

# Amos

*The Book of*

Session Eleven:  
March 8, 2005

*Amos 9:10-15—Out of Nowhere...Hope*

## ❖ The Text (NRSV)

<sup>11</sup>*On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen,  
and repair its breaches,  
and raise up its ruins,  
and rebuild it as in the days of old;*

<sup>12</sup>*in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom  
and all the nations who are called by my name,  
says the LORD who does this.*

<sup>13</sup>*The time is surely coming, says the LORD,  
when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps,  
and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed;  
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
and all the hills shall flow with it.*

<sup>14</sup>*I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,  
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,  
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.*

<sup>15</sup>*I will plant them upon their land,  
and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land  
that I have given them,  
says the LORD your God.*

## ❖ What's going on here?

The first ten verses of what we call chapter nine of Amos were clear about God's word of judgment against Israel: the people had *nowhere* to hide and would be reduced to *nothing*. And yet *now*, from nothing, and out of nowhere, we hear amazing words of hope and of promise. The contrast is extreme—virtually nothing in the previous eight and two-thirds chapters prepared us for a word of grace and restoration on the other side of exile. All Amos could see and all he could speak was God's "NO" to Israel, a "*no*" that would end in the death of the nation. So how can this same God, much

less this same prophet be announcing resurrection and the "YES" of God on the other side of the "NO"? Seriously, what's going on here?

Well, given how sharply this last passage breaks with the theme and main idea of the rest of the book, many to most scholars can only make sense of these last five verses as the reflection of a generation *after* Amos, a generation that had seen the destruction that came on the northern kingdom but still saw God doing a new thing beyond that destruction. This position points out that the words of 9:11-15 only make sense within a context of hopelessness and devastation—you can only "raise up" the fallen tent of David (v.11) if it has already been destroyed. Similarly, the YHWH's promise to "restore" Israel assumes that something has first happened to the nation that requires it to *be restored* in the first place.

For that matter, this last passage in the book of Amos turns key ideas of Amos' upside-down. The idea of the "day" (of the LORD) has up to this point been a day of judgment—in fact, in 5:18ff, Amos lambasted those who looked forward to the coming "day" of God's action with hopefulness. But here in 9:11, the "day" of YHWH has become precisely an occasion for hopefulness. And other key images that Amos had developed in the first eight chapters—the destruction of the cities and strongholds, and the planting of vineyards and gardens without getting to enjoy their produce, for example—are now reversed. These all seem to assume a setting that comes long after the first "day" of YHWH that was indeed one of darkness.

Now, does all of that necessarily *prove* that Amos did not compose these last five verses? And if he didn't, then what do we do with this passage, the *only* passage from Amos that gets picked up and quoted by New Testament writers? To answer the last question first, these verses, just as much as the first eight chapters, are Scripture for Jews and Christians alike. After all, many,

if not most, of the books of the Old Testament are anonymous, but are still very much a part of our canon and are very much the living Word of God to us. And even if these last five verses were not written by Amos, they are not intended to contradict or disprove the rest of Amos' message, but simply to say that God was not finished with Israel when the Assyrian invaders captured Samaria in 722 BC.

Think about it—if some later generation didn't like what Amos had to say, they simply would not have kept his writings. Or his message might have been dismissed as dusty old words given to an earlier time that were no longer relevant. But clearly, that didn't happen with Amos. Even if a later community felt God speaking a prophetic word of restoration to them, for some reason these last five verses were connected with the rest of Amos' message. Rather than denying or correcting Amos' theology, these last five verses simply say that the God of Israel always reserves the right *not* to let "NO" be the last word.

All of that said, we still haven't answered the question of whether or not Amos *could* have written and intended to include these words in his message. And for what it's worth, the leaning of this seminarian is not to let "no" be the last word. It could well be possible that Amos has let himself be open to divine surprise here. We have seen again and again how Amos insists that God's ways often overturn our expectations. When the people expect God to bless their prosperity, Amos announces judgment and curse. When the people feel secure in their own strength, Amos exposes how weak and shaky they really are. So, we have to ask here now whether Amos at the last saw that God might again reverse things and bring life out of death for Israel. And my answer, again, clearly only that of a somewhat presumptuous seminary student, is to say *yes*, it is *possible*, even if only just possible.

That is not to say, however, even if Amos *did* compose these last five verses, that the first eight and a half chapters get tossed out now. Even if the very same man who prophesied YHWH's relentless destruction a generation before it came *also* prophesied a new day of restoration, he still knew that the judgment would come. The resurrection of Sunday might come—and generations later, after the exiles returned from Babylon, they knew that it did—but for Amos, it always had to come on the other side of the grave and burial that go along with Good Friday. In the end, regardless of who did the writing, as we have the book now, Friday and Sunday are inextricably bound together. The "yes" of the one does not allow us to forget that the "no" has also come first, and the "no" of God is clearly not the last word, but, even unexpectedly, gives way to a divine "yes."

Several specific details are also worth mentioning here that describe just what is worth hoping for. First of all, it is significant that YHWH is the one doing the rebuilding. Amos had pressed the point that when the disaster came on Israel, it would be at YHWH's hand. And now once again, YHWH is named as the actor—this time for restoration. God is described as actively restoring Israel, not passively allowing people to rebuild on their own, but actually rebuilding and repairing the broken nation, tools in hand. In this scene, God comes close, even stooping down to pick up from the ground what had fallen down, and now that coming close is not a fearful thing as it had been before. The picture is of a God who is willing to move beyond shows of great and terrible power (9:5), for example, and who will not be bound behind the glorious realms of heaven (9:6). This God comes close in an act of love. Again, this is not to say that the God of 9:10-15 is a different one than in ch. 1-8, but rather that the God of majesty and sovereign freedom chooses in the end to express those in selfless, even humbling love. The same God who could not stand to allow the poor of Israel to be trampled to remain trampled is the God who will not

let the broken Israel remain broken. That is the way God expresses freedom—that is the way God is truly “the Lord.”

A second significant detail here is how the vision of hope looks back specifically to David. Obviously, “restoration” will involve some looking backward, some undoing of a wrong or fixing of what has been broken. But the thing we look back to is important—it says something about what we want for the present and future. Ask a stranger what the high point or “glory days” for the United States were/are, and you will learn something about what is important to that person. For some, the unquestioned safety, unity, moral clarity, and strength that came in the years after World War II represent our greatest days (or, as Tom Brokaw says, our “greatest generation”). For others, the idealism and social activism of the Kennedy years are the “good old days.” Each suggests a very different ideal world, even though both are drawing on events from the past.

All of this is worth mentioning because 9:11 looks back to the reign and family of David specifically. In mind here is that time in Israel’s life *before* the split of the kingdoms, suggesting a hope of reunion. And while David’s reign was remembered as an ideal time of prosperity and peace, in some ways, so was the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel, who ruled when Amos was alive. And yet this passage doesn’t hold up Jeroboam’s tenure as the “golden age” to look back to—so prosperity and wealth alone are not necessarily the hope. The vision for the future is not just a time when Israel will be powerful or wealthy again, but a time when justice will be practiced, when the rich do not accumulate wealth at the expense of others. *This* is just as much a part of the vision of hope for Israel as the imagery of prosperity.

And really, the imagery of prosperity here in these verses, especially in 9:13-14, is different from the hoarding of wealth and complacent luxury of the past. The images are not of stockpiled money or opulent

living arrangements like the ivory couches of chapter six. Rather, the images are of plentiful harvests of food and drink so that *everyone* has enough. There is abundance to be sure—there is so much to harvest that they are still gathering in the crop when it’s time to start plowing again (9:13)—but it is not a self-centered, greedy kind of abundance.

Finally, the promise of God in 9:15 builds on that imagery of planting. Not only will the people be able to plant vineyards and be able to enjoy the fruit of those vineyards, but God will plant the people themselves on the land, never again to be plucked up. In the end, the “YES” of God is different than the “NO,” which was conditional. As the book ends, and it really has been masterfully put together here, the final word is God’s unconditional “YES.” And the God who says that “yes” is willing to be called Israel’s God, “your God” in 9:15. The covenant relationship is picked up once again, and even after its death, God wills to be in relationship with Israel.

#### **Connections: What Does Hope Look Like?**

- What is or was the “golden age” of our country, in your eyes? What makes it so special to you? What ideals and values might that reveal about yourself?
- How would you read this passage differently if you hadn’t read through the first eight-and-a-half chapters of Amos before you got to 9:11-15? How would you have heard the promises differently without the context?
- What does it say about who God is that the final word here in the book of Amos is not one of judgment? What does it say about who God is that we had to get to this promise and hope only by first coming through that judgment?
- What has been a Holy Saturday experience for you? What have been times in your life where you have found yourself between cross and resurrection? What moved you to Easter Sunday? What helps you to move on to Monday and Tuesday then?