

Amos was sent to Israel to prophesy judgment for their false worship and oppression of the poor. Judgment after judgment follows. We could ask the question: 'Is this the end of God's purpose for Israel?' No. In the midst of God's righteous judgment after judgment we see a promise of restoration to Israel and beyond.

Plumblines

JK Rowling has been criticised on social media for her opinions on sex and gender. These attacks could be called cancel culture; wanting to remove someone from prominence for causing offense. Now there are areas of proper public concern, such as trafficking, slavery or racism. Yet there are some issues where one is one week in the right but the next week in the wrong. Public opinion is fickle and even oppressive.

Is the LORD fickle, oppressive or is he just? In Amos 7 the LORD shows Amos two visions. First, locusts will swarm across Israel devouring all greenery and, second, fire will consume water and land. Amos cries mercy, Israel is so small. The LORD relents.

But then the LORD shows a wall built true to plumb, with plumblines in hand. Plumblines are used in building work to find the vertical line up and down. The LORD uses his plumblines, judging Israel against the law. Look at verse 9:

The high places of Isaac will be destroyed
and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined;
with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.

He rightly judges Israel for worshipping in the wrong place and in the wrong way. Moses told Israel to worship the LORD at the tabernacle, then in the temple at Jerusalem. Instead they worship calf idols at Bethel and Gilgal and oppress the poor. The plumblines held against their worship finds them wanting.

This plumline is also held against our worship. What do you, what do I worship? Tim Keller, in his book *Counterfeit Gods*, says "The human heart" is an "idol factory" that

takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them.

How do I know if I have counterfeit gods? Keller suggests these questions:

(1) What am I always daydreaming about? (2) What do I most fear losing? (3) What fills me with irrational anger, anxiety, despondency or guilt? (4) What do I spend too much money on?

But the problem is sometimes I don't want to know. I'm comfortable with my false worship.

Don't prophesy

I rarely get told off as a chaplain. Young soldiers get in far more trouble. But even I am corrected. The officer in charge of the car fleet once said, "Padre, I'm really disappointed in you..." because I'd been speeding. The truth is, I don't want to listen to correction. It's embarrassing.

Amaziah, priest of Bethel, doesn't want to listen to Amos. In Amos 7:10. he says to Amos, Leave, seer. Go home. Prophecy there. Don't prophesy here at Bethel. We'll worship our way.

But Amos says

I wasn't a prophet but shepherd and farmer. But the LORD sent me, saying, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' You say,

Don't prophesy against Israel; stop preaching against Isaac descendents.

Now hear what the LORD's words:

Your wife will be a prostitute, your children will fall by the sword, you'll die in a pagan land and Israel will be exiled.

You see, even if I don't want to listen, God's word, his judgement, will come to pass.

Famine of hearing

As a husband I know best. But experience has taught me of my wife's wisdom. She frequently knows better than I do. Now I could say I don't need her advice. But what if she stopped talking to me? I'd lose, not just her suggestions, but her.

In chapter 8, the LORD shows Amos a bowl of summer fruit. This seems irrelevant to what follows, but it's wordplay. Fruit: פֶּיִךְ sounds like end: עֵקֶב. The summer fruit is rotting for Israel's end is nigh. Temple songs will turn to wailing, bodies will be strewn everywhere and then silence.

Yet the rich Israelites ignore the coming judgment. They abuse the poor for profit. They can't wait for the end of the Sabbath to sell less for more; to buy and sell people; and sell husks as food.

God does not forget their treatment of the poor and how they despise his Sabbath. He will turn their religious feasts to mourning and their singing to weeping as in the funeral for an only child.

But worst of all, he will give them what they ask for, a famine of hearing. He will stop speaking to them. He will stop calling them to repent. They will hear no more and fall, never to rise again.

Now, if I don't want to listen to God, he'll call again and again, but eventually he'll give me what I want, a famine of hearing. He'll stop calling me to repentance. Instead of rescue, I'll get judgement.

Eyes fixed

Sometimes we play hide and seek. Our youngest Ezra doesn't really get the idea. He wants to be found. He tells us where he is and where everyone else is.

But what if you want to hide from God's judgment? Look at chapter 9. The LORD calls from the altar:

Strike the tops of the pillars
so that the thresholds shake.
Bring them down on the heads of all the people;
those who are left I will kill with the sword.
Not one will get away,
none will escape.

He sees where they are. They can dig into the grave to get away, but his hand will take them. They can climb the heavens, but he will bring them down. They can hide on Mount Carmel, but he'll find them. They can hide at the bottom of the deep blue sea, but he'll send the serpent after them. Even in exile he commands the sword to slay them. For his eyes are fixed on Israel for evil and not for good. Unfaithful Israel can run, but they cannot hide.

But if God's eyes are on Israel to bring judgment, is not all lost?

Chapter 9 verse 7,

Are not you Israelites
the same to me as the Cushites?
declares the LORD.
Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt,

the Philistines from Caphtor
and the Arameans from Kir?
Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD
are on the sinful kingdom.
I will destroy it
from the face of the earth.
Yet I will not totally destroy
the descendants of Jacob,
declares the LORD.

The LORD Almighty will judge those who oppress the poor and worship idols rather than the LORD. Israel is no better than the pagan nations. Yet the LORD will not totally destroy. He will save his remnant. For he will...

Restore

How will he restore? Look at chapter 9 verse 11:

In that day
I will restore David's fallen shelter—
I will repair its broken walls
and restore its ruins—
and will rebuild it as it used to be,
so that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations that bear my name,

declares the LORD, who will do these things.

Amos mentions David's fallen shelter. This is surprising; Judah isn't yet in exile. But they will be. Amos prophesied around 760–750 BC. Israel was exiled first, in 722 BC, and then Judah in 586 BC. Yet after exile David's shelter will be repaired, restored and rebuilt.

But look at verse 12. This is not a restoration of just Israel, but the nations are called, starting with Edom. Edom had been judged in chapter one.

And soon rather than famine, the fields will abound with produce, the reaper overtakes the ploughman, the vine planter overtakes the one treading the grapes. The exiles return and rebuild, plant and reap. And in verse 15,

I will plant Israel in their own land,
never again to be uprooted
from the land I have given them...

Jesus is the greater David, restoring his fallen shelter. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples ask, Acts 1:8,

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said... "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set... But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The Father has set a time to restore Israel but for now Jesus sends all his disciples, not just to proclaim judgment, but to call the nations to him. As we heed the warning of God's judgment let us also call the nations to trust in the name of Jesus.

