

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## The Hand of the Lord: The Hand with the Plumb Line - Amos 7:7-9

There's nothing like a plumb line to show whether a structure has been built vertically or not. In its simplest form it's just a weight on the end of a thin line of cord that's held against the structure. If the building work lies parallel to the line, then it is standing vertically. All well and good. However, a plumb-line (or plummet line) is not only used to measure the quality of building but it is also used in demolition. Such is the case in the book of Amos 7:7-9. We read: "Thus did he shew unto me; and behold, the Lord stood upon a wall [made] by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And Jehovah said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb-line. And the Lord said, Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more. And the high places of Isaac shall be desolated, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will arise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

Just imagine it - Israel was prospering! No doubt the people saw this prosperity as a fruit of keeping the Law of God. Unfortunately, the assumption was a wrong one because over in Tekoah in Judah, God was about to call a farmer to take a message of judgment to his people. His name was that of the book we are studying – Amos, which means "loading" or "weighty". The time lay between 760 and 750 years before the birth of Christ.

By the way, it may be worth noting that prophecy is not only a foretelling and but a forth-telling. In general, a prophet is raised up by God during a time of spiritual failure. His purpose is to forth-tell rather than foretell. That is to say, the prophet is raised up by God to give a message to a failing people at a particular time and in specific circumstances. Of course, the message may include predictions about the future! For example, the prophets often warned the people of the imminent judgement that would follow if the people ignored God's word. On the other hand, a prediction may look far into the future. This can be seen in the last chapter of Amos where the prophet speaks of the future restoration and blessing of Israel. So the book of Amos contains both aspects of prophecy – forth-telling and fore-telling.

The first two chapters are made up of warnings against the nations, including prophecies against neighbouring peoples (Amos 1:3-2:3). Then there are prophecies against Judah and Israel (2:4-16). Chapters 3 to 6 continue the proclamation of judgment against Israel. From the beginnings of the fall of Israel in Jeroboam's time, God had revealed through his prophets that the Bethel sanctuary would be destroyed. (1 Kings 14:1ff.) So it is no surprise that much of Amos's message is directed against the false worship at the shrine of Bethel. Next, God illustrates the coming destruction by five visions of judgment (Amos 7:1-9:10), and then concludes the book with a promise of restoration and blessing (9:11-15).

Although there is much evidence of Israel's prosperity in the book of Amos, it was accompanied by corruption (Amos 8:5), injustice toward the poor (2:6 and 8; 4:1), drunkenness (4:1; 6:6), and religious apostasy (4:4). Do these items ring a bell? We ourselves live in a prosperous country, but corruption is rife, the poor are disadvantaged as far as the law is concerned, alcoholism is a major problem and a once Christian nation is marked by a falling away from the very principles and laws that made it great.

Some of our Christian heritage is still apparent. For example, the Coronation Oath still requires each new Sovereign to "uphold, to the utmost of his or her power, the Laws of God in the Realm; and the true profession of the Christian Gospel." Through its senior peers, Parliament pledges itself to support the Sovereign in this. Unfortunately, we find that Christian principles have been eroded for political expediency and the true Gospel of God's Son has become so diluted that it is despised by the ordinary population who are, generally, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Remember, there was a bishop appointed in Durham who seemed to have unsound views on the resurrection of Christ. Shortly afterwards lightning struck a cathedral and caused a great deal of damage. Then there was a decision to accept women as publicly participating priests within the established church. If I remember rightly, this was followed by a fire at Windsor Castle. But God's voice is just not being heard! Recently, a controversial archbishop has been appointed in the established church. I dread to think what may happen to that church if he lends himself to further apostasy! We pray to God that he may remain faithful to a true interpretation of the scriptures.

This kind of dilution of the Christian Gospel is also seen in the links being forged between other religions and Christianity. The Prince of Wales has said that he would like to be known as "A Defender of Faith", rather than "The

Defender of the Faith". True Christians are to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Will the next step in our failing nation be a change in the Coronation Oath in order to facilitate the beliefs of the prince? God forbid! These links between religions will be welded when the true Christian church is taken to be with the Lord at His coming. This will leave a counterfeit church on earth. This is represented symbolically by the woman in the book of Revelation 17:3-6: "And he carried me away in spirit to a desert; and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and had ornaments of gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and the unclean things of her fornication; and upon her forehead a name written, Mystery, great Babylon, the mother of the harlots, and of the abominations of the earth. And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And I wondered, seeing her, with great wonder."

The chapter goes on to interpret the symbol as a religious system (the woman) ruling a political one (the beast). The imperial purple and scarlet she wears indicate that, momentarily, she has attained sovereignty over the nations in general and Israel itself. The fact that she is decked with precious ornaments shows that she is materially rich and uses that wealth to glorify herself. Furthermore, the golden cup indicates her delight in perversion. Although the cup is beautiful in itself, it is filled with the filthiness resulting from her fornication with the world instead of the purity that results from a deep devotion to the true God. In fact, she is later said to be a persecutor of real believers in God. She is drunk with the blood of the saints and the witnesses of Jesus.

The beast she rides upon is described as scarlet with seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads are seven mountains. Rome was known as the "City of Seven Hills". Hence, the centre of its power is revealed. The ten horns are ten kings who will receive power with the beast for a short period of time. So the beast will be a revived Roman Empire probably made up of ten countries in the regions of the Mediterranean Sea. In the same chapter, Revelation 17:10-12, we find another seven distinct kings that outline the previous characters of rule during the period of the old Roman Empire up to the eighth one listed in the chapter. These are not to be confused with the ten kings who will ultimately hate the religious system based in Rome and destroy her.

It's true that Israel has been blessed while trusting in the living God. We can find in the historical pages of the Bible an abundance of grace and deliverance shown to Israel. Think of the plagues upon Egypt while they were bent under the burdens of the Egyptians. God heard their cry and acted for them. At the same time, He proved Himself greater than the false gods of Egypt. He protected their children on the night of the Passover. He then delivered them by producing a passage through the Red Sea. He destroyed the pursuing army. He provided water and food in the wilderness despite their moaning and groaning. He stayed the River Jordan to allow them safe passage to the Promised Land. He defeated their enemies so that they gained the land. He divided the land to the tribes of Israel. At the present time, we see an Israel marked by unbelief. A mosque stands upon the site where their temple should be. Their enemies are claiming their God-given land for themselves. And so we can move through the times when Israel were blessed and also times when they were steeped in unbelief and disciplined by God.

I invite you to read: "*The Trumpet Sounds for Britain Volume 2*" by David Gardner. Its pages highlight some of God's great deliverances in relation to our own country. For example, how did God help the English to deal with the Spanish Armada? What happened at Mons in 1918 when it appeared that the English would be overrun by the German army? Was there really any hope for the British who were trapped at Dunkirk in 1940? What led to victory in the Battle of Britain? By what remarkable means was Malta preserved during the last World War?

Consider well how God has been gracious to us! At the time of writing this script, the war in Iraq seems to have been won by the USA and her ally. How was life preserved? Only by the grace of God! However, let us be very careful not to boast in what has been accomplished. It is always dangerous to enter into a war when the spiritual condition of the nation is so poor? God honours those who honour Him. He allowed Israel to fail in battle because they went to war independently of Him. There is always the danger of us doing the same.

But there's a major difference between a nation which was God's chosen people and any other nation! The position of the Christian Church should not be a political one. The true Christian does not get himself entangled with the things of this world. It was never the intention of God that His church should be yoked together with the state of any country. On the other hand, God has put in place governmental authority (Romans 13). Even though its rulers may be unbelievers, they are still called His servants. The authorities are to be obeyed by Christians because they are responsible for maintaining law and order. The only time a Christian may have cause to defy any authority is when it asks him or her to do something that is ungodly. For example, Peter and John were arrested and jailed in Jerusalem because they preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead (Acts 4). When brought before the council, they were commanded not to preach in the name of Jesus. Peter and John asked the council to judge if it was right in the sight of God to obey them or to obey God. The two were threatened again, but protected by the Lord. They were soon found in a prayer meeting where a request was made for boldness to speak God's word.

As Christians, we thank God for the freedom to preach the Gospel of God's Son in this land at the present time. But let us not be complacent. The enemy of souls will do all he can to prevent the preaching of the Gospel. The attitude of our nation towards Christianity is changing adversely. There may come a day when our laws will forbid the preaching of the Gospel. Should such a day emerge, will we Christians be faithful? Will we obey God rather than man? Let us earnestly pray that the freedom we have to proclaim the good news will continue until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ for those who love Him.

Amos has been called the champion of the poor and oppressed. In this book, we see him directing people back to the Law of God that they had rejected (Amos 2:4). That Law often speaks out to protect the orphan, the widow, the traveller, and the needy. This Law is found in the Pentateuch, the first five books of Old Testament of the Bible. Israel had said, "All that the Lord says we will do". The Lord spoke. The children of Israel found themselves powerless to keep God's law. It simply shown them up as sinful. It shows us up as being equally sinful. Nevertheless, the Law of God is good. It was used to form the core of the law of our own land besides that of America at the time of the Pilgrim Fathers. Unfortunately, successive governments have chipped away at it in such a way that many of its taboos are now freely practiced by its people.

Returning to the passage, we find that there were three aspects to the judgement pronounced by the Lord. First, the high places of Isaac shall be desolated. Second, the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste. Third, the Lord would rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.

God's long-suffering has been worn out by Israel's perversity: so Amos ceases to intercede (compare Genesis 18:33). The plummet line is laid against their wall in the midst of Israel showing that God's judgments are measured out by the most exact rules of justice, on the one hand, and will reach into the very centre of the nation, on the other. As mentioned before, this use of the plumb-line may be seen elsewhere in scripture where destruction takes place. See 2 Kings 21:13; Isaiah 28:17; Isaiah 34:11; and Lamentations 2:8.

The high places of Isaac speak of areas that had been dedicated to idols. Altars were built either on the tops of hills or on artificial mounds. The people of Israel boasted that they were following the example of their forefather Isaac, in erecting high places at Beer-sheba for example (Amos 5:5; compare Genesis 26:23-24; and, 46:1) but Isaac and Abraham erected them before the temple was appointed to be at Jerusalem - and that worship should be directed to the true God. These people built their high places after the temple had been fixed as the only place for sacrifices to God. Therefore, they had set these up in unbelief - in direct disobedience to the God to whom the worship of idols is obnoxious.

There may well be a play on words here if we use the meaning of the name of Isaac. The latter means "laughter". We might read: "The high places of laughter shall be desolated." This emphasises the frivolity that often comes with the devil-driven worship of idols. In Hosea 4:12-13 we read: "My people ask counsel of their stock, and their staff declareth unto them; for the spirit of whoredoms causeth them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God: they sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oak and poplar and terebinth, because the shade thereof is good; therefore your daughters play the harlot and your daughters-in-law commit adultery."

Unfortunately, there is a growth in the occult in this country that leads to devil worship and other heinous acts. If this is left unjudged, then the Christian heritage left at such a great cost by our forefathers will be lost.

The second judgement was that the sanctuaries of Israel would be laid waste. A sanctuary is a place that is set apart to God. It is a place that offers rest, refuge and restoration in the things of the Lord. Israel was to lose these privileges. There was to be no rest for the wicked. There was to be no refuge from God's judgement. There would be no time allowed for restoration.

May the Lord Jesus Christ keep us close to Himself for we know that He is the man who Isaiah describes as a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the storm, as brooks of water in a dry place and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land (Isaiah 32:2). As the hiding place from the wind He keeps us from every wind of doctrine. That is, He ensures that we are well taught in the truth of the scriptures. As a covert from the storm, He keeps us safe throughout the trials and tribulations that so often come with the Christian confession. As brooks of water in a dry place, He gives us rest and refreshment. Finally, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land He gives us to grow spiritually - there is always growth in the shadow of a rock in the wilderness.

The last judgement stated that the house of Jeroboam was to fall by the sword. That is to say, he and his family line would be judged violently. When pronouncing judgement upon King Ahab, God said that his posterity would be removed and every male of the family line would be killed. He then likens this to what happened to the house of Jeroboam (1 Kings 21:21-22). He whose name means "enlarger" was to become "nothing". The prophecy's fulfilment

can be found in 2 Kings 15:8-12 where Zechariah, son of Jeroboam II, the last of the descendants of Jeroboam I was slain by Shallum.

Leaders of nations have a great responsibility before God. Jeroboam was marked by evil doings and was judged accordingly. God is not mocked. Yet, knowing the burden of this responsibility, it is vital that Christians take notice of 1 Timothy 2:1-4: "Therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings and all that are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

In closing, I ask you to place the plumb-line of God's Law against your life. Here are its basic Commandments in simple terms:

- I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from slavery in Egypt. Do not worship any other gods besides me.
- Do not make idols of any kind
- Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
- Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
- Honour your father and mother.
- Do not murder.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not steal.
- Do not testify falsely against your neighbour.
- Do not covet.

These are the foundational points of the Law of God. If we place them against our lives, we soon find ourselves wanting. Those who break one of these commands, break the whole Law. Only the Lord Jesus Christ has kept the law of God fully as a man here on earth. All others are sinners in need of a Saviour. Only the One who bore the judgement of God against sin can be the Saviour. Christ was made sin so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

This makes Christ the end of the Law for righteousness. Christians are no longer under the Old Testament Law, but are under grace – the unmerited favour of God! It is written: For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast. The Law was never given to save people. Salvation has always been through faith. All who put their trust in the Person and work of Christ will be saved! Note that Scripture is dogmatic when it states that there is none other name, under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved. Thank God that Christ is my Saviour! Is He yours?

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