

Amos 9:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them:

Analysis

Though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence (וְאִם־יִתְבָּאוּ בְּרַאשׁ הַכַּרְמֵל מִשְׁם אָפָּשׁ וְלִקְחָתִים)—Mount Carmel, a densely forested mountain range, provided countless hiding places in caves and thickets. The verb chapes (חָפֵשׁ, "search") describes thorough, determined seeking that will succeed. **Though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them** (וְאִם־יִסְתַּרְוּ) (מִגְּדָּע עַיִן בְּקָרְקָע קַם מִשְׁם אֲצָה אֶת־הַנַּחַשׁ וְנַשְׁכָּם)—even the sea's depths offer no refuge. The nachash (נחש, serpent) likely refers to sea creatures (possibly sea serpents of ancient mythology, or literally dangerous sea animals), but symbolically evokes the serpent of Genesis 3—all creation, even that which represents chaos and danger, obeys God's command.

The progression is deliberate: vertical extremes (heaven/hell) in verse 2, then horizontal hiding places (Carmel's forests, sea's depths) in verse 3. Every conceivable refuge fails. The verb tsavah (צָה, "command") emphasizes that all creatures—even dangerous serpents—are God's instruments. This echoes Jonah's experience: he fled to the sea to escape God's command, but God commanded both storm (Jonah 1:4) and great fish (Jonah 1:17) to accomplish His purposes. Nature isn't neutral—it obeys its Creator, even when executing judgment.

Historical Context

Mount Carmel, located on Israel's Mediterranean coast, featured dense forests and numerous caves—ideal hiding places. Elijah confronted Baal's prophets there (1 Kings 18), making it symbolically significant for true versus false worship. The sea held mythological terror in ancient Israel—representing chaos and danger (cf. Leviathan in Job 41, Psalm 74:13-14, Isaiah 27:1). Amos declares that neither the most secure land refuge nor the most terrifying sea depth can shield from Yahweh's judgment. This would have been particularly striking to an agricultural people who feared the sea and viewed dense forests as dangerous.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What modern equivalents to Mount Carmel or the sea depths do people use to hide from God—wealth, busyness, intellectual skepticism, moral relativism?
2. How does Jesus's claim to authority over wind and waves (Mark 4:39-41) connect to Amos's declaration that even the serpent obeys God's command?

Interlinear Text

מִשְׁׁמָה הַכְּרֵם לְ
בָּרָא שׁוֹמֵן
יְשִׁיבָא
וְאַם
H518 And though they hide
H2244 H7218 H3760 H8033
of Carmel

מִשְׁׁמָה הַכְּרֵם לְ
בָּרָא שׁוֹמֵן
יְשִׁיבָא
וְאַם
אֶלְקְרַת יָם
I will search and take them out
H2664 H3947 H518 H5641 H5048
thence and though they be hid

מִשְׁׁמָה הַכְּרֵם לְ
בָּרָא שׁוֹמֵן
יְשִׁיבָא
וְאַם
בְּקָרְקָעָה
from my sight in the bottom of the sea
H5869 H7172 H3220 H8033 H6680 H853
thence will I command

מִשְׁׁמָה הַכְּרֵם לְ
בָּרָא שׁוֹמֵן
יְשִׁיבָא
וְאַם
בְּקָרְקָעָה
the serpent and he shall bite
H5175 H5391

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 16:16 (Parallel theme): Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks.

Isaiah 27:1 (Parallel theme): In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.

Job 34:22 (Parallel theme): There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.