

Amos 9:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I saw the Lord standing upon the altar: and he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered.

Analysis

I saw the Lord standing upon the altar (כִּי-יָדַי נִצְבֵּא עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ—Amos's fifth and final vision shows Yahweh Himself standing al ha-mizbeach (upon the altar), likely the idolatrous altar at Bethel where Israel corrupted worship. The verb nitsav (נִצְבֵּא, "standing") implies judicial authority, not priestly service—He stands to pronounce sentence, not receive sacrifice. **Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake** (פְּגַע בְּקַפְתּוֹר וְרָאשׁ הַסּוּסִים) commands destruction from the top down—strike the kaptor (capital/lintel) so the sippim (thresholds) shake, causing total structural collapse. This symbolizes comprehensive judgment: no escape from God's sanctuary-turned-slaughterhouse.

Cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword—the Hebrew bets'a'm be-rosh kullam (בְּצִיעַם בְּרַאשׁ כָּלָם) means "cut/wound them in the head, all of them," signifying total destruction beginning with leadership. The phrase **he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered** emphasizes absolute inescapability. Four times in verses 1-4 Amos declares divine omnipresence in judgment: no height, depth, hiding place, or exile prevents God's hand from reaching covenant-breakers. This terrifying vision reverses Israel's false security in God's presence—the very altar where they sought blessing becomes ground zero for judgment.

Historical Context

Amos's final vision (9:1-10) concludes five visions that structure his prophecy (7:1-9, 8:1-14, 9:1-10). The earlier visions showed locusts, fire, a plumb line, and summer fruit—each revealing Israel's coming judgment. This climactic vision depicts Yahweh Himself commanding the sanctuary's destruction, probably at Bethel, the northern kingdom's primary worship center established by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:28-33). Archaeological evidence confirms Bethel was violently destroyed around 722 BC when Assyria conquered Israel, fulfilling Amos's prophecy. The vision's language echoes Exodus 12:23 (the Passover destroyer) and Psalm 139:7-12 (divine omnipresence), but inverts them—now God is not deliverer but judge, and His inescapable presence means not comfort but terror.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the image of God standing upon the altar challenge comfortable assumptions about worship guaranteeing divine favor?
2. What does it mean that neither height nor depth, hiding nor exile, can shield the unrepentant from God's righteous judgment—and how does Romans 8:38-39 transform this terrifying truth into gospel hope?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי אָדָם וְאֶת בְּנֵי הָרָקִידָה
 I saw the Lord standing upon the altar and he said Smite

H7200 H853 H136 H5324 H5921 H4196 H559 H5221

בְּרֵאשִׁית וְרָא כָּפֹת וְרָא כָּפֹת יְמִינֵי וְרָא כָּפֹת עַמּוֹת
 the lintel of the door may shake that the posts and cut them in the head

H3730 H7493 H5592 H1214 H7218

לֹא אֶאֱתֶר גַּם כָּל מִן אֶסְרִית מִן כָּל מִן
 the last of them with the sword all of them and I will slay

H3605 H319 H2719 H2026 H3808

לֹא תִּמְלִט נָסָל לְהַמְלִט נָסָל
 he that fleeth he that fleeth of them shall not be delivered

H5127 H0 H5127 H3808 H4422 H0

פָּלִיט:

and he that escapeth

H6412

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 68:21 (Parallel theme): But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.

Revelation 1:17 (Parallel theme): And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

Isaiah 6:1 (References Lord): In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

John 1:18 (Parallel theme): No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

Amos 3:14 (Sacrifice): That in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him I will also visit the altars of Beth-el: and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground.

Habakkuk 3:13 (Parallel theme): Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.

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