

How do you react when you hear God's Word? In Amos 7-8 we see Amos' reaction to God's Word being revealed to him, and then we see a priest's very angry response to God's Word. We see how God's people had been reacting to his Word over time, and a final word comes from God with a fitting twist on his judgement.

We are presented with four visions in the two chapters: one of a locust plague, one of a colossal fire, one of a plumb line (or it maybe of tin), and one of a basket of summer fruit.

In the first two, Amos understood immediately what they meant, but he needed to have the second two explained.

In the first two, Amos was so horrified by the visions that he prayed, asking God to not allow the visions become reality, calling on God to remember his promise to his covenant people and not to destroy them (just as Abraham and Moses had done). and surprisingly, God does relent from letting the two visions become reality.

But like the opening chapters, where the refrain was "*For three transgressions and for four, I will not revoke the punishment...*" we find that the third and fourth visions in chapters 7 and 8 are not revoked. God's patience has a limit. Amos is not given the opportunity to ask for God to have mercy.

Instead, God asks Amos what he sees.

In the third vision, he said a word which is confusing in the Hebrew but which is most often translated as "a plumb line", but it could also be translated as "tin". If it is a plumb line, then it is a vision of judgement. The plumb line is a heavy weight on a bit of string which is used to check whether walls are built straight. God is judging his people and not liking what he sees, because they are not upright. But if the vision was of a wall of tin, and tin in his hand, then it is a scene of impending disaster, because at the start of the bronze age, God had a massive supply of tin (which is used in making bronze) and the

Israelites would not have strength against it. Either way, it was a gloomy forecast.

But God then adds in an explanation. He was deserting his unfaithful people. The false sites of worship set up by the descendants of the patriarchs will be made desolate, their sanctuaries laid waste and the house of their king destroyed.

During the week we had media frenzy when a journalist wrote that our Prime Minister broke his promise to hand the lodge over to the treasurer. Imagine if the fuss if the media heard a death threat?

A priest, Amaziah, heard the word from God on the lips of Amos, and reported to the king that Amos was out to kill the king. Then Amaziah turned on Amos. His response to God's word was not to pray for mercy, as Amos had done, but to kick Amos away. He used arguments such as "Go back south. Earn your food down there. This is an official temple of the kingdom, you have no authority here!"

Amos then prophesied specifically about the fate of Amaziah and his family, and of the way they would end up. Yet the confrontation also confirmed that the people of Israel were not simply making a few slip ups in the way they understood God's Word. When it was given to them, their leadership immediately rejected it, and tried to remove God's Word from their land.

No wonder the fourth vision is also of uncompromising judgement. He is shown a basket of summer fruit. Our translation of the Hebrew misses so much in this text. It is more like a basket of ripe fruit, and God explains that the time is ripe for his people to be judged. They will not sing joyfully anymore, they will wail. There will be much death, and then silence.

Amos then prophesies to those who flagrantly have broken God's Word, whose love is not for obedience to God, but rather who get frustrated by religious holidays, who delight in ripping off people, who have increased commercial gain at

the expense of human value, and who water down their products to make bigger profits. God in his Word had declared these things as abhorrent. There was flagrant disregard of God's Word, even in the choice of which site for the Temple, which should only be in Jerusalem, not in Bethel or Dan, where the northern kingdom had set up two alternative Temples.

So the Lord made another pronouncement through Amos *"The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. Shall not the land tremble on this account and everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?"*

Their doom was sealed.

Yet one more punishment would happen. It is a very fitting punishment, for the people had rejected God's Word. So he made this announcement of a drought and famine in chapter 8.

*"The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. 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 they shall not find it. In that day the beautiful young women and the young men shall faint for thirst. Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria, and say, "As your god lives, O Dan," and, "As the way of Beer-sheba lives"— they shall fall, and never rise again."*

It would be a famine of the Word. God would remove His Word. The people rejected it, so he would remove it. Not only was it a fitting punishment, but since his word is a light to our path and a lamp to our feet, and it is through his word that salvation is known as God reveals His truth to us, then it is a preliminary to judgement. They shall fall and never rise again.

We know that Israel did perish as prophesied. We know that the Assyrians completed what

God had said would happen, and that the house of Jeroboam the second was destroyed. Yet there is something else in this passage, which I skipped over.

That something was the description of the day of judgement. It is meant to mean that no-one would miss it. It would be a cataclysmic day. Yet listen to it from 8:9-11 *"On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day."*

Do you see any connection to the death of Jesus? As decisive as the judgment God made on the people of Israel was the judgment God the Father handed out on his only Son. The cross was a day of judgement. He took our punishment, the penalty we deserved for rejecting God and his word. and on that day, the Word of the Lord could not be found on earth, until he rose again on the third day.

In the New Testament, God spoke again about judgement. He says that all who believe in Jesus, who trust in Him are saved from the final day of wrath, because they are united with Christ in His death and resurrection. We have passed from death to life. But at the same time, there will be many who refuse to believe and obey God's Word. How sad it will be.

So how should we respond to God's word? We can respond like Amaziah and reject. But far better to respond like Amos by praying for forgiveness and mercy, and warning people to avoid that last day, for unlike the people of Israel, we still have time to repent.