

## CAN I GET A WITNESS?

Amos 7:1-17

Why is it so difficult to face up to the truth when things aren't going very well and to take action to make things right? We see this problem in every area of life. One particular outworking of this refusal to face up to the truth and to take proper action is in the area of the national debt, deficit spending, governmental programs, and taxes. This subject has been dominating the news of late and it seems that our law makers just can't face the facts that we can't go on spending what we don't have. You can see this same thing with people who are hooked on alcohol or drugs. The worst part of trying to help such a person is getting them to face the fact that they really do have a problem. Usually what is needed in such situations is a confrontation to get the government (in the case of bad fiscal policy) or an individual (in the case of bad personal habits) to face up to the reality of what is happening and the consequences of continuing down the same road. Usually the person or group who initiates the confrontation is not very well received and will be subjected to a lot of ridicule and even abuse. Many will not confront others with problems for this very reason. Some who would dare will find themselves backing away and ignoring the problem after being rebuffed. Those who can really help are those who will stand firm for truth.

The nation of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) was heading down the road to ruin and God kept sending messengers to them to confront them with the truth of what was happening. One such messenger was Amos. Amos didn't even live in the Northern Kingdom. He lived in Judah. He was just an ordinary person with an ordinary occupation from an ordinary village. He lived about the same time as the prophets Hosea and Isaiah. Amos left Judah and went to Israel to proclaim God's message to them. Amos had been given a series of messages regarding all the neighbors of Israel as well as Judah and Israel. He started out proclaiming the sins and judgment of Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon and Moab. All those who heard his message agreed with him that those people deserved the punishment they were going to get. Amos did not stop there. He had merely set the stage for the rest of the story. He went on to point out that Israel had done the same things as the other nations and had just as much injustice being practiced.

God used a series of visions or revelations that he gave to Amos of what could or would happen to Israel. In some of these impending disasters Amos was successful in interceding on behalf of the people and some of the disasters were averted.

### Interceding Witness – 7:1-6

<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. <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. Amos 7:1-6 (NASB95)

One of the visions that Amos saw was a pending disaster of a collapse of their economic system for the nation that would come about by an invasion of locusts that would destroy the crops that were the engine for the economy of Israel. Amos rightly concluded that Israel would not be able to survive such an attack. Compared to the surrounding nations, Israel was a very small country and such crop failures would be more than they could cope with since they were a small territory nation and did not have any reserve alternatives. Because of intercession, the invasion of locusts was cancelled.

As if the locust were not bad enough, some commentators think that Amos was actually using the locust to represent the pending invasion of the Assyrians. If we take a quick look at the last verse of Chapter 6, we see the dire warning

I will stir up a nation against you, O house of Israel, that will oppress you all the way from Lebo Hamath to the valley of the Arabah.

This warning was followed immediately by the vision of the locusts coming upon the land to devour the crops. The reference to the “king’s mowing” would indicate that the grass hoppers would come after an initial first harvest or later in the growing season. If this vision is really about an invading army, then the king’s mowing is likely a reference to what had happened to Israel in the time of Jehoahaz by Hazael and Benhadad who were kings of Syria and had been the instruments of God’s chastisement of Israel. Things had gotten better (new growth) and now the locust or Assyrians were threatening.

However, there were other dangerous possibilities that could produce the same outcome of a collapsed economy and one of those was a wildfire that could sweep through the farm land and destroy their crops. Such a disaster was worse than that caused by locust since the fire would consume even the roots of the plants and make any recovery almost impossible. Again, Amos interceded and that possibility was also cancelled.

Some have seen this threat in terms of something more sinister such as what happened to Israel by Tiglath-pileser (also known as Pul) of Assyria who carried away a large number of the Israelites before the final collapse of the nation. His actions burned deeply into the nation’s population and weakened it substantially so that it would not be able to survive.

Can you think of things that are definite threats that could sink our economy and cause an economic collapse, not only for the US but also might trigger a larger crisis for the entire world? We keep hearing about climate change and drought and it has happened in the past. The dust bowl of the 1930s was a big factor in the economic depression of that time. We have also had major fires in areas that did not affect farmland, but it could happen to such areas. War in the Middle East would disrupt the flow of oil to the major industrialized nations and create havoc in the worldwide economy. A major credit downgrade for our debt would put a heavy burden on an already fragile recovery that we are in. We have heard just recently about large asteroids that will pass fairly close to the earth. By close it will be a little closer than the synchronous satellites that orbit the earth. Everyone can breathe a sigh of relief until you hear that it will pass this way again in the year 2020 and the possibility of it striking the earth has not been ruled out. It is said that it will be visible during the day as it passes by about seven years from now. The point is that we do have some very possible and major vulnerability to impending disasters and all of us would do well to intercede on behalf of the world.

### Truth-Telling Witness – 7:7-9

<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.” Amos 7:7-9 (NASB95)

Amos began his prophetic messages about 40 years before the fall of the Northern Kingdom at the hand of the Assyrians. Things were going pretty well for the nation at that time and no imminent danger was sensed by the rulers or the people. If people are being threatened and things are going poorly, then people are more likely to heed a message such as Amos was bringing to them. By the time things get bad enough for people to listen it is usually too late. God sent Amos to Israel in plenty of time for them to repent and to avoid the judgment of God.

In the vision that God gave to Amos, Amos saw the Lord standing beside a wall that had been properly built and He had a plumb line in His hand. When God had established the nation of Israel, they had started out with good laws and fair practices – as a wall that was plumb.

Over the years they had gone away from what was right and proper and had substituted other practices that were not righteous. After so long a time, God was not going to put up with such practices any longer among His people. Judgment was coming and the basis for judgment was to be the plumb line of God or His righteousness.

The terms “high places” and “sanctuaries” refer to the religious centers of the nation. High places of Isaac was probably a reference to Beersheba (in Judah) since this area was associated with home the patriarchs and the well of Isaac. This area had become a pilgrimage site for pagan worship. The sanctuaries of Israel were Bethel and Gilgal where pagan religious practices were carried out. These would be destroyed and God would no longer overlook the wickedness and injustice of the people and their leaders. This was not the only area where God would deal with the people. The house of Jeroboam represented the civil government that was also rotten to the core and God would destroy both the religious system and the civil government. You can imagine that Amos' words were not what the people or their leaders wanted to hear.

#### Opposed Witness – 7:10-13

<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.” Amos 7:10-13 (NASB95)

Amos was prophesying at the entrance to the place of worship at Bethel. The priest Amaziah had heard this message of gloom and doom and he decided to do something about it. He didn't call the people and the government to repentance which would have been the right response. Instead he refused to face the truth and attempted to have the prophet silenced. His message to the king was that Amos was committing treason because he was saying that the king was going to be killed and the people would be captured and led away into captivity. Can you imagine someone standing outside the Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. saying that the President was going to be gunned down and that most of the nation would be taken hostage by some insignificant nation? Would he be arrested? Maybe. Would anyone really pay attention to him? Not really. By the way, the Washington National Cathedral recently decided to perform marriage ceremonies for same gender couples.

Amaziah tried to get Amos to be quiet and leave. “Why don't you go back to Judah and do your prophesying there? We don't need you to come to the place where the king worships and where he governs. Who do think you are anyway?” Amaziah had assumed that Amos was like some of the itinerant preachers who lived off contribution of food from people who heard them. He had assumed that Amos was doing what he was doing just to make a living. If that were the case, then please go somewhere else.

#### Obedient Witness – 7:14-17

<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.’ <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.’” Amos 7:14-17 (NASB95)

Amos wanted to set the record straight. He was not prophesying for a living. He was not a prophet by trade or profession. The only reason he was there was that God sent him to give adequate warning to the people of Israel. Because Amaziah did not recognize the truth of Amos' words and because he attempted to stop the message from God, then judgment would come upon Amaziah and his family. The judgment was pronounced there by Amos and he then repeated the judgment against Israel that they would be carried into captivity.

Amos encountered strong opposition and an unfriendly situation and yet he continued to be faithful to God in proclaiming the truth that God had given him to deliver. So many times when we go on a mission to talk to someone about their relationship to God, we will meet opposition and an unfriendly reception from those we are visiting. We often will use that opposition as an excuse to back away and not continue to visit the people who need to hear that God loves them and that unless they repented and turn to God to accept that love then they will end up spending eternity separated from God – eternally lost.

If we expect God to use us to do the work of the kingdom, then we will have to be faithful in proclaiming the truth even in the face of opposition and ridicule.