



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Amos 7

“The Repentant God and the Man of God”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our Scripture reading is from Amos chapter 7, but I wanted to just say a word to you about the reading of Amos before we read the Scripture this morning. We need to have an altar call. [Laughter] How many of you have read the Book of Amos in the past two weeks? Would you raise your hand? Look, that's very good. How many of you have read Amos twice? A few of you have read Amos twice. Congratulations. How many have read Amos three times? There's somebody who's read Amos three times. Did you not know how many have read Amos four times? Now see I know there is someone here who has read Amos six times. And so in the name of the elders to Roberta Weaver who is sitting over here behind the piano, we awarding here a trip to Hawaii at Merle's expense. [Laughter] Now, they're leaving this week for Hawaii and so I want you, Roberta, and you, Merle, to think of us as the ones who've given you this trip at Merle's expense.

I really was very delighted this morning because in the eight thirty service the majority of the people, maybe the great majority of the people, have read Amos at least once over the past two weeks, and, I know, you cannot help but get a great deal more over the ministry of the word if you read Amos because the prophets are not an easy books for us to read. We are so many centuries from the life that they lived, and there

are so many things we would find difficult to understand if we did not read and read and perhaps even consult a simple commentary on some of the sections. So I’m very gratified to see you raise your hand that you’ve read Amos. But, you know, in spiritual things you either go forward or you go backwards. So next week we’ll have another altar call, and we have only three or four messages in the Book of Amos left and I hope you’ll read Amos again this week. And I want you to know I read through the Hebrew text again.

And yesterday I was coming down from Chicago, and I was reading the 7th chapter, which is the chapter that we are expounding today again, and I had my Hebrew testament open on the seat by me. I was sitting in the first class section because I had a first class upgrade from the coach section, and there were thirty-four first class seats in this DC10 and there were three of us there. So I got some special attention from the stewardess, flight attendant. And so one of them came up to me and looked down and saw that Hebrew Old testament and she looked at it and then she said, “Is that Hebrew?” And I said, “Well yes, it is.” And she said, “Are you a rabbi?” I said, “Well why do you think I ordered lox and bagels for breakfast this morning.” [Laughter] I didn’t say that but we had a nice little conversation as a result of reading Amos chapter 7 in the Hebrew text. So I want you to know I did read Amos over the past two weeks in the Hebrew text and will do it again for next week. So we’ll have another opportunity to see you raise your hand. For those of you who’ve read it more than once I really do admire your persistence and I know that you profited from it.

But let’s turn now to Amos chapter 7, and we’ll read verse 1 through verse 17 for our Scripture reading. You can see that Amos in chapter 7 through the first part of chapter 9 gives us now a series of five visions that he received from the Lord. They are interrupted by the encounter with Amaziah the priest. Verse 1.

“Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, He was forming a locust-swarm when the spring crop began to sprout. And behold, the spring crop was after the king's mowing.”

Now, let me explain that. I, in the first service this morning, explained it in the message but I think maybe it would be better here. There were two takings of the grass crop for the animals: One in the early spring when the grass was particularly tender and that the king took for his animals. It was like the IRS taking the best of the production. Therefore, the second growing of the grass is the final growing of the grass. And so the point of Amos’s vision is to show that if the locusts consume the second growing, then there’s no further growing, so the situation is looked at as being a rather hopeless situation. That’s the reason Amos writes what he does.

“And behold the spring crop way after the king’s mowing. And it came about, when it (that is the locust swarm) had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I said, ‘Lord God, please pardon! How can Jacob stand, for he is small?’ The Lord changed His mind about this. ‘It shall not be,’ said the Lord. Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, the Lord God was calling to contend with them by fire, and it consumed the great deep and began to consume the farmland. Then I said, ‘Lord God, please stop! How can Jacob stand, for he is small?’ The Lord changed His mind about this. ‘This too shall not be,’ said the Lord God.”

You notice of the addition of the word that suggests the sovereign, Yahweh.

“Thus He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand. The Lord said to me, ‘What do you see, Amos?’ And I said, ‘A plumb line.’ Then the Lord said, ‘Behold I am about to put a plumb line in the midst of

My people Israel, I will spare them no longer.’ The high places of Isaac will be desolated and the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste then shall I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

Notice there’s no answering prayer on Amos’s part.

“Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, ‘Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words.’ For thus Amos says, ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.’ Then Amaziah said to Amos, ‘Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying. But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence.’ Then Amos replied to Amaziah, ‘I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet.”

That, incidentally, is one of the major critical problems of the Book of Amos. That Amos should say he’s not a prophet but go on to say he’s going to prophesy. The probable reason for this is that Amos is denying that he’s a professional prophet. That he doesn’t belong to the guild of the prophets referred to the other passages in the Old Testament. It’s very much, I think, as if a person were to say having preached a very good message and someone complimenting him he should say, “I’m not really a minister but I’ve been preaching.” Like a businessman, for example, or someone else who is not ordained by a particular church. Mr. Spurgeon, for example, was never ordained. He might say I’m not an ordained minister but I preach the word. So Amos, I think, is saying something like that. I’m not a member of the prophetic guild but he is prophesying and it’s obvious he’s fairly good at it too. So Amos adds it and said to Amaziah.

“The Repentant God and the Man of God” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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“I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower 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 hear the word of the Lord: you are saying, ‘You shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you preach against the house of Isaac.’ ‘Therefore,’ thus says the Lord, ‘Your wife (he’s talking to Amaziah) will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled up by a measuring line and you yourself will die upon unclean soil (that is he would go into captivity and die there outside the land). Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.’”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we approach Thee through the name of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that we do not look for the coming of the Messiah, but we look to him who has already come and has completed his atoning work and now waits to finish the work that he will do when he comes a second time and establishes his kingdom. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the vantage point that we have when we read the completed revelation of the word of God. We thank Thee, Lord, for the way through the Holy Spirit that Thou hast given us a measure of understanding of Thy truth. And today, we worship Thee through Jesus Christ, the Messiah, our mediator and Lord.

We ask Thy blessing upon us as a local assembly, upon our elders and deacons and the members and the friends and the visitors who are here today, Lord, bless them richly. May the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ be special to them and, especially, at this time of the year when we often think more particularly about certain aspects of the ministry of Christ. We pray for our country. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon the

president, upon our government. Give us the opportunity to continue to preach the word of God with freedom under the ministry of the Spirit.

We pray Thy blessing upon the outreach of the whole church of Jesus Christ wherever the word goes forth today. And for the Chapel and its ministries, we pray for them the publications, the radio ministries, and other outreaches that not only the Chapel as a whole but individual members have. Lord, help us to faithfully represent Thee in the day in which we live and deliver us from the sin of indifference and lethargy. And the things of the Lord give us boldness to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And now we ask Thy blessing upon us as we sing, as we listen to the word of God, we also remember those who have requested our prayers minister to them, Lord. We pray for their blessing and for the glory of Thy name.

We pray for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Message] Singing that particular Christmas hymn always reminds me of my mother because when I was growing up I had a bad habit of often sitting with my mouth open and I can still hear my mother say, “Close your mouth, Louis. Close your mouth.” Maybe there was an anticipation of the fact that God was going to call me to minister the word of God, I don’t know but they didn’t think that. I’m sure I must have looked rather silly. And so as I looked out on the audience this morning you look nice holding your mouth open while you were singing that Gloria. I always feel a little self conscious saying GL-OO. [Laughter] so anyways, I like the hymn but it does remind me of my mother. It would remind me to keep your mouth closed.

The subject for today as we turn to the exposition of the prophecy of Amos is “The Repentance of God and The Man of God.” One of the finest of the interpreters of the Book of Amos says with reference of chapter 7, “scratch the surface of the prophecy of Amos and outcomes the doctrine of eternal security.” The doctrine of eternal security is a doctrine that many of us are well acquainted with or think we are well acquainted

with it. And it certainly is one of the most marvelous of the doctrines of the word of God. It’s usually expressed in words that stress the human side of our security as the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

But the doctrine of eternal security or the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints simply defined is really the doctrine of eternal life. That is when we are given eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is eternal life. It’s not six-month’s life. It’s not one-year’s life. It’s not life until you sin, but it is eternal life. It’s not the doctrine that a professing believer is saved no matter what its practice may be; that overlooks very important truths that we don’t have time to expound this morning such as the possession of a new nature, the doctrine of family discipline which is exercised by the Lord God when we do not live in conformity to the revelation, and what it says about true family life. It overlooks also the doctrine of Christian rewards. Positively, it’s the doctrine that God secures in grace the salvation of true believers keeping them from sinning as a practice and from apostasy. In other words, those who have been brought to life through the effectual grace of the Holy Spirit will not lose that life. We say he preserves, we persevere. “We may better speak of the perseverance of the savior than the perseverance of the saints,” Mr. Spurgeon used to say.

One of the leading 20<sup>th</sup> Century theologians has defined the doctrine this way. Perseverance may be defined as that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer by which the work of divine grace begun in the heart is continued and brought to completion. So when we talk about the perseverance of the saints, we mean simply that true believers will not apostatize from the faith and in the mean time they will not sin as a practice. Well, that doesn’t mean they will not fall into sin, but sin is not the bit of their life.

Now, that’s a very important doctrine, and it’s a doctrine taught not simply in the New Testament, but in other words is taught in the Old Testament as well. And one can see it here. Israel has been given invaluable covenantal promises but yet Israel at the

present time has become largely a people who simply profess the faith and whose life is far from it. There is a remnant that is true to the word of God. They’re not sinless, but they have truly believed in the covenantal doctrine of the coming redeemer. For example, and they are trusting in that and growing in the knowledge of the Lord but they’ve become the minority. It is truly a remnant and so one of the purposes of Amos is to recover this doctrine of eternal life or the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints from abuse and there was a lot of abuse of that in Israel at this time because they conceived of themselves because they had the covenantal promises as being a saved nation. So Amos points out that the historical fact of divine election is marvelous but it doesn’t guarantee the salvation of every individual Israelite. He said in chapter 3, “You only have I known of all the families on the earth.” But then he added, “Therefore, I will punish you for your iniquities.” And that generation of which Amos was a part largely a lost generation and because of that God sends them into captivity, a remnant remained faithful from the Old Testament Scriptures revealing a great deal of their life.

Later on when the southern kingdom also went into the Babylonian captivity, there was Jeremiah, a faithful man. God’s promises were maintained with reference to Jeremiah, but others had departed from the faith and were largely also a lost generation. In Amos’s case, he’s pointing out that the sins of the nation exposed the hollowness of their claims to belong to him. It’s obvious that the prophets felt that one could look at the general tenor of life and make an accurate judgment with reference to the faith of the nation. Well the question arises and it, I’m sure it must have arisen with some Israelites who heard Amos who were true believers.

And when they heard him speak about the fact that God was going to judge them and send them into captivity, and they had been truly trusting in the promises of God, they must have raised the question in their discussions about spiritual things, “Will God stand by his promises when the wrath comes?” And that comes before us now in these final visions and Amos will point out that God does stand behind those ancient promises.



Those ancient promises will be fulfilled. It reached its climax in the last part of chapter 9 where he points out in spite of all of the ways in which this generation has departed from the Lord, those ancient promises still will be fulfilled, but the present generation is largely a lost generation. So Amos’s answer is, “Yes, God’s faithful to his promises to those who by grace had been brought to the knowledge of him.”

Now, five visions are given in chapter 7 through the first part of chapter 9. These visions are interrupted by confrontation between a liberal ecclesiastic by the name of Amaziah who was a priest in Bethel in this heretically apostate northern kingdom and the conservative rustic in one sense a kind of charismatic. In this sense not that he spoke in tongues but rather that he had the gift of prophecy, and he exercised his gift of prophecy even though he was not an official member of the prophetic guild. We have so many instances and examples of people like Amaziah today that it’s hard to know where to begin.

Ten years ago, I saw, in Britain an influential book was published by largely a number of Anglican theologians, important men. And they sought to show that the doctrine of the deity of Christ was an unbiblical doctrine. Their book that they edited, authored, and published was called “The Myth of the Incarnate God.” And, of course, it was an attempt to show that Christ was not really truly the Son of God in the sense in which the Christian church had always propagated that doctrine; that he was not possessor of full deity. Shortly after that a number of evangelicals in Britain published an answer. And the evangelicals did a fairly good job. And they entitled their little book “The Truth of an Incarnate God,” and the theological moles, if you will pardon the express, but I read spy novels and we always hear about the moles who are in the governments and are spying for another government.

Well the theological moles, the servants of Satan, really according to Scripture went back into their hole for a little while, but they emerged from time to time and down through the years literally thousands of people have sought to attack the Christian faith

and particularly the doctrine of Christ. I think I mentioned that just recently one of the Book of the Month Club’s selections is entitled “The First Coming,” written by a professor of philosophy at Loyola University professing Christian institution. And in this particular book, the goal of this professor is to let us know that Jesus Christ did not really claim to be God that we should not think of him as the son of God in the historic sense in which those terms are used but rather we should think of him as an unusual man, a kind of prophet but not the son of God in the historic sense. So over and over again we have these attempts to overthrow the Christian faith.

Amaziah would have felt quite at home. He was living in an apostate kingdom. It’s true that they went through all the emotions of a believing community. They even talked about Yahweh. They had their sacrifices. They had their temples. As he mentions here, their sanctuaries. They had their king of Israel, but it was all heretical. And so Amos is called from his business of the sycamore figs and herding sheep to go to the north and to give them the truth as the prophet of God and that’s what he’s doing.

Now, these visions that we’re going to look at are visions of total destruction in verses 1 through 6, and then a vision that is sort of a test in verse 7 through verse 9, a test of the nation. And then we have an interruption, perhaps, caused by the fact that Amos’s doctrine is now become so despicable to the religious men of the northern kingdom that they feel something has really got to be done about it and so the encounter with Amaziah is inserted at this point perhaps as a result of some of these very messages that we are reading about here the visions. The question is national survival and the doubling of the visions emphasizes that. So we’ll read through them and just make a few comments. And try to set our attention on the things that may be of some importance.

“Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, He was forming a locust-swarm when the spring crop began to sprout. And behold, the spring crop was after the king’s mowing. And it came about, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I

said, ‘Lord God, please pardon! How can Jacob stand, for he is small?’ The Lord changed His mind about this. ‘It shall not be,’ said the Lord.”

So what Amos prophesied as a result of his vision is a temporal calamity. The IRS or the king has taken that which belonged to them. Nothing is left but the second growing of the grass and God has formed a locust swarm. It’s obvious that the heat forming the locust swarm is the Lord God himself. In fact, that very Hebrew word is a word that is used of God’s creation in Genesis 1 and 2. It suggests a skillful artisan and so we have the hand of God. It was a word that was often used of a potter who is making pottery by the skill of his art. And so the Lord God in his skillful artisanship forms the locusts swarm when the spring crop began to sprout.

Now, the cause is the Lord God. He’s the one responsible for the evil. Now, Amos has already spoken about that, and we’ve talked about it so we won’t say anything more about it. But you remember that Amos pointed out an evil takes place, has not the Lord done it? Well, here is an instance of just that. Well, Amos responds with a prayer. It’s great to have a prophet but to have a praying prophet is even greater. So Amos is not simply a prophet who is giving out messages of judgment but he is one who’s entered into the tragedy of the situation and being one of them he prays, “Lord God please pardon.” It’s a strange prayer. You know you wouldn’t think that he would pray please pardon. You would think that he would say please don’t do it. Please don’t bring it to pass but he says, “Please pardon,” why? Well of the simple reason that that lies back of the locust swarm is the sin of the northern kingdom and so he realizes that the cause of this is their sin. And thinking about that he said, “Lord please pardon. How can Jacob stand for he’s small?” And we read, “The Lord changed His mind about this.” So he got his answer. The Lord changed his mind. Let’s read on before we say a word about that. The next vision is also a vision of total destruction verse 4 through verse 6, “Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold the Lord God was calling to contend with them by fire.”

Now, this too is a supernatural kind of judgment that is to fall, and those of you who read through the Book of Amos will remember that in the first and second chapters he talks about sending a fire. Well, here we have something very similar. It’s God’s means of judgment. And so the vision here then is of the Lord contending with them by fire and consuming the great deep and then beginning to consume the farmland. So the fire from God is destroying everything. It’s a supernatural calamity. It even dries up the great deep

Now, the great deep is a reference to the cosmic sea under the earth as a source of the springs and waters according to their views. And, furthermore, it was characteristic of people here in the northern kingdom to be exposed to the doctrine of the worship of the gods of the great deep particularly Rahab. You read about Rahab in the Old Testament and you’ll also about Tiamont. And Tiamont was one of the gods of the great deep. I love the sense of humor that the Lord has because the judgment here is the judgment of fire consuming the great deep; in other words, burning poor old Tiamont out of house and home as we would say. So the Lord God is burning the false god and his home up. There’s a lot of humor in this and those who worship Tiamont. I’m sure they got the message. So and they got the message, and they were anxious to have Amos’s life if they could possibly have it. So again the lesson is that his people are not secure from divine calamities falling upon them.

Now, when we say his people I mean, of course, the covenant people. They are the object of divine calamities. The cause again is the Lord God and again Amos prays, “Please stop Lord, how can Jacob stand for he’s small.” And we read. “The Lord God changed his mind about or the Lord changed his mind about this.” “This too shall not be,” said the Lord God. The addition of the term Lord God in order to stress the sovereignty of the Lord God, so the cause is divine judgment; the prophet prays and the prophet receives his answer.

Now, that raises the question, two questions really, both of them have to do with the virtue of prayer. The determination of God to save and secure a people for himself is inscrutable, ultimately. How can you explain divine election so that all of our questions are answered? Well, after you’ve studied the Bible for forty or fifty years, you’ll have a lot more answers than you do when you are first presented with this but after all, in the Bible all through the Bible, divine sovereign election is ultimately traced to divine sovereign love and beyond that as we’ve so often said we’re unable to go. We say God loved us and he chose us. If you say, why did he choose us, well the Bible tells us all the reasons why he didn’t choose us, why he did not choose us. They were not reasons for his choice: good works, culture, education, etc, etc. He chose us, the Scriptures say, simply because he loved us, sovereign love, true love is sovereign, sovereign love.

And if you say why did he love us? You say well he loved us because he loved us. And if you say why did he love us because he loved us? We say because he loved us. And so we have what philosophers call infinite regression. Everything goes back to he loved us because he loved us, because he loved us, because he loved us, and that’s as far as we can go with reference to the divine election. But, nevertheless, what about prayer? What place does prayer have in a situation in which God is sovereign? Well, prayer, incidentally, is suggested by the Lord God. It’s he that tells us we ought to pray. So prayer suggested by the Lord God we learn from Scripture moves God who is the ruler of everything.

Now, that may be a puzzle. Why does God sovereignly do things and then call us to pray? Why should not we say, he’s going to accomplish all of his purposes so we sit back and enjoy life? Well, of course, even we didn’t understand anything we’d know that was wrong because the Bible says over and over again that we should pray. So we pray and as a result of the study of the Scriptures, we learned that when God says that he will do certain things and secures the accomplishment of those ends or goals, the Scriptures also say that he secures the ends and goals that he is determined to secure through

prayer, through witnessing, through many other things that are incidental in our Christian experience. So prayer is one of the divinely ordained means by which he accomplishes his divinely ordained goals and the prophet he prays and God answers.

Now, you can find this in the Bible illustrated so often you wonder how we can miss it. Now I don’t remember, I don’t say we understand everything about this. Many of us can say after forty years we understand a lot more than we used to understand about it but we don’t understand everything. For example, when Zecharias has announced to him that John the Baptist is going to be born, and finally John the Baptist is born then we read that the heavenly messenger says Zechariahs your prayer has been heard. Now, if Zechariah had been a student of the word of God like some people I know who overstress some doctrines of the word of God and do not seek to truly explain them he might have said I don’t have to pray. I know that a forerunner of the Lord is going to come because Malachi speaks of him coming and Isaiah chapter 40 speaks of him coming but, nevertheless, when Zechariahs is given the promise he prays and then when it comes to pass the heavenly messenger says God’s answered your prayer. So we learn that we pray for things that are set out in the word of God. In fact, that’s the best kind of prayer to offer.

Some people say I don’t know what I should pray when I pray. Get down on your knees and open the Bible and look at the things in the word of God, when you come to a promise lift up your heart to the Lord and pray that that promise may be fulfilled with your life. It may be something he’s guaranteed but you’ll discover that as you pray God’s word in accordance with it, those things will begin to come to pass in your life. One of the means by which he accomplishes his purposes is through prayer. So Amos adopts the divine estimate of things, and so he says pardon Lord please stop and God answers his prayer. What a lovely thing to have a prophet who prophesies and prays.

Now, then what about this, the Lord changed his mind about this. We’ve always been taught that God is immutable; that he doesn’t change. To change would be to go from present situation to something better or something worse. That’s inconceivable. We do have theologians today like process theology that suggests that God is a changeable God. But usually that’s a failure to understand the scriptural teaching. We don’t have time to talk of all of the reasons why we can say God is immutable and at the same time answer questions that naturally arise like the incarnation. Did that producer change in God? Did the creation producer change in God? If a god is immutable, he must be immobile. All of those things, of course, raise questions which are, I think, easily answered or relatively easily answered.

But what about this God repentant? Sometimes translated in the Old Testament in some versions God relented. Did Amos pray God into a better frame of mind after his anger? In other words, was God angry and Amos prayed and the Lord God said, “Well I guess I overreacted. I’ll change my mind.” Of course, the very idea is inconceivable. It’s terrible even to think a thought like that. Let me explain briefly. God’s repentance does not refer to a change in God’s being or his attributes. It has to do with a change in his manner of treating men. His words often have a nature of contingency about them. Remember Jonah when he went to Nineveh. Do you remember his message, a very short message? It went all over that great city. It was a big city. And his message was very simple. He didn’t have to prepare any sermons at all so far as we know. Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed. Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed.

If you were taking odds, if there was a Las Vegas at that time, I wonder what the odds would have been on Nineveh’s destruction. Yet forty days Nineveh shall be destroyed God’s speaking. Well, actually it didn’t take place. The Scriptures say the Ninevites repented and God repented. And Nineveh was not destroyed. So but if you look carefully at that message yet forty days you’ll see there was contingency written into it. So yet forty days was the period of time for their response in repentance which in this

case was favorable. He could have just as well blown the whistle on Nineveh without any warning but he gave the warning because of the contingency involved.

Now, if you read Jeremiah chapter 18, there Jeremiah goes into great detail on that particular type of thing. He says when people repent God forgives. When they don’t, he doesn’t. He explains the theology of it. Now, I’ve always thought the analogy of a thermometer is useful. Is the thermometer changeable or unchangeable? Well the superficial observer might say it’s changeable. The mercury moves in the tube according to the heat and cold. It’s up. It’s down. It’s very changeable. Now, in another sense the thermometer is unchangeable. It moves according to the fixed law. It invariably responds to the temperature. So the thermometer is an unchanging instrument. Unchangeable instrument, if it were a perfect instrument. So repentance in God is not change of will or change of his attributes or his being. It’s a will to change.

If God had created the Ninevites after their repentance as he had threatened to treat them before the repentance, this would have proved him to be mutable because it would have showed him to be at one time displeased with impenitence and then at another time displeased with penitence. So the fact that he changed is a reflection of the change in the Ninevites who conformed to his will. God did not change. They changed. And so here when we read the Lord changed his mind about this. It shall not be. We don’t have any change in the essential being of God any more than when God created this universe there was any change in his attributes and being. He created something outside of himself. Or when the Lord Jesus took to himself a human nature, the divine Son’s attributes and being did not change, he just took to himself an additional nature, a human nature, but the divine attributes and the divine being in the divine Son remained the same. So when we read here, God repented -- changed his mind. We’re not to think that, therefore, God is a changeable God.

Well, the second or the third vision is a vision that’s a kind of test. Walls were built of stones without mortar, and that was common in the land. They would slowly



shift and they would settle. In fact, in the Talmud there was a legend that Gabriel was sent out with the Lord God and with a sack of stones and he was to scatter them all over the earth. But when Gabriel flew over Palestine the sack broke and all the stones fell out there. So here is a land filled with stones, and naturally buildings were made with stone and they settled and you had to have a plum line.

Now, carpenters don’t use a plum line much anymore. Yesterday, I went out at something built in part of our house, built by a carpenter. It was off kilter. I looked at it and said that’s libel to drive me crazy. So when the carpenter came in I said, “This is off line by about three eighths of an inch.” They don’t use a plum line anymore you know. He said, “But when I put the top on it, it would look all right. [Laughter] Well the plum line is a very good thing. You go around Dallas and you see the new homes, they don’t use a plum line much. You can tell if you just watch the workmanship.

So here is a plum line, and the plum line is there to measure. And it’s Israel that’s being measured. And so we read.

“He showed me and there was a man standing by a vertical wall with a plum line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, ‘What do you see Amos?’ And I said, ‘A plum line.’ And the Lord said, “Behold I’m about to put a plum line in the midst of my people Israel and I will spare them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be desolated the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste. Then I shall rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

Well, it’s obvious that Israel’s failed the test that generation. His self-revelation has been disregarded. They were brought by him into the grace of the covenant relationship. They had to walk before him according to his law but they failed and as a result the judgment must come. Amos doesn’t pray. He senses that this is the final judgment as far as that generation is concerned. It’s at this point that Amaziah finally has

had enough. And the priests of Bethel sent word to Jeroboam the king of Israel saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is unable to endure all his words for Amos says Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.”

Now, we don’t have time to go into detail here, but this a very interesting thing because as you can see what he’s doing is testing Amos. He’s God’s plum line by Amos to see how Amos will respond. He accuses of misrepresentation. He accuses him of conspiring of being a traitor to the kingdom. His loyalty is discredited; many of the great men of God have had that accusation laid against them. Jeremiah was called a traitor. The Lord Jesus was looked at by some as a kind of revolutionary. The apostles turned the world upside down. They frequently liked to bring the charge of civil disobedience against them. And so, consequently, it’s not surprising that that’s one of the ways in which Amaziah attacks Amos.

And then he says, in essence, he’s acting in self-interest. Notice the 12th verse, “Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying!” In other words, go to the south. They’ll receive you down south. We don’t like that kind of preaching up here in the north. Go south. Go to Judah. Southerners will listen to you. Furthermore, you will get money down there. There you can eat bread. That’s what he means by that. We’re not going to pay you anything up here Amos. So you’re not going to have a profitable time up here and she has got the wrong man. But listen let me tell you, there are lots of men out there who are seeking to preach the word for financial reasons a lot; that even in our evangelical circles. So he says Amos goes out, flees to the south and there he bred and there do your prophesying. This blind man contemptuously refers to him as the seer. That’s very interesting because Amaziah is blind and he calls Amos a seer. If you just listen to his own words, he might have gotten saved. But at any rate, he attacks him then saying he’s acting in self-interest.

And I guess for Amos in Amos’s life there would have been normally some temptation. After all, he’s not too popular up north.

How’d you like to be dodging sticks and stones all the time and maybe lose your life? That’s no fun. And then to be encouraged to go south where he might have a favorable response, who wouldn’t want to preach to twenty five hundred people rather than this small crowd. Who wouldn’t? That’s quite a temptation. So Amos is tempted to act out of self-interest and the desire for success and security. And then, of course, he also is confronted with authority of the north. He is, in effect, told the church he’s not going to stand for what you’re doing. So like the Christians in Soviet Russia or the Christians in Romania or in other places where they stand for the truth of the word of God against the authorities, Amos is standing against the authorities beginning to feel the pressure. So what would you do? Well, I’m afraid I’m happy that Amos was in this position and not S. Lewis Johnson Jr. It wouldn’t be nice.

You know, in boxing there are different kinds of fighters. I always look at boxers as if I wish I was like they are. It has a kind of fatal appeal for me. If I turn the dial on the TV and see a fight going I just inevitably look at it. You know, I’d love to have the courage to get in the ring like some of those fellows. On Friday night, there was a fight, a knockout in the first round for the one of the versions of the world heavyweight championship. There are two kinds of fighters: One like one of the present champions who is an attacking fighter, Mike Tyson, saw him fight, tremendous puncher. Everything is forward until the other guy falls or he falls. And he hasn’t fallen yet. Well, the others are called counter punchers. And when the other guy attacks you’d better be careful to defend yourself after you throw your blows because the next blow is going to come from the other fellow who’s got sneaky right or lefts as the case may be.

Amos is a good counter-puncher. Listen to what he says. He says in verse 14, “I am not a prophet, am I the son of a prophet.” I’m not one of you professional fellows. “I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs.” I need your money. I have an

independent source of income. I’ve got a business. So you threaten me with being able to eat my bread down south. That’s no threat. I’ve always thought it’d be nice if all evangelical preachers had independent sources of income. There’d be a whole less people in the congregation probably because they would fearlessly preach the word of God. And they would know that no matter where they preached they would still survive. But some fellows they have to trim their sails because they know that if they say words a little too sharply, they might offend some of the elders or the deacons or some of the members of the official board and they might not be there too long. And they’d be out there looking for a new place to preach. I admire courageous preachers. I really do. I wish I had the courage of a lot that I know, who in difficult situations are nevertheless faithful to the Lord.

So Amos counterpunches and he says look I don’t need the money. Furthermore, if you’re talking about going south where they will receive me and further that they won’t receive me up here, I’d like to let you know that so far as I’m concerned I stand on divine authority. You thought that you could pull rank on me, but the trouble is the rank that you’re talking about is not as high as my rank because your rank that you are suggesting is to be on good terms with King Jeroboam and with these false priests and prophets in the northern kingdom who are contrarily to the word of God preaching the word. But look my authority comes from the Lord God. Yahweh took me. I have higher rank. I have the highest rank you could have. I am a prophet of the Lord God. That’s what we are, incidentally, as preachers of the word of God. That’s our authority. We have the highest of rank.

And Mr. Spurgeon and others who like to say if God calls you to be a missionary, don’t stoop to be a king. We’re speaking about this very thing. If God has called us to the ministry of the word of God we have the highest authority for the performance of what we’re doing. So I’m not a prophet. I’m not even the son of a prophet. I’m a herdsman and growing figs but the Lord took me. It was the sovereign hand of God laid

upon me when I didn’t have the intention for the ministry he took me. And he took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, “Go prophesy to my people Israel.”

And now my admiration for Amos increases, of course

Now, he looks at Amaziah all his enemies are standing around. Would have been nice wouldn’t it to have an instant replay of this and see exactly where it occurred and who was standing around listening. “But listen,” he says, “Now hear the words of God. You are saying you shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you preach against the house of Isaac.” “Therefore,” thus says Yahweh. You are saying this but Yahweh says this. “Your wife will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled up by a measuring line and you yourself will die upon foreign soil. Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.”

This all this reminds me so much of people who even in our day and even evangelicals say don’t preach the Bible outside the place where the Bible ought to be preached in a church. You’re welcome to Bible preaching but don’t bring it into public life. Stay home in Judah. Don’t bother us in Bethel. It’s the king’s sanctuary. Don’t introduce doctrine in our schools. Don’t poison the minds of our children. Don’t bother us with Christian ideas about social and political life that would degrade religion. Hitler’s third Reich was filled with shrines and sacred cows and ministers all over the place. The state was the temple, the king sanctuary, and to remain silent became a sin. That’s why men who weren’t even as evangelical as others like Carl Barth left the country. There’s always some Amaziah there to serve as a priest on behalf of the state and see to it that the dissenters are deported and discouraged. As evangelicals, we have the responsibility to speak the word of God.

Now, we should speak it responsibly, but we should say what we say in the life of the country and not keep it within the confines of an auditorium like this. So the lord of the plum line measures the two men. One is taken away in judgment. One is left for the simple reason that one bowed before the word of God.

“The Repentant God and the Man of God” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, we remind you that the Scriptures say that Christ has offered an atoning sacrifice for sinners and you may have the forgiveness of sins if you bow your heart before the Lord God at this very moment. Confess your sin. Acknowledge Christ, the savior, from sin. Receive him as your personal savior in genuineness. We invite you to come to Christ. Believe in him. Trust in him. Receive God’s marvelous forgiveness.

May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are so grateful to Thee for prophets and preachers and men of God who are neither prophets nor preachers and women of God who were faithful to Thy word and who are today faithful to Thy word. Give us courage. Lord, deliver us from cowardice. Help us truly to represent our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.