



## The Visions and the Visionary

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Date: 11/25/18

### First Point: Visions from God (Amos 7:1-9; 8:1-3)

### Second Point: God's Visionary (Amos 7:10-17)

#### Digging Deeper: Plumb line or Tin?

Amos' third vision is found in Amos 7, verses 7-9. However, there is some great confusion in how to properly translate this verse.

<sup>7</sup> *This is what he showed me: behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a **plumb line**, with a plumb line in his hand.* <sup>8</sup> *And the Lord said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; <sup>9</sup> the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."*

Plumb line makes sense in the context. We would expect someone standing by a wall to evaluate it with a plumb line.

Plumb lines are a string with a weight on the bottom. The weight has to be a non-magnetic metal. They are used on walls to see that they are truly vertical and true. However, there's a problem. Plumb lines are typically made with a lead bob at the end. But the text doesn't mention the line, just the metal at the end. And, to deepen the problem, the Hebrew word here, "anak", is a loan word from an ancient Babylonian language called Akkadian. It always means tin, not lead. So, let's retranslate verse 8 to illustrate a greater problem.

<sup>8</sup> *And the Lord said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "Tin." Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am setting tin in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them;"*

The problem is obvious. The passage just became incomprehensible. Fortunately, Zechariah the prophet provides some essential background.

In Zechariah 4:10 we read:

*Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the [tin] plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand."*

Zechariah uses a different word than Amos. It seems that the southern kingdom of Judah used a genuinely Hebrew word for tin, and the northern kingdom borrowed a word from another language (Akkadian) for tin. But Zechariah makes it clear that the Jews sometimes used plumb bobs made of tin. So plumb line IS a legitimate translation of this difficult text.