

### A Vision of the Lord Judging Israel

#### Amos 9:1-10

**Amos 9:1-4** – *“I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said: “Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword. He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who escapes from them shall not be delivered. <sup>2</sup> Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them. Though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.*

*<sup>3</sup> And though they hide themselves on top of Carmel, from there I will search and take them. Though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them. <sup>4</sup> Though they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword and it shall slay them.*

*I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good.”*

#### Background Notes

Remember the simple outline that we’re following for Amos: eight prophecies (chapters 1-2), three sermons (chapters 3-6), and six visions (chapters 7-9). We’ve studied the prophecies and the sermons, and we’ve started to study the visions. The first three visions were recorded in Amos 7, and the well-known fourth vision, the vision of the basket of overripe fruit was in Amos 8.

The final two visions are found in Amos 9. In the first half of the chapter, Amos saw a vision of the Lord standing beside the false altar at Bethel, ready to judge the northern kingdom of Israel for its sins, and for its refusal to return to the Lord for forgiveness.

Amos was a “missionary” prophet. The Lord called Amos to leave his usual employment in the southern kingdom of Judah, and asked him to travel north to speak out against the sins of the northern kingdom of Israel. Amos came to Bethel, where there was an idolatrous shrine, and that’s where he gave his prophecies, sermons, and visions.

In the vision, the altar (v1) was not the true altar of the Lord of the Temple at Jerusalem. No, Amos saw the Lord standing beside the pagan altar at the shrine of the golden calf in Bethel. Some commentaries propose that Amos saw the Lord standing by the true altar in Jerusalem, but in view of the *context*, I believe that the Lord was standing by the false altar at Bethel, ready to judge the northern kingdom.

In the vision, the Lord indicated that He would destroy the idolatrous shrine, and that He would judge all those who were involved in false worship. No one would escape. The northern kingdom of Israel came to an end about 40 years after Amos related this vision of judgment. Assyria conquered the capital city of Samaria in 722 BC. We don’t know how much

of the destruction of Bethel took place during the invasion, or before that time during the violent earthquake, but we do know that the people who were left in the land even after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel actually continued their idolatry at Bethel.

But that's not the end of the story. The great revival under King Josiah of Judah swept north in 621 BC, and whatever remained of the shrine at Bethel was demolished. The false priests were destroyed and the idolatry at Bethel ended. *"And he broke in pieces the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images, and filled their places with the bones of men. Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he broke down; and he burned the high place and crushed it to powder, and burned the wooden image. As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were there on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar, and defiled it according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words" (2 Kings 23:14-16).* The "man of God" mentioned here was a young prophet from Judah who predicted this judgment when Jeroboam I set up the golden calves at Dan and Bethel (see 1 Kings 13).

Now move on to 2 Kings 23:19: *"Now Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger, and he did to them according to all the deeds he had done in Bethel. He executed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned men's bones on them; and he returned to Jerusalem."* This vision of Amos came true **on God's time schedule**.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. No one can escape the judgment of God.

The Bible teaches us that **no one** can escape the judgment of God. This truth is clearly taught in the first few verses of Amos 9. In the vision, Amos saw people trying to get away with their sin and trying to escape God's judgment - but **no one** escaped!

They couldn't escape from God by hiding in the caves on Mt. Carmel (v3). They couldn't escape from God by going to the bottom of the sea (v3). Even leaving their homeland and going into captivity (v4), there would be no escape from God. A person can go as high as possible ("*the heavens*") or as low as possible ("*Sheol*," or the depths of the earth) - but no one will ever escape from God, because God is omnipresent.

**God is omnipresent.** A concise definition of God's omnipresence is: **all of God, in all places, at all times.** Psalm 139:7-8 says, "*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.*"

If you know the Lord, the doctrine of the omnipresence of God is a great and comforting truth. However, if you don't know the Lord, the doctrine of the omnipresence of God is an awesome, fearful truth. You cannot hide from God. You cannot escape the judgment of God for your sin. Hebrews 9:27 says, *"It is appointed unto man once to die, after this the judgment."* And Hebrews 10:31 says, *"It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God."* No one can escape the judgment of God.

## 2. Everything is under the control of God.

**Amos 9:5-10** - *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. <sup>6</sup> 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.*

<sup>7</sup>*"Are you not like the people of Ethiopia to Me, O children of Israel?" says the Lord.*

*"Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir? <sup>8</sup> Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth - yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," says the Lord. <sup>9</sup> "For surely I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve, yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground. <sup>10</sup> All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, who say, 'The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.'"*

Amos 9:1-4 emphasized **God's omnipresence**. Amos 9:5-10 emphasized **God's omnipotence**. God is all-powerful. He is in complete control of everything.

**God is sovereign over creation** (v5-6). Think of the power involved in idea of the earth melting when the Lord just touches the earth with His finger! And **God is sovereign over all people** (v7). God not only brought Israel out of Egypt into the land of Canaan, He also brought the Philistines from Caphtor, (most likely a reference to the island of Crete), and He brought the Syrians from Kir (possibly Moab).

**Everything is under God's control, both nature and people.** *"The mountains shake before Him; the hills melt; the earth shakes before Him, the world and all who dwell in it" (Nahum 1:5).*

The point of this great truth is two-fold. God was saying to Israel:

- a. Don't think you're special. In fact, Israel, you're like the idolatrous Ethiopians to Me (v7). You're no better than the pagan nations, and you will be judged - just like everyone else.
- b. I have the power to judge you - and I **will** destroy you from the face of the earth (v8). However, because of My great grace, I will not completely destroy you. I will preserve a remnant of your people (v9), but your sinful nation will be destroyed. The sinners who say that this judgment won't happen will surely die by the sword (v10).

There was no question that this judgment would take place, because **everything** was (and is) under God's control. About 40 years after this prophetic vision, the pagan Assyrian Empire conquered and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel.

Do you see how these two doctrinal points go together? The truths that no one can escape God's judgment - and that everything is under God's control? Think it through:

- **God is omnipresent.** No one can hide from God or escape God's judgment because God is omnipresent. He sees everything. You may hide your sins from others, but you can't hide your sins from God.
- **God is also omnipotent.** He has the power to judge sinners, and He can use anything He wants to use in the process. He can use anything - from nature to nations - because God is in control of everything.

Ephesians 1:11 says, "*He works all things according to the counsel of His will.*" Has that verse sunk in yet? **Everything** is under the control of God!

## Practical Application

### Praise the Lord for His sovereign grace!

Where do we find the grace of God in Amos 9? The fact that you can't escape the judgment of an all-powerful God doesn't sound like grace, does it?

The grace of God is clearly seen in verses 8 and 9. In spite of Israel's persistent sin and their turning away from Him to worship idols, God promised: *"Yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," says the Lord. For surely I will command, and will sift the house of Israel among all nations as grain is sifted in a sieve - yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground.*"

Through His sovereign control of all things, God promised that He would graciously preserve a remnant from the northern kingdom of Israel. In previous "Talks" from Amos we've mentioned that the Jewish people today represent all twelve tribes of Israel, including descendants of the ten tribes from the northern kingdom.

Notice – in verse 9 God indicated that He would use the nations as His "sieve" – the method He would use to "sift the house of Israel." History certainly backs this point up, doesn't it? Over the years, God has been "sifting" the Jewish people who are scattered in many nations around the world. Out of this sovereign sifting process, God is preserving a remnant of His people for Himself - and **not a single kernel of grain that God has chosen for Himself will be lost!** Praise God for His sovereign grace!

What is true for the remnant of Israel is true for every believer. We are saved – but not by our works, and not because we chose God. We are saved because, in His great grace and mercy, **God chose us!**

Do you appreciate this truth, that our salvation is all of God? If you appreciate that truth, then - **praise the Lord for His sovereign grace!**