

## Sermon Draft

**Text: Amos 7:7–15**

**Sermon: “Know Your Enemy”**

The place is one of the sanctuaries of northern Israel, Bethel, about ten miles north of Jerusalem. The year is about 760 BC. Yahweh, the God of Israel, the true God who created the heavens and earth, called Amos to be his prophet, his mouthpiece. And then there was Amaziah, the priest of Bethel.

Know your enemy. A sports team will study the films of the other team to learn their plays and identify their strengths and weaknesses. A chess master will study the games of the other chess master to know the opponent’s strategies. In the business world, a company will study its competitors.

In a much more serious matter, you should know your ultimate enemy: **“The old evil foe Now means deadly woe; Deep guile and great might Are his dread arms in fight”** (LSB 656:1). What are the aims and goals of the old evil foe, the devil, the “ruler of this world”? What is his agenda? What are his strategies, his tactics? Know your enemy.

Well, certainly the devil wants to see all manner of violence and wickedness. The more of that, the happier he is. But the center of what he is about is unbelief. He wants to keep unbelievers in unbelief, dead in their sins. And he wants to entice believers away from our Lord and Savior, away from faith to unbelief and death.

But what does the Holy Spirit want? The Holy Spirit wants to create and sustain faith in the heart. The Holy Spirit wants to tighten the bonds between us and our Savior, to help us become stronger, more mature Christians, to grow in Christ. How does the Holy Spirit do that? By means of the Word of God. He works through the Word of God proclaimed in its truth and purity. Through the Law of God, he leads sinners to contrition and repentance. Through the promises of God fulfilled in Christ, he creates and sustains faith and gives joy in the Lord. The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God.

The devil's goal is to prevent sinners from hearing that Word. He wants to keep you from hearing, really listening, and taking seriously what the God has to say. At its core, the devil's agenda is to prevent us from hearing the life-giving Word of God himself, our Maker and Redeemer.

How does the old evil foe do that? We see his tactics recorded in Holy Scripture. One approach is to fill the arena with umpteen false voices to drown out or marginalize the true voice of God. Throughout the history of ancient Israel, we read of false prophets, counterfeit voices. They usually outnumbered the true prophets. The false prophets would tell sinners what they wanted to hear, and as a result, they were popular. The true Word of God is never the only voice in the arena. So, which voice are you going to listen to?

Another common approach was and is to silence the proclaimers of God's saving Word. It is said the prophet Isaiah was sawn in half. Paul was beheaded. Peter was crucified upside down. Very often the prophets and apostles were pursued and imprisoned. The prophet Jeremiah as well as Paul often found themselves in prison. But God has the last laugh. The writings of the prophets and apostles are still with us today, preserved so we can hear and study them. God will not be silenced.

The devil, the ruler of this fallen, corrupted world, strives to keep us from hearing the true Word of God as in our text from Amos 7. Again the year 760 BC. The place is Bethel, about ten miles north of Jerusalem. When Solomon died, the northern ten tribes separated. But God had made Israel his very own covenant people, both the northern tribes and southern as well. God raised up prophets like Elijah and Elisha to proclaim his Word to the people. Now God called Amos and sent him to proclaim.

Amos was there in Bethel, where throngs of people had gathered to worship instead of worshiping at the temple in Jerusalem, where they were supposed to go. The north set up its own sanctuaries. One was located at Dan in the far north and the other at Bethel, in the southern end of the Northern Kingdom.

So, Amos was called, sent by the true God to proclaim what the true God had to say. Amos would repeatedly emphasize just this point with expressions such as, “Thus spoke Yahweh, the God of Israel” or “the utterance of Yahweh.” The true God wanted his Word to be proclaimed to the people, and through that Word, the Holy Spirit works.

Therefore, Amos kept saying, ***“Listen to what the Lord God Almighty has to say.”***

But the authority at the false sanctuary in Bethel did not want to hear it. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, complained about Amos to the king in Samaria. He twisted Amos’ words. Amos was announcing God’s words of judgment against rebellious Israel, but Amaziah construed it as a conspiracy by Amos: ***“Amos has conspired against you [O King Jeroboam II]”*** (v 10). Amaziah painted Amos as political subversive changing Amos’ message to suit his agenda. Amaziah interpreted the message of God as mere human politics, as the Southern Kingdom trying to overthrow the Northern Kingdom. Through his prophets, the true God spoke to sinners to give them life.

Amaziah considered Amos, the prophet of the true God, to be fueling conspiracy. Amaziah discounted what Amos was proclaiming as only words from Amos, invented by Amos to serve the political goals of Amos and the Southern Kingdom.

The old evil foe tries to prevent sinners from hearing the true life-giving Word of God still today by leading people to discount it, trivialize it, ignore it, dismiss it as simply human speech and human opinion.

Amaziah tried to pressure Amos to leave, to go back to his home in Tekoa in Judah, about ten miles south of Jerusalem: ***“O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah”*** (v 12a), flee as if your life is in danger. He did not care about Amos, he just wanted him gone. After all he was the one who lied to the king.

Amaziah revealed his real thinking as he said to Amos: ***“But never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom”*** (v 13). To proclaim judgment against Bethel was to oppose the government. The false government of northern Israel in Samaria and the false temple of northern Israel in Bethel were united. To proclaim against one was to proclaim against the other. The false government supported and promoted the false religion. The kingdom of darkness does not want sinners to hear the true Word of the true God. It seeks to silence or remove the true prophets. It leads people to discount the Word of the true God as only self-serving religious talk, as only self-serving proselytizing.

The kingdom of darkness wants to prevent sinners from hearing the Word of God. How about you? Do you want to hear the Word of God? Or do you find ways to discount and ignore it? Do you dismiss it as irrelevant and boring? Do you have more important things to do with your time? Our lives are busy, swamped with daily duties and activities. And so many voices are vying for our attention on TV, the computer, digital devices, over the radio. Because we are bombarded with so many voices, the danger faces all of us to listen only to ourselves.

Know your enemy. Our ultimate enemy, the enemy, the old evil foe, wants to prevent us from hearing the life-giving Word of God himself. The enemy wants sinners to listen only to themselves. The powers of the old age wanted Amos the prophet of God to leave. They wanted him gone. But Amos was called and sent by the Lord God Almighty himself to proclaim the Lord's words. Amos remained and kept on proclaiming the Word of God. The Word of God spoken by Amos was written down and preserved. To this day, now over 2,700 years later, we can still read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Word of God spoken by the prophet Amos.

God will not be silenced. God is the God who speaks. He does not hide himself in secrecy so that access is only via divination, sorcery, and astrology, or by turning inward and looking into our own souls. The true God, the almighty Creator, speaks. We see that throughout the Scriptures, beginning in Genesis 1. The true God speaks in human language so that he can be heard and understood. He is not deceitful but open and transparent. God is a straight shooter. He reveals his will and ways in clear human language. He wants his Word to be preached, proclaimed, spoken, and written because through his Word, the Holy Spirit leads sinners to contrition and repentance. That was why God called Amos. God's Word of judgment and repentance leads sinners away from their idols and their crooked ways. It reveals that those false ways lead only to death. The false voices only confirm sinners in their sins. Listening only to ourselves has the same effect. Only the Word of God can lead us out of this endless cycle of sin and death.

The promises of false voices, the promises of the world, mislead. They misdirect us to believe in illusions. But the true God fulfills his own promises.



Listen to what the Lord God Almighty has to say.

So, what happened in our story? Sure enough, ancient Israel rejected the Word of God spoken by the true prophets and listened only to themselves. Thereby they brought God's judgment down upon themselves. In the 700s BC, God raised up the ancient Assyrians, who came and destroyed the Northern Kingdom and most of the Southern Kingdom. Then a century later, God raised up the ancient Babylonians to destroy even Jerusalem. The death sentence came down on collective Israel just as Amos had announced. God does not deceive like other voices. What God says is truth.

But that is not the end of the story. God through his prophet Amos also spoke a promise, the sure and certain promise that one day, God would reverse the judgment. In Amos 9:11–15, God promised that he would raise up a new and greater Davidic king. God would restore his people Israel and incorporate us Gentiles into his future kingdom, so we too now belong to God and are made co-heirs of heaven.

In the fullness of time, God's promise was fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus came as the new and greater Prophet, and like the prophets of old they rejected him, And God laid upon him the iniquity of us all. Jesus, the messianic King, suffered in the place of sinners and for sinners. He suffered in our place and for us. But then God raised him up bodily, just as he promised through Amos when he said, "***I will raise up the booth of David***" (9:11). God raised him up and highly exalted him above all.

And the Holy Spirit is still at work through God's Word. Listen to what the Lord has to say. Through the ancient prophetic Word of Law and judgment, the same God still leads us daily to contrition and repentance. He still calls us all to repent, to confess the sin of listening only to ourselves and hearing only what we want to hear. Through the prophetic Word of promise, fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah, he creates and sustains faith and transforms our lives. Through Holy Baptism, Jesus, the new and greater David, puts his name upon us. We belong to him. Through his Supper, received by our mouths, he unites us with his life-giving body and blood. Moreover, he promises that one day, we will inherit the new and greater promised land, the new creation, in Christ.

Listen to what the Lord God Almighty has to say.

Despite so many confusing voices (including our own), let us listen to what the Lord God Almighty has to say.

Amen