

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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DOCUMENT 233

NOT A PEBBLE FALLS

A COVENANT DEEP DIVE INTO AMOS 9:9 AND THE SIEVE OF JUDGMENT

The Precision of Yahweh's Judgment and the Preservation of the Remnant — A Three-Religion Covenant Response

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☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
The sieve of כְּבֵרָה (kevarah) in Amos 9:9 is read in rabbinic and Jewish exile tradition as a promise that the <i>Golah</i> (Diaspora) is not the end of Yahweh's covenant with Yisra'el (Israel) — dispersion is real, but the people are never lost from His hand.	Luke 22:31–32 directly echoes the sieve image: Yeshua (Jesus) tells Shimon Kefa (Simon Peter) that “Satan has asked to sift you like wheat” — the same covenant pattern of testing applied to an individual disciple, not only the nation.	The Qur'an (29:2–3) asks whether people imagine they will be left merely to say “We believe” without being tried (<i>fitna</i>) — a parallel concept of sifting as the proof of genuine faith rather than its destruction.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the *Tanakh* does so by addition or reinterpretation, never by overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed

standard; and **Yahweh**'s own words declare the covenant unchanging (**Malachi 3:6**; **Tehillim (Psalms) 119:89**), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh**'s covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written *Tanakh*. **Yahweh (יהוה)** and **Elohim (אלהים)** appear in bold throughout. Hebrew book names are given with English in parentheses. Hebrew transliterations appear in ***bold italic*** with English meaning in parentheses at every occurrence. Scripture references are bold. Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rabbinic commentary, New Testament texts, and the Qur'an are cited as historical and comparative reference — not as binding authority. The Written Tanakh governs all conclusions.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Bereishit (Genesis), Devarim (Deuteronomy)	Covenant precedent for judgment, remnant, and restoration
Nevi'im (Prophets)	Amos, Yeshayahu (Isaiah), Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah), Yechezkel (Ezekiel), Malachi	Prophetic witnesses to sifting, refining, and preserved remnant
Ketuvim (Writings)	Tehillim (Psalms)	Covenant reflection on Yahweh's precise justice

I. THE TEXT AND ITS SETTING — AMOS 9 IN CONTEXT

I-A. The Vision of the Altar (Amos 9:1–4)

The ninth and closing chapter of **Amos** opens with a vision of **Yahweh** standing beside the altar at Beit-El (Bethel), commanding the pillars to be struck so that the roof falls on the worshippers gathered beneath (**Amos 9:1**). What follows is a fourfold declaration of inescapability — if the guilty dig into she'ol (שְׁאוֹל, the grave), **Yahweh**'s hand will take them; if they climb to the heavens, He will bring them down; if they hide on Mount Carmel, He will search them out; if they descend to the bottom of the sea, His serpent will strike them there (**Amos 9:2–3**). Even captivity itself offers no shelter: **Amos 9:4** declares that **Yahweh** will set His eyes

on the exiles “for evil and not for good.” The chapter’s opening movement is total: there is no geography, height, depth, or circumstance that removes a person from covenant accountability.

I-B. “Yet I Will Not Utterly Destroy” (Amos 9:8)

The hinge of the chapter — and the verse that governs everything that follows — is:

Amos 9:8: “Behold, the eyes of the Sovereign Yahweh are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth — except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Ya’akov (Jacob), declares Yahweh.” (JPS 1985)

The Hebrew construction pairs total judgment (“*I will destroy it from the face of the earth*”) with an explicit covenant exception (“*efes ki* (אָפֶס כִּי), *except that*”). Yahweh is not describing two contradictory outcomes — He is describing one precise outcome with two components: the sinful kingdom (the nation as a corrupted political and cultic structure) is destroyed, while the house of Ya’akov (the covenant people themselves) is not utterly ended. **Amos 9:9** is the mechanism by which this precision is carried out.

I-C. Reading Amos 9:9

“For lo, I will give the command and shake the house of Yisra’el (Israel) among all the nations as one shakes [things] with a sieve, and not a pebble falls to the ground.” (Amos 9:9, JPS 1985)

The verse is built entirely on a single agricultural picture — grain and stone passed through a sieve — applied to the scattering of Yisra’el (Israel) among the nations. Three Hebrew words carry the full weight of the verse’s meaning: the verb of shaking, the noun for the sieve itself, and the noun for the tiniest particle that does or does not fall through. Each is examined in turn below.

II. WORD STUDY — THE VOCABULARY OF THE SIEVE

II-A. נוּעַ (nua) — H5128

The verb behind “*shake*” is *nua* (נוּעַ), H5128. BDB glosses its primary sense as “to quiver, totter, shake, wave, wander, stagger” — a root describing back-and-forth motion without fixed direction. The specific form in **Amos 9:9** is *va-hani’oti* (וְהִנֵּעֹתִי, “and I will cause to shake”), the Hiphil (causative) first-person form. This grammatical detail matters: the sieve is not shaking itself, and Yisra’el (Israel) is not being shaken by an impersonal historical accident. Yahweh Himself is the causative agent — “**I will cause to shake.**” The Babylonian and Assyrian empires that scattered Yisra’el (Israel) and Yehudah (Judah) among the nations are the visible instruments; Yahweh is the hand that moves them.

II-B. כֶּבֶרֶה (kevarah) — H3531

The noun for “*sieve*” is *kevarah* (כֶּבֶרֶה), H3531. This word is a *bapax legomenon* — it occurs exactly once in the entire Tanakh, here in Amos 9:9, and nowhere else. Its precise construction cannot be cross-checked against other biblical usage; lexicographers reconstruct its meaning from the verse’s own agricultural context and from cognate terms in related Semitic languages for a coarse hand-sieve or riddle used to separate stones and debris from grain or sand. The **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** two-or-three-witness standard cannot be

applied to the word itself — there is only one biblical witness to *kevarah* — so its meaning rests on context (**the shaking of grain, the falling of a pebble**) rather than on comparative scriptural usage, a limitation this document states plainly rather than overstating certainty it does not have.

II-C. צָרוּר (*tzeror*) — H6872

The noun translated “**pebble**” (or, in some translations, “**kernel**”) is *tzeror* (צָרוּר), H6872, from the root *tzarar* (צָרַר, to bind, be narrow, confine). Its most common Tanakh usage is “**bundle**” or “**bag**” — as in **Bereishit (Genesis) 42:35**’s “**bundle of money**.” In **Amos 9:9** and **2 Shmuel (Samuel) 17:13** (the only other close occurrence, describing small stones dragged from a city), it denotes a small, compact, bound object — a pebble or a hard kernel of grain. The prophet’s choice of this word, rather than the ordinary word for stone (*even*, אֶבֶן), emphasizes smallness and compactness: the tiniest possible particle, whether the smallest fragment of rubble or the smallest kernel of grain.

II-D. The Grammar of Precision

The verse closes: וְלֹא־יִפֹּל צָרוּר אֶרֶץ — “and not a *tzeror* (*pebble/kernel*) shall fall (*yippol*) to the *eretz* (אֶרֶץ, *land/ground*).” *Yippol* is the Qal imperfect of *nafal* (נָפַל, H5307, “to fall”) — the identical root that produces *ha-nofelet* (הַנוֹפֶּלֶת, “the fallen one”) two verses later in **Amos 9:11**’s “**booth of David that is fallen**.” The prophet builds a deliberate word-bridge on the root *nafal*: what does **not** fall through carelessness in the sieve of judgment (9:9) is set directly against what **has** fallen in ruin (David’s booth, 9:11) and what **Yahweh** promises to raise back up. The same root frames both the precision of the judgment and the certainty of the restoration.

III. THE SIEVE IN AGRICULTURAL AND INTERPRETIVE CONTEXT

In the ancient Near East, threshed grain was passed through a coarse hand-sieve to separate it from stones, clods, and debris before final winnowing. Two readings of the metaphor have been held across the history of its interpretation, and per the **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** evidentiary standard this document states both rather than collapsing the tension prematurely, since the rare word *tzeror* genuinely permits either.

Reading One — the pebble is what the sieve catches and destroys. On this reading, the mesh retains the worthless stones while good grain falls through and is preserved. “Not a pebble falls to the ground” then means: not one piece of worthless rubble — the sinners identified explicitly in the very next verse, **Amos 9:10** (“**all the sinners of my people shall die by the sword**”) — will slip through unnoticed. Judgment is total against the guilty; none of them escapes by hiding among the scattered nations.

Reading Two — the pebble is the good kernel that must not be lost. On this reading, *tzeror* denotes the hard kernel of grain itself, and the sieve’s mesh is fine enough that even the smallest true kernel is accounted for and does not fall away unnoticed. “**Not a pebble falls to the ground**” then means: not one member of the genuine covenant remnant, however small or seemingly insignificant, will be lost or forgotten in the dispersion. Every kernel is tracked.

The two readings are not, in the end, in conflict — both describe the same sieve doing the same work with equal precision. Whether the falling object is the discarded stone or the preserved kernel, the verse's central claim is unchanged: the scattering of Yisra'el (Israel) among the nations — the historical Assyrian and Babylonian exiles, and the longer *Golah* (Diaspora) that followed — is not chaotic, random, or capable of losing track of a single person. **Yahweh** who causes the shaking (*va-hani'oti*) also governs every particle that moves through it. The judgment scatters; it does not lose. This is the same principle **Amos 9:8** already announced: total judgment on the sinful structure, total precision toward the covenant people.

IV. FIVE COVENANT WITNESSES TO THE SIEVE AND THE REFINER'S FIRE

Per the **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** standard, **Amos 9:9's** sieve does not stand alone. The following five witnesses corroborate the covenant pattern of precise, purifying judgment that separates without losing.

Witness One — Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 1:25: Smelting Away the Dross

“I will turn My hand against you; I will smelt away your dross as with lye, and I will remove all your alloy.” (Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 1:25, JPS 1985)

The verb *tzaraf* (צָרַף, H6884, **to smelt/refine**) describes metallurgical purification — heat separates dross from silver without destroying the silver itself. Like the sieve of **Amos 9:9**, the fire does not annihilate; it separates.

Witness Two — Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 30:11: A Full End, But Not to You

“For I am with you — declares Yahweh — to save you; I will make an end of all the nations among which I have dispersed you, but I will not make an end of you; I will discipline you in measure, and will not leave you unpunished.” (Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 30:11)

The phrase **“in measure”** (*la-mishpat*) is the same precision as the sieve of **Amos 9:9** pictures: real discipline, exactly calibrated, never total annihilation of the covenant people.

Witness Three — Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 5:1–4: The Hair Bound in the Hem

Yahweh instructs the prophet to shave his head and beard, divide the hair into thirds for burning, striking, and scattering — yet **Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 5:3** commands:

“Take from there a few hairs and bind them in your skirts.”

Even inside a judgment enacted as a sign-act of near-total destruction, **Yahweh** instructs a remnant to be deliberately preserved — bound, not lost, exactly as no *tzror* falls unaccounted through the sieve.

Witness Four — Malachi 3:2–3: The Refiner and Purifier of Silver

“For he is like a refiner's (*metzaref*) fire and like fullers' soap. He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi.” (Malachi 3:2–3) The purpose clause is explicit: refining is *for*

purification, not for destruction of the silver. The sieve of **Amos 9:9** and the refiner's fire of **Malachi 3:2–3** describe the identical covenant logic in two different agricultural/metallurgical pictures.

Witness Five — Luke 22:31–32: Satan's Request to Sift Shimon Kefa

“Shimon, Shimon, behold, Satan has asked to sift you (σινιάσαι, *siniasai*) like wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.” (Luke 22:31–32)

The Greek verb for “sift” is drawn from the identical agricultural image of **Amos 9:9**'s sieve, now applied to an individual disciple rather than the whole house of Yisra'el (Israel). This document cites the passage as a comparative witness to the covenant pattern's persistence — not as an authority equal to the *Tanakh*, per the doctrinal authority standing rule above — and notes that the outcome promised is preservation of faith through the sifting, not loss.

V. FROM THE SIEVE TO THE SUKKAH — AMOS 9:11–15 AND THE FALLEN BOOTH OF DAVID

The chapter that opens with inescapable judgment (9:1–4) and precise sifting (9:9–10) does not end there. **Amos 9:11** turns immediately to restoration:

“In that day I will raise up the *sukkat David ha-nofelet* (סֹכֶת דָּוִד הַנוֹפֶלֶת, the fallen booth of David); I will repair its breaches and raise up its ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old.”

The scattering of 9:9 and the raising of 9:11 share the same root *nafal* (to fall) identified in II-D above — the very thing that has fallen is what **Yahweh** commits to raise. **Amos 9:14–15** completes the picture: exiles replanted in their own land, “never again to be uprooted.”

This restoration passage carries additional weight in Christian tradition as a comparative witness: **Acts 15:16–17** records Ya'akov (James) citing **Amos 9:11–12** at the Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) council to argue that gentile inclusion among the nations who “**bear my name**” fulfills this restoration prophecy. Per the doctrinal authority standing rule of this document, that New Testament application is cited here as historical and comparative reference only — the written *Tanakh* itself, not any later interpretive use of it, remains the governing text. What the *Tanakh* itself states plainly is this: the same **Yahweh** who scatters with precision in **Amos 9:9** restores with equal precision in **Amos 9:11–15**. The sieve and the sukkah are two movements of one covenant faithfulness.

VI. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — HOW EACH TRADITION READS THE SIEVE

ELEMENT	JUDAISM	CHRISTIANITY	ISLAM
Primary Reading	The Golah (Diaspora) as covenant sifting, not	The sieve applied individually to a disciple	Fitna (فِتْنَة, trial/testing, Q. 29:2–3) as the proof

	covenant termination — the astonishing preservation of the Jewish people across millennia as a distinct people is read as the ongoing fulfillment of the sieve's promise.	(Luke 22:31–32) and corporately through Amos 9:11–12's citation at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:16–17) as a restoration text.	of genuine faith — no soul is left untested, echoing the sieve's refusal to let anything pass unexamined.
Covenant Strength	Refuses despair in exile; the sieve promises accounting, not abandonment. Amos 9:9 is a standing text in Jewish reflection on survival through dispersion.	Preserves the remnant principle as covenant continuity; treats the sifting of the individual disciple and the sifting of the nation as one pattern of testing that ends in restored faith, not loss.	Preserves the principle that testing has purpose and an end — trial refines rather than destroys the sincere believer, paralleling the sieve's separation of worthless from genuine.
Covenant Departure	Where the sieve is read only as total condemnation of the Diaspora rather than held together with Amos 9:8's explicit "I will not utterly destroy," the text's own balance is lost.	Where Amos 9:11–12's restoration is treated as having superseded or replaced the Tanakh's own covenant terms, rather than as comparative witness to them, the doctrinal authority standing rule of this document is departed from.	Where testing (fitna) is detached from the specific covenant vocabulary and history Amos 9:9 addresses — the scattering and gathering of a particular covenant people — the parallel becomes generic rather than textual.
Covenant Witness	The sieve's promise that not a pebble falls unaccounted stands as textual grounds for hope through every historical dispersion, without requiring any explanation of why the exile occurred beyond the covenant's own	The same root (nafal, to fall) links what is sifted (9:9) to what is raised (9:11) — judgment and restoration are one continuous covenant act, not two unrelated events.	"Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity" (Q. 2:286) resonates with the sieve's precision — testing is calibrated, not arbitrary, paralleling Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 30:11's 'I will discipline you in measure.'

	stated terms (Amos 9:8, 10).		
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VII. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON THE SIEVE OF JUDGMENT

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
I	Yahweh Himself is the causative agent of the shaking (<i>va-hani'oti</i>) — the scattering of the covenant people among the nations is never outside His sovereign hand, however severe the earthly instrument used to carry it out.	Amos 9:9
II	Total judgment on the sinful structure and total preservation of the covenant people are not contradictory outcomes — they are the two named components of one precise act.	Amos 9:8
III	Not one member of the true covenant remnant, however small, is lost or forgotten through carelessness in judgment, whatever the scale of the dispersion.	Amos 9:9 (Reading Two)
IV	Judgment against unrepentant sin is equally without escape — no sinner slips through unnoticed, wherever among the nations they are scattered.	Amos 9:9–10
V	What falls in judgment (9:9) and what has fallen in ruin (9:11) share one root — the same Yahweh who scatters is the one who has already committed to raise up what has fallen.	Amos 9:9, 11
VI	Discipline is administered “in measure” — calibrated, not capricious, and never a full end for the covenant people even where it is a full end for the nations among whom judgment falls.	Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 30:11
VII	The sieve and the sukkah are one covenant act, not two: sifting scatters without losing, and restoration rebuilds	Amos 9:9–15

	exactly what was scattered — covenant history moves from precision in judgment to precision in restoration.	
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***“For lo, I will give the command and shake the house of Yisra’el among all the nations
as one shakes with a sieve, and not a pebble falls to the ground.”***

Amos 9:9 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

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