

Amos: The Shepherd Prophet (Part 9)

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Date: 04 December 2013

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[0:00] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

The second half of the book that has as its primary focus or theme the visions, what Amos saw. We looked at what he said and now what he saw. And we've looked at four visions. And now we're ready for vision number five, which brings us into chapter nine. It's going to be about 25 years. When Amos prophesied, of course he's prophesying God's judgment on Israel, the northern kingdom. And yet it's going to be 25 years before those prophecies actually come true. Now I would interject here, even though I've chosen not to necessarily focus upon the possible prophetic nature of Amos. Because some of these prophecies that deal with what God is going to do to the nation Israel, many see a kind of twofold fulfillment.

[2:03] Not only the immediate fulfillment, immediate in the sense that it's already happened, you know, of course for our day. But 25 years after these prophecies, God's word came true for the northern kingdom.

But there's a second meaning, I think we could say, and that would be the prophetic meaning and the ending and restoration of Israel.

And we're going to see next time we get to the very end of the book that I think is probably clearly a reference to a future event, even future in our day.

And so we'll get to that when we get to that last part. But just kind of a little bit of a review. This is not in your notes, but just kind of bring us up to speed as we enter into this final chapter in Amos. And you could look at the book of Amos with another kind of outline. And you might jot this down. This is kind of a three-part outline for the book of Amos.

[3:15] But it helps us kind of bring us up to speed to this fifth vision. You could say that in the first two chapters, Amos looks around.

He's looking around. And Amos begins by looking around the nations that circled the nation of Israel or the northern kingdom.

And so you remember, he then announces the judgments of God upon Syria, Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and even Judah, which is the southern kingdom.

And so all of these nations, seven judgments against seven nations. That's where Amos begins, remember, in the book. And I think we could safely say that if those Israelites who were listening to Amos' prophecy, then they probably at that point were feeling pretty good about themselves, you know.

We kind of get glad when judgment overtakes our enemies. And so they're probably thinking about that. But then Amos announces an eighth judgment. And it is, of course, against Israel.

[4:28] And the balance of the book is going to focus on the judgment against the northern kingdom, Israel. And Amos names their sin. And we've seen a kind of repetitious repetition of these kind of identifications of their primary sins.

And if I could list them here, it would be bribery, greed, adultery, immorality, selfishness, ingratitude, idolatry.

I could go on and on with the list. Rejection of God's Word. Rejection of God's prophets. In fact, not just simply rejection of His Word and His prophets, but actually causing the Word to cease or at least attempting to have God's Word come to an end and His prophets to keep silent.

So we've seen all of those. And if I might just add a little footnote, you know, it sounds a lot like the sin of America, actually. It's pretty easy to see a parallel. And not just America, but cultures, various dominant cultures over the history of mankind.

Have fallen into these same areas, getting away from God. And so the prophet looks around. And then he looks within. You could say chapters 3 through 6 deal with that.

[5:53] He looks within the hearts of the people. So he gets very personal. And Israel, I think at that point, would have been asking, how can our God send judgment upon us?

Emphasis on us. Are we not God's chosen people? Are we not God's blessed people? I think sometimes we find ourselves with that same kind of question anytime somebody raises the specter of the possibility of God judging our nation.

And we say, well, how could He do that for us? We're a blessed nation. We're a Christian nation. But Israel was enjoying a time of peace at this time. And they were also enjoying a time of prosperity as a nation.

Now, not everyone was in on that prosperity because there was oppression against the poor, against kind of the downcast of the society.

But it was a time of prosperity by and large for the nation. And it was a time of religious revival. But not in the sense that we would understand that or hope for that.

[7:05] Because God does not look at the outward appearance or the trappings of religion. But I'm saying this because this is what kind of lulled them into a false sense of assurance, confidence that God would not judge them because of all these things that were going on.

And they just look at their nation and say, well, everything's great. Everything's fine. Of course, remember, Amos said, you're at ease in Zion. Woe to you. But that's what they were.

They were just very confident, overly confident. And it was a false confidence, false assurance. But God doesn't look at the trappings of religion. He looks at the heart.

And God, of course, sees the truth of it, what's in the heart. And so God said to Israel, and I think God says to us, woe to you that are at ease in Zion.

And then Amos said, of course, prepare to meet thy God. Those are two statements that come out of the book of Amos that I think are most appropriate for our nation today.

[8:12] Well, really, for the church in our nation. Because judgment begins at the house of the Lord. And that is, woe to you, you're at ease in Zion.

And so prepare to meet thy God. So that's kind of an overview. Kind of gets us up to, almost up to speed. Because thirdly, if we look at chapters 7 through 9, Amos is looking ahead.

His focus is ahead, out into the future. Really, in terms of time, the near future, 25 years, pretty short period of time, really, when it comes to the judgment of God.

So he looks around, he looks within, he looks ahead. And Amos sees five visions. And we've looked at four of them already. There is the first one, the devastating plague of locusts.

But Amos prays, remember, and what does God do? He repents. He relents. And then there's the fiery drought. And Amos again prays.

[9:17] And again, God relents. And then he sees the vision of God holding a plumb line. And we talked about that, what a plumb line is. That's pretty straight in our minds, I think, now.

And God stands upon, so to speak, stands upon Israel and measures her according to his plumb line, which, of course, is his word, the word of God.

And Israel does not measure up. They're not plumb. They're out of plumb. Kind of like my living room. I've been putting crown molding up in my living room.

And I discovered that one end of this rectangular room is about two inches narrower than the other end. I thought, my goodness. It looked square to me, but it didn't measure up.

And so that's what was happening with Israel. They did not conform to God's word. But this time, Amos doesn't pray and God doesn't relent.

[10:17] And so it marks the reality that Israel's day of grace is now over. And then Amos sees a fourth vision, the basket of summer fruit.

We've already looked at that. And in essence, it is God saying the end has come. It has come. And so Israel, like summer fruit, has ripened for judgment.

And so there's going to be a famine in the land, he said. Remember? Remember, not a famine of bread. That's chapter 8, verse 11. Or thirst for water. But of hearing what?

The words of the Lord. There's a famine of the words of the Lord. Of hearing the words of the Lord. All right, now. Come. We've brought it up to date. And looking at chapter 9, we're ready to look at the fifth and final vision.

And we'll look at everything tonight that I think pertains to the vision itself. And then next time we'll look at the balance of chapter 9 that really is not just simply a statement of judgment.

[11:27] Once again, kind of a summary of God's judgment on the nation of Israel. But also there's some interesting hope that is mixed in that.

And we'll look at that next time. All right, so vision number five. And what is the vision? It's the Lord standing by the altar. All right, so that's some kind of vision.

I'm not sure what that vision consisted of. Of course, no one has looked and seen God face to face and lived. So some representation in this vision of the Lord Himself.

Amos knew it was the Lord Himself that was standing by the altar. Now, this fifth and final vision is a little different. It's unlike the previous four visions on a couple of scores.

In the first place, Amos saw God Himself standing beside the altar, not a symbol. A symbol like we had in the first four visions.

[12:28] Fire, locust, plum line, summer fruit. He sees God Himself. So this is a little bit different. This is a different kind of vision. And also, in this fifth and final vision, Amos did not speak any words.

In fact, you could look at the other visions, well, say all five of them together, and you see that the first pair of visions, in there, Amos spoke a lot of words.

In fact, more words than God in those first two visions. And then in the second pair of visions, vision three and four, Amos spoke a word or two.

Just barely spoke at all. But then we get to this final vision, and Amos did not speak a single word. And so I think it begs the question, what's the significance of that?

I mean, is there some message to see here? And I think it is this growing emphasis on divine retribution. That when it really comes down to it, this is all about God.

[13:33] And God is the one who has been offended. God is the one who is going to exact His judgment. And so as you go through the visions, man is totally out of it, and it's God and God alone.

So the emphasis on divine judgment or retribution. Now, the details of the vision and what they mean for Israel in the next several verses, we'll just kind of take these verses one at a time.

We'll really take it phrase by phrase. In verse 1, the Bible says, I saw, that's what Amos wrote down, I saw the Lord standing by the altar. That's the vision.

He saw the Lord standing by the altar. The altar, of course, signified a place of communion with God. And so kind of on the surface of it, on the face of it, even as Amos would speak this part of the prophecy, it could have been taken as something very positive.

The Lord standing by the altar, because the altar was a place of communion. So maybe this is a word of hope, but not so. Even though their initial impression would be that God accepts our worship.

[14:54] That would have been their initial perception. If Amos had just said, well, you know, I saw this vision and then said nothing about it, or had no words to describe it or the reason for the vision, then it could have been perceived as something very positive.

That their worship is acceptable. Now, when I say worship, of course, I'm talking about the form of worship, which was prescribed by God.

We're talking about sacrifice. The sacrifices brought to the altar. And God standing by the altar would have normally signified His acceptance of that sacrifice as an atonement for their sin, as a fulfillment of His law.

And I think Israel would have taken it that way. In fact, I believe they had a confidence about that. That, again, was false. And they're about to have a rude awakening.

Because in verse 1, it goes on to say, this is God speaking, of course, and He's giving a command. It's an imperative. We don't really know who He's giving the command to. I personally think that it is Himself and His angels, or an angel, that He's speaking to when He says and commands, strike the doorposts.

[16:15] Now, in that translation, that's the new King James translation, doorposts is a little bit misleading because the word really speaks of the tops of pillars.

You know, on the top of a pillar, you have kind of a decorative, kind of sculpted, they call it the capital of the pillar. And that's what the word really technically means.

And so He's saying, strike the tops of the pillars, and that the thresholds may shake and break them on the heads of them all.

Now, that's kind of interesting, isn't it? The idea being, of course, that God will knock the pillars of the temple down. What temple? We're talking about the temple of Bethel. This is where Jeroboam

It, that was kind of his private, his personal temple where he worshipped.

And I can't think of the priest's name now. Ahaziah, Ahaziah, something like that. Anyway, that's where he served.

[17 : 24] And that's where Amos is prophesying, just out the doors of this temple. And God is saying, strike the capitals, the tops of the pillars, and so that the thresholds may shake and break them and the heads, break them on the heads of them all.

So God's going to knock down the pillars, and that is going to then make the roof cave in. So we're talking about the destruction of the temple here. But it signifies what God is going to do all over the entire nation.

Because their worship had become false, it had become mixed with idolatry, and worse, it was worshipped out of a heart that was not right with God.

And so this includes then the worshippers themselves, the worshippers and their leaders, will be crushed. So God says, strike the pillars, bring the roof down, and everyone in there is going to be crushed, that is destroyed.

Then verse 1 goes a step further, and I will slay the last of them with the sword. Now what would that be a reference to? I think it means that in the event that some are able to escape the collapse of the temple, they are going to be slain.

[18 : 46] They're going to be put to the sword. I think we're talking about an invading army here, and we know that that's going to come. The Syrians are going to come. So anybody who escapes God's initial judgment by destroying the temple, they're going to meet their end as well.

The point being, no one will escape God's judgment. And by the way, Amos has made that point numerous times throughout the book.

And he's made it in many different ways. He's about to make it very profoundly here. There will be no escape from God's judgment whatsoever. Now verses 2-4 show that no hiding place will save the people.

And God does this in a rather interesting way. First of all, not the dwelling place of the dead beneath the earth.

That's no place of escape. In that verse he says, though they dig into hell. The word is Sheol. And I know there's much debate about that word Sheol, especially from those who do not believe in a literal hell.

[19 : 58] But Sheol, in many places in Scripture, directly refer to a specific place that the New Testament calls hell.

And then there are occasions when he's just speaking simply of the grave. Now I think here, because of the next thing he's going to say, I think here it's a reference to the place of the dead beneath the earth.

We're talking about those who have died outside of God's grace, who have not believed and have not followed Him. God says, if that's where you're going to hide, from there my hand shall take them.

So, so in a metaphor, kind of a, using hyperbole, really I guess would be the technical term, because no one is going to, you know, going to go to hell and God's going to, they can't go to hell and hide.

But he's saying, kind of hypothetically, even if you could go hide in the, in hell itself, I'm sovereign even over hell. And, and I can find you there and I will, I will take you.

[21 : 16] And then he says, not the, to the opposite extreme, not to the dwelling place of the dead above the earth. So these first two, I think, are references to the extreme hideout.

You know, if you could go to the depths of hell, or if you could go to the heights of heaven, that you'll not be safe there.

God says, from there I will bring them down. Now again, these are hypotheticals. You know, extreme examples.

Not that anybody could ever hide in these places, but the point is, there's no place, no place that you could go that I will not find you. And then he goes on, not the highest, now he goes back to the highest again, but this time, not quite as high.

Not, not the highest terrestrial hiding place. All right, so it's kind of interesting the construction. He begins with the highest of highest, or lowest of lowest rather than the highest of highest.

[22 : 24] And now, we're going to kind of bring it down to earth and start at the height and also to the depth. And, and so he says, though they hide themselves on top of Carmel, Mount Carmel.

All right, to go up to the top of the mountain to get away from this judgment. It won't work. In fact, he says, from there I will search and take them. And he's going to do that, use the Assyrian army to bring a total, total annihilation.

And not the lowest terrestrial hiding place. All right, so again, to the highest place imaginable on the earth, which would be the top of a mountain. And to the lowest place imaginable on the, on this earth.

And that would be to the bottom of the sea. So though they may hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, God says, from there I will command the serpent and it shall bite them.

So, you know, that's a metaphor. The point being, of course, is that there's no place to hide. And then there's a fifth one here.

[23 : 28] Not even captivity in a foreign country. though they go into captivity before their enemies. All right, so you can flee the nation altogether. Even go into captivity with one of your enemies and I'll still find you there because God says, from there I will command the sword and it shall slay them.

No way of escape. Every conceivable hiding place, figurative and literal. I believe the two, first two are figurative because no one can go to hell on their own.

No one can go to heaven on their own. But there are two extremes to make the point. And then the literal would be the top of the mountain, bottom of the sea. But every conceivable hiding place will not save them from judgment.

Once God has pronounced His judgment, there is no escape. It's interesting and I put this in your notes. It's kind of reminiscent and you're going to think, really?

And just think about this a moment. It's reminiscent of God's promises or promise in Romans 8, 35-39. And I'll just pull out some of those verses. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[24 : 37] We know this verse, don't we? It's a marvelous passage. For I am persuaded that neither height nor depth... Now, God has just said, you can go to the heights to the depths to flee my judgment and I will get you there.

I will find you. But now, He's not talking about judgment in this passage, is He? Height nor depth shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's a wonderful promise. And we embrace that and live for that. But here's the point I want to make. The redeemed cannot be separated from God's love.

You can't get away from His love. Even if you wanted to. And if you're one of His redeemed, you wouldn't want to. But there's no escaping His love.

Likewise, the rebel cannot hide from God's wrath. There's no place to get away from God is the point.

[25 : 35] And His love or His wrath. Those who are under His wrath. Alright, so why will they not escape this judgment?

God says there, I will set my eyes on them for harm or evil and not for good. Now, God is sovereign and there isn't anything God cannot do.

And if God is going to bring judgment, if His eyes are upon you for harm and not for good, then there is, there is no way to escape that.

No way to talk your way out of it. Remember what Hebrews 10.30 says, The Lord will judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Now, verses 5 through 6, these verses affirm God's power to carry out His judgment. What God says He will do, He is able to do and well able.

[26 : 46] In fact, there is no question about it. First thing, His identity is revealed here and you will find this kind of combination of titles and names for God in a number of places.

This very formula is found in many, many places in the Bible. But the verse begins, The Lord God of hosts This is the Lord God of hosts.

The Lord is the Hebrew word Adonai. It's not His name as a title for God. He's the Lord. The word God here, though it doesn't often appear this way in our English text, it's usually the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh, and it's usually translated with the word Lord in all capital letters.

But it's in the word God is here in our English text in all capital to clue you in that this is the name Yahweh. And so this is the sacred name for God.

So we have a title for God, we have the sacred name for God, and then tagged on to that and you have to take it as a whole to really get the idea of hosts or the word hosts, sabba'ah in the Hebrew and it means army.

[28:06] And so when you put that all together, this identifies His position and what is His position? Lord, supreme.

That's His position revealed to us by the title Adonai. But not only position, but His person. And we have His personal name here, Yahweh.

And when you tag on of hosts, then it identifies His power. And not just His measure of strength, but His absolute power.

And that's why I put in parentheses there the term omnipotence. All power. I mean ultimate power. All power.

Perfect power. Now note the link with verse 1. The vision started out by Amos saying, I saw the Lord.

[29:06] And it's the name Adonai. And then verse 5 tells us who that Lord is. He is the Lord God of hosts. Alright.

Not only His identity, but His sovereign power is described. His omnipotence. That's described in the next several verses. it's really profound.

The way He uses kind of a mixture of metaphors. And for example, the first one, He touches the earth and it melts.

Literally melts away. Not that it has or that He did, but it could. I mean He has the power that all He has to do is just touch it. It's just gone. I mean He did speak everything into existence.

And His power could just dissolve everything as if it were butter. And it's a metaphor. Very visual.

We can imagine that. Like taking a really hot knife and touching butter and it just kind of goes away.

[30:12] Oh, got some comment back there, Chris. I didn't even see the carrier over there.

I didn't know what that noise was. I did see your faces though. Something strange is happening. Alright, so this first kind of identification or description speaks of His absolute mastery over all the earth's physical substance.

I mean He's clearly pointing to the substance of this planet, of the earth. And His power could dissolve it like a hot iron on butter, just melt it away.

and all who dwell there mourn or grieve. Also in verse 5. And this is a reference to His absolute mastery over all the earth's inhabitants.

There's anyone who lives on this planet who can escape His sovereign power that He's not all powerful over. river. And it shall swell like the river.

[31:24] That would be the Nile. The word river is in capital with a capital R. It's a reference to the Nile. And subside like the river of Egypt. Again, that's the Nile. What's this speak to?

The absolute mastery over all the earth's physical conditions. You're talking about flooding. just using that as one example, but it would include then, by extension, everything on this planet like tornadoes and hurricanes and floods and high winds and snowstorms and ice storms.

All those things are under His power. He has absolute mastery over all of this earth's physical conditions. He who builds his layers.

Now, this is a little difficult to translate. If you look just at the translations in the various versions, you have some variances there. I think some use the term upper chambers.

I think the NASB has that. What about the ESV? Heavens. No, that's the skies. The layers, the word instead of layers, spheres.

[32:44] Spheres. What translation is that? Don't know? Okay. Upper chambers. All right. Well, what's He talking about?

Well, the best conclusion I think is that He's talking about the heavens, the upper chambers in the sky.

sky. It's a reference not just simply to our atmosphere, but even beyond. In fact, I think it includes all three heavens as 1 Corinthians 12. 2 says, because He's talking about the chambers, the layers in the sky.

So there's the first heaven, which is our sky, our atmosphere. The second heaven is the universe. The third heaven would be the heaven of heavens, the abode of God. And so He, His absolute mastery over the celestial, which includes all three heavens, and has founded His strata.

Here's another one that's even more difficult to translate, and there are several different words that are used in the versions. The word itself that's translated in the New King James, strata.

[33:56] Anybody have a King James? I forgot the word they use. They use for the chambers, they use stories, and for that one they use troops. Use what?

Troops. Yeah, troop. Yeah, and that's really closer to the, I guess, the literal meaning of the word. It should be translated or could be translated band.

In fact, a literal translation of the Hebrew word would be band, not a band that plays musical instruments, but a band that binds things together and it's used a number of places in scripture. One place it's used to describe the banding of a group of soldiers, unifying them. It holds them together.

It's a band of soldiers. In fact, in the New Testament, there's a reference to the Italian band. That's not some rock group. That's a band of soldiers.

[34:57] soldiers. And so, if that's the meaning here, and that's the literal meaning of the word, then it's talking about the terrestrial, that he has absolute mastery over the terrestrial in the sense that he holds all things together.

He's put a band on all the elements of this planet, the physical realm. We think that things hold together and operate according to some kind of precision or clockwork because that's just the way it was created and God got it all, sometimes we think this, or some people think this, God got it all started, created it, started the watch, so to speak, wound it up and it's just been running according to the order in which it was created.

But the point is that God continues to hold all things together, if God ceased to do that then there would be no reason why every atom, every molecule would just simply fly apart.

And so this I think is a reference to his absolute control, mastery over the physical realm. He holds all things together like a band.

And then who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth, the Lord is his name. This is the final one and I think it speaks of the absolute mastery over all the earth's elements.

[36:34] Sea being used here, but all elements would be included in that. Thank you.