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 “gift” 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.

Read verses 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.

Application: The first judgment is represented by a locust swarm who consumes the grass. This has a short-term effect of judgment.
Read verses 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)

Application: The second judgment is represented by fire which burns the roots and even ruins the ground. This has a much longer-term effect of judgment.

Read verses 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 two 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.
Amos 7:1-8:3 • When There Are No Prophets Available, Page 3 of 5

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Since Isaac is the father of both Esau and Jacob, it may also be referring to the practices of the other descendants of Isaac establishing places of false worship on the high places within the geographic boundaries of the land of Israel.

Q: Why do you suppose Amos did not intercede the 3rd time?
A: Because it was only in the course of the 3rd vision that God specifically raises the issue of false worship. Amos knew there was no defense for it.

Point: The 3rd 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.

Application: The third judgment is represented by a plumb line which represents very exact judgments of God precisely measured against His Word. This is a picture of final judgment.

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.

Read verses 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.
14 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. 15 But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, ‘Go prophesy to My people Israel.’

**Application:** 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 verses 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 who 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:** When the authorities intended to lead the flock become corrupt and false, God raises up in their place someone faithful to do their job.

**Personal 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?

**Read verses 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.

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

16 "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.’ 17 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 parcelled up by a measuring line and you yourself will die upon unclean soil. Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.’"
Read 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.

Application: The final vision of judgment is represented by a basket of summer fruit, a symbol that Israel is ripe for punishment. As fruit is plucked from a tree, so the unfaithful 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?