

Amos 8:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-8/amos-81-3/>

In his fourth vision, Amos sees a basket of summer fruit, the ripening of which suggests that its end has come. Since the words for “summer fruit” and “end” sound similar, the LORD uses wordplay or a pun to declare to Amos that the end has come to His covenant people dwelling in the land while in violation of His covenant, and that He will spare them no longer.

As in the previous visions, Amos began this fourth vision by saying, *Thus the Lord GOD showed me.* The word translated as “Lord” is “Adonai” in Hebrew, which means “master” or “ruler.” The term translated as GOD is Yahweh, the covenant name of God. Amos used these two terms for the LORD to confirm the authenticity of his message. He wanted his audience to know that what he saw was of divine origin. Indeed, it was the Lord, Israel’s Ruler and covenant partner, who showed Amos what he was about to disclose. This added much weight to the prophet’s message.

What Amos envisioned was *a basket of summer fruit*. The term translated as *summer fruit* [“qayits,” in Hebrew] refers to pomegranates and figs that were harvested at the very end of the agricultural season, during the months of August and September. Amos saw these fruits in a *basket*, a container (possibly something woven or interlaced) that was used to carry fruits.

Having shown the *basket of summer fruit* to Amos, the LORD asked him a question: *What do you see, Amos?* As a Judahite farmer, a grower of sycamore figs who was called to prophesy in the northern kingdom (Amos 7:14), Amos would have had no difficulty identifying the item that he saw. Thus, he responded with simple words: *A basket of summer fruit*. But while the item was easily recognizable, its meaning and significance was not. So, the Suzerain God proceeded to explain the meaning of the vision to Amos, telling him that the *basket of summer fruit* symbolized the end of the northern kingdom of Israel.

The meaning of this vision lay in the pun or wordplay between the Hebrew word for *summer fruit* (“qayits”) and the Hebrew word for *end* (“qets”). Although these two terms are not related in origin, they sound similar (homonyms). This is because of the difference between the Judahite and Israelite dialects of Hebrew. In the northern kingdom of Israel, the word “qayits” “summer fruit” was pronounced as “qets” (“end”). So, the Suzerain God mimics the Israelite pronunciation of “qayits” to say to His prophet, *the end has come for My people*.

Upon hearing these words, Amos’s audience would have caught the wordplay and would have quickly made the connection intended by God. That is, the Israelites would be ripe for judgment just as crops are harvested at the end of the agricultural year. As the vision shows, God’s judgment would be inevitable because the LORD said, *I will spare them no longer*. The Israelites would be punished severely because they failed to obey the covenant stipulations of their Suzerain (or Ruler) God.

Furthermore, God explained the severity of His judgment, *The songs of the palace will turn to wailing*. The word for *palace* can also be translated as “temple.” Temple songs that were

designed for joy would turn into mourning. At this point, the LORD paused to assert the truth of His judgment with the formula, *declares the Lord GOD*. The Suzerain God is the master or Ruler, the one who has full authority to do what He wants. He threatened to judge His covenant people because they disobeyed His covenantal laws and refused to listen to the instructions of the prophets. Enough was enough. God could spare His people no longer. Judgment was surely coming.

Then, God resumed the details concerning His judgment on Israel and said, *Many will be the corpses; in every place they will cast them forth in silence*. This meant that dead bodies would lie everywhere, and people would silently throw them out to be burned. There would be so many bodies that there would not be ample resources for the normal wailing and sadness. God's judgment on His covenant people would be unpleasant.

This all was in keeping with the provisions clearly set forth in the covenant between God, as the Suzerain/Ruler and the people of Israel as His vassals. The covenant set forth blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience (Deuteronomy 27-28). Israel agreed to be bound by the terms of the covenant (Exodus 19:8). The terms for disobedience were clearly set forth (Deuteronomy 28). Now the provisions relating to consequences for disobedience are about to be invoked. By way of Amos, Israel has been sent the modern equivalent of a "demand letter" telling Israel to mend their ways or bear the consequence. In this case, Israel will lose their land to Assyria, like a ranch property being foreclosed due to non-payment. Israel's "payment" was to keep the provisions of the covenant, which was for their best interest (Deuteronomy 6:24; 10:13).

Biblical Text

¹ Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, *there was a basket of summer fruit.* ² He said, "What do you see, Amos?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the Lord said to me, "The end has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer. ³ The songs of the palace will turn to wailing in that day," declares the Lord God. "Many *will be the corpses; in every place they will cast them forth in silence.*"