

Amos



Leadership Review

Reading Context: Amos

Lesson Text: Amos 1: 1-2; 3: 1-8; 7: 14-15; 9: 13-15

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Lesson Aim: At the end of this session, participants should be able to: a) present a general overview of the life of Amos, the prophet; b) summarize Amos's message from God for the people; c) discuss the historical contest in which Amos carried out his ministry; d) discuss Amos's leadership qualities; e) apply principles from Amos's life to lives of today's African American.

Introduction

"A voice for the times: best describes the ministry of Amos to God's chosen people. He stands as God's messenger in a difficult hour in the history of Israel and Judah. He had a call, a conviction and powerful message. God called Amos to deliver words of doom and destruction, restoration and hope. As a common man, he was in touch with the political, social and religious conditions of his times.

The name Amos means "burden bearer." It comes from the Hebrew root work *amas*, which means "to carry." The book of Amos does not provide any personal or family background information about him. The time of this birth and death are unknown. In one sense the prophet is a mystery, but he stands as the most colorful personality among the Minor Prophets.

Amos's Calling and Commission

Amos came from Tekoa, a small village about ten miles south of Jerusalem. Tekoa, located in the heart of Judah, was a wild desolate desert area.

The setting of central Judah provides a very unusual place for the calling of a prophet. Who would expect God to call a person from this area to be His voice? The main occupations for the Tekoa were sheep herding and fruit growing. Amos describes himself as a shepherd and picker of sycamore figs (Amos 7:14).

Amos had a problem being a prophet. When Amos traced to the shrine city of Bethel, he was confronted by Amaziah the high priest who was disturbed by his message. Amaziah told Amos, "O seer, go flee away to the land of Judah and eat bread there, and prophesy there; but never

again prophesy at Bethel for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is the temple of the kingdom" (7:12-13). Amos quickly informed the high priest of his credentials: "I was not a prophet nor a son of a prophet, but a herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees. And the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel" (7: 14-15).

We can assume from the conversation that Amos did not attend the "School of the Prophets" or receive training from other prophets. He seems to have been called by God and prepared for his unique mission by experience and special revelations.

Sizemore states: "we do not have a biography or personality analysis of Amos. However, we do have stirring and demanding words which reflect a courageous and creative mind seized and empowered by the hand of God."¹ Kyle M Yates states: "In an emergency God can raise up an effective prophet to do His will."² In any case Amos is God's man for the hour. In Amos we see a profile of a common man called by god to carry a special message.

Amos's Context for Ministry

The Book of Amos comes from the middle of the 8th century B.C. The two Hebrew kingdoms had stood divided for 175 years. For both kingdoms it was a time of security and peace. However, it also marked the beginning of Israel's decline.

Amos carried on the his ministry from about 760-750 B.C. This placed his ministry during the time when King Jeroboam II reigned over Israel, Uzziah reigned as king of Judah, and Ashurban III was king of Assyria.

Politically, Israel enjoyed a time of great peace and security. Their stability came as a result of many neighbors having internal problems. Even Israel's greatest threats, Assyria and Syria, were at war with each other.

Under the leadership of Kind Jeroboam II, Israel became strong and rich again. Israel regained all of its territory and splendor. The last time the nation enjoyed such prosperity was in the days of King Solomon. With peace and prosperity in the land, the people believed that God was smiling on them.

Socially, the rich became wealthier the expense of the poor. The rich took advantage of the nation's stability and improved their businesses through increased trade and commerce. Their businesses were good and the labor was cheap.

The wealthy lived a lift of luxury. They had vacation homes along the sea and winters homes in the mountain. These homes were built of the best materials money could buy. They slept in the finest beds and had the best to eat. In other words the rich got richer, while the poorer got poorer.

The impoverished of the nation experienced many problems. They were being oppressed and exploited. The poor could not get justice in the marketplace or in courts. They were being sold for a pair of shoes (2:6). Scales were rigged in the markets and judges were on the take. This was nation divided between the “haves and have not’s.”

The increased wealth, peace, territorial expansion, and the prosperity did not bring spiritual renewal. The people were unfaithful to God. Yates states: “The people practiced worship that insulted God.”³ They gave their allegiance to the golden calves at the shrines in the cities of Bethel and Dan.

Many people practiced a false religion propagated by Amaziah, the high priest, who also supported political and social corruption. These were dismal days for the common people.

Amos was alert to his social environment and had a clear insight into the conditions of his time. Undoubtedly his early environment and occupation helped prepare him for his mission. These and other factors contributed to his character development and aided in cultivating the qualities necessary for effective leadership.

Amos’s Message to Israel

Amos’s message is a cry for universal justice. Amos makes this issue clear in summarizing the sins of Israel, its neighbors and enemies (1-2: 5). From Amos’s standpoint, Israel and all her neighbors were guilty of moral and social misconduct.

The prophet provides a list of those nations and their sins against humanity. These sins include inhuman treatment, hatred, un-brotherly conduct, cruelty in war oppression of people and slavery. He pronounces God’s punishment for each nation. The people of Israel rejoice as Amos tells of their neighbors’ punishment. However, their rejoicing quickly turns into anger, as Amos begins to tell of their sins.

Amos proclaims to the people of Israel that they are like their neighbors (2: 6-8). They stand guilty of many sins, including the inhuman treatment of the poor. He declares further that their sins are worse than those of their neighbors. In fact, their greatest sin was being unfaithful to God.

Amos tells the people of Israel that they are guilty of three crimes: 1) they did not: heed previous warning, 2) they have practiced empty worship and 3) they have committed acts of gross injustice (4:4-14; 5:21-27). He boldly declares that the dark day of the Lord is now upon them. Israel must now choose the right path or face the wrath of God.

Amos’s message falls naturally into two parts. In the first part he reminds his hearers of their sins and God’s chastisement. God said that He will “shake the house of Israel and purge out the sinners among His people” (9:9). In the second part of the message, God promises to restore the

fortunes of His people (9:13-15). The second portion of Amos's message in a proclamation of restoration and hope.

Amos's Leadership Qualities

The leadership style of Amos is unique. It is a very strong style of leadership for a very difficult religious and social era. Amos was both bold and confrontational.

The prophet Amos reflects several leadership qualities. These include: courage, dependability, endurance, enthusiasm, integrity, knowledge and loyalty.

- A. **Amos Was Courageous**. His courage is seen in his traveling from Tekoa, Judah to Israel. He had the courage to take God's message directly to Israel. Amos confronted Israel's leadership with God's message, withstanding even the challenge of Amaziah, the high priest. He was a man of courage.
- B. **Amos Was Dependable**. God needed someone He could trust. Amos's dependability is seen in his actions. He left his occupation and traveled to Israel to deliver the message that God gave him and did not leave Israel until he had finished his mission. Effective leadership and dependability are closely connected.
- C. **Amos had the Ability to Endure**. He possessed mental and physical stamina. He endured the pressure of speaking an unpopular message to the people of Israel and the threats from the high priest. Some believe that this quality was probably developed during his rural upbringing and his time spent as a shepherd and fruit grower. An effective leader is able to endure opposition. Obstacles are almost a constant part of a leader's life.
- D. **Amos Was Enthusiastic**. He had the zeal to carry out God's directives. He spoke to Israel with the power of God. God had called him to carry a special message to Israel and he did so without complaining or hesitating. Willingness to give the best effort is fulfilling a mission is one of the marks of an effective leader.
- E. **Amos Was a Man of Integrity**. He was a moral and honest man. He spoke the will of God to the nation of Israel from his heart. The prophet did not care about the feelings of the rich or powerful in Israel. He told them the truth and did not hold back.
- F. **Amos Exhibited Knowledge**. Amos knew what was going on in Israel and in the surrounding nations. He picked specific examples of inhuman treatment and sin. He was very much aware of the problems of the poor and oppressed. Amos might have become aware of the vast political and social problems of each nation through his travels to various marketplaces. Effective leaders are aware of people's problems and potentials – as individuals and as a society. An effective leader must be "in the know."
- G. **Amos Was Loyal**: His loyalty was reflected in his commitment to speak on God's behalf. Amos did not travel to Israel proclaiming God's word because of personal ambition. He went to fulfill his calling. The commission to be a Christian leader requires loyalty to God, God's people and his God-given task.

Scripture Focus

KJV (King James Version)

Amos 1: 1-2

¹ The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

² And he said, The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.

Amos 3: 1-8

³ Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying,

² You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

³ Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

⁴ Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?

⁵ Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?

⁶ Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?

⁷ Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

⁸ The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

NLT (New Living Translation)

Amos 1: 1-2

¹ This message was given to Amos, a shepherd from the town of Tekoa in Judah. He received this message in visions two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam II, the son of Jehoash, was king of Israel.

² This is what he saw and heard: “The LORD’s voice will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem! The lush pastures of the shepherds will dry up; the grass on Mount Carmel will wither and die.”

Amos 3: 1-8

³ Listen to this message that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel and Judah—against the entire family I rescued from Egypt:

² “From among all the families on the earth, I have been intimate with you alone. That is why I must punish you for all your sins.”

³ Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?

⁴ Does a lion ever roar in a thicket without first finding a victim? Does a young lion growl in its den without first catching its prey?

⁵ Does a bird ever get caught in a trap that has no bait? Does a trap spring shut when there’s nothing to catch?

⁶ When the ram’s horn blows a warning, shouldn’t the people be alarmed? Does disaster come to a city unless the LORD has planned it?

⁷ Indeed, the Sovereign LORD never does anything until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets.

⁸ The lion has roared— so who isn’t frightened? The Sovereign LORD has spoken— so who can refuse to proclaim his message?

Amos 7: 14-15

¹⁴ Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit:

¹⁵ And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.

Amos 9:13-15

¹³ Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.

¹⁴ And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them.

¹⁵ And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.

Amos 7: 14-15

¹⁴ But Amos replied, "I'm not a professional prophet, and I was never trained to be one.^[c] I'm just a shepherd, and I take care of sycamore-fig trees.

¹⁵ But the LORD called me away from my flock and told me, 'Go and prophesy to my people in Israel.'

Amos 9:13-15

¹³ "The time will come," says the LORD, "when the grain and grapes will grow faster than they can be harvested. Then the terraced vineyards on the hills of Israel will drip with sweet wine!

¹⁴ I will bring my exiled people of Israel back from distant lands, and they will rebuild their ruined cities and live in them again. They will plant vineyards and gardens; they will eat their crops and drink their wine.

¹⁵ I will firmly plant them there in their own land. They will never again be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God

Scripture Search

Fill in the blanks.

1. Amos was a _____ by occupation.
2. Amos accused his society of empty _____ and gross injustices.
3. Amos was a leader who was courageous, _____ and dependable.
4. Amos preached a message of doom and destruction, restoration and _____.
5. Amos wanted justice to run down like _____ and righteousness as a mighty _____.

The African American Connection

The problems of the African American community exist in four basic areas: economics, education, politic and anti-social behavior. Some of the problems within one area develop as a direct result of problems existing in another area. Solutions to many of these problems are complex and difficult. Some problems can be addressed through fair government policies; however, other problems will require empowering communities to help themselves.

Economics

Economics is one of the major problem areas we face. The economic factor is an underlying cause for other problems. The African American community is a \$130, billion a year community. However, only a small percent of this revenue is recycled through the community.

What are two or three ways that we can give money a longer circulation life in our communities? Is an increase in Black businesses the answer? Is a “buy Black” campaign a possible solution? Will forming community co-ops help? If we boycott certain banks, will this help stop some of the “red lining” that is often practiced against our communities?

Education

African Americans are seeing a weakening of the public education system. This is due in part to the emergence of rich and power school districts. This kind of development reflects another kind of segregation. Rich school districts tend to be in the suburbs and poo districts are usually in the inner city where many of the people live. The condition of housing has often deteriorated in the area and they are sometimes controlled by slum landlords. With limited funding, increasing expenses and high enrollment, poor school districts do not keep up with the rising cost of education students.

To add to this problem, a high number of African American youth continue to drop out of school. This adds to the problems of unemployment, which aggravates other social problems such as crime, drug addiction and homelessness.

Are these possible answers to our educational dilemma? More Black teachers and administrators in charge of our schools? More involvement of our parents in the Parent Teachers Association (PTA)? More security personnel in schools to insure the safety of our students and school staff?

Politics

The third major area of concern is politics. Politically the African American community is suffering. What effect do such things as lack of voting, redistricting and lack of qualified candidates who are willing to run for office have on our political situation?

Anti-Social Behavior

Finally, many African American communities are facing an array of problem with anti-social behavior such as crime and drug abuse. There is a continued rise of Black on Black crime. The illegal drug business continues to cause a rise in crime and violence. In this dangerous illegal business many young Black boys and men are being killed daily and an alarming number of young Blacks are being incarcerated. What can African American Christians do about this?

In what ways could our recommitment to God and the church, our decision to being speaking out, and our taking initiative to make positive changes make a difference in the amount of drugs sold and used in our neighborhood?

Can the Lord make a difference through our churches? Or is the church doomed to stand by and let the devil completely take over our communities?

Notes:

