

Amos 7:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me: and, behold, the Lord GOD called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part.

Analysis

Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me: and, behold, the Lord GOD called to contend by fire—(כִּי הָרַאְתִּי אֶלְךָ יְהוָה וְיָגֹעַ קָרָא לְרַב בָּאֵשׁ אֶלְךָ יְהוָה) the second vision begins with the same formula as the first (verse 1), emphasizing continuity in divine revelation. The phrase "called to contend by fire" (qore lariv ba'esh, קָרָא לְרַב בָּאֵשׁ) uses legal terminology: riv (רִב, "contend/bring lawsuit") appears frequently in covenant lawsuit contexts where God prosecutes Israel for breach of covenant (Hosea 4:1, Micah 6:2). Here God "calls" or "summons" fire as His instrument of judgment.

And it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part (וְתַאֲכַל אֶת-תְּהוֹם בְּכָה) (אֶקְלָה אֶת-פְּחַלָּק) —the fire is supernatural, consuming even tehom rabbah (תְּהוֹם בְּכָה, "the great deep"), which refers to subterranean waters or the primordial abyss (Genesis 1:2, 7:11, 49:25). Fire consuming water defies nature, indicating apocalyptic judgment beyond ordinary disaster. The phrase "did eat up a part" (akhelah et-hacheleq, אֶקְלָה אֶת-פְּחַלָּק) likely means "the portion" or "the land"—the fire was about to consume Israel's territory, their inheritance (cheleq, חֶלֶק, often means "portion/inheritance," Numbers 18:20, Deuteronomy 10:9, 12:12).

The imagery escalates from the first vision. Locusts threatened crops; fire threatens everything—water sources, land itself, total annihilation. This parallels covenant curses: Deuteronomy 29:23 warns that disobedience will make the land "brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass

groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah." Fire is God's instrument of judgment throughout Scripture: Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24), Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:2), Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16:35), and eschatological judgment (2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12; Revelation 20:9-10, 14-15). The consuming fire represents God's holiness purging sin—"our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29, citing Deuteronomy 4:24).

Historical Context

Fire judgment was well-known in Israelite experience and theology. God appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:2), descended on Sinai in fire (Exodus 19:18, 24:17), and led Israel by pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21). Fire consumed sacrifices (Leviticus 9:24, 1 Kings 18:38), symbolizing God's acceptance and His holy presence. But fire also executed judgment: rebels (Numbers 16:35), blasphemers (Leviticus 10:2), and covenant violators (Leviticus 26:30-33).

Amos's vision of supernatural fire consuming even "the great deep" intensifies the threat beyond natural disaster. Normal fire can't consume water; this is cosmic-scale judgment, perhaps anticipating the final conflagration Peter describes (2 Peter 3:10-12). The vision communicates that Israel's sin merits total destruction—not just crop failure (vision 1) but annihilation of land and people. Only Amos's intercession (verse 5) delays this judgment.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the image of fire consuming even water emphasize the totality of deserved judgment for covenant violation?
2. In what ways does God's "consuming fire" holiness inform both His judgment of sin and the costliness of Christ's atoning sacrifice?

Interlinear Text

לְרַב קָרָא וְהַבָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים כְּהֵן
H3541 shewed H7200 Thus hath the Lord H136 GOD H3069 H2009 called H7121 to contend H7378

בְּבָבָה וּמְאַת אֲכֵל הָאֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים בְּאָשָׁה
by fire H784 Thus hath the Lord H136 GOD H3069 and did eat up H398 H853 deep H8415 the great H7227

בְּמִלְּקָה אֲתָא אֲכֵל הָאֱלֹהִים
and did eat up H398 a part H2506 H853

Additional Cross-References

Amos 7:1 (References God): Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings.

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