

Amos's Vision of the Plumb-line

Our First Reading today from Amos shows him having a vision (Amos's third vision), where the LORD Himself appears, standing next to a wall. To impress the vision on Amos, He asks the prophet what He sees. Amos sees a plumb-line in God's hand. The lead weight that the LORD is holding on a cord shows that the wall, once vertical, has now sagged out of plumb. A careful stonemason or bricklayer would tear it down and start his building over.

The meaning of the vision is clear. The LORD is picturing Himself as a mason laying brick or stone. The wall represents Israel, the people He created to receive His covenant. The plumb-line is His Law, the standard laid down at Mount Sinai for Israel's life as His covenant people. The Law reveals Israel's sin: the people are like a sagging, crooked wall, ready to be torn down. "*I shall not overlook them any longer,*" the LORD says (verse 8).

On their high places throughout the land and in the calf sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan, the people of Israel have been flaunting their unfaithfulness to the LORD. These shrines will be destroyed by the invading Assyrians. Israel's leader, both in the nation's successful military campaigns and also in the people's abandonment of the Lord's Law, has been Jeroboam II. Therefore, the LORD says, "*I shall use a sword to rise up against the family of Jeroboam,*" (verse 9). Jeroboam's royal line will come to a bloody end.

This time the prophet remains silent and does not intercede for his people. The Lord has measured Israel, found His people wanting, and announced His decision: "*I shall not overlook them any longer*" (verse 8). Amos is not allowed to protest or intercede.

Jeroboam II completed his 41-year reign and died in 753 B.C., a few years after Amos finished his ministry. He was succeeded by his son Zechariah, who also "*did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam [I] son of Nebat,*" (2 Kings 15:9). After a six-month reign, Zechariah was assassinated, and the royal house of Jeroboam II - the dynasty of Jehu - came to its bloody end. No doubt Shallum, Zechariah's assassin, thought that he was acting to carry out his own plan to become the next king of Israel. Actually, his sword carried out the LORD's judgment announced by His prophets Amos and Hosea (Amos 1:4).

"*Through the Law we become conscious of sin,*" the Apostle Paul says (Romans 3:20). Too often God's people forget this first function of the Ten Commandments in their lives. If we live in daily repentance, we will constantly measure what we think, say, and do by the plumb-line of the Lord's law. Such daily self-examination will prevent any kind of self-righteousness, because the outcome will always be the same: our lives are "out of line," like a crooked wall ready to be

torn down. Those who think that they can save themselves by keeping God's commandments are insolently asking to have their sinful lives measured by His all-seeing eye against the perfect vertical of His plumb line. His final righteous judgment will not spare them.

How can we escape the Lord's judgment? The perfect life of Jesus Christ fully measured up to His Father's holy standard, and that life was lived for us. When His Spirit gives us faith through Baptism and the Word, God writes down His verdict on the holy, loving life of Christ next to our names. Jesus lived and died in our place "*so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God,*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,*" (Romans 8:1).