Behold Your God - Amos 9:1-15

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I'm sure many of you are breathing a deep sigh of relief at that. So I have a quiz for us. Who is the book of Amos about? After all these weeks of lions and locusts and plumb lines and baskets of ripe fruit, who is this book actually about? Is it a shepherd of Tekoa named Amos? Or is it a corrupt, complacent, and confident people in Israel? No, the book of Amos is very plainly about God.

What he is like, what he says, what he will do, and how he responds to his people and their wickedness, all the way through the book has simply been a roar of a lion against a comfortable, complacent, and corrupt people. All through oracles and warnings and visions and narratives, Amos has painted for us a picture of this lion's roar. Well, this morning, we get to see the lion.

No more warnings, no more visions, no more symbols. Chapter 9 opens very plainly. Amos no longer sees visions.

He says, I saw the Lord. Not locusts, fires, plumb lines, the Lord himself standing on the altar. So this morning, as we look at our passage, we're going to behold our God, the God of Amos, the God of the Old and New Testament, a God of judgment, a God who brings ruin, but a God who also brings salvation and restoration.

We see our text essentially breaks up into two main sections. We have a tale of two houses. Verses 1 through 10, we're going to see a house ruined, and then 11 through 15, we're going to see a house restored.

So let's look here first at the house ruined. Amos opens with a picture of God's judgment in 1 through 4. Listen again to what he says. He says, 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, and not one of them shall escape. Again, notice we see the Lord, but notice where Amos sees the Lord. Not in a palace or in the capital of some foreign power.

He sees him in the temple on the altar. Remember, this is a judgment on Israel. This is a picture of God standing on the temple in Bethel, a counterfeit place of worship, not Jerusalem down south in Judah.

It's in the temple. This is God's judgment on his people in the very place where they felt safest, but was also a very picture of their idolatry. And Amos looks up, and standing beside the altar, another way to translate that word would be on the altar in Bethel, is not a king or a priest, but God himself.

Normally in this position, you would expect a priest to offer a blessing from the altar, but that is not what God offers. He's not offering a blessing. He is not presiding over offerings.

He is instead demolishing the building. He says, strike the capitals until the thresholds shake. The capitals were the tops of the pillars that you would see in the temple, and the thresholds were the low parts of the floors and the doors.

So he's saying, he's striking the top of the building and down to its very foundation. It will crumble. And what follows this destruction, and it just keeps going, he shatters it on the head of the people in there.

All those who are left, he says, he will pursue and kill with the sword. And what comes after this is the worst game of hide and seek in history. They dig into Sheol, from there my hand shall 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 out and take them. They hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent and it shall bite them.

It's a picture of them going everywhere they could, from the lowest place you can imagine to the highest, and everywhere in between they're fleeing, trying to get away. And the Lord says, you cannot flee, you cannot hide, from the seas to the mountains, everywhere in between. Well maybe, he thought, well maybe if we just throw ourselves into captivity, let the nations take us, certainly that will be better than to fall into the hands of an angry God.

The Lord says, and if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword and it shall kill them. He ends with this terrifying phrase, I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good. An inversion of the blessing of Jeremiah, I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper for good and not for evil.

This is the exact opposite, he has a terrifying plan for Israel because they had not repented. He is saying, you can't hide from the one who created the hiding places. So that's the judgment that Amos paints for us.

And then in 5 and 6 we get a picture of the judge who brings the judgment, and he gives it to us in the form of a hymn, it says, the Lord God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile and sinks again like the Nile of Egypt, who builds his upper chambers in the heaven 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. It's interesting, some commentators find this to be out of place, like it doesn't fit in the text where it is, but I think when you read it, it's very plain what Amos is doing. He's given us a picture of this great judgment, and now he's giving us a picture of the judge who brings it.

Who is the one who's able to do these things? Who is the one who's standing on the altar? The Lord is his name, the Lord of hosts, the commander of the armies of heaven, the one who touches the earth and it melts like wax, and the people who live in it mourn, the one who causes the ground to heave like the Nile as it floods, who builds his palace in the heavens and lays its foundations on the floor of the earth, calls the sea and the sea comes. And you can hear pictures of Old Testament narrative and history in this, from Genesis 6, a world under water, the same power that formed the world can equally unform it. This is decreation language, judgment.

This is the God who stands on the altar. The language, too, in this hymn is evocative of Solomon's prayer when he blessed the temple, when they built it. Listen to what Solomon says, he says, but will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built.

This is the picture of the God that Israel claimed to worship, but Israel had forgotten all of this. Instead of seeing a God who was far too big for all of creation to contain, they treated the temple as a box that God had to live in and that's where he belonged, a cozy shrine for their mascot. But the God Solomon prayed to cannot be contained by a building and cannot be managed by religion.

The Lord is his name. So now we have a picture of the judgment and the judge, now Amos gives us a picture of the judged. Listen to verse 7, maybe one of the more shocking verses I think you find in Amos.

Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel, declares the Lord? Did I not bring Israel from the land of Egypt and the Philistines from Kaphtor and the Syrians from Kir? I mean, think about what an Israelite would have heard when they heard that. Aren't we God's people? Didn't he rescue us from Egypt? Isn't Exodus the proof that we are God's favored ones? And God answers them in effect, you think you're the only people I've moved across the map? The only people I've delivered? I brought the Philistines out from Kaphtor. I brought the Syrians out from Kir.

In my eyes, he says, you're at the same level as the Cushites, distant strangers, foreign people. I mean, this has a sort of weight as somebody, as if God were to come in here and say, Christ community, you think you're so great? Have I not saved trans people? Have I not delivered the liberals and the progressives, Muslims? I've moved them all. Now this isn't to say that Exodus didn't matter.

It was the greatest act of salvation in the Old Testament and is echoed all throughout the New. But Amos says that having been caught up in the saving event doesn't mean the same thing as being saved. Just being a part of the crowd in Exodus wasn't enough to actually have been part of God's people.

The Lord had called Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But instead, they had become what he says in verse 8, a sinful kingdom. Instead of being a kingdom of priests, they were a kingdom of sinners.

And of that kingdom, the Lord says, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground. God promises, I will purge the kingdom. He says, 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.

Here we go with more shaking language, just like he's going to shake the foundations and the capitals of the temple. He says, I'm going to shake my people like a sieve, trying to sort out pebbles and chaff and wheat. He says, not one pebble will fall to the ground.

In other words, he says, every sinner amongst my people will be caught. None will escape my eye. But notice, you might hear that and say, well, aren't we all sinners? Israel was all sinners.

God still saved them. But notice, there's this particular semantic range with the word sinner here that Amos has in mind, and he kind of clarifies it in verse 10. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword.

Well, who's the sinner? Those who say, disaster shall not overtake and meet us. So who's the sinner? It's not the person who knows that they are a sinner and cries for mercy, not the repentant one who hears the warnings of Amos and turns to the Lord. It's the one who says, none of this is going to happen.

You're bluffing. I don't believe you. None of this is true.

It doesn't matter. It's the person who's laughing at the thought of God judging them at all. And we could see that so often today.

So many of us feel disaster won't overtake us. Our economy is the envy of the world, as difficult as it may be right now. Stock market may be low some days, but it's still better than other nations.

Look at all the technology we have, modern medicine, the advances we have. Look at every crisis we've made it through. We've weathered them before, we'll weather the next.

We are, after all, the most powerful nation on earth. Surely, if anything, we're going to catch up with us. It would have by now.

So we're good. We're safe. But we're equally guilty of this in the church.

We're a Bible-believing church where we've been here for 25 years. We know the right doctrines. We have people in the pew.

We show up. Our building's paid for. None of this will happen to us.

We're God's people. But again, hear Amos here. This is exactly what Israel thought.

This is a God of judgment who will not bear sin. But did you catch, in the midst of that, the glimmer of hope? He's a God of judgment, but he's also a God of salvation. Look back at verse 8. Listen to what he says.

Except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob. Now, the next verse is to make it clear this is not a loophole for the careless, but it's God's promise to preserve and purify his people. That's what the judgment of the sinner there is for.

He's saying, amongst my people there are those who will not repent, who are complacent, who are corrupt, who are comfortable, and my judgment will purge them from my midst so that only a pure remnant remains, those whom he has called. Now maybe over the last few weeks you've been wondering what all of this actually means for us. Again, this is some prophet who's predicting an Assyrian invasion of an Israelite people 2,700 years ago.

Why do we read these stories? What do they actually mean for us today? Well, listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians. If you know the context for the 1 Corinthians, he's writing to a proud church, a church with abundant gifts, prosperous, a church sure of its own standing. It sounds familiar.

And he looks at the Exodus generation, the very people Amos is talking about here, those that God has delivered up, and he says this, Nevertheless, with most of them being the Exodus generation, God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. And then again in verse 11, Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages come.

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed, lest they fall. Paul is saying that all the judgments we see in the Old Testament, the wrath of God falling on his people or on his enemies, were written down for us. They're written for his church today.

They're not museum pieces for us to just admire. They're instruction for us to learn from. Paul says that out of that whole generation brought out of Egypt, God was not pleased with most of them.

In other words, again, having been in the crowd was not enough. Having seen the sea part wasn't enough. What saved anyone from the Old Testament all the way to the New was the same thing, whether they trusted in and obeyed the Lord.

So what are we supposed to learn from that is that we should not desire the evil that they desired, that we should humble ourselves and trust the Lord. And notice, even then, the judgment in

Exodus was a mercy. The way I like to say it is the judgment in Exodus was evangelistic.

Listen to Exodus 7. The Lord says, The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them. God says that his judgment against Israel is meant to reveal him. And what happened afterwards, we see in Exodus 12, where Moses says that a mixed multitude went up with him, many livestock and flocks and herds.

That word there for mixed multitude, he's saying that there were Egyptians with God's people in the Exodus. There were those who saw the judgment, who experienced the judgment, and went out with his people, repented and followed. That's what judgment is meant to do.

It reveals the Lord so that his people will repent and turn towards him. Brothers and sisters, that's why Amos is in our Bibles. That's why Amos 9 is here for us.

This judgment that God sent is not just destruction, it's revelation. It's a warning shot across the bow of every complacent and comfortable heart in the room. It's Amos saying, Behold your God, a God of judgment, and repent, turn.

But Amos does not paint an incomplete picture of God. He is a God of judgment, yes. That judgment leads us to respond in repentance, but God's kindness also leads us to repentance.

So see, we have the first house is ruined, the house of Jacob, the house of Israel. But now let's look to the second house, the house restored. While back, Ezra got really into watching this old house.

He used to watch it. He watches it with his grandfather down in Connecticut. And I started watching it with him, but you would think like, Oh, well, maybe Wes is learning how to be a better DIYer.

And that couldn't be further from the truth. I am still absolutely... I know how to swing a hammer, but I have no idea how to plan out a project. But it's fascinating watching these super skilled craftsmen take a house that has seen far better days, sagging, water-stained, rotting at the sills.

They don't bulldoze it. They don't destroy it. They restore it.

And they build it better than it was before. That's the thing I love about that show, is there's no grandiose pictures. It's just, we made this house, we fixed it up, and it's beautiful as it was in the old days.

Versus a show like Extreme Makeover Home Edition, where they go all glitz and glamour, and then ten years down the line, the family has to foreclose the house because they have to keep up with all these terrible repairs and things like that. No, they restore the house. They build up the bones, and they repair what's broken, and they keep that same old house back to its glory days.

And that's the picture that Amos has here in these final verses of his prophecy. A restored house. And we see both a promised Messiah who will do the restoring, and a promised land for those that he restores.

Here, verses 11 and 12. A promised Messiah. Again, notice the sudden change in mood.

Weeks of doom and gloom and judgment, and now we end with nothing but good news. I think one of the high points in all of scripture, I think this is one of the most beautiful passages. Some scholars don't even think Amos wrote this.

They're like, this couldn't be the same guy. But Amos is again writing about God. How could he stop at verse 10? The God of the Old Testament, the God of judgment, is also a God of salvation.

To leave out either would be to lie about who he is. He just has two houses in view. The first being the house of Jacob, the house of Israel, the people who have been sieved and shaken in verses 1 through 10.

And then now, the house of David. The royal line to which God had promised a redeemer and a kingdom. And remember the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7. And if you don't know that passage, it's just a linchpin in all of scripture.

It's one that you should read and know and meditate on. He says to David, the Lord will make you a house. I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

And I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And that was the promise. That promise carried on through Judah.

But if you know, again, where we are in the history of scripture at this point, you'd think, has he been faithful to that promise? I mean, look at what Amos calls the house of David. He says it's not a house. He calls it a booth.

I will raise up the booth of David. It's a shed, a shelter. Something you threw together in the vineyard and would leave behind at harvest to just get taken down by the wind.

By Amos' day, the kingdom had been completely split in two, and the great house of David was this pathetic, sagging, lean, rotting-at-the-sills house. But God says, I will raise it up. I will repair its breaches.

I will rebuild it as in the days of old. It's not a demolition. It's a restoration.

The old house made new again. But how? How does he do that? What does that actually look like in history? How will he rebuild it? How will he make the house of David great again? If you want to turn to Acts 15, Acts 15, James, and Acts 15, I think 16 and 17. I can't remember.

I didn't write it down in the reference. I'm silly like that. James writes this, quoting Amos 9. After this, I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen.

I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who make these things known of old. How is the house of David raised up and rebuilt again? It was through Jesus, David's greater son. And the nations who are called by his name, the remnant of Edom and all the nations, are not a conquered enemy, but a people gathered by the gospel.

That's what James sees. He sees the Gentile nations coming to Jesus, calling upon his name, building his church, and he says, this is what Amos is talking about. It's not a military expansion.

It's a missionary expansion. It includes a mixed multitude, just like the Exodus, the Gentiles, people like you and me. That's the hope Amos had.

Israel, Judah, and all the nations called by his name. This is how the two houses meet. The sieve shakes out the people and every unrepentant sinner, but the true grain, the people called by his name, they remain.

The remnant of Jacob find their home in the house of David, in the son of David, in Christ himself. The sinful kingdom is destroyed, and we are left with a kingdom of priests. But wait, there's more.

In verses 13 to 15, now we get a picture of the promised land. And this is where the passage really just bursts with color. It's just three of the most beautiful verses, I think, in all of scripture.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes, him who sows the seed. The mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it, and I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them. And they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.

And I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God. This is a greater-than-Eden picture. I mean, just think of the curse in Genesis 3.