

The prophet Amos was one of the first of a group which came to be known as the “Writing Prophets.” These godly men committed to writing down the inspired oracles which the LORD gave them as they pronounced judgment both on the Northern (Israel) and Southern (Judah) Kingdoms. They wrote and spoke God’s Word in the darkest days of Israel, just before her exile into Assyria, and in the days leading up to the exile of Judah in Babylon. May God impart to us their sober message and enable us to find the nuggets of grace even in the midst of somber judgement.

Mon/Tues: Read Amos 1:1 & Amos 7:10-17

A Shepherd Called

The prophet Amos wrote his prophecy against Israel a mere two hundred and forty years after David the shepherd boy was anointed king in place of Saul. Amos was from Judah, south of Jerusalem, in the Judean village of Tekoa, about five miles south of Bethlehem. He was called by God as a missionary to go from his home and prophesy against the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the forty-one year reign of Jeroboam II. He dates his prophecy by pointing out that Jeroboam was king in Israel when he wrote (Amos 1:1).

Who was Amos? As he tells the priest from Bethel (Amos 7), he was originally a sheep-herder and fig-tree dresser. It may be that he was a wealthy farmer, but I think most likely he was an average shepherd who supplemented his income by working with fig trees. Such shepherding was not a low task, however. The kind of sheep identified as the flock which Amos took care of were known for their fine wool. The king of Moab had just the same kind (2 Kings 3:4) and he was known for the quality of his flocks.

Yet, there is a humility in Amos as the ungodly, false priest of Bethel rebukes him for his prophecies of judgment against the northern kingdom. Though this priest contemptuously rejects Amos’ words and tells him to go home to Tekoa with his tail between his legs, Amos does not react angrily. He simply states that he had no paid, professional background as a prophet and insists that he only took the mantle of prophecy on himself when the LORD took hold of his life! He then goes courageously on to utter once again the coming doom to fall upon Israel (Amos 7:15-17). He is willing to lay down his life, if needed, since the Word of God has such a grip on his life.

Meditate and Pray: Please ask the LORD to always give our church courageous, gracious and wise under-shepherds who, like Amos, will not hesitate to speak the truth of the Word of God no matter what the cost. Use this hymn as a prayer to ask the LORD to always make you open to His Word, no matter what the cost (# 376 in the red Trinity hymnal):

4 Thou my faith increase and quicken,
let me keep thy gift divine,
howsoe'er temptations thicken;
may thy Word still o'er me shine
as my guiding star through life,
as my comfort in my strife.

5 Speak, O God, and I will hear thee,
let thy will be done indeed;
may I undisturbed draw near thee
while thou dost thy people feed.
Here of life the fountain flows,
here is balm for all our woes.

Weds-Fri: Read Amos 5:4-15 & Isaiah 8:16-22**The Word is Evidence**

Why there was such a profusion of writing prophets right before the exiles to Assyria and Babylon? There are two answers:

- 1) The LORD knew that Israel (and then Judah) would refuse to heed the prophets. But nonetheless, the words predicting divine judgment and exile would be written down and sealed up (Isaiah 8:16) so that the LORD could show that He had sent these prophets when their prophecies of judgment came true (see Deuteronomy 18:21-22). Thus writing prophets vindicated the truth of God's Word.
- 2) These prophecies were written down as proof that the LORD was doing something far greater through the prophets than just declaring the urgent need for repentance. He was speaking through them to predict the Messiah. Isn't this what 1 Peter 1:11 means when it says that the Spirit of Christ in these prophets was writing about the Messiah's coming, sufferings and glory? Also, compare Isaiah 9:6 -- the Promised Child would be born "unto us," a promise meant to light up the dark day in which Isaiah prophesied. Thus the writing prophets pointed to the coming of Christ as their main hope.

Meditate and Pray: Lord, may we always rely on your Word and know our true deliverance will come when you keep your word of prophecy that Jesus will return.

Sat-Sunday: Read Amos 7:1-6 & Genesis 18:16-33**Unrelenting Mercy**

Here is a deeper reason why the LORD gave these prophets this gripping message and had them write it down for the ages: So that their tears for their people would be remembered and so that the God who sent them would be known as a God of unrelenting mercy even in the midst of judgment.

Amos' message is one of the most sober predictions of judgment against Israel in the whole Bible. His sermons and visions full of judgment – first uttered against the surrounding nations, and then uttered against God's own people. But right in the middle of such dire prophecies, the LORD melts Amos' heart so that in God's Name he pleads with tears for Israel to seek the LORD (Amos 5:4-6 & 5:14).

It's as if the terrible judgments which Amos saw about to fall gave the prophet the kind of broken-heartedness which honored the LORD. Even in Amos' words of judgment, no one could say that the LORD was callous towards sinners! No one could say that He delighted in punishing His people! Amos pleaded because the LORD softened his heart and made him a fitting messenger of compassion even in the midst of words of judgment.

We see such compassion flow again in Amos 7, where Amos stands in the gap for Israel. Just as Abraham pleaded for any righteous in Sodom to be spared (Genesis 18), Amos pleaded that the LORD would remember that Jacob (another name for Israel) was too small to stand under such terrible judgments. Twice Amos interceded, and twice God relented.

Meditate and Pray: Behold God's sovereignty in taking this soft-hearted shepherd from Tekoa and making him a prophet of fiery judgment. But also note how God's mercy is never to be forgotten even in days of destruction. The very breath of the LORD's mouth by which He slays the wicked (2 Thessalonians 2:8) is the breath of His Word that comforts His own. Lord, may we never stop seeking mercy for ourselves and others before your face. As our mind's eye sees the coming judgement looming, may the knowledge of our gracious Savior's heart give us boldness to ask and receive in this day of grace.