

The Prophet From Tekoa
Amos 1:1-2, Amos 7:10-17

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Today I'm beginning a study in the book of Amos in a sermon series called, "*A Prophet for Today.*" Let me read to you about this prophet from Tekoa:

Amos 1:1-2; 7:10-17, *"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. He said: "The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers."... 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. 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." 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. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom." 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. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' Now then, hear the word of the Lord. You say, "Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the descendants of Isaac.' "Therefore this is what the Lord says: "Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land."*

When I first studied the book of Amos, I remember wondering, "How could such a book be relevant in today's world?"

Then, as I worked through Amos, I was struck at how contemporary and practical it is to our situation today.

Commentator James Montgomery Boice writes: *“The Book of Amos is one of the most readable, relevant, and moving portions of the Word of God. But in much of church history (until very recent times) little or no attention has been paid to it. Why? It’s because the book speaks powerfully against social injustices and religious formalism, and many who would otherwise read the book have been implicated in such sins and are condemned by it.”*

So, I’m praying that God will use our study of Amos to show us how relevant the prophet from Tekoa is for us today.

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First, let’s look at the author. Amos begins with these words in verse 1a, *“The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa.”*

We know very little about Amos. He’s mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, although different men with the name of Amos are mentioned, like Luke 3:25, where a man named Amos was mentioned in Joseph’s genealogy.

Amos says he’s *“one of the shepherds of Tekoa.”* The village of Tekoa was probably the birthplace of Amos and where he lived when God called him to His service.

Tekoa was a little village in the southern Judean hill country about 5 miles southeast of Bethlehem and about 10 miles south of Jerusalem.

It was probably on the dividing line between the desolate wilderness area to the east and the agricultural lands to the west.

Tekoa is perhaps best known because of the wise woman that was employed by Joab to convince King David to be merciful to Absalom found in 2 Samuel 14.

2 Samuel 14:1-2, *“Joab son of Zeruah knew that the king’s heart longed for Absalom. So Joab sent someone to Tekoa and had a wise woman brought from there.”*

Tekoa also had a military fortress associated with it. It is mentioned during the period of kings: Rehoboam, about 920BC, found in 2 Chronicles 11:5-7; Jehoshaphat in 860BC, found in 2 Chronicles 17:2; 20:20, and Uzziah in 760BC, found in 2 Chronicles 26:10.

The presence of the wise woman and the military fortress suggests that the citizens of Tekoa were exposed to far-ranging news and information.

This means that Tekoa wasn’t just a sleepy little village with unlearned little villagers.

Amos also identified himself as *“one of the shepherds.”* The Hebrew word for *“shepherds”* used here could also mean *“sheep breeder.”*

When we hear that someone is a *“shepherd”* we tend to think of someone who’s simple and uneducated, but that’s not necessarily the case.

David was a shepherd but wrote some of the most moving poetry in history. He was also an incredibly gifted military leader, and a competent political leader.

Therefore, it’s likely that Amos was a sheep breeder with oversight of many sheep.

Commentator Gary V. Smith writes, *“Being a shepherd is not identical to being a simple uneducated peasant. The literary style, method of argument, and knowledge of international political affairs clearly demonstrate that Amos is an educated and knowledgeable person.”*

Amos also stressed his non-professional role as a prophet. In fact, he made that very point later in Amos 7:14b, where he wrote, *“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.”*

Amos wanted to make it clear that he wasn't a professional prophet, but a shepherd by profession.

So, out of a little village called Tekoa, God called a man by the name of Amos to speak on His behalf.

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Now let's examine the recipients. Amos went on to write in verse 1b, *“...the vision he saw concerning Israel.”*

I want to note that other prophets often begin by writing, *“The word of the LORD....”* Amos didn't begin his book like that. He began by saying, *“The words of Amos.”*

Now, that didn't mean that he was the sole author because he used the clause, *“the vision he saw.”* This expression indicates that he received the words of his prophecy from another source.

Perhaps he was referring to the visionary material that was given in Amos 7-9, but it's more likely that he used it in the sense of divine revelation.

In reality, he was claiming divine origin and authority for his prophecy. He was called by God to speak for God.

But to whom was he to speak? Amos' prophecy was primarily *"concerning Israel."* Since this is the case, let me give a quick history lesson.

The first three kings of God's covenant people were Saul, David, and Solomon. Saul reigned as king from 1050-1010 BC, David reigned as king from 1010-970 BC, and Solomon reigned as king from 970-930 BC.

Each king reigned for 40 years. When Solomon died in 930 BC, the kingdom split in two. The northern kingdom was called Israel and the southern kingdom was called Judah.

At the time that God called Amos to speak for Him, Amos was living in the southern kingdom of Judah, but God called him to go and speak to the northern kingdom of Israel.

At this time in their histories, both kingdoms enjoyed relatively peaceful relations with each other. So, it was easy for a southerner to preach to northerners.

Commentator Gary V. Smith writes: *"No specific group within Israel is identified here in Chapter 1, verse 1, but internal evidence suggests several different audiences in Israel. Most conceive of a fairly short ministry in Israel centered around the capital city of Samaria and the national temple of Bethel. The political, social, and religious behavior of the audience is described by Amos in great detail within each prophecy. The audience response is often unknown, with the exception of the strong negative response in Chapter 7, verses 10–13."*

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Third, the date. Amos wrote in verse 1c that the words that God gave him came *"two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel."*

This tells us the period Amos preached to Israel. Although we don't have a precise date, we have three pieces of evidence to help us establish an approximate date.

First, Amos said that he preached "*when Uzziah was king of Judah.*" Uzziah was the king of Judah, the southern kingdom, and the homeland of Amos.

According to 2 Kings 15:1-2 and 2 Chronicles 26:1-3, Uzziah reigned for approximately fifty years. His reign dates from 791 to 740 BC. He was a strong king who brought security and great prosperity to Judah.

In 2 Chronicles 26:16-21, we find that his powerful rule was cut short because of leprosy, a direct result of his pride.

Second, Amos said that he preached when "*Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel,*" the northern kingdom. He reigned from 786 to 746 BC. This Jeroboam was known as Jeroboam II, a powerful military leader.

The prosperity of Israel is evident in Amos 6:1-7, and the nation's worship of Baal is fully described by the prophet Hosea. The Book of Amos describes life under king Jeroboam.

And third, Amos said he preached "*two years before the earthquake.*" However, we have no clear indication in Scripture when the earthquake took place.

External evidence based on recent excavations suggests a date that refers to an earthquake which struck Hazor between 765–760 BC." So, God called Amos to go and preach a message to the northern kingdom of Israel around 760 BC.

It was a short ministry lasting only one or two years, but it was a powerful ministry. It was recorded by Amos and preserved for posterity.

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As we begin looking at the message of Amos, keep in mind that we only have his notes and not the full manuscripts of his sermons.

Commentator J. A. Motyer writes, *“What a pity that Amos left us only the distilled essence of what he said and not his sermons in their full development and application! To affect his hearers, Amos must have developed his themes, made his connections clear, opened and applied his message, and rubbed it home. But all he left us was his notes.”*

With that in mind, let’s read what Amos wrote in verse 2, *“He said: ‘The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.’”*

Amos began with a wonderful image: *“The Lord roars.”* As a shepherd, Amos probably had heard the deep-throated roar of a lion many times. It would’ve been a frightening sound to hear.

In these few words, Amos was saying that the Lord is like a roaring lion, seeking to attract the attention of the people of Israel.

Moreover, when he states that the Lord *“thunders from Jerusalem,”* he wanted the Israelites to know that the proper place of worship of God was Jerusalem and that was from where God’s message originated.

Amos wanted the people to know that he was God’s voice speaking to them from God’s earthly city.

Furthermore, Amos said that *“the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.”*

This is a description of a drought which is often a symbol of judgment in the Old Testament. Although it's not that prominent in Amos, it is present.

To a shepherd like Amos, two of the best illustrations of devastation would be the withering of the shepherd's pasture and the lush Carmel ridge.

When all the grass was gone, and the vineyards of Carmel had faded, it would be obvious to any observant Israelite that God was at work.

So, God called Amos to take a message of judgment to the people of Israel. Not only were they going to face God's wrath if they didn't change, but King Jeroboam would die by the sword, and they'd be taken into exile, away from their homeland.

What was the reaction to Amos' preaching? We read about it in Amos 7.

Amos 7:10-13, "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. 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." 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. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."

But Amos' preaching and prophecy were rejected by the priest, as well as the people of Israel.

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Conclusion

Having analyzed Amos' call to speak for God, let's take note of three principles. First, God uses insignificant people to accomplish His purposes, like Amos. We know very little about him.

Now, sometimes God uses people who're widely known to accomplish His purposes, and we thank God for that. But, more often, God uses unknown and insignificant people to bring glory to Himself.

So, don't worry about fame or success, just seek to be faithful to God, and He'll use you for His glory.

Second, God's message is directed to His people. Though the kingdom was divided, the nation of Israel was still considered by God to be His people.

Whenever we read or hear God's word, we mustn't think that His word is for "others." It's directed to us and to His church. So, we must pay attention to what God says to us in His Word.

And third, God's message of judgment must always be seen in view of His promise of salvation.

God will always discipline His people who don't obey Him. Indeed, Israel went into exile by the Assyrians in 586 BC. But God's promise of forgiveness and salvation must always sound greater than that of judgment.

For us, we find the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. So let us be sure that we belong to Him.