

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos

Lesson 12: Visions of Judgment and a Famine of the Word -- Amos 7:1-8:14

There is a kind of standing in the gap that does not make the news. A shepherd from Tekoa, with no prophetic pedigree and no political backing, sees a vision of locusts devouring the land, and the first thing he does is throw himself between his people and the disaster. O Lord God, please forgive, he prays, how can Jacob stand, for he is so small? And God relents. Then comes fire, and again Amos pleads, and again God relents. Long before we meet the famous plumb line, we meet a man who loved a people that did not love him back, pleading for mercy they had not asked for. That is where these chapters begin, and it tells us something about the heart of God before we ever reach His verdict.

Then the visions change. God shows Amos a plumb line, the simple weighted string a builder drops to see whether a wall is true. God sets it in the midst of His people and says He will not pass by them again. There is no pleading after the plumb line, because a plumb line does not negotiate. It only reveals. The wall is either straight or it is leaning, and Israel has been leaning a long time. Something in us flinches at that image, because we know that if God dropped a plumb line beside our own lives, it would expose every place we have quietly let things go crooked while calling it normal.

The fourth vision is a basket of summer fruit, ripe and ready, and it carries a grim pun in Hebrew: the fruit is ripe, and so is the end. The harvest looks like abundance, but it means the season is over. And tucked into this chapter is one of the most terrifying sentences in all the prophets. God promises a famine, not of bread or water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. People will stagger from sea to sea searching for a word from God and not find it. We rarely fear that famine. We should. To have God's word within reach and treat it casually is to flirt with the silence Amos warns of.

Between the visions stands a confrontation we cannot skip. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, tells Amos to go home, to stop prophesying, because the land cannot bear all his words. Imagine saying that to God's truth: it is too much, take it somewhere else. As we walk through these chapters, let us watch for the Amaziah in our own hearts, the part that wants the comforting word and not the searching one, and let us pray for the heart of Amos instead, who stood in the gap, told the truth, and treasured every word that came from the mouth of God.

Group Discussion: Amos warns of a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. In what ways do we live surrounded by Bibles and still go spiritually hungry, and what would it look like for your group to truly treasure and feast on God's word together?

Personal Reflection: When God's word presses on something crooked in your life, do you respond more like Amaziah, who said the land cannot bear all his words, or like Amos, who received and treasured the word? Name one area where you have been resisting what God is plainly saying, and what surrender would look like there.

Read Amos 7:1-8:14

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 18:22–33, Abraham interceding for Sodom; Ezekiel 22:30, God seeking one to stand in the gap; 2 Chronicles 7:14, the conditions of repentance and mercy; Amos 5:18–20 with 1 Samuel 3:1, the rarity and preciousness of God's word; Matthew 4:4, man does not live by bread alone but by every word from God's mouth

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