

SUMMER 10 - Lavender and Roses - Blood and Iron

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[0 : 0 0] ... Friends, how's the volume going there tonight? It's just, notice with all the fans it's a bit difficult.

So if you're struggling with hearing, just put up a hand or something and then I'll know and the people will know. Yes, so we might need just a little more volume. I was struggling too and my hearing's beginning to fail.

So listening earlier on to a reading, so thanks for that. friends I wonder which Old Testament hero is your particular favorite perhaps it might be Abraham the friend of God or it might be Moses that humble leader of the people of God or it might be David a man after God's own heart or it might be that rather sort of charismatic if not ecstatic prophet Ezekiel it might even be Daniel or Samson or Rachel or Rebecca or Sarah or Hannah which one do you most identify with of these people and which one is the one that interests you as a person you know you think yeah I really like the way that person functions which one would you sort of seek to emulate or perhaps even model yourself on think about it for a moment now as you think about that person I wonder if you can think about the events of their life that are recorded in scripture that you would not emulate are there events in this that in their life that sort of somewhat time tarnish their image you know the ones that I mean so so like when

Abraham refuses to trust God and he lies about his wife Sarah he does it twice in his life then he agrees to Sarah's attempts to provide him with a child or might it be Moses as he strikes the rock in impatience and maybe even with lack of faith or when David steals Bathsheba from Uriah and murders him in order to have this woman or even when he fails to discipline his children properly or perhaps you might think of all the deceit and scheming that goes on in the household of Jacob mostly involving Jacob himself but certainly also involving his wives and his children you see my guess is that when you think about some of the most well-known characters in the Bible you will find flaws in them that's true amongst most Old Testament heroes I was sure there's some that get away with it but that's probably because you only got one little short story about them and you don't give them give much of the rest of their lives it's true also amongst New Testament heroes they also are at times flawed human beings you see old or New Testament heroes they are human beings they are sinful human beings just like their ancestors Adam and Eve these people are flawed human beings they are people in other words just like us friends it's taken us a full month to get to this particular point in the book of Amos tonight we've reached the very end of it and as we have we've heard the critique that Moses has uttered all the way through the book and we've met a nation that we know is a very flawed nation and what I want to do tonight together is to ask ourselves can there be any hope for a nation such as this is there any hope for God's great purposes that he has had for his people Israel is there any hope for God's great purposes for the world of course because if he can't do it with his own people can he do it in the world as a whole after all you see Israel is just like our Old Testament heroes isn't it you see if not worse they are just like Adam and Eve and they as I said are just like us as well and answering the question is there any hope will be of great aid for us it will help answer our personal question as well it will help us answer the question what hope is there for us for me and for God and his purposes if God continues to work through such people as me and us and you so that's the thrust of tonight's sermon and the way I want to proceed is to take a look at the nation of Israel from two very different perspectives but from the same mouth I want to look at the nation of Israel from the perspective of chapters 1 through to chapter 9 verse 10 and then what I want to do is just take a look at the nation of Israel from the perspective of chapter 9 verses 11 through to 15 and you'll see some striking differences so let's get started now how can we summarize who

Israel is from nine whole chapters well the first thing we can do is to ask who Israel is according to these chapters if you're wanting to follow there's an outline there for you to do it the answer I think is pretty easy who is Israel well Israel is largely the 10 northern tribes under king Jeroboam the second with a capital city in Jerusalem in other words by Israel the divided nation this is not the way God intended them because he wanted them a united nation and this is picked up in Amos 3 have a look in your Bibles at Amos 3 in Amos 3 we are told that northern Israel is part of the family of God they are still the chosen people of God though they may be in the north they are chosen by God look at Amos 3 see what Amos says hear this word of the Lord that the Lord has spoken against you oh people of Israel against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt you only have I known of all the families of the earth and therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities I wonder if you can hear what Amos is saying these people are the chosen people of God the family of God God has known them they are those he brought up out of Egypt chapter 3 verse 1 so if that's who Israel is what is Israel like you know what what do they look like what what sort of people are they well this book has been very clear they are a nation morally corrupt we heard from it time and time again they refuse to care for the poor and the underprivileged look at Amos 3 again just flip down a few verses to chapter 3 verse 10 God says they do not know how to do right that is they are morally corrupt but they're not only morally corrupt they are religiously corrupt as well you see they fail to practice right religion and they corrupt every element of their religious practice they have corrupt shrines and they are complacent about their sin and they're confident in their security just flip a couple of chapters to chapter 6 in your Bibles chapter 6 verse 1 it says alas for those who are at ease in Zion and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria the notables of the first of the nations to whom the house of Israel resorts can you see what God is saying he's saying here is a nation totally ignorant of the abysmal state of their corporate life here is a nation that's like all humanity they are sinful they are rebellious Israel is just like their ancestor Adam the nation is like the description of human beings in Genesis chapter 6 verse 5 you see in

[7:57] Genesis 6 verse 5 we are told about humans before the flood and do you know what we're told about them we're given these words every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually now do you think the flood healed that no not a chance they have been just as bad afterwards and Israel has made an art form of being rebellious and irreligious and morally corrupt here is God's chosen people God's special people but totally like the rest of humanity in their sinfulness so now how do you think God's going to react to this what do you think God will do how will God respond well Amos leaves us in no doubt we're in chapter 6 look at verse 8 this is the Lord now just to tell you a bit it says they're the Lord of hosts let me tell you what that really means the hosts are his armies so this is the Lord of armies and he says in verse 8 I abhor the pride of Jacob hate its strongholds and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it can you see what God's saying he's saying I hate the arrogance of this people in chapter 4 we told him we'd been told that he had warned them time and time again in the past in chapter 7 to 9 we're told that he changed his mind about judging them time and time again and he relented from sending judgment or at least twice we know of but we know from the history of

Israel there are many more times than that but chapter 7 to 9 go on and make it clear that as far as God is concerned his patience has run out Israel's time has run out God is going to judge the sinfulness of his people with a fierce judgment now look again at chapter 7 look at verse 9 God says the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste what God is going to do is he's going to raise up enemies against their rulers and their people and he says it there I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword and then in chapter 8 he promises the ultimate disastrous punishment he will send a famine of the word of God we looked at that last week you can see this in chapter 8 verses 11 and 12 and he'll even send the ultimate punishment a famine of the word of God then in chapter 9 we're told of God's judgment chapter 9 we're told

God will strike them they'll be nowhere to hide before God's terrifying judgment as chapter 9 look at it chapter 9 verse 9 says God will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve he will scatter them throughout the nations now a sieve in this situation slightly different from ours that is you're sieving things to sort of have things left over and you're sort of left over with stuff in your sieve and you just throw it out you know you you throw it around you throw the leftovers to the nations and you scatter them through the nations and none will escape not even a pebble will reach the ground Amos 9 verse 9 so now we've heard who Israel is we've heard what

they are like we've heard how God's going to respond and we need to ask why why will God act this way toward his children his people why will he act with such devastating judgment well as we look at some of the doxologies that are scattered through the book we have some hints let me show you turn back in Amos again have a look at them with me

Amos chapter 4 verse 13 so Amos 4 verse 13 for lo the one who forms the mountains creates the wind reveals his thoughts to mortals makes the morning darkness and treads on the heights of the earth the Lord the God of hosts is his name now this verse is clear can you see what it's saying it's saying God is a creator now just flip over one chapter to Amos 5 verse 8 and here we hear again the one who made Pilates and Orion and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night who calls the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth the Lord Yahweh is his name can you see what he's saying he's saying this God who's responding to Israel is the one who divides night and day darkness and night he's the one who made the stars in the heaven he's the one who moves the water about the earth wherever he chooses to move it he is the creator the sustainer of the world the universe but other passages such as Amos 8 tell us that this God is a God who hates evil we saw in Amos 5 verses 14 and 15 that he wants people to love God as he himself does friends can you see the picture of God here it is strong and it is bold here is a God who is holy here is a God who loves that which is good he hates that which is evil he is holy he seeks that his people are holy as well and when they are not he must push his holiness push lack of holiness out of his presence for he alone can have holiness where he is he must therefore punish the sinfulness of his people he must punish the sinfulness of his world you see God is the holy and sovereign Lord of all the earth and he's able to do this his nature as holy and sovereign Lord of all the earth demands that he does do it so there's the picture of Israel in Amos 8 now it's not a pretty picture is it and it doesn't look good for them these are God's chosen people but they are sinful people they stand under God's holy and righteous anger they are therefore people destined for punishment but now let's turn to those last few verses

Amos 9 11 to 15 and the picture here is very very different there is one famous commentator of the Bible who said many years ago a century or two ago that these last verses are all roses and lavender where everything else up to this point has been blood and iron and it's like that isn't it these verses are really rosy they're lovely they're pretty but everything else up to this point has not been pretty it has been ugly and it has demanded judgment so let's see what we can make of these verses and the way I want to approach them is to ask the very same questions we asked about the rest of the book so let's get started first who is Israel here have a look at it who is Israel here well the Israel spoken about here is a very different Israel in one sense you see it's no longer divided can you see that it is an Israel reunited under a descendant of David very different from where they are at the present and by the way did you notice the quotation of this passage in Acts chapter 15 the apostles use it to talk about how you treat Gentiles and what it is to be for the Gentiles to be included look at verse 11 on that day

[15 : 39] I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen repair its breaches raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old more than that you see not only is Israel a reunited nation the Israel in these verses is an inheritor of all the grand promises of God you see the promises to Abraham the promises to David the promises of God to his people throughout history they are found here completed here can you see what these verses are saying are saying the nation pictured here is still God's chosen nation still God's treasured possession but let's if that's who Israel is what is Israel like here well it is a nation restored after judgment Amos chapter 9 verse 8 gave us a hint that restoration might be possible when Amos said that God's destruction might not be total there he said that God might not utterly destroy the house of Jacob there there might be a remnant that would escape but there's much a grander picture here in verses 11 to 15 it is grand beyond comprehension almost you see she's no longer under judgment she's no longer decimated

God's not sort of scattering the sieve contents everywhere no she's complete and whole the blessings of Abraham have been completed and fulfilled the nation possesses the land forever it is a land full of abundance and riches it's like Eden in its fruitfulness in fact it's almost even better than Eden it's so abundant that the one who ploughs is overtaking the one who reaps the land's just producing so much that you cannot keep up with it and the tender of grapes is overtaking the one who sows seeds you know it's as though the plants are just growing up as soon as the seed hits the ground they're bearing fruit and the people are following behind you gathering it up and it is just overwhelming in productivity the quantity of wine will be so enormous that it's a wonderful picture

isn't it the mountains shall drip fresh wine it's as though all of these wonderful vineyards are just dripping with wine and it's just overflowing and it's just abundant in Exodus we were told that the land would flow with milk and honey friends this is not milk and honey this land is rippling and flowing with newly fermented wine not just milk and honey it is overflowing with abundance the hills are melting and flowing and dripping with wine and the cities promise destruction in chapter 5 they're going to be rebuilt and re-inhabited

Israel will finally be a blessing to the nations as God intended her to be and this is what the apostles pick up in Acts 15 look at verse 12 nations called by her name called by the name of Israel and who are therefore part of her company will be there we friends will be there who have no right to be there and even the age long enemy Edom will be part of the restoration friends can you see that these verses are saying and what they're saying about God's response God's response is overwhelmingly generous and kind it is a response of faithfulness and mercy there is no way that Israel or even the remnant of Israel could be seen to have deserved such mercy and kindness in fact we know from last week what they deserved this is over the top this is unexpected this is undeserved abundant and rich beyond compare and this forces us to ask a question why why is this the case why does God act this way well the Bible is clear and even Amos has been clear

God is a God of justice and holiness however he's also a God of very great love and mercy and his disposition is overwhelmingly strong toward this mercy this disposition in God drives God to overwhelm judgment with mercy it causes God to do what he can to not downplay holiness and justice but at the same time to cause mercy to triumph over judgment this is the God of surprising mercy of kindness and of love and of who relents concerning judgment and Amos knew it and that's why he asked God to be merciful in chapter 7 why he asked him to relent because he knew that was his nature Amos was simply saying to God God be what I know you to be the God who relents concerning judgment who overflows with mercy and kindness so friends what do we learn when we put all of this together today well Amos has taught us some very great truths about God hasn't he first

God is a God who has a purpose for his world and that purpose is full of goodness God is a God who has a purpose for his world and it is full of goodness two God is a God who is realistic about humans he knows that if humans are left on their own they cannot achieve his purposes in his world humans are incurably sinful and if God is to be all that you'd expect a God to be then he must act justly and in judgment this brings us to our third point God must judge humanity for its sinfulness because he is holy and just and righteous he must judge humanity for its sinfulness because this is his character fourth God is overwhelming in his disposition to have mercy he is as Exodus as he revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 34 the Lord the Lord the gracious and compassionate [21 : 51] God slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness God's overwhelming disposition is to have mercy so the question is how God can get from point three to point four does that make sense how can God get from point three to point four from being holy and righteous and therefore needing to punish sin to being overwhelming in mercy and kindness and love how can he get from point three to point four how can he get from Amos one through to nine ten to nine eleven to fifteen well I think you have to go to the New Testament to get the answer the answer is hinted at in the Old Testament but I think it is spelled out fully in the New so I want you to turn with me in your Bibles to Romans chapter one in fact Romans chapters one through three so turn to Romans and just take a quick flick through it just Romans one to three and you'll notice he starts off by saying this is me Paul this is what I've come to do and then look at where he gets to in Romans chapter one verse 18 for the wrath of

God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth and then he gets stuck into the Gentiles and you can imagine the Jews doing an Amos sitting there cheering saying yeah those Gentiles they're rotten sods but we know that don't we and so then he moves on to talk about the Jews and he talks about the Jews in chapter 2 and then finally he gets to chapter 3 and look at him in verses 9 through to 18 he summarizes his argument from chapters 1 through to 3 here and he says this what then are we any better off the we meaning we Jews no not at all for we have already charged that all both Jews and Greeks are under the power of sin as it is written there is no one who is righteous no not even one there is no one who has understanding there is no one who seeks God all have turned aside together they have become worthless there is no one who shows kindness there is not even one their throats are open graves they use their tongues to deceive the venom of vipers is on their lips

their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness their feet are swift to shed blood ruin and misery are in their paths and the way of peace they have not known there is no fear of God before their eyes well that's like Ramos one to nine isn't it if not worse because we're in the gun now because no not one means no not Andrew no not Heather no not you there is not one but look at how he goes on you see in Romans 3 21 to 26 he lays out the solution to man sinfulness human sinfulness look at it with me he says verse 21 but now but now apart from law the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the law and the prophets the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe for there is no distinction since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God they are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as sacrifice of atonement by his blood effective through faith he did this to show his righteousness because in his divine forbearance he passed over sins previously committed it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus did you hear it that he himself is righteous and is the righteouser the one who makes righteous those who have faith in Jesus he is three and four and only in the cross can they meet he's just finished saying no human can be righteous in the sight of a holy God but now he says that well actually humans can be righteous that righteousness comes by faith in Jesus Christ for God freely offers forgiveness and atonement through him in other words God allows Jesus to take the punishment and penalty of our sin and in doing this he satisfies his justice he truly regards sin as sin he does not fudge he punishes sin but at the same time he allows mercy to triumph over judgment and he does this by allowing the punishment and penalty for sin to fall upon Jesus instead of us so God allow sinful people to be made righteous or justified this is an extraordinary act of overflowing mercy and kindness isn't it we humans deserve judgment but an overwhelming display of grace has God offering forgiveness and he offers it by enabling the punishment to be taken within his own being that is in his own son can you see what I'm saying I'm saying that only because of Jesus can God be the God we see in Amos 9 only in Jesus can God overwhelm judgment with mercy and only because of Jesus will the great promises of Amos 9 be fulfilled only because of Jesus will the promises to Abraham be met only because of [27 : 45] Jesus will a day come when the reaper will be overtaken by the one treading grapes only because of Jesus will new wine drip from the mountains and flow from the hills and there be a place which is so rich that it is beyond compare and only because of Jesus will return to Eden and to unfettered and unending fellowship with the living God and that is why when the garden city comes around at the end of revelation who is in the middle of it there is no temple but God is there and the lamb you see this is the amazing astonishing overwhelming grace and mercy of our God thanks to God is to God to talk briefly about how we might respond and it strikes me there are three responses that we should make the first response is one of thankfulness isn't it we should turn to God with overwhelming gratitude and thanks and the reason one of the reasons Christians sing to this day and love it every generation of Christians loves it is because it is a way of saying God thank you for this we should turn to God with overwhelming gratitude and thanks just as he promised the Israelites that Eden would come from the exile so he has turned us from being his enemies to being his friends and all it is all from him and he alone is to be praised so it's first response second response we should respond to what we've heard today with repentance you see the sin of Israel and our sin meant that Jesus had to die friends a righteous man died for us unrighteous men and women God in the flesh died for me he died for you he died for us and our rebellion our sinfulness was culpable and we must turn back from it we must repent of it we must continue to put our faith in Jesus who alone brings us to God that's the second response one of repentance and heartfelt and diligent repentance but there's a third response you see in the cross we have seen God's overwhelming love and having been loved we should ourselves love and that's what God's complaining about with his people in Amos that they have not done this you see God has met our disobedience with his grace he has been surprisingly and overwhelmingly gracious and kind he has been love and this is where we are to be with each other where the world looks to rights and duties and it says this is what I must have this is what I deserve this is my right we look elsewhere we look to what God has done for us and we say I'm going to do the same and so when we are wronged we Christians surprisingly turn and act in love where people treat us wrongly we treat them rightly when a spouse mistreats us

we speak in kindness when a child is rebellious we forgive when a parent is exasperating we forgive when a work colleague is malicious we do not retaliate and mull about how we are going to seek revenge when people are needy we are generous because our God is we are people who overwhelm judgment with mercy and stinginess with kindness for we are the people of God and we know love and so we love even as we have been loved friends today I want you to be overwhelmed again by God's great love for you and I want you to go into this week determined to act as God has acted toward you not how others have acted toward you but how God has acted toward you and when you see or you hear of a brother or sister struggling go to them sit with them cry with them when they're rejoicing go ostracized be a friend to them where there are people who are sick and lonely go to them where people at church here are unwelcomed and neglected watch out for them and care for them where people lack the gospel around the world go to them with the great news of this gracious and kind God where you have been hurt by someone determined that you'll seek reconciliation and set it right friends

[33 : 11] God has forgiven us in his son he has purchased us with his blood and we cannot but respond in a manner in like manner to those that we see every day it is an incredible thing that this God has done for us let us pray father we thank you that you are the lord the lord the gracious and compassionate God slow to anger and abounding in overwhelming love and faithfulness thank you that in your son you have forgiven us father please help us not to just be people who who take on that forgiveness but then do nothing now father help us to take on this forgiveness and then act as we've seen you act we pray this that your son the lord jesus christ who redeemed us might be glorified in us we pray this in his name amen