

## Amos 7:10-15

Did you ever have a difficult **choice** to make? Were you ever in a situation where you had to make an **immediate** decision, and you didn't know what to **do**? Picture yourself in **this** situation - as a **judge**, or more likely as a member of a **jury** in a **murder** case. In the course of the trial you receive conflicting information from two different people. Both stories are completely **believable** - both people seem to be totally **honest**. However, believing **one** story would mean **life** for the accused person, while believing the **other** would mean **death**. That kind of situation reminds me of the fairy tale, "The Lady And The Tiger." In that story, a young man was placed in front of two doors. Behind one door was a beautiful **princess**, and behind the **other** door was a man-eating **tiger**. If he opened the correct door, he could **marry** the princess - but if he chose the **wrong** door, it would mean certain **death**. Life or death - all hanging on one little **decision**. Let's look at the life and death decisions which were faced in our **text** today, as the people in that text struggled with the question, **Whose Word Is Right?**

We begin by hearing the word of **Amaziah**, the priest of **Bethel**. He said to King Jeroboam II, the ruler of Israel at that time, "*Amos has **conspired** against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to **endure** all of his words.*" Those of you who are familiar with the religious scene in the days of the Divided Kingdom realize that **Bethel** was not a place where **true** believers worshiped. Jeroboam I, the first king of the **Northern** Kingdom, who had ruled some 150 years earlier, had set up **golden calves** in the cities of Bethel and Dan - an act which greatly **displeased** the LORD. God had told His people that they were **not** to worship any **graven images**, and also that they were **only** to worship in **Jerusalem**. In order to **correct** the situation, God sent **Amos** out of his **hometown**, the **Southern** Kingdom, to preach to the people of the **North**.

We **then** hear the word of **Amos**. Amos' message was a **harsh** one. "*Jeroboam will **die** by the sword, and Israel will certainly go into **exile** away from its own soil.*" We should probably note that this was not the **first** message which Amos had brought to the Israelites. He had previously pleaded with the **people** to **repent** of their apostasy, and he had also pleaded with **God** to **forgive** their unfaithful actions. God had **listened** to the prayers of Amos, and had granted the people many extra **chances** - but not **this** time. This time the LORD would **follow through** with the destruction He had promised.

Amaziah, this priest of the false **calf-worship** religion, tried to paint a very **negative** picture of **Amos**, in the presence of King Jeroboam II. Notice how he

made Amos sound like a **personal threat** to Jeroboam - as if Amos was stirring up seeds of **treason** against the king. Amaziah also craftily **omitted** the merciful **pleading** which Amos had done on behalf of the people, along with the great **faithlessness** of the **people**, which had been the real **cause** behind Amos' message of death and destruction.

Jeroboam II had a **choice** to make. **Whose Word Was Right?** Whom should he **believe** - Amos, and the **Triune God** whom he represented - or Amaziah, and the **idols of gold** which his forefathers had established in the land? His decision would be a **far-reaching** one. It would not only affect **himself**, but also everyone else in his country. Unwisely, Jeroboam chose to listen to **Amaziah** who had said, "*The land is not able to **endure** all of his (ie. Amos') words,*" and consequently also the words of the **LORD** who had sent him. Jeroboam's decision to **reject** the Word of the LORD from the mouth of His prophet resulted in the **fulfillment** of **Amos'** prophecy. King Jeroboam **died** by the sword, and the 10 Northern Tribes were led away into **exile** - never again to return as a nation.

Perhaps the advice of Amaziah has also crossed **our** minds lately. With the lack of **rain** which we've been experiencing here in western Wisconsin this year, I can well imagine some of you saying things like **this**: "*We need a **break**. The crops aren't able to **bear** these severe **drought** conditions.*" And with all of the **godless** things happening in our nation, and around the world, I can imagine **others** saying things like **this**: "*The world just isn't what it used to be. I can't even **bear** to watch the news anymore.*" But we need to remember that in **all** things, our Lord is still in **control**, and that He only wants to **bless** us - which He **has**. God has sent **enough** rain to keep **many** of our crops alive. And even the **detestable** things happening around the world can be viewed as a **blessing** - in the sense that God has **told** us in His Word that the conditions in our world will continue to **deteriorate** as the Last Day grows closer and closer. Praise God that His **Word** continues to be **true**. Conditions in the world **are** getting worse, and that tells us that the **end** of all these problems is very **near**.

Then there is the "problem" of what to do with all the **extra money** that we continue to have in our congregation. This year, in spite of the fact that we were going through a world-wide pandemic, we again have an excess of over \$40,000 from our last fiscal year budget. What a **wonderful problem** to have! These are funds which God has given to us so we can continue to **reach out** in more ways to more people with the saving Gospel of Jesus. Our Wisconsin Synod is conducting and encouraging Gospel outreach in **42 foreign countries**, and we're exploring outreach opportunities in 17 prospective **new** mission fields as well. We wouldn't

**have** these opportunities if the LORD didn't think we were capable of carrying it out. So, whom are **we** going to believe - the **skeptics** who foresee only **gloom** and **doom** for Christianity in the future, or the **LORD** who promises that His children will always be in His **protective care**? And what will our **response** be? I can safely **guarantee** that if we become **frustrated** or **complacent**, and turn **away** from the LORD, His promises of **destruction** will also rest on **us**, as they did on the people of the Northern Kingdom. But, if we **trust** in Him and cling to His **love** and **mercy**, He will continue to bless us **richly**, and crown our efforts to further His kingdom with **success**.

So much for the choice which **Jeroboam II** had to make. But in our text, the Prophet Amos **also** faced a choice. Amaziah had said, *"You seer, **get out of here!** Flee to the land of **Judah**. You may eat food and prophesy **there**. But you must never again prophesy at **Bethel**, for it is the sanctuary of the **king** and the **national temple**."* We aren't sure whether those were the words of Amaziah himself, or a message which he was delivering from King Jeroboam. But in either case after **hearing** that, we would think that Amos didn't have much of a decision to make at all! He obviously wasn't **appreciated** in Israel. Amaziah had even accused him of being there just as a **money-making** scheme. Why didn't Amos immediately pack up and head for **home**? Because **God** had **also** spoken to Amos. Amos said, *"I was not a **prophet**, nor was I a **son** of a prophet. Rather, I was a **sheep breeder** and I took care of sycamore **fig** trees. But the **Lord** took me from tending flocks, and the Lord said to me, '**Go, prophesy to my people Israel**.'" Now, who was **Amos** going to **believe**? **Whose Word Was Right**? The **logical** choice would have been to listen to **Amaziah**. Since Amos had been **rejected**, he ought to pack up and **leave** - follow the path of least **resistance** - and save himself a lot of **headaches** and **heartaches**. But the **spiritual** choice was to follow the **LORD's** call, even though it would mean **hard times** and **persecution** for Amos himself. And **that** is the choice which Amos clearly **made**. Since it was the **LORD** who had called him away from his shepherding and farming to **preach** without any previous theological training, Amos felt that he simply could not **refuse**.*

We also will be wise to choose the path which the **LORD** lays before us, in **spite** of how rough and rocky it may **appear** to be. Following the LORD may not always be the **logical** choice, but it will always be the **correct** one. The decisions which we face together as a congregation affect not only our **own** souls, but also the souls and spiritual lives of **others** - even of those whom the LORD **will** bring into His flock in the **future** through our labors. How do we know what to do? **Whose Word Is Right**? If we stick with the LORD and His Word and promises, as Amos did, we can **always** be sure that we've made the **right** decisions - decisions

which will mean spiritual **life**, and **not** eternal **death**. May God grant us the wisdom and the foresight to choose **His** Word above all others, because **God's** Word is **always** right. Amen.