

Many of us have questioned “Why GOD?” “Why would God send a plague upon all the world?” Some have cried “Dear GOD send us rain to quench the fires;” while parts of the Nation begged “GOD stop the floods and hurricanes” and still others questioned “Why did God cause a building to collapse?” Our Scripture readings this day assume that GOD is not so capricious. The Roman Empire and the Greeks before them, believed in a Pantheon of Gods who did play with people’s lives to hear them scream from natural disasters, from war, from love. But consider a different vantage point. The Hebrews and Christians, have each believed in One True God: Creator, Judge and Redeemer; but also that God loves Creation, and most of all God loves God’s people.

Scripture names over and over and over again, humanity turned away from GOD. We who claim to be Believers, we who have been adopted with the identity “Christian” have fallen, seeking our own desires. YET for thousands of years, over hundreds of Empires and Kingdoms, in every country, when we who have sinned repent, turning around to ask forgiveness, GOD has wiped clean the slate, acting in love instead of punishment. But back when Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sinned, the world was still new. Even when David and Solomon sought their own desires; the sins of Israel’s great Kings were 3 Millennia ago. Jesus was sacrificed on the cross 2000 years ago; and again God forgave, that not even our act of killing the Son of God would separate us from God’s love. But Today, after so many failures, so many sins, after so many wars and mass murders, so much hate and derision; Can God/ Will God, still forgive us?

This was the fear of the Psalmist, who like JOB replies in verse 8 “Let me hear what God the LORD will speak...” YET, instead of being reminded GOD IS GOD, the Psalmist describes God’s adoration.

In the summer of 2019, when candidating at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Tucson to become your pastor, this same passage from Amos came up. However, in these two years some intriguing developments have taken place making this very relevant.

In the first 7 verses of Chapter 7, Amos describes God revealing to the Prophet a vision of GOD’s destruction of the world, **First by Insects**. According to Amos, God created Locusts, which would devour all vegetation, causing the people of the world to suffer. The Prophet plead for forgiveness, And GOD Forgave. But while GOD repented, the people did not.

Intending to create greater production of Honey, researchers bred the European Honey Bees we know with East African Lowland Bees and introduced this new variation in Brazil. By 1985 26 Swarms of these hybrid giant insects escaped, with hives found this year throughout Texas, California and Arizona! The Africanized bees are typically bigger, far more defensive, reacting more quickly to disturbances than indigenous bees. They can chase a person ¼ mile, have Killed over 1,000 human beings, the venom can kill a horse, victims generally receiving 10 times more stings than from ordinary European Honey Bees.

A **second time in Amos**, God reveals to the Prophet a Vision of the destruction of the world. At the bottom of the sea, God has forms a ball of fire. Understand the hyperbole of this, that rather than wild fire in drought, this would be a fire under the ocean. This seemed bizarre and far-fetched, until last week when July 2nd -5th film footage was released of “The Eye of Fire” in the Gulf of Mexico, a natural gas fire erupting from a leak in the earth’s crust beneath the sea, with a 400 meter diameter as it burned on the surface. Where the Oil Company is reported to have used Nitrogen to extinguish the flames, the Prophet Amos plead with God, “Cease, I beg of You!” and GOD forgave. But while God repented, people did not.

Whereupon, Amos is given a 3rd revelation. Most of us are familiar with architectural lines needing to be Straight and Level, here the Prophet Amos is made to see that vertical walls also need to be Plumb. 2000 years before **Sir Isaac Newton** postulated a Theory of a Law of Gravity, the Ancients had been using a

Plumbline, with a gravitational weight. When the weight hung free, the line from heaven to earth demonstrated whether a wall was True or out of alignment. The Prophet Amos was taken by GOD to a Wall of the Temple at Jerusalem, presumably what we now know to be the Wailing Wall, which is the only existent element of what once was the Inner Sanctum of the Holy of Holies, the most sacred place where only the High Priest of Israel went to pray for the people to GOD; where faster than email, prayers placed in cracks in the wall go directly to heaven. Here it is revealed to the Prophet, to speak to the Nations that the Walls of the Temple are no longer True, instead the whole of the people will be crushed by the fall of the walls, for the people's corruption.

This is where our portion of this text begins today, but the text also leads us to fascinating elements. Just as today, there is a contest here over whose version of the truth is truly true. The prophet of God is named Amos, where the Official Court Prophet of the King of Israel was named Amaziah. The King's Court Official accuses Amos of being **a PROPHET for PROFIT**, spreading Fake Bad News to undermine the Government. To which Amos provides this Classic response, "I am not a prophet or even the Son of a Prophet!" I was chosen by God to tell the truth, do with the truth as you please.

I beg to differ with the New International Translation here, because they have Amos identifying "I was a Shepherd and Dresser of Sycamore Fig Trees."

The truthful part of this is that Amos was not a Court Official nor even from inside the Beltway. Amos was a rural bumpkin, who had made his life as an Arborist trimming trees. Sycamores are notorious as messy trees, needing you to pick up peeling bark. Even more, that branches often grow across other branches, which left to their own growth will damage the tree in conflict during a strong wind. What a marvelous vocation for a Prophet sent from God, **A Specialist in dealing with Conflict brought on by The Holy Spirit!**

The part I have difficulty with is that other Bibles traditionally translate Amos' primary vocation not as a Shepherd, but as a **Herdsmen**. A Shepherd much like a King would sit atop a hillside, watching over the whole of the flock, where they could see approaching danger. When the flock moved, the sheep followed the Shepherd or the Shepherd would come round behind as often sheep go in their own direction. A Herdsman on the other hand led a flock of goats or cattle from being one in the midst of the herd. The Herdsman ate what the herd ate, slept where the herd slept, in short was one with the needs and concerns of the herd experiencing life as the herd experienced.

But there is another subtle and important problem in this text. **The 3rd Vision that is revealed to Amos is of a Plumbline** held up beside the Temple of Israel to determine if their faith in God, and their relationship to God is Plumb and True. The difficulty is the Hebrew word commonly translated as Plumbline is ANAK, but the Hebrew language never had the word Plumbline! ANAK is a word borrowed by Syro-Phoenician, much as English has borrowed the word "Sushi" from Japanese, "Façade" from French, or Ratatouille from the Mediterranean, because we had no word for these things until the items were already appropriated into our culture. Hebrew does have a word spelled ANAH, the only difference coming from the formation of the final letter. And in Hebrew an H looks exactly like a K, except for being dotted, much as we would dot a letter "I". However, ANAH does not mean Plumbline, instead ANAH in Hebrew means "A Sigh". So the deeper meaning of this text is that after God had revealed the sins of the people to the Prophet, over and over again; and the prophet had begged God again and again to forgive, but people never changed; GOD revealed to the Prophet just how much out of True their faith in God/their relationship to God was. Here, the Prophet of the King challenged the Prophet of God... All that God could say was A Sigh: "Arrrgh!"

I do not believe that God has fashioned plagues against us! I do not imagine that God has sent Killer Bees to destroy us, or that God has created a Fire under the Ocean! I do know these things to be real and true in our world, but I also know them to be of our own human creation. AND I believe that Almighty God, who Stretched the Spangled Heavens, continues to REPENT and to FORGIVE, but that in all probability we will not, and God does Sigh as well.