

## What Sort of Shepherd Do You Want?

King Solomon was the smartest king the world has ever known. The bible plainly shows us this. But Solomon had a son named Rehoboam. And if Solomon was the wisest king the world has ever known, then Rehoboam probably was the most stupid king the world has ever known. We see this so very clearly in how he ruled as a king. Shortly after he became king, all leaders of the tribes in the north came to him. And they asked him one simple question: will you treat us as well as your father did? Rehoboam thought about the question for a little while. And his answer was simple and stupid. He told all the northern leaders: ‘if my father was able to tax you and get money from you, then I’m going to tax you twice as much.’

Needless to say, Rehoboam didn’t get his money. And what he got in return was a rebellion. The ten northern tribes of Israel broke away. A man named Jeroboam became their king. (I know, here is where it gets a little confusing. Jeroboam is in the north. Rehoboam is in the south. It’s a little confusing, so listen closely!) Rehoboam was a stupid king. Oh, but he had competition. Jeroboam, in the north, spent his life trying to out-stupid Rehoboam, in the south.

You see, Jeroboam didn’t like all the people in the north going south to the temple in Jerusalem. He thought they might just stay there. And indeed some did. So, he made up his own religion. He had his craftsmen make not just one, but two golden calves. He placed one way up north in Dan. The other he placed in Bethel. Now, what you have to understand, is that the LORD promised him that if he would be faithful to the LORD, then he would establish his kingdom and rule and he would give him power and peace. But, Jeroboam led his people in the north to worship these made up gods, these golden calves. He let anyone who wanted to become a priest in service to these golden calves. Jeroboam managed to out-stupid Rehoboam by doing everything he could to make the LORD angry. Not surprisingly, Jeroboam had a brutal and blunt end to his life.

With all this in mind, we enter God’s word this morning. For, the kings in the north never gave up the *sin of Jeroboam*, this golden-calf worship. And the LORD was always against the kings in the north because of this. And this morning we meet one of these priests. We meet one of these priests who worshipped and led others in worshipping the golden calf in Bethel. His name is Amaziah. The LORD did not choose Amaziah to be a priest and a shepherd over the LORD’s people in the north. Amaziah chose *himself*. And the king in the north let Amaziah be a priest for one reason. The priest told the king what he wanted to hear. Even more than that, he drove out all the prophets who tried to speak the truth. Listen to what Amaziah told his king: *“Amos 7:10 Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: ‘Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. 11 For this is what Amos is saying: ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.’”*

Amaziah told the king what he wanted to hear. And even worse, he drove away all those who were trying to speak the truth. At this point, let me ask you a question: Would you like a shepherd like this? Would you like a pastor who told you what you wanted to hear, whether it was the truth or not? Think about that question for a little while: What sort of shepherd would you like? Would you like a pastor and shepherd who would tell you what you like to hear? And while you’re letting that question simmer in the back of your mind, let’s meet a different sort of prophet and pastor.

In these words we see that Amaziah is angry at the LORD’s prophet, Amos. He says: *“Amos 7:12 Then Amaziah said to Amos, ‘Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. 13 Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.’”*

Amaziah hates Amos and he commands him to leave. And we learn so very much about Amos by what he says in response to Amaziah: *“Amos 7:16 Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac.’ 17 ‘Therefore this is what the LORD says: ‘Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land.’”*

He tells Amaziah: ‘you want me to never say anything bad against you. You want me to stop saying the truth.

Too bad. This is what the LORD says: Your wife will cheat on you. Your children will die and all these ten northern tribes will be conquered and then carted away to Assyria.'

Now, which shepherd do you want? Do you want Amaziah? Or do you want Amos? Do you want the shepherd who tells you what you *want* to hear? Or do you want the shepherd who tells you what you *need* to hear. Think very carefully about the answer to that question.

You would like to think that you would like and would choose a shepherd who would tell you what you need to hear. After all, who wants a 'yes' man? Who wants a hired gun who tells people what their itching ears want to hear. If that's true—if you want an Amos instead of an Amaziah, they why don't you listen when he speaks the truth to you? For your pastor, just like Amos, tells you the truth that you need to hear. He tells you: do not gossip, do not lie, do not watch movies with filthy language and filthy views of God's gift of sex. He tells you: pray more!, be in God's word more! Don't just say you are Christians, but *act* like Christians! You see, we might say that we want an Amos to tell us the truth. But there is a very powerful part of us who preaches like Amaziah. There is that part of us who says: 'go away and preach that message somewhere else. Because I like TV, whether it's good or bad for me, and I *don't* like praying or being in God's word more.'

What sort of shepherd do you want? Do you want a shepherd who hides your hypocrisy? Or do you want a shepherd who shows our hypocrisy? But really, as we look at these words, this really isn't the question we should be asking. If we travel too far down this road we end up trying to out-stupid Jeroboam and Rehoboam together.

What then is the question we need to ask? Amos tells us the truth: *"I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. 15 But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"*

Amos didn't choose to be a shepherd of people. He was doing just fine as a shepherd of cattle. But the LORD chose him and sent him to proclaim the truth. You see the question is not: What sort of shepherd would you choose? The question is: What sort of shepherd did the LORD choose? The LORD chose for you a pastor who is like you. He loves his Savior, Jesus. But inside of him is a hypocrite who speaks like Amaziah, telling God to stop preaching the truth. He chose for you a shepherd who has the privilege of pointing you to the real shepherd. This shepherd has the joy of telling you of Jesus who doesn't just show you your hypocrisy, but also forgives your hypocrisy. I have the privilege of pointing you to a shepherd who leads you into the truth and gives you peace and provides for you day by day. I have the privilege of pointing you to a shepherd who is not afraid to show you the death that your sins lead to. And I have the privilege of pointing you to the shepherd who died to take away death. And now you will live with him forever, whether on this earth now, or forever in heaven.

So then, my brothers and sisters, let us do everything in our lives and in our power to thank our faithful Shepherd, Jesus. For he has forgiven our hypocrisy and buried our fear and sorrow at hearing the truth. Now the truth in the eyes of our Father is that we are his saints. Let us thank him by struggling against the voice of Amaziah inside of us. Let us gladly hear God's word. Let us gladly strive to obey God's word. Let us never make room in our hearts to gossip, lie. Let us never make room in our hearts to watch filthy things and hear evil words. Let us pray alone and together. Let us grow in God's word by ourselves and together. For our Father has chosen Jesus to be our Good Shepherd. Amen.