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August 28th: Amos 9 & Matthew 1:1-17

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Shaking the nation. The genealogy of Jesus Christ.

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Transcript

Amos chapter 9. I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said, Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people, and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword. Not one of them shall flee away, not one of them shall escape. If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them.

If they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search them out and take them. And if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them.

And if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them, and I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good. The Lord God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile and sinks again like the Nile of Egypt, who builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name. Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel? declares the Lord.

Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Kattor, and the Syrians from Kir? Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground, except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, declares the Lord. For behold, I will command and shake the house of Israel among all the nations, as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall to the earth. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, Disaster shall not overtake or meet us.

In that day I will raise up the booth of David that has fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it, as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the nations who are called by my name, declares the Lord who does this. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes, him who sows the seed. The mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities, and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards, and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens, and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God.

Amos chapter 9 is the final chapter of the prophecy, and the final of the five visions with which the book concludes. As Daniel Carroll notes, it's quite different from the others in containing no reference to an exchange between the prophet and the Lord. Rather, the prophet Amos sees the Lord in a vision, and hears the Lord's word concerning his people.

The Lord is standing beside the altar, at the heart of the people's worship. Presumably, this is the altar at Bethel. The altar at Bethel, we must remember, was condemned to destruction in chapter 3, verses 13 to 14.

Here, and testify against the house of Jacob, declares the Lord God, the God of hosts, that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground. The Lord here commands the capitals, the top of the great pillars of the temple, to be struck, until the thresholds at the bottom shake. The temple is being unsettled from its top to its bottom.

The temple, we must consider, was a microcosm of the entire world order, and of the people, but also a macrocosm of the human being. By shaking the temple, the Lord is throwing the whole symbolic order into instability. The hero might naturally think of the earthquake that was about to come upon the nation in a couple of years' time.

However, the earthquake is a concrete symbol of a greater judgment that is about to arrive. By focusing upon the trembling temple, the vision helps us to connect these two levels, the immediate and more literal referent of the physical disaster in two years' time, and the greater disaster that it symbolises. Carroll argues that the phrase

translated "shatter them on the heads of all the people" should rather be rendered "cut off the heads of all of them" referring not to the capitals of the temple, but to the people.

He argues that those at the temple would lose their lives as the disaster struck the building, perhaps even during a festal celebration. It's also possible that "the heads of all of the people" particularly refers to their civil, religious and political authorities who would be present at the temple, leaving the people without many of their leaders. We could however also read this in a more symbolic way.

The heads of all of the people are akin to the capitals of the temple, the top of the great supporting pillars of the body politic. They are going to be radically shaken. We might think here, for instance, of the striking of the house of Jeroboam and the weakening of the monarchy after the assassination of Zechariah, Jeroboam's son.

All but one of the six kings in the three decades after the death of Jeroboam II to the extinction of the Northern Kingdom were assassinated by rivals or removed by foreign powers and the nation was also at war for a lot of time during this period. With the striking of the capitals of its pillars, the whole nation would be shaken and destruction would come for them all. Vertical extremities symbolically related to the tops and bottoms of the pillars of the temple also appear in the two verses that follow, the depths of Sheol, the realm of the dead, and the heights of heaven, the dwelling place of God and the divine council, and the top of Mount Carmel and the depths of the sea.

There was nowhere to escape from the Lord's judgment. He was going to bring down the house of Israel from its rafters to its roots and no part of the nation would escape the general catastrophe. The Lord would seek them out and destroy them with the symbolic serpent and the literal sword.

His purpose has set upon their ill no longer their good. The literal earthquake would be the sign of the cosmic earthquake that was going to destroy the whole house of Israel. The literal earthquake was a great enough disaster in itself, it would be remembered two hundred years later, being referenced in Zechariah chapter 14 verse 5. In verses 5 to 6 of this chapter we encounter the third of the doxologies of the book associated with the statements of judgment.

The others are found in chapter 4 verse 13, For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness and treads on the heights of the earth, the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name. And then in chapter 5 verse 8 to 9, He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name, who makes destruction flash forth against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress. The doxology in verses 5 to 6 picks up on elements of the statement concerning the extent of the Lord's judgment in verses 1 to 4. It also reminds us of chapter 8 verse 8,

Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who dwells in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt.

As in the preceding doxology, there is a reference to the waters of the sea being poured out on the surface of the earth. This is an image, among other things, of a foreign nation invading the land and overwhelming it. The doxology, which particularly relates to the coming literal earthquake, also expands to refer symbolically to the greater shaking of the land.

It implies a connection between the land and Egypt, whose character the land has taken on. The creation themes of these verses, who builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth, stand alongside themes of de-creation. The Lord, as it were, is going to reverse day 3 of creation, the raising of the land out of the waters.

The waters of the sea will once again cover the surface of the earth, sinking it into the great deep. Of course, symbolically speaking, the dry land was Israel, which was brought up out of the sea in the Red Sea crossing and the deliverance from Egypt. Drawn up and out of the waters of the nation, now those waters are going to engulf it once more.

It's being de-created and returned to the domain of the Nile and the dominion of the deep. Israel was in constant danger of presumption. They prided themselves in their privileged covenant status and did not sufficiently consider the consequences of their unfaithfulness.

The Lord here punctures their complacency and their false sense of a unique immunity to catastrophic judgment on account of their elect status. Verse 7 is a remarkable verse. It flies directly in the face of cherished and virtually unchallenged beliefs concerning Israel's privilege as the elect people.

Everyone would have instinctively answered no to its questions, but they imply affirmative answers. Israel is indeed like the Kushites, the Philistines and the Syrians. Kush is in the region of modern Sudan and would have been one of the extremities of the known world for the Israelites of that day.

The book began with oracles addressed to the various nations and here the Lord suggests that he had been graciously involved in the histories of other nations beyond Israel. Israel might be the Lord's firstborn, but that does not mean that he is the Lord's only son. Rather, the firstborn is to mediate between the father and the other sons and the father is actively concerned for them too.

He had brought them up out of their former lands, much as he had brought Israel out of Egypt. We might have hints of a similar analogy between Israel's experience and that of other nations in Deuteronomy chapter 2. In verses 5, 9 and 19 of that chapter, the Lord declares that Israel is not to harass or contend with Edom, Moab or Ammon, as the Lord

had given them their respective lands, in a manner that suggests a similarity between their reception of their lands and Israel's reception of the gift of the land of Canaan. While Israel does have a special relationship with the Lord as his firstborn son, the relationship is not as popularly imagined.

It does not offer grounds for presumption. Indeed, the kingdom of Israel would be destroyed. The Lord would shake them among all of the nations, another judgment that the earthquake would literally anticipate.

However, there would be mercy in the judgment. Although there are different ways to take the image of the sieve and the identity of the pebbles left in it, it seems clear that it is an image of judgment that would involve some sort of separation and different degrees or modes of judgment for different elements of the population. Carroll suggests that we should think of the pebbles as the comfortable and self-confident perpetrators of injustice, who would experience targeted judgment in the land, while the rest of the nation would be scattered through the sieve among all the other nations.

The chapter and the book concludes with two connected prophetic statements of hope and reversal. That of verse 11 and 12 begins with In that day, and that of verse 13 to 15 with Behold the days are coming. The judgment will come upon Israel and the people, but it will not be the final word.

There is hope of restoration and new life on the other side. The Lord declares that he will raise up the booth of David that has fallen. There are numerous opinions among commentators about what this might refer to.

Many see it as a reference to the Davidic dynasty more generally. The booth of David could be a reference to the kingdom of David, which was torn apart after the death of Solomon. As Jerusalem is referred to as a booth in a vineyard in Isaiah chapter 1 verse 8, some have seen this as a reference to Zion, others as a reference to the temple.

Peter Lighthouse has made the argument that this is a reference to the shrine for the ark in Jerusalem that David set up. After the battle of Aphec at the beginning of 1 Samuel, the worship of Israel was torn in two. There was the site of the tabernacle and then there was the site of the ark.

In 2 Samuel, David brought the ark into Jerusalem and set up a shrine for it. David's booth, or his shrine for the ark, was a place of prayer and song. The ark shrine was also more open to the Gentiles.

We might think of the fact that the ark was in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite prior to its being brought into Jerusalem. Peter Lighthouse has argued that the vision here refers to the restoration of that ark shrine, a place more of song than of sacrifice, and which included Gentiles among its worshippers. In verse 12, remnants of other nations

are brought into the enjoyment of these blessings.

The use of the word possess might initially connote for us a sense of violent or coercive conquest, but that is challenged both by the context, where in verse 7 the Lord declares his interest in these other nations, and also by the description of the nations as those who are called by the Lord's name. Israel is not the only nation that is called by the Lord's name. The remnants of other nations will be called by his name also, and they will be joined into a common possession of the blessing of the Lord's presence in their midst.

Along with this vision of the raising up of the people again and the bringing in of other nations, in verses 13 to 15 there is a vision of the restoration of the land and its fruitfulness. Verse 13 recalls Joel chapter 3 verse 18, which is earlier in the book of the 12th, but later historically as a text. And in that day the mountain shall drip sweet wine, and the hill shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water, and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord, and water the valley of Shittim.

The vision is one of restoration, rebuilding, and reversal. The Lord will establish his people in the land, and they will not be uprooted from it again. A question to consider.

In Acts chapter 15, James in summing up the decision of the council of Jerusalem, refers to Amos chapter 9 verses 11 to 12, presenting those words as being fulfilled in the work of Christ and his church. Reading these two passages alongside each other, how can each one shed light upon the other? Matthew chapter 1 verses 1 to 17. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nashon, and Nashon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon, Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiad, and Abiad the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliad, and Eliad the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Mathan, and Mathan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of

Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ, fourteen generations. Matthew 1, the first chapter of the first book of the New Testament, begins in a surprising way. We might think that moving into the books of the New Testament we get away from the most boring parts of the Old Testament, which are the genealogies.

But lo and behold, the first book of the New Testament begins with a genealogy. Genealogies may seem like bare and boring lists of names to us, but within Scripture they serve a multitude of different purposes. They establish the pedigree of certain office holders.

They present historical transitions between blocks of narrative. They serve to mark out families and the way that they have expanded and particular lines are developed. They manifest some of the patterns in history and the larger arcs of God's work over the course of many centuries.

They can present that history in a nutshell, bringing to mind the broader structure of the story, without going into every single detail. And they also can serve the purpose of bringing to mind certain features of the past, certain characters from the past that are salient in understanding present characters. All of these things, to some extent or other, are taking place in Matthew 1. Matthew is connecting the story that he is telling with a story that has gone before.

This is not a story that has just begun. It's the story that the Old Testament tells, brought to its proper culmination and climax. His genealogy establishes Jesus' pedigree.

It connects Jesus with David as David's true heir. It connects Jesus with Abraham as his true son. It tells the story of the Old Testament in a way that helps us to see the larger pattern and flow of that story and the way that Christ might relate to that.

It's introduced with the expression, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Now, this could be read, and many have read it as the book of the Genesis of Jesus Christ. And I don't think that's an accident.

It draws our mind back to the very beginning of Scripture, in that book where there is a lot of emphasis upon genealogies. Also, as in some of the other Gospels, it highlights the fact that Jesus is the Alpha. He's the beginning.

He's the one who starts all these things off. He's the one who's with God before the creation. He's the one who is at the very dawn and the first stirrings of Israel's history and story.

He is connected with that part of the story. And so, as we look all the way back to Genesis, we should be able to see Christ there. And telling the story in a way that starts at that point, it helps us to recognize just how firmly rooted Christ is within the story of Israel and the story of the creation as a whole.

Matthew does not just begin with the book of Genesis. He ends with a reference back to the final verse of the Old Testament in its Hebrew ordering, which is 2 Chronicles chapter 36, verse 23. Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up. It's the Great Commission of the Old Testament.

And what Matthew is doing here is telling his story in a way that is sandwiched by the first verse of the Old Testament. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and the last verse of the Old Testament, the verse that speaks of Cyrus's decree, Christ sums up that entire story in himself. Christ is playing out the story of scripture himself.

Christ is the new Israel. Christ is the one who takes all history into himself. It's a book-ended narrative from Genesis to Chronicles, from the beginning to the end.

And Christ is the one who holds everything together. It's also like a new book of Chronicles. The book of Chronicles begins with the very beginning with Adam and God's creation of Adam, and then it moves into a focus upon the genealogy of Abraham and of David.

And that's what Matthew is doing here. He's connecting Christ with that very beginning of the book of Chronicles, and he seems to depend upon the book of Chronicles for certain parts of his genealogy. And moving in his story to the very end of the book of Chronicles, as Christ fulfills a new great commission, a commission that's greater than that even of Cyrus.

In beginning his gospel in such a way then, he presents the story as being continued in Christ, as being summed up in Christ, and suggests that the story of the gospel must be anchored in what has gone before. By beginning his gospel in this way, he gives us a sense of just how auspicious these events are, how significant these stirrings in Bethlehem and Nazareth actually are. In contrast to Luke and Greco-Roman genealogies, but like the Old Testament, Matthew works forward, starting with the most ancient figure and then moving forward to the most contemporary.

It ends with the most important name though. Part of this demonstrates the proper lineage of Christ, connects Christ with previous characters, and we might also see it as

something that could have been substantiated by genealogical records of important figures kept in the temple, where they could be checked prior to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. It begins with Abraham, who's mentioned seven times in the book of Matthew, and there's a neat transition between the heading of the book and the genealogy.

It's the book of Genesis of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, and then Abraham was the father of Isaac. So it leads very neatly into that list. It isn't just a list of names though.

There are people mentioned within it who are not strictly part of the genealogy itself, people like Zerah, or people like Uriah, or the brothers of Judah or Jeconiah. Likewise, women did not need to be recorded in the But they are recorded, and they're not necessarily the ones that you would expect. If you were going to make a list of the women that are important within the Old Testament, you may think of the great matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, etc.

And yet that's not what we see here. We see characters like Tamar, we see Rahab, we see Bathsheba, we see Ruth. These are figures who are outsiders who come in.

Bathsheba is associated with Uriah the Hittite, and Rahab is a person of Jericho, Ruth is a Moabite, and Tamar is presumably a Canaanite. All of these figures are Gentiles who are brought in, and within the Gospel of Matthew this is something that Matthew wants us to see, that the people of God have always included Gentiles to some extent, but this is just preparing for the greater inclusion of the Gentiles that will occur through the ministry of Christ. It's also preparing the way for Mary.

Mary is someone who gives birth to Christ in an unusual manner, and all these unusual women who have come into the story in surprising ways, maybe prepare us for her and what she does. The names mentioned are sometimes different from the names that we find elsewhere. So the Septuagint of 1 Chronicles 2, verse 9 has Aram rather than Ram, and here we have Aram rather than Ram, although the ESV changes it to Ram.

Amos instead of Amon, and Asaph instead of Asa. In Jeremiah 22, verse 30, there is a curse upon Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah or Keniah, by Jeremiah. Neither Jehoiachin's nor Jehoiachin's descendants would sit upon the throne.

Thus says the Lord, write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah. So it seems strange that he's mentioned on the list here. James Bujon has suggested that Sheol-Tiel is adopted by Jehoiachin, or that new life is breathed into the cursed line by taking in this child from without, and so he's protected from the judgment by means of adoption.

There are three sets of 14, and 14 is an important number. It's the gematria of David's name. David frames the genealogy, not surprisingly because Christ is the son of David, he is the greater David.

14 of course is seven times two. There are 14 years from Ishmael to Isaac, there are 14 years serving for Rachel and Leah, there are 14 years of plenty followed by famine. But it is also a pattern associated with the moon.

There's a pattern of waxing and waning. So the genealogy waxes from Abraham to David, then it wanes from David to the deportation to Babylon, and then it waxes again as Jeconiah is given new life through Sheol-Tiel, and then it leads finally to Christ who comes at the climax of this second great waxing of Israel's history. 42 is also six sevens.

Christ is the one who brings in the seventh seven, the seventh seven being associated with Jubilee and the arrival of that time. It's also a time, times and half a time, as in 12 months plus 24 months, two years, two times, and half a time, six months, it makes 42 months. Perhaps we're supposed to see Israel's history to this point as a sort of testing that leads to the deliverance of Christ's arrival.

Jesus comes at the fullness of time. He's the one who completes this genealogy, who brings it to its destiny, who completes the movement started in Abraham to David, that first great waxing of Israel's history, and brings it into a second great waxing. He is the son of Abraham.

He's the son of David. He's also the son, more directly, of Joseph the son of Jacob. Now we've already met a Joseph the son of Jacob in the book of Genesis and we'll see similarities between these two characters as we go on.

But for now we should note the fact that Jesus is given to a father, not just to a mother. He is born to a betrothed couple so that he would be raised by that couple, so that he would have as his father Joseph and all that Joseph's genealogy gives him. This is part of what gives him the foundation of his title as the Messiah, that through Joseph he's descended from Abraham and David.

Now he's not biologically the son of Joseph but as in the case of Jeconiah there is an adoption here as it were. But he is given to Joseph that Joseph might raise him as his own and the story of Matthew focuses on Joseph in its nativity account which should serve as a caution against marginalising or downplaying the importance of Joseph as a figure within the story of Christ. A question to consider in the way that Matthew structures this genealogy he is able to pick out certain characters that stand out from the rest.

Characters that are either paralleled with others, characters that need not be mentioned but are mentioned, characters that are repeated or present in particular moments,

characters that frame the entire genealogy and characters that are present within the genealogy in other structural forms. What characters do you see Matthew particularly highlighting? How is he highlighting them and how does their connection with Jesus and his genealogy help us to understand who Jesus is when he comes on the scene?