

The so-far unanswered question

• Will the nation of Israel be totally exterminated or will a small remnant survive if they seek Yahweh?

• If God's people lose their distinctiveness will he allow them to survive?

• If Israel becomes like all the other nations – then the Exodus has no special meaning

The Answer – part one – God will indeed destroy Israel

• Almost

• But not totally

• The nation was indeed ripe for judgement

The question that is now in our minds as we approach the end of Amos's book is: was there any hope for northern Israel whatsoever? As the prophecy has proceeded, the message seems to have become intensely severe. God has taken – or is on the very edge of taking – an oath against Israel ¹. Once an oath of anger is taken by God, it cannot be changed or avoided.

¹ 4:12; 6:8; 8:7

Is Israel to be exterminated altogether? Might not God have mercy on a 'remnant' of Israel? This was suggested by Amos 5:15 ('Perhaps Yahweh, God Almighty, will be gracious to a remnant of Joseph'). While Philistines will 'perish even to the remnant' ¹ and not the slightest remainder of their community will be allowed to survive, perhaps God will preserve a residue of Israelites, a small number that will continue. Maybe a small section of the nation will be allowed to outlast the disaster if they seek Yahweh now before it is too late. Otherwise Amos has sung a funeral song over them.

¹ 1:8

In this section Amos raises a question: will God allow His people to continue if they lose their distinctiveness?

⁷“Are not you and the Cushites both the same to me – you people of Israel? Oracle of Yahweh! Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Arameans from Kir?”

The purpose of God's rescuing Israel from Egypt was to take them to Himself and purify them so that they would become utterly different from the nations of the world. If Israel resembles the other nations in their wicked ways, then there ceases to be anything special about the exodus. God brought Israel out of Egypt. So what? God is moving nations around all the time. He moved the Philistines from Caphtor on the island of Crete. He moved the Arameans from Kir. What is special about the exodus? Nothing at all unless you appreciate the meaning of it; and its meaning is that it was the time when He was taking Israel to Himself to make them different from the other nations. If that 'differentness' is neglected or repudiated, then the exodus loses its significance. It remains a historical fact, like other migrations in the history of the world – but it has no special meaning to us. Take away God's purpose to make Israel unique, and there is no other purpose that can be seen in Israel's departure from Egypt. It becomes just like the Philistine immigration from Caphtor, or the Aramean immigration from Kir.

So if Israel is just like any other nation, and the exodus is just like other migrations among the nations, will God allow His people to continue? Amos answers the question. There are two parts to the answer.

(i) **God will destroy Israel** and the nation will not be allowed to continue as it has been for centuries. If northern Israel has totally lost its distinctiveness, then just as 'the Philistines will perish even to the remnant' ¹, just as 'the Aramean people will go into exile' ² – might He not say something similar to Israel? He almost says it:

¹ 1:8
² 1:5

⁸“Look, the eyes of the sovereign Yahweh are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth...”

But actually God has something to add to His prediction.

“...yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob”– oracle of Yahweh.'

The destroying, annihilating, exterminating anger of God will almost wipe northern Israel out of existence, but He cannot quite do that. Israel itself had almost destroyed what God had done in making the nation unique, because the nation had ceased to hold to its faith in Yahweh. Israel was ripe for exterminating punishment, like the other nations surrounding Israel. Yet whatever Israel might have done, it was still true to say, 'You only have I known of all the families of

• *God could not go back on His choice of Israel and his oath to Abraham*

The Answer – part two – God judges his people with a discriminating and purifying judgement

• *The sieve illustration – a tiny purified remnant will survive but the bulk of the nation will be wiped out*

• *Amos's predictions accurately fulfilled and recorded in*

The church and the gospel

• *God abandons an unbelieving church and does a new thing*

Eventually northern Israel was restored but only in the gospel

the earth'. God could not completely and utterly go back on His choice of Israel. He was swearing – taking an oath – that He would punish Israel; but He had also sworn to Abraham that his seed would last for ever! He could wipe other nations out of existence, but He could not totally and utterly do that with Israel.

(ii) God judges his people with a discriminating, purifying judgement.

9““For look, I will give the command and shall shake the house of Israel among all the nations, as one shakes something in a sieve and not a pebble reaches the ground.””

Amos uses an illustration. He imagines someone sieving out stones or pebbles from sand or soil. (There is no reference to grain; grain was winnowed not sieved.) In Amos's illustration, it is not what falls through the sieve that is destroyed. Rather what gets through the sieve is purified, and what is retained is subsequently thrown away. The large 'pebbles' of the nation will be thrown away. Even those who go into exile will suffer further agonies and will be extinguished from the story of human history. There will no return from the exile of northern Israel. The northern part of the nation will cease to exist. Only a tiny remnant will be purified and will survive. How will they survive? Amos goes on to deal with that in the next few verses. But the bulk of the nation will be wiped out.

10““All the sinners among my people will die by the sword, all who say ‘Disaster will not overtake us or meet us.’””

After the death of Jeroboam II the nation survived for a few decades and then northern Israel was destroyed. It ceased to exist. Amos's predictions were fulfilled. 2 Kings 17:1–18 records the end of northern Israel. The capital city of Samaria was besieged ¹ and eventually was defeated. The people were deported to far away places in Assyria ². 2 Kings 17:21–23 points out that the removal of the northern kingdom was a fulfilment of prophecy. Were there any survivors? Only a tiny remnant was preserved. They presumably made their way to the southern kingdom of Judah. There was no hope for Samaria in the immediate future.

God wants His church to be distinctive and sharply different from the world. If at any point His people cease to be a distinctive people, and an unbelieving 'church' arises, that part of His church is abandoned perhaps for centuries. A remnant survive; a new movement of the Spirit takes place elsewhere and the remnant are blessed in the new thing that God does – elsewhere. Whether the old 'shell' that was abandoned will ever be restored is doubtful, but one notes in Scripture that northern Israel became the corrupt, half-Assyrian, half-Israelite 'Samaritans'. They never got any special blessing from God until Jesus came – but then they were the first pagans outside of Israel to be given the gospel. 'You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria!' ¹. Eventually even northern Israel was restored but only in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

¹ 2 Kings 17:5
² 2 Kings 17:6
¹ Acts 1:8



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