

XII. The LORD Is His Name

20-Feb-05

Amos 8:4-9:6

Keddie Chapters 11-12

Theme: “The LORD is His name” summarizes the holy character of God who comes in judgment on the Day of the Lord to punish apostate Israel.

Key Verses: Amos 9:5-6 ⁵The 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. ⁶He 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.

Review

Last week we looked at **Amos 7:1-9; 8:1-3 – the four visions of judgment**. These visions came in two pairs, similar in both content and format. **The first two visions were of the locust swarm and of the consuming fire. Both of these devastating events were formed by God and controlled by His sovereignty. In both cases, Amos prays that God would relent from sending the disaster upon Israel. And in both cases, God does relent and says “It shall not be.”**

The third and fourth visions were of objects: the plumb line and the basket of summer fruit. In these two visions, Amos is asked to identify what he sees, but he is given no further opportunity to intercede. Judgment may have been delayed, but it was still certain. **The plumb line was God’s measuring stick that He used to judge the righteousness of His Church – Israel. But the people of God were found to be way short of vertical, and their leading institutions of sin – the false religious shrines, and the house of the king – are condemned for demolition. The basket of summer fruit speaks to the timing and surety of the coming destruction. In that day, the day of God’s judgment, when the sins of God’s people are fully ripe, the end will come.**

God has used His plumb line throughout history – the letters to the seven churches in Revelation are one example. **He continues to measure His church today.** We must always stand firm, on guard to prevent liberalism or other heresies from creeping in and causing the church to veer from the vertical. **We always need to safeguard the purity of our faith and practice. We always need to be coming to the Savior, like Amos, and say, “We are small; forgive us. We are little; restore us. We are not worthy; purify us. Make us to stand in Jesus Christ.”**

Introduction

Today, we begin the seventh and final major section of the book of Amos. We will cover this section today and next week. The final five verses (9:11-15) are the most uplifting in the book, and we will study those next Sunday. Although the tone of those verses may make it seem as if they are a separate section, **a structural analysis of 8:4-9:15 indicates** that the last five verses of Amos complete **the final seven-part chiasm of the book**. The last five verses form two units of the chiasm and correspond to the opening two units in both theme and specific language. Today, we will look at the first four units of this final chiasm, saving the best for last.

A. Land’s coming destruction: Yahweh will overthrow the land because of the sins of the rich inhabitants (8:4-8)

- theme: sins involving the land agricultural products

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- B. Yahweh will punish Israel (8:9-14)
 - begins: in that day
 - ends: “they will fall and not rise again”
- C. Yahweh’s judgment: no escape (9:1-4)
 - killing by the sword
 - I will command
 - wherever they flee, Yahweh will find and kill them
 - ends: “I will set my eyes against them”
- X. CENTER: hymnic exclamation: seven poetic lines (9:5-7)
- C’. Yahweh’s judgment: righteous remnant will be spared (“no pebble of grain will fall to the ground”) (9:8-10)
 - dying by the sword
 - I will command
 - Yahweh will scatter Israel in the nations, and all the sinners will die
 - begins: “the eyes of Yahweh are against ...”
- B’. Yahweh will restore devastated Israel (9:11-12)
 - begins: in that day
 - begins: “I will cause to rise the booth of David that has fallen”
- A’. Land’s future restoration: Yahweh will restore Israel and the land’s fertility (9:13-15)
 - restoration of land’s agricultural products

Exposition

A. The Trembling Land (8:4-8)

This first unit (8:4-8) once again covers familiar ground. As **Amos** again describes Israel’s twin sins of vain religion and social injustice, he **uses some of the same words and images that he used in describing these sins in the very first section of his prophecy, thus tying this section back together with its chiasmic pair.**

1. Ethics (8:4-6)

This new section starts off with a declaration to “hear” the Word of God. Amos is saying, “Heads up! Pay attention! I’ve got something new to tell you.” But of course, he is just hammering home again his same message against Israel. He addresses his message to those “who swallow up the needy, and make the poor of the land fail.” In the Hebrew, the word translated in the NKJV as “swallow up” is also used in Amos 2:7, although the NKJV translates it differently there. A comparison with the NIV translation helps here:

Amos 8:4 (NIV) Hear this, you who *trample* the needy and do away with the poor of the land.

Amos 2:7a (NIV) They *trample* on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.

This is one of Amos’ deliberate echoes back to the first section of his prophecy, tying the first and last parts together. He further ties this section back to the first in verse 6 by essentially quoting 2:6:

Amos 8:6 ⁶That we may *buy the poor for silver*, And *the needy for a pair of sandals*—
Even sell the bad wheat?

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Amos 2:6 ⁶Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they *sell the righteous for silver, And the poor for a pair of sandals.*”

At the end of the book of Amos, the people of God are no different than when the book opened. The rich men of Samaria trample on the *needy*, make the *poor* to fail, buy and sell the *poor* for silver, and trade the *needy* for something as inconsequential as a pair of sandals. In other words, they treat people as commodities, things to be used and tossed away when their value has been extracted.

How do they accomplish this oppression of the less privileged? Through the aggressive pursuit of immoral business practice. Their **business ethics are immoral on at least two accounts. First, they are cheating their customers by underselling the quantity and overpricing the value of their goods:** “making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit” (8:5b). Obviously, **this is a clear violation of the Eighth Commandment** which prohibits stealing. But as we have already seen in the book of Amos, the fortunes of these Samaritan robbery barons was built upon theft: “‘For they do not know how to do right’ says the LORD, ‘who store up violence and *robbery* in their palaces’” (3:10). What they are doing here in Amos 8:5 is **also a clear violation of the case law in Leviticus:**

Leviticus 19:35-36 ³⁵You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. ³⁶*You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*

The command to follow honest business practice is rooted in the spiritual character of God. God is holy, and He commands His people to be holy as well. That extends into every area of our lives, including our work lives.

Shell has well defined business principles and ethics. We are continually reminded that our core values are honesty and integrity, and we are warned against any type of unethical business behavior. We have annual ethics training and ethics compliance notes that go out. And despite all of this focus on business ethics, honesty, and integrity, within the past year the CEO of the Royal Dutch Shell Group and one of his right hand men were forced to resign in disgrace after it was discovered that they lied about the proven oil reserves of our company and then covered it up from the public. While this scandal did not rise to the level of business abuse immortalized by Enron, it is embarrassing and flies in the face of our company’s commitment to business ethics. Ancient Israel had no monopoly on dishonest weights and measures.

The second way in which their business practices are immoral is in the way they violate God’s law with respect to the Sabbath – breaking the Fourth Commandment. The New Moon (or first day of the month) was a religious festival that was treated like a Sabbath (cp. Num. 28:11-15; 29:5-7). God prohibited Israel to work on the Sabbath or festival days. And yet, what is the attitude of these robber barons? They are impatient for the Sabbath to be over so they can continue cheating their customers. **Rather than looking forward to the coming of the Sabbath in order to enjoy the Sabbath rest, they are anticipating the ending of the Sabbath to re-engage in their sinful pursuits. Their attitude toward the Sabbath makes a mockery of God’s law and the worship that is prescribed on that day.** The Sabbath and the worship of God hold no importance in their lives. **They have no use for the Sabbath, nor for the God of the Sabbath. Thus, their vain, empty religion is exposed yet again as having no impact on their lives.**

2. Earthquake (8:7-8)

For the third time in the book of Amos, God swears by Himself – this time referred to as “the pride of Jacob” (cp. 4:2; 6:8). It is a sign of God’s great displeasure with Israel that He takes this oath. Of course God will never forget any of their evil works. God is omniscient – He cannot forget. But **sometimes God says that He will forget our sin, meaning that He has forgiven it and does not hold it against our account any longer.** Forgive and forget. This is what God does for us through Jesus Christ in the New Covenant:

Jeremiah 31:33-34 ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. *For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.*

So, **what God is swearing here when He says He will not forget their sin is that He will not forgive their sin.** This is a terrible oath, one that causes the very earth to tremble and shake: “Shall the land not tremble for this, and everyone mourn who dwells in it? All of it shall swell like the River, heave and subside like the River of Egypt” (8:8). The land rises and falls like the Nile river ebbs and flows, flooding its banks every spring. **The land trembles as if in mourning for the terrible judgment that will descend because the Lord will not forget nor forgive the sin of the people who claim to be His own.**

Amos prefaced his entire prophecy by dating it “two years before the earthquake” (1:1). Perhaps Amos is referring here in 8:8 to the earthquake by which he dates his prophecy. If so, then the people of Israel could remember that Amos had predicted an earthquake would come in response to the wrath of God against them for their sin.

B. Famine of the Word (8:9-14)

In the next unit of this chiasm, Amos gives us one more natural phenomenon and then follows that up with two spiritual disasters. Each of these three sub-units is introduced by the phrase “in that day” or “behold the days are coming.” This is Day of the LORD language, as we have previously seen in Amos 5:18-20 and extensively in the book of Joel. The Day of the LORD that the people foolishly longed for is coming.

1. Solar Eclipse (8:9-10)

In verse 9, Amos describes a solar eclipse: “I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight.” Just as Amos’ description of a “spiritual earthquake” was confirmed by a real earthquake two years later, astronomy tells us that two solar eclipses occurred during Amos’ lifetime: one in 784 BC and the other on **June 15, 763 BC.** **This latter eclipse could easily have occurred within a few years of the original date of this prophecy. It is as if the literal fulfillment of Amos’ words was given by God to underscore the even more significant spiritual truth contained in the announcement of the eclipse.**

Darkness. **Amos has already told us that the Day of the LORD is darkness and not light. A solar eclipse is the epitome of darkness and not light.** Joel spoke about the sun becoming dark three times in his brief prophecy (**2:10; 2:31; 3:15**). Remember what we said when we studied Joel? **The darkness of the sun described in these apocalyptic passages reminds us of the**

plagues on Egypt, when God visited judgment upon that land. We should have Egypt in view here, because Amos has just mentioned that land in the previous verse.

Furthermore, remember what happened **when the Israelites reached Mt. Sinai during the Exodus? Mt. Sinai was covered with smoke, so that it became dark and the heavenly bodies were occluded from view. Furthermore, the very creation trembled:** “the whole mountain quaked greatly” (Ex. 19:18b). This language is a poetic rendition of what actually happened when the Lord came to Mt. Sinai, and it is thus **a picture for us of what happens when the Lord comes.** As Robertson puts it: “God's coming in judgment disturbs the very foundation of nature's order.”

When God came to Mt. Sinai, He did not come in judgment, but to bless His people and enter into covenant with them. However, this time, *in that day*, God is coming in judgment upon His apostate people. **The land shakes and the sun is quenched before that great and terrible Day of the LORD. It is a day of mourning and wailing, of judgment and destruction.**

Notice how the Exodus theme is continued in the lamentation of verse 10: “I will make it like mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day.” **The tenth plague of Egypt is in view here – the death of the firstborn son.** When the Day of the LORD came to Egypt, Israel was blessed with the covenant of God at Sinai while Egypt was judged with the death of the firstborn. **In this Day of the LORD, the role of Egypt is now being played by wayward Israel.**

2. *Spiritual Famine (8:11-12)*

Amos has told us that God had previously sent physical famine and drought upon the land in an attempt to draw Israel back to Him (4:6-8). Now He announces something even worse: spiritual famine and spiritual drought. First **He announces the spiritual famine in verses 11-12.** Again notice that the announcement is prefaced by the phrase “Behold the days are coming.” This is Day of the LORD type language.

“I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.” At first glance, this seems to be a bit strange. **The people of Israel obviously already were not listening to the word of God.** They weren't listening to Amos. They hadn't listened to Joel. They weren't going to listen to Hosea. They didn't care about the word of God. They had no use for the word of God. **So why would the withdrawal of God's word be any different than the status quo?**

I think a couple of responses are in view. **First, this is a terrible judgment against the people of Israel.** “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). **When the word of God is withdrawn from a culture, there is no hope of revival.** As Motyer puts it: “When the blessing is withdrawn, there is no way to recover it.” **Second, the word of God serves as leaven in the world. It is the basis and foundation for a moral and just society.** When a society abandons the word of God, it goes downhill fast. Look at our own society. Look at other cultures in history. Keddie says: “Human societies owe much more than they realize to the presence in their midst of the Word of God and those that believe and preach the Savior revealed in that Word.” **A famine of the word of God is a death sentence for society.**

By the time Israel realizes what they have lost, it will be too late: “They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it” (8:12). From sea to sea likely means from the Dead Sea in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. Interestingly the next line says from “north to *east*,” not “north

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to *south*.” If south were included, then all four compass points would be indicated. I believe it is significant that **they look everywhere for the missing word of God except the *south*. Why?** Because the south is where the red states are? No, **because in Judah, in Jerusalem, to the *south*, was the one place in Israel’s day where the word of God could still be found.** They look everywhere for the missing word of God except for the one place it can be found. How like that is our society today? **Where do people go to look for answers to the big questions of life and death? Anywhere but the one place those eternal truths can be found: the Scriptures of the Bible.**

Motyer exhorts us to cling to the word of God: **“Have we got a Bible still in our hands? Let us prize it, read it and commit its precious truths to heart and mind.** It is not an inalienable possession; it may not be ours forever. **Is the Bible still preached in our church? Let us love to hear the Word of God; let us be urgent to bring others within earshot of it.** It is not our guaranteed privilege; the voice of the preacher could be silenced. The truth of God is our only fence against error.”

3. *Spiritual Thirst (8:13-14)*

The consequence of a spiritual famine of the word is a spiritual thirst that is unfulfilled. Jesus Christ provides the water of life that satisfies and fulfills a person:

John 4:13-14 ¹³Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. *But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.*”

Spiritual famine of the word leads to a drying up of that water of life, resulting in spiritual thirst. When the word of God does not come and fill the hearts and minds of people, people seek to satisfy that thirst with something other than the truth. Ecclesiastes puts it well:

Ecclesiastes 4:9 ⁹He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put *eternity in their hearts*, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

Humans are created with “eternity in their hearts.” Only an eternal God can fill an eternal hole. If God does not fill that gap in people’s hearts, they begin searching for something else that can satisfy that longing. Some people fill that hole with drugs, or work, or sex, or power, or relationships, or money, or things. Some people go on a “search for meaning,” trying to understand why they are here. That is why cults are some popular, and so dangerous. They can seem okay on the outside, and they can seem to fill that emptiness that causes people to search for meaning. **But only the truth of God’s word and the presence of the Holy Spirit indwelling a person can ultimately fill that missing jigsaw puzzle piece in our hearts.**

That search for meaning, that quest for identity, that desire to fill the missing place in the heart is at the core of the spiritual thirst described in verses 13 and 14. The young people of Israel, those who have inherited the famine of the word as a consequence of their elders, are pictured as searching for an oasis in a spiritual desert. **But because there is a famine of the word, their spiritual thirst leads them in all the wrong places.** Three of them are listed in verse 14: the “sin” of Samaria, Dan, and Beersheba.

First, consider **the “sin” of Samaria.** This phrase can also be translated as “those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria.” Ashimah is the name for a pagan goddess. Apparently **syncretism – the combination of true religious forms with false ones – was alive and well in Samaria.**

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Second is Dan. **Dan** is the “official” shrine of Israel in the northernmost part of the land. It was set up along with the Bethel site by Jeroboam I about 200 years earlier. **It represents the corrupt state religion of Samaria – the kind we’ve seen Amaziah the priest of Bethel defend.**

Third – Beersheba. We’ve already encountered Beersheba once before in Amos 5:5. It was a place of pilgrimage in southern Judah. **“As the way of Beersheba lives” indicates that the pilgrimage itself had become a means to an end. Like a relic or an icon, the object of worship has been lost in superstition or tradition. The pilgrimage became proverbial, but it did not satisfy their thirst.** Dan to Beersheba encompasses the northernmost and southernmost areas in the combined kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Thus no matter where they look, from top to bottom, their spiritual thirst goes unslaked. **No oasis can be found in this spiritual desert.** A famine of the Word ends in a drying up of the water of life: “they shall fall and never rise again.”

C. Vision of the LORD of the Altar (9:1-4)

The third unit in this final chiasm intensifies the theme of the Day of the LORD, because we see the Lord Himself appear.

1. *From Altar to Earthquake (9:1)*

This is the fifth and final vision that Amos saw. The first four visions we looked at last week were structured in two pairs, focusing on either events or objects. **This vision is simply of the Lord Himself. The location of the vision is next to the altar.** The meaning of the altar is plain: **it is the place of sacrifice, the place of atonement, the place of reconciliation between God and man.** It is upon the altar that sins are covered over, restitution is made, and forgiveness is granted. **However,** none of those things are going to occur at this altar. **This altar is not a place of blessing; it is a place of judgment.** Likely it is the false altar of the shrine of Bethel, where true reconciliation could never come to pass because it was outside of God’s proscribed Word.

Just as at Mount Sinai, when God speaks, the earth trembles, causing the thresholds of the false shrine to shake. The theophany of God’s arrival in judgment causes the earthquake and brings the shrine down upon the heads of its false worshipers. Motyer writes: “Long, long ago Samson had pulled the temple of Dagon down from below, but when the Sovereign calls up His forces the building receives great shattering blows from above, on *the capitals*, driving them down upon their own *thresholds* until the whole edifice crumbles in on its occupants’ *heads*.” Those who escape the collapse of the shrine will not escape the sword or captivity. That is the summary statement in verse 1, and it is the theme of verses 2-4.

2. *From A to Z (9:2-4)*

Just as no one who is “in Christ” can slip away and lose their salvation, no one who is judged in God’s wrath can slip away and avoid judgment. In a couplet of *merisms*, Amos convinces us of that fact. **A merism is saying of two extremes that includes everything in between. We often say “from A to Z” or “from beginning to end.”** These are merisms that describe the completeness of the subject we are discussing. **And the theme of the merisms in verses 2 and 3 is that there is nowhere that one can run and hide from God. You cannot escape the long arm of the Law anywhere between heaven and hell or from the top of the mountain to the bottom of the sea.**

This is a characteristic of the Day of the LORD. When Amos introduced the subject of the Day of the LORD in 5:18-20, he described this concept of its inevitability. You could run from the lion, but the bear would get you. Just when you were safe from the bear, the serpent would bite you. And look what we have here in 9:3: “Though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command *the serpent*, and it shall bite them.” Amos is reminding us of the Day of the LORD with his language here. And we are reminded once again of the futility of trying to outwit or outrun God. **When God comes in judgment, there is no escape. Death, captivity, and exile cannot be avoided.**

D. Sovereignty Hymn – Third Stanza (9:5-6)

Today we will end with the central unit of the final chiasm. Fittingly, **this central unit is the third stanza of the sovereignty hymn we first saw in 4:13 and 5:8-9. The pivot or central point of the chiasm is the name of the LORD.**

The first three units of the chiasm have been increasing their intensity of judgment in a description of the Day of the LORD. The first unit describes the sins of the people and culminates with an earthquake – the sign of God’s coming presence. The second unit continues the theme of God’s coming presence in judgment by the darkening of the sun. God’s judgment results in both spiritual famine and spiritual thirst, leading to death. In the third unit, God Himself appears; He comes – it is the Day of the LORD. There is nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. **Judgment on the Day of the LORD is inescapable. That is the theme of the central hymn.**

God is described as “the Lord GOD of hosts.” He is God Almighty, the Omnipotent One, the All Powerful Lord. **Three different acts of God’s sovereignty over creation are described, all of which tie back to the first three units of the section. God is sovereign over: 1) the earth; 2) the heavens; and 3) the seas. That in itself is a merism – these three categories include all of creation.**

God is sovereign over the earth: “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” (9:5). Here we have God’s power over the earth, and sovereignty over the earthquake. **Amos 8:8 is nearly the same as Amos 9:5 and obviously derived from this hymn. The earthquake of Amos 9:1 also falls in this category of God’s sovereignty.**

God is sovereign over the heavens: “He who builds his layers in the sky and has founded his strata in the earth” (9:6a). The word “layers” can be variously translated as “palace” or “temple;” the Hebrew word literally means “steps” or “stairs,” often associated with a royal dwelling place or temple. Regardless of the exact translation, the thought is one of power over the heavenly places. **This is exactly what God demonstrates in 8:9 when he causes the sun to darken.**

God is sovereign over the seas: “Who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth” (9:6b). **God’s mastery over the seas was described in the merism of Amos 9:3. This same couplet was used in the previous stanza of the sovereignty hymn in 5:8.** But I guess it was good enough to be used again here.

How does the hymn end? “The LORD is His name.” That’s it. That’s all. Nothing more need be said. He is righteous. He is holy. He is omnipotent. He is sovereign. This is the end of the line for Israel. **Because they have sinned against God and against man, countless time after**

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time without remorse, without confession, without restitution, the Day of the LORD comes and the judgment of God falls upon Israel. In 722 BC, Samaria is destroyed, the Israelites are either killed or captured and deported, and the nation of Israel ceased to exist. **The LORD is His name.**

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to sing once again Amos' hymn *The LORD God Is His Name*. It is arranged to the tune of "Behold a Branch is Growing" (#153 in the Trinity Psalter). As we sing, reflect on God's sovereignty from A to Z, from top to bottom, from earth to sky to sea. He is the Sovereign God. The Lord God is His name.

Behold who forms the mountains,
Who makes the wind to blow;
Declares His thoughts to mankind,
And darkens morning's glow;
Who treads upon the land,
High places He commands—
The LORD God is His name.

He made the constellations –
Pleiades, Orion.
He brightens death's dark shadow,
And blackens morn's clear sun,
Seawater He calls forth,
And pours o'er all the earth—
The LORD God is His name.

Rains ruin on the mighty,
And fury on their fort.
He is the LORD Almighty,
The God who does this work.
Who touches, melt the earth,
And all who dwell there mourn—
The LORD God is His name.

Who floods the River's bound'ries,
Subsides the Nile's flow.
Who builds stairs in the heavens,
And founds them here below.
Seawater He calls forth,
And pours o'er all the earth—
The LORD God is His name.

Next week: Lesson 13 – The Booth of David – Amos 9:7-15 – Keddie Chapter 13

Close in Prayer.