

Amos and the Prophets

Week Four: Prophets and Priests and Kings

The Threefold Mediation of Divine Presence

- In the earliest parts of Israel's story, Abraham goes to a King Melchizadek, ruler of Salem (later Jerusalem) who receives a tenth of Abraham's battle loot in a prayer ceremony. In other words, Israel did not have its own kings or priests. With Moses Israel begins with a prophet, and shortly after his brother Aaron becomes the nation's high priest. Only after many generations did Saul become the first king.
- In most of the monarchical period, the priests (except the ones like Ezekiel who become prophets) tend to stay loyal to a king rather than shaking things up. The exceptions to this are times of civil war (David vs. the house of Saul, Absalom vs. David), when priests go with factions. Prophets, on the other hand, starting with the prophet Nathan, have a tendency to shake up the royal court. (cf. Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, etc.)
- Think of kings and priests as the stable and prophets as the occasional voices of God: each has its time of emphasis, and neither ultimately is complete without the pressure the others exert.

Amos 6:1-8: Oracle Against the Slackers

- Which two kingdoms are the subjects of this oracle in verse one? What move does verse 2 make?
- Why are such slackers so horrifying in times like Amos's? (Look back at 2:6-8.)
- If humans swear by God (not Christians, of course), what does God swear by?

Amos 6:9-14: The Coming Destruction

- What does the name of YHWH become in verse ten? Is that spooky or what?
- Note that the destruction of Samaria is not a prediction but a command in verse 11.
- Verse 13—check translations. This could be a place name or a pun or both.

Amos 7:1-9: YHWH Pulls Back the Plagues

- Does God ever change God's mind? Either way you answer, let's talk.
- Why, after six chapters of gloomy stuff, does Amos object here?
- What's a plumb line, and why does it matter?

Amos 7:10-17: You Stinking Little Son of a... Prophet!

- Who snitches on Amos, and to whom does he snitch? Has Amos actually said what Amaziah accuses him of saying?
- What does the priest tell Amos to do?
- What does Amos's disavowal of the prophetic tradition do for his message?
- What is the prophet's/God's response to this call for silence?

Implications

- Prophets, like kings, are genuinely human players in a genuinely divine history.
- Prophets are free to use some very sophisticated poetic/philosophic devices in their announcements of God's *dabar*, and they are also free to be graphic and crude. There is no singular prophetic "style."
- In the Bible, people can and do pray to God and see the fate of the universe change. Prayer actually matters here.

This Sunday school handout and several others are available as .pdf files at <http://hardlylastword.wordpress.com/angels/>