

# Amos 8 • The Coming Spiritual Famine

## Introduction

This is one of those passages of Scripture which functions as a lesson for future generations of believers. It documents why judgment was exacted and provides a clear example of what will take place yet again should God's people replay the same behavior yet again. Just as Jesus concludes the Olivet Discourse with a series of teachings as to His expectations for His people's spiritual condition upon His Return, the message through Amos provides an example of the worst case possible in regard, those who are not merely unprepared, but who really don't seem to care and are living only to please themselves. They are not entirely unaware of the requirements of God's Word, but have pursued their own path and desires consistently for so long that when the time comes when they finally recognize not just the truth but the need for His Word, will find it is unavailable to them. This is what happens when self-deception allows worldly values to replace the biblical so that the standard by which one measures their life.

<sup>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."

<sup>4</sup>Hear this, you who trample the needy, to do away with the humble of the land, <sup>5</sup>saying,

"When will the new moon be over,  
So that we may sell grain,  
And the sabbath, that we may open  
the wheat market,  
To make the bushel smaller and the  
shekel bigger,  
And to cheat with dishonest scales,  
<sup>6</sup>So as to buy the helpless for money  
And the needy for a pair of sandals,  
And that we may sell the refuse of  
the wheat?"

## [Read v.1-3]

**Q: How would the original audience have understood the relationship between "the end" and "summer fruit"?**

A: It is a wordplay in the original Hebrew between "qes" ("the end") and "qayis" ("summer fruit"). This is not about the inevitable cycle of changing seasons, but the final and last one with no more to follow.

**Q: What might be textually interesting about this in an eschatological sense?**

A: The Last Days are characterized in Scripture as paying attention to the seasons. This is an indication not just of a change, but an inevitable end.

<sup>32</sup>"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; <sup>33</sup>so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. <sup>34</sup>Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. <sup>35</sup>**Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.** — Matthew 24:32–35

**Q: How is this end in Amos characterized?**

A: As consisting of death and mourning.

**Q: What is obviously and purposefully absent from this message?**

A: Hope of recovery, return or even delay of the inevitable consequences.

**Application:** There is no **second** chance for the unrepentant who are **steadfast** in their **unresponsiveness** to God's Word and ways.

## [Read v.4-6.]

**Q: What is the agenda of the apostatized who will inevitably experience God's judgment?**

A: "...to do away with the humble of the land" (v.4).

**Q: How do the apostate view a change in the seasons?**

A: As yet another opportunity to exploit others to enrich themselves.

**Q: What are the requirements of the Law where the poor are concerned?**

A: Provision was made to take care of them at one's own expense, which was actually out of the abundance enjoyed by the more fortunate. (Dt. 24:19-21)

**Point:** While they are attempting to bring about the end of others, God is bringing about their own end.

**Q: Why are they looking forward to the end of “the new moon...and the Sabbath”?**

A: Their impatience for the end of religious observances reveals the true nature and character of their spiritual state, that they are hypocrites observing such things in name only.

**Q: Is their agenda merely to cheat others in order to make a greater profit?**

A: Their aim is complete exploitation of their situation so they can subjugate the weak and make a profit actually selling them off as well, breaking the Mosaic Law designed to help those who find themselves in that situation. (Ex. 21:2; Lev. 25:39-42; Dt. 15:12-18)

**Q: What does it mean to “sell the refuse of the wheat”?**

A: On top of cheating the overall price, even making it so that the weak had to sell themselves to obtain what was offered, the product itself was a cheat which didn't even consist of the good part. It consisted of that which no one else would find acceptable.

**Q: How is this a further, and especially egregious, breaking of God's Law?**

A: They were supposed to leave the edges of their fields available to such people in need, and instead they are not just keeping it all to themselves, but selling it as well. (Lev. 19:9-10)

**Application:** That which the apostate offer is not just presented **dishonestly** with an agenda of **exploitation**, but is so lacking in **substance** as to be the most worthless.

**[Read v.7-10]**

**Q: What is the basis for God's oath?**

A: The deeds of sin previously referenced.

**Point:** Once again, notice that no infractions from the “First Tablet” concerning the worship of God are cited, but from the “Second Tablet” alone as to their treatment of others.

**Q: What might “the pride of Jacob” be referring to?**

A: When God calls the people “Jacob”, He is drawing a parallel between their current spiritual condition and that of their forefather before he came into a right relationship with God. It is a “corporate solidarity” where the picture of Jacob the sinner before he met the Angel of the Lord, who came away changed and with the new name “Israel”, is representative of the spiritual condition of the whole group. Everything Jacob did before meeting the Lord was for himself, even stealing his brother's blessing (Gen. 27) and conniving him out of his birthright. (Gen. 25) Likewise, they are acting the same way in their treatment of others, stealing and cheating for themselves that which does not belong to them.

**Q: What is the nature of the signs which will serve to prove the fulfillment of God's oath presented in v.8-9?**

A: They are signs in the natural world involving an earthquake, flood, and cosmological signs.

**Q: How are these things reflected both spiritually and emotionally in v.10?**

A: Because this is not just a financial or physical loss, but additionally an even greater personal loss spiritually, it becomes mourning for the dead, both for literal loss of life and the consequences of spiritual death.

**Observation:** Interesting how these things are replayed again in the End Times as repeatedly provided in God's Word.

**Application:** The **loss** which the apostate suffer is far more **devastating** that the mere physical as they will not be able to replace the **spiritual** consequences.

<sup>7</sup>The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob,

“Indeed, I will never forget any of their deeds.

<sup>8</sup>Because of this will not the land quake

And everyone who dwells in it mourn?

Indeed, all of it will rise up like the Nile,

And it will be tossed about

And subside like the Nile of Egypt.

<sup>9</sup>It will come about in that day,” declares the Lord GOD,

“That I will make the sun go down at noon

And make the earth dark in broad daylight.

<sup>10</sup>Then I will turn your festivals into mourning

And all your songs into lamentation; And I will bring sackcloth on

everyone's loins

And baldness on every head.

And I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son,

And the end of it will be like a bitter day.

<sup>11</sup>“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD.  
<sup>12</sup>People will stagger from sea to sea And from the north even to the east; They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD. But they will not find it.  
<sup>13</sup>In that day the beautiful virgins And the young men will faint from thirst.  
<sup>14</sup>As for those who swear by the guilt of Samaria, Who say, ‘As your god lives, O Dan,’ And, ‘As the way of Beersheba lives,’ They will fall and not rise again.”

### [Read v.11-14]

**Q: How does this “famine...for hearing the words of the LORD” reflect the aforementioned reason for judgment in v.4-6?**

A: They were literally cheating people where literal food was concerned; now they will themselves experience a shortage of spiritual food.

*Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found;  
Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him. — Psalm 32:6*

*<sup>6</sup>Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.  
— Isaiah 55:6*

**Q: What may be particularly ironic about how this famine comes about?**

A: In Amos 2:11-12 we learned that these people themselves silenced God’s Word through His messengers.

**Point:** *God’s hardening of a heart comes after the bearer has steadfastly hardened their own.*

**Q: What do the repetitive uses of “famine”, “thirst” and “hunger” in Amos all have in common?**

A: They focus on something which goes unfulfilled—“they will not find it”. (V.12)

**Q: What is the reference in v.13 to “virgins” and “young men” describing?**

A: A lost generation raised by spiritually corrupt parents who will be casualties because they, too, never put God’s Word and ways into practice. This a particularly bitter judgment, that there is no hope even for the next generation or that the original generation will be able to leave a legacy.

**Q: What is the meaning of v.14?**

A: These centers of false worship by which the apostate people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel have worshiped, served and sought protection from will not just fail the people, but permanently fall.

**Observation:** *It is noteworthy that upon their return to the land of Israel after the Captivity, that Israel no longer incurs this repeated problem of idolatry and the worship of foreign gods.*

**Application:** *God gives people over to that which they relentlessly **pursue**. When they steadfastly **refuse** His Word, even demanding it be **withdrawn**, God in turn **withholds** it from them. It is a response to behavior, not an arbitrary **judgment**.*

### Overall Application

*God does not respond to those who reject His Word; He actively rejects **them**, providing no words of comfort or even a message of salvation. Although they may invoke His name, they will not find a Word from God to remove His curse without some the right accompanying reaction such at Nineveh, where they recognized and responded to the message. The point at which God abandons a people does not come arbitrarily or without due notice, but in the shadow of their inevitable demise. Though they swear allegiance to Christ or some other religious cause or entity, when the divine decision is made, the vacuum of God and His Word leaves a void which cannot be filled from which they will never rise again. This is why those abandoning God’s Word is no small matter today.*

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