

AMOS, COURAGEOUS PROPHET

“Can I share some advice with you?” Yvette caught her breath at the courage it took to ask that question, and she was studying her friend’s face for any sign not to proceed.

“Yes, please!” said Tanisha with an expression that showed intense curiosity. The two of them had been talking about Tanisha’s teenage daughter, who was showing so many new patterns. She was withdrawn, hardly speaking to her parents at all. She had changed her look and was wanting all new clothes. And her grades had slipped too; she seemed constantly distracted.

“Well, let me preface this by just saying that I am no expert. I didn’t do everything perfectly with my own children,” said Yvette. “Your daughter is her own person, and I don’t want to read into things. But here is what kept me going when my girls needed love and were showing the opposite in return.”

As Yvette described some of the struggles she had seen, she recounted trying to offer boundaries, even while inviting a young adult to make a few mistakes. Yvette could see the expression of her friend soften.

“I don’t know if what I am saying is helpful. But could we pray for your daughter and your relationship?” She reached across the table to clasp Tanisha’s hands.

1 What are some signs that let you know when a conversation is going to be difficult?

2 When have you been on the receiving end of unwanted advice?

¹ The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen 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.

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¹¹ And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the LORD.

¹² But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not.

...

⁷ Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

⁸ The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

¹ The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.

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¹¹ “I also raised up prophets from among your children and Nazirites from among your youths. Is this not true, people of Israel?” declares the LORD.

¹² “But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.

...

⁷ Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.

⁸ The lion has roared—
who will not fear?
The Sovereign LORD has spoken—
who can but prophesy?

A Shepherd Called to Speak

Amos is a name you might recognize, but his story and prophetic ministry are not well-known. He is among the first prophets to use a written text to record messages from God. During an age when things seemed to be going well—before the exiles of Israel or Judah—he exemplifies God’s desire to use people who are willing to speak the truth, including ideas that are difficult or unpopular.

Amos comes from Tekoa, about ten miles outside of Jerusalem. Yet most of his prophecies will address the northern kingdom of Israel, which was engaged in idolatrous worship practices in the cities of Dan, Bethel, and Gilgal (thus Israel’s residents do not need to travel to the temple in Jerusalem). It is an age of divided kingdoms, divided

loyalties, and divided people. So it is the perfect time for God to raise up a prophet to speak and to warn (Amos 2:11). The pertinent question is whether anyone will listen or whether will they reject his message as troublesome (v. 12).

Amos is but a shepherd and raiser of livestock, not from a school or tradition of prophets (1:1; 7:14). He does not have a long resume of experience. But his vision is from God and “concerning Israel” around 750 BC (1:1). You might wonder, *What makes this message controversial and unwanted? Why wouldn't Israel be eager to receive a prophetic vision from God?*

But consider what it means to live in an age where the system appears to be working. Amos's contemporaries would cheer at God's expressed judgment against foreign nations, those guilty of war crimes (Amos 1:3–2:3). But when the script is flipped, when Judah and Israel become the objects of God's judgment (2:4–16), Amos appears to be disloyal. After all, the sinful abuses of *other* nations are the real problem, right?

Instead, through the ministry of Amos, God holds His own people accountable for social injustices and religious abuses: taking bribes, trampling the poor, rampant immorality, and worshiping at every altar (Amos 2:6–8). It sure looks like Israel is Amos's main target! “The lion has roared” is a metaphor for God's fearsome authority, thundering from Zion and the place where God had chosen for His name (1:2; 3:8). Through Amos, God is confronting what disasters shall come upon those who depart from the covenant and close relationship with God.

1 What are Amos's credentials that make him able to speak for God?

2 What does God, through Amos, accuse Israel of doing?

3 What does God reveal about His character through Amos?

¹⁰ Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words.

¹¹ For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land.

¹² Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: ¹³ But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court.

¹⁴ Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: ¹⁵ And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.

¹⁰ Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. ¹¹ For this is what Amos is saying:

"Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land."

¹² Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. ¹³ Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."

¹⁴ Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. ¹⁵ But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

Message Received and Rejected

Amos is confronting the complacency of God's people who are normalizing injustice. God says to him, "the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; . . . I will rise against the house of Jeroboam" (Amos 7:9). This calls to account the religious leadership and line of kings.

Amos comes under immediate personal attack. He is in the center of worship in Israel, at the shrine of Bethel, from where he proclaims God's judgment. In return for the idolatry and immorality that God has seen, He will judge the house of Jeroboam harshly (Amos 7:17). The king will come to a foul end, the sanctuaries of Israel will be

wiped away, and the people shall go into exile, losing possession of the promised land (7:11).

Unsurprisingly, the authorities have a thing to say about this talk. Israel still has a king on the throne, one who does not intend to go quietly. And the priesthood of Bethel doesn't appreciate Amos's verbal accusations either. One priest, Amaziah, gives a deflective evaluation: "the land cannot bear all [Amos's] words" (7:10).

He accuses the prophet of supporting a conspiracy against the king. Amos's words of warning are targeted to anyone who might want to escape what is coming. But Amaziah tells him to leave Israel: "Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there" (v. 12). He implies that Amos is putting on a show in exchange for food, that he could take his message and leave. It reveals more about the corrupt mindset of the speaker who thinks only in terms of self-interest.

Amos responds calmly, but directly. He is no professional prophet as if he were born into a family of performers. He was a shepherd and a tender of "sycamore-fig trees" (v. 14). He claims a modest profession, a far easier way to support himself. But it was God who called him away from his former life in Judah to be a witness to Israel (v. 15). What Amaziah opposes is the message of God, at his peril.

1 What is Amos accused of doing?

2 What are the warnings able to do for Israelites who hear them?

3 What does the witness of Amos show us?

Called to Truth

By all appearances, Amos was a successful shepherd and cultivator of the soil who wasn't looking to become a prophet. Yet God sent him away from his homeland of Judah to the northern kingdom of Israel with a message of judgment. It isn't a recipe for outward success. While his warnings went unheeded, they did not go unheard—even the king's servants could not ignore this Judean shepherd. The king and his priesthood were unwilling to change; they wished Amos would disappear.

One important caveat is that we don't understand the full impact of Amos's words for the people who heard them. Long after Amos died, the nation of Judah would also come to understand the exile of Israel as a sign that *God does not turn away from sin and injustice*. God applies the same standards to all.

Another message is that God empowers the people whom He sends. God continues to call people today. Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these" (John 14:12). And Paul agrees that everyone saved by Christ is "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10).

Every believer is a messenger for truth, no matter the context. It could be through a prophetic or evangelism ministry, but messengers come in all kinds of forms. In Romans 12:4–8 Paul lists spiritual gifts that are distributed among believers. But "sharing the truth in love" is not a spiritual gift: it is a shared responsibility. When we offer ourselves to be "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1), we are aligning with God's will and empowered to do what God sets before us—whether we saw it coming or not.

1 When has God called you to do something you weren't expecting to do?

2 How does offering ourselves fully to God prepare us to be used by God?

3 What good works might God be preparing for you, even now?

Faithful Witness

There are two ways of honoring the witness of Amos in the week ahead. Amos was a truth-teller—someone who paid a price for sharing difficult news. Second, he proclaimed judgment against idolatry or mistreating others. Choose which of these two roles stands out more to you, and put a mark next to the corresponding prayer below. If you are comfortable sharing, tell a friend what you find convicting or challenging, and why.

Father, make me a truth-teller. Show me ways I have ignored, distorted, or hid from hard truths.

Father, may Christ be at the center of my worship. Show me ways that I substitute something else, or take others for granted.

Key Text

And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. —Amos 7:15 KJV

But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.” —Amos 7:15 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of June 29 through July 4

Mon. Isaiah 49:1–6—A Light to the Nations.

Tue. Psalm 72:1–13—A Deliverer Will Come.

Wed. Ephesians 2:1–10—Saved By Grace.

Thu. Ephesians 2:11–22—No Longer Strangers.

Fri. Isaiah 60:1–7—Nations Come to God’s Light.

Sat. Isaiah 60:8–14—Nations Bow to Zion.

Next Week: Matthew 8:5–13

We will continue to talk about God’s fairness toward all people. Can you notice anyone using the word “fair” this week? Where does the word show up in conversations?