

Amos: The Nobody from Nowhere

Introduction

He hailed from a tiny village in northern Judah called Tekoa. Don't bother looking for it on a map, for the Judean wilderness has long since swallowed it into memory and digested its remains. Its nearest relative and more modern development adjacent to the ancient city is named Khirbet Tuqu. Tekoa, in its time, was located a few miles to the southeast of Bethlehem. Its most notable mention in Scripture was in the fourteenth chapter of **2 Samuel**, when Joab sends for a "wise woman" from there to persuade King David to forgive his troublemaking son Absalom and allow him to return to Jerusalem after being exiled for the murder of his half-brother Amnon. Other than a few other passing mentions, including the village being fortified as a strategic location by King Rehoboam in **2 Chronicles 11**, there is very little notoriety associated with this humble outpost in the wilderness.

Amos, the prophet, was just as simplistic in nature as the town from whence he came. An uneducated man and simple farmer, he earned his meager living as a "herdsman and a picker of figs" (**Amos 1:1, 7:14**). He had no illusions of grandeur, but rather, embraced his lot in life with no pretense or aspirations of becoming anything but who and what he was. Amos was comfortable in his own skin, and more than content to remain an unknown person from an unknown place. However, if we have learned anything from Scripture, it is that our God uses the foolish things of this earth to confound the wise (**1 Corinthians 1:27**). So, we should not be surprised in the least that He chose such a simple man as this to stand in defiance of kings and religious leaders alike. God had given Amos a message to deliver. He did not ask to be chosen, but he also was not a shirker by any means. And when the time came, he was not only obedient, but completely unflinching in the face of tremendous ridicule and opposition. This simple man from Tekoa had a backbone, and he knew how to use it.

In order to understand Amos' mission, and just why The LORD chose him at this particular moment in time, quite a bit of historical context is needed. Being from the southern kingdom of Judah, life was actually a bit better than it had been for some time. Azariah, also known in the OT by his throne name, Uzziah (Amos 1:1), was for all intents and purposes a godly king. And because of this the southern kingdom was under God's protection. Some of Amos' contemporaries would have been the prophet Isaiah, as well as Micah and Joel.

It is worth mentioning that while Uzziah was in fact godly, he did not however completely rid Judah of its peripheral idol worship (**2 Kings 15:4**). This perpetuated oversight would eventually lead to the downfall of the nation, for even when its kings were godly men (with the exception of Hezekiah who did destroy all the high places **2 Chronicles 30-31**), for mostly political reasons they were disinclined to completely rid the country of its idolatry. Nonetheless, the Bible tells us that as long as Uzziah sought the LORD, he prospered. Late in his reign he became prideful however and decided to enter into the temple of The LORD unauthorized and he was punished for his sin.

But when he (Uzziah) grew strong, he grew arrogant, and it led to his own destruction. He acted unfaithfully against The LORD his God by going into the sanctuary to burn incense on the incense altar. The priest Azariah (same name different person), along with eighty brave priests took their stand against King Uzziah and said, "Uzziah, you have no right to offer incense to The LORD—only the consecrated priests, the descendants of Aaron, have the right to offer incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have acted unfaithfully! You will not receive honor from The LORD God." Uzziah with a fireman in his hand to offer incense, was enraged. But when he became enraged with the priests, in the presence of the priests in The LORD'S temple beside the altar of incense, a skin disease broke out on his forehead. They rushed him out of there. He himself hurried to get out because The LORD had afflicted him. So king Uzziah was diseased to the time of his death. He lived in quarantine with a serious skin disease and

was excluded from access to The LORD'S temple while his son Jotham was over the king's household governing the people of the land.

2 Chronicles 26:16-21 (clarification added)

It is clear from this reading that although things were better in Judah than they had been under previous kings, they were far from being perfect. Subsequent rulers with the exception of godly men like Hezekiah, and Josiah, became more and more rebellious in their dealings, and God would eventually allow the kingdom to be overrun by the Babylonians as prophesied by Isaiah (**2 Kings 20:16-18**).

Although Judah was prospering under the reign of Uzziah when Amos was called to prophesy, the situation in Israel, the northern kingdom was far different. The country had accumulated great wealth and while its upper class citizens were at ease, their king Jereboam II was wicked to the core. Idolatry was rampant as well as social injustices of every conceivable type. The poor were being exploited and even sold into slavery, as the wealthy considered them to be of no more value than livestock for auction. What little the poor of the land possessed was often taken by the higher class of society and given as offerings to their foreign gods. They went so far as to take the very clothes from their poor victims and lay down upon them as they worshipped their false gods (**Amos 2:8**)! So God, who had seen enough, called a prophet from Judah, this poor shepherd and picker of figs named Amos, to go and stand before the people of Israel and declare their nation ripe for judgment! It was to become a showdown like no other.

Needless to say, as Amos first began his prophecies against the wicked countries that surrounded Israel, Syria, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, the message would have been well received. For these rogue nations had infected great hardship upon the people of Israel. But when Amos turned his attention to the crimes of Israel herself, he like Christ, was despised and rejected. For people are always quick to listen to the condemnation of the sins of others, but when the spotlight is shown into their own wicked hearts, then it becomes another matter entirely.

So why does this ancient prophecy matter when it happened so many centuries ago (around 760 BC)? Why is it relevant for us today? Because our country is guilty of many of the same sins that Amos preached against. Idolatry, the exploitation of the poor, and the continual lust for more. These are the very same evils that led to Israel's downfall. So just imagine if you will, a farmer, not well educated, not well known, being called by The LORD to stand within the halls of congress and condemn those who have corrupted this nation for years. Then you will begin to fully understand, the divine calling of Amos.

I believe that it is past time for those who claim the cause of Christ to take a stand against the moral corruption of this society. And I do not believe that will happen by electing the "right party" for I fear all or most of politicians are corrupt to the core. There is an old proverb that states, "*Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*" I fear that our country is ripe for God's judgment just as ancient Israel in the days of Amos.

So what are we, the church to do? I believe that it is time, past time in fact, for us to take a stand against sin. *All sin*. And in order to do that, we must first eradicate it from our own lives. We need to separate ourselves from this world and stand for God's truth. In short, like Amos, we need to find our voices and our backbones. This world is passing away and we need to be a voice in the wilderness calling for sinners to repent. Will we be despised for this? Absolutely, but we might be the last hope for someone to hear of the salvation offered in Christ Jesus. But before we can accomplish anything, we must leave behind all that would so easily entangle us. Amos left his farm and his livelihood for a greater cause. We must also disentangle ourselves from the cares of this world in order to take our stand. For we have been given a divine calling. And that calling is to come out from this world and follow The Savior.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of The Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is not from The Father, but is from the world. And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.

1 John 2:15-17