

**CERTAIN JUDGMENT – AND HOPE**  
**Amos 9**

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Is there any place that you can really hide? Perhaps, once upon a time, there was a place that we might be able to go undetected, a place where we could take cover, a place where our whereabouts would be unknown. But I'm not sure those places exist anymore. It seems as if we live in a day when there is a video camera mounted in every hallway, at every doorway. I was actually a member of a health club that had video cameras in the men's locker room. You would take your shower and come out and change, and the video cameras would be aimed at you the whole time. I'm not sure who had the job of monitoring those particular cameras, but I bet they had to pay them pretty well.

But those video surveillance cameras are nothing compared to what police have now.

Taking cover doesn't help anymore because the helicopters are equipped with enormous candle power. **One police department boasts that their McDonnell Douglas is equipped with a 30-million candle power Nightsun SX-16 searchlight capable of illuminating an entire city block at one time. In fact, one police department in Canada boasts that despite the fact they have 15-20 calls per shift since their helicopter took to the air a year ago, not a single suspect has ever escaped the HAWCS1 once the police helicopter got involved in the chase. At 500 feet away, the infrared camera can pick up a thief's footprints, which appear like heat sources in the snow. When the police pooch loses his scent, the infrared camera keeps following the felon. The Canadian chopper has an average response time of 90 seconds, while patrol cars take an average of six minutes. Watching the infrared camera, the flight crew directs the police on the ground to the suspect. The flight crew says it's not unusual to say, "Officer, he's five feet in front of you. Reach down and touch someone."**

There is absolutely nowhere to hide, no place to go where the crime choppers on patrol won't get you these days.

So it is in the big cities.

But it's not just helicopters any more. Most modern phones, laptops, and tablets have built-in location tracking that pings some combination of GPS, Wi-Fi, and mobile networks to determine the device's position. And in fact, even when you switch off your location tracking device from pinging GPS satellites, if you're connected to a cellular network or Wi-Fi, the device is still transmitting its coordinates to third parties. ([www.wral.com/Raleigh-police-search-goodgle-location-history, 3/15/2018](http://www.wral.com/Raleigh-police-search-goodgle-location-history,3/15/2018))

For example, a criminal stole a cellphone. By the time he got back to his housing complex, the police were waiting for him – because they followed him all along. They used the same device to

catch a car thief and a woman who made a string of harassing phone calls. (“Police secretly track cellphones to solve routine crimes,” [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com), 8/23/15)

In fact, I’ve gotten irritated with my own phone lately. Not only does it know where I am, it tells me where I’m going! Wednesday morning of this week, I got in the car, started the engine, looked down at my phone – and it told me I was 12 minutes away from BSA Hospital. How on earth did my phone know I was going to BSA Hospital Wednesday morning? Because that’s where I always head out early on Wednesday morning. My behavior, my pattern, was predictable. That morning, I was thrilled that my phone was wrong. Siri doesn’t know nearly as much as she thinks she knows. I was going to VBS and on to the hospitals later on Wednesday afternoon, which totally confused the girl.

But the reality is, if you’ve got an iPhone, it will track your movements and tell you where you are most likely to be headed. And how long it will take to get there.

Oh, it’s not just GPS. It’s facial recognition. Picture a crowded street. Police are searching for a man believed to have committed a violent crime. To find him, they feed a photograph into a video surveillance network powered by artificial intelligence. A camera, one of thousands, scans the streets (like those already in Europe), instantly analyzing the faces of everyone it sees. Then, an alert: The algorithms found a match with someone in the crowd. Officers rush to the scene and take him into custody. (“Facial recognition gives police a powerful new tracking tool,” [www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com), 7/30/18)

You might change the color of your clothes, but you can’t change your face. Big Brother is, indeed, watching. In fact, Big Brother is in your pocket right now!

Is there any place you can hide? Any place you can escape? Hardly anymore.

So it was for ancient Israel when they tried to escape the wrath, the all-searching eye of God.

When we come to Amos 9, we come to the very last vision of the five visions of the book of Amos. Remember, this minor prophet can be divided into the words of Amos in the first six chapters, and the five visions of Amos in the last three chapters.

In chapter 9, we come to the last of the five visions. Last week we looked at the first three visions: the vision of the locusts, the vision of the devouring fire, and the vision of the plumb line. As we move from the first vision to the fifth vision, Amos becomes less an actor across the stage of the text, and the Lord becomes more and more dominant.

### **I. Certain Judgment (9:1-8a)**

In the first four verses of this section on judgment, we see that there is no hiding place. A whole new meaning comes to the familiar words, “You can run, but you cannot hide.”

The vision begins with Amos seeing the Lord standing beside an altar – probably the altar of the Bethel shrine, since Amos had preached against the ritualistic religion of that shrine. The altar was

a place where God was to receive the offerings given by his people. Rather than accepting their offerings, the very first word of the Lord is “smite.” It sounds like an earthquake.

Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake,  
And break them on the heads of them all!  
Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword;  
They will not have a fugitive who will flee,  
Or a refugee who will escape.

The sanctuary, which had been used for Israel’s sanctimonious services, would be completely destroyed. The temple will tumble, like a house of cards. The people, in fact, will suffer, and should anyone escape, the Lord will slay them by the swords – that is, by the hands of another nation.

Psalm 139 brings us so much comfort. As a matter of comfort, the psalmist declares the ever-presence and the all-knowing nature of God.

Where can I go from Your Spirit?  
Or where can I flee from Your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, You are there;  
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.  
If I take the wings of the dawn,  
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,  
Even there Your hand will lead me,  
And Your right hand will lay hold of me.  
If I say, “Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,  
And the light around me will be night,”  
Even the darkness is not dark to You,  
And the night is as bright as the day.  
Darkness and light are alike to You.

The psalmist is saying there is nowhere he can go that he is not under the protection of his God, of his Lord. Whether it be heaven or hell, whether it be the sky above or the sea below, “there is no escaping the comforting hand of God,” says the psalmist, using an all-encompassing metaphor to describe the presence of God.

Amos is saying God is ever present and there is no way to escape God. But instead of saying there is no way to escape God’s comfort, Amos is declaring to ancient Israel that there is no place where you can escape God’s punishment. You can run, but you cannot hide.

Notice, he says, you can go to the limits of the universe. Look at verse 2. “You can try to go to the depths of the grave, to Sheol. Yes, and even there My hand will take you.” You might even ascend the other direction, toward heaven. But it doesn’t matter how high you climb; God will get you. “I will bring you down,” God says.

Not only can you not hide in the limits of the universe, you cannot hide in the limits of the earth. “It doesn’t matter if you go to the summit of Mount Carmel” (verse 3). “I’ll pluck you down from

there. Or you might try to hide on the bottom of the floor of the sea. But even there I'll send a serpent to bite you" (see Amos 5:19).

There are no limits to the pursuit of God.

How this contrasts with Paul who said that neither the heights nor depths can separate the people of God from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). But just as the people of God cannot be separated from the love of God, those receiving the wrath of God cannot hide from Him either.

In fact, in verse 4 He says, "Though you try to hide among the prisoners of war, the exiles in captivity, I will take the sword of the foreign nation and slay you there." There is nowhere to hide from the eyes of God.

Jonathan Edwards has been described as one of the greatest intellects that America has ever produced. He preached a sermon on July 8, 1741, at Enfield, Connecticut, during the height of revival excitement. It was a sermon that preaches the wrath of God and the heat of hell like no other sermon I've ever read. They say that Jonathan Edwards would simply read the sermon, face buried in the manuscript, and the power of his penned words would cause men and women to grab the pews in front of them until their knuckles turned white.

Edwards said, **"Almost every natural man that hears of hell flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security; he flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do.... The greater part of those who heretofore have lived under the same means of grace, and are now dead, are undoubtedly gone to hell; and it was not because they were not as wise as those who are now alive: it is not because they did not lay out matters as well for themselves to secure their own escape."** ("Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God," 155-56)

Edwards' metaphors are so powerful. **He said the wrath of God is like a black cloud that hangs directly over your head, "full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God, it would immediately burst forth upon you."** (Edwards, 158)

**He said the wrath of God "is like great waters that are damned for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose."** (Edwards, 158)

**He said God's wrath is like a bow that is bent. The arrow is aimed at our heart already, ready to sting. "And justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment being made drunk with your blood."** (Edwards, 159-59)

In fact, he said **"God holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more**

**abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.... yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; that you were suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell.**

**“Oh sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit....” (Edwards, 159-60)**

A sobering sermon much like that of Amos.

Verses 5 and 6 are the doxology of a hymn. “Don't forget the might of the Lord,” he seems to be saying in verses 5 and 6. “Look at God's creative nature,” he seems to be saying. He talks about God's power, God's creativity, and God's control.

It is this God, who is so powerful that he can touch the land and cause it to melt, who controls the rain. It is a God who is over both heaven and earth. That's why to try to escape from Him is futile, indeed.

In verse 7 through the first part of verse 8, we see that Israel's covenant status, in the end, was not enough. I'm afraid the ancient Israelites thought that being chosen was a privilege when, in fact, it was a responsibility. Israel had falsely thought her history with God meant he would always protect them and do good for them. But in Amos 3:1-2, He has already said that the fact He had chosen them meant He was going to punish them.

It's not so much privilege, as it is responsibility.

He declares in verse 7 that Israel is in no way less accountable to God than any of the other nations. Amos shocks his hearers. He takes the very core of their faith – God's redemption of their fathers from Egypt – and turns it against them. We learn there is no such thing as unconditional salvation history. There is no lasting, guaranteed immunity. God has been involved with the movements of all the peoples.

He says to ancient Israel, “You are like the Ethiopians to me. Or don't forget the Syrians and the Philistines – they had exodus experiences, too.” Did the exodus experiences of the Philistines and the Syrians guarantee that they would avoid God's punishment? Of course not. God's eyes are on (notice verse 8) the sinful kingdom.

The sinful kingdom was the leaders of ancient Israel. The rich, the priests, the judges, the rulers, the king. But not the righteous poor, who were being oppressed.

This was a wake-up call for ancient Israel. And I think it ought to be a wake-up call for the church. Many have comforted themselves with the protection of God based on past religious experience. Like the ancient Israelites, you cannot and I cannot afford to look at the good things God has done for us in the past and assume He's "still on our side."

You cannot look at past experiences and ignore present realities. And of all the people of faith, Baptists are perhaps the worst. Living for Christ is not a one-time salvation experience that means we can live like we want to beyond our baptism. Rather, it is taking up our cross daily and following Him.

## **II. Certain Hope**

I want you to notice that verses 8 through 15 are not a certain judgment, but a certain hope. It's the idea of where the wrath and the grace of God meet.

What looked like total destruction is now, we see, limited destruction. The sinful kingdom and the house of Jacob are not identical. A remnant, a portion of the people would survive the disaster. The poor and the needy, who were abused and oppressed by the rulers and by the rich, were not condemned by Amos. God is going to sift the people. Like grain that is shaken in the sieve, the house of Israel is going to be shaken among the nations. The grain will be kept and the chaff will be thrown away.

Yet, in verse 10, once again the people think calamity will not overtake them. How foolish it is to base our protection, like ancient Israel did, on an event of the past. They placed their protection on the Exodus from Egypt.

In verses 11-12, He says He will raise up the fallen house of David. The Davidic dynasty is no longer described as a house (II Samuel 7:11, 27) but, rather, simply a booth or shelter. And a fallen tent at that.

Of course, David's dynasty was only ultimately fulfilled in the coming of the Christ, the coming of the Messiah who was from the lineage of David and would fulfill the Davidic covenant (Isaiah 9:6-7; 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5; 30:39; 33:15-17; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 12:8-13:8).

But notice this new rule of David, this new dynasty, would include a remnant of Edom and the nations. The people of God are never the people of one nation, but the people of all nations who fear Him. In Acts 15, the church realized that even as the Spirit came upon the people of Israel, the Spirit had come upon the house of Cornelius, a Gentile.

Finally, there is a promise of plenty in Amos 9:13-14.

"I am going to bless you so much when you find yourself in restoration," He says. "You are going to plant vineyards and drink wine. You are going to make gardens and eat their fruit." So much so, He says, that the guy plowing will overtake the reaper. The cycle will go so fast that before you

can completely harvest one crop, you'll be plowing for the second one. "The mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will be dissolved."

How is it this passage can include so much about the judgment, the wrath, the punishment that comes from God as well as the grace and the restoration of God?

It's all about the cross. There is no scene, there is no depiction that explains both the wrath and the grace of God better than the cross. For on that cross, God revealed His wrath against His own Son on your behalf and on my behalf. God, by His nature, is holy and righteous and good, and He cannot overlook sin. By His nature, He must be repulsed. By His nature, to be true to Himself, to be true to His righteousness, He must strike out against the sinner.

Paul said in Romans 1:18 that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Paul asks the question in Romans 3: How can God be both just, that is righteous, and also the justifier, the one who brings us close to Himself? He can only do so for those who have faith in Jesus. Because of the cross, because His blood has paid for our sins – sins God had previously passed over but could no longer pass over – Paul says in Romans 3:26 that God is now both just, true to His nature in being righteous, and also the one who justifies or brings us into relationship with Him.

God's word is a word of punishment. But it is also, it is finally, it is beautifully a word of grace.

Dare you wait another moment only to experience the wrath of God? Dare you reject the Christ of the cross another day? Dare you suppose, as the ancient Israelites did, that somehow God will treat them in a special way that they will not face the same righteous God that all other nations had faced?

Do not wait another moment. Rather, come into the grace of God through Christ, who has already borne God's wrath upon His back for you.