

"Go Back To Where You Came From!"

Amos, The Unwanted Prophet: Part One

Our picture of Amos must be enlarged a bit. He may have been a sheep-breeder, but he also lived in a strategically located fortified walled village that had strong ties to Jerusalem administratively and defensively. The archaeological remains of Tekoa lie some twelve miles southeast of Jerusalem, on a high hill right at the point where the cultivated lands end and the uncultivated land begin that slope down to the Dead Sea.

The sycamore groves referred to previously would likely have been some distance from where Amos lived, for to grow properly they required the warmer climate of the Jordan valley where he would have taken his flocks for pasturing when the hills of Tekoa were barren.

Theologically, it seems, the sheep-breeders of Tekoa were unique. Like others elsewhere in Israel, they were of course devout Yahwists and believed themselves to be a part of Yahweh's peculiarly known and loved people. But there is no evidence that Amos thought, as did the Yahwists of Jerusalem, that Yahweh was somehow especially present at Zion or with the Davidic dynasty. Nor, strangely enough, does he ever mention the covenant Yahweh made at Sinai, as other prophets do.

In fact, Amos seems to view the sacrificing of animals going on there as a senseless novelty without precedent. "Did you bring me sacrifices and oblations those forty years in the desert, House of Israel?" he asks, implying, "No, you did not!"

"How did your rest, Amos?" Miriam asked, looking at the view below. Her husband seemed quiet and pensive. She knew her husband too well and also knew that he was looking at the view but was distracted.

"I had another dream," Amos said slowly and somewhat quietly. "The Lord God Yahweh repeated the vision about the locust plague but also added a drought upon Jacob to destroy him."

"Amos," Miriam responded almost desperately, "I was right! You need to go quickly. Your vision frightens me. You need to travel soon before it is too late!"

"I pleaded with Yahweh to spare our brothers, to spare the House of Isaac," Amos said. "I first pleaded for them, pleading for forgiveness, as part of my plan that I mentioned last night. That is when Yahweh seemed to relent," Amos told her, taking hold of her hand. "But the Lord God repeated the first vision of locust added the second vision of drought. I pleaded all the more." Then Amos stopped and was quiet.

"Yes, Amos," Miriam encouraged him. "What was his response?"

Then Amos looked into Miriam's face and smiled, "Yahweh, the Lord God, said for my sake, 'It will not happen.'"

"Even though I feel our Northern brothers and sisters under King Jeroboam are prosperous and strong," Miriam admitted, "I feel their wealth is at the expense of the less fortunate."

"You are right, Miriam," Amos quickly said with growing anger. "The problem with our Northern brothers and sisters is that there is no mishpat, justice." Amos almost spit it out. "There is no Tsedakah, uprightness in the land."

"If there was justice for the less fortunate," Miriam said, "where the weak and poor could be heard, the Lord God Yahweh would not have to punish our Northern neighbors."

"The rich along with the poor," Amos added. "If it were not for the weak and poor I would almost want Yahweh to punish the rich and powerful, but it is exactly the weak and poor who would pay in the end."

"I know you too well, Amos," Miriam looks at him tenderly. "I know that your vision had touched you so much that even now you have prayed to Yahweh to relent in his anger."

"Miriam," Amos admitted, "I just don't know what to do? Imagine me traveling to the north to deliver this vision. They would never listen to me. If I don't warn them, the Lord God may carry out something even worse." Amos reluctantly added, "On the other hand, if I do deliver Yahweh's message, then the Lord God will be even more reluctant to forgive and relent in his punishment of our Northern Kingdom."

"I know that you will think of something," she said. "Besides, Yahweh has picked you."

"I will have to prepare," Amos reminded her, "since there are things to do here first. I know that you can handle things when I am gone."

"It would be better to prepare yourself first," she said in his support, and added, "by the time you are ready to leave, may the Lord God bless you with a clearer vision on how to proceed."

"In the meantime, I will try to get more information on what is really happening in the north," Amos decided. "I am certain there will be more visions, since Yahweh has told me so."

"Oh?" Miriam looked at him in surprise.

"Since we don't get many visitors, especially from the north," Amos said while looking at the view of the world below them, "I plan to visit Jerusalem to find out more information before I head North. Hopefully by then things will be a little more clearer."

Miriam was also distracted by the view below, such a vast panorama of many of their neighboring countries. "Maybe the Lord God will send a vision on what to bring to our northern brother and sisters."

"I don't expect much sympathy from Jerusalem. If it is wisdom I am looking for, I would be better off visiting our Edomite brothers. Maybe some will pass this way, since they are about due for a visit," Amos reflected as he looked east where his view took him.