

## Amos 9:11-15

### 'Lavender and Roses; Blood and Iron'<sup>1</sup>

#### Favourite Characters

I wonder which Old Testament hero is your particular favourite.  
Perhaps it is Abraham, the friend of God.  
Or Moses, the humble leader of the people of God.  
Or David, the man after God's own heart.  
Or the rather charismatic and ecstatic prophet Ezekiel.  
Or perhaps it is Daniel.  
Or Samson.  
Or Rachel, Rebekkah, Sarah, or Hannah.  
Which one do you most identify with?  
Which one is the one that most interests you as a person?  
Which one would you seek to emulate or model yourself upon?  
As you think about this person, I wonder if you can think about events in their life that you wouldn't seek to emulate.  
Are their events that somewhat tarnish their image?  
You know the events I mean.  
Like when Abraham refuses to trust God and lies about Sarah or agrees to Sarah's attempts to provide him with a child.  
Or when Moses strikes the rock in impatience and maybe even in lack of faith.  
Or when David steals Bathsheba from Uriah and murders him to do it?  
Or even when he fails to discipline his children properly.  
Or perhaps you think of all the deceit and scheming that went on in the household of Jacob, involving Jacob himself, his wives, and his sons.  
You see, my guess is that when you think about some of the most well known characters in the Bible, you find flaws.  
This is true amongst the Old Testament heroes.  
And it is true amongst the New Testament heroes as well.  
These people were flawed human beings.  
They were sinful human beings like their ancestors Adam and Eve.  
They are people like us.  
Tonight we have reached the very end of book of Amos.  
And as we have heard the critique of Amos we have met a nation that is very flawed.  
Well, what I want to do tonight is for us to ask ourselves together whether there is any hope for the nation of Israel.  
Is there any hope for God's great purposes for Israel?  
Is there any hope for God's great purposes for the world?  
After all, Israel is just like us, just like the Old Testament heroes, just like Adam and Eve, and just like us.  
What hope is there for us and for God and his purposes if God continues to work through such people as us and them?

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<sup>1</sup> The title comes from Wellhausen's famous remark that Amos 9:11-15 is 'roses and lavender instead of blood and iron.'

This is the thrust of tonight's sermon.

And the way I want to proceed tonight is to take a look at the nation of Israel from two perspectives. I want to take a look at the nation from the perspective of chapters 1 to 9.

And then I want to take a look at the nation from the perspective of chapter 9, verses 11-15.

## **Amos: Two Perspectives**

### ***Amos 1:1-9:10***

- Who is Israel?

Okay, let's take a look at Amos 1:1-9:10 first.

How can we summarise who Israel is from these first nine chapters?

First, we know that the Israel spoken about in these chapters is largely the ten northern tribes, under King Jeroboam II, with a capital city of Samaria.

In other words, Israel is a divided nation.

It is not the way God intended it.

This is picked up in Amos 3 where we are told that northern Israel is part of the family of God.

So, this is the second thing to say about Israel.

They are the chosen people of God (3:2).

They are those that God brought up out of Egypt (3:1).

- What is Israel like?

The book of Amos also describes what Israel is like.

They are a nation morally corrupt.

They refuse to care for the poor and underprivileged.

As Amos says in 3:10, 'they do not know how to do right.'

And they are nation religiously corrupt.

They fail to practise right religion and they corrupt every element of their religious practice.

On top of these sins, the nation is complacent about their sin and confident in their security (Amos 6:1ff).

They are totally ignorant of the abysmal state of their corporate life.

The point being made by Amos is that Israel is like humanity.

They are sinful and rebellious.

Israel is like their ancestor Adam.

The nation is like the description of human beings in Genesis 6:5.

That is, 'every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil all the time.'

- How will God respond?

So, how will God respond?

Again, Amos leaves us in no doubt.

He makes clear in Amos 6:8 that God hates the arrogance of this nation.

In chapter 4 we are told that he had warned them time and time again in the past.

In chapters 7 to 9 we are told that he had changed his mind numerous times about the judgment that he was going to send.

But chapters 7 to 9 make it clear that time has run out.

God is going to judge the sinfulness of his people with a fierce judgment.

He is going to destroy the places of their false religion (7:9).

He is going to raise up enemies against their rulers (7:9) and their people.

And he will even send the ultimate punishment, a famine of the word of God (Amos 7:11-12).

He will send his people into exile.

There will be no place from which they will be able to hide from God's terrifying judgment.

God will shake the house of Israel as grain is shaken in a sieve.

And not a pebble will reach the ground (Amos 9:9).

- Why?

But let's now ask ourselves why.

Why will God act this way?

Why will he act in such devastating judgment?

Well, as we look at some of the doxologies that are scattered through the book we get some hints.

Amos 4:13 tells us that God is the creator of the world.

Amos 5:8 tells us that he is the one who divides night and day, darkness and light.

Other passages, such as Amos 8, tell us that this God is a God who hates evil.

He is a God who wants his people to love good as he himself does (Amos 5:14-15).

You see, the picture of God here is that he is a holy God.

He loves that which is good.

And he hates that which is evil.

He is holy and he seeks that his people are holy as well.

And when they are not, he must push holiness out of his presence.

Which means that he must punish the sinfulness of his people.

And he must punish the sinfulness of his world.

God is the holy and sovereign lord of all the earth.

### ***Amos 9:11-15***

So, there is the picture of Israel in the vast bulk of the prophecy of Amos.

They are God's chosen people.

But they are sinful people who stand under God's holy and righteous anger.

They are people destined for punishment.

But let's now turn to Amos 9:11-15.

The picture here is very different.

In fact, one famous commentator of the Bible said that these verses are roses and lavender where everything up until this point has been blood and iron.

So, let's see what we can make of these verses.

And the way I want to approach them is to ask the same questions that we asked of the rest of the book.

So, let's get started.

- Who is Israel?

First, who is Israel?

Well, the Israel spoken about in these verses is a very different Israel.

It is not a divided Israel.

It is an Israel reunited under a descendant of David.

Moreover, it is an Israel that is an inheritor of all the great promises of God.

In other words, it is still God's chosen nation and God's treasured possession.

- What is Israel like?

But now let's look at what Israel is like here.

It is a nation that is restored after judgment.

Amos 9:8 gave us a hint that restoration might be possible when Amos mentioned that God's destruction might not be total.

There might be a remnant who would escape.  
But here Israel is grand again.  
It is no longer under judgment.  
It is no longer decimated.  
It is complete and whole.  
The blessings of Abraham have been fulfilled.  
The nation possesses the land forever.  
And it is a land full of abundance and riches.  
It is like Eden in its fruitfulness.  
And the nations are part of it.  
Israel is finally a blessing to the nations as God intended them to be.  
Even the age long enemy of Edom is part of the restoration.

- How will God respond?

Can you see what these verses are saying about God's response?  
His response is overwhelmingly generous and kind.  
It is a response of faithfulness and mercy.  
There is no way that Israel or even a remnant of Israel could be seen to have deserved such mercy and kindness.  
This is over the top.  
This is abundant, unexpected, and rich beyond compare.

- Why?

So, let's ask ourselves this last question.  
Why is this the case?  
Why does God act this way?  
Well, the Bible is clear and even Amos has been clear.  
God is a God of justice and holiness.  
However, he is also a God of very great love and mercy.  
And this disposition in God is overwhelmingly strong.  
It drives God to overwhelm judgment with mercy.  
It causes God to do what he can to not downplay holiness and justice but at the same time to cause mercy to triumph over judgment.  
God is the God of surprising mercy, kindness, and love.  
He is the God who relents concerning judgment.  
Amos knew this.  
This is why he asked God to be merciful in Amos 7.  
Amos was simply appealing to God to be what Amos knew him to be – the God who relents concerning judgment.

## **What do we learn?**

So, what do we learn from this?  
Well, Amos has taught us some very great truths about God, hasn't he?  
First, God is a God who has a purpose for his world and that purpose is full of his goodness.  
Second, God is a God who realistic about humans.  
He knows that if humans are left on their own, they cannot achieve God's purpose in God's world.  
Humans are incurably sinful.  
And if God is to be all that you'd expect a God to be, then they deserve only judgment.  
This brings us to our third point.  
God must judge humanity for its sinfulness, because he is holy and righteous.

Four, God's overwhelming disposition is to have mercy.

He is the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in love and faithfulness.

So, the question is how God can get from point 3 to point 4.

How is it that God can be both holy and righteous as well as loving and gracious.

How can he get from Amos 1-9 to Amos 9:11-15?

Well, I think that to get the answer to this question we need to go to the New Testament.

The answer is hinted at in the Old Testament but it is spelled out in the New.

Romans 1-3 says what Amos 1-9 says but it says it about the whole world.

It says that all humanity is sinful and deserves punishment.

Take a look at Romans 3:9-18.

Here Paul summarises his argument up until this point.

He says...

*<sup>9</sup>What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. <sup>10</sup>As it is written:*

*"There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup>there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.*

*<sup>12</sup>All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*

*<sup>13</sup>"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. <sup>14</sup>Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. <sup>15</sup>Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup>ruin and misery mark their ways, <sup>17</sup>and the way of peace they do not know. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear of God before their eyes." [Romans 3:9-18, NIV]*

But now I want you to listen to how he goes on.

You see, in Romans 3:21-26, Paul lays out God's solution to human sinfulness.

*<sup>21</sup>But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup>This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup>God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—<sup>26</sup>he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. [Romans 3:21-26, NIV]*

Paul has just finished saying that no human can be righteous in the sight of a holy God.

But now he says that God has offered a righteousness.

This righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

God freely offers forgiveness and atonement through Jesus.

In other words, God allows Jesus to take the punishment and penalty for our sin.

And in doing this, God satisfies his justice.

That is, God truly regards sin as sin and punishes it.

However, at the same time, he allows his mercy to triumph over judgment.

He does this by allowing the punishment and penalty for sin to fall upon Jesus instead of us.

So, God is just.

But God is also the one who allows sinful people to be made righteous or justified.

This is an extraordinary act of overflowing mercy and kindness, isn't it?

Humans deserve judgment.

But in an overwhelming display of grace, God offers forgiveness.

Can you see what I'm saying?

I am saying that only because of Jesus can God be the God we see in Amos 9.

Only in Jesus can God overwhelm judgment with mercy.

And only because of Jesus will the great promises of Amos 9 be fulfilled.  
Only because of Jesus will the promises to Abraham be met.  
Only because of Jesus will a day come when the reaper will be overtaken by the ploughman, and the planter by the one treading grapes.  
Only because of the Jesus will new wine drip from the mountains and flow from the hills.  
Only because of Jesus will we return to Eden and to unfettered and unending fellowship with the living God.  
This is the grace and mercy of God.

## **Responding as God's children**

### ***Response 1***

Now, in the remaining few minutes of this talk I'd like to move on to how we can respond.  
And it strikes me that there are three responses that we should make.  
The first response is one of thankfulness.  
We should turn to God with overwhelming gratitude and thanks.  
Just as he promised the Israelites that Eden would come from exile, so he has turned us from being his enemies to being his friends.  
It is all from him and to him alone should be the praise.

### ***Response 2***

Second, we should respond to what we have heard tonight with repentance.  
You see, the sin of Israel and our sin meant that Jesus had to die.  
A righteous man died for us.  
God in the flesh died for us.  
Our sinfulness and rebellion was culpable.  
And we must turn back from it.  
We must repent of it.  
And we must continue to put our faith in Jesus who alone brings us to God.

### ***Response 3***

But there is a third response.  
You see, in the cross we have seen God's overwhelming love.  
And having been loved, we should ourselves love.  
You see, God has met our disobedience with grace.  
He has been surprisingly and overwhelming gracious and kind.  
He has been love.  
And this is what we are to be to each other.  
Where the world looks to rights and duties, we look elsewhere.  
We look at what God has done for us and do the same.  
And so, when we are wronged, we surprisingly turn and act in love.  
Where people treat us wrongly, we treat them rightly.  
We are people who overwhelm judgment with mercy.  
For we are children of God.  
We know love.  
And so we love as we have been loved.  
Friends, today I want you to be overwhelmed again by God's love for you.  
And I want you to go into this week determined to act as God has acted toward you.  
Where you see or hear of a brother or sister struggling, go to them, sit with them, cry with them.  
Where you see someone lonely or ostracised, be a friend to them.

Where you have been hurt by someone, determine to seek reconciliation.