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C0925 – July 1, 2009 – Amos 9:1-10 – The Sinful Kingdom & The Sieve

We're nearing the conclusion to the Book of Amos, the prophet of doom. And as we come to a close we want to recall the covenantal background of this book which is so vital to Amos meaning. The Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants stand back of most if not all of prophets. For the Abrahamic Covenant we look to Gen 12 and the Call of Abraham. That covenant gives Israel their position as the chosen people of God and contains three basic eternal promises; a land, seed and worldwide blessing. Those promises are what God will do for them in history. They do not depend in any way upon who and what Israel is, they depend on who and what God is. And so that covenant, based on the immutable character of God gives national security for the people of Israel and is a key for interpreting Amos 1:3-2:3, in that all of those nations listed there cursed Israel and therefore come under the curse of God. The Abrahamic Covenant is also the key for interpreting the last verses of the book, Amos 9:11-15 which we'll cover next week, the national restoration of Israel into her promised blessings of the land, seed and worldwide blessing. So the Abrahamic Covenant at both the beginning and the ending of the book serve as book ends embracing the heart of the message of Amos. Everything sandwiched in between is explained in terms of the Mosaic Covenant. That's a very important message in itself because it shows that the Mosaic Covenant works inside of the Abrahamic Covenant. For the Mosaic Covenant we look to Exod 20 and the Mt Sinai event. That covenant governs Israel's experience as the chosen family of God and promises blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. So the law expresses what God wants them to do. And obviously if you've been here for the Book of Amos you know that the northern kingdom was not doing what God wanted them to do and so He has sent Amos as His prosecuting attorney to call them back to covenant loyalty to Him. He had sent prophet after prophet to them calling

them to repent, repent, repent, repent and they had not and so they had passed through the first four degrees of cursing or discipline and now he has sent Amos who has commanded them to seek God, to seek the Lord God so He might bless them. But as the book comes to a close we learn in the visions that the nation is certain to undergo the fifth degree of cursing, which is exile from the land, and we also learn that the time is near. So, Amos is a harbinger of bad news. He's had a bit of a conflict with Amaziah the false priest of the northern kingdom and so tonight we want to work with chapter 9:1-10.ⁱ

Another important thing we must recall is that the northern kingdom had developed a false religious system. Jeroboam I had invented this system in 1 Kgs 14. 1 Kgs 14 is another key to Amos. It's a key to all pagan religious systems. All pagan religious systems come out of the sinful heart. And this is a system that deviated from the true worship of YHWH in a number of significant ways. Remember that the kingdom was divided under Rehoboam into the northern and southern kingdoms. In the south Rehoboam had two tribes and in the north Jeroboam became king and he had ten tribes. This was a divinely authorized separation. They were two kingdoms with two kings but they were to have one place of worship. Jerusalem. The Lord had chosen Jerusalem to be the place where He put His name. And so it was the only divinely authorized location for worship. This caused a bit of a problem for Jeroboam because Jerusalem was in the southern kingdom. But the Lord had promised him that if he were to obey His commandments and statutes then He would make Jeroboam an everlasting dynasty. Jeroboam had tremendous potential to build an everlasting kingdom. God had promised him security if he would obey. But in the Law it mandated that the males of Israel were to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem three times per year and this scared Jeroboam because he thought that if they were to go down to Jerusalem to worship God they would have so much joy in Jerusalem that they would ally themselves with Rehoboam and he would lose his kingdom. But who had promised him His kingdom? The Lord had. The Lord had promised him security if he would obey. But Jeroboam didn't trust the Lord's promises; he trusted his own fleshly gimmicks. And so what Jeroboam did to secure his kingdom was develop a new religious system in the north by building altars at Dan in the north and Bethel in the south. And he set up the golden calf as a symbol of YHWH. And he instituted the Feast of Tabernacles, but not in the 7th month and 15th day as the word of God declared, but one

month later in the 8th month and 15th day. And finally he set up a non-Levitical priesthood and said anyone that volunteers can be a priest. Since the Levites were the Bible teachers what did this do to Bible teaching? It disappeared. We can't have any of that! Why if we have Bible teaching people might get their lives straightened out and return to loyalty to God. We can't have that. And all of these slight nuances of the divinely revealed worship the Bible calls sin. So his rebellion against the word of God 150 years earlier had led to this corrupt religions system. And every system that departs from the word of God, a little bit here, a little bit there, is going down the same road of developing a corrupt religious system. There is no difference between what Jeroboam set up and what most of the denominations have set up today. They are all fragmenting and developing their own false religious systems. And it's sin. There's no other word for it. And if we're reading our Bibles we shouldn't be surprised; the word of God says the church age is going to go from bad to worse and end in total apostasy on the day of the pre-trib rapture. So you will have a small remnant but the mass majority will be in apostasy.

Now, with that introduction turn to Amos 9. This is the last of the five visions; it concerns itself with the destruction of the Temple, the nature of the destroyer, the Lord God, the sieve as an instrument of judgment and a final glimmer of hope, the restoration of Israel and fulfillment of her Abrahamic promises.

Let's read v 1, the destruction of the Temple and those gathered. **I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and He said, "Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake, And break them on the heads of them all! Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword; They will not have a fugitive who will flee, Or a refugee who will escape.**

This is a picture of the Temple being demolished during one of their festivals. It may be that this is the alternative Feast of Tabernacles Jeroboam I devised in his own heart to celebrate in the 8th month and 15th day rather than the 7th month and 15th day. The Lord God strikes at the heart of the problem which is the idolatry that had grown rampant in the northern kingdom.

I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and He said, notice, He is near to them, He is with them, but He's with them for judgment. Now there's

a lot of disagreement over this **altar**. Some have said it's the altar at Bethel, others at Dan or Gilgal, some even at Jerusalem saying the prophecy has to do with the whole nation of Israel and not just the northern tribes. And still others say it's figurative for the whole system of religious idolatry in the north. I'm inclined to think this is literally the **altar** at Bethel since it was the primary Temple in the north and that while normal daily religious activity could take place at any altar, of which there were many, it is likely that the main festivals were carried on at the Temple in Bethel. And here you probably have the nation gathered for the Feast of Tabernacles in the 8th month and 15th day and then suddenly the whole house is demolished.

And so the Lord issues the command, "**Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake**, probably He's commanding an angel or angels to carry out the destruction. The **capitals** were ornamented headpieces on the tops of the great pillars that supported the roof of the Temple. Capitals is actually in the singular so it could refer to the main pillar which was the weight bearing pillar and if it fell the whole Temple would fall in. **So that the thresholds will shake** refers to the foundation stones of the Temple which were large ashlar that held the door in place. From top to bottom, the destruction will be complete. You may recall another temple falling down when Samson pushed out on the pillars of the Philistine Temple of Dagon. But this judgment comes not from a man pushing out but from God Himself and so from heaven to earth, from top to bottom just as when the veil of the Temple was torn it was torn from top to bottom signifying the judgment from heaven upon earth. **And break them on the heads of them all!** In other words the Temple roof comes crashing down on the heads of the worshippers leaving a heap of ruins composed of stone and bodies mangled and dripping with blood. I find it significant that when the Lord God initiates His strike He does so at the root of the problem which is the idolatry that had grown rampant in the northern kingdom.

Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword; in other words, if anyone should escape the crash of the building they would not escape the **sword**. The inevitability of escape recapitulates the theme of 5:18-20 where a man is in a forest and he meets a lion and he escapes the lion and meets a bear and he escapes the bear and in the midst of his home, safe and secure, so he thinks, he meets a poisonous adder and dies a slow painful death. The judgment of God is inescapable. **They will not have a fugitive who will**

flee, Or a refugee who will escape. They're pictured as prisoners caught in an inescapable Alcatraz, where neither might, nor equipment, nor swiftness, nor bravery will suffice for escape (cf 2:14-16). How can this be? Vv 2-4 answer, What is it about the judgment that makes escape impossible? Vv 2-4 answer, for those who escape the crushing blow at the festival it is only a matter of time before they are caught.

²“Though they dig into Sheol, From there will My hand take them; And though they ascend to heaven, From there will I bring them down. ³“Though they hide on the summit of Carmel, I will search them out and take them from there; And though they conceal themselves from My sight on the floor of the sea, From there I will command the serpent and it will bite them. ⁴“And though they go into captivity before their enemies, From there I will command the sword that it slay them, And I will set My eyes against them for evil and not for good.”

Their problem is Who it is that is pursuing them. Who is their enemy? The Lord God. What attribute of God is most apparent in these verses? Omnipresence. God is in all places at all times. Omnipresence, like most of the attributes of God, is a double edged sword. On one side it's a comfort. You're never alone. That can be a very delightful thought if you're ostracized, if you're shunned. But on the other side it can be terrifying. You can't get away from God. His watchful eye is always upon you. And no matter where you hide you He is always there. So their escape attempts will not be successful.

Notice the phrase **From there...**used over and over in vv 2-4. Mark them with a pencil or something. V 2, **From there will My hand take them...From there will I bring them down...**verse 3, **I will search them out and take them from there...From there I will command the serpent...**verse 4, **From there I will command the sword.** In other words, I'm everywhere and everywhere you might try to hide I'm sovereign there.

So let's see where they might hide. Verse 2, **Though they dig into Sheol,** the Hebrew concept of Sheol was that it was the very deepest part of the earth, obviously no one could dig a hole that deep. But even if they could,

From there will My hand take them; And though they ascend to heaven, in other words to the very highest part of the universe, you couldn't but even if you could, **From there will I bring them down.** The point being that neither the deepest depth nor the highest height will get you out of the reach of God's hand. His omnipresence means He is wholly here and wholly there. He's wholly everywhere.

Verse 3, now we get to some possibilities, **“Though they hide on the summit of Carmel.** Mt Carmel rises quickly out of the Mediterranean and ascends to a height of 1800ft. It is said that there are 1,000 caves in Carmel and that fugitives or refugees often hid in them. This was the best hiding place in the whole northern kingdom. But even from there He says, **I will search them out and take them from there;**

And though they conceal themselves from My sight on the floor of the sea, were it possible that they could find a way to go under water temporarily to conceal themselves while His army passed by God would see them and **From there** He would **command the serpent and it would bite them.** The **serpent** here is the great Sea Monster sometimes called Leviathan or Rahab and it was considered the most dangerous of all marine life. And yet even the most powerful sea monster is under the command of God. Even there in the depths the Lord is present and He commands all the kinds in His oceans.

Verse 4, another attempt to survive, **“And though they go into captivity before their enemies,** in other words if you choose to surrender so you'll be taken back to the nation Assyria and you think that by leaving the land of Israel and going to Assyria you're going to somehow be outside of My domain and presence you're deadly mistaken. **From there I will command the sword that it slay them,** the Lord God is in all places at all times, He can never be escaped. Even in Assyria who commands the sword? The Lord commands the sword. Who controls history in all places and at all times? Who controls kings and the commands they issue? The Lord God. So you're not going to escape, it's impossible to escape.

And I will set My eyes against them for evil and not for good.” A very fearful statement because the expression so far in Hebrew thought was that it was good for God to set His **eyes** upon you for it meant blessing and

fortune, but now they are **set against them** for evil and cursing. **Evil** here is the word from chapter 3:6, it doesn't mean the Lord is evil, it means the Lord sends calamity upon sinners. It refers to His justice. He is a just God and He brings calamity upon those who sin against Him. "If a calamity occurs...has not the Lord done it?" Of course He has. He's sovereign over history. He's sovereign over all.

Verse 5 and 6, another of what scholars call a Nature Hymn. We've seen them in chapter 4:13, chapter 5:8-9 and now again in 9:5-6. **The Lord GOD of armies, The One who touches the land so that it melts, And all those who dwell in it mourn, And all of it rises up like the Nile And subsides like the Nile of Egypt; ⁶The One who builds His upper chambers in the heavens And has founded His vaulted dome over the earth,**

He who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the face of the earth,

The Lord is His name, notice how it begins, **The Lord GOD of armies**. In every nature hymn the Lord is called the God of armies. He's portrayed as a Great Warrior marshalling all of nature as His instruments in battle. Take Amos 4:13, "For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind And declares to man what are His thoughts [that's man's thoughts], He who makes dawn into darkness And treads on the high places of the earth, The LORD God of hosts is His name." Note He's the creator, He forms mountains, and He creates the wind. Notice His knowledge of man's thoughts, His control over nature, He makes the dawn into darkness. Now turn to chapter 5, verse 8, "He who made the Pleiades and Orion" - again, He's the creator of the stellar bodies, "And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day *into* night," He controls the daily rotations of solar and planetary bodies. "Who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the surface of the earth," He controls climatology, the weather, He does all that, no such thing as natural law or forces of nature. It's God's word. And now, chapter 9, the third Nature Hymn, **The Lord GOD of armies, The One who touches the land so that it melts**, the earth is like an ice cube and when the Lord puts His finger on it, it melts, it dissolves under His fiery judgment. I mean, you have to imagine the power, His little finger just brushes the land and it melts. Other places this is used of the mountains being flattened. In other places it says the Lord merely speaks and the earth melts. So the attribute of God here is what? Omnipotence. God is mighty. He's infinitely powerful.

Nothing is too hard for Him. **And all those who dwell in it mourn, And all of it [the land] rises up like the Nile And subsides like the Nile of Egypt;** more geophysical movements. He is the Lord of plate tectonics. He causes downward thrusts and upward thrusts. He bends rock. The Lord can make the earth quake with great ease; He can twist it and toss it about as He pleases. If you thought the Lord was unable to do all these things it was He who founded the earth by the very voice of His power, and commands it's every movement. Probably this is metaphorical for the chaos and tumult that ensues when His army invades.

Verse 6, very interesting, very difficult, **The One who builds His upper chambers in the heavens And has founded His vaulted dome over the earth, He who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the face of the earth, YHWH is His name,**

What are these upper chambers and His vaulted dome? There are several ideas scholars have suggested. One is simply that His upper chambers are clouds that He fills with waters and the vaulted dome is the sky over the earth. In that case it's talking about the climatological cycle in the earth's atmosphere. Another idea, quite different is that the upper chambers are His divine palace built in the heavens and the vaulted dome is the pillar that stands on the earth in support of His palace. So in this idea the whole stellar heavens are like a divine palace and the earth is like a great ashlar, a foundation stone upon which the heavenly palace is built. A third view is that this is referring back to Gen 1:7, the second day of creation when the Lord separated the waters above from the waters below and created an expanse in between which He called heaven. I know you have to stretch your brain here to get these pictures but I encourage you to go back to Gen 1 and read each day and draw each day out, I think this will help you picture how God constructed the universe. It will inform your biblical cosmology. So in this view on day one the creation was a watery mass and on the second day the Lord separated some of the waters out so you had waters above and waters below and an expanse or heavens in between. Some scholars are saying that the upper chambers here are the waters above and the vaulted dome over the earth is the expanse or sky. There have been different models of the waters above. Some have said God originally created a solid sheet of ice around the earth about 2 feet thick. Others have said the water was not around the earth but around the universe, forming the outer boundary (Humphreys). Others

have said it was a canopy of vapor that enveloped the earth; Joseph Dillow in his thesis at DTS popularized this view in the late 60's. Creation atmospheric scientists are still working with this model and others. But it has come into problems in that it creates a greenhouse effect that makes the earth intolerably hot. So it's not resolved yet. Nevertheless, I mention this because there's a lot of work to be done in the area of pre-Flood climatology and cosmology. The leading scholar now is Larry Vardiman if you're interested in these models. These are viable areas of interest if any young creationist wants to go out and develop in these areas. This would be a verse of importance.

He who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the face of the earth, some say this is a reference to the Flood of Noah when the Lord opened the windows of heaven and it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. In any case, there's no question that God is sovereign over all and if He can build this kind of a thing and regulate the climate obviously He can smash you quite easily if He wants. **The Lord is His name, YHWH.** And as the Lord (Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God), He would keep His Word and judge those who had disobeyed Him.

Now, with the crash of their Temple, with escape attempts declared impossible because the Lord is omnipresent, He's omnipotent and He's sovereign over all, the only objections left by an Israelite might be that, "We're the elect of God. We have a unique position. And God uniquely brought us out of the land of Egypt and gave us our own land. We therefore have eternal security. So there's no way He's going to destroy us." They're relying on past actions of God for present security. As if those things protect them from divine judgment. That's an overemphasis on what covenant? The Abrahamic. See, it is the Abrahamic Covenant that is of God's grace. It's all God's grace and people like to appeal to grace, they want grace, grace, grace and they interpret grace to mean license, I can do anything I want because I'm covered by grace. That's wrong. See, it's not just people in the church who confuse these covenants. Israeli's confused them too. They liked to think about the Abrahamic because that's all grace, it's all blessing. Oh, we can do whatever we want, we can sin, sin, sin and nothing's going to happen because the Lord chose us. But they didn't like to think about the Mosaic, because that one said, uh, uh, if you sin I'm going to curse you. So they've got these out of balance.

So, here's the argument: yeah, you may be a big God but we've got security because you elected us via the Abrahamic Covenant, therefore you can't touch us God. How does the Lord respond to that in v 7? **"Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?" declares the LORD.** I thought Israel was His son, now He calls Ethiopia His son? You're no different than the Ethiopians. You can claim all day we've got the Abrahamic Covenant but did you forget about the Mosaic Covenant. That's the one that deals with how I want you to learn obedience to Me! And you're failing miserably. I judge all sin in all nations. In fact having the Abrahamic Covenant you guys are held to a higher standard. You ought to be doing it better. That's chapter 3:1-2. With great privilege comes great responsibility. So you can't appeal to the Abrahamic Covenant as a scapegoat. Nor, middle of verse 7, can you appeal to God's acts for you in history as His covenant nation. **"Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, of course he had. And the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?** If you try to say, oh now, look what God did for us in history, we're the special people of God. Well, don't forget that God also brought up **the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir.** He re-located those people too, so don't get a big head you who think you're so secure in the Abrahamic Contract that you can abuse God's grace and get away with it. No one sins and gets away with it. All sin has to be paid for.

And **"Behold, verse 8, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom,** and that's Israel, no where else in the word of God is Israel called quote **the sinful kingdom,** don't you mean the Abrahamic Kingdom, the Davidic Kingdom? No, the sinful kingdom. Emphasis: Covenant disobedience, you are in violation of statute 101, 102, 103, 105. They were in violation of about 612 of the 613 commandments and God is not very happy about it and it's time to judge. You have to love the way He puts it, so gentle, **I will destroy it from the face of the earth;** a lovely thought. God had put up and put up with these people and He'd had it. **Destroy** here, of course, because you may say, well, there's no one left, this is total destruction. The ten tribes are going to be lost forever, only two tribes will remain and every Jew on planet earth today is either of the tribe of Judah or the tribe of Benjamin. Hold your horses. **Destroy** here must be understood out of its context in Deut 28, the cursing section of the Mosaic Law. And there it has to do with exile, exile from the land (Deut 28:20, 24 ["ruined"], 45, 48, 51, 61,

63).ⁱⁱ So, what this is, yes, a lot of them will die, most of them will die, maybe upwards of 90% casualty rate. But look what else the Lord says in verse 8.

Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,” Declares the LORD. See, there’s a remnant. There’s always a remnant of believing ethnic Israel. What do we find in the Book of Revelation, chapter 7? 144,000 are sealed, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel? So do some from each tribe survive beyond this destruction? What about in the Millennial Kingdom, there’s a land allotment when the Lord Jesus Christ completes the Conquest that was not completed in Joshua’s day and how many land allotments are there? According to Ezek 47-48 there is land for each of the twelve tribes. So, of course, they survive. There is always a remnant. Even in the NT, they’re singled out in Gal 6:16 and called “the Israel of God.” That’s not the church as a whole, that’s the believing ethnic remnant that makes up part of the church. They are the “true Israel” circumcised not only in flesh but also in heart (Rom 2:28-29). They are of the like faith of Abraham which has always been the requirement to enter into the promised blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. God gave the promises to the whole nation but the promises are entered into only by those who are the called like Abraham and who respond by faith like Abraham. And so because the Lord has promised to bring all of these promises to fulfillment in one generation of Israel He does not totally destroy the house of Jacob. He has covenant promises to fulfill to Abraham and his believing seed.

Verse 9, “**For behold, I am commanding,** and here we get a glimpse at how the judgment is going to take place so that some are destroyed and some are spared. **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.**

¹⁰“**All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, Those who say, ‘The calamity will not overtake or confront us.’** I used to work for the USD of Agriculture and we often used a sieve to separate the seed from the dirt and chaff. We had a number of these, some with finer mesh, others with coarser mesh for different sifting. Some would pass through; some would stay in the sieve. I’m of the inclination to take this that the whole **house of Israel**, scattered among all the nations will be shaken in a sieve so to speak, among all the nations and those that pass through the sieve are the wicked sinners and those that remain in the sieve are the righteous, having trusted in the Lord God. And that’s the separation issue. The Law was not a bad

thing; it was to show them their sin so they would stop relying on their own works of righteousness and turn to faith in the Lord who supplies our righteousness. It's all the issue of whether I'm going to justify myself before God by works or whether God's going to justify me before Himself through faith. That's the difference between the chaff that passes through the sieve and is destroyed and the kernel of wheat that stays in the sieve and is rescued. There is always a remnant. And that sets us up for the final verses which we'll cover two weeks from now and the issue of Premillennialism or Amillennialism.

So let me conclude by saying this about the northern kingdom. These were a religious people, they had all sorts of things going for them on the outside, but their hearts were rotten. They were like a basket of ripe summer fruit. They carried on the façade of worship, the façade of sacrifice, the façade of reverence for the festivals. Everything that characterized what they thought was the divine religion, but they were not plumb. The Lord said I hate your festivals, I cannot stand the stench of your sacrifices, I cannot even look upon them, you're music is noise to My ears. Take it all away and come and seek Me, seek Me with all your heart.

It's not surprising that biblical students reflect on this and remark that it is so much of our Christianity today. We have so much religious motion, so much tradition, so many programs, so much music, but when the light of God's word is shined in the hearts of the individuals what does the Lord God see? Does He see us with the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ? Does He see us remaining faithful to His word? Or are we empty hearts full of external ritual? There is only one place to be secure and that is Golgotha. There the Lord God put His only begotten Son and laid upon Him the iniquity of us all, that we might become the righteousness of God, not of works but of grace through faith so that if we are to boast it is in Christ and Him crucified and not in our works. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today and you shall be saved.

¹ So, Israel is in violation of the Mosaic Covenant. But that leaves the introduction and the conclusion which are explained by the Abrahamic Covenant. The book begins, of course, with the oracles of doom upon foreign nations, starting in chapter 1:3 six Gentile nations are marked for destruction; Syria, Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon and Moab, all nations that mistreated Israel

and therefore come under the judgment of Gen 12:3, as an outworking of the Abrahamic Covenant, if you curse Israel you will be cursed, and cursed they were. God is a covenant making and covenant keeping God. But that also goes for Israel, she was the object of divine selection and therefore was subject to discipline under the Mosaic Covenant, the heart of the book from chapter 2:4 to 9:10 is all the outworking of that covenant as the Lord God disciplines and disciplines for her continual violations of that covenant. But the end of the book, chapter 9:11-15 ends with an air of hope for the nation Israel, a restoration of the nation Israel at the end of days and that of course is based on the Abrahamic Covenant. God made certain irrevocable promises and the book ends with that glimmer of hope. So, those covenants are crucial for understanding not only Israel's history but all of history. They are keys to understanding God's plan for the ages.

ⁱⁱ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 1:1450.

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