

“Almost, Not Quite, Pert Near, But NOT Plumb!”

Amos 7:7-15

7 This is what He showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in His hand. 8 And the Lord asked me, “What do you see, Amos?” “A Plumb line,” I replied. Then the lord said, “Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

9 “The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jereboam.”

10 Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. 11 For this is what Amos is saying:

“Jereboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.”

12 Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. 13 don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.”

14 Amos answered Amaziah, “I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. 15 but the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’

Obadiah verses 8-18

8 “In that day,” declares the Lord, “will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, those of understanding in the mountains of Esau? 9 Your warriors, Teman, will be terrified, and everyone in Esau’s mountains will be cut down in the slaughter. 10 Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever. 11 On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. 12 You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble.

13 You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor gloat over them in their calamity in the day of their disaster; nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. 14 You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble.

15 “The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. 16 Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been. 17 But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance. 18 Jacob will be a fire and Joseph a flame; Esau will be stubble, and they will set him on fire and destroy him. There will be no survivors from Esau.” The Lord has spoken.

[NOTE 1] I'd like to start this morning by giving you some background on Amos and Obadiah. Amos and Obadiah were not contemporaries. It is believed by most experts that Amos was written in the mid-8th century before Christ and Obadiah was written toward the end of the 6th century before Jesus was born. So there was an approximate 150 year gap between them. Obadiah is mainly about the descendants of Esau and how they got wiped off the face of the earth. And Amos is more about the descendants of Esau's brother Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. Abraham had a son named Isaac and Isaac had two sons named Jacob and Esau. The descendants of Esau settled on Mount Seir and Jacob's descendants are the ones we call the Israelites. Between 2 and 300 years before Jesus walked the earth the Edomites were wiped off the face of the earth. Their name and their language have completely perished. What Obadiah prophesied happened as he said it would. The Israelites paid for their sins as Amos predicted but they were not wiped out. Please hear me on this. The Edomites were wiped out because they did NOT repent. The people who refused to repent, to be sorry, or to even acknowledge God, were the ones who were wiped off the face of the earth.

[NOTE 2]

Amos describes himself as a shepherd and also one who was responsible for caring for sycamore-fig trees. These sycamore figs were a very important crop for the people of Judah. You see, at a certain point as the figs begin to ripen they need to be cut open so that some of the juice can escape for the figs to ripen properly and achieve the desired level of tastiness. So Amos worked seasonally dressing fig trees and owned sheep. In our Scripture passage he acknowledges that he is not a prophet or the son of a prophet. He had not been trained in any way. The only thing that Amos knew, was that God had called him specifically and especially to speak the Word, God's Word, to Israel. Amos was from the village of Tekoa in Judah which was 12-15 miles directly south of Jerusalem. At the time, the region was separated into two kingdoms the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Amos was from Judah and was sent to preach in Israel. As long as he prophesied against surrounding countries everything was fine. But when Amos prophesied in Bethel of Israel, that is when there began to be an uproar because he prophesied against Israel and King Jereboam. Here was a man from Judah preaching/prophesying against Israel. Jereboam had set up two state sanctuaries and Amaziah was the high priest of one of them. Jereboam had broken away from Jerusalem and created new shrines and a duplicate religious system. The problem was that this "duplicate" religious system included worshipping a golden calf and incorporated parts of Baal worship. The whole purpose of the calf, the altar, the priesthood and the festivals was to give credence and stability to Jereboam's northern kingdom. So when Amos starts prophesying against Bethel and its system of worship he is attacking the very foundation of the kingdom of Israel.

Obadiah is one of the shortest books in the Bible, only 2nd and 3rd John and Jude toward the end of the New Testament are shorter. Only a page and a half in this Bible it is easy to overlook. We know very little about Obadiah except that he was fearlessly faithful to Yahweh and Israel, passionately abhorred the enemy of Edom and firmly

believed in the ultimate judgment of godless nations. Obadiah teaches us that pride and selfishness lead to destruction. The main sin of the Edomites was pride. They didn't believe in the existence of any God. They were materialists whose security was in human power and possessions. The outward cause of their arrogance was their assumption that their rocky mountainous home territory was impenetrable. In many ways it was impenetrable just as much as the Titanic was unsinkable. The Israelites thought that Jerusalem was impenetrable. As in most things humans take complete credit for and pride in, it fell apart.

Historians tell us that at the time Amos was prophesying that the nation of Israel was experiencing a prosperity built on oppression of the poor and immoral court practices combined with a religion that mixed elements of true worship with elements of Baal worship. Sound familiar? Under Jereboam the people became selfish, preoccupied with materialistic things, and the rich got richer as the poor got poorer. To this society God held up His plumb line and found that the walls of the lives of the Israelites were severely crooked. So both Obadiah and Amos are prophesying to countries that are severely prideful and selfish in general. [NOTE 3]

God gives Amos, this shepherd and dresser of fig trees, a vision of a plumb line. How many of you know what a plumb line is? It is a plank something akin to a 2x6 that has two ledges, one directly above the other attached to the plank at right angles. Then a cord was attached to the top of the plank and run through a hole in the top ledge and it hung down with a lead weight attached at the bottom of the cord. The plank was set against a wall and if the cord just touched the lower ledge after the cord was pulled taught by the line then the wall was plumb. They didn't have levels back then. The plumb line helped them to make their walls straight, perpendicular to the earth. For carpentry and buildings, levels are mostly used today. But in cement, brick laying and stone-work a plumb line is still used. I remember back in the middle 80's when I was working as a carpenter's assistant in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The contractor that I worked for often employed a master-stone worker named Ewold to build fieldstone fireplaces for him. Ewold would set up plumb lines on the two outward corners and would be sure to keep those corners straight, perpendicular, or plumb. Ewold made the most magnificent, beautiful fireplaces out of field stone that I have ever seen. He used a plumb line to make sure that his work was straight and true.

I remember the first time that Carl, the general contractor that I worked for, sent me out on a job on my own. It was to build a deck on the back of a mobile home that had had a significant amount of remodeling done to it. Well I set the poles for the corners and used a level to make sure that I was level to the ground all the way around. The only problem was that it was crooked with regard to the house. It was just barely good enough that Carl didn't make me take it all down and start over. It was almost, but not quite right.

I remember when my sister's constant pleas finally wore my parents down and they decided to get Katy a horse. I made it very clear that I didn't want a horse. I would help with the fence and the barn but after that I did not want to ride it so I wouldn't have

to feed or water the animal and most importantly I would not have to clean horse manure out of the barn. So my Dad and I started on the barn. Well everything was going fine until we were putting the roof trusses on. My Dad told me to be careful not to put anything where it could fall down. I set a 2x4 across two others and it was fine until my Dad started hammering below it. The 2 x 4 vibrated off and hit him right in the head. Then we began to put the plywood sheeting on the trusses for the roof. My Dad gave me specific instructions to keep the sheets square with the edge. So I put the first sheet down and according to the edge/corner that I was looking at, it was perfect so we nailed it down. I placed the next sheet so that it lined up with the first sheet. I figured if the first sheet was square the others would be as well. Well to make a long story a little bit shorter, the sheets were square with the front edge of the barn, but they were crooked with the back edge so that by the time we got to the top corner, where there was supposed to be a 4 inch overhang there was little or no overhang whatsoever. A quarter of an inch at one corner had become 4 inches by the time we got to the top. From a certain point of view it was straight, but not quite what Dad was shooting for.

I was five years old when my parents built the house they just recently “sold” to my sister. Even now I can remember the foreman of the crew that did the stone work for the fireplace. He made his men take down a wall they had made because it wasn’t straight. You could say, it wasn’t plumb. It was almost, but not quite plumb. They had to start all over and do it right. The plumb line told him that the wall was not straight. Well, in Amos’ vision God was setting a plumb line (the covenant law) among His people Israel. The nation had been built true to plumb but now it was out of plumb and needed to be torn down. Many years ago when Amy and I first got married, I moved into Amy’s house. The basement was unfinished so my brother-in-law and I were putting new paneling on the walls. We’d measure it out and I’d go cut the piece and we’d bring it in and it wouldn’t fit. The main reason the pieces didn’t fit is that the walls weren’t square or plumb. I grew up in West Bend, Wisconsin which is less than 20 miles from Germantown. There were a lot of Germans in the area. Just like there are a lot of Dutch people in Western Michigan and many Christian schools affiliated with the Reformed denominations, so there are many Lutheran Christian schools in Southeastern Wisconsin. When I was a young lad I had a baby sitter I simply knew as Mrs. Fisher. She was German and when something was close but not quite right she would use the term, pert near. The walls in Amy’s basement were almost, or rather pert near plumb, but the weren’t straight. **[NOTE 4]**

I hope you are starting to see where I got the title from. Almost, not quite, pert near, but NOT plumb. In Obadiah the Edomites... and in Amos, the Israelites ...were found to be a long ways from plumb, straight, or right. The people were arrogant, morally corrupt and they thought they were invincible. I believe that the message from Amos and Obadiah is relevant to you and me today. You may be working at getting the wall of your life straight, level or plumb but woe to you if you proclaim it plumb or perfect when it is not. None of us has a perfectly plumb or righteous life. For the Israelites the law was the plumb-line. For you and me, Jesus Christ is the plumb line.

The walls of our lives are constantly measured by the Lord Jesus Christ. He measures us by His plumb-line of absolute, unconditional and unlimited love, forgiveness, service, purity, and honesty. The good news is that HE is the Master Builder of our character and not only shows us what is out of plumb but helps us to straighten out the wall. We do not have to remain crooked. God never leaves us as He finds us. He loves us where we are at and also loves us enough to not let us stay that way, growing toward being more like Him every day. All we need to do is admit that our wall is not plumb and that we need His help, by the power of the Holy Spirit to help straighten it out. Then we need to accept that help and rely on or depend on Jesus. **[NOTE 5]**

In the case of the Israelites and Amos, the people did eventually repent, but not until their “impregnable” city of Jerusalem was conquered and they spent 70 years in exile. In the case of the Edomites whom Obadiah was preaching too, they people did not repent. They were wiped out because they not only didn’t repent but they were proud and arrogant, greedy, devoid of wisdom and understanding, and they were violent and gloated over the suffering of the Israelites.

In the face of severe and hostile opposition both Amos and Obadiah spoke God’s Word to a people who had grown complacent in their lifestyle and asleep in their faith. They simply worshipped as they chose, whom and what they thought was logical, comfortable, and beneficial. Amos told the Northern Kingdom that if they did not repent, the Assyrians would destroy them and that is exactly what happened. Obadiah told the Edomites they would cease to exist and they are no more. Don’t give in to pride, arrogance, violence, or let yourself delight in someone else’s pain. That will tilt your life away from God, away from plumb. In verses 10-15 of Amos chapter 7 we see how the plumb line was applied to a prophet, a priest, and a king. One is accepted, the other two are not. The prophet heard God’s word and obeyed. The priest and the king heard the Word of God through the prophet but they did not listen. God told them that their wall had settled, bowed, and/or was tilted, but they would not listen. Which will you be in your life? Will you hear Amos speaking God’s Word and give your life over to the Master Builder, Jesus Christ? Or will you do as the Edomites and assume you have it figured out and you don’t need God. **[NOTE 6]**

Spend time reading the Gospels and pay attention to the plumb line. What did Jesus do? Do that! Follow His example! I am not saying you need to dress like He dressed, live where He lived, or speak Hebrew, Greek, and/or Aramaic like Jesus did either. I am saying that we should love like Jesus, care like Jesus, have compassion like He did, heal like Jesus did, pray like Jesus did and point to God like Jesus did. Hold up Jesus Christ as your model, your plumb-line, so to speak, and seek to live His way. **[NOTE 7]** Spend time in prayer every day and ask for opportunities to show love in your actions, pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and take every opportunity to share how God is working in your life Be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks the reason for the peace, joy, love, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and/or self-control in your life. So what are you going to do about it? What changes is God whispering to you this morning? What are some things you need to change this

week? Please write something down! The walls of your life will probably never be perfectly plumb as Jesus' were. The walls of our lives may be almost, not quite, pert near, but NOT plumb. But in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do our best and depend on God through the power of the Holy Spirit for the rest. Let's strive to be like Jesus and grow every day a little closer to plumb, a little closer to righteous, a little closer to holy – separated out for God's use. Let's pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “Almost, Not Quite, Pert Near, But NOT Plumb”
Based on Amos chapter 7 and Obadiah given November 17, 2019

- I. Amos and Obadiah were prophesying at different times to different people, but their warnings were that if the people continued down their current path, they would reap the reward of their sin.
- II. Amos was preaching to the descendants of Jacob (Israelites) and Obadiah was preaching to the descendants of Esau (Edomites).
- III. God gives Amos the vision of a plumb line set before the people. A plumb line tells one if a wall is straight or square. It is used the same way that a level is used on a vertical surfaces today. Is your life square with Jesus?
- IV. The Israelites in the case of Amos and the Edomites in Obadiah's case were found to be grossly out of plumb, in other words, far from right or righteous. The people were arrogant, morally corrupt and they thought they were invincible. They no longer exist.
- V. Jesus is our plumb line. We are to stack up our lives compared to Him. Our goal must be to become more like Jesus. Spend time learning more about who Jesus was, how He thought, and what He did.
- VI. What is God saying to you this morning? Where is your life a little out of plumb?
- VII. What are you going to do about it? What changes is God asking you to make in your life? What baby step can you make today?