

AMOS—WEEK 9

JUDGEMENT AND RESTORATION



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Cover Picture is by James Tissot (1836–1902)

Amos was the owner of a flock of sheep. Tissot shows him with a stick and a dog.

God’s judgement will be total. He’ll destroy Israel and all its buildings “from the surface of the ground.”

But the faith isn’t about buildings, and God restores the booth of Jacob. They’ll get back to the roots of faith.

We’re pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

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Amos, Week 9 — Judgement and Restoration

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1 Amos 9:1–4 (ESV)

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.*

*“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.
If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel,
from there I will search them out and take them;
and if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea,
there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them.
And if they go into captivity before their enemies,
there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them;
and I will fix my eyes upon them
for evil and not for good.”*

This section is intense, maybe too intense. The Lord’s judgement on Israel will be total. There’s no escape. *Not one of them shall flee away.* They cannot flee the heights of *heaven*, nor to the depths of *Sheol*. The Lord will pursue them to *the top of Carmel* and to *the bottom of the sea*.

But then the LORD says something so extreme it almost doesn’t make sense. *“I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good.”* That’s puzzling given that God cannot sin. Can a holy God even say this?

The Hebrew word translated here as “evil” (רָעָה “ra-ah”) means “evil, misery, distress, injury.” The word translated as “good” (טוֹבָה “tovah”) means “pleasing, good.”

So, this isn’t about good and evil in the moral sense. It’s about good and bad outcomes.

Notice the words, *“I will fix my eyes upon them.”* God pays attention. This highlights two things. First, it’s not the Assyrians they want to run away from; it’s God. Second, running away from God is nuts.

One of the funniest things reported in scripture is Adam hiding from God when he saw he was naked. Not only did this have no chance of working, it “announced” that he had eaten the forbidden fruit.

Thus begins the story of sin as comedy. Never forget that we are part of that story.

2 Amos 9:5–6

*The Lord GOD of hosts,
He who touches the earth and it melts,
And all who dwell there mourn;
All of it shall swell like the River,
And subside like the River of Egypt.
He who builds His layers in the sky,
And has founded His strata in the earth;
Who calls for the waters of the sea,
And pours them out on the face of the earth—
The LORD is His name.*

Just as the previous passage showed that there's no avoiding God's judgement, this passage shows that there's no arguing whether God is qualified to judge.

The Hebrew at the beginning sounds clumsy to an English speaker, so it's translated loosely. The passage literally says, "The Lord, Yahweh, of the heavenly armies, He who strikes the land, and it melts." Melted land is lava from a volcano, which instantly turns life into mourning for *all who dwell there*.

The *River of Egypt* is the Nile, which floods seasonally. Land swelling and subsiding sounds seismic—an earthquake or the heaving associated with some volcanic eruptions. In any case, it's awe inspiring.

The Hebrew translated as "layers" (מַעְלָה "ma-ala") literally means stairs. It's a reference to the highest heavens. God commands the waters too. The LORD's power and reach know no limits.

The last line declares, "Yahweh [I AM] is His name." That's everything.

Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." — John 8:58

It's no surprise that *they took up stones to throw at Him* (John 8:59a). He was claiming to be the great I AM—Yahweh. You can do every miracle in the book, and that's still nothing compared to I AM.

Marvel movies have become all the rage lately, especially since Disney took over. The characters have amazing powers and live amazing lives. Their adventures make great movies.

But you and I have more powers and live more amazing lives. Why? Because we're real and they aren't. They're fictional characters. They don't actually live amazing lives at all. They don't live any lives.

That's what I AM is all about. Yahweh is not a created being. His existence is real in a way ours isn't.

This hints at the true meaning of eternal life in Christ. No one can fully imagine it, but it's glorious.

3 Amos 9:7–10 (ESV)

*“Are you not like the Cushites to me,
O people of Israel?” declares the LORD.
“Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,
and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?
Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom,
and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground,
except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,”
declares the LORD.*

*“For behold, I will command,
and shake the house of Israel among all the nations
as one shakes with a sieve,
but no pebble shall fall to the earth.
All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword,
who say, ‘Disaster shall not overtake or meet us.’”*

This passage begins by saying that Israel is just like other nations. *Cush* is very far away; it’s a colloquialism for the ends of the earth. Israel is far from God. Next a parallel is drawn between God delivering Israel from Egypt and His delivering two pagan nations from their oppressors. “Don’t think you’re so special, Israel.”

Then it describes the punishment in absolute terms. The Hebrew word translated as “destroy” (שָׁמַד *“shamahd”*) literally means exterminate or annihilate. But the passage quickly clarifies this to say that it doesn’t apply to the house of Jacob (the Israeli people). The kingdom, not the people, will be wiped out.

But don’t miss that the thing that distinguishes the ones who will *die by the sword* is confidence—those *who say, “The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.”*

Overconfidence is the opposite of humility. Overconfidence about one’s relationship with God is insane.

Few things are as poisonous to spiritual health.

How can we reconcile this with what John says about knowing that we have eternal life?

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. — 1 John 5:13 (ESV)

Is this not overconfidence in a can?

No, because confidence isn’t overconfidence. Also, as we’ll soon see as we walk through 1 John, the gospel reinforces humility instead of erasing it.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. — 1 John 1:8 (ESV)

4 Amos 9:11–12 (ESV)

*“In that day I will raise up
the booth of David that is fallen
and repair its breaches,
and 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.*

At last, right at the end of Amos’s prophesy, God says He’s going to restore everything. At first, it sounds like the LORD is going to rebuild walls and buildings. But no, something else is going on.

Why does it say, “*the booth of David?*” The Hebrew word (סֹכֶת *“soo-kaht”*) literally means temporary shelter for livestock. Remind you of anything?

Right after the Christmas holiday the image of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in a stable is still fresh. Might that be what this is about?

Maybe, but this also conveys the idea that the grandiose temple and other structures aren’t the keys to faith. They will get back to the simplicity of the feast of booths instituted in Leviticus 23:33–43. They’ll get back to the roots of their faith.

The reference to *all the nations who are called by my name* is another clue. That means there must be gentile nations *who are called by my name*. In fact, the NKJV translates this as, “*all the Gentiles who are called by My name.*” The messianic implication is unavoidable, so the NKJV just spells it out.

These two concepts go hand-in-hand. The Messiah is about the roots of faith, not grandiose structures.

The great challenge of modern Christianity is to get back to the seriousness and purity of the faith of the first century. We need to get back to the roots.

We’ve gone soft. Martyrdom is not part of our civilization. It’s too easy to be a Christian. That yields uncommitted Christians and churches that cater to them. Awesome structures for worship have replaced the awesome level of Christian charity and sacrifice that once turned the world upside down.

But this isn’t the case everywhere. Martyrdom is a reality in some places. Pray for the persecuted church.

But there’s a glorious twist to this. Many of the places where the persecution is the worst are, right now, experiencing great revival. The gospel is going forth, and many people are coming to Christ.

Our prayers for the persecuted church should reflect this. Don’t just pray for the persecution to end.

There are other priorities.

5 Amos 9:13–15

*“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD,
“When the plowman shall overtake the reaper,
And the treader of grapes him who sows seed;
The mountains shall drip with sweet wine,
And all the hills shall flow with it.
I will bring back the captives of My people Israel;
They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them;
They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them;
They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.
I will plant them in their land,
And no longer shall they be pulled up
From the land I have given them,”
Says the LORD your God.*

The book of Amos closes with a glorious view of blessings. The plow is associated with planting; the plowman overtaking the reaper is an image of planting the next crop immediately after the one is harvested. That’s unreasonably quick, but nothing compared to the next image.

Grapevines take a long time to mature. You don’t tread grapes for many years after planting seed. The *treader of grapes overtaking him who sows seed* is absurd. So is, “*The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.*” This is almost an image of Eden—or of heaven.

But, most importantly, their return from exile will be permanent. “*And no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them.*”

Being ruled by Rome does not contradict this. They were not *pulled up from the land*. A remnant remained and remains to this day. It was a close call though—but that’s typical of the way God reduces Israel to just a remnant.

Israel had two more close calls much more recently. After WWII, the UN designated land for the Israeli nation. The Arabs didn’t like this agreement and that led to the Arab-Israeli War of 1948.

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/arab-israeli-war>

Israel won their independence, but that wasn’t the end of it. Their Arab neighbors were anything but placated, and another war broke out in 1967. Though greatly outnumbered and outgunned, Israel won this war in only six days.

The Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) has made a first class documentary detailing the, shall we say, “coincidences” that led to this incredible victory.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ah9bLW3Rh4>

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What's the funniest Bible story?
2. How do you think of God's infiniteness?
3. Are some Christians "overconfident" in their salvation?
4. How should we pray for the persecuted church?
5. What is your view of "incredible coincidences?" Are they miracles?

Items for prayer: