

## Amos 7:1-8:3 • When There Are No Prophets Available

### Introduction

Sadly, I attended a church for many years which had a “Board of Deacons” with specifically assigned positions according to the gifts of the Spirit: A deacon of administration, a deacon of teaching, a deacon of evangelism, and so forth. For years and years the church struggled with the fact that it didn’t really grow numerically, all the while never having anyone to fill the “deacon of evangelism” position; they just never felt they had anyone with the “gifts” or “skill set” or “calling” or whatever suitable spiritual pedigree they thought necessary. In retrospect, there were people coming in and out of that congregation during those years that had a burden for outreach but whose efforts were rebuffed by leadership because those individuals did not appear to be “qualified”. Well, here we have the coming end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and there are no qualified prophets available to speak God’s message. So what does God do when there are no prophets available? He uses whatever faithful servant He has on hand.

<sup>1</sup>Thus 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. <sup>2</sup>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?”

<sup>3</sup>The LORD changed His mind about this.

“It shall not be,” said the LORD.

### [Read v.1-3]

#### **Q: Throughout the Bible, what do locusts generally represent?**

A: They usually symbolize a human enemy, one that is so superior in numbers and strength that they literally consume the land that they conquer like real locusts consume all the vegetation in their path.

#### **Q: What is significant about the fact that the invaders would come during the spring crop AFTER “the king’s mowing”?**

A: The king would first exact **his** taxes from the people who would then bear the brunt of the damage and suffering inflicted by the invaders to follow.

#### **Q: What is Amos’ reaction? How does God respond?**

A: Like Moses and other biblical examples, Amos intercedes on behalf of the people and God listens to him. The phrase “*changed His mind*” can also be translated “He relented”, meaning that He did not allow the “locusts” to utterly destroy the land but to cease short of completion.

**Point:** This was the first warning given the Northern Kingdom of Israel. During the reign of Menahem, the invading armies of Assyrian King Pul (2 Kings 15:19-20) were turned back by buying him off with 1,000 talents of silver, taxes extracted by Menahem from the people.

<sup>4</sup>Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, the Lord GOD was calling to contend with them by fire, and it consumed the great deep and began to consume the farm land. <sup>5</sup>Then I said,

“Lord GOD, please stop!  
How can Jacob stand,  
for he is small?”

<sup>6</sup>The LORD changed His mind about this.

“This too shall not be,” said the Lord GOD.

### [Read v.4-6]

#### **Q: How does this second judgment build upon the first?**

A: Whereas the locusts ate up the grass—that which is above the ground—fire burns down to the very roots and even ruins the ground. It’s not just the loss of a single year’s crops but future years as well. The first judgment is inconvenient for a short time, whereas this is actually a famine that will result for years to come.

#### **Q: What is Amos’ reaction? How does God respond?**

A: Amos again intercedes on behalf of the people and God listens to him. God again “relents” so that the destruction is not 100% complete.

**Point:** This was the second warning given the Northern Kingdom of Israel. During the reign of Pekah, the invading armies of Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser III would carry away all of the land of Naphtali and a significant portion of the northern part of the kingdom. In effect, only part of the Northern Kingdom was “consumed” completely (2 Kings 15:29)

<sup>7</sup>Thus He showed me, and behold, the LORD was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand. <sup>8</sup>The LORD said to me, “What do you see, Amos?”

And I said, “A plumb line.”

Then the LORD said,

“Behold I am about to put a plumb line  
In the midst of My people Israel.  
I will spare them no longer.

<sup>9</sup>The high places of Isaac will be  
desolated

And the sanctuaries of Israel laid  
waste.

Then I will rise up against the house of  
Jeroboam with the sword.”

### **[Read v.7-9]**

**Q: What is different about the third judgment from the format of the first two?**

A: Amos does not intercede.

**Q: Is a “plumb line” something used only for construction of buildings?**

A: In its biblical usage, a plumb line is often used in reference to destroying houses/peoples; it denotes very exact judgments of God that are precisely measured responses invoking His justice. (See 2 Kings 21:13; Isaiah 28:17; Isaiah 34:11; Lamentations 2:8) In this case, the precise scope of judgment is against the Northern Kingdom of Israel and not against the neighboring Southern Kingdom. The fact that it is placed “in the midst of My people” means that He will not relent as last time—the destruction of the Northern Kingdom will be complete.

**Q: In the first 2 responses, Amos intercedes on behalf of “Jacob”; but here God calls for final judgment to fall on “Isaac”. What might this mean?**

A: It might be that whereas Amos is appealing to the Lord to remember His covenant passed on through Jacob, that “the high places of Isaac” is referring to people’s then-current practice to build altars wherever they liked. Isaac built altars in various places, but remember that there was no Jerusalem much less a Temple during his lifetime. So the people may have perverted Isaac’s practice by claiming their building of their own worship centers was in keeping with their heritage in him, thus justifying their false worship.

**Q: Why do you suppose Amos did not intercede the 3<sup>rd</sup> time?**

A: Because it was only in the course of the 3<sup>rd</sup> vision that God specifically raises the issue of false worship. Amos knew there was no defense for it.

**Point:** The 3<sup>rd</sup> invasion from Assyria, led by Shalmaneser V during the reign of Hoshea would eliminate the Northern Kingdom forever. (2 Kings 17:6) All of the prophecies given through Amos would come true.

**Overall Point:** Final judgment did not come without warnings, without increasingly stronger signs and events just as predicted for the End Times. Righteous men can minister and reach out to a point until final rejection results in final judgment.

<sup>10</sup>Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words.

<sup>11</sup>For thus Amos says, ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.’”

<sup>12</sup>Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! <sup>13</sup>But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence.”

<sup>14</sup>Then Amos replied to Amaziah, “I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. <sup>15</sup>But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, ‘Go prophesy to My people Israel.’”

### [Read v.10-13]

#### **Q: What is Amaziah’s first course of action?**

A: He tries to discredit Amos with the government (King Jeroboam) and the people of the Northern Kingdom in general. Note that Amaziah basically quotes Amos correctly, but tries to discredit the message by attacking Amos’ character.

#### **Q: What is the nature of Amaziah’s second attack?**

A: He calls Amos a “seer” and demands that he “flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying”. These behaviors, along with the label “seer”, were common to corrupt priests and false prophets who used religion strictly for personal gain. Amaziah is mocking Amos while trying to cast him in the eyes of King Jeroboam and the people as just another “prophet for hire”. Amaziah is trying to discredit Amos while at the same time building himself up. It’s another attack on the messenger rather than the message.

#### **Q: What is significant about Amaziah’s reference to Bethel as both “a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence”?**

A: Bethel is the place where a false priesthood, temple and idols were set up in an attempt to duplicate the Temple in Jerusalem so the people of the Northern Kingdom would not need to go there and worship correctly. Amaziah is trying to give this place credibility as a legitimate place of worship by declaring Amos a false prophet unfit to serve there. In reality, no **REAL** prophet of God was fit to serve there.

**Point:** *The very government and religious authorities that would normally have been in place to protect the people and keep them on the right path were, themselves, completely corrupted and false.*

### [Read v.14-15]

#### **Q: Whereas Amos previously responded to God, how does Amos respond to Amaziah?**

A: That he is neither a prophet proper, nor ever trained in one of the schools for prophets in the Northern Kingdom (this is the reference to “nor am I the son of a prophet”), and that he is not only a humble herdsman that was never the leader of animals much less men, but that he was in general a very financially poor person of the land. (Hence the reference to “a grower of sycamore figs”, something only the most poor and desperate ate.) He is only there because of the Lord.

**Point:** *What happens when the authorities intended to lead the flock become corrupt and false themselves? He raises up the faithful to do their job.*

**Application:** *Should we dismiss every person that speaks up who is of humble or “unqualified” origins? Is God limited to speaking just through “qualified” leaders? How should we present our own “credentials” when presenting God’s message to others?*

<sup>16</sup>“Now hear the word of the LORD: you are saying, ‘You shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you speak against the house of Isaac.’ <sup>17</sup>Therefore, thus says the LORD, ‘Your wife will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled up by a measuring line and you yourself will die upon unclean soil. Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.’”

<sup>8:1</sup>Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, there was a basket of summer fruit. <sup>2</sup>He said, “What do you see, Amos?”

And I said, “A basket of summer fruit.”

Then the LORD said to me, “The end has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer. <sup>3</sup>The songs of the palace will turn to wailing in that day,” declares the Lord GOD. “Many will be the corpses; in every place they will cast them forth in silence.”

### **[Read v.16-17]**

**Q: What is different in the way this pronouncement of final judgment is delivered from the previous?**

A: It is given through Amos himself as a righteous man in full agreement with God’s judgment, spoken clearly and plainly to the people, not obscured with symbolism.

**Point:** One of the characteristics of God’s final judgment is to expose and mete out particular punishment for false teachers and false prophets.

### **[Read v.8:1-3]**

**Q: Does Amos intercede on the people’s behalf as a result of being shown this fourth and final vision of judgment?**

A: No. He realizes that God has already relented and that His final judgment is justified by the people’s unresponsiveness and disobedience. The symbol of the basket of summer fruit is a reference that Israel is ripe for its last punishment. As fruit is plucked from a tree, so Israel will be plucked from the land.

## **Overall Application**

- *In these Last Days, we have been warned over and over that a great apostasy and deception will take place, that there will be almost countless false teachers and false prophets arising from within and without of the church. How do we identify them? How do we handle them? Do we recognize when God is no longer using “legitimate” channels of authority and instead speaking through those that remain faithful who may not have the full “accepted” credentials of leadership?*
- *Based on the example of Amos, what does one need to be used of God? How does that compare with our own attitude and flexibility?*
- *How should we intercede on behalf of others? What is our role in these Last Days?*