

Susanna Petroysan heard her daughter cry out, “Mommy, I’m thirsty. I want a drink.” She and four-year-old Gayaney were stuck in a basement `beneath tons of collapsed concrete and steel. It was December 7, 1988, and an earthquake in Armenia had just killed 55,000 people.

“Mommy, I’m so thirsty. I want a drink.”

After feeling around in the darkness of their basement, Susanna found some shattered glass. She used it to slash her left hand and then gave the hand to Gayaney to suck her blood. Days passed. Susanna had no idea how many times she cut her hands. She only knew that if she stopped, her daughter would die.

Hands were cut, blood was shed, and the child was saved.

The prophet Amos is familiar with earthquakes. In fact, his book begins with an earthquake (1:1) and ends with one (9:1). At the end of Amos 1:1, the prophet announces that his ministry ceased “two years before *the* earthquake.” This particular earthquake must have been stronger than normal, as is indicated by the use of the definite article *the*. The definite article implies that this tectonic shift stood out to the degree that one could simply refer to it as *the* earthquake, and everyone knew which one that was. Most scholars connect *the* earthquake to the one attested to in the ancient city of Hazor and dated to around 760 BC.

In Amos 1:2 the prophet describes the impact of divine shaking. “The Lord roars from Zion and from Jerusalem He utters His voice. The shepherds’ pastures mourn, and the peak of Carmel withers.” Zion/Jerusalem is in the south, while Mount Carmel is in northern Israel. The entire Promised Land wilts and withers when the Lord roars and unleashes His shaking judgment against His people.

Seismic shaking is a major theme in many places in the Book of Amos. It’s most prominent at the beginning of chapter 9 (1-4) where God’s command makes the thresholds of the temple shake. An earthquake is very much implied in the following verses:

Amos 3:15—God commands the *turning over* of Bethel and the royal houses;

Amos 4:11—part of Israel was *turned over* like Sodom and Gomorrah;

Amos 6:11—the LORD promises to *smash* all of Israel’s houses;

Amos 8:8 and 9:5—God predicts that the Promised Land will *shake* to such an extent that the Nile River in Egypt will move up and down.

So, it’s fitting, that Amos, whose oracles, or prophetic messages, are literally earthshaking, begins his book referring to *the* earthquake.

The earthquake and resulting rubble is God's judgment upon His people for their unbelief, which turned divine promises into slogans that no longer impacted their lives. Individual autonomy and selfishness emerged unchallenged, and Israel began to fall apart. Oblivious and callous to God's Word, Israel's leaders became intoxicated with violence, bloodshed, and economic exploitation. As long as the nation was up and running, sick as it was, people continued to turn a deaf ear to God's Word.

So, the Lord used the Assyrian Empire to carry out his earthshaking judgment. About 40 years later, in 722 BC, Israel's capital city of Samaria was destroyed, and thousands of people were exiled (2 Kings 17:1-6). This earthquake of divine judgment changed everything.

Just south of Naples, Italy, and overlooking its famous bay is the small city of Pozzuoli. Pozzuoli has a claim to fame. It is the most earthquake-prone place on the planet. Every year its citizens experience 4,000 earth tremors! No other place in the world is so unstable—*except* your life and mine. We know, day after day, what it is like to live with earthquakes.

Tremors rumble when we say, "Just one more drink. Just one more lie. Just one more fling. Just one more glance." But one more always leads to one more, and then just one more. And then a massive earthquake hits, and in its aftershocks we find ourselves trapped in a basement of bondage and brokenness. Sure, being obsessed with pornography, money, gossip, food, people's approval, or work is a strange place to be in, at first. It's crushing to be trapped beneath tons of collapsed hopes and shattered dreams. But in time we become accustomed to living in destruction and death.

On Ash Wednesday God invites us to confess our sins that keeps us stuck on stuff that kills and steals and destroys. He invites us to admit that all too often *we're* living in a mess largely of our own making. Our God wants us to confess our willful disobedience that continues to trap and torment us with guilt and shame all the days of our lives.

It was mid-afternoon in central China on May 12, 2008, and suddenly disaster struck! An earthquake hit with a magnitude of 8.0 on the Richter scale. Concrete panels, crumpled steel, and crushed tile buried tens of thousands of people. They groped in the darkness, gasping for air, wondering how long they would live. Rescue workers reported that they repeatedly heard screaming.

Five days after the massive Chinese earthquake, a group of rescue workers found the body of a young woman. She was in the kneeling position. Her back was hunched over, supporting a crumbled ceiling; her arms stretched forward,

hands thrust firmly into the muddy earth. As the rescue workers walked away, suddenly the team leader understood. He ran back to the woman's side and reached underneath her body. There, in the tiny shelter that the woman created by using her body as a protective shield, was a baby. He was about three months old, alive, unhurt, and sleeping soundly. Inside the baby's clothing was a cell phone. On it was this message. "My dear child, remember I love you."

When our world crumbles all around us, when our continual sins shatter our confidence, when all our dreams become our worst nightmares, Amos promises that God comes to rescue us in the rubble. The Lord still says, "My dear child, remember I love you!"

And this love rebuilds what the earthquake has destroyed. God promises in Amos 9:11 to repair and rebuild our lives. Hear the Gospel of the Lord: "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old."

These sure and certain promises to the house of David are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Our Savior reaches into our wreckage to pull us free, and He does it with hands laced with blood. Finally, you see, blood was all Jesus had. His disciples had deserted Him. His garments had been gambled away. Even His Father had turned His back. Hands were cut, blood was shed, and we are saved.

Blood was all He had, but the blood of Jesus is all we *need*.

"What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus! What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!"

At the Holy Supper tonight Jesus reaches into your rubble here and now. His blood rescues, redeems, restores, and repairs everything that has been so broken.

And what is our response? We can do no better than to use John's words in Revelation 1:5-6 to thank, praise, serve, and obey our loving God. "To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins *by His blood* and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."