

“All the Prophets Testify”: Amos 7:1-9

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 June 03

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<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions?

Outline (the following is adapted from *TLSB* p.1457; we are expanding/collapsing the major divisions as we proceed through them):

- I. Judgment against the Nations (1:3-2:16)
- II. Declarations concerning Israel (3:1-6:14)
- III. Visions (7:1-9:15)
 - A. Visions That Do Not Come to Pass (7:1-6)
 - 1. Vision of the locusts (7:1-3)**
 - 2. Vision of the fire (7:4-6)**
 - B. Visions That Do Come to Pass (7:7-9:10)
 - 1. Vision of the plumb line (7:7-9)**
 - 2. Historical interlude (7:10-17)
 - 3. Vision of the summer fruit (8:1-14)
 - 4. Vision of the Lord beside the altar (9:1-10)
 - C. Restoration of David’s Booth (9:11-15)

Note that Amos 7:7-15 is the Old Testament Reading for *Lutheran Service Book* Proper 10 B, for the Sunday on July 10-16 in that year of the Three-Year Series, when the Amos Reading is paired with the Gospel Reading of Mark 6:14-29, the account of the death of John the Baptist (both attempts to silence a faithful prophet?).

Vision of the locusts (7:1-3):

7:1 *This is what the Lord God showed me:* confer 7:4 and 7:7 (Keil-Delitzsch notes also 8:1). Amos puts into words what the Lord revealed to him in a visual form. We remember Amos 1:1, “The words of Amos ... which he saw”. *CSSB* comments, “Introduces reports of visions that convey God’s message through things seen as well as heard”. Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “The plastic pictorial form of the vision impresses vividly on both prophet and people the quick and living character of the divine Word, reenforcing and driving home the message already given in speech. The five visions of Amos all repeat his message of imminent judgment; but they are not a mere repetition, an unbroken and undifferentiated series.” Keil-Delitzsch says the visions “confirm the contents of the prophetic addresses in the preceding part”, distinguishing, however, the first four visions from the fifth/last, as well as the first two from the third and fourth.

behold, he was forming locusts: the word “behold” is always a sign of something important that follows (confer at 7:4 and 7:7). What exactly Amos saw that qualifies as the Lord’s “forming” locusts is not clear. Laetsch remarks on the Creator of the largest things “with equal power and wisdom” creating the smallest things “so that they can carry out the purpose for which He made them”. We remember locusts from the books of Revelation and Joel and the locusts’ indicating God’s curse for covenant violations. *TLSB* comments, “Amos was able to see exactly how the land would be judged.” Of course, the last thing Amos had said was that the Lord would raise up a nation against the house of Israel (6:14). Perhaps the locusts figuratively represent the literal invading nation. Keil-Delitzsch says, “The fixing of the time has an important bearing upon the meaning of the vision”. (Lessing discusses when Amos sees the vision, but that time need not necessarily be the same time that the locusts are being developed in the vision.)

when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout: Of the latter growth, *CSSB* comments, “The growth that came up in the fields after the grains and early hay were harvested. On these the flocks and herds pastured until the summer drought stopped all growth.” *TLSB* explains: “Crops brought forth by late spring rains. Amos saw that an agricultural catastrophe was in the offing, since both the early grain crop (then maturing) and the second crop (just sprouting) would be destroyed by the locust swarm.” Again, the expected locusts may or may not have been literal; Luther for one takes them as indicating the army of the Assyrians.

and behold, it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings: Regarding the “king’s mowings”, Roehrs-Franzmann says, “nothing is known of this from other sources” (confer Keil-Delitzsch). *TLSB* comments, “The king had already exercised his royal prerogative of taking the first reaping. Consequently, nothing was left for the people but famine.” However, Keil-Delitzsch comments, “such an exemption of the king from the judgment is evidently at variance with the meaning of this and the following visions”, and so Keil-Delitzsch interprets the time reference spiritually (that is, after Israel had been judged and was starting to flourish again).

7:2 *When they had finished eating the grass of the land*: presumably both the early grain crop and the second crop as *TLSB* explains them but still in the course of the vision. Keil-Delitzsch discusses the difficulty of the prophet’s intercession’s being too late.

I said: confer 7:5 and compare the third vision. Amos the prophet intercedes for the people like faithful prophets before and after him, including our Lord Jesus, Who even now lives and intercedes for us. Surely the Spirit moves him to carry out his office faithfully, but we can distinguish between *what* Amos said and the Divinely-Inspired *record* of what Amos said.

“O Lord God, please forgive!”: confer 7:5 and compare the third vision. As Lessing notes, Amos in preaching his disturbing oracles does not take “sadistic glee”. Amos pleads for forgiveness of the sin that merited the judgment and perhaps so also essentially the removal of the judgment. *CSSB* comments, “Amos makes no appeal to the Lord’s covenant with Israel—perhaps because Israel’s unfaithfulness had removed all right to such an appeal”, but to some extent compare Lessing, who points to Amos’s using covenant names. *TLSB* comments, “The only hope that Amos’s appeal might succeed is God’s compassionate nature”. Lessing comments, “forgiveness is rooted in God’s gracious covenant and...he promises this forgiveness through the new covenant...in the blood of Christ, shed for the forgiveness of sins”.

How can Jacob stand? He is so small!”: confer v.5. The name of Isaac and Rebekah’s son was “Jacob” before it was changed to “Israel”, here, of course, the nation, at least the northern kingdom, is in view (Lessing thinks Israel as a whole is in view throughout). *CSSB* comments, “Mass starvation would afflict all the people...Powerless to withstand the calamity.” *TLSB* comments, “Amos earnestly intercedes for Israel, pleading that the nation is too weak and poor to survive such a crop failure. This is ironic, since the prophet also criticized the people for their greed and materialism”. Roehrs-Franzmann notes the contrast between small Jacob and “the overpowering might of his Judge”; Luther compares small Jacob to the Assyrians. The issue seems to be “by whom” can Jacob stand, without powerful allies, especially not the Lord, Who is sending the destruction. Similarly, St. Paul asks, if God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:32)? Lessing discusses legal rights and standing, emphasizing God’s grace in Christ.

7:3 *The Lord relented concerning this*: confer 7:6 and compare 7:8-9. *TLSB* comments, “Remarkably, the Lord answers the prophets’ intercessory prayer by agreeing to spare Israel.” (Note the Lord answers all prayers in His time and way; in this case the Lord’s answer to Amos’s prayer was what Amos had requested.) Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “Prophet and people are reminded that their God is no relentlessly mechanical fate but a Person with a will and a heart, who does not desire the death of the sinner”. The Hebrew verb *nacham* can mean such things as “to be sorry”, “to be moved to pity”, to have compassion”, and “to repent”. We would not say that God was “sorry” or “repented” of having planned the judgment and shown it to Amos. And, of course, God knew that Amos would intercede and that He Himself would relent. We want to be careful of making human prayers the ultimate cause of Divine action. Interestingly, *CSSB* distinguishes between the Lord’s relenting and forgiving, as does Luther, who paraphrases the Lord as saying in 7:8, “Even if I postpone for a time that captivity with which I have threatened Israel, yet I will no longer pass over its sins.” Lessing seems to think the relenting includes forgiveness, and Lessing notes the irony that the people are to repent and escape destruction but the Lord relents and does not immediately deliver it.

“It shall not be,” said the Lord: “it” whether figurative locusts or a literal nation? *TLSB* comments, “History shows that Israel’s punishment was postponed rather than forever averted. Sadly, the people’s obstinacy eventually did them in”. The relationship between this initial vision of locusts and the following visions of the fire and plumb-line/sword may be discussed: two that did not occur and one that does occur, but all three were essentially total destruction and readily imminent? Does God really spare Israel from the locusts or fire or what they represent in contrast to the plumb-line/sword? Was there a difference in elapsed time between the visions and their depiction’s being carried out? Or, as some think, do the first two visions pertain to the Last Day and the third vision pertain to the Assyrian conquest of the northern Kingdom?

Vision of the fire (7:4-6):

7:4 This is what the Lord God showed me: confer above at 7:1 and below at 7:7.

Behold, the Lord God was calling for a judgment by fire: regarding “behold”, confer above at 7:1 and below at 7:7. What exactly Amos saw that qualifies as the Lord’s “calling” for a judgment by fire is not clear. Lessing discusses “judgment” as a “covenant lawsuit”. You may recall that back in Amos chapters 1-2, fire was an instrument of judgment on the six nations surrounding Judah and Israel and on Judah but not on Israel. Keil-Deltizsch comments, “That the all-devouring fire represents a much severer judgment than that depicted under the figure of the locusts, is generally acknowledged, and needs no proof.” Laetsch refers to “intense, burning heat, drought”.

and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land: *TLSB* explains, “The Lord’s smoldering anger was ready to send an even more severe judgment, a fire so intense that it would scorch everything, even drying up the subterranean springs.” Regarding the “great deep”, Roehrs-Franzmann also thinks the subterranean waters are in view, and Laetsch also refers to underground waters, but *CSSB* says, “Probably the Mediterranean Sea”. Luther says, “not only that water which the burning sun generally dried up otherwise too but even the deep waters”. Lessing sees the reference to “all the water that sustains terrestrial life” and says, “After the fire consumed this source of all water, all life on land would quickly wither and die.” We might think of the fire that fell from heaven at the call of Elijah and consumed the water in a trench around his sacrifice, as well as the stones and the dust (1 Kings 18:38). Regarding the “land”, *CSSB* comments, “probably referring to the promised land or, more precisely, to everything growing on the land”. Keil-Delitzsch takes the “great deep” as the heathen world and the “land” as the people of Israel. Regardless, Lessing notes an expansion from the agricultural land attacked in the first vision to the land and water in the second vision.

7:5 Then I said: confer 7:2 and compare the third vision.

“O Lord God, please cease!: confer 7:2 and compare the third vision. *TLSB* comments, “Intercession echoing that described in v 2. Previously a reprieve was given (v 3). However, the people’s sinfulness forced Amos to appeal to the Lord’s mercy again, this time in order to stave off fiery judgment.” In at least one place, Lessing, with reference to Wolff, notes that Amos’s second petition asks for forbearance of punishment not for pardon for sins.

How can Jacob stand? He is so small!: confer 7:2 and compare the third vision.

7:6 *The Lord relented concerning this*: confer 7:3 and compare 7:8-9.

“This also shall not be,” said the Lord God: confer 7:3 and compare 7:8-9. In this verse “also” and “God” are added but seemingly without any meaningful significance.

Vision of the plumb line (7:7-9):

7:7 *This is what he showed me*: confer above at 7:1 and 7:4. “Lord God” is absent in this verse, perhaps as it was just said in 7:6 and “Lord” is immediately used again.

behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand: arguably we get more tails about what Amos actually saw than in the first two visions that do not take place. *TLSB* says, “The Lord Himself to Amos in physical fashion during this series of visions.” Regarding the “plumb line”, Laetsch describes a metal, probably lead (Latin *plumbum*) fastened to the end of the line; *TLSB* explains, “Builder’s tool used to determine a straight, vertical line. (I perhaps misremember my father calling a purple chalk-line a “plum line”.) In this comparison, the wall represents Israel. Though the Lord originally set up Israel to be right and true, the nation has become crooked and warped. Israel needs to be remeasured by the Lord’s plumb line, since only then can things be set right.” Whether the wall as Amos sees it is straight or crooked seems to be debated; for example, Laetsch refers to it as “ready for” or “in need of” a plumb-line.

7:8 *And the Lord said to me, “Amos what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line,”*: As 7:7 reads, Amos knew the Lord had a plumb-line in His “hand”, though perhaps Amos did not at that point understand the significance of the plumb-line and anticipate the judgment that the Lord was about to announce, or presumably Amos would have interceded as in 7:2 and 7:5. Amos hardly seems to know before the Lord says it that the Lord will no longer forgive. (At a minimum, the Lord’s question to Amos leads Amos to speak in this series of three verses as in the previous two series of three verses.) Keil-Delitzsch suggests that the question “is asked for the simple purpose of following up his answer with an explanation of the symbol”. Kretzmann says, “the purpose of the question being to impress the importance of the vision upon the prophets’ mind.” Lessing discusses Amos’s needing an explanation and tersely naming what the Lord is showing.

Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them: CSSB notes God's first use of "my people" in Amos, and Lessing says that precisely because they are God's people "their apostasy is so shocking and the judgment will be so devastating". CSSB says simply, "the Lord is no longer open to...intercession". TLSB comments, "Though He has relented twice in the recent past (vv 3, 6), God's decree of punishment is now final." The Hebrew verb 'abar used in this verse is also used in Exodus 12:12, as the Lord says that He will "pass through" the land of Egypt to strike the firstborns but "pass over" (pacach) the houses marked with the blood of the lambs. (The English words used in translation might be taken as suggesting more closely-related Hebrew words in the original version.) Roehrs-Franzmann connects the Lord's unwillingness to hear further intercession to the narrative of Amos's encounter with Amaziah that follows, the prophet's being silenced by the priest, and says, "a people which consciously rejects the Word of God is dooming itself, is committing the sin unto death (1 Jn 5:16), and is removing itself from the intercession of man." Lessing refers to the end of the time of favor and day of salvation described in 2 Corinthians 6:2. Lessing refers to the Lord's never again forgiving, overlooking the sin, and one might think of Romans 3:25, regarding God, in His divine forbearance, "passing over" former sins (πάρεσις, paresin; "passing over" or "letting pass" or "neglecting" or "disregarding"; used only in Romans 3:25). Lessing notes that "again" refers to the previous relenting of 7:3 and 7:6.

7:9 the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate: TLSB comments, "Worship sites scattered around the Northern Kingdom." The use of the name "Isaac", Jacob/Israel's father, is perhaps notable in its recalling God's promises also to Abraham and Isaac before Jacob. With reference also to 7:16, CSSB says it is "a way of referring to Israel found only in Amos".

and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste: TLSB comments, "Likely references to Bethel and Dan...Through Moses, the Lord had warned the people about the consequences of illicit worship".

and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.": There seems to be a progression down to the king (confer CSSB; Roehrs-Franzmann says "both the religious...and the political"). TLSB comments, "Prophecy reveals that the breakaway dynastic line of the Northern Kingdom would be ended by invading enemies. Historically, this was fulfilled when Zechariah, son of Jeroboam II, was assassinated." Keil-Delitzsch sees the destruction of the sacred places and the overthrow of the monarchy as indicating the dissolution of the kingdom (confer Kretzmann). Laetsch sees "the chief irregularities and their chief instigators" and describes them as annihilated "in bloody warfare". Lessing connects the defeat of the earthly king with the exaltation of the heavenly King.

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for Amos 7:1-9 says, "By means of symbolic visions involving locusts, fire, and a plumb line, the Lord warns His people that He will punish their apostasy. However, these visions, Amos's repeated intercessions on behalf of the people, and God's forbearance did not result in repentance. People today are just as slow to heed God's Word and are equally intractable in their bad behavior. We [presumably we who repent], too, would be irretrievably lost and eternally condemned were it not for Christ and His forgiveness."

GWfT discusses God's law as a "plumb line" that can show us to be sagging and crooked even as we live in contrition and faith (repentance). While God's law always accuses our sinful nature, God's law does not only accuse us who are redeemed, as God's law also is a "rule" or "guide" or "map" showing us the good works God works in us who believe.

Next time, June 10, Amos 7:10-17

Closing Prayer & Benediction