

AMOS—WEEK 7

TRUE



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Cover Picture is by James Tissot (1836–1902).

Amos was the owner of a flock of sheep. Tissot shows him with a stick and a dog.

Israel's injustice is inexcusable. While God's love for Israel causes Him to relent from some punishments, He cannot let this go completely. Israel will be judged by a true standard.

Even Amos's words are treated unjustly.

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Thank you.

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1 Amos 6:11–14

*For behold, the LORD gives a command:
He will break the great house into bits,
And the little house into pieces.*

*Do horses run on rocks?
Does one plow there with oxen?
Yet you have turned justice into gall,
And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood,
You who rejoice over Lo Debar,
Who say, “Have we not taken Karnaim for ourselves
By our own strength?”*

*“But, behold, I will raise up a nation against you,
O house of Israel,”
Says the LORD God of hosts;
“And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath
To the Valley of the Arabah.”*

This is about how absurd Israel’s actions are. Horses do not run on rocks; they can even refuse to walk on them. Only a lunatic would try to plow rocks with oxen, especially back then. The oxen would balk at doing it. If they could be coaxed into plowing there, the only result would be damage to the plow. (In the 19th century, Esra Cornell made so much money from his invention of a plow that would cut through rocks that he founded a university.)

And all this effort would be for what? Nothing would grow there anyway.

So, this passage is depicting Israel’s actions as lunacy. Specifically, they *have turned justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.*

OK, but why is that crazy? Isn’t that just selfish? They’re taking advantage of others. Sure, that’s wrong, but what’s nuts about it?

What’s crazy is that without justice, everyone suffers—including them. What goes around, comes around. They think their conquest of a couple of big cities shows they’re invincible.

They will be conquered from *Hamath*, in the far north of Israel, to *the Valley of the Arabah* in the south.

“What goes around, comes around,” is an important lesson in how civilizations work. Kleptocracies aren’t good for anyone. A nation that protects personal property flourishes.

Nations that don’t (think North Korea, Cuba, Venezuela, etc.) spiral into the abyss. Nothing works.

2 Amos 7:1–3

Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, He formed locust swarms at the beginning of the late crop; indeed it was the late crop after the king's mowings. And so it was, when they had finished eating the grass of the land, that I said:

*"O Lord GOD, forgive, I pray!
Oh, that Jacob may stand,
For he is small!"
So the LORD relented concerning this.
"It shall not be," said the LORD.*

The first nine verses of chapter seven are three prophesies of three verses each. In this first prophesy, God gives Amos a vision of a terrible plague of locusts. The locusts show up after the "tax" portion of the harvest (*the king's mowings*) is completed. The "little" people bear the brunt of this catastrophic loss.

So, Amos pleads for the people of Israel (the descendants of Jacob) and, curiously, God relents. This sets an important pattern for the message of this whole section. This time, Amos's plea carries the day.

And his plea is simply that Jacob *is small!* He makes no case that Jacob (Israel) deserves God's favor. In fact, he starts out with, "*O Lord GOD, forgive, I pray!*"

That's an admission of guilt.

Admission of guilt is obviously essential to being a Christian. Jesus can't be your savior if you don't think you need one.

But it's deeper than that. Seeing the need for a savior is just an indicator. If someone has that wrong, everything's wrong. People need to see themselves in a proper light to have a proper concept of God. Without a proper concept of God, one can't confess Jesus as Lord in any meaningful way.

People who don't recognize their sinfulness see themselves as righteous, so the righteousness of God has no meaning. Whoever they might think God is, He isn't that.

This is what makes the born-again experience so powerful. Everything changes when you see yourself, and thus everything, in a proper light.

It's painful, but ultimately the most beautiful thing in the world.

It's what makes anything truly beautiful.

3 Amos 7:4–6

Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, the Lord GOD called for conflict by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory. Then I said:

“O Lord GOD, cease, I pray!

Oh, that Jacob may stand,

For he is small!”

So the LORD relented concerning this.

“This also shall not be,” said the Lord GOD.

By “the great deep,” Amos means a great body of water—probably the Mediterranean Sea, which is the great sea in Hebrew (הַיָּם הַהַגְּדוֹל “Ha-yahm Ha-gah-dole”).

But whether it’s the Mediterranean or not isn’t important. The point is that the coming fire will consume everything, even deep bodies of water. That’s pretty all-consuming.

But, again, God relents. And, again, Amos’s plea is simply that Jacob (Israel) is small. If God doesn’t relent, Israel won’t stand.

The beauty of this is its simple appeal to God’s mercy. Amos doesn’t claim that Israel deserves anything. His plea is that the consequences will be unbearable.

It’s an appeal to God’s love.

Never forget that God’s love is the foundation of all good things. We are confused when we think our efforts contribute to this.

God does not love us more when we serve Him. Sure, we get things done that need to get done, and that’s a good thing. Our works can glorify God, but the benefits to others and to His kingdom are just that. We don’t earn any points.

This is part of the beauty of salvation by faith alone. Our position is secure independent of our works.

This leaves us free to serve Him better. Our goals can be team goals. We can focus on the things that advance His kingdom and not waste time thinking about our position.

One place where this makes a big difference is in charity. No matter what we do, if we’re thinking about the points we’re earning, it’s not really charity. We’re still working for our own benefit.

That distracts us from the true mission and can even deafen us to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Conversely, with our own benefit out of the picture, charity can really be charity.

Only then does it truly glorify God.

4 Amos 7:7–9

Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. 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 not pass by them anymore.
The high places of Isaac shall be desolate,
And the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste.
I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam.”*

In Hebrew the words for straight (יָשָׁר “ya-shar”) and upright (תָּמִים “ta-meem”) also mean true, just, right and blameless, sound, innocent. A plumb line is the classic reference for straightness and uprightness. When God says, “*Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel;*” He’s saying that He’s going to measure them by a true standard.

The result is judgement, and this time He’s not going to relent. Jacob being small isn’t enough; they aren’t straight. Compared to a true standard, they fail.

I will not pass by them anymore, seems to be in the Passover sense of the phrase.

Yikes.

This reenforces a point made earlier—a visit from the Lord won’t be the walk in the park we like to think it will be. It’s dangerously arrogant to be confident facing a visit from the Lord.

Glorious? Certainly. Fun? Don’t be so sure.

Unless we think we’re more righteous than Isaiah, we might end up saying what he said in Isaiah 6:5:

*“Woe is me, for I am undone!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of hosts.”*

My prayer for revival often includes a plea that we be visited by the Holy Spirit. That’s proper—only the Holy Spirit can bring revival—but, as the cliché says, “Be careful what you wish for.”

A prayer for revival is a no-holds-barred request for change. The LORD gets to pick what gets changed.

Yikes.

5 Amos 7:10–13

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said:

*‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
And Israel shall surely be led away captive
From their own land.’ ”*

Then Amaziah said to Amos:

*“Go, you seer!
Flee to the land of Judah.
There eat bread,
And there prophesy.
But never again prophesy at Bethel,
For it is the king’s sanctuary,
And it is the royal residence.”*

Amaziah calls Amos a seer (חֹזֵה “kho-zeh”), instead of a prophet (נָבִיא “nah-vee”). Seer is simply a reference to perception (natural or supernatural). This falls far short of the proper label. Amos is a prophet and Amaziah knows it.

But Amaziah’s misquote of Amos is worse. He tells Jeroboam that Amos said, “*Jeroboam shall die by the sword.*” Amos didn’t say that. He said, in Amos 7:9, “*I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam.*” In 2 Chronicles 13:20 Jeroboam dies and there’s no mention of a sword.

So Jeroboam did not recover strength again in the days of Abijah; and the LORD struck him, and he died.

So Amos speaking the truth leads to his words being twisted into lies.

What a surprise.

We live in an age of twisted words. The internet is an explosion of information—and disinformation. There’s no central point of reference for what truth is. Of course, we know that the point of reference is the Bible, but that isn’t accepted by everyone. The result is chaos. People don’t know what to believe.

So, someone gets the bright idea to publish “fact checks.” That should solve the problem, right?

Not a chance. Fact checks are just as fallen as every other human institution. Facebook recently claimed, in court, that their fact checks are not even presented as facts, and thus constitutionally protected opinion.

wattsupwiththat.com/2021/12/09/bombshell-in-court-filing-facebook-admits-fact-checks-are-nothing-more-than-opinion/

We can see this as depressing or as fields white for harvest. People are tired of lies. They’re hungry.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What injustice in our society is most in need of fixing?
2. What did you see most differently after confessing Christ?
3. What kingdom goal do you have a passion for?
4. Are you ever afraid or hesitant to pray for something?
5. What modern lies offend you most?

Items for prayer: