

Exegesis of Amos 9:11-15

with an Outline for an Advent Sermon

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Introduction

James the brother of the Lord quoted Amos 9:11 at the Council of Jerusalem (Ac 15:16). His purpose was to support the work of Paul and Barnabas with the authority of the prophetic Word. They had been preaching among the Gentiles the good news of pure grace through the blood of Christ. In a unique way the quotation of the prophet's words themselves played an influential part in the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Verses 13-15 describe the blessings of the Messianic Age under the figure of agricultural abundance accompanying the permanent return to their homeland by God's exiled people. The combination of 13-15 with the previous prediction of the Messiah's coming from David's house provides a clue for understanding and preaching "this-worldly" prophetic descriptions of the Messianic Age.

Advent and Christmas Eve services usually remind us that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament prophecies. The prophets bear inspired witness that Jesus is the promised Christ. But this truth has a flip side we often fail to consider and proclaim. It is Jesus the Christ who opens the prophetic Scriptures to our understanding. Unless we listen to him speaking to us about the kingdom of God (Ac 1:3), much of the Old Testament would be a closed book for us. So it was for the unbelieving Jews in Jesus' time; so it remains for everyone, no matter how learned, who will not let the New Testament illuminate the Old. Jesus and his apostles give us the key that unlocks the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament. We need to make good use of this key. Then perhaps we will also feel freer to preach the gospel to New Testament believers on the basis of prophetic texts like this one.

Context

Under Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) Israel, the Northern Kingdom, enjoyed military success (2 Ki 14:25), high prosperity (e.g., Am 3:15) and luxurious living (e.g., 6:4-7). But the people no longer recognized their covenant with the LORD. They oppressed the poor among them (e.g., 2:6; 5:11; 8:4-6), perverted justice (e.g., 5:7,12,15), and made religious ceremony a hypocritical cover-up for idolatry and godless living (e.g., 5:21-26). Therefore the Holy One would punish his covenant people (e.g., 3:2; 6:14).

The visions of judgment the Lord showed Amos in chapters 7 through 9 have come to a climax with the fifth and last vision in 9:1-4. The Lord himself appears at (or even *on*) the altar to call for the destruction of the shrine at Bethel and the death of the unfaithful Israelites. "Not one will get away, none will escape," no matter where he may try to hide from the almighty Creator. God will fix his eyes on them for evil and not for good (9:1-4). His own people have become like a heathen nation in his sight, no different from their historic enemies the Philistines or the Arameans. His saving acts, such as the exodus from Egypt, give an impenitent Israel no special claim on his favor (9:7). "I will destroy [the sinful kingdom] from the face of the earth," God thunders (9:8). It was no empty threat. A generation later the kingdom of Israel was no more.

For a moment, a ray of gospel promise shines through the dark cloud of judgment on Israel's horizon: "Yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob" (9:8). Like a farmer sifting grain in a sieve, God will disperse his people among the nations to separate the precious remnant from the waste (9:9). Then the thunder rolls again: all the secure sinners among the Israelites will die by the sword (9:10). Finally the unconditional gospel promise in 9:11-15 brings the book of Amos to a close—a brilliant sunset in the last moments of a stormy day.

Many critical commentators cannot deal with such a radical turnaround from judgment to grace. Julius Wellhausen found here "roses and lavender instead of blood and iron" (cited by H. W. Wolff, 352) and would not accept Amos as the author of these verses. More recent scholars like Mays also call this passage a later addition: "After the Exile, when the prophetic message of judgment had been fulfilled, the oracles of salvation in 9:11-15 were added to let the broken community hear the full counsel of God" (Mays 14; 165. But contra, cf. Paul 288f.). Nothing in the book itself separates these final verses from the other words of Amos. God's law has

done his “strange work...his alien task” (Isa 28:21) of condemning sinners. In the last five verses of the book the Lord of faithful grace takes up “his own work” of comforting the condemned and raising the spiritually dead with his promise of salvation (cf. *Apology* XII, 51).

Verse 11

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶקְוִים אֶת־סֹפְתֵי דָוִד הַנִּפְלֹת
וְגִדַרְתִּי אֶת־פְּרִצֵיהֶן
וְהָרַסְתִּיו אֶקְוִים
וּבְנִיתִיהָ כַּיְמֵי עוֹלָם:

“In that day I will raise up the fallen hut of David,
and I will wall up its [lit. their] breaches,
and its [lit. his] ruins I will raise up,
and I will [re]build it as [it was in] days of old.”

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא could refer to “the day of the LORD” (5:18-20). Then, like Joel (4[Eng. 3]:16), Amos is proclaiming that the day of judgment will be a day of salvation as well. But the words may also simply connect this verse with the preceding, like an English “then.” James replaces them in Acts 15:16 with *μετὰ ταῦτα* “after these things.”

What is סֹפְתֵי דָוִד? A סֹפָה is a “hut,” a temporary shelter for cattle (Ge 33:7), for soldiers in the field (1 Sa 11:11), for watchers in vineyards (Isa 1:8), for someone who needs shade from the sun (Jonah 4:5). During הַגְּדִלּוֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּה “the Festival of Tabernacles” (Lev 23:34) the Israelites lived in temporary shelters to remind them of their tenting in the wilderness after the Exodus, a custom still followed by Orthodox Jews. Rather than the humble “hut” of David, we might expect “the *house* of David,” as in the LORD’s promise spoken by Nathan to the king: “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (2 Sa 7:16). Even though the kingdom was divided, “hut” hardly fits the state of David’s dynasty in Jerusalem in Amos’s time, when Uzziah (=Azariah), at least during the first part of his reign, ruled the Kingdom of Judah with considerable visible success (2 Chr 26). The active participle הַנִּפְלֹת says nothing about time: it could mean “fallen” in the past, “falling” in the present, or “about to fall” in the future (*GKC* 116d). This exegesis takes it to be “fallen,” in a prophetic perfect sense, to describe the state of David’s house before David’s greater son would come. Before the house will be rebuilt, it will have fallen down. “Their breaches” and “his ruins” in parallel parts of the verse support this understanding.

The Northern Kingdom, unlike Judah in the south, never had a legitimate Davidic king of its own. Amos under the Spirit’s inspiration is looking beyond his own times and beyond the end of both kingdoms to a day when no descendant of David will occupy the throne in Jerusalem. David’s ancient house will fall into a miserable state before it will be restored. Isaiah uses “*tent* of David” in a similar sense (16:5—“house” in the NIV). Amos, the prophet from Judah, makes it clear that salvation for Israel must come from a reunion with David’s house. Thus his prophecy resembles the better-known promise given through Isaiah, his near-contemporary in Judah: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit” (11:1). Jesse’s family tree must be cut down before a fresh shoot can spring from its roots.

The angel Gabriel proclaimed the fulfillment of Amos 9:11 as well as 2 Samuel 7:12f. and Isaiah 11:1 when he announced the birth of Jesus to lowly Mary: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Lk 1:32f.). Jewish interpreters also found the Messiah in Amos 9:11. The Talmud calls him “the son of the fallen” (Sanhedrin, 96b: Soncino Edition *Nezikin*, Vol. III, 654).¹

¹ For more references to Jewish sources, cf. Wenthe 30-32. According to H. W. Wolff (355), “the oracle of the fallen booth of David preoccupied the Qumran community.”

The fulfillment of this prophecy in David’s Son, Jesus the Christ, is the key that opens this verse and of those that follow (12-15) to our understanding. Jesus never claimed to be an earthly king on the model of Caesar or even David (Lk 23:2; cf. 20:20-26). When the Spirit had anointed Jesus to proclaim “freedom for the prisoners” and “release of the oppressed” in “the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:16-21; cf. Isa 61:1f.), Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in the good news Jesus proclaimed to the poor that day in his home town. His message was not the manifesto of a political movement that would spring prisoners from Palestinian jails. Mark sums up “the good news of God” that Jesus preached: “ 1] The time has come. 2] The kingdom of God is near. 3] *Repent and believe the good news!*” (1:15). Parts 1 and 2 the Jewish people were glad to hear; Part 3 most of them rejected. Jesus reigns in the hearts of those who acknowledge the truth of his Word and listen to its message in repentance and faith. He explains his kingship in his own words: he is a king born “to testify to the truth,” and “everyone on the side of truth” listens to him (Jn 18:36f.). We receive from Christ himself this key to his kingdom when we listen to him, hear his word, and keep it. “God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven” (*Small Catechism*, Second Petition).

Christ’s own conception of his reign will determine how we are to understand Amos 9:11-15. His kingship infinitely outshines the reign of his father David, but its glory is invisible to all but the eyes of faith. “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you,” or better, since the Lord was answering a question put by Pharisees, “[invisibly] among you” (Lk 17:20f.). Those who listen to him see gleams of his kingdom’s glory already now, but only at the end of this sin-darkened age will they and everyone else see its full splendor. Then even those who condemned him to death “will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 27:64).

The base word in פְּרִצֵיהֶן “their (f.) breaches” appeared in 4:3 to describe breaks in city walls, perhaps damage caused by battering rams (King 73). There is no easy explanation of the third person plural feminine suffix. Keil (330) suggests that it refers to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, to be reunited under David’s house. Both the Septuagint and Vulgate have singular possessives, translated “its breaches,” but the Greek and Latin translators may well have encountered the same difficulty we see in the Hebrew text and smoothed it out, as we do in English versions. הַרְסָתָיו “his ruins” is a *hapax legomenon*, but the root is used frequently in the sense of “throwing/ breaking/ tearing down.” The masculine singular suffix is adjusted to the name David. The Lord will raise up David’s fallen hut, repair the breaks in its walls, raise its ruins, in short, [re]build it. “Build” strongly recalls the promise of the Messiah that the prophet Nathan gave David: “He is the one who will build a house for my name” (2 Sa 7:13). For עוֹלָם, referring here to David’s time, see Isaiah 63:9, where “days of old” refers to the long-ago time of Moses. GKC 118u explains the use of the preposition.

Verse 12

לְמַעַן יִירְשׁוּ אֶת־שְׂאֵרֵי אֲדוֹם׃
וְכָל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא שְׁמִי עָלֵיהֶם׃
נְאֻם־יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה זֹאת׃

“that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations that are called by my name,”
says the LORD who does this.

לְמַעַן introduces the Lord’s purpose in rebuilding David’s house. He looks beyond the Israelite nation; he will also make his Servant “a light to the Gentiles” (Isa 49:6). Hostility between Israel and Edom went back to the rivalry of Jacob and Esau (Ge 25). The Edomites denied the Israelites passage through their land on their way from Egypt to Canaan (Nu 20:4-21). “Edom” in the prophecy represents all Israel’s heathen enemies.

David “put garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David” (2 Sa 8:14) for a time. In 1:11f. Amos has predicted judgment on Edom (1:11,12), a prophecy that might possibly have been fulfilled at the same time Tiglath-Pileser III carried off captives from Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh a few years after Amos’s prophecy (1 Ch 5:26). But the Lord has a purpose for an Edomite remnant, not only for the “remnant of Israel” (Isa 10:20, etc.). Under David’s dynasty the remnants of Edom and other non-Israelite nations will become the possession of his people—the collective subject of the plural **וְיִשְׂרָאֵל**. As the Lord foretold to Rebekah already before the birth of her twins, “the older”—Esau, father of the Edomites—“will serve the younger”—Jacob, ancestor of the people of Israel (Ge 25:23).

This kind of language can describe the violent conquest of an enemy (e.g., Nu 24:18; Isa 54:3), but in the present passage the conquered former enemies become a part of God’s people as they learn to worship Israel’s God: “Foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him...—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. The Sovereign Lord declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel: ‘I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered’” (Isa 56:6f.). The status of citizens in the Lord’s kingdom will belong also to these “others,” to “all the nations who are called by [the Lord’s] name.” As God told his people through Moses, it would be evident to all the peoples of the earth **כִּי שֵׁם יְהוָה נִקְרָא עָלֶיךָ** lit., “that the name of the LORD has been called upon you,” i.e., “that you have been called by the name of the LORD” (Dt 28:10). Israel was to confess to the Lord, **שֵׁמְךָ עָלֵינוּ נִקְרָא** lit., “your name has been called upon us,” i.e., “we have been called by your name” (Jer 14:9), a way of saying “we belong to you.” Now even an Edomite remnant, together with other chosen Gentile nations, will be included in the Lord’s family, enjoying the blessings of his covenant of grace. When Jesus overcomes the world (Jn 16:23), do not some former citizens of the world become members of his people?

The very words that Amos preached about 750 B.C. played an important part in their own New Testament fulfillment. Acts 15 tells how Paul and Barnabas on their return from their first mission journey carried the astounding news to Jerusalem that Gentiles had been turned to Christ. Some Pharisees who recognized Jesus as their Messiah still insisted that “the Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses” (Ac 15:5), a demand that negated God’s grace and would have stopped Gentile missions cold. Peter reminded them that the Lord had given his Holy Spirit to Jews and Gentiles alike: “He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith” (Ac 15:9). The church must not reimpose the Mosaic law: “Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (Ac 15:11).

After Barnabas and Paul had described God’s work among the Gentiles, James the brother of the Lord spoke up to show that “the words of the prophets” (Ac 15:15) agreed with Peter’s statement. As he quoted orally he cited Amos 9:11f. with some variations (Ac 15:16-18. At the beginning of his citation he may allude to Jeremiah 12:15 and at the close to Isaiah 45:21.)

Readers will recognize differences between Amos 9:12 in the Hebrew text and the Septuagint citation in Acts 15:17: **ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐφ’ οὓς ἐμικέκληται τὸ ὄνομα μου ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς**, lit., “in order that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord and all the nations upon whom my name has been called upon them.” Besides rendering literally the Hebraism in the relative clause at the end of the verse, the Septuagint translators seem to have read the unpointed Hebrew text of Verse 12 as **לְמַעַן יִדְרְשׁוּ אֶתִּי שְׂאֲרֵי־תְּאֵדָם** “in order that the remnant of mankind might seek me,” reading the verb **יִדְרְשׁוּ** “they may seek” instead of **יִרְשׁוּ** “they may possess”; the noun **תְּאֵדָם** “mankind” instead of **אֶדְוֹם** “Edom”; and perhaps **אֶתִּי** “me,” referring to the Lord, before **שְׂאֲרֵי־תְּאֵדָם** “remnant” instead of the simple direct object marker **תְּאֵדָם**. In Acts, **שְׂאֲרֵי־תְּאֵדָם** becomes the subject of the clause rather than the direct object. James may have used Hebrew or an Aramaic paraphrase in speaking to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem; perhaps it was Luke who chose the Greek version when he wrote Acts. Yet, as shown above, even if James quoted the

Septuagint, it supported the same sense as the Masoretic text: the Lord intends salvation for Gentiles as well as Jews, that all may enjoy a place in his kingdom through Spirit-worked faith in his promise.² The decision of the Jerusalem Council declared Paul and Barnabas free to continue preaching an unconditional gospel. Gentile believers will be added to God’s people and will also be called by the name of the Lord. New Testament readers cannot miss the reference to baptism!

Verse 13

הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם־יְהוָה
וְנִגַּשׁ חֹרֵשׁ בְּקֹצֵר
וְדָרָךְ עֹנְבִים בְּמִשְׁךְ הַזֶּרַע
וְהָטִיפוּ הַהָרִים עֲסִים
וְכָל־הַקְּבָעוֹת תִּתְמוּגְגְנָה:

“Look! days are coming,” says the LORD,
“when [the] plowman will overtake the harvester,
and [the] grape-treader [will overtake] the sower of seed,
and the mountains will drip new wine,
and all the heights will melt.”

Amos foretells a time of supernatural abundance in days to come. Israel’s fields will produce such great plenty that the grain harvest of April-June will not be completely gathered into the storehouses almost half a year later, when the October-November plowing begins. The laborers in the vineyards will still be treading out the vintage of August-September when the autumn rains have softened the ground for plowing and it is time to sow the next crops in November-December. (The verb root נִגַּשׁ Niph'al vav consecutive perfect is translated as active, not passive (cf. NIV): “will draw near/approach/overtake.” It is followed by the preposition כִּי rather than a direct object.)

There is a partial allusion to Leviticus 26:23-25, where the Lord says: “If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops, and the trees of the field their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.” The striking difference from Leviticus, though, is the absence of any condition in the prophet’s description of the Messianic Age. The abundance promised by Moses is attached to obedience, but in his unconditional promise of blessing Amos makes no reference to any preparation on the part of Israel.” The return of blessing is Yahweh’s act and rests alone on his will to restore the fortune of his elect people” (Mays 168). Salvation through the Son of David is by grace!

As part of the abundance, Amos describes grape juice overflowing the vats next to the winepresses in the vineyards and running down the mountains. It gushes down the terraces so plentifully that the hills “melt.” (תִּתְמוּגְגְנָה is a Hithpoel from מוּג “melt.” Paul [294], citing Nah 1:5 and Ps 107:26, suggests the translation “wave,” “and all the hills shall wave [with grain],” completing a chiasm with this second reference to grain at the end of the verse.) The Lord multiplies to the nth degree the richness of the land he promised to enslaved Israel in Egypt—“a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:17). Can the prophet only be using hyperbole for abundant harvests in Israel’s fields after the return from exile? See the comments on Verse 15 below.

² Wenthe (38f) says too much when he flatly asserts that the LXX “changes the sense of the MT” and argues that James’ use of the passage “reveals a freedom on the part of the New Testament church both with regard to the form of the text and with regard to its application.” The Greek supports the same application as the Hebrew text.

Verse 14

וְשָׁבְתִי אֶת־שְׁבוֹת עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וּבְנִי עָרִים נְשֻׁמוֹת וַיִּשְׁׁבוּ
וַיִּטְעוּ כְרָמִים וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וְאֶת־יַיִן
וַעֲשׂוּ גִבּוֹת וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־פְּרִיָהֶם:

“And I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they will [re]build desolated cities and will live [in them];
and they will plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they will make gardens and eat their produce.”

וְשָׁבְתִי is rendered “restore the captivity of” (*BDB*) in older translations. Newer versions translate “turn one’s fortune (to the good)” (*KB*; see the inscriptional support added in *KBS*). According to Mays (167) “it refers to the action of Yahweh when he shifts from wrath to mercy in dealing with his chosen people (e.g., Dt 30:3; Hos 6:11; Jer 29:14).” This verse looks beyond the coming exile, when the Lord will sift his people among all the nations (9:9). His people will return to Canaan and the nation will be reunited. The prophet reverses God’s previous threat of judgment, “Though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine” (5:11). The same words recall promises spoken by Moses and Joshua about the land as a gift of the Lord’s grace (Dt 6:10f.; Jos 24:13). The gifts that Israel has forfeited by unbelief the Lord will graciously restore to his people, and in even greater fullness than before. Was not the incipient fulfillment of this promise in the return from exile still only a faint shadow of what was and is to come? See the comments on Verse 15 below.

Verse 15

וַיִּטְעֵנִי עַל־אֲדָמָתָם
וְלֹא יִנְתָּשׁוּ עֹד
מֵעַל אֲדָמָתָם לְאֶשְׁרֵי נְתַתִּי לָהֶם
אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ:

“And I will plant them on their land,
and they will not be uprooted again
from their land that I gave them,”
says the LORD your God.

This final verse of the promise, the conclusion of the book of Amos, assures God’s people of a *permanent* blessing. God’s Israel will be “planted” on their land eternally, never to be uprooted again: no more exile, no more captivity, no more loneliness in a strange land far from home! This is the word of the Lord, Israel’s own gracious God—יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ—, who keeps all his promises in steadfast faithfulness and love.

In Verses 13-15 Amos piles one concrete, physical, “this-world” image on another to describe the fulfillment of the Lord’s promises. Among many parallels, see Hos 14:4-7 and Joel 4:17-21 [Eng. 3:17-21], especially 18: “The mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk.” In the second-last chapter of his book Isaiah uses some of this same imagery to describe the new heavens and new earth the Lord will create, so different from this sin-spoiled world that “the former things will not be remembered” (Isa 65:17). The people of Jerusalem “will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be

the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands” (Isa 65:21f.). According to Isaiah, in that new creation even the animals of the land will reflect a new harmony: the wolf and the lamb will feed together and the lion will eat straw like the ox. “‘They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,’ says the Lord” (65:25).

The writings of the prophets predict and prepare for the coming of the Christ, but he and his gospel also provide the key that opens wide those same prophetic Scriptures. Jesus called the Emmaus disciples “foolish” and “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Lk 24:25) not only because they had failed to give adequate attention to the prophets’ writings, but perhaps also because they had heard his teaching and still did not understand the prophets. He repaired this lack for the two on their way to Emmaus by explaining to them “what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Lk 24:27). How could he remain in the grave when the prophets promise that the Son of David will “enter his glory” (Lk 24:25) and reign with eternal blessing? He himself stayed visibly with the disciples forty days after his resurrection and “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Lk 24:45), speaking to them in particular “about the kingdom of God” (Ac 1:3).

When readers, no matter how scholarly, try to understand the prophets without letting the Word of Christ illuminate them, their mind is dulled. It is as if a veil covers their hearts, and “*only in Christ* is it taken away,” as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:14. The apostle is referring to the veil Moses put over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing its radiance fade away when he returned from speaking with the Lord. But Paul freely uses this picture to depict for us the New Testament principle for interpreting Moses, Isaiah, Amos, and all the prophets. The veil covers not the prophet’s face but the heart that ponders the Old Testament without listening to Jesus. “But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Corinthians 3:16). “*You must listen to him,*” the Lord directed through Moses when he foretold the Prophet to come. “I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account” (Dt 18:15.17-19). On the Mount of Transfiguration the Father in person bore witness to the authority of the Son’s words: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. *Listen to him*” (Mt 17:5).

Is anything lacking in Amos’s description of the Messiah’s days, to be supplied later in the words we must hear from Jesus himself?

- *The cross of the Christ is not mentioned.* The prophet’s view skips from the coming of the Davidic king to the blessings of his everlasting reign. We do not hear from Amos that by being lifted up from the earth on the cross the Christ will draw all men to himself; we do not learn “the kind of death he was going to die” (John 12:32). It remains for Jesus himself repeatedly “to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Mt 16:21f.; cf. 17:9-12; 20:18f.—the first passage includes Peter’s protest, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” The first two bracket the account of the Transfiguration, with the Father repeating “*Listen to him!*”). Amos does not explain, as Christ’s apostle Paul will after the fact, that God will exalt the Son of David and every knee will bow at his name *because* he will humble himself and become obedient even to death on a cross (Phi 2:8-10). Jesus and his apostles complete Amos’s words with the message of the cross.³
- Accordingly, in describing the blessings of the kingdom of God, Amos also does not refer to *the cross that the citizens of Christ’s kingdom will carry after him*. The prophet gives no hint that the King’s people will have trouble during their life in the world (Jn 16:33) before they fully enter into his eternal rest (Heb 4:6-11). Of course, Israel’s own national experience testified that God brought his people home by way of the wilderness, both from Egypt and from exile in Babylon. That was the Old Testament way of sorrows—could we even say a prefiguration of the way of the cross? We “pilgrims

³ We should not expect every prophetic promise to say everything included in Isaiah 53: “*Because* he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors” the Father promises his suffering Servant: “*Therefore* I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong” (Isa 53:12). Cf. also especially Zechariah 13:7, cited by Jesus on the night he was betrayed (Mt 26:31); and compare the first part of Psalm 22 (2-19 [Eng.1-18]) with its triumphant conclusion (20-32 [Eng.19-31]).

through this barren land” still pray to the Lord, “Lead me all my journey through” and “land me safe on Canaan’s side” (CW 331).

On the other hand, what positive truths about Christ’s kingdom does the Old Testament prophet proclaim in these verses, in addition to the coming of the King and the extension of his kingdom over the Gentiles (vs. 11f.)?

- Those days will be a time of supernatural abundance (v.13).
- God’s exiled people will return and enjoy life in their homeland (v.14).
- They will be “planted” in their homeland, never to be uprooted again (v.15).

The meaning of such promises is not fully revealed until the Son of David “comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found” (CW 62). All good things come from him, but the promised blessings of his kingdom are not found in the rich fields, overflowing barns, and full wine cellars of any earthly homeland. When some Roman Christians became too concerned with what they set out on their tables and put into their stomachs, Paul had to remind them, “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Ro 14:17). The prophet depicts heavenly and spiritual blessings in terms of physical and earthly things. The connection of these promises (verses 13-15) with the coming of the Christ (verses 11f.) determines that this is not just a hyperbolic description of the land’s prosperity and the Israelites’ bliss after their return from exile. When the Son of God is born David’s son in Bethlehem, faith recognizes the beginning of the Last Times, the commencement of the Messianic Age, when the Lord will pour out the fullness of his blessing. Finally his people—those who “belong to Christ,” “Abraham’s seed,” “heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29)—will enter their eternal rest (Heb 4:9) in the “city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10).

Dispensational millennialistic interpretation, disregarding the explanations of our Lord and his apostles, sees in the words of Amos a promise of national blessing and permanent material prosperity for the Jewish nation (e.g., Boice 180). The events in the Near East since 1948 lead millennialists to suggest that the “first step in God’s plan for the ultimate blessing of Israel may be unfolding before our eyes” (Boice 183). Much Jewish interpretation is similar. A modern plaque erected outside the old city walls dates the beginning of the “redemption of Jerusalem” to the reoccupation of the land by the Jews in the middle of the last century (but cf. Luke 2:38: Anna knew better!). Our Lord’s own proclamation of the kingdom of God lays this misunderstanding to rest. In an article on Romans 9–11 G. Wolff has refuted at some length the interpretation that millennial exegetes call “the normal and natural exegesis of these passages” (Walvoord 93). Motyer sums up a correct understanding of the promise at the end of Amos: “When...the adversity of nature is gone, and all the powers of nature are operating in favour of man and for his enrichment, this is not, and in the Bible cannot be, any sort of purely materialistic Golden Age. It means that *basic spiritual and moral realities have been put to rights. All is well between God and man....* The curse is gone (Gn 3:17,18) and Eden is restored” (206, emphasis added).

Because the Messianic Era began with the coming of Christ and continues through his second coming into eternity, God’s new creation has both present and future aspects for us. Commenting on Isaiah 65, J. Braun uses the picture of “a great mansion with a massive courtyard” to describe the New Testament church pictured in prophecy. “The mansion itself represents the home of the church triumphant, the eternal Jerusalem waiting for all believers....Those in the courtyard have not yet entered the mansion. They wait because they represent the church militant, believers still in this world” (II, 387). But it is good even to stand in the courtyard, because a place in the eternal mansion is worth waiting for!

The present already partakes of future blessings. Jesus came so that in his kingdom we “may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). If God’s present gifts appear more paltry in our own experience than the description at the end of Amos 9, we need to close our old natural eyes and open the new spiritual eyes of faith. Life, “the life that is truly life” (1 Ti 6:19), is ours, *now and forever*. Being justified through faith we have all the blessings that salvation includes: peace with God, access to his grace, the hope of his glory, joy in our sufferings, perseverance, character, hope, God’s love in our hearts by the gift of his Spirit (Ro 5:1-5). Amos portrays the life that is God’s gift in language his Old Testament people could easily relate to: abundant crops,

gardens and vineyards, a permanent home in the promised land. Doesn't the Holy Spirit employ a similar strategy in the visions John records in Revelation to help God's still-flesh-encumbered New Testament children picture the unseen glories of heaven? The pearly gates, gem-stone walls, golden street, river of life and everbearing fruit tree, its leaves the prescription for the healing of the nations (Rev 20f.): do not the most precious, beautiful, beneficial things we know on earth become a picture of living "with the Lord forever" (1 Th 4:17)? The material gifts that Israel could see pointed to greater spiritual blessings yet only dimly seen, to be unveiled partially with the coming of the Christ in New Testament times, fully in eternity. Even considering just our present blessings, would any disciple of Jesus want to trade justification by God's grace, the new life of faith we enjoy, and the promise of eternal life in the Father's house for a barnful of grain and title to a vineyard in the Valley of Jezreel?

Our present life by faith in Christ gives us a tantalizing glimpse of a "very good" and perfectly harmonious new creation. That is how earth, our present home, came from the hand of God at the beginning; thus it will be perfectly restored when Jesus comes again. Reconciled to our heavenly Father through David's greater Son, we enjoy all the blessings we can handle in our present life of faith. But the prophet's promise gives us hope for more. Christ has prepared a new, eternal paradise for his own. That is why "we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Outline for an Advent Sermon on Amos 9:11-15

Introduction: Many old buildings are being restored today. The text speaks of two houses far gone: the royal house of David and this old world we're living in.

THEME: THE LORD WILL RESTORE THIS OLD HOUSE.

- I. The Lord rebuilt the fallen hut of David, as he promised (11,12).
 - A. The "good old days" of David were long gone in the prophet's time, just before the last chapter of Israel's history, exile in Assyria.
 - B. A remnant of Jews would return from their Babylonian exile, but no Davidic king would reign ("fallen hut of David").
 - C. Gabriel announced to Mary that her son Jesus will reign forever on David's throne (Luke 1:32, 33).
 - D. This unconditional promise of grace also looks forward to the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's people (remember your baptism!). Cf. James' quotation of the text in Acts 15.
- II. Through Christ, God will renew this old world, as he promises (13-15).
 - A. The disruption of nature points to the enmity between man and God (Gn 3:17-19).
 - B. In Christ's kingdom we enjoy the fullness of God's blessing.
 1. The text contains Old Testament physical pictures.
 2. New Testament reality: abundant life (John 10:10) and a rich supply of spiritual gifts (Ro 5:1-5). These are supplied by the Christ, the Son of David, who humbled himself to the cross, rose from the dead and now reigns in glory. (Hear the Prophet who came 750 years after Amos!)
 - C. People need our help in all their needs. Yet, however much help is given, human remedies for hunger and homelessness provide nothing that lasts.
 - D. Through faith in Christ we look forward to a new creation, matching Paradise at the beginning.
 - E. This hope is for sharing with other hungry, homeless sinners.

Conclusion: Our God designed and built this house to be lived in. There still is room.

NOTE: The preacher looking for a series of less familiar Advent texts from various prophets might consider also portions of Hosea 14, Isaiah 65:17-25, Joel 4 [Eng.3]:17-21, and Jeremiah 33 (similar to Amos 9 in that blessings of the Messianic Age are connected with the sprouting of the “righteous Branch” from David’s line), etc. Such texts offer a variety of imagery while illustrating the need for a New Testament understanding of these Old Testament prophecies.

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