

V. *The Prophet from Tekoa*

02-Jan-05 Amos 1:1-2; 7:10-17 Keddie Chapters 1, 10

Theme: The LORD roars as the lion from Zion.

Key Verses: Amos 7:14-15; 1:2 ¹⁴Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah: "I was no prophet, Nor was I a son of a prophet, But I was a sheepbreeder And a tender of sycamore fruit. ¹⁵Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, And the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'" ... 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."

Review

Last week we finished the book of Joel. **The final section of Joel presents us with three valleys. The first two, the Valley of Jehoshaphat and the Valley of Decision, essentially show us the same thing. When Jesus Christ returns again, on that great and final Day of the LORD, He will come again to sit in judgment upon the nations.** Although the nations rage against their Divine King, Christ will destroy those arrayed in battle against Him and will shelter His own people. **The third Valley is the Valley of Acacias – the dwelling place of the Lord forever with His people. Paradise is restored, the Church is purified, God's enemies are purged, and thus we will ever be with the Lord.** As we leave Joel, **remember its theme: "The day of the locust points to the Day of the LORD."**

Joel is only 73 verses long, but it packs quite a wallop. We've seen the impact it has had on the New Testament, in the writings of Paul, of John, in the sermon of Peter, and even in the words of Christ. Joel is even quoted by his fellow prophets Isaiah and Micah (and as we'll see today – Amos!). The Psalms are the most quoted OT book in the NT, but verse for verse, the book of Joel has a more significant influence. As we begin to study the book of Amos, you'll notice that it is quoted or alluded to far less in the NT, even though it is exactly as twice as long (146 verses vs. 73 verses).

Introduction

The structure of Amos can be considered as (what else but) a seven-part chiasm. This structure is not quite as "tight" as the structure of Joel, and it could easily be divided up differently. However, I do think that the following structure is helpful for us as we consider the overall scope of the book.

Introduction (1:1-2)

A. Coming Judgment Upon Israel and Its Neighboring Nations (1:3-2:16)

B. Destruction of Israel and Bethel's Worship Center (3:1-15)

C. Condemnation of Wealthy Israelite Women: Empty Religious Activity, Social Injustice, and Coming Judgment (4:1-13)

X. CENTER: Call to Repentance and Lament (5:1-17)

C'. Condemnation of Wealthy Israelite Men: Empty Religious Activity, Social Injustice, and Coming Judgment (5:18-6:14)

B'. Destruction of Israel and Bethel's Worship Center (7:1-8:3)

A'. Coming Judgment Upon Israel (Scattering Among the Nations) and Future Restoration Among the Nations (8:4-9:15)

Minor Prophets: Joel & Amos

As you might expect from the structure of a prophetic book, **the center of the chiasm is the call to repentance, just as it was in the book of Joel.** We have nine weeks to consider the seven sections of Amos. I will use today's lesson as a bit of a background and introduction to the prophet Amos. We will cover one section of the prophecy every week, except for the last section, which we will consider over the final two weeks of the class.

I will be doing something slightly different today as we look at Amos. After going over the introductory verses to the prophecy, we will skip ahead to the second half of chapter 7. The reason is that this portion of the book is an autobiographical narrative, and gives us additional insight into the prophet Amos, his call, and his ministry.

Exposition

A. Introduction (1:1-2)

1. Amos of Tekoa (1:1)

Remember how Joel started? "The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel" (Joel 1:1). Contrast that with the introductory verse of Amos:

Amos 1:1 ¹The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders 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.

We have a lot more information here! We mentioned that **Joel was merely "a voice" who pronounced "the word of the LORD."** **Amos is much more than an anonymous voice.** In fact, he tells us that these are his words, although as we will see, Amos was under the compulsion of the Lord even as he spoke. So **what do we learn about Amos?**

First, we know his profession. Amos was not a professional prophet. He was first of all a "sheepbreeder." This may simply mean he was a shepherd, but it may mean more, that he was a sheep owner, rather than a hired hand. For example, during Elisha's day (about 70-80 years before Amos), the king of Moab was also called a "sheepbreeder" who paid a heavy tribute in sheep and wool to the king of Israel (2 Kgs. 3:4).

Amos tells us more about himself in chapter 7:

Amos 7:14 ¹⁴Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah: "I was no prophet, Nor was I a son of a prophet, But I was a sheepbreeder And a tender of sycamore fruit."

Notice how **Amos reinforces this image of himself as a non-professional prophet.** There was no "prophet blood" in his lineage! **Rather he was a sheepbreeder, as we have seen, but also a tender of sycamore fruit.** Keddie says that the sycamore trees described here produce a cash crop of a "species of fig." Keddie concludes that Amos was "a farmer of some means." Boice, on the other hand, says the sycamore was a very poor kind of fruit, suitable for only the poorest in the land. He views Amos as a hired hand, taking care of the sheep and growing a poor crop – in other words – "a poor man who worked hard for his living." Whether he was wealthy or poor, we do know that Amos was not a professional prophet; first and foremost he was an agricultural man – an "Aggie" (Gig 'em!).

Second, we know Amos' home town. It was Tekoa, a village about 6 miles south of Bethlehem and about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. In other words, **Amos was from the southern kingdom of Judah. That becomes very significant, because essentially the entire**

prophecy of Amos is against the northern kingdom of Israel. Amos is up front about that: “which he saw concerning Israel.” Amos was a “foreigner” preaching in Bethel and other points north. With a negative message and a southern accent, Amos was sure not to be welcomed by his listeners. We will see that in a moment when we consider chapter 7.

2. Date (1:1)

Third, we know the time period in which Amos lived and preached. It was “in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.” **These references put Amos’ date in the first half of the 8th century BC, somewhere between say 785-750 BC.** This makes Amos a contemporary of Jonah. Amos would have been finishing his ministry about the time Hosea started his. Joel likely preceded Amos, as we’ll discuss in a moment.

If you remember my description of this time period from my class last winter on Hosea, you’ll recall that **the reign of Jeroboam II was a so-called “golden age.”** The political instabilities and wars of previous generations were over. Israel was basking in the long reign of Jeroboam II – a period of 50 years of peace and economic expansion. *There was a chicken in every pot, a camel in every garage, the Samaria stock exchange was up, and the chariots ran on time.* Times were good. People prospered. Leisure became possible. That nasty little business with Elijah and Ahab and Jezebel was in the past, almost forgotten, like that difficult massacre that Jehu, Jeroboam’s great-grandfather, had accomplished to secure the throne and the country.

Israel had broken away from Judah more than 150 years before, and **their religion, while somewhat loosely based on the “Bible”, bore little resemblance to true temple worship in Jerusalem.** The time when God’s law was most prevalent was past (been there, done that), and there were many serious national sins. **Worship had been corrupted, although some outward forms remained.** As Keddie puts it, “They had an easy religion consisting in the multiplication of ritual observances, never commanded by God but sufficient to ease the seared consciences of wicked people.” **Accommodation to outside cultures was rampant.** Although it appeared gilded on the outside, the society was decaying from within. **The wealthy led lives of decadence and excess. Societal injustice upon the poor and oppressed was practiced and even encouraged by the wealthier people of the land.**

This is the society into which Amos ventured. Hosea started his ministry at the end of this period of prosperity and saw the crack-up of the nation as it dissolved into chaos and exile through Assyrian conquest some 30 years after Jeroboam II’s death. However, Amos is coming into his ministry during the peak of the golden age, while prosperity and peace are everywhere and no dark clouds seem to be on the horizon.

3. Earthquake (1:1)

Amos further dates his ministry by the phrase “two years before the earthquake.” Unfortunately, we do not know from history when this earthquake occurred or any details about it. However, we do know that it was memorable. It was still remembered in the time of Zechariah, over 250 years later:

Zechariah 14:5 ⁵Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee *As you fled from the earthquake In the days of Uzziah king of Judah.*

It was a memorable earthquake, because it was an earthquake of judgment. Amos was called by God to preach a word of judgment against the nation of Israel. Amos predicted that God would shake the land as a sign of His judgment (8:8; 9:1-6). Two years after he started preaching, God's word came to pass, just as Amos foretold.

Let's recap. What do we know about Joel? He was the son of Pethuel. That's it. What do we know about Amos? He was a farmer, either a man of means or possibly a hired hand. He was skilled in at least two areas, sheepbreeding and tending sycamore fruit. He did not come from a line of prophets. He was from Tekoa, a village in Judah, but was called by God to preach in the northern kingdom of Israel. He lived and ministered in the 8th century BC, a time of unsurpassed peace and prosperity. Underneath that gilded exterior lay a culture decaying through societal injustice and superficial, corrupt religion. Finally, what Amos said came to pass. He predicted an earthquake, and it came and shook the land. Amos might not have been from a prophetic family, but it is certain that he had the true prophetic gift.

4. The LORD Roars from Zion (1:2)

That brings us to **verse 2, the theme verse for the book of Amos.** Just as Joel 1:2-4 regarding the locust invasion sets the tone for the entire book of Joel, Amos 1:2 fulfills the same function for the book of Amos. If this verse seems familiar, that is because it is. **The first two lines of Amos 1:2 are a direct quotation from Joel 3:16.** Amos begins his book in the way that Joel ends his. I believe that Isaiah and Micah, and now here Amos, are quoting from Joel. That would make Joel the earliest of the Twelve.

So **what is Amos trying to tell us in this theme verse?** "The LORD roars from Zion, and utters His voice from Jerusalem" (1:2a). **First, we can see who is truly behind the words of Amos. It is the LORD – Yahweh – the Covenant name of God, the personal name of God.** This is the name of God revealed to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:5). It is the name of God associated with His holiness. It is the name of the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God who saves His people and overthrows His enemies. It is the name of the God who dwells in the midst of His people. Right off the bat we are reminded of who God is and what He has done.

Secondly, we have this picture of God as a roaring lion. "The LORD roars." When does a lion roar? A bit later in the book, Amos asks rhetorical questions on this subject:

Amos 3:4 ⁴Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?

The answer is "no!" A lion roars when his victim is in sight. A lion roars to paralyze its target with terror. **A lion roars when there is no escape for his prey.** Who is roaring? The LORD. Who is the victim in His paws about to be devoured? The northern kingdom of Israel. **The Lord roars in judgment against Israel.**

Third, where does the Lord roar? "From Zion." **He is a Zion lion.** Where is Zion? In Jerusalem, in the land of Judah. He is the Lion of Judah, the righteous one, speaking judgment against His apostate people. The designation of Zion is significant here. It is the place where the Temple is situated, where the proper altar of sacrifice is located. Amos will be speaking out against the false altars and the false worship at Bethel and other locales in the north. **God is uttering His voice from the center of true worship and condemning those false expression of religion in Israel.**

Finally, what is the extent of the lion's roar? “the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers.” Motyer explains: “From the luscious meadows in the river valley to the height of Carmel, from Amos' own shepherd-haunts in the far south to the Carmel range in the north, **all comes under the blight and blow of judgment.** That is the metaphor. It is one of totality.”

Amos 1:2 sets the tone and the theme for the rest of the book. The theme can be summed up as: “The LORD roars as a lion from Zion.” The lion image recurs several times throughout the book of Amos. This verse also sets the tone. **When the lion roars, the end is near. Amos is almost relentless in his persistent message of judgment, particularly against the northern kingdom of Israel. It is not until the final 5 verses of the book that we gain any relief and look ahead to the glorious future of restoration.**

Joel was all about locusts. Amos is all about lions. Locust and lions. Lions and locusts. I wouldn't want to meet either in a dark alley.

B. Amos and Amaziah (7:10-17)

Now, let's jump ahead to chapter 7 to finish our initial introduction to the prophet from Tekoa. Amos relates to us a biographical encounter he has with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel.

Remember that **Bethel, located in the southern part of Ephraim, was one of the two religious shrines originally established by Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern kingdom.** Jeroboam rightly reasoned that if all of the inhabitants of his new kingdom continually turned their religious eyes to the Temple in Jerusalem to the south, that he would not long have a kingdom. So, an alternate religious system was established, ostensibly based on the true faith, but inevitably corrupted because it was a rival to the revealed word of God. Jeroboam I was condemned by God for this perversion of the true faith. All the later kings of Israel were also condemned because they “did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin” (e.g., 2 Kgs. 15:18, 24, 28 etc.).

1. Amaziah's Opposition (7:10-13)

a. The Royal Memo (7:10)

Over the years, a false priesthood had been established at these locations in the north. **In Bethel, we meet Amaziah, who might have been the chief priest. Amaziah hears Amos' message, and he doesn't like it.** Amaziah might have been a pagan, but that doesn't mean he was dumb! He knew a negative attack ad (I mean message) when he heard one. Amos' southern accent undoubtedly branded him as a foreigner, and Amaziah couldn't have foreigners coming and speaking out against the state religion and the crown. **Something had to be done.**

So he did what any good corrupt state official would have done – he sent a memo to the king. And to make sure the king got the memo, he made it personal. “Dear king, the weather's fine here in Bethel. How is it in the hills of Samaria? There's a guy here named Amos making trouble. He's conspiring against you. He's one of those southerners, but he's here in your kingdom making inflammatory statements. He might be one of those, you know, terrorists. Maybe an assassin. You better watch out. He's stirring up all the countryside against you and it's coming to a boil. We got a powder keg down here. I don't know if we can stand it any more. The land is not able to bear all his words.”

Minor Prophets: Joel & Amos

When Hannah was three and Travis James was four, we were eating dinner with some families from church at Fuddruckers. The adults were at one table and the kids at another. Halfway through the meal, Travis brought his food over to the adult table and sat down with his parents. When asked why he relocated, Travis replied, “Hannah is saying so many words that I can’t eat!”

Travis was not able to bear all of Hannah’s words, so something had to be done. Likewise, **in Amaziah’s estimation, something had to be done about Amos and his words of judgment against Israel. So Amaziah embarked upon a three-pronged strategy to eliminate the prophet from Tekoa** (based upon the analysis of Motyer).

b. *Misrepresentation (7:11)*

The first attack came through misrepresentation. This is a favorite tactic in political campaigns. **You take the position of the opponent and you misrepresent it or “spin” it to his disadvantage.** In the previous section, Amos has said that God “will rise with the sword against the *house* of Jeroboam” (7:9). The *house* of Jeroboam. Not Jeroboam himself. But Amaziah can’t resist a little parsing of the quote. “Jeroboam shall die by the sword.” Very close to the original, but like a three-dollar bill, a clever counterfeit.

Amos predicted the destruction of the house of Jeroboam. And it came to pass as he foretold. Jeroboam died a natural death (2 Kgs. 14:29). However, his son, Zechariah, was assassinated after six months by Shallum who took his place. This act fulfilled a prophecy on this household:

2 Kings 15:12 ¹²This was the word of the LORD which He spoke to Jehu, saying, “Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.” And so it was.

Notice the precision of the word of God and His prophet. Four generations of the house of Jehu would rule. Jeroboam was the third generation. He died in peace. But Jeroboam’s son was in that fourth position, and he was struck down. Amos has spoken, “and so it was.”

Amaziah makes the “spin” more believable by adding to it something that Amos did say: that “Israel surely shall be led away captive from their own land.” Amos prophesied this in 5:27 and in 6:7. So, how do you misrepresent and “spin”? **You take a little bit of truth and mix it with a half-truth and you pitch it in a way that makes it a complete lie.** In this method, Amaziah was following the example of the Father of Lies. The Serpent in the Garden deceived Eve in the same fashion, taking part of the truth of God’s word and twisting it around so that it was a total lie.

c. *Temptation (7:12)*

The second attack comes from temptation. Amaziah attacks Amos’ motives for serving God. *Go* and *flee* imply that an unpleasant fate would await Amos should he remain in Israel. **Amos would have been tempted to abandon his calling in order to save his skin from the wrath and power of the king of Israel.** Personal safety would trump obedience. Furthermore, by fleeing to the *land of Judah*, **Amaziah implies that Amos would find a much more receptive audience to his message of judgment on Israel. The temptation of success and security lurks behind these words** – the kind of success that he evidently was not having in Bethel. Surely Amos would have a much easier time of it and earn a lot more dough (to buy bread with!) if he went home. Boice puts it this way: “Since Amaziah was in the religious business for money, he assumes that Amos is in it for money too and tells him (as one professional to another) that he will do far better in his own land if he wants to preach against Israel.”

d. Authority (7:13)

The third attack comes as a confrontation with authority. Seeing that Amos hasn't been defeated by spin or self-interest, **Amaziah dons the full mantle of his ecclesiastical authority** as the Grand Poobah of Bethel **and proclaims in self-righteous tones that Amos is no longer welcome here!** "Bethel is a Royal Chapel and a National Cathedral and people like Amos are decidedly out of place!" (Motyer). Who does Amos think he is? He is like the little guy fighting City Hall. And so Amaziah calls upon the royal guard to give Amos the old heave-ho.

2. Amos' Origins (7:14-15)

Amaziah has done all he can to silence the prophet from Tekoa, but he has been unsuccessful. Amos gets in the last word.

Amos first defends himself against Amaziah's opposition by revealing his own origins. Amaziah has presumed that Amos was a professional prophet, in it for the money. Amos had probably just blundered into Bethel accidentally – after all, it wasn't far across the border and you didn't need a passport in those days! All Amos had to do was turn around, go back to Judah, and success was assured.

Amos quickly blows a hole through that theory. Not only is Amos not a professional prophet, there are no prophets in the family. **Amos is not in this business for the money.** As we have already seen, Amos was an Aggie. He was a sheepbreeder and a farmer of sycamore-figs, not a prophet. However, the Lord had different plans for this Aggie.

The Lord *took* Amos as he was going about his daily business of working with the sheep. Amos was going in one direction in his life, and then the Lord stepped in, intervened, and changed the course of Amos' life forever. Amos wasn't looking for this whole prophet-gig thing. It was the farthest thing from his mind. But when the Lord "takes" you, you don't say no. **God took hold of Amos and told him to "Go, prophesy to My people Israel."** That was it. **Amos heard the word of God, and Amos obeyed the word of God. Amos was in Bethel because that was where God wanted him to be.**

You see, Amos had been touched by someone with more authority than Amaziah and Jeroboam could ever bring to bear. **Amos had been changed by the LORD, the Covenant God of Israel. No wonder he could stand in the courtyard of Bethel and be unafraid at the posturing of a mere man. Amos had seen heavenly authority; Amaziah couldn't compete.**

3. The LORD's Oracle (7:16-17)

Remember that Amaziah had attacked Amos in three ways. Amaziah had appealed to Amos' sense of professionalism, but Amos deflected that by revealing that he was an Aggie, not a professional prophet. He was in Bethel because God wanted him there, not because he wanted to be there. Second, Amaziah had threatened Amos with the full panoply of royal and ecclesiastical authority at his command. That didn't faze Amos either – once He had been touched by God and took by God, human authority paled in comparison.

The other method of attack had to do with misrepresentation of Amos' words. Amos deals with that attack here in verse 16, before giving a further oracle of judgment in verse 17. **Amaziah had twisted Amos' words so that they misrepresented what he had said. Now Amos has the opportunity to quote Amaziah. Notice that Amos presents a true portrait of Amaziah's words:** "You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not spout against the house of Isaac.'"

Minor Prophets: Joel & Amos

That is exactly what Amaziah has been saying. He has been trying to stop Amos from prophesying against Israel. So, Amos does not misrepresent Amaziah – he quotes him accurately.

Although Amos quotes Amaziah accurately, he does not obey Amaziah. “Never prophesy again at Bethel” says Amaziah. So what does Amos do? He prophesies at Bethel. **The word of judgment in verse 17 is a two-part condemnation. The first part is a personal judgment against Amaziah. The second part is a reconfirmation of Amos’ message regarding judgment on Israel. Ironically, Amos quotes Amaziah quoting him in verse 11:** “And Israel shall surely be led away captive from his own land.” This is the one part of Amos’ message that Amaziah had gotten right! A lot of good it did him though.

The personal judgment on Amaziah and his family is severe. Amaziah’s wife would become a prostitute, making her unclean and unfit to be the wife of a priest (Lev. 21:7). Amaziah’s children would die by the sword, thus cutting off Amaziah’s line. And Amaziah himself would join the rest of Israel in exile and death in an unclean land. For a priest, this would be an unthinkable fate, to be stripped of his priesthood through ceremonial uncleanness. As Hosea might say, “like people, like priest” (*cf.* Hos. 4:9). We do not know any more about Amaziah, but we can be sure that Amos’ words came to pass exactly as he said. **Amaziah fades from history while Amos roars the judgment of the Lord.**

The prophet from Tekoa might have been an Aggie, but he sure had backbone! His background may have been amongst the herds and the sycamore-figs, but he stood in the foreground against all opposition. God had touched his life, and Amos would never be the same.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with some remarks from Keddie. **“The message of Amos is pre-eminently a message of new life. That message, however, comes in the context of a nation under judgment.** As we shall see in these studies, Israel, like the nations of the so-called Christian West today, enjoyed an unparalleled degree of prosperity and yet was never further from the God who had given her every good thing she possessed. The contemporaneity of Amos for the practical neo-paganism of the West is indisputable.”

“Amos was called out of Judah to go north and declare God’s will to Israel. Israel was ruled by Jeroboam II and was prosperous and secure, although the wealth was in the hands of a few and national life was characterized by the oppression of the poor, greed for material prosperity, debauchery and, not least, false religion. Indeed, it was with respect to worship that Israel was most offensive to God. All her other sins flowed from this polluted spring.”

“The parallels with our own time are obvious enough, however different the circumstances. Much of what passes for Christianity in the West is a ‘going-to-the-church’ religion — if even that — devoid of personal commitment to the Jesus Christ of the Bible and devoid, also, of the slightest interest in, or knowledge of, the doctrinal teaching of God’s Word. Ethical standards — individual and national — accurately reflect the rejection of God, his Son and his Word. Prosperity — ostensibly the sign of the success of a culture and certainly something which should be seen as the blessing of God and the opportunity of doing good to others — becomes the occasion of greater oppression and hedonism and, not least, utter carelessness about the things of God.”

Minor Prophets: Joel & Amos

“Into this society, so frighteningly reminiscent of our own, God sends the prophet from Tekoa to tell men and women the truth about themselves — to tell them of their sin in rejecting God’s revealed will for their lives, of the justified anger of a holy God who cannot look upon sin, of the divine verdict on their decadent national life and their empty religion, of the impending destruction of their culture and national identity and, far transcending all of these hard words, of the way of salvation and the restoration of the Israel of God.”

This then is our introduction to the Prophet of Tekoa. I look forward to the rest of our quarter’s study in the book of Amos, as we listen to the roaring Lion of Judah. May God give us ears to hear.

Next week: Lesson 6 – The Fourth Transgression – Amos 1:1-3-2:16 – Keddie Chapters 1-2

Close in Prayer.