

# Amos 9:7-10

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-9/amos-97-10/>

*The Suzerain God dismisses Israel's arrogance and false confidence in themselves and says that He will shake the sinners of His people and kill them by the sword.*

Israel's covenant relationship with the Suzerain (Ruler) God led them to believe that they were immune to judgment regardless of how they lived. Rather than take seriously their commitment to do all God had commanded (Exodus 19:8) they instead rationalized. But the LORD taught the people that His choosing of them to be His people was not based upon any merits on their part. The book of Deuteronomy makes clear that God's election of Israel was a free gift, which was based upon His gracious love for them and His faithfulness to their forefathers (Deuteronomy 7:1-7).

Therefore, *the LORD* dismissed Israel's arrogance and false confidence in themselves, saying, *Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?* This was a way to say "You are not a special people deserving of special privilege."

The Hebrew phrase translated as *the sons of Ethiopia* is literally the sons of Cushites, and it refers to a group of people living in the land of Cush in Africa. The area to which Cush refers is not modern Ethiopia but the area along the Nile just south of Egypt. This place was also called Nubia, roughly corresponding to modern Sudan.

It should be noted that the place called *Cush* was named after the oldest son of Ham (Genesis 10:6). The term *Cush* literally means "black," and, historically, the Cushites were dark-skinned (Jeremiah 13:23). But the LORD's reference to the Cushites here was likely because they were remotely distant from the land of Israel. God wanted Israel to know that a distant and different people were just as special to him as was Israel. God's choice of Israel was not because they had superior traits, but because of His love for them (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

God wanted the Israelites to know that He has no partiality, and has absolute control over all the nations of the world. Even the most remote nations were under His control.

Elaborating on the theme of His absolute dominion over all the nations and his lack of partiality, the Suzerain God asked a second question, saying, *Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?*

The Israelites were enslaved for approximately 400 years under Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Genesis 15:13; Exodus 12:40-41). While in Egypt, Israel knew nothing but labor and extreme harshness. But God delivered them from their bondage in *Egypt* and redeemed them "with an outstretched arm" (Exodus 3:13-15; Exodus 6:6-7). And the same God who *brought up Israel from the land of Egypt* also orchestrated the movements of other nations as He brought up the *Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir*. God orchestrated both.

The *Philistines* originally came from Caphtor, probably another name for Crete (Jeremiah 47:4; Deuteronomy 2:23). They were located on the coastal plains of Israel and were often regarded as Israel's enemies (2 Kings 10:32-33; Amos 1:6-8). The *Arameans* originally lived in *Kir*, although its precise location is unknown. They were one of the most frequent enemies of Israel. In Amos 1, the LORD said He would send the *Arameans* back to their homeland in *Kir* because they had "threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron" (Amos 1:3; 2 Kings 16:9).

In our passage, however, the LORD explained to the Israelites that, although they had a covenant relationship with Him, they were like the other nations to Him in terms of His care for them. They were not so different from the other nations as they thought they were. The Suzerain God of Israel is "the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe" (Deuteronomy 10:17). He is the LORD of those living in distant lands (like the Ethiopians) as well as those living in proximity to Israel (like the Philistines and the Arameans). As such God could do what He pleases to both Israel and the other nations. He would bless those who live uprightly and curse or punish those who transgress His laws. God's intent for Israel was for them to serve a priestly function so that the surrounding nations, like the Philistines, would come to know Him (Exodus 19:6). The original covenant God made with Abraham made clear that God's intent was to bless all nations through him and his descendants (Genesis 12:3). But a part of God's partiality was that God would judge Israel just as He had the other nations if they fell into wickedness and exploitation of the weak by the strong (Deuteronomy 8:19-20).

Verses 8-10 appear to form an ABB'A' chiasm.

A The LORD will destroy the sinful kingdom of Israel

B Yet the LORD will not eliminate all the peoples of Israel

B' Of those scattered throughout the nations, the LORD will not lose track of a single one

A' The sinners of Israel will die by the sword.

Amos said that *behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom and He would destroy it from the face of the earth*. The term "behold" serves to introduce the announcement about God's careful attention on the *sinful kingdom*, a phrase that likely refers to the northern kingdom of Israel since it was the kingdom to which Amos preached his warning messages. This forms the A of the chiasm. Historically, the kingdom of Samaria was never restored.

The phrase "*the eyes of the Lord God*" is used figuratively of God's observation and careful attention on human affairs. This phrase is used both positively and negatively in Scriptures. For example, in Psalm 34, David states, "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and His ears are *open* to their cry" (Psalm 34:15). In this psalm, David wanted his audience to know that the LORD honors those who live a righteous life by walking in God's ways and by refraining from evil. This is the positive use of the phrase.

However, in the context of Amos, the phrase “the eyes of the Lord” is used in a negative sense. The prophet wanted the Israelites to know that while residing in heaven, God perceives the actions of men on earth and judges accordingly. This picture served to tell Israel that the Suzerain (ruler) God could destroy them and remove them from the face of the earth because of their sinful deeds.

Nevertheless, while the nation Israel would be destroyed, there was still hope for a remnant because God said that He would *not totally destroy the house of Jacob*. This is the B part of the chiasm. As before, the phrase “house of Jacob” refers to the northern kingdom of Israel. This confirms the identity of the “sinful kingdom” referenced earlier. The emphasis here seems to be upon the people of the kingdom rather than the kingdom itself, as well as God’s promise to *Jacob* (Genesis 28:13-15). God would allow a remnant of His covenant people to survive so that His promises with Israel’s fathers might be fulfilled (Genesis 12; 2 Samuel 7).

The B’ part of the chiasm repeats the center, which is the main point in a chiasm, that God will preserve a remnant. He made it clear that the LORD would *shake the house of Israel among all nations*, meaning that a remnant will be exiled and scattered throughout the world. His shaking of Israel would be similar to *grain shaken in a sieve; but not a kernel will fall to the ground*. All would be accounted for and watched over.

A *sieve* was an instrument with holes for undesirable materials to be separated from the grain. It was used in the ancient world during the work of processing harvested grain. In the process of passing the grain over the *sieve* the hope would be to preserve the *kernel* of grain in the *sieve*, while the trash pours through the holes. The picture is that God will preserve those whom He scatters among the nations. God will not lose track of a single one.

The LORD then repeated the point made in A, with the statement in A’ which says *All the sinners of My people will die by the sword*, meaning they will die to the foreign invader. Although a remnant will be spared, God has marked out a group of *sinners* who will die by the sword. The distinguishing sin of this group was that they were *Those who say, ‘The calamity will not overtake or confront us.’* This group did not listen to the prophets. They did not read God’s word and receive it for what it said. They simply decided to believe that they were fine, and that they were safe.

Perhaps this group of *sinners* felt they were strong enough to resist invasion. Or perhaps they felt entitled for God to protect them. They might have rationalized that they were keeping their responsibilities to God’s covenant because they were being diligent to keep the religious rules. But God rejected their worship activities that did not translate into obedience, specifically loving their less-fortunate neighbors as themselves (Amos 5:12-15, 21-24).

To be sure, all human beings are technically sinners in the eyes of the Holy God. To be a sinner means to miss the mark; to not live up to God’s standard of righteousness. This has always been the case, ever since Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6-7; Romans 3:23). Amos knew that. He understood that every Israelite was a sinner and repeatedly asked them to repent to avoid God’s judgment and to experience God’s grace and mercy (Amos 5:6, 14). But here Amos singled out a specific group of *sinners* that were destined for judgment: *Those who*

say, 'The calamity will not overtake or confront us.' This refers to the arrogant Israelites, those who felt secure in Samaria and did not heed the warning that there would be a day of calamity of the LORD (Amos 6:1-7). God's judgment would fall on all those whose sins were rooted in their arrogance. Those Israelites who lived by their pride and arrogance stood guilty before the Suzerain God and were to be condemned (Amos 6:1). Those who humbled themselves before would find forgiveness of their sins and would survive God's judgment.

### **Biblical Text**

<sup>7</sup> **“Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me,  
O sons of Israel?” declares the Lord.  
“Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt,  
And the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?  
<sup>8</sup> “Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom,  
And I will destroy it from the face of the earth;  
Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,”  
Declares the Lord.  
<sup>9</sup> “For behold, I am commanding,  
And I will shake the house of Israel among all nations  
As *grain* is shaken in a sieve,  
But not a kernel will fall to the ground.  
<sup>10</sup> “All the sinners of My people will die by the sword,  
Those who say, ‘The calamity will not overtake or confront us.’**