



Sussex Freemasons - West Group

'The West Wing'
(Bognor, Chichester, Clapham, Littlehampton,
Midhurst, Pulborough, Steyning and Worthing)

The West Wing Learning and Development Team

'The West Wing' Lodge of Instruction

Lesson 13

Opening the Volume of the Sacred Law in the Second Degree. Amos 7: 7-8

Preceptors Notes



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Lesson 13 -

Lesson Aim

Opening the VSL in the Second Degree

Lesson Objectives.

By the end of this lesson /tutorial the Masonic Student will be able to :

Examine the meaning of Amos 7: 7-8



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Lesson 13

The Plumb Line of Truth: Amos 7:7–8 and the Second Degree of Freemasonry

Introduction

When a Lodge is opened in the Second Degree under the English Constitution, the Volume of the Sacred Law is opened at Amos 7:7–8.

The suitability of this passage to the Second Degree is readily apparent. Amos presents us with the image of a plumb line, an instrument by which uprightness is tested, while the Fellow Craft is entrusted with the Plumb Rule as one of his Working Tools.

Tonight, however, it is important to make a distinction at the outset.

We are not suggesting that Amos was writing about Freemasonry or about Masonic ritual. In its original biblical context, the passage concerns God's judgment upon Israel. What we shall examine is how the enduring symbolism of the plumb line can be applied within the Masonic context, and what that symbolism may teach the Fellow Craft.

The Second Degree marks a progression from the elementary moral instruction of the Entered Apprentice towards greater intellectual and moral development. The Fellow Craft is encouraged to enlarge his understanding through the study of the Liberal Arts and Sciences, but increasing knowledge brings with it an increasing responsibility for how that knowledge is used.

The central image in Amos's vision is the plumb line—a simple operative instrument which, in the hands of the prophet, becomes a profound symbol of measurement, uprightness and judgment.

Likewise, in Freemasonry, the Plumb Rule is transformed from an instrument of construction into a guide for upright conduct.

This raises a question which will remain with us throughout the lecture:



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If the plumb represents a standard of uprightness, what does it reveal when we apply it to ourselves?

Amos 7:7–8 — King James Version

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

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.”

The Historical Setting

Amos prophesied during the eighth century BC, a period when the Kingdom of Israel enjoyed considerable prosperity. Yet beneath that outward prosperity lay corruption, injustice, exploitation of the poor and spiritual complacency.

The book of Amos presents a series of visions concerning Israel and its relationship with God. Earlier visions include opportunities for judgment to be withheld following Amos's intercession.

The vision of the plumb line represents a significant development.

A builder uses a plumb line to establish whether a wall is truly vertical. If the wall deviates from that standard, the plumb line does not cause the fault; it **reveals** it.

The vision can therefore be understood as presenting Israel with a standard against which its condition is to be assessed.

The important point for our purposes is not simply that the plumb represents judgment, but that **the standard remains the standard**. The wall is not made upright by changing the instrument of measurement.

This gives us our first Masonic question:

When we find that our conduct falls short of the principles we profess, do we correct ourselves—or do we attempt to redefine the standard?



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The Plumb Line in Operative Masonry

Before considering the symbolic application, it is useful to remember the operative function of the plumb.

The plumb line is one of humanity's oldest construction instruments. Consisting essentially of a weighted cord suspended by gravity, it establishes a vertical line.

The accuracy of walls, pillars and other upright structures depends upon such simple but reliable principles.

Without the plumb:

- walls may lean;
- structures may become unstable;
- defects in construction may remain hidden;
- and eventually the integrity of the building may be compromised.

The operative mason trusted the plumb because it did not alter its standard according to convenience.

Gravity does not negotiate with the builder.

The wall must conform to the standard; the standard does not conform to the wall.

This practical reality provides a natural foundation for the speculative symbolism.

The Plumb Rule in Speculative Freemasonry

The Fellow Craft is entrusted with the Plumb Rule as one of his Working Tools.

Operatively, the plumb establishes verticality and proves the correctness of workmanship.

Speculatively, it teaches the Mason:

“To walk uprightly in our several stations before God and man.”

Here we encounter an important distinction.



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The **plumb line of Amos** and the **Masonic Plumb Rule** are not being presented as historically identical objects or as evidence that Amos intended a Masonic lesson.

Rather, Freemasonry takes an existing and readily understood building instrument and applies its operative function to moral conduct.

The operative question is:

Is the wall upright?

The speculative question becomes:

Am I upright?

The plumb does not make a crooked wall straight.

It reveals whether the wall is straight.

And this gives the Working Tool its power as a moral symbol.

It does not automatically make us virtuous. It gives us a standard by which we may examine our conduct.

The Fellow Craft may therefore ask:

- Are my motives upright?
- Are my dealings honest?
- Is my word trustworthy?
- Do my actions correspond with my profession?

The value of the symbol lies not merely in knowing what it represents, but in allowing it to test us.

Why Amos 7:7–8 is So Appropriate to the Second Degree

Whatever the precise historical circumstances by which this passage came to be appointed to the Second Degree, its suitability is immediately apparent.

Amos presents the plumb line as an instrument by which uprightness is tested.



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The Fellow Craft receives the Plumb Rule as a Working Tool by which he is taught to walk uprightly.

The connection therefore gives us a useful starting point for reflection.

The Entered Apprentice is taught to control his passions and to lay a moral foundation.

The Fellow Craft is expected to begin building upon that foundation.

But what is the value of acquiring knowledge if the character of the man acquiring it remains unchanged?

Knowledge without integrity may become dangerous.

Learning without virtue may produce pride rather than wisdom.

The Second Degree's emphasis on intellectual advancement therefore need not be separated from its moral instruction.

Indeed, the two may be regarded as complementary.

The more a Mason learns, the greater his responsibility becomes to use that knowledge wisely.

The plumb line therefore asks a searching question:

Does my conduct correspond with the standard I profess?

The Standard and the Mason

One of the striking features of the vision in Amos is that Israel is measured against the plumb.

The standard is not adjusted to accommodate the wall.

This provides an opportunity to consider the difference between a **standard** and our own **perception** of that standard.

A Mason may sincerely believe that his conduct is justified. He may have convincing reasons for what he has done. He may even persuade himself that his motives are good.



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But self-justification is not the same thing as uprightness.

The Working Tool invites us to step outside our own assumptions and examine ourselves against the principles to which we have committed ourselves.

Freemasonry does not prescribe a particular theology. It does, however, require reverence for the Divine and places the Volume of the Sacred Law before the Mason as the rule and guide of his faith and conduct.

For the Mason, therefore, the important question is not merely:

“What do I think is right?”

but:

“By what standard am I measuring what I think is right?”

This distinction is particularly important when circumstances make the right course difficult or inconvenient.

The Second Degree and Intellectual Advancement

The Second Degree is frequently associated with education and intellectual development.

Its lectures direct attention towards the Liberal Arts and Sciences, including:

- Grammar
- Rhetoric
- Logic
- Arithmetic
- Geometry
- Music
- Astronomy

Collectively, these disciplines encourage disciplined thinking and the pursuit of knowledge.

But the possession of knowledge is not, by itself, wisdom.

Geometry teaches order.



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Logic teaches reason.

Music teaches harmony.

The Plumb reminds us of uprightness.

These are not competing lessons.

Rather, they may be understood as different aspects of the same Masonic objective: the development of a man capable of thinking carefully, acting responsibly and living according to principle.

Knowledge should refine character.

Character should govern the use of knowledge.

The Fellow Craft is therefore not simply being encouraged to know more.

He is being encouraged to **become more**.

The Middle Chamber

The Fellow Craft progresses towards the Middle Chamber of King Solomon's Temple.

This journey symbolises advancement through labour, discipline and increasing understanding.

Admission is not gained merely through curiosity.

It is associated with faithful work.

The symbolism of the Middle Chamber therefore provides another useful distinction.

A Mason can become more proficient in ritual without necessarily becoming more virtuous.

He can acquire Masonic knowledge without necessarily applying it.

He can accumulate information without allowing that information to transform his character.



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The Plumb Rule reminds the Fellow Craft that advancement in Masonry should not be measured solely by ritual proficiency, examinations passed, offices held or years of membership.

A more searching measure is:

Has the Mason himself become more upright?

True advancement is therefore measured not merely by what we have learned, but by what that learning has done to us.

Building the Inner Temple

Freemasonry frequently employs the imagery of building as a representation of personal and spiritual development.

Each virtue may be regarded as another stone.

Each good action another course.

Each act of self-discipline another strengthening of the structure.

But a building must also be true.

That is where the plumb becomes particularly significant.

It asks:

- Are my motives upright?
- Are my dealings honest?
- Is my word trustworthy?
- Do my actions correspond with my profession?
- Am I the same man in private as I am in public?

These questions are not intended merely to judge others.

The Working Tool points the Mason towards **self-examination**.

The plumb represents the standard.

Conscience is our awareness of our own conduct in relation to that standard.



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But conscience itself must be examined and educated; it is not infallible merely because it is our own.

The challenge of the Mason is therefore not simply to follow whatever feels right, but continually to examine whether his understanding and conduct accord with the moral principles he professes.

Complementary Scriptural Passages

The symbolism of Amos can be illuminated by other passages of Scripture, each of which contributes something different to the idea of uprightness and building.

Isaiah 28:17

“Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet.”

Isaiah provides perhaps the closest parallel to Amos, explicitly connecting building imagery with judgment and righteousness.

The image reinforces the idea that the instrument establishes a standard against which conduct is measured.

Micah 6:8

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good...”

Micah moves from the imagery of measurement towards practical conduct, emphasising justice, mercy and humility.

This reminds us that righteousness is not merely an abstract principle. It must become visible in the way a man treats others.

Matthew 7:24–27

Christ compares the wise builder with the foolish builder.

Here the emphasis is upon the foundation upon which the structure is built.

The lesson complements Amos: a sound structure depends upon sound principles.



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Ephesians 2:19–22

St Paul uses the imagery of stones being built together into a spiritual temple.

The building metaphor is again applied to moral and spiritual development.

Taken together, these passages allow us to see several related dimensions of the symbolism:

Amos: measurement and judgment.

Isaiah: righteousness as the standard.

Micah: practical justice, mercy and humility.

Matthew: the importance of a sound foundation.

Ephesians: the building of a spiritual temple.

These passages do not establish that Amos was intended as a Masonic text.

Rather, they demonstrate the richness of the biblical building imagery from which Masonic symbolism can draw.

Practical Lessons for Today's Mason

The value of a Working Tool ultimately lies in its application.

Every Fellow Craft might therefore ask:

Does my business life withstand the plumb?

Does my family life withstand the plumb?

Does my conduct within the Lodge withstand the plumb?

Do my words reflect integrity?

Am I the same man in private as I am in public?

Every Mason encounters moments when expediency competes with principle.



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The easier course is not always the upright course.

The symbolism of the plumb therefore challenges us not simply to profess principles when they are convenient, but to maintain them when circumstances test us.

And perhaps the most searching question is this:

When the standard is inconvenient, do I remain upright—or do I move the standard?

The answer to that question is ultimately personal.

The plumb cannot be persuaded.

It simply reveals.

The Fellow Craft and Personal Transformation

We can now return to the central purpose of the Second Degree.

The Fellow Craft is encouraged to advance in knowledge.

But knowledge should lead to understanding.

Understanding should lead to wisdom.

And wisdom should influence conduct.

If these things remain entirely separate, something has been missed.

The purpose of Masonic education is not simply to enable a Mason to remember more facts about Freemasonry.

It should encourage him to reflect more deeply upon the principles of Freemasonry and, ultimately, to live them more faithfully.

We might therefore ask three questions:

What have I learned?

What have I understood?



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What have I changed?

The first concerns knowledge.

The second concerns understanding.

The third concerns character.

The Plumb Rule directs our attention particularly towards the third.

Conclusion

The opening of the Volume of the Sacred Law at Amos 7:7–8 in the Second Degree provides a remarkably appropriate opportunity for reflection.

In its original context, Amos's vision concerns God's judgment upon Israel according to a righteous standard.

Freemasonry does not claim that the prophet was speaking about Masonic ritual.

Rather, the Craft adopts the enduring symbolism of the plumb line and applies the operative idea of uprightness to moral conduct.

The biblical meaning and the Masonic application should therefore be distinguished, while recognising the powerful connection between them.

The operative mason uses the plumb to establish whether a structure is upright.

The speculative Mason may use the same image to examine whether his own life is upright.

The Working Tool does not make us upright.

It gives us a standard against which we may discover whether we are.

As the Fellow Craft advances in knowledge, he must also advance in virtue.

The Liberal Arts and Sciences may develop the mind, but knowledge must ultimately be governed by character.

The Middle Chamber may symbolise advancement, but advancement should ultimately be reflected in personal transformation.



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The temple we build is not merely an intellectual construction.

It is also moral.

And so the plumb asks each of us a question that cannot be answered merely by learning more Masonic information:

When I measure myself against the principles I profess, what does the plumb reveal?

Perhaps that is the enduring lesson of Amos 7:7–8 for the Fellow Craft.

Not that we should judge others by our own standards, but that we should be willing to **measure ourselves**.

Not that we should claim perfection, but that we should recognise deviation and seek correction.

Not merely that we should acquire knowledge, but that knowledge should help us become wiser.

And not merely that we should call ourselves Masons, but that our conduct should increasingly demonstrate the principles we profess.

The finest architecture is therefore not found only in temples and cathedrals.

It is found in a life consistently aligned with truth, justice and honour.

The plumb gives us the standard.

The work of making ourselves upright remains ours.



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Discussion Questions

Why do you think the Second Degree places such emphasis upon intellectual advancement while simultaneously reminding the Fellow Craft of moral uprightness?

What is the difference between the plumb as an objective standard and our own conscience or perception of what is right?

Does acquiring Masonic knowledge necessarily make a man a better Mason? If not, what additional step is required?

How can the Fellow Craft apply the symbolism of the plumb to his conduct within the Lodge, his family, his profession and the wider community?

What happens when our personal interests conflict with the principles we profess?

If the plumb does not make a wall upright but merely reveals whether it is upright, what might that teach us about self-examination?

What is the difference between progressing through Freemasonry and being personally transformed by Freemasonry?

When the standard becomes inconvenient, are we more likely to correct ourselves—or to move the standard?



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Lesson 13 -

Lesson Aim

Opening the VSL in the Second Degree

Lesson Objectives.

By the end of this lesson /tutorial the Masonic Student will be able to :

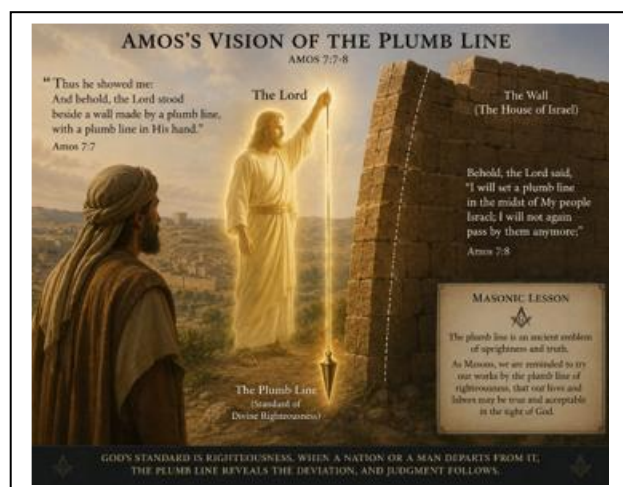
Examine the meaning of Amos 7: 7-8

The Plumb Line of Truth: Amos 7:7-8 and the Second Degree of Freemasonry

Introduction

When a Lodge is opened in the Second Degree under the English Constitution, the Volume of the Sacred Law is opened at **Amos 7:7-8**. This choice is neither accidental nor merely traditional. It is rich in symbolism and perfectly complements the lessons imparted to the Fellow Craft. The Second Degree marks a Mason's progression from the elementary moral instruction of the Entered Apprentice to the intellectual and moral development expected of one who seeks to advance in knowledge and wisdom.

The central image in Amos's vision is the **plumb line**—a simple operative tool that, in the hands of the prophet, becomes a profound symbol of divine justice and moral integrity. Likewise, in Freemasonry, the Plumb Rule is transformed from an instrument of construction into a guide for upright conduct. The opening of the Sacred Law at this passage reminds every





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Fellow Craft that the true temple is built not only with knowledge but with character.

Amos 7:7-8 (King James Version)

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

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."

The Historical Setting

Amos prophesied during the eighth century BC, a period of considerable prosperity for the Kingdom of Israel. Outwardly the nation appeared successful, yet beneath this prosperity lay corruption, injustice, exploitation of the poor, and widespread spiritual complacency.

AMOS: A PROPHET IN A TIME OF PROSPERITY AND DECLINE

Amos prophesied during the eighth century BC, a period of considerable prosperity for the Kingdom of Israel. Outwardly the nation appeared successful, yet beneath this prosperity lay corruption, injustice, exploitation of the poor, and widespread spiritual complacency.

OUTWARD PROSPERITY

- Economic Growth
- Strong Trade
- Beautiful Homes
- Full Granaries
- National Success

BENEATH THE SURFACE

- Corruption in Leadership
- Injustice in the Courts
- Exploitation of the Poor
- Widespread Spiritual Complacency
- Turning from God

OUTWARDLY, ISRAEL APPEARED SUCCESSFUL.

BENEATH THIS PROSPERITY LAY DECAY.

AMOS' MESSAGE

"Seek good and not evil, that you may live... but let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Amos 5:14, 24

TRUE PROSPERITY IS FOUND IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND FAITHFULNESS TO GOD.



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God granted Amos a series of visions revealing that divine patience had reached its limit. Earlier judgments had been withheld following Amos's intercession, but the vision of the plumb line marked a decisive moment.

Unlike previous visions, the plumb line was not a warning of possible judgment but the declaration of an objective standard.

A builder uses a plumb line to determine whether a wall stands perfectly vertical. If the wall deviates, the plumb line exposes the fault. It does not create the error; it merely reveals it.

Similarly, God declares that Israel's national life will be measured against His perfect standard of justice and righteousness. The judgment is based not upon opinion but upon immutable truth.

The Plumb Line in Operative Masonry

Before considering the symbolic application, it is useful to remember the operative function of the plumb.

The plumb line is one of humanity's oldest construction tools. Consisting of a weighted cord suspended by gravity, it establishes a perfectly vertical line. Every upright wall, pillar, or tower depends upon its accuracy.

Without the plumb:

- walls lean;
- foundations become unstable;
- structures eventually fail.

The operative mason trusted the plumb because it obeyed an unchanging law. Gravity does not bend to convenience.

This practical reality provides the perfect foundation for speculative symbolism.



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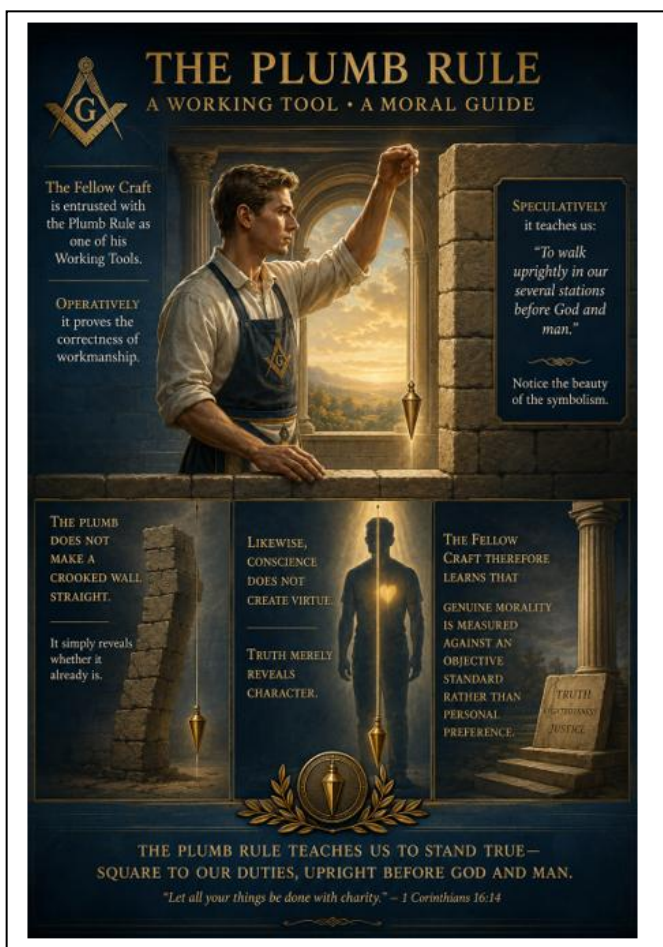
The Plumb Rule in Speculative Freemasonry

The Fellow Craft is entrusted with the Plumb Rule as one of his Working Tools.

Operatively it proves the correctness of workmanship.

Speculatively it teaches us:

"To walk uprightly in our several stations before God and man."



Notice the beauty of the symbolism.

The plumb does not make a crooked wall straight.

It simply reveals whether it already is.

Likewise, conscience does not create virtue.

Truth merely reveals character.

The Fellow Craft therefore learns that genuine morality is measured against an objective standard rather than personal preference.



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Why Amos 7:7-8 is Opened in the Second Degree

The connection between Amos and the Second Degree is immediate.

The principal symbol in the passage is precisely the working tool entrusted to the Fellow Craft.

Yet the symbolism reaches far deeper than the tool itself.

The Entered Apprentice is taught to control his passions and lay a moral foundation.

The Fellow Craft is expected to begin building upon that foundation.

Knowledge without integrity is dangerous.

Learning without virtue produces pride rather than wisdom.

Thus the Bible is opened at Amos to remind every Fellow Craft that increasing knowledge must always be accompanied by increasing moral responsibility.

The plumb line asks a searching question:

Does my conduct correspond with the standard I profess?

Divine Standards and Human Standards

One of the remarkable features of Amos is that God does not alter the plumb line to suit Israel.

Instead, Israel is measured against the plumb.

This distinction carries an important lesson.

Modern society often changes its moral standards according to fashion, convenience or public opinion.



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The Masonic ideal is different.

Truth does not change because opinions change.

Justice does not change because society changes.

Integrity does not change because circumstances change.

The Fellow Craft is continually reminded that true morality rests upon principles that transcend individual preference.

Freemasonry does not prescribe theology, but it consistently teaches reverence for the Divine and fidelity to the moral law revealed through the candidate's own Volume of the Sacred Law.

The Second Degree and Intellectual Advancement

The Second Degree is frequently described as the degree of education.



Its lectures direct attention to:

- Grammar
- Rhetoric
- Logic
- Arithmetic
- Geometry
- Music
- Astronomy

Collectively these Liberal Arts and Sciences encourage disciplined thinking and the pursuit of knowledge.

Yet wisdom is more than information.



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Geometry teaches order.

Logic teaches reason.

Music teaches harmony.

But the Plumb teaches integrity.

Knowledge builds the mind.

Character builds the man.

Thus Amos provides the moral balance to intellectual development.

The Middle Chamber

The Fellow Craft progresses toward the Middle Chamber of King Solomon's Temple.

This journey symbolises advancement through labour, discipline and increasing understanding.

Admission is not gained merely by curiosity.

It is earned through faithful work.

The plumb line reminds the Fellow Craft that advancement in Masonry is not simply measured by ritual proficiency or years of membership.

True advancement is measured by personal transformation.

A Mason who grows in knowledge while remaining deficient in integrity has misunderstood the purpose of the Degree.

Building the Inner Temple

Freemasonry frequently describes life as the construction of a spiritual temple.



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Each virtue becomes another stone.

Each good action another course.

Each act of self-discipline another strengthening of the structure.

The plumb asks continually:

- Are my motives upright?
- Are my dealings honest?
- Is my word trustworthy?
- Do my actions correspond with my profession?

These questions remain relevant throughout a Mason's life.

Complementary Scriptural Passages

Several other passages reinforce the symbolism found in Amos.

Isaiah 28:17

"Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet."

Isaiah employs identical building imagery to illustrate divine justice measured by perfect standards.

Micah 6:8

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good..."

Here righteousness is defined not by ritual but by justice, mercy and humility.

Matthew 7:24-27

Christ compares the wise builder with the foolish builder.

The permanence of the building depends entirely upon the quality of its foundation.



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Knowledge alone cannot preserve the structure.

Ephesians 2:19-22

St Paul describes believers as stones built together into a spiritual temple.

Again construction imagery illustrates moral and spiritual growth.

Together these passages complement rather than replace the symbolism of Amos, each reinforcing the enduring themes of uprightness, justice, and faithful building.

Practical Lessons for Today's Mason

Every Fellow Craft may ask himself:

- Does my business life withstand the plumb?
- Does my family life withstand the plumb?
- Does my conduct within the Lodge withstand the plumb?
- Do my words reflect integrity?
- Am I the same man in private as in public?

The plumb line cannot be deceived.

Neither can conscience.

Every Mason encounters moments when expediency competes with principle.

The lesson of Amos encourages him to choose the upright path, even when it is the more difficult.

In an age when moral standards are often regarded as relative, the symbolism of the plumb remains timeless. The Fellow Craft is reminded that the finest architecture is not found in cathedrals or temples, but in a life consistently aligned with truth, justice, and honour.



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Conclusion

The opening of the Volume of the Sacred Law at Amos 7:7-8 in the Second Degree is profoundly appropriate. The passage unites biblical imagery with one of the Fellow Craft's principal working tools, providing a vivid reminder that moral uprightness must accompany intellectual advancement.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the biblical meaning of the passage and its Masonic use. In its original context, Amos's vision proclaimed God's judgment upon Israel according to His righteous standard. Freemasonry does not claim that the prophet was speaking about Masonic ritual. Rather, the Craft adopts the enduring symbolism of the plumb line as an illustration of the virtues it seeks to cultivate. In doing so, it invites each Mason—whatever his faith tradition—to reflect upon the necessity of living an upright life measured against the moral teachings of his own Volume of the Sacred Law.

As the Fellow Craft ascends in knowledge, he must also ascend in virtue. The plumb line teaches that true greatness lies not merely in what a man knows, but in how faithfully he lives. Every Mason is therefore called to examine himself continually, striving to ensure that the temple he builds within his own heart is square in purpose, level in charity, and ever upright before God and his fellow man.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Second Degree emphasises moral uprightness alongside intellectual advancement, rather than knowledge alone?
2. In what ways does the symbolism of the plumb line challenge modern ideas that moral standards are purely subjective?
3. How can the Fellow Craft apply the lesson of Amos 7:7-8 in his conduct within the Lodge, his family, his profession, and the wider community?