

Amos: prayer warrior and prophet

- Amos 7:1-17
- Amos can be divided into three sections. We completed section one last week, which consists of Amos 1-6, and could be called: First Oracles. Today we begin section two, which is chapter 7, and the first three verses of chapter 8 and could be called: Visions. The last section runs from 8:4 until the end of the book and could be called, Last Oracles. Let's look at chapter seven today under these headings: Three visions, One proud accuser, One faithful man.
- **Three visions**
- As we know, sometimes God gives visions to his people. Paul wrote about this in 2 Corinthians 12, where he was given a vision of heaven. Paul said twice that he didn't know whether he was in the body or out of it. In other words, he doesn't know whether God actually took him up into heaven, or whether God took Paul there in his mind. Peter had a vision of a sheet being lowered from heaven with unclean animals on it. Jacob had a vision of a ladder coming down from heaven. And God said to Joel, referring to the day of Pentecost and following, "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." (Joel 2:28) When God gives a vision, he places a picture in your mind instead of speaking words into your ears. Or sometimes, he gives you the picture, and then he explains what it means or what you are to do. I am not one who regularly has visions or dreams that I interpret as from the Lord. But I had a vivid dream last Sunday night about my father, with whom I had a difficult relationship for much of my life. He died of cancer in 2006. In the dream, I was sitting on the front pew at church, with my family, and my father walked in, a few minutes late. The meeting was already started. He was very thin, and feeble, and when he sat next to me he said, "I had to shower to get here." And then he laid his head on my shoulder, and I kissed him on the neck. Those two things, his head on my shoulder, me kissing him on the neck, never happened when Dad was alive. In the dream it was a very tender moment, and I woke up at that point and felt more compassion and more love for my dad than ever in my life. It was powerful. I don't know whether it came from the Lord, and I don't know what it means, but I was comforted by it. The three visions Amos was given did not bring comfort to the people of Israel, nor were they meant to. Let's look at them briefly, paying particular attention to Amos' responses.
- **Locusts (vs. 1-3)**
- Notice that the Lord showed Amos a picture, a vision, of what He was about to do. He was forming locusts to destroy the crops in Israel. The latter harvest was just coming up, and it was about to be devoured. This means little to us, but it would have been terrifying to Israel. The first harvest was for the king and his army and the elite. That harvest was already in. The latter harvest was for the farmers and the common people, and it was going to be destroyed. This is not like an ice storm is coming and we rush to the store, only to find out there's no bread and milk. No, we survive ice storms quite nicely without bread or milk. But the latter harvest fed the nation of Israel, and its destruction would have meant widespread famine, starvation, and death.
- What does Amos do? He prays. Why does He appeal to God about the locusts? Because God is in charge of the locusts! Amos goes to the only one who can save the nation from starving to death.
- How does he pray? First with humble repentance. "O Lord God, please forgive!" He does not question why God would bring judgment on the nation; Amos knows they deserve it and that God has every right to bring it to them. Instead he simply asks for forgiveness, on behalf of the nation. We have seen the anger of God against the wicked, and now we see the mercy of God in response to one man's prayer. Amos asks for forgiveness. Then he appeals to God's compassion. "How can Jacob stand?" And to God's pity. "He is so small!" Amos prays because he knows of God's justice, and because he knows of God's mercy and love.

- The Lord relented. (vs 3). There is no question here that God did not relent because the sin Israel had committed didn't matter to Him; it was because He is a merciful and a loving God. And the catalyst for God's relenting, was that Amos prayed. We have talked about this before, but it is an amazing truth all through Scripture, that God listens to the prayers of His people and even changes His course of action in response to them. Not every time. Jesus prayed in the garden on the night of His betrayal, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Then he continued, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." The Father's will was to crush his son, for our sake. Notice that Jesus did not command God with His words; so how can we ever presume to do so! God is sovereign over everything, right down to a swarm of locusts. He is sovereign over the storms that come, and he is sovereign over the storms that go around us. But we are called to pray! We can pray even for our nation, that God would withhold His judgment, and who knows but that God will relent, and instead bring revival?
- **Fire (vs. 4-6)**
- This vision is even more deadly, as God again showed Amos what He was about to do. Fire that even devoured the deep and ate up the land. This is hard to understand, but at the very least it means massive destruction. The deep may even refer to the foundation of the mountains that rise out of the sea. It reminds us of what God said in Deuteronomy 32:22. "For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth, and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains." In other words, this fire no one could put out.
- Again, Amos prayed. He stands like Moses, between God and the people of God, and pleads for their lives. Again, God relents. Not because their sin was not great but because God's love is greater. As Corrie ten Boom said, "There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still."
- Do you see two powerful attributes of God on display in this book, and the grace-filled tension between the two? God's wrath against sin is settled for all eternity, and there is no changing that. If that wrath against sin were removed from God's character, He would cease to be God. At the same time, God's love for His people and His commitment to save and keep them for all eternity is part of His character, His divine nature. That also cannot and will not be changed, lest God cease to be God!
- **The Plumb Line (vs. 7-9)**
- Again, God shows Amos a picture, but this one is different. Instead of a picture from nature, a swarm of locusts, or a fire, God shows Amos a wall. This is something we presume that man built. And beside the wall is a plumb line. This is a picture that you builders can appreciate. What does a plumb line show you about a wall? Right, whether it is straight, perfectly vertical. In this picture, God says He is setting the plumb line in the midst of his people. How do you know whether your life is true to plumb? How do we know if we are walking uprightly, walking in truth, walking in righteousness? What instrument do we hold up against our lives to show us whether our way of living is true and right? Yes, the Word of God. When God called his people out of bondage in Egypt, he gave them a land, and he gave them his word. He didn't tell them just to figure out what plumb was, and just to live any way they wanted to. Would that be love, for God to tell us that we can live any way we want to? Some people would say yes. But it would not be love, it would not be the grace of God any more than you would be loving your children if you didn't have any boundaries for them, and you let them do and go and say and live and love any way they pleased. Those who reject Christ don't start with rejecting Christ. They start with rejecting his Word where it interferes with the lifestyle they want to pursue. Is it loving to tell them that that's ok, that they can live any way they want to? If that is love, then Jesus didn't love the woman caught in the act of adultery? Remember? The Pharisees wanted to stone her because she had been caught in the act. Jesus did not condemn her. Instead he forgave her. And said, "Go and sin no more." He did not say, "go and live any way you choose. He gave her a godly and a joyful boundary, for her good and for God's glory. The Psalmist wrote, "I will keep your law continually, forever and ever, and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts." (Ps. 119:44-45) We will walk in freedom by keeping close to the Lord and to the plumb line of His Word.

- Amos' response to this vision was different, wasn't it? He did not pray. God showed him the vision and showed him that it was set. It would happen. The high places of false worship and the sanctuaries would be laid waste. The northern kingdom, the house of Jeroboam, would be brought down by the sword.
- **One Proud Accuser (vs. 10-13)**
- So far, Amos has had no detractors, at least none that he has told us about. But as with any ministry, any church, any follower of God, it's just a matter of time. I have told many young pastors, especially church planters, that any time you are doing the work of the Lord, there will be accusers. If they hated Christ, how much more will they hate us? And we know that often, as we saw in the book of Nehemiah, it is not opposition from the outside that is the hardest to deal with: it is opposition from within. When those we thought were with us are suddenly collecting reasons why they should oppose us. God is sovereign over all storms, though, right? We can trust Him.
- Amaziah fancies himself to be the man in Israel who is going to bring down Amos, stop his mouth, shut him up, and sweep him into the dustbin of history. Who is Amaziah? A priest. Oh, the irony, that a man, Amaziah, who is supposed to go before God on behalf of his people, and go before the people on behalf of God, tries to stop Amos, the man who IS going before God on behalf of his people. Amaziah makes himself a roadblock, or, tries to. He sends a letter to the king, telling him of this great conspiracy that Amos is the leader of, telling the king that Amos has even threatened his life, which Amos did not do. There is no evidence that the king asked Amaziah to check on this situation with Amos, and there is no evidence that the king responded to Amaziah's letter! So, Amaziah takes it into his own hands to bully Amos into leaving. "Go back to Judah," he says. Question: Have you ever been told to go back to where you came from? Ever been told to keep your God-talk to yourself? If you have, then you know a little of what Amos was facing. Let's see how he responded. We can learn from it, and take caution from it as well.
- **One Faithful Man (vs. 14-17)**
- I love Amos' first response to a man who had made himself his enemy. Amos says, basically, "I am nothing in my own right." Amaziah, you're all upset about this big conspirator who is out to destroy Israel; hey, you give me way too much credit! I was no prophet, and neither was my father. I was just a shepherd and a vine dresser. But the LORD took me, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel." You see, I am not your problem, Amaziah. **God** is. I am not bringing judgment to Israel. **God** is. I am not speaking my words, Amaziah. **God** is speaking His words through me.
- Amos is humble. But he's not afraid. Amaziah has just told Amos to hightail it back to Judah, and Amos responds, "Now therefore hear the word of the Lord." (verse 15b) YOU say, do not prophesy and do not preach. This is what the LORD says. And Amos tells Amaziah what the Lord was going to do, and it is not pleasant. But the consequences for sin never are.
- Amos is a faithful man. We see his faithfulness to stand in the gap for the people of Israel, praying for God to relent from bringing famine or fire. We see his faithfulness to stand up before his accuser, relying not on his own strength, but on the Lord. We see him standing to deliver the message that God has given him to speak, and without fear, depending on God alone to bring to pass what He has promised. We see a faithful God, most of all. Who will accomplish what He wills through us, as we walk in obedience. We have nothing to fear. Nothing to lose.
- Prayer