

AMOS 7

¹⁰Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel:

Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to endure all of his words. ¹¹This is what Amos says: “Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will certainly go into exile away from its own soil.”

¹²Then Amaziah said to Amos, “You seer, get out of here! Flee to the land of Judah. You may eat food and prophesy there. ¹³But you must never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the sanctuary of the king and the national temple.”

¹⁴Then Amos responded to Amaziah:

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. ¹⁵But the LORD took me from tending flocks, and the LORD said to me, “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.”

¹⁶But now, hear the word of the LORD, you who are saying, “Do not prophesy against Israel” and “Do not preach against the house of Isaac.”

¹⁷This is what the LORD says: “Your wife will be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be parceled out with a measuring line, and as for you, you will die upon unclean soil. And Israel will certainly go into exile far away from its own soil.”



The perfect pastor preaches exactly ten minutes. He condemns sin roundly but never hurts anyone's feelings. He smiles all the time with a straight face, because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his church. He is 29 years old with 40 years of experience. He deals perfectly with problems and challenging personalities without ever raising his voice or risking a negative interaction.

Unfortunately, such a perfect pastor does not exist. The best pastors in the Bible cannot measure up to such a list. Such a list disqualifies, for instance, the prophet Amos. For that matter, Jesus Christ is disqualified. We see that certain truths are just going to make enemies. They just are. Yet the Lord has called each of us to faith, and part of that faith includes wisdom and truth. Within this faith are ministers, sometimes called prophets. We get to see two prophets conduct a bit of a showdown this morning in Amos 7.

FALSE PROPHET MEETS TRUE PROPHET

1. The false prophet sticks to his lies

What we have before us is a showdown over preaching rights. And of all the showdowns in the Bible, Amos versus Amaziah ranks right up there. I'm going to share some history and then point out some relevant lessons.

Jeroboam II was upon the throne. He was a strong king. He had military victories galore, and he had conquered the surrounding nations. He even conquered the southern kingdom of Judah, which was ruled by the line of David. He was fourth in the dynasty of King Jehu, who was once God's answer to wicked king Ahab and Queen Jezebel four generations ago. Although not from the line of David, Jeroboam II had a great heritage and spiritual potential. He was prosperous and so was Israel.

However, Jeroboam II was not spiritual. He was not good. Although there was much wealth in the nation of Israel, there was little wisdom.

- Feasting and banquets took the place of true worship.
- A spirit of greed ruled society.
- Corruption of justice was a common sin.
- Might became right.
- Seizing land was an everyday occurrence.
- Landlords had all the legal machinery to repossess from the poor.
- With scornful indifference, men “lived at ease in Zion” (6:1).

Among Jeroboam’s priests was a piece of work named Amaziah. He was a priest at Bethel, a hub of northern worship. This was not Jerusalem. They were not worshipping as the Lord prescribed in Exodus and Leviticus. At the northern and southernmost points of the northern kingdom of Israel, in this time period, the wayward people of Israel worshiped golden calves. Amaziah undoubtedly offered sacrifices at the golden calf in Bethel, and for the last 200 years the northern kingdom had mixed idol practices with biblical ones. They attempted to worship the true God in a false, pagan way. We call that syncretism, joining the worship of the true God with that of a false god. It’s sinful and dangerous to your soul. Amaziah, as a syncretist, wasn’t interested in some southern rustic like Amos coming in and causing problems. He was interested in sticking to his lies.

So Amaziah attempted to silence Amos, to censor him. Amaziah brought the charge that Amos was just there to make a buck. ¹²*“You seer, get out of here! Flee to the land of Judah. You may eat food and prophesy there. ¹³But you must never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the sanctuary of the king and the national temple.”* It was as if to say, “You’re a crook looking for work, Amos. Go home to your shepherd town and be the redneck that God made you.”

So if it were today, we would say Amaziah had Zuckerberg kick Amos off Facebook and made Jack from Twitter delete all of Amos’ tweets. Leave our golden calf and our wealthy landowners alone. Go home to your southern kingdom, which we conquered anyway. We’ll let you go if you go now.

Does that kind of thing still happen today? Do false prophets still crop up? Do they stick to their lies and look down on undereducated and rustic religious people? Of course. Of course there is an elitist view of what true worship ought to be. If you have some semblance of the Christian God, many think, you’re doing alright. Nevermind the fact that a little yeast can work through the whole batch of dough. Small errors poison and corrupt the whole Christian faith. The good news is that Jesus expressed blessings on those who are persecuted, because that is just how His true prophets were treated. Even if we are strict to the truth, we can hold fast to our mistreated Savior, Jesus Christ, against whom the whole multitude of false prophets raged and foamed. They still do. They hated Him when they placed Him on the wood of the cross and they hate Him now. Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The Father has established the throne of His Anointed One. You who believe are part of His kingdom.

Even Jesus said things the authorities wanted to censor. Not sinful things like false accusations, gossip, and bad language—but societal taboos and heroic statements that may possibly offend. They were not off-limits in Christ’s teachings. “Do not pray like the hypocrites. Do not babble like the pagans.” “Love your enemies.” “Except a man be born of God, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” “I am the Bread of Life. I have come down from heaven.” “This is my body; this is my blood.” “Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it.” All of these statements have proved offensive and hurt people’s feelings along the way. But they are the truth that human ears need to hear and human hearts need to trust.

George Orwell said that if liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear. Immanuel Kant said that if the truth kills them, let them die. So how does a true prophet talk?

2. The true prophet confesses the truth

Amos, the book, is one of the oldest volumes of sermons. Amos, the man, may be the most forceful preacher of repentance and judgment among all the prophets of the Old Testament. His name means “burden,” and to the wealthy and royal of Israel, Amos was indeed a burden. Stern, fearless, self-contained, carved straight out of granite, this prophet possessed great spiritual gifts of rhetoric, oration, public speaking.

Amos lived close to nature as a sheep breeder and a dresser of sycamore trees. Doubtless he often studied the stars, observed the moon’s changing phases, and marvelled at the sunrise over the ranges of Moab. He was untutored, with no special, professional, or formal preparation to preach. Instead, he was educated in the school of vigilance. He wasn’t part of the prophetic guild or school of prophets, which did exist as far back as the Judges. On the contrary, the Lord took him from following the flock and called him to prophesy to Israel, which for Amos was by now a foreign country. No, unlike Isaiah and Hosea, Amos’ mission was not to his own country, but to the northern kingdom of divided Israel.

Such a rustic, when called from the open life of the country to the feverish atmosphere of the city, became an expert in society, bringing an outsider look into politics and religion. He used brief sentences, indulged in questions and exclamations, and he understood the power of repetition.

You take a moment and read Amos, and you will find it all—95% threats of judgment and LAW. Amos starts by condemning the surrounding nations, closer and closer until he gets to Judah, of the line of David. He focuses the rest of the book on Israel, the errant northern kingdom.

- In the first three chapters Amos described the Lord as a lion, saying, “The Lion roars.”
- In chapter 4 he calls the rich women “cows” who will be led away with fishhooks.
- Amos condemned Israel for trying to worship the true Lord in a pagan way.
- In chapter 5 he discussed how Israel is not prepared for the day of the Lord.
- He said, “Seek the Lord and live” twice; then he says, “Seek good, not evil, that you may live,” and, “Hate evil; love good.”
- He is known for a preacher of justice, but Amos is more concerned about idolatry. He traces that their injustice to empty, false worship of a pluralistic god.
- In chapter 6 he warns of exile.
- In chapter 8 he warns about a famine of God’s Word, that, if they wouldn’t listen to it, God would no longer speak it.
- Eight and a half chapters of law and condemnation and judgment. In the middle of it, Amos famously said, “Prepare to meet your Maker.”

In the middle of visions in chapter 7-8-9 Amos was challenged by Amaziah. Amos did not talk about his feelings. He explained the Lord’s call into ministry. He pointed out the unsuspecting nature of all this, a prophet who had been personally content to breed sheep and prune trees. Now he’s telling the Lord’s will.

The call to preach is the Lord’s. That goes for every worker who has received a comprehensive call into ministry at a place such as this. The call is the Lord’s. Our call comes through the church, but it is equally not to be opposed. Let the called worker be faithful and firm in the face of false teachers.

The mission is the Lord's. Some missions make themselves known as the gospel of Jesus creates its own forms. The mission is right here, right now, among our family and friends. Other missions are unlikely opportunities God has dropped into our lap. Maybe you never thought you'd be speaking truth and comfort to this or that friend. God only knows how He threw you two together! Maybe you never thought you'd be back in church. God only knew how to break your sin and bring you in, all with the Law and Gospel.

By the way, the message is the Lord's. Some messages will involve more harsh judgment because hearts are hard. Those hearts need the Law, because they don't know what they don't know when they presume to know it. Their hearts of sin must be broken. Amos is 95% Law and judgment. But his mission came from God.

All this goes to show necessity in personal conviction for a true prophet of God. Conviction cannot be inherited, just as what you believe cannot be inherited. It must be owned and expressed personally. No one can believe for you. No one can trust God for you. No one can imagine themselves into your position and accept truth into your heart for you.

But God can speak Gospel to you, and through that Gospel the Spirit can work your faith to own and express Jesus Christ as Lord. You see, by the end of Amos, we do get that 4%-5% of Gospel. The Lord would repair David's fallen tent. (This prosperous, expanded earthly kingdom of Israel wasn't it.) The Messiah would come. David's line remained intact. There was a Lord to trust in, a babe to be born, a righteous Branch to grow from the stump of Jesse, and there was a promised heavenly country. The Lord's people were never to be uprooted from the place promised to them by grace. He would beckon them with a new call, a persistent call, the call to believe in Jesus Christ alone. In Christ the Lord would call the remnant home.

So too the Lord calls you. He calls you to doubt not that truth you know so well. He calls you to speak that truth to whomever you may tell. He calls you to battle the forces of death and hell. His call removes old backgrounds and demolishes the work of the devil and forgives sins. His call draws you to His promises in your baptism and fills your cup of blessing in communion. He will one day call you home in Jesus' name, Amen.