

Seeing it as it is: Amos 7

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[0 : 0 0] It's nice to be with you tonight. I was in a church in North Eust just a couple of weeks ago and everybody sat at the back. There were only ten and the church was twice the length of this one so I really appreciate you sitting fairly close tonight. It was a kind of night just like tonight outside but the one good thing about it is I had no problems parking my car because we were away in the middle of nowhere but tonight here I had problems parking but it's good to be here and this is the sort of a book, it's the sort of chapter that I don't think any preacher would choose to preach on. So when Johnny sent it to me I thought oh here we go. So if you've got your Bible it's the book of Amos and it's chapter 7. I'm reading from the English Standard Version ESV.

This is God's Word. This is what the Lord God showed me. Behold he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout and behold it was the latter growth after the king's mowing. When they had finished eating the grass of the field I said oh Lord God please forgive. How can Jacob stand? He's so small. The Lord relented concerning this. It shall not be said the Lord. This is what the Lord God showed me. Behold the Lord God was calling for a judgment by fire and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. Then I said oh Lord God please cease.

How can Jacob stand? He's so small. The Lord relented concerning this. This also shall not be said the Lord. This is what he showed me. Behold the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line with a plumb line in his hand and the Lord said to me Amos what do you see? And I said a plumb line. Then the Lord said behold I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel. I will never again pass by them. The high places of Isaac shall be made desolate and the sanctuaries of Israel should be laid waste and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword. Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam 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. For thus Amos has said Jeroboam shall die by the sword and Israel must go into exile away from his land. And Amaziah said to Amos oh seer go fly 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. 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 therefore hear the word of the Lord. You say do not prophesy against Israel and do not preach against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus says the Lord your wife shall be a prostitute in the city and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line. You yourself shall die in an unclean land and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land. And this is God's word. Just a brief prayer. Father we thank you for these great truths that echo down to us from the dawn of history. We thank you that we're able to have a look here at the sermon notes as it were of this preacher of long ago. And we just ask for your help tonight that we'll somehow see what he saw and we'll be able to understand what this is all about. Grant us your help for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[5 : 03] Amen. As we open up this seventh chapter tonight and enter into the last section of the book of Amos, six times in as many verses in the chapter, he refers to the God of Israel as the Lord God, or as the NIV has it, the sovereign Lord. And in using that language, I think Amos is just reminding us that the God of the Bible is really God. For the first six chapters, you will know by now that the imminent judgments of the sovereign Lord have been the burden of the message that Amos has been called to preach to the people of his day and to Israel in particular.

But what we mustn't overlook is that along with this unpopular, unpalatable message of judgment, there are also little shafts of light. If you read the prophecy carefully, little shafts of light that would encourage us to believe that the God of infallible justice is also a God of incredible mercy.

And I think it's this that guarantees the bringing to pass of God's saving purposes in the world. If it was just justice and judgment, we would all be wiped out.

But we haven't been wiped out because God is a God of mercy. The line to the coming of Messiah was being preserved, even amid all the gloom and doom in the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th century BC.

No question about that. And the graphic pictures of national judgment in the book of Amos are really preparing us, I think, for the final eternal judgment that is sure to come.

[7 : 04] And yet at the same time, thinking on this theme of judgment, the book is moving relentlessly to this conclusion. There's hope.

There's a message of hope. There are little glimmers of hope peppering the book. And eventually, Amos is going to tell us, and you feel you want to hear it a lot sooner than this, but he's going to tell us in chapter 9, the last chapter, that there is hope for us all.

And this is ultimately to be found in the promises concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. So I'm a bit of a blow-in tonight. I know you've had six chapters expounded to you, and after I go, you're going to have another two expounded to you.

What I want to do is to try and confine myself to this seventh chapter. And I want to look with you tonight at three things about Amos in chapter 7, in terms of his all-round ministry.

I didn't know until this afternoon that the title for tonight is Seeing It As It Is. I gave my own title to it when I was preparing, An All-Round Ministry.

[8 : 13] So I want us just to have a wee peep at Amos in this chapter. And the first thing I want to draw your attention to is that he's a man of prayer. You could easily miss that, but you mustn't miss it, and I mustn't miss it.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that in the past, God spoke in different ways and at different times through the prophets. Amos is a classic example of that.

In the Old Testament, the prophets, they sometimes received the word of God by way of revelatory visions. That's how God spoke to them.

And this was true of Amos, way back at the very beginning of the prophecy, in the very first verse of this book. He saw before he spoke.

He was a seer. He saw before he spoke. A vision is not about seeing what isn't there. A vision is about seeing what is there.

[9 : 14] It's about seeing things as they really are, and then saying what God wants him to say about what he has seen. That's what's really happening here.

It's a message given directly by God. It's not invented. It's not dreamed up. It's not imagined by the person receiving it. And if you're watching carefully and listening carefully as we read through the chapter there, there are three visions in this chapter.

But we want to look at the first two only. Just for a moment. We'll come to the third one later. But we want to look at the first two visions. To see Amos, in particular, as a man of prayer.

So, let's look at the visions. What Amos saw in these verses, and we're looking at verses 1 through 6 here. What Amos saw in these visions, he began to speak.

And he began to write down in words that ordinary people like you and I can understand. And that tells us something. Every preacher, and there are, I'm quite sure, a few preachers sitting here tonight.

[10 : 25] Every preacher needs to be convinced. And he needs to be confident of the fact that nothing can compare with the spoken word.

Nothing. Not drama. Not visual aids. Not mime. Not dance. Nor indeed any other non-verbal methods of communication.

I'm not saying God can't speak through these other things. But nothing can compare with the word of God coming in words addressed to our minds and our understanding.

The first vision he sees is that of devouring locusts. In this vision, God forms swarms of locusts as a potter forms his vessel made of clay.

And that's telling us that God is gloriously active in the normal processes of the created order. He's obviously made these locusts.

[11 : 30] Created these locusts. And here he gathers them together with the specific intent of them coming across the land of Israel.

Not just in their hundreds of thousands, but probably in their millions to strip the land bare. I don't know whether you've ever been in a country where you've had a plague of locusts. I was in Kenya once.

And we had a plague of locusts. I was covered from head to toe. And when we got back home into the house, they were clambered onto the windows. It was an astonishing thing. The sky was full of them.

And it's that kind of thing that you have here. God's obviously made the locusts. He's gathered them together with a specific intent of them coming across the land in their hundreds of thousands to strip the land bare.

The prospect of a splendid crop of grass is being endangered. The first crop mentioned here, known as the king's mowing, that would be safely gathered in during October.

[12 : 32] But the picture here is that of the second crop of lush grass. After the late rains, during March and April, that crop is going to be devastated by these locusts. That's the vision Amos sees.

And when it takes place, total ruin stares the whole countryside in the face. No pasture for the cattle, for the animals, for six months. And a big problem for the people.

The animals wouldn't survive. Would the people survive? That's the first vision. The second vision is of this consuming fire.

And it's that of God sending fire into his controversy with Israel. The burning summer heat would produce such a drought that the whole land would be dried up.

Completely devastated. And it's presenting us again with another picture of even greater severity than that of the plague of locusts. The locusts would only destroy a crop. Whereas this fire was going to dry up the whole land, including every place where water was to be found.

[13 : 39] And you look at that and it gives us a foretaste, does it not? Of what is recorded in 2 Peter 3.10 with reference to the end time. The day of the Lord will come like a thief, said Peter.

The heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be destroyed by fire. And the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. These judgments are a kind of a forerunner to the final judgment.

Now these are visions that haven't occurred as yet when Amos preaches and writes. The content of these things hasn't really taken place. They may very well refer to literal locusts and literal fire, bringing famine, bringing drought.

But I think it's only fair to say that some commentators, including John Calvin, believe that they actually symbolize an invading army of men. That's how Calvin sees it.

Now it's not important for our purposes tonight to know one way or the other. But however you view it, there can be no doubt that these acts of God in judgment, when they occurred, they would utterly ruin and devastate this nation.

[14 : 44] What's important for us is that we take careful note in this and not miss it on the way through, of Amos' response to what he sees and understands in these two visions.

When Amos sees what's in God's agenda for Israel, what does he do? He gives himself to prayer. And I think that's the important point we need to grasp from it.

Following the visions are intercessions. Amos has a lesson to teach us here. He converts what he sees and what he understands by what he sees into prayer.

He doesn't think to himself, okay, sara, sara, whatever will be, will be. That would have been to embrace fatalism. No, he didn't do that. He prayed. And if I may be allowed to say this, the man who truly understands the doctrine of the sovereignty of God will believe in the importance and absolute necessity of prayer.

He'll not sit back with his arms folded and say, well, God's going to do it, God will do it. No, no, not at all. I would be surprised. And if I had to ask you the question, do you believe in prayer?

[16 : 02] I would be very surprised if anyone within these walls would say no. Surely we all believe in prayer. But the reason we know this man believed in prayer is because he prayed.

He didn't say, I believe in prayer. He prayed. That's how we know he believed in prayer. If disasters are to be averted, if deliverances are to be experienced, if doors are to be opened, if doubts are to be scattered, if divine intervention is to happen, we must give ourselves as the people of God to prayer.

I think that's the lesson we learn from Amos here. That's exactly what Amos did on both occasions. He prays in verse 2 after the vision of the locusts. And then in verse 5 after the vision of the consuming fire.

Listen to him pray. They're very short prayers. He cries out in verse 2, Oh, Lord God, please forgive. How can Jacob stand? How can he survive?

He's so small. And then in verse 5 he cries out, Oh, Lord God, please cease. I beg you to stop.

[17 : 22] How can Jacob stand? How can Jacob survive? He's so small. You see, the situation was this. The people of the land of Israel thought they were something special.

They thought they were the people. They were proud. They were spiritually proud.

They were self-sufficient. But Amos knew better than that. So he pleads on their behalf for mercy.

He pleads with the Lord on their behalf for forgiveness. He humbles himself before the Lord on their behalf. And he acknowledges, if the people will not do it, their smallness and their sinfulness.

He tells the Lord in just a couple of sentences, he tells the Lord, Lord, if you don't step in and do something for these people, they're going to be blown away by your judgment. And cease to be.

[18 : 29] And what happened in answer to his prayer? God held back his hand from judgment. On both occasions we read, The Lord relented and said, This shall not be.

Now some translations have the words, The Lord repented. Not the Lord relented. Some translations have the words, The Lord repented. But as John Wycliffe says, God doesn't change his mind, as men do, but he changes his course of action in answer to prayer.

And that change is quite consistent with his eternal purpose. Now you need to think that through. What I'm trying to do is explain the unexplainable. There is a mystery here with regards to the sovereign God.

But the bottom line is that the eternal purposes of a sovereign God are continually being worked out through the prayers of his people. Even John Wesley, who gets a bad press in some circles, even Wesley believed that.

He said that the prayers of the saints were the decrees of God being worked out. Now from our perspective, with our little finite fallen minds, and from our viewpoint, it may appear at times when we pray as though there has been a change of mind on God's part.

[19 : 51] But it is, in actual fact, simply a change in his course of action. That's what happened with these two visions. Judgment was deferred because Amos prayed.

He humbled himself, and he prayed for mercy, and he prayed for forgiveness, and the judgment was averted, and it was postponed, but it was not annulled, and it was not cancelled.

God doesn't change his mind. God didn't change his mind, but he can change his course of action when people give themselves to prayer.

Now you need to think that through and work that out, but that's what's happening here. Amos, the man of prayer. Here's the second thing. Amos and the message of the plumb line.

Verses 7 through to 9. It brings us to the third vision, the vision of the plumb line. Having said all that I've said, under the last heading, Amos, the man of prayer.

[20 : 50] Let me just say this. I'm sure you've heard people say it before. There is a time, I know not when, a place, I know not where, that seals the destiny of men for glory or despair.

And no amount of praying will alter that. Or divert it, or avert it, or defer it, or postpone it.

When you consider this third vision, you can see from verses 7 through 9, the Lord's standing by a wall. It's been built true to plumb. He has a plumb line in his hand.

And the Lord asked me, what do you see, Amos? A plumb line, I replied. Then the Lord said, look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel.

I will spare them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined. With my sword, I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.

[21 : 56] He was the king in the northern kingdom. The sovereign Lord is standing with a plumb line in his hand to test this wall. The message in this vision, as distinct from the first two visions, is crystal clear.

The message here is that with regards to these people, the day of grace is over and judgment is inevitable. The time of his mercy has run out and no prayer, no prayer is to be offered.

That's the striking thing here. That's the frightening thing here. It's as if God is saying in this particular vision, enough is enough.

And this is a very solemn thing. Here is God whose name and nature is love. Here is God, the master builder.

And he's standing beside a perpendicular wall that clearly represents the nation of Israel. He had set his love upon them. Brought them into being as a nation.

[23 : 12] He had protected them. He had provided for them not just during their wilderness wanderings, but over the centuries. He had given them his law, the Torah.

And it was his law that symbolized by the plumb line in his hand. It was his word that made them what they were in times past.

It was his word to them that had galvanized them into being the people of God. He had said to them in chapter 3 of this prophecy, you only have I known of all the families in the earth.

That's what he said to them. You only have I known. But he expected them to say to him, you only will we worship.

They were different from all the other nations. They were his chosen people. Even people who've got problems with the doctrine of election would never have a problem with that with regards to Israel.

[24 : 20] They were his chosen people. He had redeemed them from Egypt. They were called to be an obedient people. They were called to be holy people, even as God is a holy God, as they ordered their lives according to the law and according to the testimony, according to the Torah.

But those days had long since gone, it would appear in this vision. God brings the exact same plumb line to the exact same wall that he had built from the calling of Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees up to the days of Moses, the wall representing the nation.

He brings the plumb line out in order to inspect the nation. And in order to carefully examine the nation, the Puritans used to say, God is a precisionist.

And here's God measuring the nation against his own standards of measurement as in the law and as he does so, he notices the wall is bending and it's tottering and it's out of line and the cracks are appearing everywhere and it's about to fall and come crashing down to the ground.

In this vision, Israel has failed to pass the test of the Torah. The God of creation, the God of eternity, the God of history, the God of Israel, the sovereign Lord, he can spare them no longer.

[25 : 47] They had become an embarrassment to him. They had paid no heed to the law and to the testimony over a long period of time, even though God had sent his servants to them, his prophets to them.

They thought they knew better than God. substituting man-made centers of religion, introducing man-made ideas into their religious practices, they're going to be destroyed.

God has made up his mind. The high places in the northern kingdom of Israel were repeating the error of those who were building the Tower of Babel. They thought they could get closer to God by climbing steps and erecting buildings that were reaching up to heaven and God tells the nation of Israel through the lips of Amos, the high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined.

With my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam. When the Assyrians would come and they came in 721 BC, when they would come all these things that they had done and treasured, they would have to go.

What I'm saying to you, and I say this with thought in this, I'm not saying this carelessly, there is a time when even praying can't make any difference. The prophet Jeremiah was told something similar by the Lord in Jeremiah 7 and 16.

[27 : 06] God said to Jeremiah, do not pray for this people, nor offer any plea or petition for them. Do not plead with me for I will not listen to you.

That's what God said to Jeremiah. It's in the Bible. So why mustn't Amos pray for these people? Why mustn't he pray?

They are guilty of idolatry. They had crossed the point of no return. Do you think it's possible to do that? God said to Jeremiah, do you not see what, this is with regards to the southern kingdom, do you not see what they're doing in the towns of Judah in the streets of Jerusalem?

The children are gathering wood, the fathers light the fire, the women need the dough, and make cakes of bread for the queen of heaven. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger. Who's doing this?

Some tribe in the middle of Papua New Guinea? No, these are the people of God. And the same message was given to Jeremiah in chapter 11, verse 14, to a people who had broken the same covenant stipulations again and again.

[28 : 19] God said to Jeremiah, don't pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them because I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their distress. Do you know what's happening? Do you know what the picture Amos is getting here in this vision?

What was happening was that Israel's creator is now becoming her executioner. Now, the book of the law that they had jettisoned is the book that is now going to judge them.

The writing's on the wall in this vision. Like Belshazzar in the book of Daniel, they're weighed in the balances and they're found wanting. Constant rejection of the Lord led to ultimate rejection by the Lord.

This frightening thing still happens, brothers and sisters. When you have a people who are privileged to hear the word of God on a regular basis, I would wager that you're sure to find somebody in that gathering is going to continually reject it until one day God eventually rejects that person, gives them up, to use Paul's phrase in Romans 1.

Gives them up to their own desires and no amount of praying. No amount of praying will ever be able to change their destiny. I'm just saying tonight, don't let that person be you.

[29 : 50] Amos had stopped preaching in order to pray. Now he must stop praying in order to preach. Now both these things are vital and both have their place in the economy of God.

God, there was a time to pray and there's a time not to pray. But let's look finally at how he was called to exercise the ministry of preaching now as I bring us to a final conclusion.

Amos, the man of prayer. Have a wee look at this chapter when you go home. Just see how brief his prayers were, how pointed they were, how simple they were, how profound they were. Amos, the man of prayer. What he sees, what he understands by what he sees, puts him down on his knees to pray.

Then have a look at Amos and the message of this plumb line. Keep in mind, this wall is Israel. It's bending, it's tottering, it's cracking, it's going to crush to the ground because it's being measured by the very plumb line that made them the people of God.

It's now judging them. Now Amos in the ministry of preaching from verse 10 to the end. We've no doubt that we've read some of his sermon notes in the earlier chapters, but there are some aspects of Amos' preaching that are mentioned exclusively here in the seventh chapter that I want to leave you with.

[31 : 02] They're worth considering and especially if anybody in here is giving serious thought to preaching being God's will for their lives. Two things in particular to pay attention to that are of great importance from this passage, which incidentally is the one autobiographical section in the whole book.

The first is this. I want to underline the origin of authoritative preaching, the origin of authoritative preaching. How did such a man as Amos ever get himself involved in the prophetic ministry, in preaching the word of God?

Well, let him speak for himself. We read from verse 10 onwards in a conversation he had with Amaziah, who was the priest at Bethel, during which time Amos tells us how it all began.

We read in verse 14 and 15, that Amos said to this Amaziah, I was neither a prophet, he says, nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd and I took care of sycamore fig trees, but the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, go, prophesy to my people Israel.

And you read that passage. I tell you what came to my mind when I read it. That passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called.

[32 : 28] Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many influential, not many of noble birth, but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

He chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him. Who was this guy Amos? He was no religious professional.

He hadn't even been groomed in one of the prophetic schools, one of the schools of the prophets. And he certainly hadn't been given the opportunity to study for a theological degree at the University of Jerusalem.

Although there is nothing wrong with getting a theological degree, but this man's not in that league. But he's called by God. And he's called by God to preach God's word.

And this is what gives him his authority to do what he's doing. He's probably a man of few words under normal circumstances. I mean, he's a shepherd. He was used to his own company on the hills looking after his sheep.

[33 : 28] He's a very ordinary guy, it would appear. He's doing a hard day's work. And he apparently needed, you know, to take on an extra job on the side gathering figs to keep body and soul together. But he knew something of the grace of God in his life.

And he knew he was doing what he was now doing because God had called him. He didn't choose his vocation. He hadn't woken up one morning and said, I would like to be a prophet. He hadn't responded to an advert for a vacancy in the evangelical times of his day.

He had an unmistakable call from God. Now, we might call this man, forgive the term, a layman. He's a layman.

He had been faithful as a shepherd looking after sheep with four legs. And the Lord puts his hand on him and says, now I want you to look after my sheep, those that have got two legs.

You've had plenty of training. Now I want you to go and talk to my people and faithfully deliver a message to them. It was as simple as that. It was as serious as that. But when it comes to authority, when you read Bob Fieser's commentary on this, it isn't the prophet.

[34 : 41] The authority is not in him. It's in the prophecy. It isn't the messenger. It's the message. It isn't the preacher. It's the preaching that stamps it all with divine authority.

It's the authority of the word given by God and not the personality of the preacher that's all important. Even when the preacher knows he's called by God and even when he takes his calling seriously and even when he prepares himself thoroughly, the authority in preaching is this book here and woe betide any man who tries to preach anything else.

The second thing and the last thing is opposition to authoritative preaching. Apparently, Amos' preaching had a considerable impact on the nation even although the people didn't repent.

that seems like a contradiction in terms. But there it is from the king and the throne downwards. I think it's all summed up. Here's the response of the nation at all the different levels.

Verse 10, The land is not able to bear his words. What a statement that is. The land is not able to bear his words. They couldn't stomach it.

[35 : 54] They didn't listen. They certainly heard loud and clear what he was saying. They got the message. If we could picture what was taking place, God's word must have come like a fire, like a double-edged sword, like a hammer coming from the lips of Amos.

It was a ministry that burned, that purged, that cut to the quick, that smashed to pieces the status quo in the nation from top to the bottom. I like to think of Amos as the 8th century BC equivalent of John the Baptist.

Nobody was coming up to Amos after he preached and said, well done son, that was a great sermon. I tell you, they were shaking in their shoes. But for the vast majority of them, it didn't make a slight bit of difference.

Such a faithful preacher, such authoritative preaching as you can imagine, is sure to be misrepresented. It's sure to be misunderstood. What he says is liable to be twisted and perverted.

That's exactly what happened. And who by? The religious professionals. Ahaziah, the priest from Bethel, he conspires against him. He wants to get rid of him. A-S-A-P as soon as possible.

[37 : 06] So he accuses Amos of things of which he wasn't guilty. Amos wasn't guilty of an attempted coup of the king. Not at all. Nor had he predicted Jeroboam's death.

Although Amosiah said he had. It's true that Amos spoke of the death of the house of Jeroboam, but not of the death of the king. He spoke of God's sword rising against the dynasty of Jeroboam, but not against Jeroboam himself as a person.

So Amosiah is twisting it. Personalizing what the preacher says is a common tactic by those who want to discredit the preacher and his preaching. They did it with the apostle Paul. Read Galatians.

Amosiah the priest, he comes across as an unscrupulous politician speaking out against Amos, the uncompromising prophet. He resents what Amos is preaching.

He'll go to any lands to have this prophetic voice silenced. He tells Amos in verse 12 to go back to where he came from and prophesy there. He's telling them, will you go back south of the border, son? Earn your money there.

[38 : 12] He may very well be implying in what he's saying that Amos is in this whole thing for the money just like Amaziah was in it for the money and that Amos was a hired hand just like Amaziah was a hired hand.

But of course Amos wasn't. But he's reminding Amos for sure that he's not a preacher because he's not been officially registered or personally recognized in Israel.

Amos, this is not your patch. This is not your pitch. It's my patch. It's my pitch. Off you go.

And he accuses Amos of invading his space and preaching on his turf and on his territory. How did Amos respond to that? Verses 16 and 17. He said to Amaziah, you say stop preaching.

But this is what the Lord says. When I was in Ballymen, I was in Ballymen for 10 years. I was in a big church. And there was a few sort of things being said.

[39 : 14] You know, grapevine, is that what you call it. And the elders' court was convened and some of these things were brought to our attention and this wee man in the elders' court is, oh, he was almost 80 years of age.

He put it like this. They say, what do they say? Let them say. Let's keep on preaching the Bible.

You say, stop preaching. Is that what you're saying, Amaziah? But this is what the Lord says. Amaziah wants to see Amos go away, never to come back.

But Amos tells Amaziah that he's the one who's going to go away and the whole nation will go with him, the northern part of the country. And it's Amaziah who'll never come back. Unconverted men, hired men, men who are in it for the money or because they think it's a cushy number, they don't like to hear a message on judgment.

Even if that message at times is tinged with mercy, they can't stand it. They don't like the whole counsel of God. When Paul preached in his missionary journeys, we're told he reasoned with people on the truth of judgment.

[40 : 28] I can't think of a subject that will give more bite to preaching than the certainty of judgment. Can you? I can't think of any other subject that will cause people to look for the healing balm of the gospel of the Lord Jesus more than the message of judgment.

Can you? Now thankfully, it's not the only note that needs to be struck, but it is a note that is missing in today's Western world as it teeters on the brink of disaster, just like Israel in the 8th century BC.

John Piper says, sometimes the people need a holy fright. Amos was the guy who brought it. It's thought by some that Amaziah was eventually able to have the prophet Amos deported back to the south.

If that's the case, but no proof of it, his voice may have been silenced in the north, but he became one of the first of the writing prophets, and although he's long since dead, he's still speaking today.

I don't want to steal anybody's thunder, but as you go through this book with its recurring theme of judgment, it's important not to lose sight of what's coming in the last chapter where God's mercy becomes clearer as the long night of judgment comes to an end.

[41 : 36] I picked up a book by Mark Deaver. Some of you will know who I'm talking about, American. He says he loves to answer the question, how are you doing? You know, people, how are you doing? He loves to answer the question, better than I deserve, is how he loves to answer that question.

Better than I deserve, and he says, because it reminds him of the gospel. Well, brothers and sisters, can I tell you something? If it was only down to justice being done, you and I would be cast off.

Even in how we've lived the Christian life, never mind how we lived before we were Christians, but God is a God of incredible mercy. Can I give you the words of a hymn just to finish?

Just a verse. After all these years. Is this not the language of our hearts tonight? All of us, if we really know ourselves in the light of these great truths that are in this book, nothing in my hands I bring.

Simply to thy cross I cling. Naked. Come to thee for dress. Help us. Look to thee for grace. Foul. I to the fountain fly.

[42 : 45] Wash me, Savior, or I die. We said it a long time ago, did we not? Are we not saying it again tonight? God, be merciful to me.

I am a sinner. You're the judge of all the earth. You're going to judge the secrets of all men. What Amos is saying here way back in the 8th century BC is just a forerunner of the great day that is yet to come.

But we know that in Christ the promises of God are all yes and amen. And there's hope for us all in Jesus.

Let's just pray. Father, thank you for Amos, his fearlessness, his faithfulness. Help us, Lord, in the small way that we are able to be just as fearless and just as faithful and to preach your truth and to live out your truth in love and grace and with mercy but not to choose the things that we want to say.

To say the things that you want us to say even if that strikes the note of a righteous judgment. Hear our prayer. For Jesus' sake, Amen.