

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

PLUMBING A MYSTERY

Amos 7:7-15 [16-17]

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Chris Repp

7This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. 8And the Lord said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; 9the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

10Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. 11For thus Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'" 12And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; 13but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom." 14Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, 15and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

[16"Now therefore hear the word of the Lord. You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.'" 17Therefore thus says the Lord: 'Your wife shall become

a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parceled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.'"]

Author's Note: First, it seems to me that while vv. 16-17 are difficult words, the rest of this pericope makes no sense without them. I have included them here for needed context. Second, it will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with Amos that there is no Gospel in this pericope. Nor is there Good News in the "Gospel" text for the day (Mark 6:14-29). Following Melancthon's dictum that where the gospel is lacking it must be added in, (see Edward H. Schroeder, "Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?" in the Crossings archive: <https://crossings.org/archive/ed/IsThereLutheranHermeneutics.pdf>). I have chosen to draw on the second reading for this Sunday (Ephesians 1:3-14) for help with the Prognosis section of my analysis.

DIAGNOSIS: Out of Line

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : Crooked

Amos pulled no punches in conveying God's message to the Northern Kingdom. God's chosen people had made a mockery of justice and oppressed the poor. God's plumb line showed the nation to be fatally out of line. It is hard to read through Amos chapters 1-6 and not think of the situation in our own country. How do we measure up to God's plumb line? Have we also trampled the poor and afflicted the righteous?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : Defiant

Behind the corruption and indifference to the poor is a misplaced faith. The people have turned away from God to other gods and to their own devices, and have not even turned to God

for help in times of trouble (see Amos 4). And now, when they have been measured and found wanting, they only want to blame the messenger. Moreover, they assume that God's prophet is like them, concerned only about "earning his bread." In so doing, they make themselves deaf to God's word. What about us? Can we hear God's word of judgment on us? Can we even believe that there could be such a thing? Judgment on us, the greatest nation the world has ever seen? Or are we only willing to hear "God bless America"?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Abandoned*

Whether they will hear it or not, God's judgment stands. The out-of-plumb people of Israel are doomed to fall. Not only is gravity (natural consequences) fighting against their crookedness, God now actively opposes them as their enemy, preparing to rise against them, to destroy everything they have come to put their trust in, and to send them into exile. And, again, what about us? Are we, likewise, doomed? Hard to know, isn't it, if we have shut the mouths of the prophets who would dare utter a word against our beloved land or our cherished way of life.

PROGNOSIS: Re-Aligned

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Adopted*

There is another message, though, even (especially) for those who suspect that God's word of judgment through Amos might apply also to them. Because it does. This is the mystery of God's will. For God, too, has gone into exile. Forsaking divine prerogative, the Son has left the Father to come among us as one of us in Jesus Christ, to suffer the consequences of our out-of-plumb condition so that the world God so loves might be straightened out in him. Will we hear this message?

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Hopeful*

Something happens to us when we do hear this message. Our hearts

are changed, weaned away from our old allegiances and turned to the true source of life (cf. Eph. 1:12). Turning away from self-interest and tribalism, we put their trust in God's promises, and this opens our hearts not only to God, but also to the world God so loves.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Upright (Holy and Blameless)

Following our Lord's example, impelled by the compassion he has taught us, we who have been made children of God now go into exile as well. Ignoring our survival instincts and forsaking our illusions of security, we go to live among those exiled by sin to call them back to God and into God's family. And as we carry out that call, we live in hope for the day when all things are made new, and heaven and earth are finally plumb.