

Hope in God

God offers hope to those who return to Him in repentance.

Deshawn was waiting for his mom to finish cooking breakfast. As they were talking about the events of the coming day, his mom unexpectedly collapsed on the floor with a heart attack. Having recently received CPR training in high school, Deshawn jumped into action. He called 911 and tirelessly performed CPR until the paramedics arrived. Even though the ordeal only lasted about ten minutes, Deshawn later confessed that it felt like “time stood still” and that help would never arrive. Thankfully, Deshawn’s mom lived to tell others about her son’s heroic efforts.

Sometimes, instead using the phrase to describe something agonizing, we say “time stood still” to refer to a wonderful experience: a sunrise, an embrace, a victory. As Amos closed his book, he envisioned an ideal future where time would stand still in a good way. Looking toward Israel’s future, he saw an era of abundance and prosperity, when all the seasons just blended together into one long harvest. The prophet described a yield so plentiful that the harvester simply would not be able to keep up with the abundance. Before one harvest was finished, the plowman would follow on the heels of the reaper, planting the next crop. Now that’s a bountiful harvest!

Amos ended the book with another reference to elongated time. Sometimes we use the expression, “never say never.” Here, Amos used the phrase, “never again.” He promised that Israel would never again be uprooted from the land. Never! Even after devastation, God always offers hope.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

AMOS 7:1–9:10

The book of Amos easily divides into two main units: the words of Amos (chapters 1–6) and the visions of Amos (chapters 7–9). Another way to outline the book is to divide it into three sections: eight oracles (chapters 1–2), three sermons (3–6), and five visions (7–9). The first four visions all refer to object

lessons, where God showed Amos something (7:1,4,7; 8:1), but the fifth vision is quite unique. It is called a “theophany,” where God Himself appears instead of merely revealing the vision to Amos.

The first vision focused on locusts (7:1-3). Like the locusts in the book of Joel, these predatory insects devoured everything in sight, rendering Israel totally vulnerable. Amos responded to this first vision with shock, wondering how Israel could stand against such an invasion. Thankfully, God relented from that devastation.

In the second vision (vv. 4-6), fire devoured everything around it. The book of Amos began with God’s promise to send fire against six different nations (1:4,7,10,12,14; 2:2). That imagery returned in this vision. Once again, Amos was distraught and begged God to forgive helpless Israel (7:5). And like the first vision, God relented.

The third and fourth visions involved word plays in the Hebrew language. In the third vision, Amos saw a plumb line (vv. 7-9), a weight on a string used to determine whether a wall is vertical or not. God positioned His plumb line against the nation, revealing that Israel was morally crooked. Consequently, her shrines would be devastated, and God would rise up against the nation.

Some scholars believe that a better translation of “plumb line” is simply “tin.” If so, the point would be that no competent builder would construct a wall from tin. A wall made of even the strongest tin will easily crumble and fall. Either way, the nation was heading toward a total collapse.

The fourth vision, a basket of ripe summer fruit (8:1-14), used a Hebrew play on words for summer fruit (*qayitz*) and end (*qetz*). The end had come for Israel. Like summer fruit, Israel was ripe for judgment. This vision revisited many of Amos’s earlier themes of Israel’s oppression of the poor and needy. Consequently, God promised famine—not for bread or water, but for “hearing the words of the LORD” (v. 11).

Unlike the first two visions which explicitly stated that God would relent of coming judgment, the Lord indicated that His patience had come to an end in the third and fourth visions: “I will no longer spare them” (7:8; 8:2).

As noted, the fifth vision is different from the others (9:1-10). This theophany made the Lord its centerpiece as He stood beside an altar. Given the literary context, Amos most likely saw the altar at Bethel, the king’s pagan sanctuary. In the vision, God struck the capitals of the pillars and knocked down this place of pagan worship. What followed was a picture of captivity with no hope for escape and no safe place to hide.

Amos also sandwiched a story between the third and fourth visions (7:10-17). This narrative revealed tensions between Amos and Amaziah, the king’s priest at Bethel. Amaziah accused Amos of conspiring against the king by saying, “Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will certainly go into

exile from its homeland” (v. 11). He tried to force Amos to return to Judah, but Amos refused to be intimidated. He asserted that Amaziah would join the other Israelites who would be driven into exile. His children would die by the sword, and his wife would be forced into prostitution.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

THE INTRODUCTION (Amos 9:5-6)

This final vision in the book of Amos depicts God’s people in the broader context of all nations—and even the entire earth. The Lord reigns as sovereign Ruler over all people, and His judgments are final.

VERSE 5

The Lord, the GOD of Armies — he touches the earth; it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn; all of it rises like the Nile and subsides like the Nile of Egypt.

Verses 5-6 make up another hymn fragment. Readers may recall that a hymn is a song for the purpose of adoration or praise toward God. When one closely examines these partial hymns sprinkled throughout Amos, it becomes easier to notice one similarity connecting them. At their core, each fragment emphasizes the divine name (Amos 4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6). In this case, Amos referred to **the Lord, the GOD of Armies**. The importance of specifying God’s name shows exactly who is behind the closing judgments, as well as the eventual restoration of Israel.

Amos chose three participles to describe God’s actions: God touches, builds, and summons. In verse 5, Amos noted that when God **touches the earth**, it causes great distress for humanity. Imagery of an earth that **melts** reminds us of Isaiah, who noted that earth will mourn as it (and its residents) waste away (Isa. 24:4).

God’s hand also causes the earth to ebb and flow. The prophet pointed out that under God’s authority, the world **rises . . . and subsides like the Nile**. This description hearkens back to Amos 8:8 and could refer to the way nations pass across the stage of history.

In Amos’s day, the Nile River was predictably unpredictable. It would rise and flood, then subside, often many times a year. Like the Nile, God’s devastation would rise quickly, flood everything, and then subside. Similar flood language can be found in Amos 5:8-9 and 8:8.

VERSE 6

He builds his upper chambers in the heavens and lays the foundation of his vault on the earth. He summons the water of the sea and pours it out over the surface of the earth. The LORD is his name.

The second participle Amos used in the passage was **builds**. Specifically, God **builds his upper chambers in the heavens**. The Hebrew word translated *chambers* basically means “stairs,” like the steps leading up to a temple or an altar. But Amos was not referring to an earthly temple. He was describing a temple in the heavens.

God’s house is as large and vast as the universe and the **foundation of his vault is on the earth**. A rare word, *vault* typically refers to a strap or band that ties branches together. Similarly, a *vault* separates the sky from the earth and prevents them from collapsing together.

God touches. God *builds*. And, finally, God **summons the water of the sea** and **pours** it wherever He desires. With this image, Amos drew on the language of creation. The word translated *summons* (*qara*) is the same word used in Genesis 1. God “called” (*qara*) the light “day” and the darkness “night” (Gen. 1:5). He also called the firmament “sky” (v. 8), the dry land “earth,” and the waters “seas” (v. 10). When God beckons creation, it obeys Him.

As noted, the heart of each hymn in Amos is God’s personal name: **The LORD**. The coming destruction was not the result of an impersonal force or coincidence. While not a human, God has personal attributes like reason, morality, and conscience. Most important, He is capable of social relationships. His **name** also carries authority and power that serve as the foundation for His righteous judgments against sinful people.

EXPLORE FURTHER

As a prayer activity, meditate on Amos 9:5-6. Pray the verses back to God, thanking Him for His awesome power and authority, even in judgment.

Write a paraphrase of the passage and use that as a prayer prompt during the coming weeks to reflect on your relationship with Him.

THE SHAKING (Amos 9:7-10)

As early as Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 7, God told the people of Israel that He had chosen them. Even though everything on earth belongs to Him, God cherishes His people. But the Israelites weren’t chosen because they

were more deserving. God chose them for a purpose—to become His priests and His ambassadors. But they were not exempt from correction when they sinned. God was going to shake His people, like a farmer rattling a sieve.

VERSE 7

Israelites, are you not like the Cushites to me? This is the LORD’s declaration. Didn’t I bring Israel from the land of Egypt, the Philistines from Capthor, and the Arameans from Kir?

In some contexts, leaders have what is called “diplomatic immunity.” In other words, representatives of one nation are protected from the penalty of laws in another nation. They’re exempt from any obligation to those laws. But Amos emphasized that things worked differently in God’s kingdom. His people have no immunity. The Israelites had no special protections just because they belonged to Him. Like the nations around them, Israel would be punished for rebelling against the Lord.

Beginning in verse 7, Amos switched from the third person to the first person. God was now doing the talking, and He began with a few penetrating questions. **Are you not like the Cushites to me?** referred to a people living in the area of modern-day Sudan in Africa. The word “Cush” occurs fifty-four times in the Hebrew Bible. Isaiah 18:2 describes a Cushite’s distinct physical features as being tall and smooth skinned. Jeremiah also noted the dark pigmentation of the Cushites’ skin (Jer. 13:23).

Cushites appear predominantly in military contexts (Isa. 20:3-4; Jer. 46:9; Ezek. 30:4-5; 38:5). Interestingly, for about a century, Egypt was ruled by a series of seven Cushite pharaohs. This Cushite period occurred from about the mid-eighth to mid-seventh centuries BC.

Amos also addressed what it meant for Israel to be God’s people. They thought their special relationship with Him meant special privileges and that God would make allowances for them that He wouldn’t make for other nations. After all, they were His possession. But Amos emphasized that this unique relationship involved greater responsibility, not entitlement.

The **Arameans** were a loose federation of cities in modern Syria, with Damascus as its capital. Israel could trace its own origins to Aram. One of the earliest confessions of faith in the Bible states that Abraham was “a wandering Aramean” (Deut. 26:5) who journeyed to Canaan. Eventually, his descendants came to Egypt, where they became a populous nation. Egypt oppressed Israel, but God delivered them through the exodus under the leadership of Moses. King David won victories against the *Arameans* during his reign (2 Sam. 8:5-6), but they later regained strength and became a threat to God’s people.

God asked another rhetorical question: **Didn't I bring Israel from the land of Egypt?** With this, God wasn't trying to find logical answers. He was trying to persuade hearts. Blinded to their true condition, Israel thought they had earned a pass from God's punishment. But the Lord made it clear that they were in the same boat as the Cushites, Egyptians, **Philistines**, and *Arameans*. He noted that each of these nations originated from somewhere else, just like Israel. But while God gave the promised land to His people, He would also drive them out if they refused to repent and turn to Him.

VERSES 8-10

Look, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will obliterate it from the face of the earth. However, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob — this is the LORD's declaration — for I am about to give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations, as one shakes a sieve, but not a pebble will fall to the ground. All the sinners among my people who say, "Disaster will never overtake or confront us," will die by the sword.

When a parent says, "I'm keeping an eye on you," children know they are being held accountable for what they do. Likewise, **the eyes of the Lord GOD** are on His children. But Amos drew a distinction between **the sinful kingdom** and the **house of Jacob**. This phrase *sinful kingdom* occurs nowhere else in the Bible. Some suggest that it can only mean the nation of Israel, while the *house of Jacob* must refer to a remnant of Israel that would survive (Amos 3:13; 7:2; 8:7).

Using the language of widespread devastation, Amos predicted that God would **obliterate** the sinful kingdom. The expression **face of the earth** is drawn from flood language in Genesis (see Gen. 6:7; 7:4,23). When the world was destroyed by flood, a tiny remnant (Noah's family) survived. Likewise, a remnant would survive Israel's destruction.

God said He would **shake the house of Israel**. Whether this is another reference to an earthquake is debatable. If so, this is the last of several references to such a catastrophe in Amos (Amos 1:1; 2:13; 4:11; 6:11; 8:8; 9:1). In the beginning of this fifth vision, God struck the capitals (the tops of tall, supporting pillars) and sent them falling on people's heads (9:1). But, as history reminds us, a nation doesn't have to experience a literal earthquake to be shaken.

A **sieve** is made up of a piece of mesh with small holes in it. In Bible times, sieves were sometimes made with woven palms and even pottery. In archeology, a sieve is shaken sideways, allowing dirt and other small particles to pass through the holes and fall to the ground. Meanwhile, larger materials remain in the sieve and can be plucked out for analysis.

Amos used the same imagery of a farmer who scoops up grain with a sieve. Along with the grain, chaff-like pebbles and other debris are collected. Once vigorously shaken, the grain falls through onto a piece of cloth or a mat, while the chaff remains in the sieve and is discarded. The particular sieve that Amos identified represents God's judgment, which will miss absolutely nothing. Not a single **pebble will fall to the ground**.

As God shakes the nation, **all the sinners** will die. However, in His judgment, God included a qualification. Judgment would also be reserved for Israelites who ignored His warnings and denied the coming wrath.

Some Israelites believed that **“disaster will never overtake or confront us.”** At its core, the Hebrew word translated *disaster* (*ra*) simply means “bad.” Even today, Israelis might admonish their unruly pet, *kelev ral* or “bad dog!” That very simple word is used in all kinds of biblical contexts. It is naïve to believe that bad things will never happen to us, but it is more dangerous to believe that God will overlook sin and let us pass without consequences.

EXPLORE FURTHER

To learn more about Aram and Cush, read the articles “Aramean” on page 96 and “Cush” on page 374 of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How do these nations weave in and out of Israel's history? How would you summarize God's work within those nations?

THE RESTORATION (Amos 9:11-15)

The closing verses of Amos represent a radical shift. With the flip of a switch, the mood changes from judgment to hope. Restored fortunes, agricultural bounty, and stable land holdings provide a God-centered message of hope.

VERSES 11-12

In that day I will restore the fallen shelter of David: I will repair its gaps, restore its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name — this is the declaration of the LORD; he will do this.

Some scholars suggest that this section of Amos is so different from the rest of the book that it could not have been original to the prophet. But that is not the case. As early as Deuteronomy 30, Moses envisioned a return of God's people, a restoration of fortunes, and a gathering of His people

after judgment. Other prophets—including Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah—also expressed dual messages such as those summed up in 9:11-12 and 9:13-15, specifically *restoration* and *reversal*.

Prophets often used expressions like **in that day** to describe upcoming judgment. But they also turned these words on their heads to describe times of forgiveness and restoration. Here, Amos depicted a transition from the harsh realities of the present to an idealized future.

In this vision, God promised to restore the **fallen shelter of David**, but Amos didn't use the typical Hebrew word for *shelter*. The word here is *sukkat*, which sometimes describes God's dwelling place (Job 36:29). It was also used to describe the temporary shelters built during Israel's feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:42-43; Neh. 8:14-17). During this festival, Israelites temporarily lived in booths to commemorate their journeys in the wilderness.

Here, *shelter* conveys an expanded meaning. Restoring David's fallen *shelter* means to restore David's house. While this could be a reference to Jerusalem, it more likely points to the Davidic monarchy. Ultimately, Jesus fulfilled this promise when He rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey (see Zech. 9:9-10; Matt. 21:1-11). In the Gospels, people sometimes asked about Jesus being the Son of David, which was a clear reference to a Davidic king. Indeed, His resurrection and ascension attest to the kingdom's restoration and the King who sits on its throne.

The **remnant of Edom** includes people, not territory. This is not military subjugation, though Israel certainly had a longstanding animosity with *Edom* (Isa. 34:5-15; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 32:29; Obad. 6-21; Mal. 1:2-4). Jacob's brother Esau was the ancestor of the Edomite people. So, these nations were close relatives, and Edom was once part of David's dynasty (2 Sam. 8:14).

One of the earliest messianic prophecies of the Bible mentions Edom becoming "a possession" of Israelite kings (Num. 24:17-18). So, Amos adopted messianic language and affirmed that Israel would one day possess Edom. And, just like a small portion of Israel would survive the coming catastrophe, a remnant in Edom would become a portion of God's people too.

The mention of Edom also reminded readers of God's plan for the Gentiles. While Israel was His chosen people, He also guaranteed that members of all nations would **bear my name**. In the New Testament, Paul's first missionary journey was enormously successful among Gentile audiences. But the early church, which was born as a Jewish movement, wasn't sure what to do with Gentiles who confessed Jesus as Savior.

Christian leaders eventually met in Jerusalem to settle the matter. In Acts 15, Jesus's brother James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, referenced Amos 9:11-12 to demonstrate that Gentiles were also called to bear the name of God. (See also Hos. 1:9-11; 14:6-7)

Scholars often note the universal scope of God’s plan. In Amos 9:5, God touched the earth. In Amos 9:6, He poured the water over the face of the earth. In Amos 9:9, He shook Israel. And, in Amos 9:11-15, He included **all the nations** that bear His name, even the Gentiles.

VERSE 13

Look, the days are coming — this is the LORD’s declaration — when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the one who treads grapes, the sower of seed. The mountains will drip with sweet wine, and all the hills will flow with it.

As in verse 11, Amos foresaw a new day for God’s people. The word translated **look** is an invitation to open one’s eyes, to envision something utterly new. God encouraged the Israelites to see a future completely different from their present reality. Amos chose four images to describe this incredible bounty, starting with a **plowman** and a **reaper**. Normally, their work would be separated by months. But, in God’s new economy for Israel, the one plowing **will overtake** the one reaping. We might call this a mega harvest—so bountiful that the produce can’t be completely gathered before its time to plant again.

In this scenario, time stands still. Imagine that you own a popular vacation rental property. Your business is so good that bookings just flood in. Competition is so robust that customers staying on your property book their trip for next year even before they check out this year. Your guests’ current and future stays are drawn together into one moment.

What’s true of the field is also true of the vine. Amos’s third image turns to the **one who treads grapes**, along the sower of grain. **Sweet wine** will be in abundance. **Mountains will drip** with it and **hills will flow** with it. (See also Joel 3:18.) This word for *sweet wine* is only used five times in the Old Testament, but it always represents blessings. Joel 1:5 spoke of God’s judgment as the removal of *sweet wine*—and the blessing of its return (Joel 3:18).

VERSE 14

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel. They will rebuild and occupy ruined cities, plant vineyards and drink their wine, make gardens and eat their produce.

Once again, Amos stacked a list of vivid verbs to describe Israel’s blessing: **restore, rebuild, occupy, plant, drink, make, and eat**. The main idea is that God will *restore* **the fortunes** of Israel. The language is comparable to the words of Jeremiah, where God promised to restore things “as in former times” (Jer. 33:7). Once again, God will turn everything upside down.

God's people will also *rebuild* and *occupy* their ruined cities. The Bible tells of Nehemiah, who helped the Jews rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and pagan kings like Cyrus and Darius, who helped finance the reconstruction efforts. Finally, Israel will *plant vineyards, drink their wine, make gardens, and eat their produce.*

The prosperous planter is the fourth and final image in the passage. In 5:10-11, Amos had warned the people that Israel would never again drink wine from the vineyards they had planted. Now, this curse was being reversed and replaced with blessing.

VERSE 15

I will plant them on their land, and they will never again be uprooted from the land I have given them. The LORD your God has spoken.

The book of Amos ends with God's promise to **plant them on their land** where they would **never again be uprooted.** (See Isa. 60:21; Jer. 31:35-37; Ezek. 37:25; Mic. 4:7.) *Never again be uprooted* emphasizes God's reversal of the curse and harkens back to the flood in Genesis. God used the phrase four times in two verses to promise Noah that no such catastrophe would ever strike the earth again (Gen. 8:21; 9:11). God promised that He would *never again* strike down every living thing or use a flood to destroy the earth "as long as the earth endures" (8:22). Jeremiah 32:40-41 and Hebrews 10:17 also use "never again" language to describe God's faithfulness.

Amos sealed the promise by leaning into the authority of God's word: **the LORD your God has spoken.** The only other time Amos used the expression *your God* was related to meeting Him in judgment (Amos 4:12). Here, the prophet indicated a shift in God's relationship with His people, where they would finally move from rebellion to a renewed sense of fellowship.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article, "Vine" on pages 1632-1633 of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. In ancient times, abundant vines were viewed as expressions of God's favor and blessing. How did Isaiah and others use vineyard images to describe His care for Israel? How does the imagery relate to our walk with God today?