

• God's overwhelming judgement brings stunned silence

The end of Amos chapter 6 leaves us somewhat stunned and awed. The greatness of God's judgement is almost overwhelming. With great houses and small houses smashed to pieces ¹ and bereaved relatives retreating into stunned silence and fear of even whispering the name of Yahweh. What disaster sin brings! 'Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death' ².

¹ 6:11
² James 1:15

• Is there any hope for Israel

Now Amos 7:1-9:15 will tackle the question: is this the last word or is there any hope whatsoever for Israel?

• Three visions – intercession averts judgement – but not indefinitely

Amos 7:1-9 brings before us three visions. In the first two Israel is faced with the threat of extermination, first by locusts and then by divine fire. In both of the visions the threat of extermination is turned aside by Amos's intercession.

The first vision is a threat of extermination by natural means, that is by a locust invasion.

1. Vision One – a locust invasion

¹'This is what the sovereign Yahweh showed me. He was preparing a swarm of locusts at the beginning of the growth of the spring crops. It was the spring crop after the king's share has been harvested'.

The threat of judgement was coming from God.

• The threat of total judgement

²'And when they had finished consuming the vegetation of the land...'

The judgement was about to be total, a judgement involving complete annihilation.

• Amos intercedes

² 'And when they had finished consuming the vegetation of the land, I said, "Sovereign Yahweh, please forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small"'.

Amos is a man of intercession; and God heard his praying.

• God changed His mind

³'Yahweh changed His mind concerning this. "It shall not be", said Yahweh'.

2. Vision two – divine fire

The second vision is a threat of extermination by supernatural means, that is by divine fire.

⁴'This is what the sovereign Yahweh showed me. The sovereign Yahweh was calling for judgement by fire. It consumed the great deep and it was consuming the land'.

• The threat of total judgement

Again the judgement was about to be total. God's holy fire, God fiery holiness, irresistibly devours and eventually annihilates all that is not pleasing to Him. That which does the will of God abides for ever. That which displeased Him is burned up and devoured. This divine fire even devours the ocean; then it was about to proceed to the land. Soon nothing would be left.

• Amos intercedes again

But again Amos is a man of intercession.

⁵'And I said, "Sovereign Yahweh, please forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small"'.

And again the Lord heard his prayer, and judgement was averted.

• God changed His mind again

⁶ 'Yahweh changed His mind concerning this. "It also shall not be", said sovereign Yahweh'.

3. Vision three – a plumb-line

The third vision presents us with a threat of extermination but one that cannot be turned aside by intercession. Twice God had threatened to punish and exterminate Israel. Twice intercession had turned aside the judgement, but now there comes something that apparently cannot be turned aside by judgement.

⁷'This is what He showed me. The sovereign Yahweh was standing beside a wall made with a plumb-line, and He had a

• *The builder uses a plumb-line to check whether the wall is still upright*

plumb-line in His hand'.

In the vision God was standing by a wall which originally had been made with a plumb-line. In other words when the wall had originally been made, it had been made upright. Now God the Builder is returning to see whether the wall is as upright as it was when He made it. The Builder is returning to check whether the wall is beginning to fall down or whether it is still upright as He made it originally.

God is about to come to Israel and see whether the people of God are still the way He made them in the beginning.

⁸'And Yahweh said to me, "What are you seeing Amos?". And I said "A plumb-line". And the Lord said, "Behold I am about to put a plumb-line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer"'.

• *God has come to check whether Israel is aligned with his divine laws of compassion, mercy and justice*

When God originally redeemed Israel by the blood of the lamb, He then took them to Sinai and gave them His law. On Mount Sinai, the people said 'All that Yahweh has commanded we shall do' ¹. The originally 'vertical' nation was a nation free from idolatry, worshipping Yahweh only. It was to be a compassionate nation; it had divine laws which protected the poor and led the nation in the direction of compassion and mercy and justice. But now God returns with a plumb-line in His hand. He wants to know whether Israel is still the same as He had made it.

¹ Exodus 19:8

• *No intercession because the nation is so far removed from God's ways*

But since the nation is so far removed from the way God had set it up at the beginning, God will destroy it – and this time there can be no intercession.

⁹"The high places of Isaac will be destroyed, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

• *Israel's sin has reached the point where it is useless to pray*

Why is there no intercession this time? Because Israel's sin has reached the point where even intercession will be useless. Samuel was famous as an intercessor but after Saul's sin of 1 Samuel 15, he made no attempt to see Saul or pray for him. There came a point in the threats against Judah when God said 'Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people' ¹. Jeremiah was told 'Do not pray for this people' ². The author of Hebrews knew that there were certain people he could not renew to repentance ³; he had nothing to say to them and only spoke to those who had not sunk so low ⁴. John spoke of a 'sin unto death' and said 'I do not say that anyone should pray for this' ⁵. This time Amos cannot report that intercession turned aside God's judgement. There can come sin where intercession will not make any difference, when the prophet cannot renew the people to repentance, where one need not recommend prayer.

¹ Jeremiah 15:1

² Jeremiah 11:14

³ Hebrews 6:6

⁴ Hebrews 6:9

⁵ 1 John 5:16

• *Their sin – a failure to abide by the original specifications*

What was it that brought the wrath of God upon Israel to this extreme extent where even intercession could not avert the judgement? It was the sin of failing to abide by original specifications. The sin of not 'abiding' in what was given by God at the beginning.

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