



Amos - Chapter Seven

Summary of Chapter Seven

Amos prophesied that destruction would come in form of locust and devouring fire and he pleaded with the Lord to relent and God was gracious and would not destroy Israel. However, they were so far away from the way they should have been as his people that they would still go into exile.

Amaziah, a priest who worshipped idols at Bethel, reported Amos to the king and also insisted that Amos should return to Judah and not prophesy in Israel again. However, Amos stated he was not a professional prophet earning his living but was warning the people with God's word of judgement; exile that would befall the king, Amaziah and all the people.

III Amos 7:1-9:15 - Visions of Judgement

In the final section of the book, the prophet turns from speech to sight. He now tells of visions he has received from God that leave no doubt of the deadly peril in which the nation stands. The first is a vision of inescapable judgement (7:1-9), a vision frighteningly confirmed by the prophet's experience with the priest of Bethel (7:10-17). The second vision is of Israel's terrible end (8:1-14). The last is of the Lord standing at the altar of sacrifice (9:1-15). However, this vision has two parts, the first of which continues the theme of judgement (9:1-10), whereas the second sounds a note of hope (9:11-15).

III.a Amos 7:1-17 - A Vision of Inescapable Judgement

Israel is too far gone to avoid judgement despite pleas from Amos to spare them.

III.a.i Amos 7:1-9 - Locusts, Fire, and a Plumb-Line

God reveals to Amos in three pictures that there is no hope for Israel. In response to the first two, the prophet pleads for mercy for the nation (v.2 and v.5), and God twice graciously relents (v.3 and v.6). However, the third picture is so convincing

that the prophet sees there is no hope and therefore makes no intercession. The idea is that God has repeatedly shown mercy to his erring people, only to have them continue in their idolatry and complacency towards him. Sooner or later, their time will be up.

¹ This is what the Lord God showed me: he was forming locusts at the time the latter growth began to sprout (it was the latter growth after the king's mowings).

Amos 7:1

This is what the Lord God showed me. The prophet Amos will relate a vision from the Lord. This was something he saw, something the Lord showed him.

Judgement would fall on Israel like a plague of locusts: <<*He gave their crops to the caterpillar, and the fruit of their labour to the locust*>> (Psalm 78:46), <<*What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten*>> (Joel 1:4), and the swarm that would come in final judgement to torment those who oppose God: <<*Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads*>> (Revelation 9:3-4)

The latter growth was the wheat crop harvested after the barley. If it was lost, there would be little to eat in the coming year.

The king's mowings were the part of the crop paid as a tax to the king. The tax would be collected but the rest of the crop destroyed.

² When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said,

‘O Lord God, forgive, I beg you!

How can Jacob stand?

He is so small!’

³ The Lord relented concerning this;

‘It shall not be,’ said the Lord.

Amos 7:2-3

O Lord God, forgive, I beg you! In spite of the severity of all that Amos had said, there was no element of vindictiveness in him. Unlike Jonah, he did not want what he was predicting to happen. He pleaded earnestly that God would show mercy.

How can Jacob stand? He is so small! At this vision of terrible judgement, the prophet's heart is moved with pity and compassion for Israel, and he asks God to consider Israel's frailty.

The Lord relented. Like Amos, God does not desire to destroy his people. He is very patient: <<*The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness'*>> (Exodus 34:6), and: <<*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance*>> (2 Peter 3:9). Unlike the capricious gods, who may decide for no reason either to destroy or release, the Lord is utterly reliable: he has promised to relent in response to repentance; refer to Jeremiah 8:5-10 and Jonah 3:10-4:2.

⁴ This is what the Lord God showed me: the Lord God was calling for a shower of fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. ⁵ Then I said,

'O Lord God, cease, I beg you!

How can Jacob stand?

He is so small!'

⁶ The Lord relented concerning this;

'This also shall not be,' said the Lord God.

Amos 7:4-6

The Lord God was calling for a shower of fire. Judgement would come upon Israel like a fire so intense it would dry up the sea, i.e. the great deep, and scorch the land: <<*For by fire will the Lord execute judgement, and by his sword, on all flesh; and those slain by the Lord shall be many*>> (Isaiah 66:16), and: <<*To you, O Lord, I cry. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flames have burned all the trees of the field*>> (Joel 1:19). After the vision of locusts, now Amos sees a vision of a great consuming fire upon the land of Israel. In response, he does what he did before, plead for mercy: O Lord God, cease, I beg you! It is in God's nature to relent from punishment once he sees that the people have learned from their punishment, such as occurred because of David's sin in taking an unauthorised census: <<*And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; but when he was about to destroy it, the Lord took note and relented concerning the calamity; he said to the destroying angel, 'Enough! Stay your hand.'* The angel of the Lord was then standing by the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite>> (1 Chronicles 21:15).

'This also shall not be,' said the Lord God. As happened with the vision of locusts, God relented at the prayer of the prophet.

⁷ This is what he showed me: 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,

'See, I am setting a plumb-line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;

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.'

Amos 7:7-9

The third picture that God showed Amos was of a plumb-line held against a wall. A plumb-line is a string with a weight fastened to the end of it. When the string is placed beside a wall and the weight is allowed to hang freely, it will be apparent whether or not the wall is perfectly vertical. If the wall is leaning and it is not fixed, it will eventually collapse. Compared to the standard of the Torah, the plumb-line according to which the wall of Israel was built, it is clear to Amos that the nation is now so far out of true vertical that the collapse cannot be prevented: *<<I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line for Samaria, and the plummet for the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down>>* (2 Kings 21:13). Israel is hardened in sin; thus, in this case, Amos does not ask God to relent.

The reference to high places and sanctuaries makes it plain that Israel is out of line with reality, particularly regarding their relationship to God. When this situation is laid where it should be, at the foot of the king Jeroboam II, the royal chaplain comes to his defence (vv.10-17).

III.a.ii Amos 7:10-17 - Amaziah Complains to the King

If the plumb line according to which Israel was constructed was the Torah, then the priesthood should have held Israel accountable to the Torah: *<<They teach Jacob your ordinances, and Israel your law; they place incense before you, and whole burnt-offerings on your altar>>* (Deuteronomy 33:10), and: *<<True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in integrity and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek*

instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts>> (Malachi 2:6-7). However, the priesthood itself was corrupt; refer to 1 Kings 12:31 for how Jeroboam I ruined the priesthood for the northern kingdom. Thus, there was no external standard being applied by which Israel's true condition could be recognised and corrected. In such a case, the end truly was at hand.

¹⁰ Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹ For thus Amos has said,

“Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land.”’

Amos 7:10-11

The reference to Amaziah the priest shows that a representative of the established religious leadership, who had the ear of the king, opposed the prophecies of Amos. His words, Amos has conspired against you, were a lie. This Amaziah was a wicked man, because he is identified as the priest of Bethel, which was one of the centres of Israel's idolatrous worship. He sent a message of King Jeroboam of Israel, who was a successful king by worldly standards, but a wicked king before God: <<*In the fifteenth year of King Amaziah son of Joash of Judah, King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel began to reign in Samaria; he reigned for forty-one years. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin*>> (2 Kings 14:23-24).

¹² And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; ¹³ but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.'

Amos 7:12-13

When Amaziah called Amos a seer, his intent may have been contemptuous. This term for a prophet suggests Amos is not a member of the royal guild of prophets who, since they were paid by the king, would speak to his pleasure, and thus has no standing in the king's sanctuary. Note that no mention is made of this being God's sanctuary or temple.

Never again prophesy at Bethel. Amaziah was offended that Amos came to Bethel and prophesied, so he does his best to send him back to Judah. Amaziah the priest

and those supporting him wanted only to hear messages of God's promises of blessing and success, not messages about sin and obedience and judgement: <<*For they are a rebellious people, faithless children, children who will not hear the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, 'Do not see'; and to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel'*>> (Isaiah 30:9-11), and: <<*For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths*>> (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

¹⁴ Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, ¹⁵ and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

Amos 7:14-15

I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son. Amos replies to Amaziah by noting that he was a reluctant, unprofessional prophet, He was not from a school of prophets but only a farmer by trade. Amos was hardly the type to launch a conspiracy.

A dresser of sycamore figs. Sycamore figs were somewhat like a mulberry. They would only ripen if bruised. They were usually eaten by the very poor.

The Lord took me, the Lord said to me. Amos was not prophesying on his own authority but on God's authority. Like many others in the Bible, God called Amos as he faithfully performed his present calling. It was because Amos was an honourable shepherd that God made him an honourable prophet. With so many allusions and illustrations from the world of agriculture, Amos spoke as a farmer and God used it: <<*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong*>> (1 Corinthians 1:27).

¹⁶ 'Now therefore hear the word of the Lord.
You say, "Do not prophesy against Israel,
and do not preach against the house of Isaac."

Amos 7:16

Now therefore hear the word of the Lord. Far from being humiliated at his lack of professional standing, Amos takes it as a badge of honour. He is not paid to say what he is saying, but does so solely at the command of the Lord.

17 Therefore, thus says the Lord:
“Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,
and your land shall be parcelled out by line;
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.”

Amos 7:17

Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword. God’s word to Amaziah, through the prophet Amos, no less, is that the calamity he wanted to silence Amos about would certainly come upon him personally as well as the rest of the nation. All the honour that Amaziah prized so highly would be taken from him: his wife would belong to other men indiscriminately; he would be deprived of any progeny; he would lose his property; he would lose his profession because of being defiled by the unclean land to which he would be taken as captive; and he would die as an exile: <<*You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images that you made for yourselves; therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts*>> (Amos 5:26-27). These terrible punishments would be heaped on this religious leader, who was recognised by the king as such but not by God, for rejecting the words of God that came through the prophet Amos.

This is exactly what Amaziah accused Amos of saying as part of the conspiracy. Amos is bold enough to speak for the Lord, and to tell Amaziah and everyone else that Israel’s impending captivity is indeed true. This was a difficult word in most difficult circumstances, but Amos was faithful to deliver it.