

The Minor Prophets
Lesson 20: Stop—Look—Listen!
(Amos 7-9)

Introduction: The prophecy of Amos concludes with the record of five special visions of judgment that God gave to His servant: the locust (7:1-3), the fire (vv. 4-6), the plumbline (vv. 7-9), the basket of fruit (8:1-14), and the ruined temple (9:1-10). However, the prophet closes his message on a positive note as he describes the future glorious kingdom that God has promised to His people (vv. 11-15).

But these visions center on three experiences of the prophet in which Amos struggles with God and man (chap. 7), declares that judgment is coming (chap. 8), and affirms that God is working out His perfect plan (chap. 9).

1. The Prophet Struggles (7:1-17)

The life of a prophet wasn't easy. On the one hand, he had to stay close to the Lord in order to hear His words and be able to share them with the people. But, on the other hand, he also had to be with the people to whom he was ministering, and they didn't always want to accept his ministry. It's no wonder that some of the prophets wanted to resign, including Moses and Jeremiah. Amos had two struggles: one with the Lord and one with the authorities, especially the king and his priest. When you read the book of Acts, you see that the apostles also faced struggles with the religious establishment and with the government.

- a. **Struggling with the Lord (vv. 1-9).** Amos was a true patriot who loved God and loved his nation, and it grieved him that he had to tell Israel and Judah that judgment was coming. No doubt he wished he was back at Tekoa caring for the sycamore trees and the sheep. But, the Sovereign Lord was in control of history, and Amos knew that God's will was best. The prophet saw three visions of judgment and responded to them.
 - i. **The vision of the locust (vv. 1-3).** First, Amos saw the vision of the locust as they were poised to attack the second crop late in the summer, after the king had taken his share (1 King 4:7). This was the farmer's last chance for a harvest, and the harvest would be destroyed. The summer heat was on its way, and there would be no more chance for a crop.
 1. The strange thing was that it was God who prepared these insects and told them what to do. It was as though He turned against His own people and deliberately planned to strip their fields of food.
 2. But since the heart of Amos agonized for his people, he prayed that the Lord would call off the judgment; and He did.
 3. Amos joined that select group of intercessors which includes Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and Paul.
 4. Amos argued that the nation was so small that they could never survive the plague of locust.
 - ii. **The second vision of the devouring fire (Amos 7:4-6).** The second vision was of the devouring fire in which the fire dried up the water and burned the land. The image is that of a great drought, and Amos had mentioned a drought earlier

(4:7-8). God's judgment so moved the prophet that he cried out to the Lord and begged Him to cease, and once more God relented.

- iii. **The vision of the plumb line (Amos 7:7-9).** The third vision was that of the plumb line, an instrument used to test whether a wall was straight and true. A man stood on top of the wall and dropped a line with a weight on it. By matching the line to the wall, the worker could tell if the wall was upright.
 1. God's law is His plumb line, and He measures His people to see how they are to the pattern in His Word, and if they are of upright character and conduct. "Also, I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plummet" (Isa. 28:17 NKJV).
 2. Alas, in Amos's time, He found that Israel was "out of plumb" and, therefore, had to be destroyed.
 3. "I will spare them no longer" was certainly an ominous statement. The nation had gone too far, and now there was no hope. For this reason, Amos didn't intercede for the land as he had done twice before.
- b. **Struggling with the authorities (vv. 10-17).** Israel's main sanctuary was at Bethel; it was the king's chapel. God had told Amos that the sanctuary would be destroyed, and King Jeroboam II would be slain. This wasn't an easy message to proclaim, for Amos was attacking both the government and the religion of the nation. Yet, he faithfully went to Bethel and preached the Word. Four different messages were involved in this event.
 - i. **Amaziah's report to the king (Amos 7:10-11).** Since the king had appointed Amaziah, he had an obligation to tell the king what the farmer-preacher was saying to the people. The king didn't bother to go hear Amos himself, although it would have done him good to listen and obey. Jeroboam was very comfortable and complacent and wasn't about to have some visiting farmer telling him what to do.
 - ii. **Amaziah's message to Amos (vv. 12-13).** Of course, Jeroboam II didn't want to hear that his chapel and shrine would be destroyed, that he would die, and that the Assyrians would exile his people. Thus, the king told his priest to tell Amos to go home where he belonged.
 1. Amaziah's words to Amos reveal the wicked attitudes in the priest's heart. He called Amos a "seer," which in this case means a "visionary." He claimed that there was no validity to Amos's message; he only dreamed it up.
 2. Then he suggested that Amos was a coward and would run away if the king began to deal with him.
 3. Finally, Amaziah told Amos to get out and stay out because the king's chapel was for the elite, and Amos was merely a prophet.
 4. It is not unusual to find conflicts between priests and prophets in the Old testament. (Of course, Amaziah was a false priest and not a true servant of God.)
 - a. Actually, both prophets and priests were needed in the land, because the priests "conserved" the ancient religious traditions,

while prophets applied the Word to the present situation and called people back to God.

- b. There were false prophets who taught lies and sometimes worked with the priests to maintain the status quo, and the true prophets, who had to oppose both priests and false prophets.
- c. In Israel, there were false priests who had no valid connection with the Levitical priesthood (see Isa. 1:12-15; Jer. 7:1-11; Ezek. 34:1; Hos. 4:4-9).

iii. **Amos' message to the priest (Amos 7:14-16).**

1. First, Amos revealed the kind of man he was by not being intimidated or running away. Then Amos told Amaziah what he was: a prophet called by God.
2. In his native Judah, he did not work as a prophet but as a herdsman and a tender of sycamore trees. He didn't make himself a prophet, nor was he a "son of the prophets," that is a student in one of the prophetic schools (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15). God had called him, and he obeyed.

iv. **The word of the Lord to Amaziah (v. 17).** Amos then proclaimed the word of the Lord to Amaziah and informed him of the judgment that God would send on him and his family.

1. Amaziah would lose all his property, go into exile, and die far from his native land.
2. The Assyrian soldiers would slay his sons.
3. His wife would be left destitute and would become a prostitute.
4. The nation of Israel would go into exile and be no more.

Amaziah had position, wealth, authority, and reputation, but Amos had the word of the Lord. Amaziah served the king of Israel and depended on him for support, but Amos served the King of Kings and had no fear of what men could do to him.

2. **The Prophet Declares (8:1-14).** After his painful encounter with Amaziah, Amos received further messages from the Lord; for it's just like the Master to encourage His servants after they've been through tough times (see Acts 18:9-11; 27:21-26; 2 Tim 4:16-17).

- a. **The end is coming (vv. 1-3).** God often used common objects to teach important spiritual truths, objects like **pottery** (Jer. 18-19), **seed** (Luke 8:11), **yeast** (Matt 16:6, 11), and in this text, **a basket of summer (ripe) fruit**. Just as this fruit was ripe for eating, the nation of Israel was ripe for judgment. It was the end of the harvest for the farmers, and it would be the end for Israel when the harvest judgment came (see Jer. 1:11-12 for a similar lesson).
 - i. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20).
 - ii. There comes a time when God's longsuffering runs out (Isa. 55:6-7) and judgment is decreed. The songs at the temple would become funeral dirges with weeping and wailing, and corpses would be thrown everywhere and not given proper burial.
- b. **Why the end is coming (vv. 4-6).** The reason was simple: Israel had broken God's law and failed to live by His covenant. The first tablet of the law has to do with our

relationship to God and the second tablet with our relationship to others, and Israel had rebelled against both.

- i. They didn't love God, and they did not love their neighbors (Matt. 22:36-40).
- ii. They trampled on the poor and needy and robbed them of the little they possessed (Amos 8:4).
- iii. When they did business, the merchants used inaccurate measurements so they could rob their customers.
- iv. They were guilty of desecration of the Sabbath and the religious holy days. Their worship interrupted their business, and they didn't like it.
- v. They would also cheapen their products by mixing sweepings of the threshing floor with the grain they sold.

c. How the end is coming (vv. 7-14)

i. Four pictures to describe the terror of the coming judgment.

1. **An earthquake (Amos 8:8).** The first was an earthquake with the land heaving like the rising waters of the Nile River. (The Nile rose about twenty-five feet during its annual flooding stage). Even the land would shudder because of the people's sins. Earlier, Amos referred to an earthquake (1:1), but we aren't sure whether it was the fulfillment of this prophecy.
2. **Darkness (Amos 8:9).** God would also visit them with darkness, perhaps an eclipse. (There was one in 736 BC.). The day of the Lord will be a day of darkness (Isa. 13:9-10; Joel 2:30-31).
3. **A funeral (Amos 8:10).** The third picture is that of a funeral, with all their joyful feasts turned into mourning and wailing. Instead of being dressed elegantly and going to banquets or concerts, the people would wear sackcloth and join in mourning.
 - a. Parents mourned greatly if an only son died, because that meant the end of the family name and line.
 - b. But God's judgment would mean the end of a nation.
4. **Famine (vv. 11-14).** Finally, the judgment would be like a famine, not only literal food but also of spiritual nourishment. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4 NKJV; see Deut. 8:3).
 - a. In times of crisis, people turn to the Lord for some word of guidance or encouragement; but for Israel, no word would come.

What a tragedy to have plenty of "religion" but no word from the Lord! That means no light in the darkness, no nourishment for the soul, no direction for making decisions, no protection from lies of the enemy.

The people would stagger like drunks from place to place, always hoping to find food and drink for their bodies and spiritual sustenance for their souls.

3. **The Prophet Affirms (9:1-15).** In this final chapter of the book, the prophet Amos shares four affirmations from the heart of the Lord—three of which deal with judgment and the fourth with mercy.

- a. **“I will strike!” (v. 1).** In a vision, Amos saw the Lord standing by an altar and announcing that the worshippers would be slain because the building would be destroyed and fall upon them. This was probably not the temple in Jerusalem because Amos was sent to the northern kingdom of Israel; and when the Babylonians destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, it was by fire (Jer. 52:12-13).
 - i. This may have been the king’s royal chapel in Bethel, although we don’t know what kind of building that was.
 - ii. The altar was the place of sacrifice and the atonement, but God refused to accept their sacrifices and forgive their sins (5:21-23).
 - iii. Their man-made religion, carried on by unauthorized priests, was an abomination to the Lord; and He would now destroy it.
- b. **“I will search!” (vv. 2-4).** Any idolatrous worshipper who tried to escape would be tracked down and slain. Though they run down into Sheol, the realm of the dead, God would search them out; and if they could reach heaven, there would be no protection there. They couldn’t hide from God on the highest mountain or in the depths of the sea (see Ps. 139:7-14). There was no hiding place!
- c. **“I will destroy!” (vv. 5-10).** Nine times in the book, Amos calls God “the Lord of hosts,” that is, “the Lord of the armies of heaven and earth.” The people of Israel created their gods in their own image and held such a low view of Jehovah that they thought He would approve of their sinful ways.
 - i. Amos reminded them of the greatness of the God they thought they were worshipping. He is the God of creation, who can melt the earth with a touch and make the land rise and fall like the swelling of the Nile River.
 - ii. Jehovah is the God of history, who showed His great power by delivering the Jews from the bondage of Egypt (v. 7). He claimed them for his own people. Yet, they turned against Him and went their own way. Therefore, He will have to treat the Jews as He treats the Gentiles.
 - iii. But, He is always the God of mercy (vv. 8-10), who will keep His covenant with Abraham and his descendants and not destroy the nation. The nation would be sifted, and the sinners punished, but not one of His true worshippers would be lost.
 - iv. It’s always the believing remnant that God watches over so that they might fulfill his will on the earth. The self-confident sinners, who don’t expect to be punished, are the ones who will be slain by the sword (v.10).
- d. **“I will restore!” (vv. 11-15).** In contrast to God’s destroying the Israelite house of false worship, God will raise up the “hut” of David, thereby assuring a bright future for the people of Israel and Judah. Like a rickety shack, David’s dynasty was about to collapse. From the Babylonian captivity to this present hour, there has been no Davidic king ruling over the Jews; and though a Jewish nation has been restored, they have no king, priest, temple, or sacrifice.
 - i. But one day, the Lord will restore, repair, and rebuild the dynasty of David and establish the kingdom He promised. When Jesus Christ comes again, the breach between Israel and Judah will be healed, and there will be one nation submitted to one king.

- ii. God will bless the land and the people, and His people shall live in peace and security. It will be a time of peace and prosperity to the glory of the Lord.

Amos ends his prophecy with the wonderful promise that Israel shall be planted, protected, and never again pulled up from her land “says the Lord your God.” Your God! What a great encouragement for the Jews to know that, in spite of their unbelief, their God will be faithful to keep His covenant promises.

Questions For Personal Reflections Or Group Discussion

1. Has the Lord ever given you a task that you would have liked not to do? If so, what was it?
2. How do you understand the phrase “The Lord changed His mind”? (see Amos 7:2-6.)
3. What is the meaning of the “plumb line” (Amos 7:8 NIV)? Why is that important for us to reflect on?
4. What was the purpose of proclaiming the impending destruction of Israel? Wasn’t it already too late?
5. Why were both prophets and priests needed in the land at the time? In what way, if any, are these roles found in the church today?
6. What was the significance of the basket of fruit (Amos 8:2)? Why is this important for us to reflect on?
7. As you read Amos 8:11-13, what stood out to you the most? When have you thirsted for the word of the Lord?
8. What is the hope of Amos 9:8-10? What important reminder does this give us as we ponder the terrible judgment God poured out on the Israelites?
9. What can we learn about God from the book of Amos?

Homework: Read Obadiah. Study title, A Tale of Two Brothers