

Bearded Men – The Minor Prophets – Amos, Part Two

The Minor Prophets

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Bible Text: Amos 7:1-13

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I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to the Book of Amos, chapter 7. Amos is one of those books in what we know as the Minor Prophets, those 12 books of the Bible at the end of the Old Testament. We were in Amos last week, we're going to be in Amos again today.

Chapter 7, one of the most famous chapters of all of the Bible. Now, understand, there is no portion of the Bible that is more important or less important than anything else, but there are some chapters in the Bible that are better known than others and Amos, chapter 7, is one of those. It goes up with Acts 2 and John 3 and Romans 8 and Revelation 11. Amos 7, as we're going to read in just a moment, contains a specific portion of Scripture that's very readily and well known.

As you're turning to Amos 7, if you were not with us last week, we addressed that Amos was the original one-hit wonder. His ministry, differing from the other Minor Prophets, was three years in length. Let me share with you these two diverse opinions that we talked about last week: either A. he preached the same message multiple times over three years or B. he preached this message one time, that he was prepared by the Lord for three years. Nevertheless, what we understand is that Amos spoke these words and these words alone publicly. So critical. Not only did God preserve them in his Word but they were repeated over and over again with the Oral Tradition of the Jewish Israelite people.

One of the things that we addressed last week, that God began the Book of Amos by pointing a finger at the world around the people of God, pointing out different countries and different cities and saying that they are in sin and they are in rebellion. And then he pointed fingers back at Israel and said, "The only difference between you and them is that you're covering up your sin. You're somehow perfuming the pig and making it look better than it really is."

Today we come to Amos 7 and we are truly dealing with a prophetic nature of Scripture. God is foretelling, not just forth telling, he is foretelling them what is to befall them and what is to come to them if they do not get things straightened out in their life.

Amos 7 beginning in verse 1,

"Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is

small. The LORD repented for this: It shall not be, saith the LORD. Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me: and, behold, the Lord GOD called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part. Then said I, O Lord GOD, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The LORD repented for this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord GOD. Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more: And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword. Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court. Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. Now therefore hear thou the word of the LORD: Thou sayest, Prophecy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.”

As I mentioned, one of the most famous chapters in all of Scripture. We'll see in just a moment this famous illustration known as the plumbline, that around that are three concepts that we need to grasp so that we get the whole message of Amos today. The first one is the prophecy of obscurity, then there is the prophecy of the obvious and finally, the prophecy regarding those who oppose the message of God. So, we're going to deal with some obscure things, an obvious item and then what happens when we oppose or find ourselves in opposition to the things of God.

The first one is: the obscure prophecies. In the first four verses of this chapter, it talks about grasshoppers and it talks about fire. And you read these prophecies that these horrible things are going to happen and think, “What is God talking about here?” Well, first and foremost, please understand this, that when it says that God repented of these prophecies it did not mean the context that many of us would take, that repentance necessitates sin. We understand that as believers in Jesus Christ we need to repent of our sins and believe on him for salvation but the word “repent” literally means to stop and turn away from. And this is an important part about these prophecies of obscurity: when God prophesied about the grasshopper and about the fire, he wasn't saying that he would

not do them, he was saying that he was going to have mercy upon the people of God and not allow them, at this time. These events, these occurrences will happen and they're a little bit obscure.

And the first one that I want to deal with is called the prophecy of famine. It mentions the grasshoppers. Now, incidentally, the item or the animal known as a grasshopper is not mentioned anywhere in the New Testament, only in the Old Testament. The next place that it's mentioned is in the Minor Prophet known as Nahum. And there's about a dozen references to grasshoppers and when grasshoppers show up in Scripture, they're used two different ways. The first one is somewhat of an obvious way, it's an illustration of showing the size or the magnitude of a large item compared to the magnitude of a small item. Remember when the Israelites were in the wilderness? And they went out into the Promised Land, remember the 12 spies went out? And ten of them came back with an Eeyore mentality, they came back with that "Oh, we can't do it." Two of them came back and said, "There's not a hill we can't take with God's provision. Let's go forth." When the ten came back and said, "We cannot do it," remember what they said? "That we are like grasshoppers compared to them. They're so big, they're so mighty, we are like grasshoppers." It's like a giant to somebody of a smaller stature. We would use this illustration today if somehow, some way we could put Shaquille O'Neill on this stage. I would be a grasshopper compared to him. And that's how they're used a lot.

But there's another way that grasshoppers are used. They're used to picture, they're used to describe a famine that is so desperate and so bad that there is nothing green left. Remember a couple of weeks ago we studied in the book of Joel and it said that there was a prophecy that the palmerworm came and the locust and the cankerworm and the caterpillar and that all the green and all the vegetation was taken away? Well, when you see the grasshopper in the Old Testament, it mentions a famine that is so bad that the grasshoppers get to the blades of vegetation before the locusts can come back for seconds.

You know, when you go to the Book of Revelation, it doesn't mention grasshoppers specifically but you know those famous four riders? Those four horsemen that are in chapter 6 when the famous seven seals get opened up? When that third rider comes out, it speaks of a famine throughout the land that is so bad that a man is willing to trade a piece of gold for a piece of bread. That's how desperate it is and yet, when you get to the Book of Revelation, what you find out is this is the finality, this is the wrath of God poured out on the rebellion of humanity.

In the Book of Amos, the first obscure prophecy is he says, "Guess what? There's going to come a time where famine is so bad you're not going to be able to find anything to eat. Forget the locusts, even the grasshoppers have gotten the smallest little amounts. But, not yet, that's going to come."

Then, the second obscure prophecy that he gives, isn't just a famine that one day will occur but fire. He says, "The deep shall be devoured by the fire." And when you go to the Book of Revelation, chapter 20, specifically verses 11-13, it says that "he being God sat

upon his throne and before his face the heavens,” plural, “and the earth were dissolved by fire.” Now, I want to put this in context for you because that’s in chapter 20 of the Book of Revelation. Previously in chapter 19, Jesus has descended out of heaven, he comes seated on the white horse with the armies, believers in Jesus Christ, behind him. Hopefully, you and me. He comes down to earth, he touches his foot on ground earth. Then, what we know as the famous Battle of Armageddon takes place. As soon as Jesus wins that battle, chapter 20 begins, what we know as the Millennium, the 1,000 year reign of Christ commences. Satan has been banished to the bottomless pit for 1,000 years. It says there is peace on the earth, Jesus reigns upon the earth. Then at the end of the 1,000 years, Satan is allowed up, he deceives yet for a little season and one final battle takes place. Many people have claimed it’s the battle of Gog and Magog because that’s where it takes place. But, as soon as that battle commences, it takes place, then it says that God takes fire and he devours everything but his and our presence: the heavens, the earth and yes, even the deep.

Now, I want you to notice how the first four verses of chapter 7 of Amos begin. There is coming a time period in the future where the famine is so great even the locusts are going to starve. There is going to come a time in the future where the fire from God’s throne is so great that nothing will be left and everything will be devoured. It’s at this point in the message, at this point in the sermon that Amos is giving, when he says, “but not yet,” that the people of God should’ve said, “Phew, we’ll take anything now. Because compared to that, whatever it is you give us, we have sinned, we have rebelled, what is it going to be.” And there beginning in that next verse is that passage where it says, “in the midst of Israel I will place a plumbline.”

This is the obvious prophecy, this is the thing that’s given, this is the illustration that is used, that we have a real familiarity with. In fact, I’ve brought one with me today to show you just in case you did not know, this is a plumbline that I have at my house. Incidentally, on this Father’s Day, some years ago, my wife gave this to me and it’s actually engraved. Not many guys have a plumbline that’s engraved but mine says, “Amos 7:8” on it. Why? Because it’s this passage of Scripture that describes this plumbline. It’s one of my favorite verses of Scripture and it’s one that I get real passionate about. So, that being said, hold on three hours from now this sermon will be over. I’m kidding. I’m kidding, I promise, that’s not going to be.

But, in Amos 7:8 it says that God set in the midst of them a plumbline. Now, just in case you are not familiar with what a plumbline is and how it works: this is a device for measuring how straight something is, how true something is. The thing that I love about a plumbline is that it utilizes God’s standard. Do you know what that is? Gravity. It doesn’t use what man’s already built, it uses what God has instilled. And what happens is, and I know many of you are familiar with this, is that when you take a plumbline and you utilize it and this one obviously is a very sharp one, but you get it straight, you can then tell what is crooked or how to build something straight.

It’s a simple device and the thing that we need to understand about this device is this: that when you use a plumbline you do not have the capacity or the freedom to argue with it.

Now, think about that for a moment. What person in their right mind drops a plumbline to build a wall and says, “You know what? I just don’t think gravity got it right this time.” And that’s exactly what God is saying. He’s saying, “Ok, guys, famine is not going to come, fire is not going to come but I’m going to set a plumbline in the midst of Israel and when I do so, I’m not going to pass by.” In other words, this is the standard, this is the means by which you can and you will know what is right, what is wrong, what is true, what is false, what is forbidden and what is accepted. You never have to wonder again.

Now, they just escaped famine and fire, they ought to celebrate what’s happening. But, as you will see in a moment, the High Priest, Amaziah, gets upset by this. He says, “We can’t handle this.” Why? Because it messed up the relationship with the king, it messed up the relationship with the world, it wrecked their world. That’s how God operates. If we are to be true and in line with him, get ready, you’re probably going to be out of line with everything else.

So, what is it about this very obvious example? The first thing is this: that it descends out of heaven. Notice, he says this plumbline will come down. That’s exactly how you hang a plumbline. You don’t hang one from the bottom or from the side, you have to find an item up top and you have to drop it and utilize the force of what we know as gravity.

Now, I want you think with me about how often the Lord descends into our lives to communicate something to us because I think one of our major problems as individuals and as a culture is that we’re so busy here on earth trying to get heaven to conform to us when God has said, “You don’t have a clue what you’re doing. We’re doing it right up here, you need to conform down there to how we’re doing it up here.”

Now, let’s think about this, from the very beginning of the Bible, in the Book of Genesis, we have Adam, this is before Eve. We have Adam and the animals and everything seems to be going ok until all of a sudden, it says, “You know, there’s just not a helpmeet found for him. He doesn’t know what to do.” What happens? God comes down to Adam and provides Eve. A couple of chapters later, it says that all the earth has grown wicked in the sight of God, everybody is rebellious. God comes down to Noah. He speaks to Noah and says, “I know you’ve never seen rain but I need you to build a boat because we’re about to have a huge flood.” A couple of chapters later in Genesis 11, humanity has survived the flood but they have rebelled again against God at what we know as the Tower of Babel. God said, “Go your separate ways.” Humanity came together. What happens in Genesis 11? God comes down to the mountain and he confounds their language. The very next chapter, God comes down to Abraham and says, “I need you to go out with your wife to a land you’ve never heard of.” Do you see the pattern in Scripture and we’re just in the first 12 chapters.

So, let’s fast-forward a little bit: the Temple, that building that David desired to build that obviously Solomon and his son had the privilege of building. There when they dedicate the Temple in 1 Kings 8, it says that God came down in a pillar of smoke so thick they could not even worship inside the building. Let’s get all the way to the New Testament. When we were sinners with no direction and no pattern and not having a clue what to do

in this thing called life, God came down in flesh, Jesus Christ. He came down to us. Why? Because we can't get to him. We are sinners in need of saving. So, he came down in the form of a baby. That's why we call it the incarnation, Emmanuel, God with us, he came down. Then you get to what we know as the cross event. And after he sacrificed his blood on the cross, they brought him down and laid him in a tomb. He arose three days later. Upon his resurrection, he taught the disciples for a while and he said, "Don't worry, I'm going to take off to sit at the right hand of the Father but you wait in Jerusalem." And what happens next? The Holy Spirit comes down like flames of fire upon those early believers. Guess what's going to happen at the end of the Bible? We've already talked about it? Jesus Christ is one day going to split the heavens and do what? Come down.

See, we've got everything backwards. We're so busy trying to convince God that our way's better when he said, "Hello, that's not how it works. You wait until I come down. I'll drop a plumbline in your midst and you don't have to worry what to do." You know, it says in 2 Peter 1 that in times of old, God by the Holy Spirit, remember the Holy Spirit that comes down, spoke unto the prophets. 2 Timothy 3 says that God breathed the Scriptures. When it says here in Amos 7 he will set a plumbline in the midst that will not go any further, let me tell you what he's doing. He brought down his Word. Folks, this is your plumbline right here. What it says is true, what it doesn't is not. It gives instruction for righteousness and it diagnoses rebellion. God has brought his Word to us, it has descended from his throne so we don't have to worry, "What should I do? What should I not do? What about this, what about that?" You know what our problem is? We want to argue with what God brought down because it doesn't work with what we want to go up. That is the descending of the plumbline.

But the second thing I want you to know about the plumbline is this: that it's definite. In other words, it cannot be negotiated, it cannot be argued, it cannot be debated. Why? Because when you've got a plumbline it's either true or it's not. Now, let me share with you, I guess, the importance of a plumbline in the Meyers' family. I married a young lady, Traci, 17+ years ago who not only knows how to dress me a lot better than I could ever dress myself, but this woman knows how to decorate a house. She has a book, in fact, she has books in our house and she reads magazines and sees articles. When she finds something that she wants done to the house, she rips it out of the magazine, puts it in a book. She has all these future plans, ok, for what the house should look like, should not look like. All that being said, ever since we've been married, our life has been in a constant flux of repairing, remodeling, etc. Our first house, that starter home, the BC house, you know, the before children house, you know, it was a small starter home and in that home, it had a living area like most homes do and then off to the side of the living area, we might today call it a keeping room or maybe a dining room but it wasn't very large. It was probably about 12 x 10 feet. She got this idea from a magazine that this room needed to be painted. Not painted any normal way, it needed to be painted checkerboard. Oh, that's right, 12 x 12 inch checkerboard panels from ceiling to floor.

Now, let me share with you the problem outside of the obvious that you've got to pull that trick off. Me, I've got to pull this trick off. In this room there was a large opening from the living room, we'll just say from the south side to keep directionally easy. On the

north side, there was a window. On the west side there was a window and on the east side there was a door frame going into the kitchen. Now, if you're going to paint any room, any color, it's difficult but when you're going to paint a checkerboard the problem is, you've got to get those squares straight because if you walk into the room from a distance, it's going to be all over the map if you don't. So, I began to go through the stages of putting a painted checkerboard on my wife's dining room.

Do you know what I discovered in a quick matter of time? And this happens in the most beautiful, most expensive of houses: nothing's straight. Nothing! The sides of the windows weren't straight, the upper part...nothing was straight. The door wasn't straight. Nothing! So, I came to Traci and I said, "Traci, we've got two very simple options here." She said, "What's that?" I said, "Option A, or Option 1 if you were to prefer numerals is that I will use one of the items that appears to be straight, we'll pretend it is straight and we'll go off of that." She says, "Well, what will that do?" I said, "Well, from that point everything will look good but if you take a step back, everything's going to be tilted." You can imagine, she didn't like that idea a whole lot.

She goes, "Well, what's the second option?" I said, "The second option is we will take a plumbline, we will drop it from the ceiling, we will get what is a true straight line and the checkerboards from a distance will be perfectly straight." She said, "What's the problem with that option?" I said, "They won't line up with anything in the room but you will know that those checkerboards are absolutely straight." Can you gather by what I'm holding, what she chose? Yes, but look at the parallel here, the definitiveness. When you would walk in that room, if you looked closely at a window, you'd have this question. "Hmm, something's not straight." When you looked at the door, you would say, "Something is not straight."

You know, that's exactly how the Lord God operates in our lives. It is straight and everything that comes up against it that doesn't line up is wrong. And it doesn't matter how you feel about it. We live in this world and say, "I just don't feel like that's a good option." I don't care about your feelings. You say, "Well, that just doesn't make logical sense." Who cares about logic? In other words, God has said, "I'm going to put a plumbline in your midst, if you are lined up with it, you've got the ok, green light, go for it. If you don't you'll be in trouble."

You know, this is what made people so upset about Jesus because Jesus came and said, "Here's the plumbline. I am the way. Anybody else who claims they're the way, can't be the way. I'm the truth. Anybody else who claims they're the truth, too bad, they're in error. I am the life. Anybody else who contradicts what I say, then they are actually death." This is the message that the world cannot stand, that there is absolute truth that we can absolutely base our lives upon. And he tells them, he says, "Hey, famine is coming, fire is coming but right now, I have descended with the definitive article of the plumbline, my Word."

But then, he picks up with what I want to call the prophetic opposition. As you continue in Amos 7, Amaziah shows up, the High Priest, and here's the irony of Amaziah

showing up: if anybody should've celebrated this, if anybody should've said, "Woo, God had mercy on us. We're not going to burn up, we're not going to starve, we've just got to do what he said," it should be the High Priest, right? But he is the one that says, "Whoa, Amos, you understand, your message is messing up our world." Why? "Because we are living in comfort right now, the king likes who we are and what we're doing. If we do what you say, it'll go against the king and he's not happy."

Here's what I call the prophecy of compromise. You know, I heard a good definition of compromise the other week, I wish I could lay claim to this but given enough time maybe people will believe I actually came up with it: compromise is forsaking an eternal truth for a temporary pleasure. Forsaking an eternal truth for a temporary pleasure. And that's exactly what Amaziah did. He said, "You know what? We know that one day we will stand before God. We know one day we will all die and face the judgment but right now we've got it good and we want to keep it good."

The criticism of Amos and his message you would think would come from the pagans. You would think it would come from the heathens. You'd think it would come from the atheists. Who did it come from? It came from the religious people. Look at Jesus' day. In Jesus' day, who argued with him? The homeless? No. The sick? Absolutely not. The down and out? They loved him. Who argued with Jesus? Religious people, people who had a system in life that so benefited them that they had compromised with the world. The world was scratching their back, they were scratching the world's back and everybody was temporarily tangibly earthly happy. And they compromised.

And then this part at the end, this prophecy of the consequence of doing that. It says when we compromise, when we join hands with the world, when we say, "You know, it doesn't matter what God said, I want to just stay where I am now because it pleases me and I enjoy this." Notice what it says at the end of Amos 7: Amaziah, tell everybody, their wives will be harlots and their children will die by the sword. Wow. What a declaration.

Can I make a parallel for you for a moment? The church of Jesus Christ is called the Bride of Christ, correct? And you know what the best description of the "Bride of Christ" I can give you in the world we live in today? A harlot. We have joined with the world. You know, 1 Corinthians 6 makes it very clear that a man, a physical man, has no business being with a harlot. Listen, the church has no business joining with the world. We've got no business holding hands and saying, "Hey, we'll scratch your back, you scratch our back. Why can't we just go down the road?" Why? Because it always taints. That's why James 4:4 calls us adulterers and adulteresses, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity in opposition with God." What he's telling us, you and me today in the 21st century, is that when we reject the Word of God, the church of God becomes a harlot in the eyes of God. That is not a compliment.

But notice what the other consequence is: your children will die by the sword. As we embark on the 21st century, in the Western World, in the United States of America, the "church of Jesus Christ" is dying. Is dying. In fact, you can look up the statistics, there's

not a single county in America today that has a greater percentage of believers in Jesus Christ than it did ten years ago. Not a one. The generation that is being raised up that we would call children today, there is but a minority of them, a small smidgeon of them that even have the privilege of descending into a church at any point in their life. If you take the parallel of Amos here, he's telling Amaziah, "Do you not realize that the Levites, the Israelites, if you reject the Word of God, your wives will be harlots, your children will die by the sword." Listen to the parallel: when we reject the Word of God, what happens? The church becomes worldly and it dies.

And that's what happening all around us. And you're thinking, "Well, Jeff, if that's what's happening, what's the cure?" Let me tell you the cure, it's real simple: do it the way God said to do it. Here's the problem: it's not convenient. It's not easy telling someone, "I'm sorry, I can't date you anymore because your lifestyle doesn't match up. I'm sorry, that relationship that your home is built upon is not what the Word of God advocates. I'm sorry, that's not the proper way to use our finances. I'm sorry, that's not what we're going to make a priority in our home." Why? Because we want earth to be everything. When yet Colossians 3:24 says our eyes should be on the things above, not the things below.

Folks, the plumbline has been determined, it's the Word of God. It gives us the measurement for salvation. It gives us the measurement for righteousness. It tells us what is rebellious. And every one of us has a choice. We can either be right now or we can be wrong later.