

Difficult Ministry

Amos 7

Intro

By way of introduction, would you please turn to the book of Ezekiel...

Ezekiel 2:1-7 (NKJV)

1 And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you."

2 Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me.

3 And He said to me: "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.

4 For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.'

5 As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they are a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.

6 "And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house.

7 You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious."

Now please look at...

Ezekiel 3:7-11 (NKJV)

7 But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted.

8 Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads.

9 Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house."

10 Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears.

11 And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse."

Now, it is clear from these two passages that Ezekiel was called to a ***difficult ministry***...

- And the hard truth is that being called to ***difficult ministry*** is not unusual...

We see examples of ***difficult ministry*** over and over again from the beginning until this very day...

- And as we consider that truth, it seems likely that each of us will be entrusted with ***difficult ministries*** as we seek to obey the calling of Christ in our lives...

With this challenging truth in mind, it is important that we continually prepare ourselves to remain faithful in our calling by studying the Word of God and allowing it to encourage us to keep fighting the good fight of faith...

- *So, if you would, please turn to Amos 7 as we continue to consider the **Difficult Ministry** of this Old Testament prophet and seek to discover application for our own lives...*

Amos 7 (NKJV)

Vision of the Locusts

**1 Thus the Lord GOD showed me:
Behold, He formed locust swarms
at the beginning of the late crop;
indeed it was the late crop
after the king's mowings.**

Please notice that Amos refers to God as...

the Lord GOD — Sovereign Yahweh — *combination of God's absolute authority and His covenant name...*

Now, in this vision, the Lord GOD shows Amos a swarm of locusts forming to attack the land in the ***time between the first and second harvests...***

- The ***first harvest*** went to provide for ***the king and all that belonged to him and his household...***

The ***second harvest*** went to provide for ***the rest of the people and all that belonged to them...***

- If locusts attacked before the second harvest then the people of the land would be devastated...

The people of Israel would have no way to stop this destructive swarm of locusts if **the Lord GOD** sent them as a judgment on the land...

REMINDER — If the Lord GOD chooses to bring judgment, no one can stop Him...

We read in...

Psalm 135:6 (NKJV)

**Whatever the LORD pleases He does,
In heaven and in earth,
In the seas and in all deep places.**

Continuing on in Amos 7 to vs...

**2 And so it was, when they had
finished eating the grass of the land, that I said:
"O Lord GOD, forgive, I pray!
Oh, that Jacob may stand,
For he is small!"**

*Amos responds to the vision by **interceding for the nation of Israel...***

Amos prays for Israel (**Jacob**) to be forgiven and in doing so, Amos recognizes that ***Israel is small***...

- [***expand*** — *contrast with how Israel viewed itself as **strong** and **powerful**...*]

IMPORTANT — We must pray for proper perspective — for the ability to see things as they actually are...[expand]

*Now, the reality is that **all people** and **all nations** are **exceedingly small** in comparison to the Lord...*

Isaiah 40:15,17 (NKJV)

**15 Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket,
And are counted as the small dust on the scales;
Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing.**

**17 All nations before Him are as nothing,
And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.**

Now, once we have this ***proper perspective*** we can ***pray rightly*** — we will be able to see things as they actually are...

- We will understand that God is the ***infinite, omnipotent, Creator of the Universe*** and we are ***very small creatures whom He loves***...

This is vitally important because it is only as ***we view God correctly*** that ***we will view ourselves and others correctly***...

- It seems clear that Amos viewed God correctly and as a result Amos viewed himself and the nation of Israel correctly...

And this proper perspective led to what we read next in vs...

**3 So the LORD relented concerning this.
"It shall not be," said the LORD.**

This is very interesting — the intercession of Amos led to the LORD relenting from the judgment of the locusts...

*And I believe this response from the LORD is due to the fact that the LORD prefers **mercy** over **judgment**...*

Ezekiel 33:11 (NKJV)

Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

I believe that the LORD wants to find a reason to give mercy — so the LORD Himself will raise up intercessors who are willing to pray for people who are under judgment...

This was so much of the ministry of the prophets — God sent the prophets to intercede for the people and to call the people to repentance...

2 Chronicles 36:15-16 (NKJV)

15 And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place.

16 But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

We see from these verses that people must respond to the mercy that is offered or eventually judgment will fall...

And even though that is true — God still desires mercy over judgment — and this truth is the heart of...

John 3:16-17 (NKJV)

16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Now, before we move on, we are also reminded in **Amos 7:2-3** that ***God has established prayer as a means of changing things...***

- Amos prayed to the Lord and the Lord relented from the locust judgment...

James 5:16 (NKJV)

...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Now, I admit that I do not understand how intercession works — and I doubt that anyone else does either...

But I do not have to know how something works — I just need to know that it works...

- [ex. I don't understand how my iPhone works but I still use it...]

And though we do not know **how** intercession works — we know **that** it works — because God has **ordained it to work...**

- The LORD has established intercession as a means for accomplishing His will in the lives of others...

With this truth in mind, I encourage you to intercede on behalf of those in your sphere of influence — your family, your friends, your classmates, your coworkers...

And as the Lord leads, intercede for others whom God would put on your heart...

1 Timothy 2:1-4 (NKJV)

1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,

2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

And on a personal note, I would ask you to intercede for me...

And if you are led to pray for me I would simply ask that you pray for me to submit to God's will for my life — that I would be willing to obey the Lord in every aspect of my life...

Now, as we move on in Amos 7, we move from the vision of the locusts to the...

Vision of the Fire

4 Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, the Lord GOD called for conflict by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory.

Amos was given a vision of a wildfire(?) that was so intense that it both destroyed the land as well as dried up water that was underground...

5 Then I said:

**"O Lord GOD, cease, I pray!
Oh, that Jacob may stand,
For he is small!"**

6 So the LORD relented concerning this.

"This also shall not be," said the Lord GOD.

Amos intercedes once again and once again the Lord relents...

- And we are reminded that the Lord is willing to relent because the Lord desires mercy over judgment...

Please understand that Amos is not causing God to do something against God's own will — that would be impossible for two reasons...

1) No human being can coerce God into doing something that is against God's nature to do...

2) God Himself cannot go against His own nature — He is not divided like we are — whatever He is, He is that completely...

So, if God is willing to relent of the judgment that He was going to bring on the people then He must have a greater purpose in relenting...

*And I believe that that greater purpose is **relationship**...*

God Himself is an eternal, loving relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and I believe that **relationship is central to what God is doing in Creation...**

- I believe that the Lord Jesus made this abundantly clear when He let us know that the two greatest commandments were to **Love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength** and to **Love our Neighbor as we love ourselves...**

The Lord Jesus said that **all of the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments...**

In other words, the focus of our lives as believers — above all else — is to first love God with all that we are and then out of that right relationship with God we will be empowered to love our neighbor as we love ourselves...

As we each obey these two commandments, we will be in **right relationship with God** and in **right relationship with others...**

If this does not convince us that ***relationship is central*** to ***who God is*** and ***what God is doing*** in human history then I don't know what will...

Let's move on in Amos 7 to the next vision...

Vision of the Plumb Line

7 Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand.

- [describe scene and the use of a plumb line...]

Now, I believe that the plumb line is representative of an ***objective standard***...

- In other words, the people of Israel were being judged by an ***unchanging objective standard of truth*** — not by a ***changing subjective standard***...

[ex. if you were to be judged by your ability to complete a math problem — (without using a calculator or chatGPT) — there would be one right answer — that answer would be objective...]

- Likewise, God's standard of judgment is objective — and He Himself is the unchanging standard — He is the plumb line...

**8 And the LORD said to me,
"Amos, what do you see?"
And I said, "A plumb line."
Then the Lord said:
"Behold, I am setting a plumb line**

**In the midst of My people Israel;
I will not pass by them anymore.**

**9 The high places of Isaac shall be desolate,
And the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste.
I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam.”**

God was going to judge Israel just as a builder judges a wall by a plumb line...

- The people of Israel had failed to live up to the objective standard that the Lord laid out in the law of Moses...

[expand — wall that is too far out of plumb must be torn down and built again — Israel had refused to be set right so they would be torn out of the land...]

- It is also interesting to note that we do not read of Amos interceding for Israel here...

Maybe the time for intercession was over and now judgment was going to fall...

*Continuing on now in Amos 7 we move from **visions** to...*

Amaziah's Complaint

10 Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel

Amaziah was a false priest who served false gods at Bethel where a golden calf had been set up by Jeroboam I...

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words.

Amaziah wants Jeroboam II to put an end to Amos' prophesying — Amaziah wants Amos silenced...

PRINCIPLE — False worshipers will persecute true worshipers — and it has been this way since the beginning...

To prove my point, please turn to...

Genesis 4:1-8 (NKJV)

1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD."

2 Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.

4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,

5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

6 So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?

7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

8 Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Cain offered false worship and instead of repenting and worshipping the Lord rightly, Cain killed Abel to silence Abel's witness...

And this persecution of true worshipers by false worshipers has continued throughout human history...

Because all false worshipers intuitively ***know that they are wrong*** — that they are worshipping something false...

- So they have to silence or kill true worshipers because true worshipers expose the falseness of their beliefs...

For another example of this reality, please turn to...

Acts 7:51-60 (NKJV) [Stephen is speaking]

51 "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.

52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,

53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,

56 and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;

58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Please turn back to Amos 7 as we continue on into vs...

**11 For thus Amos has said:
'Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
And Israel shall surely be led away captive
From their own land.'**

We have no record of Amos saying these exact words but they seem consistent with Amos' message...

- And please notice that Amaziah gives no consideration as to whether or not these prophecies ***are true*** — he simply rejects them because ***they are bad news...***

- [ex. most people reject the idea of God's judgment simply because they consider judgment to be bad news...]

But it is impossible to live well if we simply ignore or reject what we don't like...

Instead, as believers we are called to be people who ***love and embrace the truth even if it is difficult...***

- ***And in the midst of difficult truths we are to trust the greater truth that God is working all things together for the good for those who love Him...***

Let's move on in Amos 7 to vs 12-13...

12 Then Amaziah said to Amos:

"Go, you seer!

Flee to the land of Judah.

There eat bread,

And there prophesy.

13 But never again prophesy at Bethel,

For it is the king's sanctuary,

And it is the royal residence."

The false priest Amaziah essentially tells Amos to ***get out*** and ***go home...***

- Amos is not wanted in Israel — he needs to go back to Judah and leave the people of Israel alone...

And this is generally how every true prophet was treated — they were told to shut up and get out — or else...

And if we seek to share the truth of Christ with an unbelieving world we can expect similar treatment...

John 15:18-21 (NKJV)

18 “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.

19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

20 Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.”

Continuing on in Amos 7 to vs...

**14 Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah:
"I was no prophet,
Nor was I a son of a prophet,
But I was a sheepbreeder
And a tender of sycamore fruit.**

Amos explains that he did not ask for this ministry — Amos wasn't trained to be a prophet, his dad wasn't a prophet...

- Amos had been minding his own business as a **sheepbreeder** and a caretaker of **sycamore fruit**...

And maybe Amos was satisfied with his simple life — but the Lord had other plans...

**15 Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock,
And the LORD said to me,
'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'**

Amos had been a *regular guy* doing *regular work* — but the LORD ***commissioned*** Amos as a prophet and ***commanded*** Amos to go and prophesy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel...

And what was Amos supposed to do? — Reject God's commission and disobey God's command?...

• What higher authority was Amos supposed to appeal to?...

If God commissions and commands you, shouldn't you just respond in obedience?...

Now, this situation between Amaziah and Amos reminds me of what took place between the leaders of Jerusalem and the apostles in the book of Acts...

Please turn to...

Acts 4:18-20 (NKJV)

18 So they [leaders of Jerusalem] called them [Peter & John] and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

And the next time the guys got arrested, they said essentially the same thing — to see this please turn to...

Acts 5:26-32 (NKJV)

26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them,

28 saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"

29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.

30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.

31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

32 And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Please turn back to Amos 7 as we read what else Amos said to Amaziah...

**16 Now therefore, hear the word of the LORD:
You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel,
And do not spout against the house of Isaac.'**

**17 "Therefore thus says the LORD:
Your wife shall be a harlot in the city;
Your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword;
Your land shall be divided by survey line;
You shall die in a defiled land;
And Israel shall surely be led away captive
From his own land.'"**

Wow — Amos refuses to go away quietly and instead delivers a devastating prophecy to Amaziah...

- [expand on details...]

One Bible commentator

"Amaziah's loyalty was to Jeroboam, who probably appointed him as priest at Bethel. Amos's loyalty was to God, who sent him to prophesy against Israel. Conflict between Amaziah and Amos was inevitable since their loyalties were in conflict. Primary loyalty to God in their service to Israel would have eliminated conflict between the king, the priest, and the prophet. The answer to conflict among God's people is always to place loyalty to God above all else."

Conclusion

We will stop here for today and Lord-willing pick up in Amos 8 next week...

- And as we close it is vital to remember that the Lord ***will call us to difficult ministries*** — that's simply the reality of the situation...

As we seek to faithfully walk in the Lord's ***commission*** and ***command*** we will face varying degrees of tribulation and persecution...

- *But through it all, it is possible to remain loyal to the Lord who called and saved us...*

We owe all of our allegiance to Him and we can remain loyal to Him as we trust that His way is best and that He will bring us through every difficulty in a way that is ***for our good*** and ***for His glory***...