

FAITHFULNESS UNDER PERSECUTION

AMOS 7:10-17

INTRODUCTION

As a church, we've taken up the book of Amos to shore up our doctrinal defenses against Christian social justice. Advocates of Christian social justice demand that we mix or outright replace the Gospel with external, non-biblical requirements as part of the saving work of Jesus. However, when Christian brothers and sisters stand for the integrity and the truth of the Gospel in this area, they come under the pressure and attack of those in the CSJ movement. They experience persecution. Whenever the Gospel deviates from the worldly and cultural currents, and believers hold to its truth, there will be rejection, persecution, and suffering.

God called Amos out of the humble fields and forests and gave him a mission to proclaim the Lord's words to the northern ten tribes of Israel. It was a pronouncement of condemnation and judgment for their rejection of the one true God. They had abandoned the God who made them a nation, rescued them, and blessed them. At this point in the book, Amos has just completed 6 and a half chapters of Yahweh's words. And *now* the proclamation is interrupted by someone. Someone who does not speak for the Lord, nor the words of the Lord. This is the only time we'll see another character other than Amos, so this interruption should stand out and catch our attention. We should listen carefully.

Now, there's one note of clarification to make about the kings of Israel. If you read through the Old Testament books of first and second Kings, you will encounter two different kings of the northern kingdom of Israel named "Jeroboam". Jeroboam I reigned just after Solomon as the kingdom divided (1 Kings 12). Jeroboam II reigned over a century later (2 Kings 13:13), during the time of Amos. This will be a helpful distinction as we consider our text tonight.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For thus Amos has said, "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.' "

¹² And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, ¹³ but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

¹⁴ Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. ¹⁵ But the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' ¹⁶ Now therefore hear the word of the Lord. "You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.' ¹⁷ Therefore thus says the Lord: "Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land

shall be divided up with a measuring line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.’ ”

— Amos 7:10-17

THE FALSE PRIEST’S REPORT

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— Amos 7:10-11

AMAZIAH AND THE FALSE PRIESTS OF BETHEL

Suddenly, in the heat and height of Amos’ prophecy this so-called priest appears in the storyline. Who is this Amaziah character?

Much early in Israel’s history, 1 Kings 12:25-33 gives us a clue about the priests at Bethel. Just after Solomon, the kingdom split into two different kingdoms. The king of that day, Jeroboam I, was concerned about losing the hearts of the people he ruled. They were going up to offer sacrifices to the true God in Jerusalem in the land of Judah, the southern two tribes. He was scared that they would leave him and follow King Rehoboam of Judah in the south. So, to prevent this he built his own area of worship and told the people they could worship there...in front of the two golden calves that he had created. The king shared these golden calves saying:

“Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”

— 1 Kings 12:28b

Then, the king went further to personally appoint false priests to these false gods in Bethel (1 Kings 12:31-32). He appointed non-Levites to be priests for these false gods, then presented these false gods and false priests as a replacement for the true God of Israel, Yahweh. He did this to secure his position as their king.

This is a wicked and perverse thing! These are just like the pagan rituals that Israel was punished for back in Exodus 32 when Aaron made a golden calf at the people’s request. Bethel is not a place that represents the true God of Israel. The hearts of the people have turned away from God in this place.

This brings us back to the time of Amos. Up to this point, God, through the words of Amos has condemned and called out Bethel as a place of wickedness and transgression (Amos 3:14; 4:4; 5:5-6). These priests of Bethel are not what God established for Israel back in Exodus 28-29. They do not serve the true God of Israel, Yahweh. Rather, they are pagan priests devoted to the preserving the throne of the wicked king and serving false gods. This is legacy that Amaziah came from. Jeroboam I the first did much evil over a century beforehand and this legacy is still present in the northern kingdom of Israel in the day of Amos.

Naturally, when false priest Amaziah hears that there is a prophet in Israel, prophesying on behalf of Yahweh, the true God of Israel it's no wonder that he is distressed. It's direct opposition to him.

AMAZIAH'S MESSAGE TO THE KING

When Amaziah hears Amos' message, he quickly sends word to Jeroboam (the second) to tattle on Amos. Amaziah warps and distorts the words from Amos, misrepresenting him to the king. Amaziah appears to believe that Amos is trying to overthrow the throne, and that he is conspiring against Jeroboam. While Amaziah represents false gods, Amos represents the true God of Israel...perhaps this is something Amaziah simply can't understand. Amaziah rejects the message from God through Amos.

It's an interesting message that Amaziah sends to the king. The message seems to be an exaggeration or outright lie. The words sent to Jeroboam, don't really capture the heart of the message Amos was preaching. There's just enough truth mixed into the quote to make it seem reliable, but it's also mixed with deception intended to garner opposition to Amos. God's words did predict that Israel will go into exile, but the attack on Jeroboam seems to be missing from his message. Amos is not represented truthfully in this slanderous message to the king.

AMOS' REJECTION

After Amaziah sends word to the king, he continues to Amos. The New Living Translation version really captures the essence of what Amaziah says. It reads:

¹² Then Amaziah sent orders to Amos: "Get out of here, you prophet! Go on back to the land of Judah, and earn your living by prophesying there! ¹³ Don't bother us with your prophecies here in Bethel. This is the king's sanctuary and the national place of worship!"

— Amos 7:12-13 (New Living Translation)

AMAZIAH'S ATTACK AND THREAT

Amos has faithfully preached and proclaimed God's words, and he is rejected, slandered, and openly opposed by the leaders of Israel. Amaziah threatens Amos and demands that he leave the northern country of Israel and flee down to the safety of Judah.

Amaziah is not suggesting that Amos flee, he's threatening Amos' life and fleeing is the offering that Amaziah gives to Amos to preserve him. Imagine an impending thug standing in front of Amos, baseball bat in hand, saying, "it'd be best if you left here Amos". That's the sense that Amaziah is bringing. Flee this nation, or else you'll regret it.

There's also an assumption about Amos in Amaziah's words "...eat bread there..." In that day, there were "professional prophets" who were paid to serve kings. If you remember the story of Balaam from Numbers 22-24, you can see an example of this. Amaziah's jab at Amos is assuming selfish motives, prophesying on someone else's behalf. It is quite possible that Amaziah believes that this prophecy of judgement is coming from a rival king. Unfortunately, Amaziah is right, but this is not an earthly king, but rather the King of Kings.

AMAZIAH'S REASONS

Amaziah continues his threats against Amos, telling him to never prophesy at Bethel again. At this point, you can hear the tension and seriousness of Amaziah's threats. Amaziah is characterizing Amos as a man who is raising conspiracies and death threats against the king. These are serious charges, with serious consequences. You might ask why Amos is under such fire right now. God has sent Amos, and Amos is presenting God's words. It's not like Amos is just making this stuff up!

We see in 2 Kings 14:23-29 that Jeroboam II (the king during Amos' life) is not a king who was characterized by doing what pleased the Lord. He was a wicked and depraved king, that maintained the sins of Jeroboam I. Bethel has been a significant place in the life of Abraham and Jacob. Its name means "house of God". Despite its name and history, the region of Bethel was no longer devoted to God as a house of worship any longer. By Amaziah's own admission, it was devoted to worshipping the king and his kingdom. Amos follows God's commands and comes preaching the message of Yahweh in his own house, and here stands the priests of Israel, rejecting those words. The nation of Israel is not devoted to worshipping God, and thus he brings judgement upon them for their rejection of him.

"CHRISTIAN" SOCIAL JUSTICE

I want to pause for a moment and engage the topic of "Christian" Social Justice. Amaziah's actions are all too familiar. The word of God comes to the nation of Israel, and Amaziah is the evidence of their rejection refusal to listen. Despite Amos' message being the true word of God, the nation's spiritual leader, Amaziah, continues leading them in worship of a cheap replacement of their true God. The nation of Israel refuses to listen.

²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. — Rom 1:22-23

Proponents of so-called "Christian" Social Justice do much of the same. They reside in the church, creating divisions and showing partiality that draws believers away from the core of the Gospel. They refuse to hear any side but their own. Which is ironic since they claim that no one can understand their side, except specially enlightened ones.

They side with worldly agendas and social causes. They step into the realm of replacing the wonderfully rich Gospel of Jesus, for a cheap, human-oriented philosophy that undermines and ultimately attacks the saving work of Jesus. Their message is not Biblical or even "Christian". In the words of 1 Kings 12:25, "This thing became a sin."

As we hold to a Biblical view of justice, we will continue to encounter those who reject what God's word has to say and its bearing on our lives. Our faithfulness in living out the unity and hope of the Gospel must not waiver. Just like Amos, we must remain faithful in the face of faithless men.

THE TRUE PROPHET'S FAITHFULNESS

14 Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. 15 But the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' 16 Now therefore hear the word of the Lord. "You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.' 17 Therefore thus says the Lord: " "Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.' "

— Amos 7:14-17

AMOS REMAINS STEADFAST

Despite Amaziah's rejection and attack, Amos remains steadfast. He continues to proclaim God's message to Israel, faithfully following the words of God. Amos boldly refutes the slander of Amaziah with a strong defense of what is true.

AMOS' AUTHORITY AND GENUINENESS

Amos begins with how he became a prophet. Unlike Amaziah, Amos was a legitimate servant of God. He was a humble shepherd and arborist when God gave him this mission and message to proclaim to Israel. Amos is an authentic prophet. God took the lowly man Amos and made him to be his mouthpiece for the coming judgement of Israel. Amaziah isn't just rejecting Amos. He's rejecting the powerful words of Israel's true God, Yahweh. It's not Amos conspiring against the kingdom, it's God. This should be a serious wake up call to the land, and to Amaziah.

THE LORD'S RESPONSE TO ISRAEL'S REJECTION

After Amos defends his genuine calling and position as a prophet of God, he continues with God's response to Amaziah and the nation of Israel. He is not a man here to make much of himself or to earn a living. Amos is a genuine servant of the almighty God of Israel.

As Amos continues, God recognizes both Amaziah's and Israel's arrogant rejection of Himself. This false priest was leading the norther ten tribes of Israel further and further away from the one who saved them out of Egypt and made them a nation. The clear quotation of Amaziah's words of rejection is listed as evidence against him. His words are a direct contradiction of the mission that Amos had been given by God. Amaziah says, "...get out of here..." and God said, "Go prophesy...".

Now, God speaks through Amos and the focus shifts back to the Lord's sharp and clear judgement on Amaziah. This is a severe consequence to Amaziah's rebellious rejection. When the discipline comes to Israel, everything he holds dear will be upended. His wife will apparently be left in the city and be a prostitute. His children will be ruthlessly killed. He will die in captivity. And, Israel will surely go into exile. Alec Motyer puts it, this way: "...the word which he rejected he will live to see fulfilled in the captivity of the nation."¹

¹ The Message of Amos: The Day of the Lord, J. Alec Motyer

The words of the Lord are sure. They are true. Rejecting what God has revealed doesn't make them untrue, it makes the one who rejects them a fool. This is where we close. As Amos faced personal threats and persecution, he remains steadfast to proclaim the true message of God.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Amos has been our launchpad to deal with critical race theory and "Christian" Social Justice that is rapidly invading the church. Many faithful brothers and sisters have given into this wave of new way of thinking. It's creeping into the church and undermining the truth of God's word. As we close our time tonight, there are a few helpful points for us to reflect on.

First, are we willing to hear what the word of God is saying? Do we first go to the trustworthy truths of Scripture? Do we engage with the word, understand it, and then work to engage with culture based on the word as the foundation? It's easy to slip from the truth when it fails to be our foundation. Cultural fads and movements will come and go, but God's word stands forever.

Second, how do we recognize genuine servants of God? What criteria do we use evaluate those who claim to be servants of God? Do we even consider that as factor in those we listen to and follow? There are many great authors and men of God who are standing firm on the truth of Scripture. Many others have started with the so-called truth of Marxism and Social Justice and twisted Scripture to support modern human agendas. Let's be careful to listen closely to how Scripture is handled. Furthermore, God has provided shepherding elders for you. You can ask questions. You can seek help and counsel. Be sure you're using this means of grace in your life.

Lastly, are you prepared to be rejected and suffer for the Gospel? Will you continue to live out and proclaim the saving truth of Christ's work? Living biblically is not popular. And, in America, it's increasingly so. It's becoming less tolerated. We will be misrepresented, misunderstood, and maligned. But isn't it worth it for name and glory of our great savior Jesus Christ? Persecution and attacks last only for this life. In the words of Jesus:

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. — Matthew 5:11-12

Social Justice makes little of Christ, and much of humanity. Let's be faithful to hold to the foundation and core of the Gospel! Will we rest and trust that the end of those who are wicked will be in the hands of our mighty and true King. Let's be faithful to proclaim and live out the wonderous work of Jesus.