

Do We Silence the God Who Speaks?

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[0 : 00] So, after that text in Amos, which was just read, some of you might be wondering, you know, probably quite valid, why is it that the Bible seems so confusing, all these weird imageries, all this blood-curdling and bloodthirsty types of visions and images, odd place names.

It's just a lot of the Bible seems either confusing or it seems like just a bit repellent because it's so bloodthirsty and violent. In fact, many people might even be wondering if you're here this morning, like, why is it that a church would even read such a thing like this in public?

Like, you know, on a Sunday morning you struggle to come here through the rain and you don't want to really hear about all these things about judgment and destroying all the land and destroying the deep and people being dying by the sword.

Like, it's not, you know, people don't sort of wake up in the morning on a Sunday and say, gosh, I think I need to hear a story about massive earthly destruction today. I think it'll really help my inner life and sense of peace if I spend some time thinking about it.

That's not how Canadians wake up. And it's one of the reasons, by the way, that many, many churches, if you're a person who's come here this morning for a variety of reasons, you got dragged here, you got tricked here or whatever, or you're in some type of a search.

[1 : 21] And, you know, many people say, you know, George, it's no wonder, like, you know, churches that talk about these types of things, it's not very helpful. Like, look at how, like, yoga's peaceful. Like, there's lots of peaceful things.

Star Trek, you know, Star Wars is a bit like, it has like the force. It's like a bit religious. It's far, like, it's better, George. Don't you think it's better? How can you talk about Amos in Canada in a day like today?

One of the things that we do, for those who are here maybe as guests, is we don't, we believe that Messiah, that the best way to really learn about God and learn about ourselves is to go through whole books of the Bible, where we talk about, I mean, the books, everything in the Bible was originally written as a book, as an individual book, and we feel that's really the best way to come to know who Jesus is and to come to know ourselves.

It's an honest way to look at things. I'll illustrate, I mean, I just, the other day, actually, just this week I had two people who had to deal with either insurance companies or car companies, and I'm not making a negative comment about if you're here and you work for an insurance company, and if you're here you work for a car company.

I'm not talking about all, if actually what I say is about you, then maybe that's one of those things you need to repent of. But in both cases, the person got screwed because of, sorry, maybe Andrew would have been bothered that I said that.

[2 : 52] Anyway, that's not too offensive, is it? They got ripped off, that's the better word, maybe less offensive, because of fine print. And, like, one guy that I was just talking to this week, he's probably out about 10 grand because of fine print, that if he'd seen the fine print, he would have chosen a bit of a different option about it.

And another person, it was obvious that they just were pretending that they were kind and caring, but in fact they weren't. They were just trying to close a deal on a car, and they were really just trying to close a deal on the car.

I mean, basically they've learned that if you can fake being kind and caring, then you got it made. It helps you to be not kind and not caring and try to make money, except it didn't work in this case.

So, you know, many of the times people wonder about Christians and about, you know, why, you know, oh yeah, yeah, it all sounds good, you know, Jesus loves you, you know, the pig, oh yeah, he's up there, stained glass window holding a little sheep, and he looks, but you know, George, like

there's all this other side about religion and about Christianity.

And that's one of the reasons, by going through books of the Bible, what in a sense we're doing is we're saying, like what I'm telling to this is, I believe there is a God who really does exist. And I think there's some good philosophical arguments and other things for it, but at the end of the day, I believe it because I believe that Jesus actually is God's son, that he actually died upon a cross, that on the third day he actually rose from the dead, that the tomb was empty, that he rose from the dead, that he proved that he was alive.

[4 : 26] And it's because of him, and I trust him, that God actually speaks, he tells us about what he's like, and that every human being needs to be reconciled to their creator.

And Jesus is God's means to reconcile creatures like you and me back to God. And there's no other way other than what God has done to the person and work of Jesus.

Jesus. And I really believe that. Like, I believe it. And it's because of that, I don't want anybody to say, well, you know, that we hide things about what it means to be a Christian.

And at the end of the day, because Jesus trusted and loved the Bible, and if you go and you read the Gospels, he's quoting the Bible, he's making allusions to the Bible, he says he doesn't contradict a single thing in the Bible, and by that he means texts like Amos.

And when he actually, after he died and risen from the dead, and he appeared to his disciples, on several occasions, he sends them back to read what we call the Old Testament.

[5 : 33] Jewish people call it the Tanakh. And he sends them back to read it because he says, I'm in that all the way through it. And so that's why we read Old Testament texts like this. Even if they seem a little bit bloodthirsty, they don't seem at all what Canadians are thinking about.

They don't even seem at first as if it's what we need to think about. But it really is what we need to think about. You see, one of the things that's going on in this text, I'm going to have you, if you have your Bibles, we're going to look at it in a moment.

So one of the things that's going on in this text, which is really, really important, is that God actually wants to speak to every human being. Like God, the thing about the Bible is it's all sorts of different types of literature because people process things different ways.

They appreciate things different ways. I've shared with you, I don't like poetry. I never read poetry. And when I have to preach on a poem in the Bible, it's going against the grain. But I know there are many people who love poetry.

My former bishop, he was always quoting poetry. He loved poetry. I mean, he'd rather read a poem than a novel. I'd much rather have a novel where somebody gets killed and then they try to figure out who killed the person.

[6 : 40] And that's my type of, I like that, you know? I don't like poetry. But that's fine. The Bible's not just written for people like me. It's written for all sorts of different people. And that's why it's written in all sorts of different genres.

I've told you before, I have a good friend. And she was a lawyer. She'd been a lawyer for quite a few years, still is a lawyer. And she was non-Christian. And she started getting interested in the Christian faith. And she was having a hard time figuring out how things worked.

And she was at a workplace thing, like an inquiry type thing. And of all things, the speaker spoke on the book of Leviticus.

The book of Leviticus, if you're non-Christian or you don't know much about the book, that's like all the law type of stuff. And she said, as the sermon went on, on this long text of Leviticus, by the end of it, she said, Christianity makes sense.

From Leviticus! But she's a lawyer! Like it fit with her. So here's the thing. I like abstract ideas. I like being able to debate at an abstract level.

[7 : 47] It's one of the things, it's just the way I am. I know lots of people aren't. So if I say to you that God is omnipotent, sovereign, omnipresent, active in his creation.

Now because you're good Christian boys and girls, you'll all nod and go, yeah. But many of us, nothing is going on behind the eyes and between the ears. I might as well have spoken to you in Turkish.

Because it would have had the same impact on you. It doesn't mean anything at all to you. For some people, abstraction thing, that's very, very good. In fact, you know, images, oh my, images and movie clips, those are dangerous, you know.

But for others, we think in movie clips and images. So one of the things at this point in time in the book of Amos is after six chapters have gone on, where amongst other things, after six chapters in two different types of literary genres, God has tried to communicate to the people of Israel, probably around the year 750 BC, and about a massive, even though the country is very, very prosperous and very, very stable, its prosperity and stability is based upon profound injustice, human suffering, and great evil.

And now, for the rest of the book of Amos, but especially in chapter seven, God gives three images. And the images are to try to communicate in a visual way, like using words to try to create a mind, a picture that God is omnipotent, sovereign, omnipresent, and holy.

[9 : 30] But for those of us that that doesn't mean anything, the Bible, Amos uses three images to communicate the same thing. In fact, it'd probably be better to say it's as if God gives the words for three short movie clips.

So let's look at them. We'll look at them and then we'll see sort of, well, let's look at them. The first one is verse one. This is what the Lord God showed me. Behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout.

And behold, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, and we'll talk about what he said later.

Now you get this image. The three different images are going to show how that God is omnipotent, omnipresent, sovereign, and holy in the natural world, in the supernatural and natural world, and in the human and moral world.

That's what the three images are going to do, through images. And so what we see here is a picture of God being all-powerful and present and sovereign and holy in the natural sphere.

[10 : 41] And so it's a picture as if he sees God and he sees God summoning locusts. And as God summons locusts, there's an overwhelming number of locusts.

And then God directs the locusts to go to where Israel is and to do what locusts do naturally, which is to eat everything which is green. And the significance of the mowings is you might be pleased to know that even in the year 750 BC, the government makes sure it gets his taxes first.

I get my paycheck, the taxes are gone, right? Even in 750 BC, that's how it was. And so what it is is that the very, very early crops, the king comes and takes them.

Taxes are paid. You have trouble with the rest of your crops? Sucks to be you. But the king's got his tax. And so basically the king's got his tax and that's when the locusts come.

And the locusts devour everything. It means there's nothing to eat for a year. It means famine. Now the second image is in verse 4.

[11 : 55] It goes like this. Remember I said that it's using images because some of us think in pictures that God is omnipotent, omnipresent, sovereign, and holy.

Nothing goes on in our minds. Well, here's the second image. This is what the Lord, verse 4, this is what the Lord God showed me. Behold, the Lord God was calling for a judgment by fire and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land.

And here we have a different image. It's as if God starts to speak and call out. And as he speaks and calls out, a fire comes. And this is a fire that can touch what we would call spiritual or supernatural things and also natural things.

And he calls for this fire and when the fire has come, he sends it. And it's a very, very interesting image of the great deep. For Amos' hearers, it would have had a double meaning.

For some of them, it would have meant the oceans. That there's a fire that comes from God that consumes the oceans and then begins to consume the land. But for others, it's a place where the really bad and nasty but powerful gods live.

[13 : 07] And so when God calls a fire and it consumes the deep, it consumes the gods. It consumes the gods that you're most afraid of. And they're all consumed.

The water, the gods, and it starts to consume the land. And it all comes as God speaks. We have a hard time thinking of God as omnipotent, omnipresent, sovereign, and holy.

It doesn't do anything for us. This is an image that communicates it for those of us who can't think in abstractions. It also actually serves as an important check for us because sometimes abstractions just remain abstractions.

We don't think of them as being real. And a vision like this is trying to communicate to us. It's like, I think I've told you this before. I was at a, this is a long, long time ago and I'm still part of the

Anglican Church of Canada.

And there was a workshop on demons. And most, a lot of Anglican clergy, they're fine with the idea of the demonic as a type of a symbolism for evil or maybe even a symbolism for institutional evil.

[14 : 12] And it was halfway through the workshop, one of the speakers said, one moment, you're talking about demons as if they're real. And the speaker said, yeah. I said, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

Like ontologically real? Like not just an idea or a myth or a narrative or an organizing principle, but actually like real like a person?

Yeah? Well, then, then the brown stuff hit the fan and the whole conversation went a different way. And so actually for many of us, the danger of just having the fact that God is omnipotent, omniscient, sovereign, and holy is it can just become something abstract.

These images help us say, no, no, no, no, no, that's what those big words with lots of syllables mean. And then the third image, and you're going to have to take my word for it a little bit because we're going to see in a moment why I say what it is.

It talks about God being omnipotent, omnipresent, and sovereign, and holy in the realm of human life and the moral order and in institutions and human relationships, everything that it means to be human.

[15 : 25] And that's in the image that comes, the vision that comes in verse 7. This is what he showed me. Behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built 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. And we'll talk a little bit about more what it means in terms of responding to it in a second.

But here's the image. It's in the moral area and the human area. He sees the Lord. He sees the Lord holding a plumb line.

I mean, nowadays they use lasers and stuff like that, right? It's a heavy weight at the end of a rope that shows you what's vertical. And there's a plumb line and there's God holding a plumb line and beside God is a wall that's been built properly according to a plumb line.

And it's an image for the fact, as what's going to come and see here, is that God's plumb line is going to be in Israel and it won't be taken away. And it's an image that God desires to build human lives and human institutions and human endeavors according to his plumb line.

[16 : 43] And those that aren't built according to his plumb line, as we'll see in the rest of the interaction, will be destroyed. And it's an image of God being present in human affairs in a real way, with real expectations about how important institutions should work, like families and marriage and business endeavors and government.

And that there's a way that if God's presence and purpose and character and law and grace and mercy and love, which is all what's sort of imitated and talked about here with this plumb line, that there's a way that that should lead to a type of human flourishing that fits with the created order and there's a way that it doesn't and eventually God will destroy it.

There'll be judgment. So that's the beginning. And part of the reason it's confusing for us is that in our culture it's not the way most people think about God.

And that's part of the reason it's confusing to us. Because it's not the way we think of God as judging and as being sovereign over these types of areas.

In fact, in a sense, relative to what most Canadians think of as God, I would be an atheist. I don't believe that God exists. But if you think about it for a second, and this text here isn't going to try to prove that God exists, by the way.

[18 : 23] And I'm not going to in this sermon try to prove that God exists. But if you think about it for a second, the God that most Canadians think of is, I mean, you know what, you go to a better place, you know, he's kind and loving, she's kind and loving, it's kind and loving, it's like a force, it's through everything.

You know, it has less character and less reality or and less... Like, if you described a human being in those terms, would you think that was attractive?

And what human being, like, in fact, if you talked about somebody in those ways, you'd probably, like, if you had a friend that you described in those same ways, you'd say, that person has to start to learn to have some self-assertion.

Like, two-year-olds aren't like that. People aren't like that. Why is it that we think that God's like that? Like, shouldn't that be a little bit of a clue to us that the type of God that most Canadians think of as being God can't possibly be God?

Or if it is, it's a God who needs therapy or something. Like, come on, stand up for yourself. Like, tell us something about yourself.

[19 : 43] You know? And yet, most Canadians, because most Canadians think the same way, just as in Amos, when he's speaking to Israel, Israel has gotten so accustomed to speaking of God in a similar type of way that it's a complete and utter shock to them to hear that God might be something completely and utterly different than that their educational institutions, their religious institutions, their legal institutions, government institutions, the entertainment institutions, all the way that they talk about God, that that view of God might be wrong.

wrong. Not true. And in some ways, then, what goes on here in Canada is the very same thing that's going on in Israel. And it's a bit of a shock to us to hear a text like this.

So, I mean, I just want to suggest to you, this text isn't going to argue, but I'm going to just say, if you think about it for a second, it's far more likely that if God exists, he's something like this than the way most Canadians think of God.

Because the way most Canadians think of God doesn't make sense. Doesn't sound real. It's not like the way real things are. Now, some of you might say, okay, George, that might be true, but gosh, you sure hope that that isn't true.

Like, George, don't you think that's a bit of a bloodthirsty, blood-curdling, violent God? Well, I, I, to God, you need to take seriously.

[21 : 18] But I, I've only given you the, the, the visions, and the visions take place within conversation and dialogue, and you need to see the rest of it before you start to have a view of what the Bible is really trying to communicate here, because it's trying to communicate something not only about who God is, but what it means to be human, and what it means to flourish as human beings.

And so the images are there to catch your attention, but you need to understand how Amos and how God talked to each other about the different images and what they reveal. So if it, this, let's go back and look again at what happens.

I said I'd speak about it, and I will. Look at chapter 7, verse 1. Now you've got the images that God is omnipotent, that he's omnipresent, that he's sovereign, that he's holy.

Omnipresent means he's closer to you than you are to your breath, closer to you than your mind is to you, closer to you than your thoughts are to you. That's what omnipresent means.

He's also transcendent, he's completely different, he's all-powerful. But the text is communicating this in images, so here's the first image and what happens. This is what the Lord God showed me.

[22 : 23] Behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout, and behold, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, Oh Lord God, please forgive!

How can Jacob, that means Israel, how can Jacob stand? He is so small. The Lord relented concerning this.

Notice that, the Lord relented as Amos called out. It shall not be, said the Lord. It shall not be. Now, just a bit of a pause here before we get into some other things.

Here's a real challenge for us. Many Christians, and if you're here as a guest this morning, you're still trying to figure out the Christian faith, or as I said, you got tricked to come in here, you came here to get out of the rain or whatever.

Hopefully I'll have lots of coffee with us later on. But here's the thing which is a real challenge for those of us who are Christians. We lament what's going on in parts of our culture. Part of Canada, there's a whole part of Canada that's increasingly embracing the culture of death.

[23 : 29] And as well for Christians, especially Christians who are older, the fact that the church and the Christian faith used to have a privileged position in our culture and in our country that that's gone, completely gone.

In fact, that the opposite is increasing. It's very worrisome. But here's the thing. Do you notice this? Amos intercedes for his nation and his city?

And this is a challenge to every single one of us. Do we intercede for Canada? Do we intercede for Ontario? Do we intercede for Ottawa?

For those of you who come from La Belle Provence, do you intercede for Gatineau? And do you intercede for Quebec? Amos isn't said, God doesn't say to Amos, what do you mean giving me lip? That's not what God says. God relents. See, there's a mystery here that the Bible just talks about. It just shows it, but it never explains it.

[24 : 33] There's a mystery here. It portrays God as transcendent, as omnipotent, as omniscient, as sovereign, as holy, as being one who can call locusts, who can call fire that devours idols and spiritual presences in the land and water and is present in the moral order.

Yet at the same time, what it portrays is that God, as he's working, he listens to the prayers of his people. And yes, that is mind-boggling.

It's one of those things to use an Irish expression that's gobsmacking. But that's what it's trying to portray. It's telling us, amongst other things, to intercede for our city and intercede for our nation. But you see, the other thing which is going on here in the text, which is really, really important before we get to the other different images, is that look at what he says.

Look at how Amos intercedes for, and he's going to intercede for this twice in verse 2 and in verse 5. Verse 2 again, Oh Lord God, please forgive.

[25 : 52] How can Jacob stand? And what does it say? Why? He is so small. Now let me ask you this. Do you think that if you went to the Supreme Court of Canada and sat in on their meetings, they'd begin their meetings by saying, let's just all remember, Canada and all that goes on here, we're small and God is big.

I think that's how they begin their meetings and their deliberations. Do you think the Liberal Cabinet, and I'm not playing partisan politics, do you think the Conservative Cabinet began their meetings by saying, I just want you all to remember, we're small and God is big.

Okay, let's think. Do you think that's how they think at the CBC? Do you think in the Faculty of University of Toronto, University of Ottawa, Carleton? Do you think that's how when the executive of Google gets together that they say to themselves, just remember, we're small, God is big.

It's not part of the self-identity of Canada or of corporations, of Hollywood. It's not how we understand ourselves. And in fact, actually, probably for many of the people that I've just mentioned, but maybe not all of them.

You don't want to be presumptuous. It would be offensive. See, one of the things that Amos is trying to communicate week in and week out, and I know that Daniel and I have shared the sermons and I haven't yet had a chance to listen to Daniel and we all come, you know, there's different things that the Bible really calls on and speaks out to us, but the Bible wants to regulate, Amos is a book that wants to, really, these visions are so important to the book of Amos.

[27 : 30] Canada thinks that God is small and people are big and institutions are big and movements are big and banks are big and money is big and social progress is big and being progressive is big and all of these things are big and God is really, really tiny and small.

And we breathe that in. We breathe it in when we go to school. We breathe it in when we go to work. We breathe it in when we go to Tim Hortons or we go to Starbucks. We breathe it in when we read the newspaper. We breathe it in when we read, when we watch the movies and we breathe it in and we breathe it in and we breathe it in and it's easy to start to become that part of our spirit or the way that we follow Jesus is that in our heart of hearts we sort of see that God is getting smaller and smaller and smaller and all of these things are very, very big and that's how the world looks. And Amos is trying to shock us and say, no, no. God is big. Google, that's smaller. That's smaller than the Down Syndrome child you saw in Tim Hortons yesterday.

Google will come to an end. That young child will live forever in eternity. And even though individuals are bigger than institutions and countries, how many people spend all their time thinking about Nortel stocks today?

Well, maybe some of you who lost your shirt on it think about it occasionally, but the rest of us don't. And the Bible here is trying to help us to understand that God is big.

[29 : 07] People are small. Now, some of you might say, George, that's a very, very worrisome idea. Whoa, that's a worrisome idea. George, haven't you seen what it's like? Like, look at some cultures and some religions where God seems to be really, really, really big and it just seems to crush people.

It just seems to crush people. George, if you knew, you know, if you knew what it was like in Quebec in the 1950s and the way they talked about the church and God and religious things, it just

crushed the people.

George, if you look in places like Saudi Arabia where God, at least on the surface, seems to be big and people just get crushed. Like, George, you look at what happens with the Taliban. George, you look at what happens in some places under Hinduism.

Look at something. George, do you see what happens when God seems to be big and people are small? People just get crushed. Here's the thing. I'm just going to say it, but I'm not going to spend much time on it. Here's the thing.

At the end of the day, there really is a God who really does exist and so every different religion, apart from that, apart from the God who's revealed in the scriptures and is revealed in the person and work of Jesus, all of the different religions and spirituality of the worlds, they, I'm going to be very un-Canadian here.

[30 : 18] Okay? Give me a little bit of grace. I'm going to be profoundly, massively, un-Canadian. But all of the different religions and spiritualities are distortions of the real God and left to our natural thinking and our natural processes, unless it's constantly reformed by God's word, our understanding of God will start to be deformed and twisted and wrong.

And that's why one of the things that the Bible does as we understand the whole counsel of God in the context of the grace that comes to us in the person and work of Jesus, and we start to understand the person and work of Jesus in light of the whole counsel of God, is that the Bible regularly subverts every religion and spirituality and ideology.

It subverts and undercuts it, but at the same time, it fulfills it. It undercuts and subverts and it fulfills because it tries to reveal who God really is in the context of our heart, who we really are, and the wellspring of the different types of decisions and longings and hopes and fears that we actually have.

And that's what the Bible does. And so what Amos is trying to communicate is that when we understand who God is, and we're going to see this more as it goes through, is that when the Bible says is that when the God who really does exist, when we accept, when we hear him speak and we see how he redeems, and in light of his redemption and the way he speaks and what he tells us to do, when God is big and people are small, people matter to God.

And institutions will be built that enable human flourishing. But when God is small and people or ideologies or idols or projects are big, evil grows, injustice flourishes, and people suffer.

[32 : 41] That's what Amos is trying to get to us. And that's why God judges. Now, why is it you can say that the Bible is trying to communicate that when God is big and people are small that people actually flourish?

Well, you see, in some cultures where God is really massively big and people are small, you could not imagine Amos interceding for his city and God listening.

You see, the entire flow, the image seems so unbelievably powerful and if all you had was verse 1, verse 4, verse 7, and that was it, you'd have to say that these places where God seems to be huge so huge and big that people are crushed that that has to be true.

But that's not how the Word of God goes. It gives us this overpowering image of God being omnipotent and God being omnipresent and he's transcendent and he's sovereign and he's holy and he reveals it and he reveals it in a context of human injustice and human evil.

And little tiny Amos says, God, we're so small, please relent. And God does because people matter to God.

[33 : 56] And it comes up again in the next one, verse 4. This is what the Lord God showed me. Behold, the Lord God was calling for judgment by fire and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. Then I said, Oh Lord God, please cease.

How can Jacob, that means Israel, stand. He is so small. And the Lord relented concerning this. This also shall not be, said the Lord God.

And then we see the third vision. And it's this vision of the wall which shows that in fact, God is not, that the purpose of God being big and people being small is, and the way that the real God, the God who's revealed in the Bible, the God who's revealed in the gospel, in the person, work, and teaching of Jesus that he's concerned at the same time with proper human flourishing is also in this image of the wall.

Verse 7, this is what he showed me. Behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built 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. It's funny, he can't say, I can't see, he doesn't say, I see you God. He doesn't say that. He doesn't talk about the wall. He just says, I see the plumb line. Then the Lord said, Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel, and I will never again pass by them.

[35 : 16] In other words, I'm going to spare these other judgments, but I'm not going to leave being omnipresent. I'm always present. I'm always real.

See, when you give your life to Jesus and receive the grace that comes from God and start to listen to his word, everybody around you will say, you've lost your senses, you're losing touch with reality. The Bible says you're starting to enter reality. That for the first time in your life, you're beginning to live in the real world. Verse 8 again.

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 never again pass by them. The high places of Isaac shall be made desolate.

That's an institution. Not just, not about mountain places. It's talking about those places in any culture that are viewed as high places. It's, you know, that it's like when there's in the Citizen or the National Post or the Globe and Mail, they want to get expert opinion.

[36 : 26] They go to the faculty of the University of Toronto or the University of Ottawa or the Université de Montréal and that adds prestige. It's a high place. And the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste.

The retreats, the spas, the ways by which we recoup and we gather our energy, all of the things secular, spiritual, and religious, which we understand in a secular, social way as a sanctuary, they will be laid waste.

And I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword. So we see here that this, the Bible's trying to communicate a very, very, it's trying to purge us.

Okay, I had this real problem the other day. I was talking to somebody and he found out I was a pastor and then he started to praise people who were religious. And I didn't know what to say to him, but I wanted to say to him, you know what, I'm doing a sermon on Amos 7 and it doesn't say that religious people are good.

It doesn't say that spiritual people are good. It's not interested in you becoming religious. It's not interested in you becoming spiritual. It's calling you to the one true, real God who acts in a powerful way through the person of his son to reconcile you to him.

[37 : 42] And I was a bit tongue-tied. I wasn't expecting it was going to happen. I didn't quite know how to, to sort of, I felt like it would have been a bit rude to tell you, well, I'm really glad that you're flattering me and complimenting me, but actually I think you're completely wrong and I don't agree with a word you've said.

I mean, I just didn't know how to, as a Canadian, I didn't know how to, to manage that, you know. I don't agree with anything you said. But it's, it's trying to communicate this powerful thing about who we are.

But by the way, one other just thing before we go to the next, you know one of the things we see here? God cannot make straight what does not bow. God cannot make straight what does not bow. This image of the plumb line, and it's interesting, the way that we get in line with the plumb line is by bowing. And that's because one of the things that we do as creatures when we're fallen is the fall means that we're all bent.

Maybe we're bent like this, I don't know. And the way it gets made straight is when we start to bow to him. We're made straight. So how do we respond?

[38 : 56] See, that's what's going to happen right now with the rest of the text, just bringing it up very, very briefly in closing, is that Amos would have had a public ministry. It wasn't that Amos wrote these few things down and just sort of left it in a book in a coffee shop and then forgot about it.

Amos would have been saying these things over and over and over again in public. And probably what would have happened is that he would be, you know, there's three different genres. It's a different thing in the book of Amos.

There's three different genres, chapter one and two, chapters three through six and chapters seven to nine. And he would have maybe been giving these different things at different times and maybe talking to people about explaining what they meant and making them practical and real.

And eventually, they would have gotten written down. So how do you respond? So the rest of the chapter gives us the warning, the spiritual warning about how not to respond. You see, God wants us to respond by repentance and by intercession.

Calling out to God for others because we have a compassion for our city and our nation and the other institutions. And repentance because we want to bow to his word.

[40 : 02] What we don't want to do is silence God. But that's the very, very deeply ingrained human habit in the face of the true God speaking is to ask him to be silent.

Listen to how it happens here in verse 10. The visions are over. Amos has had his conversations with God. He's proclaimed this publicly in Bethel and Amaziah.

Verse 10. That Amaziah, the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam, king of Israel, saying, Amos has conspired against you. He lies, basically. Amos hasn't conspired against Jeroboam.

But Amaziah, hearing all of these things, he wants to get Amos in trouble and he lies. 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 must go into exile and from his land. And then after Amaziah has in a sense sent this to the king with the hope that the king will do something, probably in terms of executing Amos, Amaziah speaks to Amos.

[41 : 12] Verse 12. And Amaziah said to Amos, O seer, go, flee, away to the land of Judah and eat bread there and prophesy there. But never again prophesy at Bethel for it is the king's sanctuary and it is a temple of the kingdom.

Know what that is? He doesn't say it's God's sanctuary and a temple for God. That's not what he says. It's the king's.

It's a temple of the kingdom. Amaziah hears God and says to God, shut up and go away.

And that's the persistent issue even for us as Christians. Part of the growth of holiness is as different parts of the Bible convict us.

Maybe about how we treat our wife or how we treat our children or how we're relating to our neighbors or our thought life or our money. Or a political view that we might have to have a view on abortion or on doctor assist, like on euthanasia that goes against our culture that means that we won't be as welcome with our set and we want God to be silent and to go away.

[42 : 28] It's the issue of holiness for the rest of our lives is that there's always part of us that wants to say to God, shut up and go away. The beginning of the Christian life doesn't come, the Christian life isn't about me teaching you techniques to never say shut up to God and go away.

The Christian life begins when we come to the point to recognize that what is being described here in the Bible is who I am and that there is a God who does exist.

And when we in a sense say, I can't fix this, God. I need you to do what only you can do. My only hope is that this plumb line you talk about is not just a moral order but is also a grace order and a mercy order and that you will have mercy upon me.

And despite the fact that there is a deep habit out of my heart to tell you to shut up and be silent, my only hope is that you will have mercy upon me. In Amos' time, they had what we think of as a surprising thing.

We have the Ten Commandments. If you go back and look in Exodus and Deuteronomy, it doesn't begin, the Ten Commandments don't begin by saying, by God saying, listen, I've thought up ten really important rules that are really smart and really wise.

[43 : 58] You need to do them. How is it introduced? I am the God who redeemed you. So listen. So in Amos' time, they could have understood that it's in the context of redemption and grace that God speaks to us.

we live more than 750 years after Amos. 750 years after Amos, Jesus came and we live now after that and we understand in a way that Amos could have only hoped that God has acted in a powerful and public way that his Son, who is our Lord, is also the one who would die for us as an act of grace, that he would give us his righteousness, our inability to tell God to shut up, to stop saying that, that Jesus never said that and his perfect life stands for ours and it's as we're gripped by what Jesus has done for us, by God's mercy, knowing that God knows all there is to know about us and how deeply ingrained we are to tell him to shut up and to go away, that God still loves us and still sent his Son and closed us with his righteousness and paid the penalty for our sins, that in light of that, he has reconciled us to God and as the Word of God confronts us about how this week we've lived as if God is small or this week we've come to realize that we have lived a certain part of our life

telling God to shut up and go away and we can say,
God, you've made that clear to me now. Help me, Father, be gripped by what you've done for me on the cross in the person of your Son that I might begin to amend my life, that I might trust that you are wise in this, that I might listen and think about it, that I might talk with other believers about what the wisdom of your Word actually means.

Lord, mindful of what you have done for me in the cross, grant me the courage to stop telling you to shut up and go away but to listen to your Word.

that's the Christian life. I invite you to walk in it if you haven't started walking in it. There's no better time than today than to call out to God for mercy and to begin to walk the Jesus way with Jesus and others.

[46 : 25] Let's stand. Bow our heads in prayer. Father, you know those parts in our lives where we don't want to bow to you.

You know those parts of our lives where we don't want to hear your Word because it's just going to threaten the way we think, it's going to threaten our politics, it's going to threaten some of our relationships. You know those ways that we think about money, for instance, and that we know that if we start to have a different, if the text about money start to affect our lives, Father, we don't want to hear that stuff, Father.

You know those things about us that we don't want to hear your Word speaking into our life, but we thank you, Father, you know everything there is to know about us until you sent your Son to die upon the cross for us. And we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would work in our lives, that we would call out to you for mercy, that we would call out to you for grace, that we would be disciples of Jesus who would trust Jesus to make us right with you.

The grace in who he is and what he's done for us in the cross and his teaching, that that would grip us. And as, Father, that gospel grips us, helps us, Father, to listen to your Word, to bow to you, to no longer tell you to be silent, but to listen to you and to begin to live free and whole and for your glory.

Father, this we ask in Jesus' name, your Son and our Savior. Amen.