



Amos - Chapter Nine

III Amos 7:1-9:15 - Visions of Judgement (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Nine

This final vision has two parts, one negative (vv.1-10) and the other positive (vv.11-15). The negative aspect is the culmination of the previous oracles and visions. God renders as worthless all the sacrifices that the Israelites had given in an attempt to manipulate God on their behalf while they brought reproach to his name with their sinful lives. God would shatter their pagan temples and demand their own lives as sacrifices. However, God's ultimate purpose in judgement is never destruction; it is always restoration. So vv.11-15 depict a day on the other side of judgement when Israel, again recognising the Davidic kingship, would be restored to its land.

III.c Amos 9:1-15 - A Vision of the Lord standing beside the Altar

Refer to the chapter summary above.

III.c.i Amos 9:1-10 - The Destruction of Israel

The primary theme of this part of the vision is the inescapability of God's judgement. He will search out the sinful Israelites wherever they try to hide from him (vv.1-4). The final piece of lyrical poetry in the book comes next, emphasising the sovereign power of the Creator (vv.5-6); refer also to Amos 4:13 and 5:8-9.

The ultimate blow is to the idea that Israel ought to receive special favour from God because they are uniquely chosen (v.10). In fact, says Amos, God had directed the movements of many peoples on the earth (v.7), and if Israel has any special status, it is a special accountability (vv.8-10).

¹ 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 I will kill with the sword;
not one of them shall flee away,
not one of them shall escape.

Amos 9:1

I saw the Lord standing beside the altar. In this final vision of Amos, he sees the Lord right in the temple or at heaven's altar: <<*Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne*>> (Revelation 8:3), supervising the work of judgement. Amos wants people to know that God is not detached from even his hard work of judgement.

Capitals are the tops of the columns, and thresholds are the bases. The two together form a merism expressing the totality of the temple structure. Often, the thresholds are the structurally strongest part of a house. If the capitals are broken, it shows that the whole house has fallen in. This is a poetic and powerful way to describe complete destruction. Revelation 20:11-15 uses this image of no escape to describe the last judgement.

Shatter them on the heads of all the people is reminiscent of the fate of those who had captured Samson, blinded him and kept him for entertainment: <<*And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. Then Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines.' He strained with all his might; and the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life*>> (Judges 16:29-30).

Not one of them shall flee away, not one of them shall escape. Judgement is coming upon the people: <<*Therefore, thus says the Lord, assuredly I am going to bring disaster upon them that they cannot escape; though they cry out to me, I will not listen to them*>> (Jeremiah 11:11). This is God's way of saying, "You can run, but you cannot hide." As shown in the next verses, even if they tried to dig into hell or climb up to heaven, people cannot escape their responsibility before God. A high mountain like Carmel or the bottom of the sea cannot hide them from judgement: <<*Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust from the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty*>> (Isaiah 2:10), and: <<*Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among*

the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'>> (Revelation 6:15-17).

² Though they dig into Sheol,
from there shall my hand take them;
though they climb up to heaven,
from there I will bring them down.

³ Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel,
from there I will search out and take them;
and though they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea,
there I will command the sea-serpent, and it shall bite them.

Amos 9:2-3

Two more merisms: Sheol or the underworld, vs. heaven; and Carmel, the high mountaintop, vs. the bottom of the sea. Therefore, there is no place between these extremes to escape God, and there is not return for those who try: <<*As the cloud fades and vanishes, so those who go down to Sheol do not come up*>> (Job 7:9), and: <<*For thus says the Lord God: When I make you a city laid waste, like cities that are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you, and the great waters cover you, then I will thrust you down with those who descend into the Pit, to the people of long ago, and I will make you live in the world below, among primeval ruins, with those who go down to the Pit, so that you will not be inhabited or have a place in the land of the living*>> (Ezekiel 26:19-20).

⁴ And though they go into captivity in front of their enemies,
there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them;
and I will fix my eyes on them
for harm and not for good.

Amos 9:4

An essential part of the Old Covenant was the promise of blessing or cursing based on Israel's obedience; details can be found in Leviticus Chapter 26 and Deuteronomy Chapter 28. If Israel was in chronic, systemic disobedience, they could expect that God's eye toward them would be for harm and not for good: <<*I am going to watch over them for harm and not for good; all the people of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall perish by the sword and by famine,*

until not one is left>> (Jeremiah 44:27). This is a terrifying statement, showing that there is no escape anywhere in the entire creation, but it was what God had promised long before in Deuteronomy 28:64-68 if the people were unfaithful. And yet even there, God offers forgiveness and restoration to those who repent; refer to Deuteronomy 30:1-10. As David puts it: <<*He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger for ever*>> (Psalm 103:9).

Although God's grace and mercy have always been poured out on his people it is much better to live under the blessing of the New Covenant! The promise of God through Paul stands: <<*If God is for us, who is against us?*>> (Romans 8:31). Christians know that because of their standing in grace by faith, God is for them. All of the harm they deserve was perfectly poured out upon Jesus Christ on the Cross.

⁵ The Lord, God of hosts,
he who touches the earth and it melts,
and all who live in it mourn,
and all of it rises like the Nile,
and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt;
⁶ who builds his upper chambers in the heavens,
and founds his vault upon the earth;
who calls for the waters of the sea,
and pours them out upon the surface of the earth —
the Lord is his name.

Amos 9:5-6

The Lord, God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts. This is not just a flowery introduction. When Israel remembered who God is, understanding all his might and glory, then they acted in a way that brought him glory. Constantly, Amos and the other prophets teach what believers should do based on understanding who God is. This is the ninth and final time that Amos refers to the Lord as the God of hosts, revealing his absolute sovereignty. Refer also to Amos 3:13 and the associated comment.

It rises like the Nile. Again, Amos sees the coming destruction to be like the annual flooding of the Nile. The flood is absolutely inevitable, covering everything and leaving destruction in its wake: <<*Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?*>> (Amos 8:8).

Who builds his upper chambers in the heavens, and founds his vault upon the earth. This is a difficult passage to translate, and the New King James does it about as well as anyone else: <<*It is he that buildeth his stories in the heaven, and hath founded his troop in the earth; he that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The Lord is his name*>> (Amos 9:5-6 KJV). Heavens, earth, and sea are all at the beck and call of the one whose name is the Lord.

7 Are you not like the Ethiopians to me,
O people of Israel? says the Lord.
Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt,
and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Aramæans from Kir?

Amos 9:7

The Ethiopians, also called Cushites or Nubians, lived south of Egypt and were considered to be living at the end of the world. All peoples are under God's providential care.

Caphtor is modern day Crete, the origin of the Philistines, a people who opposed Israel for many generations before the Lord eventually dealt with them for doing so: <<*At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his stallions, at the clatter of his chariots, at the rumbling of their wheels, parents do not turn back for children, so feeble are their hands, because of the day that is coming to destroy all the Philistines, to cut off from Tyre and Sidon every helper that remains. For the Lord is destroying the Philistines, the remnant of the coastland of Caphtor*>> (Jeremiah 47:3-4).

Kir is identified as the ancestral home of the Syrians. It is conjectured to be somewhere to the northeast of Mesopotamia. Thus they were being sent back to where they started, with nothing to show for the intervening years. In 2 Kings 16:9 this is where the Assyrians exiled the people of Damascus.

8 The eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom,
and I will destroy it from the face of the earth
– except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,
says the Lord.

9 For lo, 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 ground.

¹⁰ All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword,
who say, 'Evil shall not overtake or meet us.'

Amos 9:8-10

The eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom. It is striking, and terrible, to hear Israel called the sinful kingdom. God wants all his people to be deeply impressed that they cannot presume upon his mercy or their 'chosenness.' It is for this reason that God allowed some of his chosen people to perish apart from him: <<*What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, 'God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.'* And David says, 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling-block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and keep their backs for ever bent'>> (Romans 11:7-10).

I will command, and shake the house of Israel among all the nations. God will use Israel's exile among the nations to sift his people, not to destroy them, but to purify them: <<*See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness*>> (Malachi 3:1-3). Jesus warned Peter that it was Satan who would shake him to try to dislodge him from a position of faith in God and to get him to deny even knowing Jesus: <<*Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers*>> (Luke 22:31-32).

No pebble shall fall to the ground. Israel will stand out among the nations, but in the sense that none of the Israelites will be able to hide among the nations. Isaiah 27:12-13 uses the sieve figure to say that none of the remnant will be lost among the nations.

All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, 'Evil shall not overtake or meet us.' It is only the unrepentant who shall be guilty under judgement, those who presume too much and never humble themselves. There is always time in this life for anyone to repent and call upon the Lord for salvation.

III.c.ii Amos 9:11-15 - The Restoration of David's Kingdom

In contrast to the mighty edifice of Israel that God would smash to the ground (v.1), the fragile, torn tent of David (v.11) would be repaired. The reminder that

well-being depends on the line of David would come with special force to the northern audience of Amos, who had rejected the Davidic king. God has committed himself to bless his people, and eventually the world, through the family of David: <<***But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever***>> (2 Samuel 7:15-16), and: <<***May his name endure for ever, his fame continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy***>> (Psalm 72:17). In that context, Israel's fortunes would be restored. The abundance described in vv.13-15 stands in stark contrast to the ruin and destruction that fell on Israel after God repeatedly warned them, appealing to them to come to repentance in Amos 4:6-11. Again, the point is that God does not intend for judgement on Israel to be final: <<***For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree***>> (Romans 11:24), but to be a tool through which blessing may ultimately come.

- ¹¹ On 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;
- ¹² in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations who are called by my name,
says the Lord who does this.

Amos 9:11-12

On that day reminds the reader of the Day of the Lord that the Israelites confidently expected. If it was to be a day of destruction instead of blessing that did not mean it was to be God's final word on the subject; the dark aspects of this day are stated in Amos 5:18-20 and the associated comments.

On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen. Long before the time of Amos, the northern kingdom of Israel rejected the royal house of David. Here God promises to restore David's royal line, fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is of the Davidic branch: <<***A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what***>>

his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked>> (Isaiah 11:1-4).

Just as the booth of David contrasted with the temple (v.1), so here the ‘possession’ of all the nations who are called by my name stands in connection with the nations described in vv.7-8. Israel does have a special place among the nations, but it is a place of mission, not of privilege. In Acts 15:16-17, which records events at the Council of Jerusalem, James cites vv.11-12, understanding that passage to indicate that in the messianic reign inaugurated by Jesus’ resurrection, i.e. when David’s fallen tent is raised, all the nations, i.e. Gentiles, become included in God’s blessings, as God had promised to Abraham: <<*I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*>> (Genesis 12:3). James used this passage to demonstrate that God promised to reach the Gentiles and to bring them into his kingdom under the Messiah, not under Israel.

Raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old. God promised to take what was ruined and to repair and rebuild it. Sometimes God works in a completely new way, letting the old die and doing a work of new creation: <<*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert*>> (Isaiah 43:19), and: <<*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*>> (2 Corinthians 5:17). At other times God works to raise up ruins and rebuild. Both are glorious works of the Lord!

In Acts 15:17a James is recorded as saying: <<*so that all other peoples may seek the Lord*>> instead of that they may possess the remnant of Edom. This is because the Septuagint, the ancient translation of the OT from Hebrew to Greek, translated Edom as ‘Adam,’ the Hebrew word for ‘humankind.’

¹³ The time is surely coming, says the Lord,
when the one who ploughs shall overtake the one who reaps,
and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and all the hills shall flow with it.

Amos 9:13

The time is surely coming. Under God’s inspiration, the prophet Amos ends the book on a note of high hope, looking forward to a day of great prosperity and abundance in Israel. Under the reign of Jeroboam II, they had material abundance, but not in the Lord. God promises to restore them to prosperity from him and in him, an offer made to all through his Son: <<*I ask not only on behalf of these,*

but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me>> (John 17:20-23).

The abundant productivity of the restored land, under the blessing of God, will be so amazing that the land does not need to lie fallow for a moment, but as soon as the one who reaps has harvested one crop, the one who ploughs comes right behind planting another one, and as soon as someone sows the seed, the grapes grow so rapidly that the treader of grapes comes to pick the ripe grapes and gather them for the winepress. This is a beautiful poetic image of a land like the Garden of Eden, with productivity that is free from the curse (Genesis 3:17-19 and Amos 4:6-10) and with greater abundance than anything currently known. Some interpreters apply this passage, which in its immediate context describes the fruitfulness of a renewed land of Israel; to a wider renewal of the whole earth in a future age: *<<For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God>> (Romans 8:19-21).*

When God releases blessing and restoration, fruit comes quickly. When God releases blessing and restoration, fruit comes from unexpected places. Normally, grapevines do not grow well on mountains or high hills, but in the days of Israel's restoration even the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. Ultimately, God is looking for the fruit of the Spirit: *<<By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires>> (Galatians 5:22-24).*

¹⁴ I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.

Amos 9:14

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel. God promises to bring his people back from exile: *<<I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first>> (Jeremiah 33:7).* He would do

so in order for them to build cities and enjoy food and prosperity; for when these things are enjoyed in obedience to the Lord and with thanksgiving to him, is to enjoy God's blessing.

¹⁵ I will plant them upon their land,
and they shall never again be plucked up
out of the land that I have given them,
says the Lord your God.

Amos 9:15

I will plant them upon their land. This final blessing of the people is predicated upon their recognition of their Davidic messiah, something that is yet to occur. The warnings from the prophet Amos about the threat of coming captivity and exile are numerous. Yet God promises restoration, and looks forward to the day when Israel shall never again be plucked up out of the land: <<*So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, 'Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.' 'And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins'*>> (Romans 11:25-27).