

A Prophet for Today

The Prophet from Tekoa

Amos 1:1-2; 7:10-17

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The Prophet from Tekoa

Scripture

Today I am beginning a study in the book of Amos in a sermon series I am calling, “A Prophet for Today.” I hope that we shall see how relevant this prophet of God is for us today in a sermon titled, “The Prophet from Tekoa.”

Let us read about the prophet from Tekoa in Amos 1:1-2; 7:10-17:

¹The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

²And he said:

“The Lord roars from Zion
and utters his voice from Jerusalem;
the pastures of the shepherds mourn,
and the top of Carmel withers.”

.... ¹⁰Then 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. ¹¹For thus Amos has said,

“ ‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land.’ ”

¹²And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away

to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there,¹³ but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

¹⁴Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, “I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs.¹⁵ But the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’¹⁶ Now therefore hear the word of the Lord.

“You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’

¹⁷Therefore thus says the Lord:

“Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and your daughters shall fall
by the sword,
and your land shall be divided up with
a measuring line;
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
and Israel shall surely go into exile
away from its land.’ ” (Amos 1:1-2; 7:10-17)

Introduction

I first studied the book of Amos—probably around 1980—as a young Christian at the University of Cape Town. I was part of a Christian campus ministry known as the Student YMCA, which was very similar to our Reformed University Fellowship. In order to help Christians grow in their faith, the Campus Minister, the Rev. Roger Palmer, chose specific books of the Bible each year that students would study in all of the ministry's Bible Studies.

A Prophet for Today

When we started studying Amos, which was probably the first book of the Prophets that I studied, I remember wondering how such an ancient book would be relevant to me in 1980.

Was I ever wrong! As we worked through the Book of Amos, I was struck at how contemporary it was and at how practical it was to our situation in South Africa. Commentator James Montgomery Boice writes:

The Book of Amos is one of the most readable, relevant, and moving portions of the Word of God. But in much of church history (until very recent times) little or no attention has been paid to it. Why? It is because the book speaks powerfully against social injustices and religious formalism, and many who would otherwise read the book have been implicated in such sins and are condemned by it.¹

So, I am hoping and praying that God will use our study of the Book of Amos to show us how relevant the prophet from Tekoa is for us today.

As we begin our study in the Book of Amos today, we are going to examine the call of a man to speak for God.

Lesson

Amos 1:1-2; 7:10-17 shows us a call to speak for God.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Author (1:1a)
2. The Recipients (1:1b)
3. The Date (1:1c)
4. The Message (1:2; 7:10-17)

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 161.

I. The Author (1:1a)

First, let's look at the author.

The Book of Amos begins with these words in verse 1a, **“The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa.”**

We know very little about **Amos**. He is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, although different men with the name of Amos are mentioned (cf. Matthew 1:10; Luke 3:25).

Amos says he **“was among the shepherds of Tekoa.”** The village of **Tekoa** was probably the birthplace of Amos and where he lived when God called him to his service. **Tekoa** was a village in the southern Judean hill country about 5 miles south to southeast of Bethlehem and about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. The village was on the dividing line between the desolate wilderness area to the east and the agricultural lands to the west. **Tekoa** is perhaps best known because of the wise woman that was employed by Joab to convince King David to be merciful to Absalom (2 Samuel 14:2-9). **Tekoa** also had a military fortress associated with it during the period of kings Rehoboam (ca 920 BC; 2 Chronicles 11:5-7), Jehoshaphat (ca 860 BC; 2 Chronicles 17:2; 20:20), and Uzziah (ca 760 BC; 2 Chronicles 26:10). The presence of the wise woman and the military fortress may suggest that the citizens of **Tekoa** were exposed to far-ranging news and information that did not make them sleepy and unlearned little villagers.

Amos identified himself as **“among the shepherds.”** The Hebrew word for **“shepherds”** could also mean “sheep breeder.” When we hear that someone is a **“shepherd”** we tend to think that someone is very simple and uneducated. But, that is not necessarily the case. One thinks of young David,

who was a shepherd but wrote some of the most moving poetry in history. He also was an incredibly gifted military leader, and a competent political leader. However, it is likely that Amos was a sheep breeder and that he had oversight of many sheep. It seems that Amos was stressing his non-professional role as a prophet. In fact, he made that very point later in his book, in Amos 7:14, where he wrote, “Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, ‘I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs.’” Amos wanted it to be clear that he was a non-professional prophet. He was a shepherd by profession. “But,” as commentator Gary V. Smith writes, “being a shepherd is not identical to being a simple uneducated peasant. The literary style, method of argument, and knowledge of international political affairs clearly demonstrate that Amos is an educated and knowledgeable person.”²

So, out of a little village called Tekoa, God called a man by the name of Amos to speak on his behalf.

II. The Recipients (1:1b)

Second, let’s examine the recipients.

Amos went on to write in verse 1b, “**...which he saw concerning Israel.**”

I want to note that other prophets often begin by writing, “The word of the LORD....” Amos did not begin his book like that. He began by saying, “The words of Amos.” However, that did not mean that he was the sole author. I say that because he used this clause here in verse 1b, “**which he saw.**”

² Gary V. Smith, *Amos*, Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 1998), 46.

This expression indicates that he received the words of his prophecy from another source. Perhaps he was referring to the visionary material that was given in Amos 7-9. But it is more likely that he used it in the sense of divine revelation. By using this expression, Amos was insisting that he claimed divine origin and authority for his prophecy. He was not speaking on his own. Indeed, he was called by God to speak for God.

And to whom was he to speak? Amos' prophecy was primarily **“concerning Israel.”**

Let me give a quick history lesson. The first three kings of God's covenant people were Saul, David, and Solomon. Saul reigned as king from 1050-1010 BC, David reigned as king from 1010-970 BC, and Solomon reigned as king from 970-930 BC. Each king reigned for 40 years. When Solomon died in 930 BC, the kingdom split in two. The northern kingdom was called Israel. And the southern kingdom was called Judah.

At the time that God called Amos to speak for him, Amos was living in the southern kingdom of Judah. But God called him to go and speak to the northern kingdom of **Israel**. At this time in their histories, both kingdoms enjoyed relatively peaceful relations with each other. So, it was easy for a southerner to preach to northerners. Commentator Smith writes:

No specific group within Israel is identified in 1:1, but internal evidence suggests several different audiences in Israel. Most conceive of a fairly short ministry in Israel centered around the capital city of Samaria and the national temple of Bethel. The political, social, and religious behavior of the audience is described by Amos in great detail within each prophecy. The audience response is often unknown, with the exception of the strong negative response in 7:10–13.³

³ Gary V. Smith, *Amos*, 46.

III. The Date (1:1c)

Third, let's note the date.

Amos wrote in verse 1c that the words that God gave him came **“in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.”**

This tells us of the period Amos preached to Israel, although we don't have a precise date. We have three pieces of evidence to help us establish an approximate date.

First, Amos said that he preached **“in the days of Uzziah king of Judah.”** Uzziah was the **king of Judah**, the southern kingdom, and the homeland of Amos. Uzziah reigned for approximately fifty years (2 Kings 15:1-2; 2 Chronicles 26:1-3), and his reign is dated from 791 to 740 BC. Uzziah was a strong king who brought security and great prosperity to Judah. His powerful rule was cut short because of leprosy, a direct result of his pride (2 Chronicles 26:16-21).

Second, Amos said that he preached **“in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.”** Jeroboam was the **king of Israel**, the northern kingdom. He reigned from 786 to 746 BC. This Jeroboam was known as Jeroboam II and he was also a powerful military leader. The prosperity of Israel is evident in Amos 6:1-7, and the nation's worship of Baal is fully described by the prophet Hosea. The Book of Amos describes life under **king Jeroboam**.

And third, Amos said he preached **“two years before the earthquake.”** This is an exact date. However, we have no clear indication in Scripture when the earthquake took place. External evidence based on recent excavations suggests a date that Gary Smith summarizes as follows: “Most modern discussions

of the issue prefer to date Amos 1:1 on the basis of the earthquake which struck Hazor between 765–760.”⁴

So, God called Amos to go and preach a message to the northern kingdom of Israel around 760 BC. It was a short ministry lasting only one or two years. But, it was a powerful ministry. It was recorded by Amos and preserved for history.

IV. The Message (1:2; 7:10-17)

And fourth, let’s look at the message.

As we begin looking at the message of Amos, keep in mind that we only have his notes and not the full manuscripts of his sermons. Commentator J. A. Motyer writes, “What a pity, then, that Amos left us only the distilled essence of what he said and not his sermons in their full development and application!.... To affect his hearers, Amos must have developed his themes, made his connections clear, opened and applied his message, and rubbed it home. But all he left us was his notes.”⁵

With that in mind, let us read what Amos wrote in verse 2, **“And he said: ‘The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers.’ ”**

Amos began with a wonderful image: **“The Lord roars.”** As a shepherd, Amos heard a lion roaring from time to time. It was frightening to hear the deep-throated roar of a lion. Amos was saying that the Lord is like a roaring lion, seeking to attract the attention of the people of Israel.

Moreover, the Lord **“utters his voice from Jerusalem.”** Amos was speaking in Israel. But he wanted the people to

⁴ Gary V. Smith, *Amos*, 48.

⁵ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Amos: The Day of the Lion*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 9.

know that the proper place of worship of God was Jerusalem. And that is where God was speaking from. Amos wanted the people to know that he was simply God's voice speaking to them from God's earthly city.

Furthermore, Amos said that **“the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers.”** This is a description of a drought. Drought is often a symbol of judgment in the Old Testament. That is not so prominent in Amos. But, it is present. And to a shepherd like Amos, two of the best illustrations of devastation would be the withering of the shepherd's pasture and the lush Carmel ridge. When all the grass was gone, and the vineyards of Carmel had faded, it would be obvious to any observant Israelite that God was at work.

So, God called Amos to take a message of judgment to the people of Israel. He was to proclaim that they were facing judgment. Moreover, he told them that King Jeroboam would die by the sword and that the people of Israel would be taken into exile, away from their homeland.

What was the reaction to Amos' preaching? We read about it in Amos 7:10-13:

¹⁰Then 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. ¹¹For thus Amos has said,

“Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land.’”

¹²And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there,

¹³ but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

Amos' preaching was rejected by the priest. And it was rejected by the people of Israel as well.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed a call to speak for God in Amos 1:1-2; 7:10-17, let us take note of three principles.

First, God uses insignificant people to accomplish his purposes. We know so very little about Amos. God sometimes uses people who are widely known to accomplish his purposes, and we thank God for that. But, far more often, God uses unknown and insignificant people to bring glory to himself. So, don't worry about fame or success. Seek to be faithful to God, and he will use you for his glory.

Second, God's message is directed to his people. Though the kingdom was divided, the nation of Israel was still considered by God to be his people. Whenever we read or hear God's word, we must not think that his word is for "others." It is directed to me and to his church. So, we must pay attention to what God says to us in his word.

And third, God's message of judgment must always be seen in view of his promise of salvation. God will always discipline his people who do not obey him. Indeed, Israel went into exile by the Assyrians in 586 BC. But God's promise of forgiveness and salvation must always sound greater than that of judgment. And for us, we find the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. So let us be sure that we belong to Jesus. Amen.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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