

Amos 7:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-7/amos-71-3/>

Amos sees a swarm of locusts devouring all the vegetation of the land. He intercedes on behalf of the descendants of Jacob, and God changes His plan to destroy Israel's vegetation.

In communicating his first vision to the people of Israel, Amos began by saying, *Thus the Lord GOD showed me*. The word translated as “Lord” here is “Adonai” in Hebrew, which means “master” or “ruler.” The term translated as GOD is Yahweh, the covenant name of God. It is the name God revealed to Moses in the burning bush when He said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14–15). Amos used the names Adonai and Yahweh together here not only to give all credit to God for the visions, but also to emphasize God’s authority as Suzerain ruler over His vassals/subjects. God is the Suzerain or Ruler, the one who established a covenant relationship with His people, Israel. Israel heard and agreed to the terms of the covenant at Sinai (Exodus 19:8).

Amos told his audience what he saw. He began with the particle “behold” to invite them to pay close attention to the message because the timing of the judgment was imminent. Then he told his audience that *He [God] was forming a locust-swarm*. The verb “to form” can also be translated as “to fashion.” In Genesis 2 it is used to explain how the LORD formed man out of the dust (Genesis 2:7). In Amos 4:13, it is used to describe how the LORD of hosts, the all-powerful God, created mountains and winds. Here in Amos 7, the verb is used to explain how God was creating or shaping the *locust-swarm* (insects) that would devour Israel’s crops.

The locust-swarm that was being formed would arrive at a special time of the year: *when the spring crop began to sprout*. The land of Israel has two important seasons — the dry season in summer, from May–June through September, when there is usually no rain; and the wet season from mid-October through March, with most of Israel’s rainfall occurring between November and February. According to Amos, *the locust swarm* would arrive when the spring crop began to germinate at the end of the spring rainy season. Amos further specified that the locust swarm would arrive *after the king’s mowing*.

The phrase *after the king’s mowing* seems to indicate that the king was entitled, as a form of tax, to a portion of the mown grass, perhaps to ensure his chariot horses and cavalry had adequate hay. This indicates that the locust-swarm would arrive at the end of the spring rainy season. A locust plague is always catastrophic because it can destroy many things. But to have it arrive at the end of the spring rainy season would have been more catastrophic because no grass would be available for the people to feed their livestock.

Amos continued to watch the devastating results of the locust plague and interceded for the Israelites when the locust *had finished eating the vegetation of the land*. He begged God to forgive the descendants of Jacob, saying, *Lord God, please pardon!* In prophetic literature, the main job of the prophets is to proclaim warnings and judgments to the covenant people of God to encourage them to repent. Here, however, another aspect of their job is disclosed, that of

intercessor (see also Jeremiah 27:18). Amos pleaded with the LORD for forgiveness and mercy on behalf of his people.

Amos asked God to forgive His covenant people because he knew they would not survive such a plague. So, he asked God a question: *How can Jacob stand, For he is small?* The adjective *small* likely refers to Israel's relative smallness as compared to other nations, particularly the Assyrian empire. Although the Israelites were strong and prosperous during the time of Amos relative to previous periods, they were small compared to Assyria. Amos could also have in mind the reality that all human endeavors are *small* as compared to the mightiness of God. Amos therefore interceded on their behalf because he knew they would become helpless and desperate should God decide to punish them with such a devouring locust.

The Suzerain God responded positively to Amos's plea. He *changed His mind about this*. That *the LORD changed His mind* indicates the paradoxical nature of God, as viewed by humans. ([See our Tough Topics article on "Founding Paradox"](#)) On the one hand, the Bible tells us that God is not a man, that He has no need to repent, which is to have a change of mind (Numbers 23:19). On the other hand, we see incidents like this where God is said to change His mind. Exodus 32:14 says "the LORD changed His mind" regarding a judgement against Israel due to the intercession of Moses. James asserts: "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much," which indicates that our requests of God affect outcomes (James 5:16).

God is in control of all things, but our decisions and actions actually matter, and change things, both in the physical as well as the spiritual world. This is a paradox from our perspective. But it is not a contradiction because the paradox stems from the nature of God, who is the essence of existence (Exodus 3:14). We as humans cannot fathom a person who created existence, holds existence together, and is existence. This is in spite of the fact that we each exist as a unique entity, created in His image (Colossians 1:16-17). However, although we cannot fathom it, it must be so, for we exist, and cannot reasonably explain our existence apart from a creator God that is the essence of existence.

In the case of Amos, God changed His plan to destroy Israel's vegetation with a locust plague and stated, *'It shall not be.'* In this brief statement, the Suzerain God did not tell the prophet that He had forgiven His covenant people. He simply relented concerning the locust-swarm. That the LORD did not forgive, or wipe Israel's sins out completely is evidenced in the very next vision in which He threatened to consume everything and bring utter destruction to Israel's property (vv. 4–6).

Perhaps the LORD turned away from an earlier judgement to show His people that He is a loving and compassionate God, one who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Exodus 34:6–8). The prophet Jonah ministered in the same era as Amos, and prophesied doom to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh if they did not repent. God relented of judgement due to their repentance and it angered Jonah, who complained of God's loving-kindness, because he did not want God's kindness to apply to the people of Assyria, Israel's enemy (Jonah 4:2).

Amos's successful intercession on behalf of Israel clearly displayed his divine prophetic call as a prophet. Prophets were often responsible to intercede on behalf of people. In addition to previous

examples, another instance is when Abimelech King of Gerar took Abraham's wife, Sarah. God warned Abimelech in a dream to restore Sarah to Abraham, and Abraham would intercede on his behalf to pray for him that he might be forgiven, "...for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours" (Genesis 20:6–7; see also 1 Kings. 13:6; Isaiah 37:4; Jeremiah 7:16).

Moses also interceded for the Israelites when they worshiped the golden calf. Like Amos, he asked for forgiveness and mercy, and the LORD relented: "So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Exodus 32:14; Numbers 14:19).

Biblical Text

¹Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, He was forming a locust-swarm when the spring crop began to sprout. And behold, the spring crop *was* after the king's mowing. ² And it came about, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I said, "Lord God, please pardon!

**How can Jacob stand,
For he is small?"**

³ The Lord changed His mind about this.

"It shall not be," said the Lord.