

Amos 7-9



‘The words of Amos ... who had visions [ḥāzâ]’ (Amos 1:1).

Vision 1. Locust Plague (Amos 7:1-3)

Alas This is what the Lord YHWH showed me: he was forming locusts just when the late-sown crops were beginning to sprout (it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings). When they had finished eating the vegetation of the land, I said, “O Lord YHWH, forgive, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” YHWH relented concerning this; “It shall not happen,” said YHWH.

He appeals to YHWH’s mercy (see Exodus 34:6-7). One has the impression that YHWH is reluctant to punish. He is almost looking for some excuse not to act. YHWH accedes to Amos’s plea, and the people receive a reprieve.

Vision 2. Judgment Fire from heaven (Amos 7:4-6)

This is what the Lord YHWH showed me: the Lord YHWH was summoning a judgment by fiery heat, and it devoured the Great Deep and was consuming the fields. Then I said, “O Lord YHWH, cease, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” YHWH relented concerning this; “This also shall not happen,” said the Lord YHWH.

This time it is fire from heaven that will destroy everything (compare Joel 1:19-20; Deuteronomy 32:22). The inclusion of the Great Deep points to a punishment of cosmic proportions. By now Amos has experienced resistance to his call for repentance. He does not ask YHWH to ‘forgive’. He simply pleads for YHWH to desist – which YHWH does.

Vision 3. Wall of tin (Amos 7:7-9)

This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with tin, with tin in his hand. And YHWH said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “Tin.” Then the Lord said, “See, I am setting tin in the midst of my people Israel; I will pardon them no more. The high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

Th. Amos no longer attempts to intercede. YHWH's decision is final and irreversible. It is reasonable to infer that this is because of the obstinate resistance that Amos met in his call for repentance. YHWH's words: 'I will pardon them no more' are echoed in the oracles found in chapters 3-4 of the scroll.

Tin was the basic element used to make bronze armour. Is YHWH threatening them with superior force? Tin is also useless as a wall.

Amos 7:10-13. Amaziah banishes Amos from Bethel

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel (the royal shrine); the country is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, ‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.’”

And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and do your prophesying there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

Amaziah calls Amos a ‘seer’ (ḥōzeh), a term which, at its best, denotes someone who is ‘enlightened’ by God, and who, in turn, ‘enlightens’ others (see 1:1). Amaziah banishes Amos from Bethel and tells him to go back where he belongs, to Judah.

Amos 7:14-17

Amos answered Amaziah, “I was no prophet, nor a member of a prophet’s guild; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and YHWH took me from following the flock, and YHWH said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ “Now therefore hear the word of YHWH. You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’ Therefore thus says YHWH: ‘Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parcelled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.’”

Amaziah will die outside the Holy Land. Amos concludes by, once again, speaking of the exile that the people (Israel) will undergo.

Vision 4. A basket of summer fruit (Amos 8:1-3)

This is what the Lord YHWH showed me – a basket of summer fruit (qāyiṣ). He said, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then YHWH said to me, The end (final hour’, ‘hour of doom’, qēṣ) has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by. The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,” says the Lord YHWH; “So many corpses! Strewn everywhere! Hush!”

The end is coming, not only for the cult and the royal house (as in vision three), but for the whole nation, ‘my people Israel’. As always in Amos the agent of the doom is not specified. What is important is that it comes from YHWH.

Amos 8:4-8

Hear this, you that trample on the **needy** (2:6),
and bring to ruin the **afflicted** (2:7) of the land, saying,
“When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah (40 litres) small and the shekel (11 grams) great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
buying the **powerless** (2:7) for silver and the **needy** for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.”

YHWH has sworn by the Glory of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any
of their deeds. Shall not the land tremble on this account, and
everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be
tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?

Amos 8:9-12

On that day, says the Lord YHWH, I will make the sun set at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will put sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day. The time is surely coming, says the Lord YHWH, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of YHWH. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of YHWH, but they shall not find it.

They will experience the wandering that Cain experienced when he killed his brother (Genesis 4:12, 14). Their deepest needs remain unsatisfied.

Amos 8:13-14

On that day the beautiful young women and the young men shall faint from thirst. Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria, and say, “May your god live, O Dan,” and, “By the life of the circle of gods at Beer-sheba”— they shall fall, and never rise again.

‘Ashimah’ can be translated ‘shame’, and Amos may be referring to the image of a calf (see 1Kings 12:28-30) that was set up by Jeroboam I in the Bethel sanctuary. Jeroboam I also erected a calf in the sanctuary of Dan.

Amos appears to be including all the local gods worshipped in shrines all the way from Dan in the north to Beer-sheba in the south. They are all nothing. So will it be for those who worship them. All ‘**shall fall and never rise again**’ (compare Jeremiah 25:27; Psalm 20:8).

Vision 5. YHWH and the destruction of the shrine (Amos 9:1-4)

I saw YHWH standing beside the altar, and he said: Strike the capitals so that the thresholds shake. Cut off the life of all those who lead the people. Those who follow behind I will kill with the sword. None of those fleeing will escape. None of them will save their lives.

Though they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.

Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search out and take them;

and though they hide from my sight at the bottom of the Sea, there I will command the Serpent, and it shall bite them.

And though they go into captivity in front of their enemies, there I will command the Sword, and it shall kill them;

and I will fix my eyes on them for harm and not for good.

Amos 9:5-6

The Lord, YHWH of hosts, is he who touches the earth and it quavers, and all who dwell on it mourn; everything rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the River of Egypt. He who builds his upper chambers in the heavens, and founds his vault upon the earth; who summons the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the surface of the land – YHWH is his name.

As previously in 4:13 and 5:8-9, the scene closes with a hymn of praise of YHWH's sovereign power. For a second time (see 8:8), the convulsion caused by YHWH's judgment is compared to the rising and subsiding of the Nile. There are echoes of verse 6 in Psalm 78:69: "He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever." In the psalm the temple is described in cosmic terms. In Amos the cosmos is likened to a temple.

Amos 9:7-10

Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? says YHWH.
I brought Israel up from the land of Egypt.

Did I not also bring up the Philistines from Caphtor (Crete?)
and the Arameans from Qir? (north of the Persian Gulf, see 1:5)

The eyes of the Lord YHWH are upon the sinful kingdom,
and I will destroy it from the face of the earth – except that
I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says YHWH.

For lo, I will command, and shake the house of Israel
among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve,
but no kernel shall fall to the ground.

All the sinners of my people will die by the sword,
who say, “Never will disaster approach or overtake us.”

Epilogue: YHWH is faithful Amos 9:11-12

On that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and repair its breaches, and restore its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; in order that they may dispossess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says YHWH who will do this.

This is the only text in the Hebrew Bible that speaks of ‘all the nations that are called by my name’.

It fits with the dream of Isaiah (see Isaiah 19:23-25) where he states:

Blessed be Egypt my people,
and Assyria the work of my hands,
and Israel my heritage.

Epilogue: YHWH is faithful Amos 9:13-15

The time is surely coming, says YHWH, when the one who ploughs will overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will flow with it.

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they will plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they will make gardens and eat their fruit.

I will plant them upon their own soil, and they will never again be uprooted from the soil that I have given them, says YHWH your God.

YHWH wants his special possession to know peace and to enjoy abundant prosperity (see 3:2).