

Amos

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Amos 7:10-17

Vss. 10-11

- George Adam Smith, the pre-eminent Scottish theologian of the first half of the 20th century and chaplain to three kings, once stated that this passage is “one of the great scenes in history.” You have Amaziah, the priest of Bethel who speaks for the king with all the king’s power and authority. On the other side is Amos, a poor man, a shepherd and a seasonal picker, who comes only with the Word of God.
- It seems that Amaziah was listening to Amos share the three visions we have in 7:1-9. Recall that at the end, Amos speaks of the house of King Jeroboam being struck with the sword. Amaziah reports this to the king and says that “Amos has conspired against you”, shifting this from a spiritual argument to a political threat and the crime of sedition, just as 800 years later Jesus’ enemies would do the same, telling the Roman governor that Jesus was claiming to be the King of the Jews.
- In 1 Kings 12 we are told that when Jeroboam I became king of the northern kingdom, he totally reorganized the religious structure of Israel. By royal decree he established new times and places of worship and appointed new priests who owed their loyalty to him alone.
- Amaziah rightly saw the threat to the king and knew, from what we know as 1 Kings 11 and 2 Kings 8 & 9, that prophets had brought down kingdoms before. Evidently he had been listening to Amos closely for “the land is unable to endure his words.”
- In vs. 11 Amaziah puts a little harsher spin on Amos’ words than the prophet himself offered. Amos did not directly say that the king would die by the sword, but the intent of the sermon was clear and Amos did explicitly say that the people would go into exile.

Vss. 12-13

- It seems that Amaziah did not get the harsher answer from the king he had hoped for. Perhaps the king was a bit afraid of arresting the prophet as Herod was afraid of arresting John the Baptist. So Amaziah confronts Amos with the king's demand that the prophet simply go away, back to Judah.
- Amaziah calls Amos a "seer", which may be an insult suggesting that he is nothing more than a palm reader or given to hallucinations. But the term may have been a compliment, acknowledging Amos as a legitimate prophet and politely inviting him to leave rather than be arrested and deported.
- Perhaps the king and his priest feared that the poor people might rise up if Amos is arrested, for surely they made up the majority. Perhaps they feared that Amos might truly be a prophet and did not want to risk harming God's servant. Whatever the reason, they wanted him to go away on his own rather than arrest him. If we can just get rid of him everything will be fine.
- Amaziah specifically tells Amos he cannot prophesy at Bethel. More than just a religious sanctuary, it belonged to the king and the king had a palace there, all of which Amos was well aware of. But what Amaziah was doing was making Amos' preaching political and not spiritual. In effect, for Amos to continue to preach at Bethel would amount to political hate speech for which he would be punished.

Vss. 14-17

- But Amos did not go. People who *KNOW* that God has sent them rarely do. Nehemiah asked, "Should such a man as I flee?" (Nehemiah 6:11). The man who started the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, when dragged before the Pope's court and was required to recant his criticism replied "I can not and will not recant. Here I stand."
- Amos replied that he had no prophesying to do in Judah because he was not a professional prophet. "I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs." That there was a trade in prophesying was widely known. The idea was that a given family had

“the gift” and that the gift could be passed down from generation to generation. The seventh son of a seventh son, that sort of thing.

- Amos' reply to Amaziah is that he was a poor man, a shepherd in the highlands of Tekoa and a grower/dresser of sycamore figs in the lowlands on the maritime plain of the Jordan Valley. These figs were poor and sold cheaply, only eaten by the poor.
- Yet, as with the boy David visiting his big brothers in the army, or the boy Gideon, hiding down in a wine press, God chooses the most unlikely of servants to fulfill a divine task. Psalm 71 says basically the same of David's experience going from shepherd to king in Psalm 78:70-72. God had chosen Amos and there was nothing else he could do. And when God chose him, the Father used the language of the covenant, “My people Israel”, to justify Amos' message.
- Amos chooses to obey God rather than man as do Peter and John in Acts 5:29. Further, he speaks a message against Amaziah personally because Amaziah holds the title and wears the robes of a priest, yet acts on behalf of a man, not God. Just as Amaziah is a priestly harlot for the king, so too his wife will be forced to become a harlot on the day of judgement. As Amaziah has become rich due to the suffering, pain, and death of others, so too will his children die, probably in front of him, and all his lands, wealth and possessions will be parceled out to the victors. And worst of all, he would not only have to live with the knowledge of his wife's debauchery, his children's deaths, and the loss of his precious wealth, but he will go into exile with the other survivors and die in an “unclean”, pagan land.
- Indeed, Amos ends vs. 17 quoting back to Amaziah the very words the priest spoke to king in vs. 11. Amaziah had rejected both the messenger and the message, refusing to acknowledge the Truth when he heard it, putting his trust in the king of Israel and his kingdom, rather than the King of Kings and His Kingdom. To repent and rightly respond to Amos' message would mean suffering financial loss and perhaps loss of status and privilege. People never want to let it go.