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A Prophet for Today / Vision; Judgment / Amos 7:1-9; Amos 8:1-9:10

In Amos 7:1-9; 8:1-9:10, we learn about God's judgment on those who profess allegiance to God.

Introduction

Earlier this week, the President of the United States of America gave his State of the Union Address to a joint session of the US Congress.

The State of the Union Address generally includes reports on the nation's budget, economy, agenda, progress, and achievements. At the same time, the president sets out his priorities and legislative proposals for the coming year.

The United States of America is, of course, not a theocracy.

But Israel was a theocracy. I am using that term in the sense that the state and the church were the same. And they were under the sovereign rule of God.

God often sent prophets to speak to his people. Every time a prophet spoke, he was delivering a message from God about the State of the Union.

The Prophet Amos was sent by God to the northern nation of Israel. Even though Israel and Judah were divided at the time of Amos' prophecy, the people in each nation still thought of themselves as God's people experiencing God's blessing.

However, Amos' message to Israel was essentially a message of God's judgment on the people who professed allegiance to God.

Scripture

Let's read selected portions from [Amos 7:1-9; 8:1-9:10](#):

7:1 This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout, and behold, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. 2 When they had finished eating the

grass of the land, I said, “O Lord God, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” 3 The Lord relented concerning this: “It shall not be,” said the Lord.

4 This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, the Lord God was calling for a judgment by fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. 5 Then I said, “O Lord God, please cease! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” 6 The Lord relented concerning this: “This also shall not be,” said the Lord God.

7 This is what he showed me: behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built 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 never again pass by them; 9 the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

8:1 This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit. 2 And he said, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then the Lord said to me, “The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them. 3 The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,” declares the Lord God. “So many dead bodies!” “They are thrown everywhere!” “Silence!” 4 Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, 5 saying, “When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, 6 that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?”

8:11 “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. 12 They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.”

9:1 I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said: “Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall

flee away; not one of them shall escape. 2 “If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. 3 If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search them out and take them; and if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them. 4 And if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them; and I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good.”

Lesson

In [Amos 7:1-9](#); [8:1-9:10](#), we learn about God’s judgment on those who profess allegiance to God.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Visions Seen by the Prophet of God (7:1-9; 8:1-9:10)
2. The Lessons to Be Learned by the People of God

I. The Visions Seen by the Prophet of God (7:1-9; 8:1-9:10)

Amos saw five visions. I would like to describe each vision briefly so that we can spend some time on the lessons to be learned by the people of God.

These are the five visions that Amos saw. Each vision described God’s judgment of Israel.

A. The Vision of the Locusts (7:1-3)

First, Amos saw the vision of the locusts.

Amos said in [Amos 7:1](#), “This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout, and behold, it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings.” God showed Amos that he intended to send a vast locust plague to destroy Israel’s crops. It was to come after the king’s harvest and before the second, more important harvest. If this second harvest was lost, it would cause widespread famine and starvation.

When I was a young boy in South Africa, my parents, brother, and I were traveling across the country. In the distance, we saw what looked like a dark rain cloud in our path. As we got closer, my Dad realized that it was a vast swarm of locusts. In just a little while, the car started hitting dozens of low-flying locusts. You think that hitting Florida love bugs is bad! Let me assure you that hitting locusts is far more dramatic. We had to pull off the road and park for 10 or 15 minutes until they had passed over the road. What was stunning was to see the devastation of the crops where the locusts had flown.

So, one can understand that Amos cried out to the Lord in prayer in verse 2, “O Lord God, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” Amos knew that a swarm of locusts would devastate the nation.

Astonishingly, the Lord granted Amos’ request, as we read in verse 3, “The Lord relented concerning this: ‘It shall not be,’ said the Lord.”

So, Amos said that the vision of the locusts would not come and result in God’s judgment.

B. The Vision of the Fire (7:4-6)

Second, Amos saw the vision of the fire.

Amos said in [Amos 7:4](#), “This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, the Lord God was calling for a judgment by fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land.” God showed Amos that he intended to send a great fire that would destroy the land. That would impact the economy and the produce, and result in great destruction of life.

South Africa has a lot of open fields. “Veld,” or prairie, fires were common. When I was a pre-teen, we had a very large fire in the field in the back of our house. We took sacks and soaked them in water to extinguish the flames. I think my Dad allowed my brother and me to help because we could extinguish the smaller flames at the edge of the field, while the men worked the larger flames in the center of the field. I don’t know how many acres of crops were destroyed but it was not the entire region, which would have been devastating.

Once again, Amos prayed to the Lord in verse 5, “O Lord God, please cease! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” A large fire that covered the entire nation would crush the nation.

And, astonishingly again, we read in verse 6, “The Lord relented concerning this: ‘This also shall not be,’ said the Lord God.”

So, Amos noted that the vision of the fire would not come and result in God’s judgment.

C. The Vision of the Plumb Line (7:7-9)

Third, Amos saw the vision of the plumb line.

Amos said in [Amos 7:7](#), “This is what he showed me: behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand.” My undergraduate degree was a discipline in the construction industry. I worked as an intern and then for two more years after graduation. I frequently went on to construction sites and saw contractors use a plumb line. It was a piece of string with a heavy weight at the end. As the builder built the wall, he would use the plumb line to make sure that the wall was going up true to vertical. I don’t know what contractors use today but that is what we used in the last century.

Plumb lines have been around for several millennia, at least since the time of Amos.

So the Lord said to Amos in verse 8a, “Amos, what do you see?” And [Amos] said, “A plumb line.”

There was a time when the Lord called the nation of Israel to himself. They were upright people. They were true to vertical. But that was no longer the case.

The Lord said to Amos in verses 8b-9, “Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.” Like the leaning tower of Pisa, the people of God were no longer upright and vertical before God. They were a crooked nation. When God took the plumb line of his word and judged his people by that word, they were out of alignment. They were crooked.

Therefore, the Lord was going to rise in judgment against the people.

This time Amos did not intercede for the people because God was clear about what was the problem with his people.

The vision of the plumb line made clear that God was going to judge the people.

D. The Vision of the Summer Fruit (8:1-14)

Fourth, Amos saw the vision of the summer fruit.

Amos said in [Amos 8:1](#), “This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit.” We remember that Amos was “a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs” ([Amos 7:14](#)). So, Amos knew what a basket of summer fruit looked like.

So the Lord said to Amos in verse 2, “Amos, what do you see?” And [Amos] said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then the Lord said to [Amos], “The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them.” Amos was making the point of God’s judgment by way of a pun on similar-sounding words. The Hebrew words for summer “fruit” (*qayits*) and “end” (*qets*) sound very similar in Hebrew. So, Amos was saying that when he said that he saw “summer *qayits*,” the Lord said, “*Qets!*” An end was coming upon Israel.

Amos mentioned sins of greed and dishonesty and robbery and enslavement and Sabbath violation in [Amos 8:4-6](#), “Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, ‘When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?’ ”

Amos stated the judgment that God was going to bring on the nation of Israel in [Amos 8:11-12](#), “ ‘Behold, the days are coming,’ declares the Lord God, ‘when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.’ ” Earlier, Amos said in [Amos 7:11](#), “Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.” And that did happen in less than a generation from the time of Amos’ prophecy. In 722 BC, the Israelites were taken into captivity and exile.

But worse than death and exile was a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Not hearing God’s word was a dreadful judgment.

So, the vision of the summer fruit would result in a judgment of a loss of the word of God.

E. The Vision of the Lord Beside the Altar (9:1-10)

And finally, Amos saw the vision of the Lord beside the altar.

This was the most unsettling of all the visions of Amos. God told Amos that he was going to destroy the people, wherever they might try to hide. Amos said in [Amos 9:1-4](#), “I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said: ‘Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall flee away; not one of them shall escape. If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search them out and take them; and if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them. And if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them; and I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good.’ ”

The people of Israel thought that because they had a special relationship with God through the covenant they were safe. However, they utterly disregarded the terms of the covenant. God pronounced that there were no different than the pagan nations around them. And they would be judged.

II. The Lessons to Be Learned by the People of God

Let me briefly mention a few lessons we can learn from the five visions of Amos.

First, God’s judgment is sometimes held off through prayer. In the visions of the locusts and the fire, Amos prayed and asked God to hold off judgment. And God did answer positively to Amos’ prayer. God’s people should pray for God to hold off judgment. The judgment of God is a terrible thing. And we do well to ask God to hold off judgment until all the elect has come to a knowledge of the truth.

Second, people who profess faith in God must measure themselves by God’s word and not any other standard. The vision of the plumb line calls God’s people to walk in uprightness. How is that done? It is done by walking in a way that is consistent with the word of God. When professing believers and churches try to

accommodate the culture, it is a recipe for disaster. Culture is never the standard by which we live. It is always the word of God.

Third, the loss of God's word is a terrible disaster. This is what happened in the vision of the summer fruit. People today care less and less for God's word. I am not talking about non-Christians. I am talking about Christians. A recent article in *Christianity Today* stated the following:

Bible reading dropped dramatically in 2022. It is unclear why. Roughly 50 percent of American adults reported opening Scripture at least three times a year every year from 2011 to 2021, according to American Bible Society surveys. Then, in 2022, that number declined to 39 percent.

That means that amid record inflation, threats of nuclear war in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and ongoing debates about the state of democracy, there were about 26 million Americans who stopped reading the Bible.

And fourth, God will punish those who profess faith but have no vital relationship with God. It is not enough to profess faith in God. You must possess faith in God. In the vision of the Lord beside the altar, we should be surprised. The altar is the place of God's mercy. But a time will come when there is no more mercy, and there will be only judgment.

Conclusion

So, let us be sure that our profession of allegiance to God is more than merely a profession. Let us be sure that we possess God himself.

[2 Corinthians 13:5](#) states, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"

May God help each one of us to examine ourselves and come to a clear and accurate assessment of our standing with God.

If it should be lacking, turn to God in faith and repentance. And he will forgive you and have his judgment fall on Jesus. Amen.