

A COMMENTARY ON THE AMOS PASSAGE

The Fellowcraft scriptural passage is from the Book of the Prophet Amos (7:7-8). The chapter begins with a threefold vision of the prophet. In the first two parts Amos sees Israel, because of her sins, threatened with destruction by a plague of locusts and then by an all-encompassing fire. As each calamity looms Amos prays for God's mercy on the nation, and his prayer is answered. In the third part, which opens with our passage, he sees God as the Supreme Architect of the Universe with a plumbline in his hand.

Thus he showed me: and, behold, the LORD stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand.

The Hebrew word we translate “standing” (בִּצֵּב , *natsab*) implies more than just standing — it denotes a position of feet planted in a stance of immovable determination. It is quite a contrast to the first two parts of the vision, in which God relents of His intent to punish Israel. God is standing upon a wall made by a plumbline — but Amos does not say whether the wall is true and solid, he simply says that it had been made with a plumbline. Was it good craftsmanship, or shoddy? The test of the craftsmanship of a wall is whether it is truly plumb. A wall can be a strong buttress, a weak support that can topple, or it can be a barrier. As God gave Israel the choice, so does He give us the choice as to which it shall be, and how well we will build it.

And the LORD said unto me, “Amos, what seest thou?” And I said, “A plumbline.” Then said the Lord, “Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more.”

In the first two parts of the vision God had set no firm standard, so He could relent of His judgment and withdraw the threatened punishments of locusts and fire. Now, however, He has set a plumbline — a standard — in our midst, and we will be judged by that standard. God cannot be accused of being capricious, because He has firmly established a standard by which judgment shall be made. He allowed Abraham to bargain with him about the number of righteous men in Sodom, and He allowed Amos to plea away the punishment by locusts and fire. Now, however, He has set a permanent standard and “will not pass by them any more” to reconsider his judgment. The term “pass by” (רָבַח , *abhar*) might be better translated “spare.” God is saying that He has now set a standard up to which the people are capable of living, and He will not again spare them if they fall short of it.

To a Fellowcraft, the plumb is an important symbol that “admonishes us to walk uprightly in our several stations before God and man.” The punishment for failure to meet that standard is worse than “the contempt and detestation of all good Masons,” and it is even worse than the several symbolic penalties of our obligations. It is the personal shame of knowing that the spiritual wall we have built is not a buttress, but a faulty edifice; and that because it is not plumb it could topple over and become nothing but rubble. On the other hand, the joy of being part of our Fraternity is the assurance that when we fail, we have the support of our brethren to help us tear down that defective work and erect a true and upright support for our spiritual house “not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

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