

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 men 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, "*Amos is raising a **conspiracy** against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot **bear** all 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, king of the **Northern** Kingdom, 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 surely go into **exile**, away from their native land.*" 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. Notice how he made

Amos sound like a **personal threat** to Jeroboam, as if he were 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 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? 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 cannot **bear** all 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. The king **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. As I think about this congregation, I can well imagine some of you saying things like **this**: "*Our budget is just getting to be too **high**. We haven't been able to keep up with our ongoing operating expenses for quite some time now, and as a result, we have had to borrow \$195,000 from the bank through our line of credit. How can the congregation continue to **bear** those shortfalls?*" And I can imagine **others** saying things like **this**: "*We've just taken on a lot of **extra** expenses. Now we are trying to support **3** pastors here at First German, and the Synod and High School are always looking for extra support too. Something has to **give**. Our congregation isn't able to **bear** all this at once.*" These scenarios are very **real**, and they continue to be of great **concern** to the leaders in our congregation. But in **both** of these instances, we also need to remember how greatly we have been **blessed** by our Lord.

Borrowing money and adding called workers - what **wonderful problems** to have - to continue to reach out in **more ways** to **more people** with the saving Gospel of Jesus - to be **privileged** to have our wonderful church and school facilities which make it possible for **everyone** to participate in worship services, and Bible Classes, and fellowship activities - to be **blessed** with **families and children** who are seeking **Christian education**, ensuring a healthy **future** for our congregation! We wouldn't have such "problems" if the LORD didn't think we were capable of **bearing** them. So, whom are **we** going to believe - the **skeptics**, or

the **LORD**? And what will our **response** be? I can safely **guarantee** that if we 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 **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** had to make. But in our text, the Prophet Amos **also** faced a choice. Amaziah had said, "***Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there, and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy any more at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary, and the temple of the kingdom.***" 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 his bags and head for **home**? He didn't, because **God** had **also** spoken to Amos. Amos said, "***I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending my flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'***" Now, whom 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** - 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 us. 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 have made the **right** decision - a decision 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.