most certainly would overlook the few small sins of Israel. After all, He is a God of love!

These sentiments are part of the delusion of sin. God is not like us. And Israel needed to understand this, as do we! After detailing the judgments that awaited Israel, Amos endeavor to impress upon the nation the character of the One who both was offended by their sin and who also would judge their sin. Yet there was still one more place to which Israel could flee; the covenant promises of the Lord. Certainly God would not violate His own promises.

### **The Foolish Plea**

Amos 9:7-10, “‘Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?’ declares the Lord.

‘Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir? Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,’ declares the Lord. ‘For behold, I am commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as *grain* is shaken in a sieve, but not a kernel will fall to the ground. All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, those who say, “The calamity will not overtake or confront us.”’”

Notice two things here; first, the purpose of this section was to remove the last excuse to which the Israelite might resort in their attempt to deny the reality of God’s judgment. Amos once again issues forth a statement of judgment in Amos 9:8-9. Yet the statement of judgment is not the focus. Secondly, the structure of this passage follows the pattern of a chiasm.

A: v. 7- Addresses the unrighteous amongst Israel.

B: v. 8a- “Behold...”

C: v. 8b- We read of the promise of mercy in the midst of wrath.

B<sup>1</sup>: v. 9- “Behold...”

A<sup>1</sup>: v. 10: Addresses the unrighteous amongst Israel.

The heart and center of the chiasm is the grace and mercy of God! Through this chiasm, Amos/God deigned to give His people a glorious statement of hope and encouragement in the midst of a most devastating exhortation.

Notice the message contained here. As there is an argumentative tone throughout this passage, we conclude that Amos either was anticipating or answering a protest here. It is as though the Israelite listening to Amos’ message of impending judgment began shaking their head in protest:

*Amos you’ve gone mad! There is no way that we could be the recipient of God’s wrath! The covenant promises of the Lord prevent it. Did not God rescue us from Egypt when we were yet sinners? How much more now that we have attained a privileged status will God protect us?*

Amos addressed the objection.

Amos 9:7, “‘Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?’ declares the Lord, ‘Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?’”

It is obvious that Israel considered the Exodus as surety that the nation by no means could be judged by God. This is why God said,

*Israel, you are not the only nation which I brought to Palestine. There also were the Philistine and Arameans. The fact that I brought you to this place secures nothing! In fact, you have become to me as the sons of Ethiopia!*

How shocking this would have been to Amos’ audience. And yet it gets even worse. Far from

remaining a “privileged nation” to God, notice that Israel had in fact become the object of His anger.

Amos 9:8, “Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth...”

There is an ethical element to the accusation here. Because Israel had trampled underfoot the weak, poor, and disadvantaged among them, they had become a nation of covenant breakers, “the sinful nation.” Now, what did God say would happen if Israel broke the covenant?

Deuteronomy 11:26-28, “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known.”

The exhortation in Amos was that Israel had broken the covenant and so stood before God as accursed!

Amos 9:9, “For behold [in the Hebrew, this word is given to introduce something unbelievable], I am commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as *grain* is shaken in a sieve, but not a kernel will fall to the ground.”

As a farmer, Amos resorted to an agriculture metaphor. An important step in harvesting wheat, following the cutting of the stalks and hitting of the heads of grain, was the sieve (a essential part of a combine.) The wheat passed through a sieve to remove the straw and chaff that had been intermixed with the wheat. The chaff is what is referenced as the “kernel” that would not fall to the ground. Notice when God would do this with Israel, not a “kernel” or “pebble” (cf. 2 Samuel 17:13) would fall to the ground. Not one false believer or sham Christian would escape!

Amos 9:10, “All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, those who say, ‘The calamity will not overtake or confront us.’”

Truly, all the guilty would perish. And who were the guilty? Here the focus and intent is clearly stated:

Amos 9:10b, “...those who say, ‘The calamity will not overtake or confront us.’”

This was the last refuge to which the condemned Israelite went in response to Amos’ judgment:

*Not us! We have a privileged status before God. All that you have said will not touch us, Amos!*

With this the last vestige of hope was removed from Israel. They stood before God as covenant breakers. The curses of the covenant surely would come upon them! Nothing they had experienced could protect them.

How hard it would have been to deliver such an awful message! Yet how much more difficult it would have been to receive it! Aren't you glad that you live today and not back then? Yet this is a leading question, for today the church in many places resembles the people of God living in the days of Amos! Mysticism/Baalism has crept into our assemblies such that in many places the focus is on experiencing Jesus or being moved by Jesus. Very few churches gather today to present to God the worship which He has prescribed! Furthermore, we've become very individualistic in our church experience no longer do we view the church as a family, but a place to go for:

- Inspiring messages.
- A spouse.
- Support.

The measure of the worth of a gathering is what I get out of it, rather than what I give. We've become consumers. The result is that the poor, hurting, and needy amongst us continue to be trampled upon and neglected.

Now when the Northern Kingdom of Israel looked like this, God judged the sinful nation. When the Southern Kingdom of Judah looked like this, they were judged. When the people of God at the time of Christ looked like this, they too were judged. And we think that it will be different when it comes to this generation?

Brothers and sisters let us come to understand that the "brand of Christianity" described by Amos not only displeases the Lord, but is under His judgment! And such is the case for many a church today which has abandoned God and gone after Baal.

Truly this is not a pleasant message. Yet lest we leave here overburdened, would you notice that the book of Amos closes with a glorious description of the faithfulness of God!

### The Faithfulness of God

Amos 9:11-15, is directed at the genuine child of God living in an evil age. So what is their confidence and hope? Notice how the section ends.

Amos 9:15b, "I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them," says the Lord your God."

Here Amos modifies the expected and typical Old Testament expression, "The Lord God" to "The Lord YOUR God!" Though the faithful child of God will suffer as mini-days of the Lord come upon their land/church, nevertheless they must know that they remain precious in God's sight, "He is the Lord THEIR God!" With this, consider the two-fold promise here; first, the short-term promise.

### The Short-term Promise

Amos 9:11-12, "In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches; I

will also raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name,' declares the Lord who does this."

The reference to "the booth of David" brings us back to that wonderful era in the life of David, prior to when he became king, when he lived as a sojourner in the land with nowhere to lay his head but in the little "booth" which God's people were commanded to build during the Feast of Booths. This is all that David had; but he was rich! For while he did not possess the treasures of this earth, he possessed God! In fact, many of the most beloved Psalms were written by David during this time; Psalms which speak of

- The nearness of God being David's good.
- The wealth David had in God though he was in flight.
- The privilege of service even when the path was difficult and the way rough.
- The glorious protection David enjoyed on account of the covenant.

Though David lived in a "booth" he lived securely saying, "in peace I will both lie down and sleep, for Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety." (Psalm 4:8) This eventually is where God would bring His people in fulfillment of Amos' prophecy— to a time and place when their wealth and most prized possession would be God alone! James before the council in Jerusalem spoke of this time regarding the church.

Acts 15:15-16, "And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, 'After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle [booth] of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it...'"

James quoted Amos 9:11-12 in reference to the New Covenant era where THE promise that Christ gave to His people was not palaces, riches, wealth, or ease of days, but simply "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) Truly today we embody the glorious promise God gave to His people facing a dreadful judgment. We are the booth of David! We live as sojourners and aliens in this land with our only hope and comfort being the Lord Himself! And yet we view ourselves as being rich, don't we? Dr. David Allan Hubbard wrote concerning this:

The messianic age... will not feature citadels to display wealth or shield from enemies but a simple trust in a sovereign God, like David's before Saul and against Goliath. (David A. Hubbard, 1989, p. 240)

That was the short term prophesy given to the people of God in Amos' day.

### **The Long-term Promise**

Amos 9:13-15, "When the plowman [who began his work in October/November] will overtake the reaper [who began in March/April] and the treader of grapes [which labor occurred in September] him who sows seed [November/December. The idea here is that the land would be so fruitful that those who work it will struggle to keep up with the

super-abundant harvest]; when the mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will be dissolved [farming didn't take place in the mountain areas of Palestine due to the lack of good soil and consistent watering... yet sometime in the future such no longer would be the case!]. Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live *in them*, they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them,' says the Lord your God."

This speaks of a time in the future when the land no longer would stingily yield its fruit- recall that the earth's productivity was barred from man on account of the fall (cf. Genesis 3:17-18; Romans 8:20).

God's people would inherit a land from which they never again would depart! Of this promise, notice THE reason God's people were removed from Palestine was because of their sin! From this we conclude that in order for God's people never again to be dispossessed from the land they must no longer have sin!

So when will the earth willingly yield its fruit? And when will we live as perfect individuals in a land from which we will never be taken? In the New Heavens and Earth! This truly is the fulfillment of Amos' prophecy.

2 Peter 3:10, 13, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up... But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."

At which time, in the words of Paul, "we shall always be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:17) This is the glorious promise which God gave to His people at the time of Amos. Now, if the first promise has been fulfilled; today we are the "booth of David" how much more confidence ought we to have that the second promise will be fulfilled?

Brothers and sisters, the message of the prophets will continue to bring us to the end of ourselves in which we will be forced to see that we do NOT live in a friendly world. This is an era of spiritual battle and warfare where...

- Christians will undergo bitter providences!
- The church will continue to be torn with schisms and distressed by heresies!
- All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted!
- The church will continue on its downward path toward being "The whore of Babylon!"

Yet through it all, what must remain our hope, consolation, and joy? What must we place before our mind's eye to keep us going? As the "booth of David" our only resource and so treasure is Christ. Let us therefore cultivate a heart of dependence upon and devotion to our King! As the heirs of the glorious promise of a New Heavens and Earth, we are to live solely for THE Promised Land that still waits all in Christ. That is what is behind the "inheritance" promised us in Scripture!

So let goods and kindreds go; this mortal life also! We are part of an unstoppable kingdom which knows no end!

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## **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 20, 2011. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.