

THE PROPHET AMOS SPEAKS TO AMERICA

Contributed by Jim Jordal
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Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. For Amos says, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land.'" Amaziah also said to Amos, "You seer, go, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but don't prophesy again any more at Bethel; for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house!" Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman, and a farmer of sycamore trees; and Yahweh took me from following the flock, and Yahweh said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"”
Amos 7:10-15a WEB

Talk about humility! Here we have Amos---who represents himself as nothing but a herdsman and farmer---acting as a prophet of God speaking truth to power with the awful portent that their king was to be slain and the nation led away into foreign captivity. This message of impending disaster should have jolted the nation---especially the religious and political establishments---into recognizing that perhaps God was angry at their continued apostasy. But heeded or not, Amos was following God and they were not.

Prophets are not always nice or politically correct. Sometimes they say shocking things, as when Nathan confronted king David in the murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, with the charge, "You are the man." Or when Elijah, accused by king Ahab of troubling Israel, said, "It is not I who troubles Israel, but you and your father's house."

Prophets also threaten traditional religion and the belief that pronouncements by theological leaders have equal weight with God's word. That's what happened here as Amos is forbidden by priest Amaziah to bring his prophetic words to the historically vital place of worship known as Bethel. Amos thus is accorded no credibility as a prophet in the king's sanctuary and royal house and is urged to take his words elsewhere.

In the New Testament we find the same thing as Thessalonica resident Jason was hauled before the rulers of the city for harboring Paul and Silas "who have turned the world upside down and have come here too." Yes, prophecy does threaten to turn the world upside down, and still has the same power today.

Prophets do not always predict the future. More often, they urge renewed consideration of God's word, coupled with the costs of not doing so and the rewards for obedience. But political and religious powers cannot always stomach such teaching because it destabilizes their carefully constructed edifices of power and domination over the bodies and minds of the people.

The Book of Amos follows the prophetic tradition as it identifies and assesses the national idolatry, massive economic greed and injustice, arrogant leadership, meaningless religion, and above all, adamant refusal not only to obey, but to even care for anything God says. So the pathway to national ruin begins.

Today America is in an even worse position than was Israel of old. They had worshiped alien gods made of wood and stone, thus angering God. We today have gone far beyond that, what with our virtual addiction to gathering wealth of all kinds to ourselves with little or no attention how it came into being. They abused a few thousand people; we abuse billions. They dominated with chariots and swords; we dominate with massive military power and expenditures coupled with a dominant culture that seems to be valued by many unwary people.

Amos was a contemporary of Isaiah, and so many of their prophecies are similar. Amos appears to be a bit sharper in criticizing evil. Both were concerned with religion that "played games" with God, substituting tradition and ritual for obedience and justice.

As we move into this election campaign it seems like a good idea to investigate what Amos says against the arrogant oppressors of his day, and to apply this learning to various issues and practices we view today as the campaign unfolds. We'll do this for a few more weeks in the hope that we may make some small difference to the voters of the area.