

Amos 7:7-17

'Obligations, Duties, and Consequences'

Obligations, duties, and consequences

All of us are people under obligation.

We have obligations as children, as parents, as workers, as citizens, and in a whole host of other areas.

Those obligations and duties cover a whole lot of things.

As citizens, we are obliged to vote.

As workers, we are obliged to turn up to work and to earn what we are paid.

As parents, we have an obligation to properly rear and care for those we brought into the world.

As children, we there is a duty to respect and care for our parents.

And each of these duties or obligations have consequences if they are not performed rightly.

Some of those consequences are psychological and emotional, such as those wrapped up with family relationships.

Some are financial, such as when we don't act as proper citizens and refuse to vote or don't drive at the speed limit.

Or when we continue not to turn up to work and lose our jobs.

And some consequences are physical, such as when we our job requires us to take photographs of celebrities who then punch us.

No matter whether the obligations are real or not, obligations and duties carry consequences.

If you fail in your obligations, there are inevitable consequences.

And if live up to your obligations, there are also inevitable consequences.

Today we are going to look at two men in the book of Amos.

We are going to see how they handle their obligations.

And we are going to see what consequences follow from their success or failure in fulfilling their obligations.

And as we observe these two men, I believe that there are some lessons to be learnt about our own obligations before God and how we fulfil them.

So, let's turn to the story as it is outlined in Amos 7:7-14.

Context

To start off, let's put the story in context.

The section that we are going to look at today is in the middle of a section of visions that God gives to Amos.

There are five of them in all.

They start at Amos 7:1 and they finish at Amos 9.

They are all visions that involve God judging his people.

The first vision occurs in Amos 7:1-3 and involves a vision of a locust plague.

Amos intercedes on behalf of the people and God relents.

The second vision occurs in Amos 7:4-6 and involved God judging by fire.

Amos again intercedes on behalf of the people and God again relents.

The third vision occurs in Amos 7:7-9 and it involves a vision of a plumbline.

This time there is no intercession by Amos and there is no relenting by God.

Instead, God promises a fierce judgment that will reach not only the religious establishment but also the secular.

God will strike even the house of Jeroboam.

Up until now, Amos has largely mentioned the social and religious sins of the people.

Jeroboam the king has not been specifically mentioned.

But now he is.

And it appears as though the mention of the king sets the context for what happens next.

Let me give you a brief overview of the story of verses 10-17.

The story

In verses 10-11 we are told that a certain Amaziah reports an oracle of Amos to Jeroboam II and accuses him of conspiracy against the king.

Then, in verses 12-13, Amaziah commands Amos to leave Bethel.

Amaziah bans him from prophesying any further there.

And he orders him to return home, where he says that he can continue to make his living as a prophet.

In verses 14-16 Amos responds.

He maintains that he is not a prophet by profession.

He also maintains that he is in Bethel because the Lord had commissioned him to prophesy there.

Then, in verse 17, Amos speaks his only oracle in the book against an individual.

He utters an oracle of judgment against Amaziah and his family.

At the same time, he goes on to deliver an oracle against the people of Israel as a whole.

We don't know what happened as a result of these incidents.

But there is no real reason to assume that he stopped prophesying or that he went hom to the southern kingdom.

A profile of Amaziah

Who is he?

So, there is the story in overview.

Now let's concentrate of the person of Amaziah.

First of all, who is he?

Well, verse 1 tells us that he is the priest of Bethel.

We know that Bethel was one of the two main religious centres of the northern kingdom.

It was established by the first king of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam I.

Bethel was probably therefore the kings sanctuary.

This seems clear from verse 13.

And Amaziah was probably the high priest of this sanctuary.

I other words, there is every chance that Amaziah was the highest religious authority in the kingdom.

What were his obligations?

As a high priest, the obligations of Amaziah were clear.

He was to ensure that God was represented properly.

He was to speak the word of God to the people.

And he was to mediate God's forgiveness to the people.

His role was a religious role.

What did he do?

So, let's now have a look at what Amaziah did.

Verse 10 tells us that he accuses Amos of conspiracy against the king.

Verse 11 tells us that he quotes two utterances by Amos:

First, he claims that Amos had said that Jeroboam will die by the sword.

Second he claims that Amos had said that Israel will surely be exiled.

The first claim is not documented in the book but may have been surmised from verse 9.

The second is something that Amos says time and time again throughout his prophecies.

However, what is important is not so much what Amaziah says but what he does not say.

For example, he doesn't state that these oracles were 'the word of the Lord' but that they were the words of Amos.

Also, he doesn't give the reasons for the threats.

So he doesn't say that judgment is coming because of the sins of the people and the religious leaders.

In other words, as a religious leader, he is not concerned with the religious basis of the prophecies of Amos.

What's more, he makes no mention of the threats Amos makes against the 'high places' and 'sanctuaries.'

The important thing to note is therefore that Amaziah deftly omits all that would be of direct concern to himself and his obligations.

Instead, he enters the political realm and concentrates on matters of consequence to the king and people.

He presents himself as one with no vested interests, thereby concealing his own personal motives from the king.

But he does more than this.

We don't know whether Amaziah was acting on behalf of the king or not, but he tells Amos to leave Israel and to go home and to no longer prophesy in the northern kingdom.

In other words, he is telling Amos to no longer bring the word of God to the north.

Amaziah's actions are clearly in breach of his obligations.

He is no longer representing God.

And he is not representing the best interests of the people.

[Maybe insert illustration here from RMC.]

What does God do?

But now let's move on to what God does.

We see this in verses 16 and 17.

In these verses Amos promises a punishment upon Amaziah.

There are five things he promises.

There is a fivefold curse uttered by Amos in the name of Yahweh.

First, his wife will become a prostitute.

In other words, she will be shamed and disgraced into plying the profession of a prostitute in order to make a living, and she will do this publicly or 'in the city.'

There is a bitter irony here given that the law specifically prohibits priests from marrying prostitutes (Leviticus 21:7).

Second, Amos declares that his sons and daughters will fall by the sword.

In other words, his line will end.

Third, Amos announces that his land shall be divided up with a measuring line.

In other words, not only will his heirs be exterminated but his heritage will also be obliterated.

Fourth, Amos promises that Amaziah will die in a pagan land.

The word literally means an unclean land and it refers to any foreign soil where the Lord is not present (cf. Deuteronomy 4:28; 1 Samuel 26:19; Jeremiah 16:13; Psalm 137:4).

For a priest, this would be an extremely severe and belittling experience.

He who was meant to be set apart and holy would become contaminated, polluted, and would be reduced to eating unclean food in an unclean land.

In other words, this man who sought to hinder Amos from fulfilling his calling from God will be deprived of his own calling.

And the fifth punishment is directed at the nation.

They will go into exile.

Tough?

Now, I don't know about you, but this punishment seems pretty tough to me.

And I think it is tough for a reason.

You see, God values his people.

He values the life of his people.

And he has sent the prophet Amos to speak his word of judgment and salvation to his people.

And this word has been misrepresented by the very person who had an obligation to ensure that it was heard.

God gave Amaziah a very high calling.

And Amaziah has not lived up to his obligations.

And his failure has very serious consequences and repercussions.

And so Amaziah's punishment will be tough.

The principle is clear and it is spelt out time and time again in the Bible.

We hear it in places such as Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 3 and James 3 as well as many times in the Old Testament.

Those who lead the people of God astray will be severely judged.

And those who are meant to be the shepherds of God's people but who don't fulfil their obligations shall incur an even stricter judgment.

Thinking it through

With this in mind, let's think things through in terms of ourselves.

The first thing we can draw out of this passage for ourselves is directed towards me and everyone else who is in a position of oversight in our church.

God is clear.

He loves his children.

And he will judge very harshly those who do not do their task properly and with due diligence and care.

We are his representatives among his people and he expects us to be good shepherds as he is the ultimate Good Shepherd.

And so Jesus and the New Testament authors speak with very tough words about those who misuse their authority over God's people.

Jesus says that those who cause his little ones to stumble will suffer a punishment worse than having a millstone around their necks and being thrown into the deepest part of the sea.

And James says that teachers will incur a stricter judgment.

But this is not only a word to those in authority.

There is also a word from God here for all of us who hear the word of God.

You see, when Amaziah heard it, he did not take it to heart.

He did not see its relevance for him.

He sought to shirk his responsibility.

He sought to ignore its cutting edge.

We who hear the word of God must realise that we will be called to account for our response to the word of God.

And if we have been richly blessed with God's word, then God will demand even more from us. For from those who have been given much, much will be expected.

A profile of Amos

Who is he?

Now let's move on to Amos.

There is not much personal information about Amos in his book.

In fact, there are only two places where we get any sort of biographical data about him.

One place is in the first two verses of the book.

The other place is here in verses 14 and 15.

Basically, Amos is saying that he is not a professional prophet.

He didn't make his living by being a prophet.

Rather, he was a prophet because God had selected him to be a prophet and commanded him to prophesy.

What were his obligations?

In other words, he is under a higher authority than Amaziah.

He is under the authority of God himself.

And if God commands him to preach and Amaziah commands him to stop, Amos knows what he must do.

He is a man under obligation.

He has been commanded by God to prophesy and so prophesy he must.

What does he do?

So, what does Amos do?

Well, he has been commanded to preach a very tough message of judgment.

And Amaziah represents where the nation is as a whole.

He is complacent and comfortable and disobedient to God.

He is interested in preserving his own position and prestige.

And he is not interested in fulfilling his obligations to God.

He commands God's prophet to stop preaching.

And since Amaziah is meant to be the head of the religious life of the nation, he is culpable.

He will suffer punishment first.

And so Amos prophesies as God has told him to do.

He urges Amaziah to hear the word of the Lord.

And then he speaks the word of God to Amaziah.

He promises the tough judgment of God.

Thinking it through

Let's now think about what this means for us.

Well, the first point of contact for us is that we are like Amos and Amaziah.

We too have obligations before God.

Now the one that I want to concentrate on is found in 1 Peter 2.

Could you please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2:9-12.

These verses talk about us as the new people of God.

The language comes from Exodus 19 and it says that we are God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

And it then goes on to tell us what God has called us to be and to do.

He has called us to declare the praises or great deeds of him who has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

You see, we are God's priests in the world.

And as God's priests, one of our roles is to declare to the world what great things God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

And then, in verse 11 and 12, Peter goes on to tell us about our other priestly duty.

We are to live consecrated lives.

We are to abstain from sinful desires.

And we are to live good lives among those who don't know God.

Now, what I want you to notice is that both of these activities – that is, both declaration and godly living – have an evangelistic focus.

Both have in mind the goal that others might come to recognise God.

You see, I think that this passage and other passages in the New Testament make clear that both as individuals and as a group, we are under obligation before God to make him known.

We are under obligation to make him known in our words and in our conduct.

We do this when we mix with people in our families, in our work, and in our daily activities.

And we do this when we function as a church.

These are obligations we have before God.

However, I think that there is more that needs to be said than simply laying an obligation on you.

You see, when I read about New Testament Christians talking about this topic they make two things clear.

First, they are clear that they are under obligation to make Christ known.

But they also say that even if they were not under obligation, they would still make Christ known.

Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 9.

And the apostles make this clear in Acts 4 and 5 when they tell people that they can't help speaking about what they have seen and heard.

Can you see what I am saying?

I am saying that God has called us to be his people just as he called Amos to be his prophet.

He has called us to proclaim his word to his people both in word and deed.

That message is both a message of comfort and a message of judgment.

It announces salvation and it announces a coming day of the Lord when God will come in fierce judgment.

God calls us to be obedient to our calling.

He calls us to be uncompromising in our presentation of that message.

Like Amos, we are to be faithful to the word of God.

We are to speak the message.

We are to warn our world.

And as we do, we are to do it from willing hearts, knowing the greatness of the news we have to bring.

We are not responsible for how people react.

But we are responsible for proclaiming the message.

For we have been called for this.