

God's Plumbline

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[0 : 0 0] Amos chapter 7 we're going to look at from verse 7 especially through to the end of the chapter but the gist of it really is in what Amaziah said to Amos in verse 12. Amaziah said to Amos O seer flee 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.

Well who would want to be a prophet in the time of Amos in the northern kingdom of Israel remember that the kingdom had split when Solomon had died and Rehoboam his son took over he caused by his rashness and foolishness the kingdom to divide and some tribes went to the northern kingdom and established a rival capital there at Samaria and they also set up rival places of worship or sacrifice at Dan and Bethel these two places they were intended to be rivals to Jerusalem as Jeroboam the first called the people to follow him and these were means that he used to try and keep the people away from what God had established at Jerusalem where Judah the tribe of Judah came to remain and have its own kings. This was a time of terrible decline and apostasy in Israel a time when as you read through Amos you can see how far from the Lord the people had gone and how much they had imported of the practices of the Canaanites the idolatry the debauchery the kind of horrible lifestyle that was part of their religion as the Canaanite religion and Israel had brought much of that into their own practice still under the impression that they were serving the Lord.

They weren't at all taking note of the fact that the prophets like Amos were saying that this was completely unacceptable to the Lord and what you find in Amos's day that he's surrounded really by apostasy departure idolatry hatred of the truth that he's conveying from God to the people and it would be bad enough if he had a team working with him if he could depend on others along with him to support him. There's no record of that. He's simply a prophet of the Lord in isolation speaking the word of the Lord to people who are adamantly against what he's saying.

And as we'll see here Amaziah the priest of Bethel this rival place of worship comes to him and says take your prophecy take your message somewhere else we don't want it here.

And as you do that as you look at that you see the imagery that God is using here where he says in verse 7 that he showed Amos the Lord saw he saw the Lord standing beside a wall built with a plumb line with a plumb line in his hand. You'll know what a plumb line is probably not much used today I don't know I'm not used to the building industry at all but it's still possibly used but in the olden days it was the means by which when you used a string with a weight on the end and left it to just settle it showed what was perpendicular what was exactly straight up and down and therefore you could measure a wall you could test the uprightness of a wall by the plumb line and if you took the plumb line and put it beside a wall and let it settle if the wall was leaning in one way or the other the plumb line showed that up there was a defect in the wall wasn't straight up and down as it used as it should have been. And that's the imagery that the prophet here is using as God led him to use this imagery of the Lord actually coming to measure his people to measure these apostate people of Israel. The Lord was saying I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel I will never again pass by them. This generation they're not going to actually anymore meet with my pity they're going to go into exile they're going to be destroyed by the forces of the Assyrians that are coming against them. I'm setting my plumb line against them.

[4 : 3 8] Now remember that God delivered these people from Egypt and that's the big illustration in the old testament of redemption or of salvation. Salvation spiritually is being redeemed from a power that holds us in oppression or captivity and delivering us so that we're free from that and into another way of life. That's what Jesus does. He delivers you from the thralldom from the grip from the power of sin and takes you into an entirely different situation so that you have instead of that place of sin and of being held in the slavery of sin you are then in the place where you are going to

be taken to heaven.

That's of course illustrated by the journey of Israel at least to a great extent it's an illustration from Egypt they were delivered they then walked with God for some time in the wilderness and then they were taken into the promised land the land that flowed with milk and honey and God settled them there but they rebelled against God and this is the result that Amos is actually speaking of here.

So what is this plumb line? What exactly was God using to measure them by? Various interpreters have different ideas about that but there are two things especially that God always emphasized to the people in relation to their relationship to him and the two things were redemption redemption and law and they came in that order. Redemption and law. God didn't give the law to Israel until he had first redeemed them from Egypt until he had set them free from the captivity of Egypt and that's how it is for ourselves spiritually as well. God has his law that we have in the ten commandments especially but it's not by a slavish obedience to that that you come to be accepted by him that you come to be righteous that you come to know salvation. Salvation comes first. You are redeemed from your sin and it's as God's redeemed people that God gave Israel his law on Mount Sinai. Deliverance from Egypt comes first and then because they are now a delivered people a people for the Lord and a people of the Lord he gives them his law and his statutes and his rules to live by. That's his own character. His own characteristics set out in the law that he gave him. It's a reflection of God's own being, God's own nature.

Everything you find in the ten commandments is really a presentation of what God himself is like and what God is like leads to what God requires to be like himself.

So that's the pattern and if you like you can look at this plumb line as a two-stranded plumb line. God is measuring the people in Amos' day by the fact that he redeemed them from Egypt, made them his people and also gave them his law.

[7 : 51] And now he's really effectively saying what have you done with those privileges? What have you done with my dealings with you? Where are you in relation to my deliverance of you from Egypt to be my people?

Where are you in relation to the law that I gave you to live in obedience to it? In other words, you could say that this two-stranded plumb line really has in consequence this redemption, this law that God gave to Israel what that really amounts to is saying you shall be holy for I, your God, am holy. Holiness is not just something that you find required by the law of God. Holiness is required by the gospel because gospel is redemption.

Gospel is salvation. Gospel is setting you free by the grace of God from the slavery of sin. And the outcome of that is that we need to be holy as God is holy.

We need to reflect the holiness of the God who redeemed us and gave us his law as setting the parameters for human behavior.

[9 : 08] That's where we are tonight. That's where all of us are as Christians tonight. Those of us who are Christians who know God's redemption for ourselves personally God is setting that against our present life.

And he's measuring us by his plumb line. And he's asking you and he's asking me tonight how near are you to this plumb line to this perfect line that I'm holding against you.

Of course, every single one of us is going to say, I can't measure up to that. I have to say that. Kenny has to say that. We preach the gospel. We know that we stand in this pulpit and preach the gospel as sinners ourselves.

As people who still have sinned to confess in our own experience on a daily basis. But here is God saying this plumb line this redemption this law it's especially in Jesus Christ.

Is that where God finds us tonight? Is that what we are striving to be like tonight? To be like this Savior in our way of life in our thoughts in our actions.

[10 : 21] None of us will be perfect in this life. Kenny mentioned this morning the words of John Newton. He was not what he would like to be.

He's not what he wanted to be. Not what he would yet be. Although he was certainly not what he used to be. That's the critical thing.

We're not what he'd like to be. None of us as Christians is. And when God's plumb line is held up against us where do you go then? If you're a Christian well you don't go to strive to meet the law in yourself though you want to be holy and to increase in holiness.

You go for your comfort to Jesus to Christ to the fulfillment of the law in him to his righteousness with which Jesus with which God covers his people.

So the two things that we want to look at tonight by way of this passage first of all what are the faults revealed by this plumb line. This is looking at the society if you like of Amos and although our own society is not a society as they were in covenant with God nevertheless there are principles here that apply to every society of human beings.

[11 : 39] A lot of people make the excuse nowadays or try to find reason their way out of out of the kind of lifestyle that a Christian life is by saying well that Bible's alright for Christians or the Ten Commandments are okay for Christians and Christians can follow them if they like but they're not for me I'm not a Christian so they have nothing to do with me.

But God's command is for human beings not just for Christians. Every single thing he sets out in the Ten Commandments are indeed aspects of human behavior that God requires.

And the faults that are revealed by this plumb line in the teaching of Amos in this passage indeed first of all there's a distortion of the truth on the part of these people.

That's exemplified or seen by way of example in Amaziah especially the way he treats and deals with Amos. So there's a distortion of the truth you can see that in verses 10 to 11.

Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam the king of Israel saying Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel the land is not able to bear all his words.

[12 : 53] For thus Amos has said Jeroboam shall die by the sword and Israel must go into exile away from his land. You see what Amaziah and what the king really are trying to do is to get rid of all the emphasis that Amos is giving in his prophecy in his ministry to the truth of God and so you find that Amaziah is really misrepresenting Amos and what he's about some misrepresentation of the truth is presenting something that's very strongly edited and that's designed to mislead the king in suggesting and stating that Amos is really up to a conspiracy in the midst of the house of Israel.

He's trying to bring people into rebellion against the king is what that amounts to really amounting to treason and rebellion conspiracy. Well of course now you have to retrace your steps and you have to retrace your steps all the way back to Eden to the garden of Eden.

Where did this kind of distortion of the truth come from? Where does the distortion of the truth that you find in our own day that you find indeed in your own heart by nature where does that distortion that inclination to twist the truth to actually pass the truth off as something else?

Where do you find that coming from? It comes of course from our sinfulness and where did our sinfulness come from? It came from our fall in our first parents in Adam and Eve in Eden.

Remember there if you recall in Eden when God created Adam and Eve and set them in the perfect environment of the garden of Eden suitable for what they were as perfect faultless human beings.

[14 : 38] in relation to what we have this evening you could say that God created truth tellers in Adam and Eve. They were created to tell the truth to speak the truth to love the truth to value the truth and the devastating thing of sin of course is that from being truth tellers they fell for the lie that Satan set before them.

that is always Satan's way that will always be the way that those who don't like the truth and value untruth instead will try and persuade us that the truth really is not something to be all that serious about.

You remember what the serpent used said to Eve has God indeed said is it really the truth?

Can you really trust God? Is this really straight up the truth? Is it not the case that he's kept things from you? That he's not been up front with you?

That he's not worthy of your trust? Now these weren't the words that Satan spoke but that was the insinuation that's the thought that he injected into their minds to turn from the truth.

[15 : 58] He misrepresented God. He misrepresented the truth that God gave. And Adam and Eve believed him and instead of being truth tellers they themselves became liars and distorters of the truth and that's been passed on to the human race ever since apart from Jesus.

Remember what happened when God searched them out in the garden and found Adam and Eve hiding trying to hide from God? Have you eaten of the fruit that I forbade you?

He said to Adam the woman whom you gave me she gave me and I ate. You see he's passing the buck he's passing off what he did he's trying to evade the truth and so he went to God went to Eve and asked her regarding what she had done the serpent beguiled me and I ate.

You see what's happened to human beings the truth tellers that God created have become liars and twistors of the truth that's why the world is how it is that's why we need the grace of Christ to clean us from within that's why we need a rebirth because in our natural state we're not truth tellers anymore we twist the truth we deviate from the truth we're twisted inside so as not to tell the truth anymore not to love the truth anymore and the society that Amos belonged to had really grossly increased their untruthfulness and disobedience to the truth of God you see there are implications to that before I leave the point this distortion of the truth implications to that really if you go back to the ten commandments and especially the ninth commandment which says which commands us not to bear thou shalt not bear false witness against your neighbor because to bear false witness to distort the truth to manipulate the truth to misrepresent your neighbor or whoever it is what is that doing it's destroying their reputation it's destroying their good name it's something that they may never get back again that's an important point in the society we belong to because sadly there's little hesitation on the part of many people and many people in authority and some in the media all sorts of agencies all sorts of different situations and circumstances that people are in and there's little hesitation in twisting the truth in misrepresenting people in actually suggesting they're something other than they are people get ahead that way in human terms they manage to advance their cause in that way by untruth truth so Amos is calling the people back to be truthful to be the truth of

God when you think of God's plumb line today and setting it against our own society well the wall's not very straight is it you could say in some ways it's almost flat on the ground in the words of Isaiah truth is fallen in our streets just as if truth were a figure personifies the truth and says this is what's happened to us this overlap with the prophecy of Amos Amos the northern kingdom Isaiah and the southern kingdom complaining of the same thing God's message in the same way pointing to untruth and unreliability well there's distortion of the truth and you can see how that comes so relevant in our own circumstances to whatever we are let's be straight let's be honest let's not be misrepresenters of any human being whatever we think of them however much they differ from us however much we might be tempted to hate them or just say something about them that isn't just quite true remember the ninth commandment remember

[20 : 20] God's truth remember God's plumb line not only is there distortion of the truth but there's secondly a hatred of the truth look at verse 12 Amaziah said to Amos O seer flee away to the land of Judah and eat bread there and prophesy there but never again prophesy at Bethel for that's the king sanctuary and is a temple of the kingdom now you notice who the speaker is the speaker is the priest of Bethel the religious leader of Bethel and he's gutted in for this Amos because Amos is speaking for God and the things of God are against the things that Amaziah and his king have been promoting and what is he really saying he's saying effectively he's saying Amos we don't want your message here anymore do you not understand that this is the king's temple do you not know that this in fact is Bethel the king's sanctuary this is the temple of the kingdom this is what we're about and you're actually interfering with it and we don't want your truth here anymore we want you to take your truth somewhere else go south maybe they'll listen to you there anyway even if they won't we want rid of it don't stay here and preach your message take it somewhere else isn't that relevant isn't that relevant in today's world that you and

I seek to live in as being truthful for God don't you find religious leaders departing from the teaching of the Bible on so many subjects don't just pick out one or two just wherever it's that departs from the truth on whatever aspect of the truth God is mentioning or commending to us where you find religious leaders in opposition to that and basically saying we don't want your Calvinistic or evangelistic message here this is the king's sanctuary this is for us we're in charge here take your message somewhere else of course you can expand that as you well know into education into other areas of our society whether it's in medical ethics or you find so much now that's a drive towards the likes of euthanasia abortion of course has been in practice for many many years and sadly no decline but rather an increase in it same happening all over the world when you try and bring the message of the gospel the message of God's word the message of the sanctity of human life the message of education to be based upon the truth of

God whatever it is we're teaching the truth of God has to underlie it what are you told you're told very often well that doesn't belong here that's outdated this is the king's sanctuary this is now 2019 we don't actually allow these things anymore and people who believe these things well they're not fit for public office they shouldn't bring their Christianity into public office they can be Christian

somewhere else they can go and be isolated by themselves they can believe what they want to believe elsewhere but don't make it part of what you teach there's a hatred of the truth and there's a temptation to us all in that like there was a temptation for Amos as well because Amos might have thought to himself well why should I put myself through this why shouldn't I go south why shouldn't I take up my prophecy somewhere else and I can be done with this kind of stuff this kind of opposition this kind of hatred

I can go somewhere else where this isn't really my experience and isn't that one of the ways in which the world and the devil will try to tempt yourself away from standing for Christ when the message is brought to you from whatever source take that away from here go south go somewhere else go to people who might be of the same mind as yourself but don't promote the values of Jesus and of the law of God here in this place you can see how relevant all these Old Testament books are how incredibly up to date this incident is in the experience of Amos confronted by Amaziah there's the false revealed we're generalizing of course there are others too but there's a distortion of the truth all along just to try and discredit Amos and there's also a hatred of the truth to try and displace him from where he is secondly though that's counteracted by the faithfulness of Amos as God's prophet verses 14 and 15 then Amos answered and said to Amaziah

I was no prophet nor a prophet's son but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs but the Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me go prophesy to my people Israel now that for you hear the word of the Lord you see how Amos is countering the threat or the way that Amaziah has come to him with this message and what Amos is really saying is this is not my doing this is not my idea I haven't invented this message I haven't chosen myself to take up this occupation the Lord has appointed me I was a herdsman I wasn't a prophet to begin with I was a dresser of sycamore figs but the Lord took me from that the Lord set me where I am the Lord now is putting words for me to speak to you as the people of God the covenant people of God and he said to me the Lord said to me go prophesy to my people

[26 : 21] Israel and isn't that how in the New Testament there is a similar incident you remember in Acts chapter 4 where Peter and John and the other apostles were going out with a message of the gospel and were suffering greatly for it when they were cast into prison and then gathered before the religious authorities and you remember the authorities got together and said what are we going to do with these men they have performed a notable miracle or through them this miracle has been performed so we can't deny that but we don't want them to speak anymore so that this may not spread any further let's warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name the name of Jesus so they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus but Peter and rather than to God you must judge for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard and when they had further threatened them they let them go finding no way to punish them because of the people for all were praising

God and that's how we too need to react to the threat to displace us from speaking for Christ whether it's by the written word by the spoken word or relation with other people this is what distortion of the truth and hatred of the truth is seeking to do to displace you or to discredit you and displace you as well and your obedience to God and our obedience to God not just individually but as a congregation of people to be obedient to the Lord in our calling in the mandate that God has given us because opposition to that mandate which is given to his church that remains to this day that is our minded mandate as a congregation to go forth with the message of Christ into the world go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father of the son of the holy spirit teaching them to observe all things that

I have commanded you and lo I am with you to the end of the age people will say to you we don't want that we don't want people converted we want all religions to be regarded as the same or coming finally to the same point of termination we want Islam we want Buddhism we want even secularism to be treated on exactly the same level as Christianity we don't want this message that Christ is the way the truth and the life and the only way to God and the only way to acceptance with God how do you react to that well you say thus says the Lord I have a mandate from Christ to be true to him that's not to say we'll see that in a minute that I have to do this in a harsh way in a condemnatory way in a way that's anything other than loving and kind and patient and tactful all of that needs to be there but not to the compromise of truth itself his obedience to

God is evident there the Lord took me and the Lord said to me go prophesy now therefore hear the word of the Lord and then his faithfulness to God as you see that is in the next part of the passage

he's saying to Amaziah you say do not prophesy against Israel do not preach against the house of Isaac by which he means the same people therefore thus says the Lord see there's Amaziah so confident that if he can just get rid of Amos if he can just get rid of that teaching that's what he means in verse 10 there the land is not able to bear all his words what he's really saying if people start listening to him and believing him it's going to be a disaster the land is going to come to be divided this is just going to end in tragedy and counteracting that Amos says well that's what you're saying take these words away don't prophesy against Israel don't preach against the house of Isaac therefore thus says the

Lord you always have to counter untruth or misrepresentation with truth itself and the truth will always show itself to be the truth you see Amos is focusing on the origin of the truth on the origin of the words that he's prophesying or preaching and the origin of course is God himself it's not a human invention it's nothing less than what God has given to him to teach not only the origin but also the effect of that word that's this word preach in verse 16 the second half of it where he says don't prophesy against it don't preach against the house of Isaac that is an absolutely beautiful word in Hebrew because it means literally just to drop like droplets of rain or that you might find with dew similar to what Hosea says in chapter 14 where God is saying to Israel regarding future blessing [31 : 57] I will be like the Jew to Israel what is more gentle than Jew as it falls during the night onto the ground but for all its gentleness it's incredibly productive it's fructifying it gives the necessary conditions for growth we have to remember that when we're denouncing sin that we try it all cost to do it like the dropping of the rain with the gentleness of the Jew not to speak in or seek to preach in a way that's just rowing with people harsh arguments what Amos is saying what Amaziah is actually saying here is really a reflection of what Amos himself was doing Amaziah knew very well that Amos was actually dropping the words of the

Lord like the Jew on Israel he wasn't being harsh with them he wasn't scolding them he was firm with them he pointed out sin for sin that it was but he did it compassionately he did it with understanding he did it with patience he did it with tact and certainly that's what we seek to do in preaching the gospel we're committed to that spirit and that's what you are committed to as a Christian as well to drop the words of the Lord to be like the Jew to those you witness to to try and win them by the grace of God to see the attractiveness of Christ to see all aspects of Christ's person as king as judge as Lord as saviour and you notice he's saying here well you're saying don't prophesy against Israel you're saying don't preach against the house of Isaac don't drop your words therefore thus says the Lord God is answering Amaziah through Amos and that's an incredibly solemn answer Amos you see Amaziah saying if we can get rid of Amos the land will be fine everything will be good everything will settle down let's just get rid of this person and this preaching this message and let's just get on with it and Amos has to tell him thus says the Lord you can get rid of me but God's word will be fulfilled your wife shall be a prostitute in the city and your sons and your daughter shall fall by the sword and your land will be divided with a measuring land you yourself will die in an unclean land and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land you see the Assyrians are on the horizon ready to overtake Israel Jeroboam and Amaziah will disappear wiped from the pages of history through their disobedience against God Amaziah is a tragedy everyone who hears the words of the Lord and continues in disobedience against them everyone is a tragedy Amaziah heard the word of God he refused he refused to accept it he refused it as the truth he thought he was better without it or that he could manage on his own that he could lead the country along with the king into better times but Amos has to say to him this word of the Lord through me will be fulfilled you'll see it you will know then what is truth and what is it and so it is for you and for me too however many people you see saying that this

Bible is unreliable outdated that it can't possibly be the word of God there are so many things in it that just don't add up thus says the Lord you reject his word and you will find out that it is true and I hope you and I will not find that out to our cost the way Amaziah did all of those souls in hell tonight know one thing for sure that the word of God is true that they were fools to neglect it they have an eternal regret which will never end because God's word will not be laughed at will not be displaced will not remain unfulfilled thus saves the Lord let's pray

[37 : 13] Lord help us we pray to be obedient to your word and all that you set before us whether it is in prophecy in law or in gospel whatever type of teaching it is grant us faith to respond grant us we pray to bow before you to acknowledge the authority of your word the truth of your word help us

