

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: AMOS 7:1-8:3**

To understand the four visions God gives Amos regarding Israel.

## Called, Equipped, and Not the Other Way Around

There is an idea in modern Christianity that God will not enlist you to His purposes until you have reached some level of competency. If you are not educated or experienced, then you are expected to get educated and gain experience before you can really be trusted to do kingdom ministry. However, a different story is told in the Scriptures. God rarely calls already equipped individuals. The Apostle Paul aside, all of the other apostles were rejects. King David was the youngest son of Jesse and merely a sheep-herder when Samuel came to anoint him as the next king (1 Sam. 16:1-13). Moses was a stuttering outlaw who had grown up among the Egyptians. While we want to equip individuals and then hope they are called, God does the opposite. He calls and then He equips. We find that same pattern in Amos chapter 7. Amos' visions are interrupted by a dialogue he has with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel (Amos 7:10). Amaziah is sent to Jeroboam, the king of the north, to inform him of Amos' prophecies. When he return to Amos, he assumes that Amos is a part of a professional guild of prophets and formally educated as such. Amos responds, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. 15 But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" God called Amos, and then equipped him with His words. God will equip you too, if you will simply answer His call, not to become Amos or Moses or David, but to become who He made *you* to be.

## Four Visions

The majority of chapter 7 and into chapter 8 deal with visions that Yahweh gives to Amos concerning Israel's impending judgment. Below is a breakdown of the four visions.

**THE FIRST VISION**

Verse 1 through 3 capture the first vision given to Amos. The vision entails a massive swarm of locusts that would devour the land. This is not the first time we have seen Yahweh send locusts as an act of judgment

against sin (Deut. 28:38; 2 Chr. 7:13-14). The most similar instance of locusts being used for judgment is found in Joel 1:4, another minor prophet. It is clear that Yahweh is the one doing this, as verse 1 says, “the LORD God... was forming a locust-swarm.” The spring crop that comes after the king’s mowing is significant as well. The king’s mowing refers to the king taking from the crops before the rest of the people do. After the king had taken, the remaining crops were left for the rest of the kingdom. However, the locusts take everything that is left, eating all, “the vegetation of the land” (Amos 7:2). This also typically takes place after the rainy season is finished, which would have been all the more devastating for the farmers. If all of the vegetation was consumed prior to the dry season, there would be no chance for any growth until *after* the *next* rainy season. The size of this swarm is so massive that, in comparison, the northern kingdom appears tiny. Amos says verse 2, “Lord God, please pardon! How can Jacob stand, for he is small?” Here, in this first vision, Amos reasons with God and God, “relents,” or, “changed His mind about this” (Amos 7:3).

### **THE SECOND VISION**

Verses 4 through 6 unpack the second vision that Yahweh gives to Amos. This time, instead of locusts consuming the land, it is fire that God calls upon them (Amos 7:4). Initially, this story conjures up an almost Sodom and Gomorrah type of image, but in actuality, it is not literal fire that God is sending. Fire in this passage refers to drought. Like the locust plague, drought would have rendered the land fruitless. The fire that, “consumed the great deep” refers to the subterranean waters that feed the springs, which in turn give nourishment to plant life. With those waters devoured, crops would die and the land would be unable to support livestock and, by extension, humans. Again, the magnitude of this judgment is so vast that Israel appears, “small” (Amos 7:6). Amos pleads a second time with Yahweh, and again, Yahweh relents.

### **THE THIRD VISION**

The third vision is notoriously difficult to translate in Hebrew. Old Testament scholars have written extensively on portions of these three verses (vs.7-9), and while there is general agreement, there are some newer ideas that need to be mentioned.

The traditional way of understanding this passage is by translating *ʾanāk*<sup>e</sup> (אֲנָךְ) as, “plumb line.” A plumb line would have been used to ensure that the defensive walls of a city were straight and balanced. A wall out of plumb could be easily compromised, but one that was made well could withstand a great deal of force, providing security for the people on the other side. This is most likely the correct understanding of this passage. The reason for this is that Yahweh then says, “I am about to put a plumb line in the kids of my people, Israel” (Amos 7:8). This will indicate, like their walls, that they are crooked and thus easily breached.

Some scholars have suggested that *ʾānāk* means “tin” based on the Akkadian term *ʾanāku*. In this understanding, the tin represents shoddy material that can be easily destroyed. Contextually, it still captures the essence of what is being communicated, but it does not seem as harmonious as the initial understanding, and the strength of the argument rests on an insistence that this word is Akkadian and not Hebrew. While it is true that a great deal of our understanding of the Old Testament comes from interacting with other ancient near eastern languages, this does not seem convincing as the only argument.

God’s judgment against Israel will come directly against the religious (and idolatrous) practices as well as the royal family: “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” (Amos 7:9). Take note of the fact that Amos does not try and convince God to relent of this judgment as he did in the first two visions. There is no discussion and thus God does not change His mind.

**THE FOURTH VISION**

Verses 1 through 3 in chapter 8 capture the fourth vision given to Amos by Yahweh. In this fourth vision, God shows Amos, “a basket of summer fruit.” The idea conveyed here is fruit that is ripe or even beyond ripe. The fruit, coming to the end of its life cycle, represent Israel coming to the end of its life cycle. Yahweh says, “The end has come for my people Israel. I will spare them no longer” (Amos 8:2), and, “the songs of the palace will turn to wailing that day” (Amos 8:3). The death will be catastrophic. Notable, in this fourth vision, Amos does not beg God to relent, thus solidifying God’s plan for judgment.

## An Accidental Confession

Situated between the third and fourth visions is a sort of interlude that involves a confrontation between Amos and a man named Amaziah, priest of the temple at Bethel. Apparently Amaziah has gotten wind of Amos’ prophecies against the northern kingdom and is dismayed by the grim message. He sends 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. For thus Amos says, ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile’” (Amos 7:10-11). Notice, there is not a mention of Yahweh in Amaziah’s report. He has missed the most important detail of Amos’ message; it’s not a message from Amos, but from God Himself.

In verse 12, Amaziah calls Amos a seer. While the word seer refers to someone who, “sees visions or dreams,” and while there is another separate word for an actual prophet, the words are often used interchangeably in the Old Testament. It could also be that Amaziah chose that word because, contextually, his interlude falls directly in the middle of literal visions that Amos has been receiving. It could also be understood as a derogatory term that conveys a pagan diviner. Amaziah understands Amos to be a professional prophet based on the phrase, “Flee away to the land of Judah, and there, eat bread” (Amos 7:12). The phrase, “eat bread,” is a phrase that means, “go make a living there” (Gen. 3:19; 2 Kgs. 4:8). Amaziah believed Amos to be one of the so-called court prophets, paid to prophesy against the northern kingdom to sow seeds of discord.

It is Amaziah’s response that is the most telling. He says, “No longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary for the king and a royal residence” (Amos 7:13). It is here that Amaziah shows his cards. The temple of Bethel does not belong to Yahweh, but Jeroboam. It is a temple of idolatry, not true worship. It values royal decrees over the heavenly decrees. Amos corrects Amaziah by telling him that he is not a professional prophet, but a shepherd who has been called by God. Because Amaziah has refused to hear the words of Yahweh, another prophecy is given: “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” (Amos 7:17). The invasion will result in violence and death, and Israel will be removed from its privileged place and taken into captivity for the sins they have unrepentantly committed.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Amos 7:1-3. What is the first vision that God shows Amos? What does it mean? What does Amos ask of God? How does God respond?

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2. Read Amos 7:4-6. What is the second vision that God shows Amos? What does it mean? What does Amos ask of God? How does God respond?
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### Day Two

1. Read Amos 7:4-6. What “lavish” things are listed in these verses that the northerners were indulging in? While they were living with such comforts, what did they notably not do?
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2. Read Amos 7:7. What is the plumb line that God is referring to? What is the purpose of it? What happens if a wall is out of plumb?
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### Day Three

1. Read Amos 7:8-9. Where is the LORD going to put a plumb line? What will it reveal? What will God do to Israel as a result? What three specific things does God mention in this judgment? Does Amos ask God to relent?
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2. Read Amos 7:10-13. Who is Amaziah? Who is Jeroboam? What does Amaziah say to Jeroboam? What does Amaziah say to Amos afterwards? Who does he call seer, and why? What does the term, “eat bread there,” mean? Who does Amaziah say the temple in Bethel belongs to?
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### Day Four

1. Read Amos 7:14-17. In your own words, write down what Amos says to Amaziah? What will happen to Amaziah and his family as a result of his rejection of Yahweh’s words?
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2. Read Amos 8:1-3. What is the fourth vision that God shows Amos? What is, “the basket of summer fruit,” and how does it connect to Israel? What is described in this passage? Does Amos ask God to relent?
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## Week 8 Discussion: The Lord’s Temple

In chapter 7, there is a brief interchange between Amos and Amaziah, the priest at Bethel. Amaziah accuses Amos of being a hired hand to prophesy against the north, and turns his message into a political one, not a divine judgment. Shockingly, he says that the temple belongs to Jeroboam (and notably not Yahweh). In the new covenant, we no longer have a physical temple we go to, but Yahweh’s temple is our body (1 Cor.

6:19-20). Beyond that, God's people gathered together are a temple for God's Spirit as well (1 Cor. 3:16-17), and thus we are not to neglect gathering together (Heb. 10:25). Talk as a group about the importance of caring for your body and meeting with other believers.

1. Icebreaker: Do you take care of your physical self? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
2. If your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, what things should you avoid and what things have traditionally been made into a big deal, but are really of no consequence?
3. How important is gathering with God's people to you? Why?
4. Is it possible to really live out your faith as outlined in the New Testament without meeting together with other believers? Why or why not?
5. Read Hebrews 10:24-25. Is it possible to stir one another up to love and good works apart from meeting together? If so, how? If not, why?
6. How important is physical self-care in comparison to emotional and spiritual self-care? If you had to make a hierarchy, what would it be?

## Takeaways:

1. God gives Amos four visions of the kinds of judgment He plans on bringing down on Israel, but Amos convinces Him to relent on two of them.
2. Amos is not a professional prophet, but a shepherd. God has a way of calling and then equipping, and not the other way around.

### *PRAYER REQUESTS:*