

The First Three Visions of Amos

Amos 7:1-9

Amos 7:1-6 – *“Thus the Lord God showed me: Behold, He formed locust swarms at the beginning of the late crop, after the king’s share had been harvested. ² And so it was, when they had finished eating the grass of the land, that I said: “O Lord God, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, for he is small!” ³ So the Lord relented concerning this. “It shall not be,” said the Lord.*

⁴ Thus the Lord God showed me: Behold, the Lord God called for conflict by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory.⁵ Then I said: “O Lord God, cease, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, for he is small!”

⁶ So the Lord relented concerning this. “This also shall not be,” said the Lord God.”

Background Notes

Amos was a successful businessman who lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, in the town of Tekoa, not far from Bethlehem. But God called Amos to leave his successful business and go into the ministry full time. I can identify with Amos at this point. The Lord called me out of secular employment and into full time ministry in the early 1970s. Up till this point, I worked as a research scientist and engineer, and I had no intention of leaving the good job that God had given me. But the Lord clearly called me to follow Him into full time ministry - and I obeyed. So I can identify with the prophet Amos.

Before we continue, let me say two things about (so-called) “full time ministry.”

1. The Lord calls all of us to serve Him full time! There’s no special class of clergy-types or Christians whom the Lord calls to spend more time in service, or to a “higher” type of service than other believers. No, **all believers** should serve the Lord **all the time**. **Where** you serve the Lord all the time is really the question - not **whether** you serve the Lord all the time. Some Christians are called to serve the Lord in secular employment, and some Christians are called to serve out of secular employment - but all Christians are to serve the Lord all of the time. I trust that all of you are serving the Lord full time, wherever you are.

2. The “grass is not greener” when you leave secular employment! Some Christians have the notion that when you leave a “regular job” to serve the Lord in full time ministry, all problems disappear. They think that there’s no more stress on the job, no more rat race, no more pressures from the world, no more worries or anxieties about your needs, no more company politics - because now you’re in the ministry. Everything is just wonderful and carefree – a ministry world of love and joy with no problems.

Well, nothing could be further from the truth! You can't escape the world! In any full time ministry, you will face pretty much all the same problems you face in any other job! And believe me, you will work harder - and many times in a lot less pleasant environment - than when you were in regular employment.

Such was the situation for Amos. Living and working in Tekoa as a successful rancher and businessman was certainly a lot more pleasant than preaching and prophesying to an unfriendly audience in the city of Bethel, in the northern kingdom of Israel.

The prophet Amos was like a foreign missionary. He lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, but the Lord directed him to preach and prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel. His ministry was centered in Bethel, a city of idolatrous worship. About 100 years before Amos' time, King Jeroboam I had set up two golden calf shrines – one at Dan in the north, and one at Bethel near the southern border of his kingdom. At the time of Amos, King Jeroboam II was in power, but the shrine was still at Bethel.

Amos delivered his eight prophecies, three sermons and six visions at Bethel. The first three visions of judgment that the Lord gave Amos about the northern kingdom of Israel are in the first half of Amos 7.

Doctrinal Points

1. God answers the prayers of His people - according to His sovereignty.

This doctrinal point comes from the first two visions that God gave Amos, recorded in Amos 7:1-6. Many Bible students and commentators believe that the plague and disaster of these two visions foreshadowed the devastation of the coming invasion that took place when the Assyrian armies overthrew the northern kingdom of Israel. That happened not many years following these visions.

In the first vision Amos saw a disastrous locust plague (v1-3). The locusts invaded at the time of the second harvest, or the second reaping. The first reaping went to the king as tribute or tax. The people, to meet their needs, kept the second reaping or late crop. So if the locusts came after the king's share had been harvested, the remaining crops and land would be devastated. The people would be left with nothing, and many of them would starve to death during the resulting famine. But Amos prayed on behalf of the nation, and God withheld the locust plague. The God of the Bible is a merciful God.

In the second vision Amos saw a consuming wildfire (v4-6). The fire ravaged the land, and even dried up the natural water sources. This, of course, would mean much suffering and death. So once again Amos prayed on the behalf of the people, and God withheld the fire. God is a merciful God.

In verses 3 and 6, what does the Bible mean when it says “*the Lord relented*” or “*repented*” or “*changed His mind*” about these natural disasters? Isn't God sovereign? Doesn't He know everything, and control everything? So how can He “relent” or “change His mind”? Yes, God is sovereign, and He does know everything, and He does control everything. You see, the answer is that this is *anthropomorphic language*, in which human characteristics are ascribed to God. **From the human perspective**, it appeared that God changed His mind in response to the prayers of Amos. But God is sovereign, and He knew all the time what He would do.

This doesn't mean, however, that God doesn't answer prayer! God **does** answer prayer! James 5:16 says, “*The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective*” (NIV). Amos was a righteous man. He prayed, God answered his prayer, and God withheld the judgments of the locust invasion and the wildfire.

We don't understand how prayer works. It's beyond our finite comprehension to fully understand how a sovereign God who knows everything and controls everything from eternity to eternity can still answer our prayers. But God asks us to pray! The fact that He knows if we'll pray and how we'll pray is certainly part of the answer, but the full answer is beyond us.

I think you see the doctrinal point that emerges from the first two visions that the Lord gave to Amos. God answers the prayers of His people - **according to His sovereignty**.

2. God measures the uprightness of His people according to His Scriptures.

Amos 7:7-9 - *Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. ⁸ And the Lord said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said: “Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore.*

⁹ The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste. I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam.

A “plumb line” is a cord that has a weight on one end. The weight at the end of the cord enables the cord to hang in a perfect vertical line. Builders and masons use a plumb line to determine if a wall or foundation is straight and perfectly vertical. A plumb line will indicate if a wall is upright - *or not!*

God said He would use a plumb line to measure whether or not His people were upright - and He found them to be crooked, not straight. They were way “out of line” because of their idolatry and social injustice. And God would have to judge them: “*The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste. I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam*” (v9). Not long after Amos gave this prophecy, this judgment happened at the hands of the Assyrians.

Now here's a question. What do you think is "God's plumb line"? **God's plumb line is His Word.** God's standard for measuring spiritual and moral uprightness has always been Scripture - in the days of ancient Israel, and today. God measures the uprightness of His people based on the standards He has clearly taught in His Word.

God's plumb line is not your status in society. God's plumb line is not how well you've done in your business, or how successful you've been in your career. God's plumb line is not how many friends you have. God's plumb line is not how much influence you have – in society or in your community – or in your church! No. God's plumb line is Scripture!

How do you measure up? How do I measure up? How well do we measure up with the standards set by God's moral and spiritual plumb line, as given in Scripture? God measures the uprightness of His people according to His Scriptures.

Practical Application

How straight is your wall in God's eyes?

Suppose the Lord were to picture our lives as if we were stone walls. If God were to send us pictures of our lives as stone walls, what would they look like?

Would our walls be strong and straight and true – or would our walls be a lot less straight than **we** had pictured them?

Would our walls be crooked? Would they be tilted one way or another? Would stones be falling out? Would parts of our walls be entirely missing? Would our walls be collapsing? Would our wall be painted to try to disguise the fact that it wasn't straight? Would our wall have ugly patches of cement where we tried to prevent it from crumbling completely?

How would our walls be pictured? Would our walls be as straight in God's eyes as they are in our own eyes? I hope that all of our lives would be strong walls – walls that are straight, and walls that line up well with God's plumb line of Scripture.

The true test – the true plumb line - is God's Word! Is every area of your life in line with God's righteous standards found in Scripture? The Word of God is the true test - and the more we know the Word, the better we're likely to do on the test.

How straight is your wall in **God's** eyes?