

<AMOS: BACK TO 'THE START'>

This is the final study on the book of Amos and it is designed to be done over two weeks. In it, we will look at a number of Old Testament themes that are foundational for understanding Amos 9.

Last week, we looked at the wrath of God. On one hand, it is something we do not want to acknowledge, because we can then imply that God is unreasonable or not merciful. At the same time, through the Old Testament, the people of God looked to God to punish their enemies. In Is 26:10-11, Isaiah admitted:

“Your kindness to the wicked does not make them do good. Although others do right, the wicked keep doing wrong and take no notice of the LORD’s majesty. O LORD, they pay no attention to your upraised fist. Show them your eagerness to defend your people. Then they will be ashamed. Let your fire consume your enemies.” [NLT]

When the wrath of God is poured out on the wicked, it vindicates the choices of the righteous, to “show our trust in you by obeying your laws [and whose] heart’s desire is to glorify your name.” (Is 26:8)

GETTING STARTED: Have you ever been in a situation where the ‘in’ group has settled on a course of action, which you saw as not honouring to God and you were being pressured to follow that course? How did you respond? How did the group respond? What thoughts (especially about how the situation might ‘pan out’) motivated your decision? (eg did you fear or risk losing your job, friendships and/ or reputation?)

READ: AMOS 9:7-15

Through their history, the sons of Abraham had prided themselves on being the ‘chosen people’. Yet, in Amos 9:7, God said that he is just as concerned for the Ethiopians (Cushites). Just as he had brought Israel out of Egypt, he had brought the Philistines from Crete (Caphtor) and the Syrians (Arameans) from Kir (not certain, maybe) “southeastern Mesopotamia, east of the Tigris toward the top of the Persian Gulf.”¹

“Two painful lessons were forced on Israel by Yahweh’s questions: (1) God’s sovereignty and care extended beyond their boundaries to distant and hostile peoples; and (2) their exodus contained no uniqueness to protect them from judgment once they had ruptured the covenant. Any vestige of national pride, social smugness, or military security was snatched away by the divine interrogator.”²

For the Israelites, this must have felt like a slap in the face. God was active in the lives of other people groups, when Israel thought they had a monopoly on God’s promises, grace and blessings.

- ? We can forget that God is also active in the lives of the people around us, who don’t share our faith, but who, nonetheless, understand there is some natural law that “what goes around, comes around” and/ or basic human responsibilities to act rightly towards the environment and those in need (eg refugees, domestic violence victims). Think of someone you know who is passionate about a social justice issue. What have they taught you about that issue and how to respond?

Smith comments that Amos raises questions:

“about how the Israelites have theologized these (historical) events. They have reified these ideas into absolute guarantees (focusing only on God’s promises in his covenant relationship), thus disconnecting the nation’s future from their daily covenantal relationship with him.”³

Similarly, there is a pervading attitude among many Western Christians, that we are ‘saved by grace, not by works’, so we can choose whatever lifestyle we like, and God will still accept us, regardless. The book of Amos challenges that mindset and in Amos 9:8-10 we read:

“I, the Sovereign LORD, am watching this sinful nation of Israel. I will destroy it from the face of the earth. But I will never completely destroy the family of Jacob,” says the LORD. “For I will give the command and will shake Israel along with the other nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, yet not one true kernel will be lost. But all the sinners will die by the sword - all those who say, ‘Nothing bad will happen to us.’”

- ? What do these words teach us about God?
- ? What do we learn about the nature of God’s judgement on the wicked (regardless of where they lived or what nation they belonged to)?
- ? In Jesus’ teaching, he told some parables about wheat and chaff (eg Matt 3:11-12, Matt 13:24-30) Jesus talked about the chaff being burnt up with “unquenchable fire”. The term “chaff” and the picture of sifting or winnowing is mentioned many times through Scripture.⁴ What promise is given in Amos 9:8-10 about what will happen to the “wheat” / true kernels?

¹ Hubbard, D. A. (1989). *Joel and Amos: an Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 25). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p138.

² Hubbard, D. A. (1989). *Joel and Amos: an Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 25). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p247.

³ Smith, G. V. (2001). *Hosea, Amos, Micah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. p403.

⁴ <https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/Chaff>

In Amos 9:8b, we come across a promise: “Yet I will not totally destroy the descendants (or house) of Jacob,” declares the LORD.” This was in line with what God had promised, eg in Lev 26:44.⁵

Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the LORD their God.

- ? In the midst of a book of judgement, we hear a message of hope. What do the words of Lev 26:44 tell us about why God would not completely destroy his chosen people? If God was committed to keeping his promises to his chosen people, to what extent can we rely on and trust God to keep his promises to us?

- ? Read Amos 9:11-15 again – but in New Living Translation.
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=amos+9&version=NLT>
 - o What things stand out for you in this passage?

Through Scripture, the words “remnant” and “return” become important themes. The nation, as a whole, was wicked and corrupt, so would be sent into exile. Ultimately, a remnant would return – both to the land and to true worship of God, so “they will faithfully trust the LORD”. (Is 10:20-23)

- ? Amos 9:11-15 anticipates the restoration of David’s kingdom, prosperity of the land and stability/security of tenure in the promised land. This prophecy echoes the blessings associated with the Davidic covenant in 1 Chron 17:9-15. (below)
 - o What similarities are there between Amos 9:11-15 and the promises given to David?

 - o Who is the ultimate ‘son of David’ through whom the promises will be fulfilled?

*I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall wear them down no more, as they did formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will subdue all your enemies. Moreover, I declare to you that the LORD will build you a house. When your days are fulfilled to go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. I will not take my **steadfast love** from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever. In accordance with all these words and all this vision, Nathan spoke to David. (1 Chron 17:9-15)*

Through the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *Chesed* captures the essence of the unique relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Read out the following explanation and highlight the things that stand out:

“Biblical scholars have often complained that the word חֶסֶד in the Hebrew Bible is difficult to translate into English, because it really has no precise equivalent in our language. English versions usually try to represent it with such words as "lovingkindness," "mercy," "steadfast love," and sometimes "loyalty," but the full meaning of the word cannot be conveyed without an explanation ... The nearest (Greek) New Testament equivalent to the Hebrew *chesed* is *charis* (grace), as Luther realized when he used the German *Gnade* for both words.”

“God’s loving-kindness is that sure love which will not let Israel go. Not all Israel’s persistent waywardness could ever destroy it. Though Israel be faithless, yet God remains faithful still. This steady, persistent refusal of God to wash his hands of wayward Israel is the essential meaning of the Hebrew word which is translated loving-kindness. ... The widening of the meaning of the Hebrew *chesed*, used as the covenant word and especially of the covenant between God and Israel, is due to the history of God’s dealings with his covenant-people. The continual waywardness of Israel has made it inevitable that, if God is never going to let Israel go, then his relation to his people must in the main be one of loving-kindness, mercy, and goodness, all of it entirely undeserved. For this reason the predominant use of the word comes to include mercy and forgiveness as a main constituent in God’s determined faithfulness to his part of the bargain. It is obvious, time and again, from the context that if God is to maintain the covenant he must exercise mercy to an unexampled degree.”⁶

- ? What things did you notice as you read this? What did you learn about God’s character?

⁵ Stuart, D. (1987). *Hosea-Jonah* (Vol. 31). Dallas: Word, Incorporated. p394.

Here enters the theme of the escape of a remnant, so clearly promised in the Mosaic covenant (Lev 26:44; Deut 4:31; 30:3; 32:36–43) and so strongly reaffirmed by the pre-exilic prophets (e.g., Hos 2:1–2 [1:10–11]; Joel 2:18–19; Mic 2:12–13; Isa 11:10–11). God’s plan for his people envisioned their destruction as a nation and their exile, but explicitly avoided their total annihilation.

⁶ The meaning of ‘chesed’ in the Hebrew Bible <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chesed.html>

In Rom 9-11, the apostle Paul told the Romans that we, as Gentiles, are 'grafted into' the people of God and became heirs of the promises God gave to Israel. In Rom 11:5-6, he linked the concept of 'remnant' with the concept of 'grace', or unmerited favour.

"So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace." (NRSV)

? What is 'grace'? What does it mean for us to be "a remnant" and "chosen by grace"?

REFLECT, SHARE & PRAY: Each time there is a bad storm, there seems to be news that yet another tree has fallen on a house or car, sometimes with deadly consequences. In this passage, God promises that he "will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted" (Amos 5:15). In one blog post we read, "Under ideal soil and moisture conditions, roots have been observed to grow to more than 20 feet (6 metres) deep"⁷ The apostle Paul used the same picture when he wrote (I pray that) "Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love." (Eph 3:17) and "continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith". (Col 2:6-7)

? Is 26:3-4 tells us: *You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! Trust in the LORD always, for the LORD GOD is the eternal Rock.*

What keeps you stable when your life is in turmoil? What does it mean to be "rooted and grounded in love" and "established in the faith"? Ask God to be your rock in the midst of whatever storms are in your life at the moment.

⁷ Leda Marritz, (August 8, 2012) "How Deep Do Tree Roots Really Grow," *Green Infrastructure for Your Community*, <http://www.deeproot.com/blog/blog-entries/how-deep-do-tree-roots-really-grow>