

First Presbyterian Church
Amos 7:7-14, Lessons of a DIY Builder
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 7/20/2025

This is a hard passage to read, and it's a hard passage to consider in our own day.
It's not what we would consider to be a "uplifting" kind of passage.

And yet the Bible is FULL of passages like this one –
the prophetic literature of the Bible contains
many pronouncements of judgment
on wayward human activities.

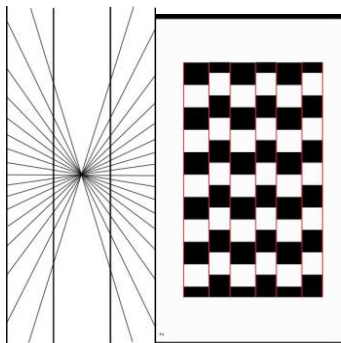
How do the messages of God's goodness, mercy and love
connect with the messages of judgement, wrath, and punishment?
What is the relationship between these kinds of passages?

Some people say there are different versions of God being presented.
That would be problematic – we would always be wondering
which version of God we were reading about in the Bible.
Some people just write off these passages as antiquated and irrelevant
because we now have Jesus.

But Jesus also spoke words of judgment,
and Jesus often quoted the Old Testamen prophets.

I think these passages (in both the Old and New Testaments)
come from experiencing the goodness, love, and mercy of God,
(which are the same yesterday, today, and forever),
and then being confronted with the crookedness of the world.

To illustrate, I have illustrations.



Are the lines straight? Or are they crooked? How can we know for sure?

Bring in ... the plumb line!

[Check the printed out illusions with a real plumb line]

When we live in a world of optical illusions,

we can be convinced that curved lines are straight
and straight lines are curved. [REPEAT]

I repeated that line because I see this illusion played out every day.

The plumb line represents the Kingdom of God. It is reliable. It is trustworthy.
It is ... true.

When we draw near to God through faith, in prayer, in song, in fellowship,
in confessing our shortcomings and receiving the grace of Christ,
in mission, in service to others,

we gain entrance into the Kingdom of God.

We hear and touch and see what life is like when God is present with us,
and it is wonderful! We receive mercy and extend it to others.

By God's grace and forgiveness,

through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit,

we are invited and empowered to live
in alignment with the plumbline.

But when we move from those times into contact with a world of degradation,
violence, and corruption, there's a shock to our system.

When we see God's creation being plundered to benefit the rich,
when we wonder why we have so much poverty
along with so many wasted resources,
we feel the sharp shift in contexts.

The way of harmony with God and creation gets twisted and misconstrued.

When the community of faith experiences this dramatic contrast,
there are three responses:

- 1) Give into the world and accept the illusion as reality
(this is apostasy and leads to even more sin and death)
- 2) Grieve the world's brokenness through lament
(this is very important, but does not lead to change)
- 3) Grapple with the crooked world through prophetic critique.
(this is part of God's transformative love)

Why do prophetic passages seem so angry?

Precisely because the authors have been exposed
to the goodness and mercy and love of God
that has moved them to become angry in the face of injustice,
to lament the state of our sinful world.

Scriptures that declare God's everlasting kindness
and scriptures that declare God's judgment on wickedness
are not in conflict with each other!

(Is it kind or loving to allow child abuse to continue?)

Nor are these things a matter of personality, personal preferences or style.
These modes of relationship with God
and our communities *depend upon one another*.

You cannot have prophetic critique or lament without kindness and mercy.
And, because the world has not yet conformed to the likeness of Christ,
you cannot dwell on kindness and mercy
without being driven to prophetic critique and lament.

remember that this word from Amos emerges from an experience of
the nearness and goodness of God,
not on a view of God that lacks those qualities.

CONTEXT: Particularly important in this story.

- Amos is a southerner, a Judean, prophesying in the North, in Israel.
- David -- Saul -- Rehoboam (overtaxes, North revolts) -- Jeroboam (King of Israel in the north)

- Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12, orders two calves made, placed in Bethel and Dan, so that the people do not travel to Jerusalem to worship there and then reject Jeroboam as king.
 - Political move with religious consequences.
 - Sets up his own system of priests -- even priests who aren't Levites.
 - The effects of this effort carry over all the way until the NT -- Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman about where we should worship.
- The Jeroboam that Amos deals with is actually Jeroboam II, who came into power about 100 years after Jeroboam I.

v. 7-8, **"This is what he showed me:**

**The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb,
with a plumb line in his hand."**

Amos has a vision of the Lord standing by a straight wall.

This thing has been built well, and the Lord is standing next to it
with an ancient builders tool that is still used today – a plumb line.

Building photos

At various steps during this project, I have learned that I can't trust my eyes.

When nailing the frame together, it would often look square enough.

But later when installing windows and doors, I realized there were
some significantly out of place studs.

When that happened, I had to get out the splitting maul,

and whack the misaligned studs until they were in line with the level.

Why did I whack at the studs? Because I was irrationally angry?

No – it was because I wanted the building to stand strong for a long time.

Yahweh says, "Amos, what do you see?" And he replies, "A plumb line."

Then the Lord said, **"I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel.**

I will spare them no longer."

God is saying, “I know what’s straight and what’s crooked -- and look,
I’ve got a straight wall right here.

But Israel is crooked, and I will not let it stand.”

Crooked how? That’s why we need the context from 1 Kings 12.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel is totally lopsided

in terms of knowing, worshipping, and submitting to the ways of God.

The old V-8 commercials come to mind where people are walking around
20 degrees off-center.

It’s obvious, God doesn’t even need a plumb line to guess that one,
but has one handy anyway.

When the nationalistic religion was instituted in 1 Kings 12,
the people probably felt a bit of a shock.

But the problem is that Israel has been in this situation for about 150 years.

They have adapted to their environment,
and now they don’t know how crooked they are.

Just as I might whack misaligned studs with a maul,

God says all the crooked places in the Northern Kingdom will be eliminated:

**“The high places of Isaac will be destroyed
and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined.”**

In vv. 10-11 the things Amos has been prophesying are reported to Jeroboam
by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel.

(Remember, this was one of the fake religious sites
instituted by the first Jeroboam ...

Amaziah is thus a fake priest).

Amaziah both accuses Amos of raising a conspiracy against the king, and he says,
“The land cannot bear all of his words.”

Speaking the truth in the midst of political and religious corruption
threatens to reveal their deceitful illusions.

Here's the thing with people who run the world based on illusions...
they don't like being seen.

So we hear this line, "Get out, you seer!"

Watch for people in your life and in our world who fear being seen.

Watch for those who say to an investigation,
"Well, that's enough we need to move on!"
They are hiding something.

And why should this seer stop seeing what he sees?

v. 13, "because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."

Political and religious propriety requires that Amos
not denounce their political and religious corruption.

What we have here in Amos 7 is Jewish Nationalism.

It's no better than Muslim Nationalism

or Christian Nationalism, or Hindu Nationalism.

The way of faith is never the way of nationalism.

1) Christians should never feel defensive about their sin.

- It's the false priests -- Christian or otherwise -- who duck, dodge, and tell the seer to go back where they came from.
 - We have no reason to feel defensive about our own sin or the sins of the church.
 - We don't have to protect "the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."
 - If something is off, then it's off, and God knows it's off, too!

2) Christians who are near to God should also feel free to make note of their dislocation in the world.

- The church has a prophetic role to play in the world (and in the church).
 - We can speak out what we discern about the world as we have encountered God.
 - Lament and prophetic critique are treated like “bad news bears.”
 - They can be unhealthy sources of bitterness, complaint, or playing the victim.
 - But every form of expressing our connection with God has potential pitfalls!
 - Let’s not hold back on recognizing political/religious corruption (esp. when they’re connected).
- The church continues not only the priestly ministry of Jesus, but also the prophetic ministry of Jesus.

Whenever I make a critique of racism, sexism, nationalism in the church –
this is the basis of those critiques.

It’s not that I harbor self-hatred of being white, male or American –
those are all identities I am grateful for.

But when I see these things becoming twisted and used abusively,
then I experience a break in my experience from the things of God,
and I feel compelled to call out what I see happening.

3) Beware of anytime that you feel too comfortable,
aren’t asking any hard questions.

- This can mean that you simply aren’t paying attention, and you think something is curved when you would have said it was straight before.
- Please don’t hear me saying that you should be afraid to be joyful.
 - I think we should always be joyful, even when times are evil.
 - Our joy comes from the knowledge of God’s goodness toward the world in Christ, and that is always true.
 - We can be joyful, fulfilled people, but still be aware of people and institutions who are crooked, who are misaligned with the K of G.