

The Plumb Line in the Pulpit

A Sermon on Amos 7:10-17

by

Grayson Gilbert

1. Introduction

2. The Man of God Endures Through Testing (vv. 10-13).

a. *The test of the fear of man (vv. 10-11).*

i. “Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words. For thus Amos says, ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.’”

1. Amaziah is not mentioned elsewhere within the Scriptures, but from this narrative, we can understand quite a bit about him.

a. He is called *the* priest of Bethel, which means he is more than likely the high priest of the sanctuary at Bethel.

b. But it is important to know he’s not a legitimate priest, nor is he offering up legitimate sacrifices.

2. Notice though what he does when he hears the Word of the Lord from Amos. He sends word to Jeroboam II and tells the king that the prophet is conspiring against him.

a. In other words, he tells the king Amos is guilty of sedition.

b. He gives Jeroboam a fairly accurate rendering of what was said by Amos thus far, but he paints a completely different picture about the intent of the prophet.

ii. By sending word to the king that Amos is starting a rebellion, the prophet is immediately faced with a dilemma: do I fear the one who has the power to destroy the body, or do I fear the Lord, who has the power to destroy both the body and the soul?

1. It wasn't uncommon for a king to kill a prophet for speaking words of judgment, but it was especially common for them to kill those they believed were plotting against them.

a. While Amos knows he isn't inciting a rebellion against the king, he doesn't know how the king will respond.

b. Amos is being tested on who he fears: does he fear the king, or does he fear the King of kings?

2. We find out in the second half of the narrative here how Amos responds, which we will get to shortly. However, I do want to point out what this reveals about the priest Amaziah.

a. He immediately rejects the Word of God upon hearing it.

b. Yet what might slip on by is that his motivations are born out of the same thing Amos is being tested by: fear.

b. The test of tickling ears (v. 12).

i. Amaziah commands the prophet to flee to the land of Judah to eat his bread and do his prophesying there.

1. There are several things going on in this short outburst from the priest that would do us well to understand exactly what he's saying.

a. He acts upon his own authority to cast the prophet Amos out of the land, but he does so tongue in cheek to add insult to injury.

- i. “But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence.”
 1. Amaziah not only commands Amos to go out of Israel and flee to Judah, he now strongly condemns his preaching at Bethel.
 2. In the Hebrew, the phrase is in the emphatic position, which simply means that it is a very strong, very urgent command being given to Amos by the priest.
- ii. We will see shortly how the prophet responds, but once again, I want to take a brief moment to highlight what this reveals about the false priest of Jeroboam.
 1. He assumes authority as the high priest of Bethel, but as you remember, he’s not a priest from the tribe of Levi.
 - a. Another way to put it is simply that he doesn’t qualify for the role, and his very occupation in the role of a priest is rebellion to God.
 - b. We likewise have many people occupying the role of a pastor in the church today who simply don’t meet the qualifications for that role.
 2. Notice why he says the prophet is no longer allowed to prophesy at Bethel. Here’s the true reason; here’s what reveals Amaziah’s true loyalties.
 - a. Bethel is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence. In other words: Bethel belongs to the king. Not God, the king.
 - b. This ultimately reveals everything else we need to know about Amaziah. His loyalty is to the king, not God.

3. The Man of God Rests Upon Divine Authority (vv. 14-15).

a. Not a prophet by trade, nor the son of a prophet (v. 14).

- i. Amaziah accuses Amos of being in it for the money and tempts him to go to Judah, where his message will be received and he will certainly rake in the cash. Amos replies,

“I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs.”

1. In the day of Amos, there were a few different ways one might become a prophet.
 - a. Now, bear in mind that this didn't make them a genuine prophet, nor did it mean God blessed them in that role.
 - b. There were strict qualifications for the prophet, but many climbed into this role in various ways.
 2. One of the ways they might become a prophet would be to disciple under the teaching of an established prophet.
 - a. After a period of formal training and teaching from a professional prophet, they would then become a professional prophet.
 - b. Commonly, they would be brought before the king to foretell the outcome of a war, whether or not they had angered the gods, or even for basic council on how to handle the issues a ruler might face.
 3. Another way one could become a prophet was if they were born into the family of a prophet.
 - a. We have the luxury of choosing our professions in the modern age, but for most of history, what your father did, you did.
 - b. Established prophets would raise their children to be prophets just like they were, and when they came of age, they entered into the profession and carried on in the family tradition.
- ii. Amos was a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs, which puts to rest the charge against him that he was in it for the money.

1. His profession was of a completely different origin, but even more clearly, he had no need of earning his living this way.
2. He wasn't fearful of the king stripping away his wages as a prophet because of something he said.

b. A prophet commissioned by God for His people (v. 15).

- i. Amos tells us that God Himself took him from tending his flock in order to tend to the flock of God.
 1. The imagery here is reminiscent of David's own kingship, where God took him from being a shepherd and made him king over all of Israel.
 2. In a wonderful twist of irony, there is a perfect demonstration of the weak being raised to shame the strong.
- ii. Amos's credentials would not have earned him any further credibility before the eyes of the false priest, but the focus of the narrative is not upon the prophet's credentials.
 1. The narrative highlights the reality that God Himself plucked Amos up from his normal life and called him to be His prophet.
 2. Thus, the reality is that the prophet doesn't rest on his education any more than he rests upon the significance of his family.
 - a. He didn't have either of these things to begin with, so it isn't like he had much of a choice—but in the sovereign plan of God, this was the precise background chosen for the prophet to shame the proud.
 - b. The one thing the prophet Amos has going for him is in fact the one thing he actually needs: he's a prophet called by God Himself to serve God's people.

- i. The point of this is not to say that the formally trained were automatically suspect any more than it is to say that every layman was called to the office of a prophet.
- ii. It is to say though that if God didn't raise them up to be His prophet to proclaim His message to His people—they aren't a prophet.
- iii. I would argue the same, in fact, is true for the pastorate, even though they are not prophets like we find in the Old Testament.

4. The Man of God Stands Upon the Word of God (vv. 16-17).

a. The prophet does not shrink back from opposition but leans in all the more (v. 16).

- i. "Now hear the word of the Lord: you are saying, 'You shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you speak against the house of Isaac.'"
 - 1. Here the prophet tackles the final test against him from Amaziah, who strictly forbade him from prophesying at Bethel.
 - 2. His answer is much like Peter and the other apostles when they were forbidden by the Jews to speak of Christ: are we to obey men rather than God?
- ii. Just as he authenticated his ministry by the call of God, he authenticates his message by the very Word of God.
 - 1. What's interesting here, at least to me, is that the Lord Himself answers on behalf of His prophet.
 - 2. What's even more interesting is how the Lord frames His response.
 - a. The priest disparages the Words of prophecy given by Amos. He accuses the prophet of delivering a mere, political message against the king.
 - b. He then accuses the prophet of doing it all for the money.

- c. And finally, He commands the prophet to silence—yet the Lord declares,
“You are saying to *My* prophet, ‘You shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you speak against the house of Isaac.’”

b. *The prophet stands tall in the end when measured against the plumb line (v. 17).*

- i. “Therefore, thus says the Lord, ‘Your wife will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled up by a measuring line and you yourself will die upon unclean soil. Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.’”

- 1. Amaziah’s time of enjoying his lofty position appointed to him by the king will come to an end—yet his rebellion and idolatry will not bear consequences to him alone.

- a. His wife shall be left without a husband to provide for her, and so she will resort to prostitution in the streets.
- b. His children will fall by the sword of the Assyrians as they come in the ransack the land.

- 2. Finally, he will go to exile and die in a strange land.

- a. All of it because the priest heard the Word of the Lord and did not listen. He did not accept it. He did not obey it.
- b. And the final word: Amaziah’s rejection of the prophecy upon Israel will indeed come to pass. She will certainly go into exile.
- c. Between these two men we see a perfect illustration of the plumb line in action.

ii. In much the same way as God is holding the plumb line in the church to determine if she shall pass the test, God is undoubtedly holding a plumb line in the pulpits within her midst to see if her leaders shall stand in the end.

1. As the apostle James says that many should not become teachers, for they shall face a stricter judgment than anyone else.

a. The reasons for this are quite clear when we consider the natural result of their leadership.

b. Many do not endure through testing; they are fearful of men, they are in it for sordid gain, and when they are called upon to speak the Word of God, they shrink back in silence when they are most needed to speak clearly and biblically to issues facing the church today.

c. Many are not called by God into this role, and yet they climb into the pulpits anyhow.

d. Many pastors do not stand upon the Word of God to inform not only their preaching and teaching, but their ministerial practice.

e. So, the question remains at the end of all of this: what do we do as church-members?

5. Conclusion