

# Amos 7:1-8:3 (PM)

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So, we've been working through this book called Amos. It's one of the minor prophets right at the end of the Old Testament.

And you heard the reading tonight. It's very heavy, isn't it? It's very heavy. And I suspect some of you over this last month are getting a little bit tired of Amos. I hope not.

But I am really grateful that there is this little book in the Bible that tells us how much God has committed to us.

So committed that he won't put up with superficiality. He won't put up with complacency or hypocrisy. He won't put up with it because he wants a real relationship with us.

So, I'm grateful for Amos. Now, let's get stuck into it. We're in chapter 7 and the beginning of chapter 8. It's probably helpful to have your Bibles open. So, you heard it read and you can hear, compared to previous weeks, something a little bit different is going on.

[ 1 : 0 5 ]     Up until now, it's mostly been Amos preaching these kind of like short sermons. But here, half the passage is Amos receiving these visions from God. Very serious visions.

And the other half is this little story about a temple priest telling Amos just to sort of go away. All right. So, what's the big idea? I think it's this.

It's about how people respond to the Word of God. How people respond. The difficult words from God. So, you have these two main human characters, Amos and Amaziah, who respond very differently to what God has to say.

Now, let's think about these characters for a moment. You've got Amos on one side. In verse 14, it says, he's saying, look, I don't come from this big line of, you know, famous pastors or anything. Like, I'm just a guy.

I'm just this farm worker. Low status farm worker. I do some stuff with trees. But I'm kind of like a farm worker. Amaziah, on the other hand, he's the professional priest. He's a company man.

[ 2 : 0 9 ]     He's connected to power. He's got the ear of the king. He'd be sort of like the dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, England. He'd officiate the state funerals, he'd do the weddings for the members of the royal family, etc.

He's a privileged religious professional. So, how do each of these guys react when God says something hard?

Let's start with Amos. Chapter 7, verse 1. Amos receives his first vision. We learned from last week that Israel had become prideful and complacent and uncaring.

And the great goal for their life was comfort. God gives Amos a vision of his judgment. And the judgment takes the form of a locust invasion which was going to destroy their harvest.

Which in an agrarian economy would have been devastating. Now, let's pause here for a moment. Up until now in our sermon series, you could have gotten sort of a wrong impression about Amos, I think. And perhaps you could see him as just this kind of fearless, sort of angry proclaimer.

[ 3 : 14 ] And he kind of rolls into town and he shouts judgment at everybody. Judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment. And then kind of skips out of there. Not really engaging with God, has to say. Just sort of just delivering the message and getting out of there.

But that is not him, is it? How does Amos respond to this vision he gets? How does he respond? He responds with prayer. Prayer. Oh Lord, please forgive.

How can Jacob stand? He's so small. Jacob is another name for Israel. Please forgive Amos' praise. That's how he responds. And there's such tenderness in this prayer.

It's Lord, they're so small. They're not, they can't handle what you're going to bring to them. Verse 3. After Amos prays, it says the Lord relented.

God presses pause. He says, okay, I'm not going to, I'm not going to do, I'm not going to do the locust thing. It won't happen. Again, we see this whole thing again in verse 4.

[ 4 : 13 ] Verse 4. Again, Amos receives another vision about a judgment of fire. And this fire is sweeps across the land. It's so intense. It says here that it devours the great deep. It eats up the water.

It consumes the water. It vaporizes it. How does Amos respond to this very, heavy vision of judgment? Again with prayer. Oh Lord, please cease.

Do you notice here that he doesn't even ask the Lord to forgive them. The people, they're not going to repent anytime soon. He simply begs the Lord. He says, please. Please God. Please God, don't do this.

Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. And just to reiterate, again, I hope you don't see Amos as this one divisional cartoonish hellfire preacher.

He's a compassionate intercessor. He's praying for the people he is warning. You know, in our world, some people take delight in bringing people down.

[ 5 : 14 ] There's this whole industry of, you know, like the Karen videos and stuff. Somebody is caught out in the worst two minutes of their life. It's on video. It gets uploaded. Millions of people see it.

Their identity is released. They lose their job. You know the story. Everyone piles on. People love it. People love it. Even in Christian circles. Some of us love this.

There's been a lot of celebrity pastor failures in the last few years. It's mostly men. It seems getting caught out doing stupid things. And when that happens, there's this huge pile on.

Like I said in my social media feed with all my Christian friends all over the world. Celebrating it. Finally, I always hated those guys at that church or that particular style of Christianity.

Oh, I never liked that. Yes, they've been caught, you know. Let me read to you from Proverbs 24, 17 to 18. Do not rejoice when your enemy fails.

[ 6 : 17 ] Do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles. Lest the Lord see it and be displeased and turn away his anger from him. Do you see what it's saying there? It's not messing around. It's saying if you rejoice in the failure of others, God will see it.

He'll be more angry with you than he is with the person who failed. See, when you gloat about these things, you put yourself in a dangerous place spiritually. If we have to speak about the failure of others, people doing stupid things like these Israelites were.

If we have to speak about this stuff, we should only ever do it with grief and mercy. We should never do it without praying for them as well.

That's what Amos did. When the vision of judgment came, he wasn't punching the air in victory. And finally, yes! No. No, he was praying.

At the end of that second vision, again, the Lord says, Okay, I won't do this. I won't bring the fire. And he delays his judgment. He exercises mercy.

[ 7 : 25 ] He exercises patience. It's also a great reminder about the importance of prayers. Folks, your prayers matter. God scoops them up. He accommodates them in his plans.

So keep praying, friends. Let's keep moving here. The third vision. God shows a plumb line being held up against a wall. This is verses 8 and 9. You know what a plumb line is? It's basically just a piece of string.

The big weight on the bottom. He holds it up like that and it's a perfectly straight line. It's used in the building industry. It's an incorruptible kind of measure of straightness.

The plumb line in the vision is held up against a wall to see if the wall is straight. It isn't. The wall, as you can guess, is the people of God who, like the wall, are crooked.

And up until this point, God has been patient and merciful. And through the ministry of Amos, he has been appealing to people again and again and again. But the time for mercy has ended. And now there is the time for judgment and justice.

[ 8 : 25 ] And in the face of this vision from God, Amos in humility accepts it. As a reminder, we're talking about how different folks respond to these difficult words from God.

And we're just talking about Amos here. But now we're going to move on. Let's move to verse 10, the second half of chapter 7. We're jumping into this interesting little story. It's the conflict between the big shot priest Amaziah and Amos.

And here we see the comparison. We've seen how Amos responds. Let's see how Amaziah responds to these difficult words compared to Amos. And I can summarize it pretty quickly here for you.

It's this. Amos says, please, Lord, forgive. Amaziah says, Amos, just shut up and just leave us. Just go away. That's the summary.

But I'll give you some more details. As we said before, Amaziah is an establishment man. He's a leading religious figure. Like a lot of people in the world, he rejects any idea of a God who would judge.

[ 9 : 28 ] It's just offensive to him. It sounds ridiculous to him. So he just puts it aside. But Amos is causing enough of a drama. He can't be ignored. So Amaziah goes to see the king.

And he says to the king, Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. Which, as you know, if you've followed this so far, is a very selective. He's very selective in what he tells the king.

He kind of, Amaziah massages the message to make it as politically inflammatory as possible. To get the result he wants from the king. Which is a tactic of many who are not friendly to faith.

Often our faith is misrepresented. In the media, for example. You know, like Christians are often represented as regressive, dangerous zealots.

Or kind of, this end, kind of these cheery, you know, harmless idiots. You know, like, but either way, our message is often misrepresented. Amos doesn't spend any time on this.

[ 10 : 26 ] He just kind of, he gets on with the job. He gets on with the job of telling them what God told him. Which is admirable, I think. Admirable. Okay, back to my point.

How does Amaziah respond to God's word? Well, he misrepresents it. Moving on to 12 and 13. Amaziah just says, look, just go do your thing somewhere else, please.

Just go back to your homeland. Make some money back there. People will like you more in Judah. And let's be honest, you don't really belong here, Amos. You don't belong here in the king's sanctuary.

In the temple of his kingdom. As Amaziah describes it. It's sort of a, how dare you come here? Country bumpkin. How dare you come here and say these things to us?

That's the attitude. So Amaziah's response. There's no humble engagement in what Amos says. In fact, he never brings God up at all. It's just, it's misrepresentation. It's rejection.

[ 11 : 24 ] And it's condescension. And perhaps that's something that you have experienced as you have been public about your faith. It's not fun. We see now at the end of this little story how Amos reacts.

How Amos reacts to Amaziah's response. It's verse 14 to 16. And he just doubles down. He says here, Amos says, look, I'm no prophet.

I'm not prophet's son. I'm just like a guy who looks after sheep and look after trees. But the Lord took me and he just said, go tell these people some stuff. Amos is saying, who I am doesn't really matter in this equation.

I don't have any authority. I'm just a guy that God spoke to. I'm just passing on what God said to me as I understand it. There was a preacher in New Zealand who was a bit of a mentor to me. I loved his preaching.

He would, in a sermon when he had to say something difficult, he would say, look, I'm just a beggar telling other beggars where there's bread. I always loved that picture. And that's what Amos is saying here.

[ 12 : 28 ] It's a great reminder to what Amos says. We don't have to be anyone special or fancy to pass on God's word to others. We just have to be willing, it seems. God does have a history of using pretty unlikely people and empowering them for his work.

But let's get back to the story here. Amos was told to shut up and leave. And to that man, Amos delivers a word.

And it's a very hard word. He says, as a result of the coming invasion, your children will be lost. You'll be exiled.

And your wife in desperation will have to prostitute herself to financially support herself. Again, Amos is not afraid to say difficult things to people. Because it's not about him.

It's not his message. It's the Lord's. He's just the messenger. Okay, I'm wrapping up here. So we've been going through this little book of the Bible. And each week, it's like judgment, judgment, judgment.

[ 13 : 29 ] I know, I know. And you've probably wondered each week, is there anything else that you can possibly say about judgment? Well, chapter 7 says, yes, there is the very important issue of this.

How will we respond to it? How will we respond when God says very difficult things? When we read very difficult things?

How will we respond to it? Will we be like Amaziah? Or will we be like Amos? So let me summarize the really 40,000 foot big picture of Amos so far.

And then pose that question one more time. Here's a really, really big picture. God delays his justice. He delays his judgment. He exercises patience until he does it.

God speaks and speaks and speaks. And he warns and warns and warns until he acts on his warnings. And one day he will. And this God who speaks and warns doesn't want us to be fake Christians.

[ 14 : 35 ] He doesn't want us to fall into nominalism or hypocrisy like Amaziah. He doesn't want that to happen because he loves us. But every single human being is personally accountable to their creator.

And the New Testament tells us that God has appointed Jesus as the judge. And at some point we will face God and there will be a final separation between those who have trusted Christ and those who haven't.

And that separation will be definitive and final and eternal. And there's no getting around that biblical truth. So what does Amos do with this message? He believes it.

He talks about it. He doesn't push it aside because it's unpleasant. And remember, this is not some fire and brimstone guy. He's not a bit too delighted in the message.

No, he speaks it and he prays about it. And he prays for the people who thought he was ridiculous. He prays for them.

[ 15 : 35 ] He prays for mercy. It's a great model for us. We pray for a lot of things in life. We pray for wisdom and joy and comfort and healing and all that. Let's pray for the folks we know who are making terrible decisions.

Who are hurting themselves and dishonoring God. That's what Amos did with the message. That's what we should do with these hard words. What does Amaziah do in his arrogance?

Amos. And his desire not to rock the boat because he's got a pretty sweet gig. And his desire to only think about comfortable things and not the hard things of the faith.

He's condescending. He misrepresents the faith. And mostly he just straight out rejects it. Now I know no one here is probably going to go full Amaziah on this stuff.

But I wonder after a month of being in Amos, I wonder a little bit of Amaziah just bubbles up every now and then. And just bubbles up to the surface. And what would that look like? It would look like maybe, you know, coming to church next week and just like, oh, Amos.

[ 16 : 37 ] Again. Judgment. Again. Enough. I just, it's summer. I just want to think about nice things. You know, I understand. But I hope that's not you. I hope each week you are cut to the heart with the seriousness and certainty of God's words here.

And I hope you pray about it. I hope you pray for the people that think you are a bit off your rocker when it comes to spiritual things.

I hope you speak about it. I hope you let others know that there is a God that they are accountable to. Who offers mercy, mercy, mercy. Forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness. See, that is on offer.

And keeps offering it until he doesn't. And with Amosiah, I hope we don't misrepresent the word.

Because it suits us. As we think about this idea of judgment, I hope we don't change it. Modify it. Soften it up.

[ 17 : 43 ] Because it suits our modern sensitivities. And finally, I hope that the salvation that you enjoy because of what Christ did on the cross, I hope that is all the more precious and sweeter as a result of hearing about the judgment of God.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.