

**The Visions of Amos the Herdsman**  
**Lesson 3**  
**Amos 6:1 – 7:17**

In the last chapter, the Lord declared that He hated and rejected the festivals of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Furthermore, He did not accept their burnt offerings or worship music because they were simultaneously worshiping their idols.

**Leaders to Exile**

Amos 6:<sup>1</sup> Woe to those who are at ease in Zion and to those who *feel* secure in the mountain of Samaria, the distinguished men of the foremost of nations, to whom the house of Israel comes. <sup>2</sup> Go over to Calneh and look, and go from there to Hamath the great, then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are they better than these kingdoms, or is their territory greater than yours? <sup>3</sup> Do you put off the day of calamity, and would you bring near the seat of violence? <sup>4</sup> Those who recline on beds of ivory and sprawl on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, <sup>5</sup> who improvise to the sound of the harp, *and* like David have composed songs for themselves, <sup>6</sup> who drink wine from sacrificial bowls while they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, they will now go into exile at the head of the exiles, and the sprawlers' banqueting will pass away.

In God's eyes, Israel was the foremost of all the nations even though she was guilty of a great national sin against the Lord. Her sin was instigated by her leaders who led her astray. But the people did not know any better. They trusted their leadership whom God blamed for the people's sin. In this passage, God instructed the Israelite leaders to look at Calneh, Hamath and Gath to see if they were better off than Israel. Calneh, which sat on the east side of the Tigris River, was not better off because Assyria had done away with its leadership in 794 BC. <sup>13</sup> Hamath was not better off because Jeroboam II defeated them and then Assyria took them over as well Calneh. <sup>14</sup> Gath had fallen to Uzziah, the king of the Southern Kingdom, so it was not better off. <sup>15</sup> All three were once powerful cities that controlled powerful nations around Israel, but they had all recently been overthrown. The nation powers to the east, north and south of Israel had been overthrown so the Northern Kingdom was vain to think that she could continue to stand. However, the Israelite leadership could not see that they were in the same danger.

Although Amos was not the first to warn the Israelites of the impending judgment, they had the notion that it was still far off. This attitude seemed to provide an incentive to remain in their reckless and sinful life. <sup>16</sup> Yet, their refusal to repent actually brought the day of judgment upon them sooner than they expected it. Even so, this message was not for the majority of the Israelites. It was for their wealthy wicked leaders who slept on opulent beds which were inlaid with ivory décor, ate the choice meats for self-gratification, sang songs about their own foolishness and fancied their songs to be equal with David while they were drinking wine from basins, not cups. They also lathered themselves in fragrant expensive oils, not ointments, and forgot the horrid national wound of sin that would soon bring an

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<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 10:9

<sup>14</sup> 2 Kings 14:25; 2 Kings 18:34

<sup>15</sup> 2 Chronicles 26:6

<sup>16</sup> Ecclesiastes 8:12-13

end to their kingdom. All of the aspects of their lifestyle would cease when the survivors went into captivity beyond Damascus. History records that this judgment occurred in 722 BC.

### Warning to Jacob

Amos 6:<sup>8</sup> The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, the Lord God of hosts has declared: "I loathe the arrogance of Jacob, and detest his citadels; therefore I will deliver up *the* city and all it contains."

The context of Amos has already revealed Jacob's city to be the town of Bethel. Jacob established it as his home when, at the age of 91, he left Laban's family. Amos was delivering these prophecies in Bethel because it was one of the two citadels of calf worship.<sup>17</sup> Bethel was near Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, and the kings had established a throne in Bethel where they could rule while they worshipped their false gods. Bethel should have been a spiritual, holy and sanctified place where the true God was worshipped, but it wasn't. It was a den of idol worshipping in flagrant rejection of all that is holy and right.

### Israel Crushed

Amos 6:<sup>9</sup> And it will be, if ten men are left in one house, they will die. <sup>10</sup> Then one's uncle, or his undertaker, will lift him up to carry out *his* bones from the house, and he will say to the one who is in the innermost part of the house, "Is anyone else with you?" And that one will say, "No one." Then he will answer, "Keep quiet. For the name of the Lord is not to be mentioned." <sup>11</sup> For behold, the Lord is going to command that the great house be smashed to pieces and the small house to fragments. <sup>12</sup> Do horses run on rocks? Or does one plow them with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood, <sup>13</sup> You who rejoice in Lodebar, and say, "Have we not by our *own* strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?" <sup>14</sup> "For behold, I am going to raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel," declares the Lord God of hosts, "And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of the Arabah."

Once again, Amos described the extent of the destruction of the kingdom when it was finally overtaken. If ten men were living in a house all but one would die. In every circumstance, 90% would die and 10% would live. In this example, the nearest relative, the uncle had the responsibility of burying the dead. <sup>18</sup> The NASB fails to translate verse 10 correctly. It should read, "And if a relative who is to burn the bodies comes to carry them out of the house," as it is rendered in the NIV and KJV. Burial was the normal means of disposing of the dead if the burial could occur before 6:00 PM on that day, but if not, then cremation was another option. King Saul and his three sons were cremated. <sup>19</sup> In the story, the uncle warned the sole survivor to keep quiet so he would not also die. Why was this one man overlooked by the soldiers in the story? It was because he called upon the name of the Lord. The uncle warned him to hold his tongue and encouraged him to get out of the house before it was crushed to the ground in accordance with the order of the Lord.

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<sup>17</sup> The other was the town of Dan.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 25:9; 35:29; Judges 16:31 - Notice that the uncle, the nearest living relative in this case, was also the one who would act as the undertaker and be responsible for the disposition of the bodies.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Samuel 31

To prove His point, the Lord asked two questions to which everyone would know the answers. Horses do not run well on rocks and farmers do not use cows to plow the rocks like they do the soil. The questions point to the real problem with the Israelite leader. They were guilty of such cruel folly. These analogies illustrate what the leadership had done. By turning justice into gall and righteousness into hemlock, they had thwarted the people from knowing God's benefits. They were rock hard in their rebellion and God would abandon them as a pile of rocks rather than use them as a plot of land well-tilled and ready for planting.

The Northern Kingdom was fraught with arrogance. In the days of David, Israel had attacked and destroyed Lodebar, and from that day on, the name of the town meant barrenness in the Hebrew mind.<sup>20</sup> It was a victory that the United Kingdom never forgot. Yet, they had forgotten that it was the Lord who had helped them in that battle. In their arrogance toward the Lord, they boasted in their recapturing of the city of Karmain and all the Promised Land back to its original borders at Hamath.<sup>21</sup> Jeroboam II was able to accomplish this feat because of the ministry of Jonah to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria which had been fortifying Syria and encroaching on the Israelite's northern boundaries. Little did they know that Assyria would later use Hamath as the starting point to march right through the Northern Kingdom all the way to the brook of Arabah or the southern boundary where the Kedron empties into the Dead Sea just south of Jericho.<sup>22</sup>

### **Vision of the Locust Swarm**

**Amos 7:**<sup>1</sup> Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, He was forming a locust-swarm when the spring crop began to sprout. And behold, the spring crop was after the king's mowing.<sup>2</sup> And it came about, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I said, "Lord GOD, please pardon! How can Jacob stand, for he is small?"<sup>3</sup> The Lord changed His mind about this. "It shall not be," said the Lord.<sup>4</sup> Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, the Lord GOD was calling to contend *with them* by fire, and it consumed the great deep and began to consume the farm land.<sup>5</sup> Then I said, "Lord GOD, please stop! How can Jacob stand, for he is small?"<sup>6</sup> The Lord changed His mind about this. "This too shall not be," said the Lord GOD.

Amazingly, this passage is one of the few examples of prophecy that will never be fulfilled because the Lord decided never to fulfill it. Amos begged the Lord God not to send the plagues of locusts and fire and the Lord agreed not to fulfill the vision. Do not confuse this vision with that of the locusts in the book of Joel; his vision will be fulfilled during the tribulation of Israel just before the Lord's Second Coming.

One interesting note can be made about the unfulfilled passage. It speaks of the king's mowing. In the days of the Northern Kingdom, the king extracted his tax on the fields before the harvest was begun. He had the pick of the best parts of each field and the owners would have to wait to put their crops in the barns until the king was finished.

### **Plumb Line against Israel**

**Amos 7:**<sup>7</sup> Thus He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand.<sup>8</sup> The Lord said to me, "What do you see, Amos?" And

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<sup>20</sup> 2 Samuel 9:4; 17:27

<sup>21</sup> A city in the tribal area of Manassah taken by Syria.

<sup>22</sup> 2 Kings 14:25

I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold I am about to put a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel. I will spare them no longer. <sup>9</sup> "The high places of Isaac will be desolated and the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste. Then I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

A plumb line consists of a piece of string with a pointed weight on the end. When it is hung and allowed to come to a complete stop, the string is perfectly perpendicular to the ground. It is used in construction to make sure the walls are perfectly vertical to the foundation. It is extremely accurate and walls that are out of plumb cannot hide their error next to the plumb line. If a wall that is out of plumb cannot be straightened, it must be torn down and rebuilt correctly.

The plumb line represents God's standards and the Northern Kingdom was out of plumb. In God's eyes, the Northern Kingdom cannot be straightened out and must be torn down, including the kingly line.

### **Amaziah against Amos**

**Amos 7:**<sup>10</sup> Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent *word* to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words. <sup>11</sup> "For thus Amos says, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.'" <sup>12</sup> Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! <sup>13</sup> "But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence." <sup>14</sup> Then Amos replied to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. <sup>15</sup> "But the Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.'

Bethel, along with Dan, contained the royal sanctuaries of calf worship and Amaziah was the chief priest of such idol worship in Bethel. Upset with Amos' words, he misquoted them to Jeroboam. Amos never said that Jeroboam would die by the sword. He said the sword would rise up against the house of Jeroboam. Amaziah was attempting to excite the king, but Jeroboam paid no attention to his warning. Amaziah then insisted that Amos leave the Northern Kingdom and return to his own homeland in the Southern Kingdom to do his prophesying and eating of bread. Amaziah wanted Amos far away from Bethel and the king's chapel in the town. Amos replied to Amaziah, defending his position that he was called by God to enter Bethel and reveal these visions to the Northern Kingdom. He was just a herdsman and grower of figs minding his own business when the Lord called him to this all important task.

### **Amos against Amaziah**

**Amos 7:**<sup>16</sup> "Now hear the word of the Lord: you are saying, 'You shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you speak against the house of Isaac.' <sup>17</sup> "Therefore, thus says the Lord, 'Your wife will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled up by a *measuring* line and you yourself will die upon unclean soil. Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.'"

Amos' reply to Amaziah should have devastated him. There were prophets in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, but those in the north were different. Elijah and Elisha, prophets to the Northern Kingdom, prophesied with great and awesome power as spokesmen for God. When they spoke, all of nature obeyed. To hear now from Amos' mouth that Amaziah's wife would become a harlot, his children would die by the sword and he would die when the land of the Northern Kingdom was under the control of another nation must have rattled Amaziah to the bone. Because Israel considered their land to be polluted if another nation controlled it, this prophecy meant Amaziah would die when the kingdom was firmly in the hands of another nation.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 24:5; Jeremiah 2:7