

## Prayer

O God my Father, I worship You and praise You. Help me I pray when my life does not make sense and nothing appears to work for good. Make me aware of Your presence and touch me with Your love, and give me the faith to bear the heartaches of life as well as enjoy its thrills. So may I see a glimpse of Your eternal love, and be encouraged to stand firm in faith throughout my life; AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

Consider reading a book about the life of a great Christian, and let the Lord use this to inspire your prayers

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for forgiveness.** Pray for forgiveness for all that you have done wrong in the last 24 hours. Submit all to Him, repent and wait for His forgiveness
- Give thanks for God's healing power and the many ways this is shown
- Pray about the space industry; pray that space flight will be used for the good of all

## Meditation

Watch over us, Lord God, in the paths we take;  
That we may be wise in all our decisions.

Watch over us, Lord God, during our conversations;  
That we may be honest in the things we say.

Watch over us, Lord God, in the company we keep;  
That we may be careful to stay close to You.

Watch over us, Lord God, while we do our work;  
That we may build Your glorious Kingdom.

Watch over us, Lord God, when our passions overflow;  
That we may be committed, sincere and faithful.

Watch over us, Lord God, in our hopes and dreams;  
That we may accept Your plans for our future.

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## Bible passage - Amos 7:1-9

<sup>1</sup> This is what the Lord GOD showed me: he formed locusts around the time the late growth of grass began to grow (the late growth after the king's mowings). <sup>2</sup> When they had completely stripped all the grass in the land, I said, 'O Lord GOD, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!' <sup>3</sup> The LORD changed His mind about this; 'It shall not be,' said the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> This is what the Lord GOD showed me: He was calling for a judgement by fire, and it dried up the great deep and was consuming the land. <sup>5</sup> Then I said, 'O Lord GOD, please stop! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!' <sup>6</sup> The LORD changed His mind about this; 'This also shall not be,' said the Lord GOD.

<sup>7</sup> This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in his hand. <sup>8</sup> The LORD asked me, 'What do you see, Amos?' I said, 'A plumb line.' Then the Lord said, 'Look, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will not pass them by again. <sup>9</sup> The high places of Isaac will be laid waste, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be destroyed, and I will attack the house of Jeroboam with the sword.'

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# Bible Study

## Review

### ***Amos' series of damning prophecies against Israel suddenly comes to a stop, and he reports three visions in which the Lord sets out His complaint against Israel***

Throughout Amos we read a consistent message about the sins of Israel and her coming judgment by war, and Amos uses a series of different methods to open our eyes to its details. The first two chapters are a round of evocative prophecies that focus eventually on Israel's sins. Chapter three pronounces God's judgement and sets out some evidence, and chapter four continues with a series of pronouncements revealing God's unrequited love for Israel. Chapter five contains a dramatic lament bewailing Israel's death, and chapter six follows with a tragic description of the dying nation. The prophecy now reaches its climax in chapter seven with this series of summary visions.

Today's reading contains three visions, with the first two leading up to the third. This is interesting because Amos clearly uses numbers in a special way, for example, in chapters 1 and 2, he takes a 'perfect' number (3 or 7), and adds one more; he gives seven prophecies against the nations before rounding on Israel in the eighth (2:6-16), and he says in each '*for three sins ... and for four ...*' (1:3,6,9 etc.). In general, this suggests that we need to look beyond a perfect number of prophecies if we want to know Amos' full message, and here in chapter seven, we have three visions, so is there a fourth? Astonishingly, if we read ahead in Amos, we will find a fourth vision of identical structure at the beginning of chapter 8!

All this means that although each of the visions in today's reading are important, the third is not the true climax of the sequence. It is a stunning vision, but it is an important 'lead-in' to the fourth vision found in chapter 8, which we will study in a few day's time.

The first vision describes a swarm of locusts coming after the first cutting of feed for the King's cattle in early summer, stripping the land (7:2) and leaving no grazing for cattle. Amos then takes the role of a prophet or priest who intercedes for the people in their peril (7:2), and God answers by averting the plague. This vision reflects accurately what people of the day would have expected of their relationship with God and of their priests and prophets.

The second vision is similar, except that the catastrophe is judgement by fire. It describes a cataclysmic drying up of sea (the 'deep') and land (7:4), which may be a poetic picture of Israel's piercing hot south wind that could create havoc with crops. Amos intercedes for the people again and emphasizes Jacob's inability to handle such catastrophes, '*he is so small*' (7:5), and the Lord accepts Amos' pleas yet again (7:6) and holds back the judgement.

The third vision is different. Amos sees a plumb line, used then as now to measure a straight vertical line. The Lord then announces that He will use the plumb line against Israel as a measure of justice and righteousness. But Israel no longer measures up to God's standards, and will therefore be destroyed by invasion (7:8).

Together, these three visions reveal Amos' message about God's absolute justice and His consequent condemnation of Israel. Together with his famous word-picture, '*let justice surge down like water, and righteousness like a never-failing stream*' (5:24), this third vision is often presented as the heart of Amos' message. But although this is undoubtedly a climax, we should be careful. As a whole, Amos' prophecy bemoans every aspect of a broken relationship with God, from injustice to religious deviance. We must also bear in mind that after the third prophecy there is a fourth, and we should hold on our opinion of the third until we have read it.

Lastly, it is worth thinking about when Amos had these visions. Did he see them in the middle of his stressful visit to Bethel, or had they been seen earlier? We cannot know for sure, but it is unlikely that God would give these visions merely to reinforce a message Amos already knew. It is far more likely that these visions were God's way of impressing his Word on Amos before he arrived at Bethel, perhaps when he was working as a shepherd, back home in Tekoa.

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** (for use in groups)

1. How does God judge His people today, and how do we know what He is doing? Have you ever heard a prophet announce what God will do to judge His people?
2. Discuss whether God speaks to us today through natural disasters, and why people find it difficult to think that God might be speaking to us through natural disasters.
3. In what ways do God's people commit the twin sins of injustice and irreligion to which Amos objects in his prophecies?

### **Personal comments by author**

*Amos was very concerned to deliver his prophesy although his words were undoubtedly unpopular in his day. He delivered his visions and prophecies in difficult circumstances, risking ridicule and a considerable amount of misunderstanding. I wonder whether he felt uncertain at times? I, like many other preachers, can feel uncertain especially when I have preached what I sincerely believe to be the truth, and it has not been received. It is important to remember that no one who preaches the Word of God or delivers a prophetic word can have the luxury of confidence in anything other than God, and if we look to our own feelings or the response of others, we are lost. The Lord will reveal the truth.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Have you ever felt that the Lord has given you a special message about something, and you have thought about it but not actually told anyone? I am aware that this is a rather sharp question, but we will each be held accountable for the message He has put on our hearts. It is always best to talk about such things with a close friend, so that important things like this do not go by default.*
- *Ask the Lord to raise up prophets today who will reveal the truth of His Word to us in our sceptical world, and pray that God's people will affirm the word and take it to heart.*

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## Final Prayer

Let me hear Your voice tonight, faithful God and Lord of all. Speak to me so that I may know Your will, whether it be hard or easy, comforting or challenging, exciting or mundane; and let me value each and every word of the instruction You give for Your servant's life. Thank You Lord; AMEN

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