

The Gazam

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Amos 4:9

(BHS)	(ESV)
הִכִּיתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּשֹׁדָפוֹן וּבִיֶּרֶקוֹן	“I struck you with blight and mildew;
הַרְבֹּת גְּנוֹתֵיכֶם וְכַרְמֵיכֶם	your many gardens and your vineyards,
וּתְאֵנֵיכֶם וְזֵיתֵיכֶם	your fig trees and your olive trees
יֹאכַל הַגָּזָם	the locust devoured;
וְלֹא־שָׁבַתְּם עָדֵי	yet you did not return to me,”
נְאֻם־יְהוָה:	declares the LORD.

The ESV is particularly linear with Hebrew in this verse. That’s why I chose it. Just follow along. Although ESV only says “with” once in line 1, of course you can see it twice in Hebrew. *Gan* is “garden,” *kerem* is “vineyard,” etc. “Return” is of course from the weak verb *shub* (pronounced “shoove”). We will return to this in a moment. (See what I did there?) But the most interesting word here to me is the *gazam*, “locust.”

There is a repeated refrain in this section of Amos, “Yet you have not **returned** to me.” God blessed them in every way, “Yet you have not returned to me” (4:6). He would bless one city and field and not another, “Yet you have not returned to me” (4:7 – 8). He struck them with blight and locust, “Yet you have not returned to me” (our verse). This repeated theme continues for more verses. God did everything he could to get their attention—but to no avail.

At this point, please read the previous essay, [Learning to Read](#). There I explore the relationship between Amos and Joel, and how they fit into the Minor Prophets as a whole. I point out how Joel links up with Amos. But there is yet another uncanny connection between them!

Our verse says that the *gazam* has devoured their produce. ESV glosses it “locust.” KJV: “palmerworm.” NASB says, “caterpillar.” But here is what makes it keenly interesting to me: the word is found only one other place in the whole Bible. Joel 1:4 says, “What the *gazam* left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.” The whole book of Joel unpacks the idea of the Day of the Lord as being analogous to a locust plague. And throughout the rest of the Minor Prophets, whenever locusts are mentioned, in my opinion the whole book of Joel is invoked. In Amos, the *gazam* that Joel predicted had come—and the people were not repentant.

This is like how the earthquake predicted in Amos 2:13, 8:8, 9:1 – 2, and 9:5 had happened (1:1), and they did not repent. Precursors to the Day of the Lord come and go—like the *gazam* of Joel—and people do not change. This reminds me of the proverb, “Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him” (Prov 27:22).

This could be a textbook example of the Reformed doctrine of General Revelation. The whole world is revelatory of the character of God. He expects people to respond appropriately. He showers blessings and expects them to thank him. He makes things hard and expects them to fear him. One leper returned to thank Jesus for healing; the Lord replied, “Where are the other nine?” (Luke 17:17). Beshazzar was rendered without excuse because he should have learned from his own family history (Dan 5:22). When he saw the plagues, Pharaoh should have heeded Moses.

But hard hearts interpret *everything* the wrong way, that is, in a way that does not acknowledge God. This distorted view of reality leads to vitiated living, and attendant consequences (Rom 1:18 – 32). They simply cannot think correctly. (This is the main point of the doctrine of Total Depravity BTW). Our thinking ought to be that of the apostle Paul,

I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Phil 4:11 – 13)

When our thinking is in harmony with the gospel, and we see things the way Jesus taught us to, and our hearts are enlightened by the Spirit, then we can see God's handiwork in all things—even disappointments and pain. The atheist sees God's work in nothing. That is what makes us different. They will continue to misunderstand *everything* until the Day of the Lord. Then they will have a big surprise. But in the meantime—we should be diligent to process all things in the light of the Gospel. This takes a self-conscious exercise of faith and is not automatic. Be practiced in believing through good times and bad.

And pray!