

Amos 9:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good.

Analysis

Though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them (וְאִם־יֵלְכוּ בַשָּׁבִי לִפְנֵי אֹיְבֵיהֶם מִשָּׁם אֶצְוֶה אֶת־הַחֶרֶב (וְהִרְגֹתָם)—even exile, which might seem escape from covenant land under judgment, offers no safety. The cherev (חֶרֶב, sword) personified as God's agent will slay them sham (there), in foreign lands. This reverses Israel's expectation that foreign exile might spare them. **I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good** (וְשִׁמְתִּי עֵינִי עָלֵיהֶם לְרָעָה וְלֹא לְטוֹבָה)—the Hebrew sam eini alehem le-ra'ah velo le-tovah describes intentional, focused divine attention for ra'ah (evil/calamity), not tova (good/blessing).

This is the most theologically devastating statement in the series: God's watchful care, normally covenant blessing, becomes covenant curse. Deuteronomy 11:12 promised that Yahweh's eyes are "always upon" the land—for blessing. Now those same eyes ensure judgment. The verb sum (שָׁם, "set/fix") implies deliberate, unrelenting focus. Jeremiah 21:10, 39:16, 44:11 use identical language: God sets His face for evil against the unrepentant. This doesn't contradict God's goodness—His just response to covenant violation is right and good, even when it involves judgment. The principle appears in Hebrews 10:31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Historical Context

When Assyria conquered Israel (722 BC), they deported survivors to Mesopotamia and Media (2 Kings 17:6), where many perished from hardship, warfare, and assimilation. Amos's prophecy proved accurate: exile didn't mean escape but extended judgment. Similarly, Judah's Babylonian exile (586 BC) involved continued suffering in foreign lands—Ezekiel and Daniel describe the hardships. The biblical pattern shows that God's judgment follows His people geographically—there's no escaping covenant accountability by changing location. This anticipates the New Covenant truth: genuine refuge isn't geographical but relational, found only in Christ.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that God's watchful care can become judgment for the unrepentant affect your view of divine providence and accountability?
2. What does it mean that the only safe place is not any physical location but being 'in Christ' (Romans 8:1), hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3)?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵם	יִלְכְּוּ	בְּשָׁבִי	לִפְנֵי י	אֹיְבֵיהֶם	מִשָּׁם
H518	H1980	into captivity H7628	before H6440	their enemies H341	H8033
אֲצִוֶּה	אֶת	הַחֶרֶב	וְהִכָּה תָם	וְשָׂמַת י	
thence will I command H6680	H853	the sword H2719	and it shall slay H2026	them and I will set H7760	
עֵינַי י	עָלֶיהָ	לְרָעָהּ	וְלֹא	לְטוֹבָהּ:	
mine eyes H5869	H5921	upon them for evil H7451	H3808	and not for good H2896	

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 26:33 (Word): And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.

Jeremiah 21:10 (Evil): For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

Jeremiah 44:11 (Evil): Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will set my face against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah.

Ezekiel 5:12 (Word): A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee: and a third part shall fall by the sword round about thee; and I will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them.

Leviticus 17:10 (Parallel theme): And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people.