

The Vision of a Basket of Summer Fruit

Amos 8

Amos 8:1-3 – *“Thus the Lord God showed me: Behold, a basket of summer fruit. ² And He said, “Amos, what do you see?” So I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then the Lord said to me: “The end has come upon My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore. ³ And the songs of the temple shall be wailing in that day,” says the Lord God— “many dead bodies everywhere, they shall be thrown out in silence.”*

Background Notes

In Amos 8 we return to the visions of Amos, with the vision of a basket of summer fruit. Remember the brief outline of Amos - eight prophecies, three sermons, and six visions? We discussed the first three visions in the first half of chapter 7. The second half of chapter 7 was an historical interlude in which Amaziah, the false priest of Bethel, tried to silence Amos and send him back home to Judah. But Amos continued to prophesy, and he continued to preach. Apparently Amos gave all of his prophecies, all the sermons, and all the visions right there at Bethel.

Bethel, that means *“House of God,”* was a place of great memories. Abraham built an altar and worshipped God at Bethel. Jacob had his “staircase to heaven” dream at Bethel, and he came back to Bethel when he returned to the Land many years later. But during the time of Amos an idolatrous shrine was located at Bethel. King Jeroboam I had set up two golden calf idol shrines in the northern kingdom – one at Dan and one at Bethel. This idolatry continued throughout the 200-year history of the northern kingdom.

During Amos’ ministry, King Jeroboam II was in power, and he continued the idolatrous ways of all the kings of the northern kingdom. Amos centered his ministry of judgment at the state shrine at Bethel, possibly within view of the golden calf.

By the way, Amos was not the first prophet from Judah that God sent to this idolatrous shrine at Bethel to pronounce judgment. During the reign of Jeroboam I, *“a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. Then the man of God cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, “O altar, altar! Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men’s bones shall be burned on you’” (1 Kings 13:1-2).* God gave the people of the northern kingdom plenty of warning that He would judge their sin and idolatry.

Doctrinal Points

1. A nation that corrupts justice is ripe for judgment.

In this vision, what was the meaning of “summer fruit”? It wasn’t a reference to good fruit, like the good fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)! No. The idea in “summer fruit” was overripe fruit – **rotting** fruit! The summer fruit represented a nation that was overripe and overdue for judgment. Israel was ripe for judgment because the people had corrupted justice and worshiped money more than God.

Amos 8:4-8 - *Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, and make the poor of the land fail, ⁵ saying: “When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit, ⁶ that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—and even sell the bad wheat?”*

⁷ *The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob, “Surely I will never forget any of their works.*

⁸ *Shall the land not tremble for this, and everyone mourn who dwells in it? All of it shall swell like the River - heave and subside like the River of Egypt.*

Notice the tricks that the merchants of Israel used to cheat in business. They made the *ephah*, a container for measuring wheat, smaller than what it was supposed to be. They made the shekel weights on the other side of the balance scale larger than what they should have been. In other words, they falsified the scales so the customers received less than they were due (a practice not unknown in America today). They sold inferior wheat for the price of good wheat. They cheated the poor. And the country’s corrupt leaders ignored these customs. They failed to put a halt to unjust and deceitful practices.

The merchants hated the traditional religious laws that required them to close up shop to “keep the Sabbath holy” because, for them, the “almighty shekel” was more important than God and His Law. The rich and powerful people of the northern kingdom sold the poor and needy into slavery for money - even for the price of a pair of sandals! This attitude sounds a lot like the worship of money in our own so-called “Christian” nation today, where commercial gain is far more important than God. For money, anything goes!

For their corruption and lack of justice, they would definitely be judged. The Lord (“*the pride of Jacob*”) swore that He would not forget **any** of their wrongdoing (v7). The coming judgment would be at the hands of the cruel invading Assyrians. Their songs would be turned into wailing and mourning (v3). So many of them would die that there would be no time for honorable burials - the bodies would be thrown into mass graves. All this literally took place 35-40 years after Amos shared this vision.

Verse 8 may refer to the powerful and devastating earthquake that occurred two years after Amos gave this prophecy (see Amos 1:1). If so, then that terrible earthquake was also part of the judgment. In any case, a nation that corrupts justice is ripe for judgment.

What does this vision say about the corruption and lack of justice in our own nation? It teaches us that this sin will not go unjudged. And what is true for a nation is certainly true for individuals within that nation.

Think about it. Are you cheating anyone in any way? Are you cheating your employer by wasting time at work, or calling in sick to get a day off? Or maybe you're overworking or underpaying someone who works for you? If God were to picture your life as a basket of fruit, what kind of fruit would be in the basket? Good fruit - or "summer" fruit? The nation or person who corrupts justice is ripe for judgment.

2. A nation that practices idolatry is ripe for judgment.

Amos 8:9-14 - *"And it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord God, "that I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation. I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head. I will make it like mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day.*

¹¹ "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God, "that I will send a famine on the land - not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. ¹² They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east. They shall run to and fro seeking the word of the Lord, but shall not find it. ¹³ "In that day the fair virgins and strong young men shall faint from thirst. ¹⁴ Those who swear by the sin of Samaria, who say, 'As your god lives, O Dan!' and, 'As the way of Beersheba lives!' - they shall fall and never rise again."

The "sin of Samaria" (v14) was the calf worship that was centered in Bethel. Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, and the royal shrine was located at Bethel, about 25 miles away. King Jeroboam II had even constructed a temple or royal residence at the shrine in Bethel (Amos 7:13).

The calf idol shrine at Dan in the far north and the idolatrous shrine at Beersheba in the far south were also included in verse 14. The shrine at Beersheba was in Judah, the southern kingdom (see Amos 5), but it was mentioned here because **all** of Israel was included in the judgment for idolatry – "from Dan to Beersheba."

All the idolatry in **all** of Israel and **all** of Judah would be judged. **All** of these shrines would fall - and never rise again. You can see this for yourself if you visit the ruins of Dan, Beersheba and Bethel. In fact, at Dan you can see the very platform on which the golden calf idol once stood! Several years ago archaeologists discovered that shrine platform, and the steps that ascended to it.

The judgment pronounced upon the people of Israel for their social injustice and idolatry was fulfilled in 722 BC, when Samaria fell to the Assyrians. And that judgment continues to this day! The spiritual famine (v11-13) certainly exists in Israel and in Judaism around the world today. *"They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east. They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but shall not find it" (v12).*

2 Corinthians 3:14-15 says: *"But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains un-lifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart."* A spiritual famine remains in Israel today.

And, on the basis of verses 9-10, I would say that this judgment will continue on until the End Times. Notice - verses 9-10 sound very much like the coming Day of the Lord as described in the prophecy of Joel and in our Lord's Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24. *"And it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord God, "that I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation. I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head. I will make it like mourning for an only son and its end like a bitter day."*

Wearing sackcloth and shaving the head were signs of mourning, so this sounds very much like the mourning for the massive death toll during the Tribulation period of the End Times. During this time, there will be idolatry in Israel again. Some will bow down to the "abomination of desolation" that will be set up in the Temple area, as prophesied by the prophet Daniel and taught by our Lord. But this idolatry in Israel will be judged, just as was the idolatry in the days of Amos. **All** idolatry in **all** nations will be judged. And **all** idolatry in the lives of **all** individual lives will be judged. God must be God!

Think it over. Is there any idolatry in your life right now? Does anything other than God take the Number One place in your life? If so, no wonder you hunger and thirst for nourishment from the Word of God - but you cannot find it (v12). The nation or person that practices idolatry is ripe for judgment.

Practical Application

Do you want the Lord to forget your sins?

Amos 8:7 says: *"Surely I will never forget any of their works"* - but Jeremiah 31:34 says: *"I will remember their sins no more."* Do those two verses contradict each other? No - there is no contradiction! Jeremiah 31:34 was quoted twice in Hebrews *in reference to believers*. Amos 8:7 was spoken *in reference to unbelievers* who would not repent and would not come to the Lord. Remember what we read five times over in Amos 4: *"Yet you have not returned to Me, says the Lord."*

Do you want the Lord to forgive your sins – **and forget** your sins? Yes, God can **forget** your sins! He can forget them because the Lord Jesus died to pay the debt for your sins. God won't engage in a cover-up and He won't "sweep your sins under the rug" - but He can forgive them and forget them. He has promised that He **will** forgive, and He **will** forget, if you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Do you want the Lord to forget your sins? The answer is a matter of your will.