

[Amos 7:7-15](#)

[Ephesians 1:3-14](#)

[Mark 6:14-29](#)

## “The realignment”

- At the ripe old age of 29, I went to see my first chiropractor with pain in my lower back
  - Funny story- I was installing a toilet in my first rectory
  - It was a small bathroom, and thus small toilet, and I believed at that age that with Katy’s help, I could handle a trivial home improvement project
  - I grabbed that toilet, lifted it over the wax ring, Katy was under it lining up the bolts so I could set it down gently and tighten it up
  - When suddenly, I felt a warm tingle in my lower back that at the time scared me more than it hurt
  - Actually, it wasn’t painful at all when it happened
  - But not knowing what the heck just happened, I almost dropped that toilet on Katy’s hands
  - I certainly did not realize I had permanently injured my back, because I recovered and picked the toilet back up again and we got it installed
  - And I didn’t think much more about it, until the next morning
  - When you guessed it, it hurt to get out of bed
  - It hurt to bend over to pick up my shoes
  - And when the pain was still there two years later, I finally admitted that it was more than a pulled muscle... denial is a powerful thing, right?
  - So an MRI confirmed a bulging disc, and I began seeing a chiropractor and getting physical therapy to stave off a surgery
  - All because I wanted to save a hundred bucks and not hire a plumber to do it
  - And for a while, until I could not afford any more, I visited a chiropractor who attempted to realign my spine to receive the pressure
  - It would work for a few days, but soon the symptoms would return
  - Over and over again, the realigning, an attempt to get my spine back into the shape it was meant to be in
  - One might even be tempted to see this reading from Amos today as describing something similar
  - A divine realigning- one that will repair the damage
  - God using a plumb line to evaluate a wall, and to realign it as needed
- This particular writing from the book of Amos, one of the minor prophets

- For a long time I didn't know what made a prophet minor or major, but it turns out that it is simply the length of the book
- He is writing around the year 750 BCE, and during a relative time of peace and prosperity<sup>1</sup>
- And while everything seems to be going well, Amos calls out the injustice under that shroud of prosperity
- The neglect of God's laws, Israel moving away from the people God wanted them to be, the rise in wealth inequality
- And he focuses on God's justice, omnipotence, and judgment
- We have contrasted, as we do in the Gospel which we will visit in a moment, the two competing kingdoms:
- God's kingdom, and in this case, the kingdom of Jeroboam and ancient Israel
- While reading for this sermon, I will confess that I sent down a rabbit hole here in Amos
  - So guess what the next 5 minutes will be?! Don't want to waste that research
  - You're gonna love it- total Bible geek kind of stuff! Ready?
- Here's what I learned... that word plumb line, that invokes such awesome imagery and has been preached on over and over again...
- Is an incorrect translation- that is not what the ancient Hebrew says.<sup>2</sup>
- That word, אֵנָךְ ('ānāk), certainly does not mean plumb line
- Now this immediately sparks my curiosity, and I can tell yours too
- Because a modern translation, the NRSV, it was created using the latest tools and information and scholarship that we have, including dead sea scrolls
- That's why we don't use the King James version anymore, because we know a whole lot more now than we used to 500 years ago
- So why does our version of the bible contain a known mistranslation without so much as a footnote?
- The truth is, we still are not sure what it is that Amos is talking about, we are not sure what this word means
- This is the only appearance of this word in the Bible
- A google search helpfully suggests that in Indonesia it means 'child'<sup>3</sup> and that there is a guy in the Bible with a name like this

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amos\\_\(prophet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amos_(prophet))

<sup>2</sup> New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Volume V, Amos 7:7-9

<sup>3</sup> Google search, <https://bit.ly/3e0l3za>

- I stumbled upon this incredible site, thetorah.com, that was speculating how the words might have been pronounced in upper and lower Judah<sup>4</sup>
- And how Amos was most likely making a pun here, having a little fun with dialects and word meanings...
- The meaning of the word itself was closer to the metal “tin”<sup>5</sup>
  - Or some other pure metal that God had used to construct a wall perfectly and with pure materials
  - Something that gleams brightly
- Turns out that it was during the medieval ages, some scholars translated it as plumb line in an attempt to make sense of the passage<sup>6</sup>
- And it stuck
- Modern scholarship keeps plumb line, and perhaps suggests that the original, lost meaning of the word involved a play on words that only ancient Israelites would understand
- I was thinking about this for us today, and I wondered if the metal silver might be a valid substitute
- The prophet has God saying to the king: I made this beautiful wall out of pure silver, and I am coming to see if it still looks like it did when I built t
  - And if you’ve messed it up, my judgment and my realignment is going to turn your hair silver!
- Turns out, maybe “plumb line” is better! It gets the message across.
  - [Your job after church today is to tell me how fascinated you found this whole thing to be... and make me believe it]!
- These two things Amos is presenting: God’s kingdom and deepest desire for us and how God created things to be
- And the less than perfect, fallen, kingdom that is ancient Israel, that is Rome, and that I think could be you and me
- When it comes to scripture, approaching it like going on an adventure is the best thing
  - And to remember that we as Christians worship the Word made Flesh, not the word written down
  - So we also must talk about Jesus today
  - Our Gospel reading again from Mark tells us about John the Baptist and his encounter with King Herod

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thetorah.com/article/amos-puns-in-the-northern-israelite-dialect>

<sup>5</sup> New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Volume V, Amos 7:7-9

<sup>6</sup> New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Volume V, Amos 7:7-9

- This Herod is one of the sons of Herod the Great, who ruled when Jesus was born<sup>7</sup>
- Scholars suspect that John's story had been embellished a bit to highlight how King Herod was a lot like the bad Kings of ancient Israel
- Mark wants us to focus not on the details of John's death, notice this is a flash back in Herod's mind
  - He is worried that John has come back to haunt him, as sometimes happened in Jewish martyr literature <sup>8</sup>
- We are to take away the kind of Kingdom Herod governs
- The kind where he gathers all of the rich, popular, and elite together to throw himself a birthday party, and tries desperately to impress them
- And finds himself in a situation where he has to decide whether he wants to impress them, and stroke his ego and his fame
- Or kill an innocent man of God
- And Herod decided that refusing the request would bring down the party too much, would cost him too much of a loss in status in the eyes of his guest
- That he killed John
- That's the kind of king Herod was, the kind of Kingdom he created and maintained
- Like his father before him who had young boys under 2 killed to try and stop the birth of a new "king"
- Herod kills a prophet and brings in a severed head to impress his guests at his banquet
- The big takeaway here is not the details surrounding John's death, but Herod's kingdom in contrast to God's kingdom
  - In the very next set of verses beyond our reading this morning, Mark begins to talk about Jesus again
  - And Jesus is throwing a banquet<sup>9</sup>
  - In this banquet that Jesus has, everyone is welcome, not just those worth of impressing
  - Everyone gets fed until they are full, rather than some some receiving amusement at the expense of others
  - In Jesus' banquet, the banquet of God, little is made much
  - 5 loaves and 2 fish feed all 5000 and their families
  - One of these examples gleams like pure metal, one is perfectly straight and matches God's original intent for creation and for human beings

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/proper10b>, Retrieved from Podcast online 7/9/21

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/proper10b/#Mark6%3A14-29=>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/proper10b>, Retrieved from Podcast online 7/9/21

- And the other is not.
- This is the good news here in these readings today: that there is more to life than what Herod and Jeroboam created
- Jesus came to challenge us once again to see something more<sup>10</sup>
- More than survival, more than social standing, more than comfort, more than even success and worldly power
- God says, look beyond all of that, all of what is shiny and tempts us, all of what we think will make us happy
- Look harder and see a glimpse of a kingdom that is right around the corner, near and yet already here
- A kingdom of abundant life
- Where everyone is loved and cared for and seen through the eyes of respect, seen in ways that honor them,
- Seen as children that God has adopted, right along with us- fellow heirs, rather than ones we need to exclude and protect ourselves from
- Where each human being is worthy to attend the banquet, not because they did something that made them worthy, but because God decided it.
- God made them that way
- Today, I find myself thinking that we all need those moments where we stop and take stock
  - Where we measure ways in which we are not what God wants
  - We spoke about our country last week with the fourth of July, and today we look inward
  - It is essential that we do this not out of shame, or guilt, but in grateful response to what God has done for us
  - We know we will never live up to God's perfection, but we can take a step toward it
  - With God's help, we can make one choice, make one change that resembles God's banquet
  - So with all of this Biblical scholarship today, if in the end we do not hear the good news and the divine challenge to live it out,
    - Then we go home empty handed
  - How can we live more fully into God's abundant life, God's banquet, God's kind of Kingdom?
  - Maybe it is as simple today as deciding to be more gracious with someone- someone we don't like, disagree with, or tend to argue with
    - Maybe they get a pass today
    - Maybe we take a step toward forgiveness

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<sup>10</sup> David Lose, <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/proper10b/#Mark6%3A14-29=>

- Or perhaps we find ways to be more generous, opening up the invitation to more people, sharing our fish and loaves
  - Opening our lives, our wallets, our hearts
- I don't know- God knows, ask God and God will show you some way to be more like what God deeply desires us to be
- Do that one thing, and then repeat. That's how any good change is made- one good change at a time.
- One realignment at a time
- God is waiting with joy to realign us- too renew us- and show us once again this new life that we are called to live
- Both kingdoms have prepared the banquet halls and the invitations are sent- where we will chose to dine?

Amen.