

Trinity 4 – Amos chapter 7, verses 7 – 17:-

Author, date and background

Amos was a native of Tekoa, a village about 12 miles south of Jerusalem. He was a shepherd and supplemented his income by caring for and harvesting wild figs from sycamore-fig trees. He claimed a direct revelation from God who took him “*from following the flock . . .*” (Amos 7, verse 15) and sent him to prophesy to the people of Israel – the Northern Kingdom with its capital of Samaria.

The date of his prophesy is during the 8th Century B.C., probably about 760 B.C.

Jeroboam was king of Israel from 791 – 740 B.C. He deliberately encouraged the practices of fertility cults (see 2 Kings 14, verses 24 – 25). The social life of Israel at this time was characterised by adultery, robbery and murder. The luxury of the wealthy was built upon injustice and the oppression of the poor. (Amos 2, verse 6 -8 etc. and also noted in Hosea 4, verses 1-2 and 11 – 13).

Bethel was located about 11 miles north of Jerusalem near Ai and was a major trading centre, Bethel stood at a crossroads, with its north-south road passing through the central hill country from Hebron in the south to Shechem in the north, and its main east-west route leading from Jericho to the Mediterranean Sea. Only Jerusalem is mentioned more frequently than Bethel in the Old Testament.

The Hebrew name Bethel means “house of God” and during the time of the divided kingdoms, King Jeroboam of Israel established two temples for the northern kingdom, one at Bethel and the other at Dan. In these temples, he set up golden calves (1 Kings 12:26–33). God often sent prophets to preach at Bethel (1 Kings 13:1–10). Many of these prophets pronounced judgement and condemnation on Bethel as a centre of idolatry (Amos 3:14; 5:5–6; Hosea 10:15).

Amaziah was priest of Bethel, owing his position and established in his living by Jeroboam.

If we read from verse 1 of chapter 7 we find Amos pleading in prayer for the deliverance of the people from the judgement of the Lord God. The threats of a plague locusts - chapter 7, verses 1 – 3 and ‘*judgement by fire*’ are both set aside through the prayer ministry of Amos. However because of the sins listed in Amos chapter 2, verse 6 through to chapter 6 verse 14, judgement was sure to come.

Verses 7 – 9 - The Plumb Line:-

The Chosen People of God were privileged to have the revelation of the Law. They were built on a sound foundation and should have been found upright. The righteous plumb line of God judged them and found them wanting. Far out of perpendicular they were bound to collapse in a disastrous fall. This time Amos does not plead against it, there is to be no reprieve!

Verses 10 – 17 – A clash with the Ecclesiastical Authorities:-

Amaziah, the priest of the shrine at Bethel, accused Amos of being a conspirator against King Jeroboam and ordered him to return to Judah. The shrine at Bethel was one of the centres of the national established religion. Any speaking against the religion was seen as seeking to undermine the state. The folk song “The vicar of Bray” pokes fun at the priest being subservient to the ruler of the state; however, remember that establishment of religion has been a cause of trouble and a stumbling block to conscience down the years! For comparison, read Acts chapter 4, verses 1 – 22.

Amaziah told Amos to make his living by prophesying in his own country of Judah. Amos denied being a professional prophet and affirmed that he had a specific call from God to prophesy. See Amos chapter 3, verses 7 – 8. Amaziah, who is implicated in the sins of the people of Israel, will suffer the consequences along with them.

The words from the Book of Revelation chapter 2, verse 7, repeated again and again in chapters 2 and 3 are appropriate for our prayers, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*”.