

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: Visions of Judgment and a Famine of the Word

Amos 7:1-8:14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

These chapters carry two great doctrinal weights. The first is the plumb line, God's fixed and unchanging standard by which He measures His people. Israel had grown comfortable judging herself by her own bent walls, by comparison and custom and convenience, but God drops a straight line and refuses to grade on a curve. The second weight is the famine of hearing the words of the Lord, perhaps the most sobering judgment in the prophets. A people who treated God's word casually, who told His prophet to take his words elsewhere, would one day stagger across the earth desperate for a word and find only silence. Both truths confront the modern temptation to domesticate Scripture, to keep the comforting parts and dismiss the searching ones. Help students see that God's standard is objective and His word is precious, and that to despise either is to court the very silence Amos foretells.

The formation aim is to produce hearts like Amos and not like Amaziah. Amos interceded for a people who rejected him, received hard truth with humility, obeyed his calling though he had no credentials, and treasured every word from God. Amaziah protected his comfort and his institution, told the truth to leave, and tried to silence the very voice that could have saved him. Lead students to examine which heart beats in them when God's word presses on something they would rather keep. The goal is a class that welcomes the whole counsel of God, that lets His plumb line straighten what is crooked, and that prizes Scripture as bread for the soul. Let the lesson point forward to Christ, the Word made flesh, who spoke truth that men called too hard, who interceded for those who crucified Him, and who gives us the very words of life that Amos's generation despised.

Question 1

Student Question:

In the first two visions Amos sees locusts and fire, and twice he intercedes, and twice God relents (Amos 7:1-6). What do these visions reveal about both the seriousness of God's judgment and the genuine power of intercession and repentance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter seven opens with the first of four visions. The Lord forms a swarm of locusts just as the late growth was coming up, the crop that would feed the people after the king had taken his share. Amos sees the land about to be stripped bare and cries out, O Lord God, please forgive, how can Jacob stand, for he is so small? And the Lord relents; it shall not be, He says.

Then comes the second vision, a judgment by fire that devours the great deep and would have eaten up the land. Again Amos pleads, O Lord God, please cease, how can Jacob stand, for he is so small? And again the Lord relents. Two visions, two intercessions, two reprieves. Before God ever announces His final verdict, He shows us a prophet pleading and a God willing to be moved.

These visions teach a profound double truth. The judgment is real and deserved; locusts and fire are no small things. Yet intercession genuinely matters. God is not a cold machine grinding out fate. He responds to the prayer of a faithful man on behalf of an unfaithful people. The smallness of Jacob, which might have been an excuse for despair, becomes the ground of Amos's appeal: be merciful, Lord, for they cannot stand on their own.

We should not flatten the mystery of God relenting into either fatalism or manipulation. Scripture presents a God who has settled purposes and who also genuinely engages the prayers of His people. The relenting here is mercy delaying judgment, opening a door for repentance that the next visions will show Israel refusing to walk through.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's judgment is real and deserved, yet intercession genuinely moves Him to mercy.
- Amos pleads on the ground of Jacob's smallness, appealing to grace rather than merit.
- Repentance and intercession have real power in God's dealings with His people.
- God's relenting is mercy that delays judgment and opens a door for repentance.
- The God of the prophets is not a cold machine but One who engages the prayers of the faithful.

Discussion Prompts

- What do these two reprieves teach you about the heart of God toward sinners?
- How does Amos's appeal to Jacob's smallness reshape how you pray for others?
- Where in your life have you stopped interceding because the situation seemed hopeless?

Question 2

Student Question:

Amos pleads, how can Jacob stand, for he is so small? When have you been moved to stand in the gap and pray for people who could not or would not pray for themselves, and who is God laying on your heart to intercede for now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

It is worth dwelling on Amos as intercessor. He is a herdsman from Tekoa, sent north to a people who do not want him, who will soon tell him to go home. Yet when he sees their ruin coming, his instinct is not satisfaction but supplication. He throws himself between Israel and the disaster and pleads for the very people who reject his message.

This is the heart of the true prophet and, ultimately, the heart of Christ. To stand in the gap is to love people enough to pray for them when they cannot or will not pray for themselves. Amos models a love that is not contingent on being received. He intercedes for those who will never thank him.

The pattern echoes through Scripture: Abraham pleading for Sodom, Moses standing between God and a rebellious nation, Ezekiel's God seeking one to stand in the gap, and finally Jesus praying Father, forgive them, for those driving in the nails. The call to intercession belongs to every believer who has glimpsed God's mercy and a neighbor's danger.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- True love intercedes for people even when they reject the one praying.
- Standing in the gap is a recurring biblical calling, fulfilled supremely in Christ.
- Intercession flows from seeing both God's mercy and a neighbor's real danger.
- Amos prays for those who will never thank him, a costly and Christlike love.

Discussion Prompts

- Who has God placed on your heart who cannot or will not pray for themselves?
- How does Amos's example challenge the way you pray for those who oppose you?
- What keeps us from the costly work of standing in the gap, and how can we begin?

Question 3

Student Question:

God shows Amos a plumb line and says He will not pass by His people again (Amos 7:7-9). What is a plumb line, and what does it teach us about how God measures His people against His own unchanging standard?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The third vision shifts the tone entirely. The Lord stands beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand, and He sets it in the midst of His people Israel. A plumb line is a builder's tool, a weighted string that hangs perfectly vertical and reveals whether a wall is true or leaning. God uses it to measure His people against His own straight standard.

Strikingly, there is no intercession after this vision. After the plumb line, God says, I will never again pass by them. The time for pleading has given way to the time of measuring. A plumb line does not argue or negotiate; it simply tells the truth about the wall. The wall is either plumb or it is not.

The image teaches that God measures His people by His own unchanging standard, not by their customs, their comparisons, or their good intentions. Israel had grown used to her crookedness,

calling the lean normal because everyone leaned the same way. But God's plumb line exposes what familiarity had hidden. His standard does not bend to accommodate ours.

This is one of the heaviest truths in the chapter. We are not measured against the culture, against our past selves, or against the person next to us. We are measured against the straight, fixed righteousness of God. That is humbling, but it is also a mercy, because a true standard is the only thing that can tell us where we have drifted.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The plumb line is God's fixed, objective standard for measuring His people.
- God measures by His own holiness, not by culture, custom, or comparison.
- Familiarity with sin makes the crooked feel normal until God's standard exposes it.
- After the plumb line there is no intercession; measuring has replaced pleading.
- A true standard is a mercy, the only thing that can reveal where we have drifted.

Discussion Prompts

- What is a plumb line, and why is it such a fitting image for God's standard?
- Where have you let something crooked feel normal because everyone around you leans the same way?
- Why is being measured by God's standard, rather than by comparison, ultimately a mercy?

Question 4

Student Question:

If God set His plumb line beside your life today, where would it expose a wall you have let quietly lean while calling it normal? What would it take to let Him straighten it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

At the center of these chapters stands a confrontation. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sends word to King Jeroboam that Amos has conspired against him, that the land is not able to bear all his words. Then he confronts Amos directly: O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, eat bread there, prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary and a temple of the kingdom.

Notice what Amaziah does. He does not engage the truth of Amos's message; he tries to remove the messenger. His complaint, that the land cannot bear all his words, is an admission that the word is heavy and searching, and his solution is to make it stop. He guards the king's sanctuary, a center of false worship, more than he fears the living God.

This is how people often resist God's word when it threatens their comfort and their institutions. They do not refute it; they relocate it, dismiss it, or try to silence it. The word that could have

saved Bethel is treated as a problem to be managed. Amaziah's loyalty is to the kingdom and the king, not to the God whose name the sanctuary claimed to honor.

There is an Amaziah in every age and, if we are honest, in every heart. It is the impulse that wants the comforting word and not the searching one, that decides God's truth is fine elsewhere but too much here, too much now, too much for me.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Amaziah attacks the messenger rather than engaging the message.
- Saying the land cannot bear all his words admits the word is heavy and tries to silence it.
- People resist convicting truth by dismissing, relocating, or silencing it rather than refuting it.
- Amaziah guarded the king's sanctuary and institution above the living God.
- The impulse to manage God's word rather than obey it lives in every heart.

Discussion Prompts

- How do people today try to silence or sideline God's word when it threatens them?
- Where do you see in yourself the impulse to call God's truth too much to bear?
- What institutions or comforts are you tempted to protect at the expense of obeying God?

Question 5

Student Question:

Amaziah the priest accuses Amos and tells him to flee to Judah and never again prophesy at Bethel, saying it is the king's sanctuary (Amos 7:10-13). What does this confrontation reveal about how people resist God's word when it threatens their comfort and their institutions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Amos's reply is one of the great moments of humble courage in the prophets. I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, he says, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. Then the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel. He claims no professional standing, no school, no pedigree. His only credential is that God took him and God sent him.

This is deeply encouraging for ordinary believers. Amos was not a religious professional. He was a working man whom God called and commissioned. His authority did not come from a title but from the One who sent him, and that gave him the courage to stand before a priest and a king and refuse to be silenced.

Amos then delivers a sharp word of judgment to Amaziah personally, not from spite but from faithfulness. He will not soften the message to keep the peace. Humility about himself and boldness about God's word go together in him. He thinks little of his own standing and much of the word entrusted to him.

Here is a model for every Christian whom God calls to speak truth in a hostile setting: humble about ourselves, confident in our calling, refusing to let opposition silence the message God has given. The validation we need is not human approval but the certainty that the Lord took us and sent us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Amos's authority rested not on credentials but on God's call and commission.
- God uses ordinary people, not just religious professionals, to speak His truth.
- Humility about self and boldness about God's word belong together.
- Faithfulness sometimes means refusing to soften the message to keep the peace.
- The believer's validation is that the Lord took and sent, not human approval.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Amos being an ordinary herdsman encourage you in your own calling to speak truth?
- Why do humility about ourselves and boldness about God's word need to go together?
- Where is God calling you to speak His truth in a setting that may resist it?

Question 6

Student Question:

Amaziah said the land is not able to bear all his words. Where have you been tempted to decide that some part of God's word is too much, too hard, or too inconvenient to bear, and how can you cultivate a heart that welcomes the whole counsel of God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter eight opens with the fourth vision: a basket of summer fruit. God asks, Amos, what do you see? and Amos answers, a basket of summer fruit. Then the Lord says, the end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them. In Hebrew there is a sharp pun: the word for summer fruit sounds like the word for end. The ripe harvest signals not abundance but termination.

The image is disturbingly beautiful. Summer fruit looks like plenty, like the reward of a good season, yet it means the season is over and the fruit will not last. Israel looked prosperous, full, ripe, but the ripeness meant the end had come. What appeared to be the height of blessing was in fact the edge of judgment.

God says the songs of the temple shall become wailings, and the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in silence. The festive sound of worship turns to funeral grief. The vision teaches that prosperity is no proof of God's favor and that what looks like the fullest season can be the last.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The basket of summer fruit signals that the end has ripened, not that blessing abounds.
- Apparent prosperity is no proof of God's favor.
- The Hebrew pun ties ripe fruit to a ripe end, beauty masking judgment.
- Worship songs turning to wailing shows how quickly the festive can become the funeral.

Discussion Prompts

- How can apparent prosperity lull us into a false sense of God's approval?
- What does the basket of summer fruit teach about reading the seasons of our lives rightly?
- Why is it dangerous to measure God's favor by outward abundance?

Question 7

Student Question:

Amos answers that he was no professional prophet but a herdsman whom the Lord took and sent (Amos 7:14–15). How does Amos's response model faithful courage and humility for ordinary believers whom God calls to speak His truth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses four through six of chapter eight expose the rot beneath the ripeness. God indicts those who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end. They cannot wait for the religious festivals to be over so they can get back to business: when will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale?

Their commerce is corrupt to the core. They make the measure small and the price great, they deal deceitfully with false balances, they buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and they sell the chaff of the wheat as if it were grain. Every transaction is a small act of oppression dressed up as ordinary trade.

What makes this passage so piercing is how their religion and their injustice are tangled together. They keep the festivals, but only impatiently, longing for them to end so they can cheat again. Worship has become an interruption to greed rather than a transformation of the heart. Their dishonest scales and their religious calendar sit side by side in the same life with no contradiction felt.

This is the very disease Amos has named throughout: a worship that does not touch the way one treats the neighbor. Justice and devotion to God belong together as a matter of the heart before Him. When they are torn apart, the festivals become a sham and the scales become an idol. God sees both, and He swears He will never forget their deeds.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Their impatience for worship to end exposed hearts devoted to greed, not God.
- Dishonest scales and the trampling of the poor were oppression disguised as ordinary trade.

- Religion and injustice had become tangled, worship an interruption to greed.
- Justice and devotion to God belong together as a matter of the heart before Him.
- God sees and remembers both the false worship and the cheating of the poor.

Discussion Prompts

- How can religious observance coexist with injustice in the same heart without conflict being felt?
- Where might impatience with worship reveal where our true treasure lies?
- What does it look like for your devotion to God to reshape how you treat the vulnerable?

Question 8

Student Question:

The fourth vision is a basket of summer fruit, signaling that the end has come (Amos 8:1–3). Drawing on the indictment that follows in 8:4–6, how do the people’s dishonest scales, trampling of the needy, and impatience with worship show that their religion and their injustice had become hopelessly tangled?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter moves toward its most chilling judgment, but first sets the stage in verses seven through ten with images of the land trembling, the sun going down at noon, feasts turned to mourning, and bitter grief like the loss of an only son. The God who measured with a plumb line now declares that He will turn the brightest day to darkness over a people who would not heed Him.

This darkness is the fitting prelude to verse eleven. A people who treated the light of God’s word casually are about to learn what it means to live without it. The mourning and darkness of these verses are the outward sign of the deeper deprivation that is coming, the silence of God.

It is sobering that the same festivals the people were impatient to finish, so they could return to cheating, are the festivals God now turns into mourning. The very religion they treated as an inconvenience becomes the funeral they cannot escape. God takes seriously how His people handle the holy things they hold so lightly.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God turns the brightest day to darkness over a people who would not heed Him.
- Outward mourning and darkness signal the deeper deprivation of God’s silence to come.
- The festivals treated as inconveniences become the very mourning the people cannot escape.
- God takes seriously how lightly His people handle holy things.

Discussion Prompts

- How does God respond when His people treat the holy as an inconvenience?
- What is the connection between outward judgment and the deeper loss of God's presence?
- Where are you tempted to handle holy things, worship, Scripture, the Lord's Supper, too lightly?

Question 9

Student Question:

God declares a famine, not of bread or water, but of hearing the words of the Lord, so that people stagger from sea to sea seeking it and do not find it (Amos 8:11-14). Why is the loss of God's word the most devastating judgment of all, and how should this passage shape the way we value, hear, and obey Scripture today before such a famine ever comes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now comes the most terrifying judgment in the book. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. People shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.

Consider what this means. The people who told Amos the land could not bear all his words will one day stagger across the earth desperate for a single word from God and find only silence. The word they despised when it was abundant becomes the thing they cannot find when they finally want it. To reject God's word in the day of its plenty is to forfeit it in the day of need.

This is the most devastating judgment of all because every other loss can be endured if God still speaks. Bread and water sustain the body, but the word of God sustains the soul. Man does not live by bread alone, Jesus said, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. A famine of the word is a famine of the very thing that makes us alive to God. The fainting of the young and strong in verses thirteen and fourteen shows that no human vigor can survive that silence.

The passage should reshape the way we treat Scripture today, before such a famine ever comes. We live surrounded by Bibles, with the word more available than any generation in history, and that very abundance can breed contempt. Amos warns us to hear God's word now while it is near, to obey it while it speaks, to treasure it as bread we cannot live without. The proper response to this judgment is not fear alone but a renewed hunger, a determination never to despise the word while we still hold it in our hands.

Verse fourteen adds a final note: those who swear by the idols of Samaria and Dan and Beersheba shall fall and never rise again. Having turned from the true word of God to false centers of worship, they have nothing to hold them up when judgment comes. Misplaced devotion offers no support in the day of collapse.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The most devastating judgment is a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.
- Those who despise God's word in its abundance forfeit it in their hour of need.
- The soul lives by God's word as the body lives by bread; its loss is fatal.
- Today's abundance of Scripture can breed contempt; Amos warns us to treasure it now.
- Hearing, obeying, and prizing God's word while it is near is the right response to this warning.
- Misplaced devotion to idols offers no support when judgment finally comes.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is a famine of God's word the most devastating judgment of all?
- How can the abundance of Bibles in our day quietly breed contempt for God's word?
- What concrete change would treasuring Scripture as daily bread make in your week?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Amos 7 and 8 as a whole. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is forming you through these chapters, whether toward intercession, toward letting His plumb line straighten you, or toward treasuring His word as bread you cannot live without. What is the first step of obedience He is asking?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Drawing these two chapters together, we see a single arc. God shows mercy and welcomes intercession, then drops His plumb line and refuses to bend His standard, then shows the ripe end coming, then warns of the most terrible loss of all, the silence of His word. Through it stands Amos, the humble herdsman who interceded, received hard truth, obeyed his calling, and treasured every word from God, set against Amaziah, who guarded his comfort and told the truth to leave.

The chapters call us to be people of the word and people of the gap. To let God's plumb line straighten what is crooked in us, refusing to call the lean normal. To welcome the whole counsel of God rather than only the comforting parts. And to prize Scripture as bread for the soul, hearing and obeying it now while it is near, before any famine of the word.

All of this points forward to Christ, the Word made flesh. He spoke truth that men called too hard and tried to silence, yet He would not stop. He interceded for those who crucified Him, standing in the ultimate gap. And He gives us the very words of life that Amos's generation despised. To treasure God's word is, in the end, to treasure Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The chapters set the heart of Amos, interceding and treasuring the word, against the heart of Amaziah, guarding comfort.
- Believers are called to let God's plumb line straighten what is crooked and to welcome the whole counsel of God.
- Scripture is bread for the soul, to be heard and obeyed now, before any famine of the word.
- Christ is the Word made flesh who spoke hard truth, interceded for sinners, and gives the words of life.

Discussion Prompts

- Which heart beats more strongly in you right now, the heart of Amos or the heart of Amaziah?
- What would it look like this week to let God's plumb line straighten one crooked place?
- How does seeing Christ as the Word made flesh deepen the way you treasure Scripture?