

## Prayer

Thank You, Lord God, for the little things of life which make our day and give us security in all we do. The love of those who are close to us; the things we do each day for others, and what they do for us; the food we eat, the drinks we enjoy, and the conversations we share each day. May we never stop praising You for the little things that make life good. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Retailing

*Pray for those who work in retail trades in your local area, from shops to the selling of food and car parts, for example. Pray for those whose living depends on their success.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the life God has given you, and for His love
- Pray that God's people will show good morality to the world
- Pray for your country's political parties and how they are funded

## Meditation

What is magnificent can often let you down;  
What is grand may lack essential quality;  
What is impressive could hide many faults;  
And what is huge may very well fail to last.

Why is it that even though we know these things,  
We still glamorise extravagance and size.  
How different from what is taught by Christ;  
That the poor in spirit possess His Kingdom,

What is ordinary can often be wonderful;  
What is simple may be found to be wise;  
What is small could be of great importance;  
And what is meek will an example to all.

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## Bible Study - Amos 9:1-10

<sup>1</sup> I saw the LORD standing beside the altar, and He said: 'Strike the lamp stand tops and shake the basins; break them on the heads of all the people!; and those of them who are left I will kill by the sword; not one of them shall flee, and no survivor will escape. <sup>2</sup> If they were to dig down into the graves of Sheol, my hand would take them from there; if they were to climb up to heaven, I would bring them down from there. <sup>3</sup> If they were to hide themselves on the summit of Carmel, I would search them out from there and take them; and if they were to hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, I would command the serpent, and it would bite them even there. <sup>4</sup> If they were to go into captivity before their enemies, there I would command the sword and it would kill them. I have set my eyes upon them for evil and not for good.'

<sup>5</sup> The Lord GOD of hosts, He who touches the earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn; everything rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the River-canal of Egypt. <sup>6</sup> He who has built His upper chamber in the heavens and set His vault over the earth, who summons the water of the sea and pours it out on the surface of the earth; the LORD is his name.

<sup>7</sup> 'Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?' says the LORD. 'Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, just like the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir? <sup>8</sup> Look, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon this sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth, except that I will not completely destroy the house of Jacob,' says the LORD. <sup>9</sup> 'Look at this, I will give the command and shake the house of Israel among all the nations just

as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble will fall to the earth. <sup>10</sup> All the sinners from among my people will die by the sword; those who say, "Evil will neither reach us or overtake us."

## Review

In our recent studies of Amos, we have been led from one degree of astonishment to another as we hear about the sins of Israel and the wrath of God's punishment on His people. Amos, a southern Judean shepherd, had the audacity to go north and tell the wealthy people of Israel that their kingdom was religiously and morally corrupt, and God had sealed its fate; Israel would be destroyed. This message brought Amos some considerable trouble. We catch a glimpse of this within his initial prophecies (chapters 1 to 4), and in the confrontation between Amos and Amaziah, the priest at Bethel (7:10f.). At some point, Amos must have gone home to Judah, because it would have been too dangerous to say more to Israel about their coming destruction; indeed, what else could he say!

The prophecy within our passage today is unrelenting. It tells us in graphic and unpleasant language that God intended to destroy Israel because of her sins (9:1), and that there would be no possibility of escape (9:2-4). In the very first verse, you may find that your own Bible says something different from this translation, focussing on the destruction of buildings (most translations speak of 'shattering columns and quaking foundations' for example). However, some care with the Hebrew words of this verse indicate that the items broken by the Lord 'standing by the altar' were objects typically present in any shrine, for example candlestick tops (compare with Exodus 25:18f.), and basins for holding the blood of offerings (see 'temple utensils', as in 1 Chron 9:19). Amos' message was simple; the Lord would destroy firstly the worthless implements of their religion in Israel; they had been defiled by the impure worship of foreign gods and were no longer fit for purpose, and there was to be no escape from God's judgement (9:3,4)!

In the middle of the passage, Amos' prophecy is broken by another of his stunning affirmations of the creative power of Almighty God (9:5,6; see also 5:8). In this case, Amos likened the work of the Lord God in building and destroying nations to the rise and fall of Nile floods, which brought a cycle of prosperity or calamity to Egypt. God's authority over life and death was just like this (9:6), a point more obvious to people of ancient times than to us today.

Amos' message becomes more shocking as it reaches the end. The famous 'Exodus' was remembered by Israel as God's favour on His special people, but in verses 7 Amos said that God had done other wonders for other nations! But then, just as we are wondering whether this can really be true, Amos prophesies a brief message, which offers Israel more hope than can be found elsewhere in all his work; he says; 'except that I will not completely destroy the house of Jacob'.

At this point, some people feel like throwing up their hands in disbelief because complete destruction is exactly what Amos' message has been about all the way along! But wait for a moment and consider the words Amos used. His entire message of gloom was preached against 'Israel', meaning the northern Kingdom of God's people which incorporated all the tribes except for Judah and its capital Jerusalem (also Benjamin, and possibly Simeon). Therefore, when Amos said that not all 'Jacob' would be destroyed (9:8), he purposefully used the common name of the father of the twelve tribes, as if to say that one tribe at least would be saved. This is exactly what we will discover in our last passage from Amos (9:11-15).

We must read these prophecies carefully, lest we misunderstand them and miss clues such as this, which are there to remind us exactly what the Lord would and did do. Although this passage includes some of the most terrible prophecies in the Old Testament against Israel, we should remember that Amos did not leave God's people without hope. In the same way, the Lord is utterly opposed to all sin and evil today, but He has given us hope through the death and life of Christ. We gladly accept that God does all these things for a purpose; He destroys evil and lifts up all who put their trust in Him.

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## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group the meaning of the destruction in Amos 9:1-4. What can this message say to us?
2. What do you imagine were the reactions of the crowds to what Amos prophesied here?
3. What sins does the Lord want to see removed from His people today, and how may they be removed?

# Discipleship

## Personal comment:

*This passage of Scripture offers us hope, even though the one sentence which offers it may seem hidden away and almost at the end of Amos' prophecies. Sometimes it is necessary to speak powerfully against evil to the point where the message of hope seems almost lost, but it is never lost, and we must never allow it to be lost. There is always hope. Scripture is clear about this.*

## Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Think and pray about the sins of God's people today, and imagine what Amos would say to the church today. Pray about those issues which divide the church and create tension within it, and ask the Lord to open people's eyes to the need for repentance and reform within His people.*
- *Speak to at least one other person about the things you have learned from this text today. Share your thoughts about how God will both judge His people and bring hope to them, even now.*

## Final Prayer

As we worship you today, Lord God, lead us appreciate love. Help us to see love in the kindness of the people that we meet and the fellowship we enjoy; and may the experience of their friendship be for us the evidence we need today of Your love for us, Lord God, and the truth of the Gospel of Jesus. AMEN

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