

Amos, a Man with a Mission

Amos 1: 1-2, 7: 10-15

Rev. Philip Parker
January 26, 2025

Years ago I was asked to teach the young people's class during Vacation Bible School. The teens were somewhat leery of the pastor being their teacher, but they were downright depressed when they discovered that we would be studying the book of Amos in the Old Testament. How could some long dead prophet have anything to say that would be relevant or helpful for teenagers? Fortunately, with a little friendly persuasion from their parents, they showed up for class and much to their surprise discovered that the book of Amos was a lot more interesting than they had ever imagined. In fact, one of them asked me when the class was over, "Do you think any of the things that Amos talked about could happen today?"

That's a good question and one that I hope you will ask when we conclude our study of the book of Amos. Beginning today and continuing in the weeks to come we're going to be taking a look at this book of Old Testament prophecy. It's nine chapters long and falls within that category of sacred writings known as the "Minor Prophets." These books are found at the end of the Old Testament. In ancient times when writings were inscribed on scrolls, all twelve of these books were placed on one scroll and that's how they got their name. The larger prophetic books of the Old Testament like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel each had their own scroll. They were known as the major prophets. Amos and his eleven companions were designated as being "minor prophets," not because what they had to say was of lesser value and inspiration, but simply because their books were a lot shorter than the other larger prophetic writings. In fact, what they had to say was often of significant importance, such as Micah's prophecy, another minor prophet, who foretold that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. So this morning let's begin our study of the book of Amos. It is located between the books of Joel and Obadiah. Let's also take a look at the life and times of this Old Testament prophet. In doing so, it will hopefully help us to come to a better understanding of both the man and the message which God told him to proclaim.

To begin with, let's take a look at what was going on in that part of the world where Amos lived. Israel, once a great and mighty nation, had been split apart by a civil war. Instead of one country, there were now two, Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Sometimes they were friendly towards one another and at other times they were adversaries. Religiously, they both honored the God of Abraham and Moses, but there were some distinctive differences. Judah continued to worship the Lord at the temple in Jerusalem and they observed the doctrines and traditions of their ancestors more rigorously than their neighbors to the north. Israel, on the other hand,

was more open to religious diversity, incorporating the practices and beliefs of the nations around them. For example, they built two worship centers, one to the north at Dan and another near the southern border with Judah. Located in the town of Bethel, worship was conducted at a temple with two golden calves. Instead of going to Jerusalem, people could come to this religious shrine and offer their sacrifices. They were told that the God of Israel was enthroned upon these divine beasts, reminiscent of the golden calf that their ancestors had briefly worshipped during their exodus from Egypt.

Now that you hopefully have a better understanding of the life and times in which Amos lived, let's take a look at who he was and where he came from. Amos was a resident of Judea, the southern kingdom. He lived in a little place known as Tekoa, located in the Judean hill country south of Bethlehem. It was a small town with limited opportunities for those who lived there. In terms of employment Amos had two jobs. He was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees. That second job involved harvesting the fruit of the sycamore tree, a nut of little nutritional value. It provided the kind of food that you ate when nothing else was available. To say the least, Amos came from a rural and disadvantaged background. You might even call him a country bumpkin. But in terms of his relationship with God and his ability to perceive and proclaim a message from the Lord, he had few equals. He was in every sense of the word a true and fearless prophet.

In fact, he felt led of the Lord to deliver a message from the Almighty to the people of Israel, the northern kingdom. This involved a journey on foot of about 40 miles. More importantly, it involved a journey from the rural countryside to a bustling urban center with an important religious shrine. He was stepping into an economic and social environment far different from what life was like in Tekoa. Under the leadership of Jeroboam II, the king of Israel, the northern kingdom was prospering both financially and politically. The country had risen to a place of prominence in that part of the world, especially with regards to the international trade routes that crisscrossed their nation. People were flocking to Bethel, a city with a religious heritage dating all the way back to those ancestral days when the patriarch, Jacob, had encountered the Lord on a staircase to heaven one night during a dream. The priests who ran the temple in Bethel were enjoying increased attendance and bountiful offerings. Outsiders upsetting their lucrative religious festivities were not welcomed.

That, in fact, was exactly what Amos intended to do. His name means "burden" and he had every intention of living up to his name, especially with regards to being a burden for those who were leading God's people astray. So he packed his bags and headed up north on a special mission. He knew what God had asked him to do. Although he was just an ordinary laborer, he knew the Lord and he knew the Word of the Lord, the accounts which had

been handed down to him about how God had revealed Himself to his ancestors. He knew that the Lord had high expectations for His people. Had not the Lord told Moses to deliver this message to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). Unfortunately, those ten tribes to the north, the ones which rebelled after the death of King Solomon, had broken faith with God. They gave Him lip service, but their hearts were elsewhere. The time had come to confront them and give them an opportunity to repent and confess their waywardness. Otherwise God's judgement would be severe. Someone had to warn them. Yes, he might be a little shabby in appearance and yes, his speech might be a mite rough around the edges, but Amos knew that God had given him a mission, a divine assignment that those rich folks in Bethel desperately needed to hear.

So what does this introduction to Amos and the mission that God gave to him have to do with us today? The best explanation comes in the form of a man I met years ago by the same name. He was Amos Britt. Amos was a fisherman who lived near the Pamunky River in New Kent County, Virginia. He had a little boat, a skiff, and he fished with a net and a hand line. He earned just enough money to keep a roof over his head. He was a roughhewn man who had lived a hard life. Alcohol had nearly destroyed him, but in his later years he had come to faith in Jesus Christ. Wanting to make up for the mistakes of his past, he took upon himself the mission of being a witness for Christ to his grandchildren and some of the other kids who lived in his neighborhood. Each Sunday he loaded them up in his old Plymouth station wagon and brought them to church. That was the joy of his life, seeing those youngsters learn about Jesus.

I still remember him with a great fondness of both mind and heart. Here's why. Just like Amos of the Bible, Amos Britt was a man of limited resources. He lived in a tiny shack and probably didn't have much of an education. Nevertheless, he knew that God loved him and he wanted to return that love by doing something that he believed would make a difference. That difference was picking up and driving a carload of kids to church. What about you and me? Is there a special mission, something that the Lord has laid upon your heart that you can do for Him. Why not spend a little time in prayer and meditation, asking God, "What can I do for You and Your people? It may not be a great thing, Lord, maybe something quite simple. But whatever it is Lord, give me, even me, a mission that I can do for the sake of your Kingdom. In this day and in this time, make me an Amos."