

SUMMER 9 - Obligations, Duties and Consequences

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[0 : 00] Well friends, every one of us here is a person under obligation.

We have obligations of all sorts, don't we? Obligations as children, as parents, as workers, as citizens, as grandparents, and in a whole host of other areas.

These obligations and duties cover a multitude of things. For us citizens, we are obliged to vote by law in Australia.

And as workers, well we're obliged to turn up to work and to earn what we're paid. As parents, well we have obligations to properly rear and care for those we brought into the world.

As children, there is a duty to respond, to respect and to care for our parents. And each one of these duties or obligations has consequences if they are not performed rightly.

[1 : 07] And some of those consequences, there are a variety of consequences. Some of those consequences are psychological and emotional, such as those wrapped up with family relationships. We all know them. Some are financial, such as when we don't act as proper citizens and refuse to vote.

Or when we disobey speed signs and don't complete our tax return. We will soon find out the financial consequences of such activities. Some consequences are physical, such as when our job requires us to work rigorously and train our bodies.

I think if a cricketer who's to succeed has really got to tear, especially a fast bowler, a tear his body apart in one sense. That's a consequence of the obligation he has in playing cricket.

No matter whether the obligations we have are real or not, obligations and duties carry consequences, don't they? And if you fail in your obligations, there are inevitable consequences. If you live up to and you fulfill your obligations, there are also inevitable consequences. Well, today we're going to look at two men in the book of Amos. And we're going to see how they handle their obligations.

[2 : 19] And we're going to see what consequences follow from their either success on the one hand or failure on the other in fulfilling obligations. And as we observe these two men, I believe there are some lessons that can be learnt about our own obligations before God and how we fulfill them.

So let's turn to the story as it's outlined in Amos chapter 7. And I led Heather a little astray. She should have gone on to verse 14, but we'll survive. We'll look at 14. So Amos chapter 7, all the way through to verse 14, starting at verse 7, I think.

So let's put the story into context. So the section we're going to look at today is in the middle. Do you remember if you're here on Sunday night, it's in the middle of a section of visions that God gives to Amos. We looked at those visions, like I said, on Sunday night, and there are five of them in all.

They start at Amos chapter 7, verse 1, and they finish at Amos chapter 9, perhaps roundabout verses 4 or even through to 6. They are all visions that involve God performing some act or promising some act of judgment.

The first three visions occur in Amos chapter, sorry, the first vision occurs in Amos chapter 7, verses 1 to 3. And it involves a vision of a locust plague.

[3 : 36] And what happens is when that vision is given, well, Amos intercedes on behalf of the people and God, we're told, relents. The second vision, it occurs in chapter 7, verses 4 to 6.

And it's God involved in sending a firestorm. And again, Moses does exactly what he did in vision 1. He intercedes again. And again, God relents.

Now, the third vision is in verses 7 to 9. And it involves a vision of a plumb line. This time, Amos doesn't intercede at all. And there's no relenting by God.

Instead, God promises that there'd be a fierce judgment that will reach out into the religious establishment of the day, but also out into the secular world. And God will strike even the house of Jeroboam.

Now, up until this point in his prophecy, Amos has largely concentrated on the religious and the social sins of the people. He hasn't really, he's had a sort of swipe at it once or twice, but not directly.

[4 : 40] He hasn't really branched into politics proper. But now, this change, this change. You see, Jeroboam the king has not been specifically mentioned in the book up until this point.

But all of that changes now. Jeroboam is actually brought out into the open and he is mentioned.

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

And with that in mind, let me give you a brief overview of the story. Follow it with me in your Bibles.

You'll see it. We'll just skim through it and then we'll come and look at the detail. In verses 10 to 11, we are told that a certain Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, reports an oracle of Amos' to Jeroboam II. And he accuses Amos of conspiracy against the king. And in verses 12 to 13, Amaziah commands Amos to get out of Bethel, to leave this sanctuary and to, you know, not prophesy any more there. In fact, he bans him from prophesying. He orders him go home and he says, when you go home, well, you can earn your living as a prophet back at home. Please don't earn it here. In verses 14 to 16, Amos responds to Amaziah and he maintains, look, I am not a prophet by profession.

[5 : 54] He also maintains he's in Bethel because God had told him to go there. The Lord had commissioned him to prophesy in Bethel. And then in verse 17, Amos speaks the only oracle in his whole book against an individual, against Amaziah, the priest and his family.

It is an oracle of incredible judgment, as I'll explain to you. At the same time, he goes on to deliver an oracle against the people of Israel as a whole. And we're not told what happens as a result of the incidents here.

There's no real reason to assume that Amos stopped prophesying or that he went home to the southern kingdom never to say a word again. I don't think he looked at it as though he was at all want to do what Amaziah told him to do.

So there's the story and overview. Now let's concentrate on the person of Amaziah. Now, first of all, who is he? Well, we're told that he is the priest of Bethel in verse 1.

Now, we know that Bethel was one of the two main religious centers of the northern kingdom. And it was established by the first king of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam I. And Bethel was probably, therefore, the king's sanctuary.

[7 : 06] And in fact, in verse 3, that's stated. It's described in this way. So when you put all of that together, who is Amaziah? Well, he's probably the high priest of the sanctuary.

In other words, there is every chance that we are dealing with a man here who is the highest religious authority in the kingdom. The high priest from Bethel, the main religious establishment of the north.

Now, as high priest, he had definite obligations. You see, we know from priesthood generally in the world of the Old Testament, and in fact, in the Old Testament itself, was the priest represented God. That is, the priest was to speak the word of God to the people. Offer sacrifices as well, but he was to speak as well. And he was to mediate God's forgiveness to the people.

His role was definitely a religious role. Even if the sanctuary was corrupt, as it appears to have been in Bethel, the religious task of Amaziah as a priest was clear.

[8 : 10] Now, let's have a look at what he did. Verse 10. Verse 10 tells us he accuses Amos of conspiracy against the king. Verse 11 tells us that he quotes two utterances of Amos.

First, he claims that Amos had said Jeroboam will die by the sword. Can you see that in verse 11? Amaziah says that Amos had said Jeroboam will die by the sword.

Second, he claims that Amos had said that Israel will surely be exiled. Look at verse 11 again. Israel must go into exile away from the land.

Now, when you look at those two accusations, the first claim is actually not said anywhere in the book. It may be surmised from verse 9.

Look back at verse 9. In verse 9, God said through Amos that I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword. Now, that could be perhaps read as though Jeroboam will be killed with

the sword.

[9 : 09] But we're not sure. The second accusation is something that Amos says all the time throughout the book. That is, he says throughout his prophecies.

However, what is important is not so much what Amaziah says, but what he doesn't say. For example, Amaziah does not state that these oracles were the word of the Lord, but rather he calls them the words of Amos.

By the way, friends, there's a tendency, I think, these days that we say, well, the Bible says, and that's a good thing to be saying, or we say Paul says, but the language of God says is often dropped out of our preaching.

But these are the words of God. They're not the words of Amos. These are the words of God, and that's what Amaziah doesn't admit to. And second, he does not give reasons for the threats.

And he does not say that the judgment is coming because of the sins of the people and religious leaders. In other words, you see, what you've got here is a religious leader.

[10 : 12] And as a religious leader, Amaziah is not concerned with the religious basis of the prophecies of Amaziah, of Amos. What's more, he makes no mention of the threats that Amos makes against the high places and the sanctuaries.

Can you see what's going on? It's really a very interesting thing that Amaziah is doing. Amaziah deftly omits all that would be of direct concern to himself and his obligations.

It is all about state, and it is nothing about religion. And yet Amos' prophecies have been about religion and its practice from beginning to end.

Can you see what's going on? He enters into the political realm. He concentrates on matters of consequence to the king and the people. He presents himself as one who has, well, basically no vested interest.

There's nothing being said against him. It's just against the king. Thereby, he reveals his own personal motives from the king. Sorry, he conceals them. But he does more than this. We don't know whether Amaziah was acting on behalf of the king or not.

[11 : 17] But in verse 13, he tells Amos to leave Israel, to go home, 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.

Go away. Hide down there in the south. Don't speak to me. Don't do what God's told you to do. Don't come here. Go away. Amaziah's actions are clearly in breach of his obligations.

He is no longer representing God. He's not representing the best interests of the people because the best interests of the people are to hear the word of God from God's appointed prophets. I've had something like this happen in my own life, actually.

Someone told me at one point in my career as a student worker that I was a very good student worker, but I was disturbing the peace and I should go elsewhere.

By fellow clergy, basically. Because there'd been a relationship disturbance and they thought that it would sort things out if I went elsewhere.

[12 : 33] And they told me this. I think that's what's been happening. You know, Amos is just stirring up trouble. So the best way to solve the problem is to tell him, go do it somewhere else. But of course, God has sent him to roar as a lion, as it were.

God's roaring as a lion and he's the mouthpiece of God and he's to do it in the north. Anyway, let's move on and see what God does. Look at verses 16 and 17. In these verses, Amos promises.

Sorry, is it verse 16 and 17? I've just lost my place. No, it's yes, it is. Verses 16 and 17. Amos promises a punishment upon Amaziah and there are five things he promises.

There's first a fivefold curse uttered by Amos in the name of Yahweh. Let me go through it first. His wife will become a prostitute. In other words, what's going to happen here is she will be shamed and disgraced into applying the profession of a prostitute in order to make a living.

And she will do it. Can you see what the text says? Publicly or in the city. Now there's an awfully bitter irony here. And that is that the law specifically prohibits priests from marrying prostitutes.

[13 : 46] That's the first thing. Second, Amos declares that his sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Third, in other words, his line is going to end.

Third, Amos announces that his land will be divided up with a measuring line. In other words, not only will his heirs be exterminated, but his heritage in the land will be obliterated.

A terrible thing for a Jew. Fourth, Amos promises that Amaziah will die in a pagan land. Now the word literally means what the NRSV says here.

That is, it means an unclean land. And it refers to foreign soil where the Lord is not present. Now for a priest, this would be an extremely severe and belittling experience.

You see, 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.

[14:51] The last thing a priest set aside to God would want. In other words, this man who sought to hinder Amos from fulfilling his call from God will be deprived of his calling himself.

And the fifth punishment is directed at the nation. They will surely go into exile from its land. Now I don't know about you, but when you get the details of that, and you get the details of that judgment, it seems pretty tough to me.

However, I think it's tough for a reason. You see, God values his people. He values the life of his people. And he has sent his prophet Amos to speak his word of judgment and of 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 Amos a very high calling. And Amos has not lived up to his obligations.

And his failure has very serious consequences and repercussions. And so Amos's punishment will be tough because he has done a very disastrous thing to the people of God.

[16:05] God's people. And the principle is clear. It is spelled out time and time again in the Bible. You can hear it lots of times in the New Testament. In Matthew 18, you hear it. In 1 Corinthians 3, you hear it.

In James 3 and many other times in the Old Testament as well. Those who lead the people of God astray will be judged severely. And those who are meant to be shepherds of God's people but don't fulfill their obligations will incur an even stricter judgment.

Now, with that in mind, we need to think in terms of ourselves. Now, the first thing that we can draw out from this passage for ourselves really is, well, directed towards me, isn't it?

And toward everyone else who's in a position of oversight of the Church of Christ. It is directed to those of you who might be training for positions of oversight. It's directed towards the leaders of our children's and youth ministry.

Our youth leaders, our children's leaders as they have the kids club this week. It's directed towards Bible study leaders, if that is you. It's directed toward the pastors of God's people wherever they are found around the world.

[17:17] And 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.

Such people are representatives among His people. And He expects them to be good shepherds as He is the ultimate good shepherd. And so Jesus and the New Testament authors speak very tough words about people 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 a millstone hung around their necks and then being thrown into the deepest part of the sea.

Now, I once sort of tried to work out what this would look like. And I worked out, you know, the sort of specific density and so on of basalt, which would have been there in the millstone. I tried to work out how much concrete would you need.

I worked out to have one of those big, you know, 10 foot high water tanks. You know, the really big ones. And you have to stand someone in that, fill it with concrete, load it on a boat with a crane, cart it out, find the very deepest part of the ocean you could find and throw it in.

[18:25] Now, I can only think of one punishment worse than that. And that's hell itself, isn't it, you see? And I think that's what Jesus is saying. That's how serious God treats people leading His people astray.

James says teachers will incur a stricter judgment. But this is not the only word to those in authority. There's also, sorry, it's not only to us in authority.

There's also a word here for all of us who hear the word of God. You see, when Amaziah heard the word of God from the lips of Amos, he did not take it to heart.

He did not see its relevance for him. He sought to shirk its responsibility. He sought to ignore its cutting edge. Friends, we who hear the word of God must realize that we will be a call to account for our response to it.

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

[19 : 30] And friends, this is a very firm principle from the book of Amos and from elsewhere in Scripture. Privilege demands responsibility. Let me stress, for those of you who are here and members of Holy Trinity, you see, friends, God has given us a rich heritage in our church of Bible teaching.

Very rich. We are blessed in many ways that many surrounding churches are not. We have had a continuous stream of biblical exposition from our pulpits.

And that means that not only are we very fortunate people, but we are people at great risk. You see, we have been very privileged by God.

And the danger is that we let the truths from God just wash over us. And we find them interesting intellectually, but we hold them at arm's length.

Friends, we must be diligent. For God will hold us to account for what we do with the riches he's bestowed on us. As Jesus himself says in Luke 12, verse 48, For from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.

[20 : 41] And from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. I had a crushing moment when I was studying theology at college. We heard a ripper of a sermon.

In chapel. It really was very convicting. And a number of fellow students and I walked back to where we used to study in the library. And one of our fellow students said, We really need to stop and pray about that.

And we didn't. And we looked at each other and we sort of looked a bit nonplussed. And friends, we should have turned to prayer immediately. Because it was a word from God for us.

And we should have prayed with each other and asked God to help us implement it with each other. We've been given much. And from those who have been given much, much will be demanded.

That puts a great risk on me as someone who spends life in the scriptures. But it puts a great responsibility on you as well. For you hear from the scriptures all the time.

[21 : 44] But let's move on now. Away from Amaziah. Back to Amos. You see, there's not much personal information about Amos in his book. In fact, there are only two places where we get any sort of biographical information about this man.

One place is in the very first two verses of the book. And the other is in verses 14 and 15 here. Look at them with me. Amos says, I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son.

But I'm a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees. And the Lord took me from following the flock. And the Lord said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel. Now, let me tell you, Basically, the point being made by Amos is, I am not a professional prophet.

I wasn't born of prophetic stock. I don't make a living by prophecy. You know, I just dress sycamore fig trees and do a bit of sheep and cattle breeding and herding and so on.

I'm a prophet, not because I was born that way. I'm a prophet because God selected me to be a prophet and commanded me to prophesy. That's what I'm doing here. I could be doing lots of other things in many ways.

[22 : 49] But no, no, God, I'm here because God directed me here. In other words, he's saying, I am under a higher obligation than you, Amos. I am under the authority of God himself.

And if God tells me to preach and you, Amos, command me to stop, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to keep preaching. I'm a man under obligation.

I've been commanded by God to prophesy and so prophesy I must. So what does Amos do? Well, he's been commanded to preach a very tough message of judgment.

And Amaziah represents where the nation is as a whole. He's complacent. He's comfortable. He's disobedient to God. He's interested in preserving his own position and prestige. He's not interested in fulfilling his obligations to God.

He commands God's prophet to stop preaching the very thing he shouldn't be doing. And since Amaziah is meant to be ahead of the religious life of the nation, he's culpable. And he'll suffer the punishment first.

[23 : 53] And so I must prophesize as God has told him to. And he urges Amaziah to hear the word of the Lord. And then he speaks the word of God to Amaziah. And he promises the tough judgment of God.

There's another occasion where this happens in the Old Testament. Do you remember when Samuel is first called by God in 1 Samuel chapter 3? And he's given this message about what will happen to the house of Eli.

And he comes out and Eli says to him, You know, what happened in there? And he tells him. But he holds back on what God had said about his household. And Eli says to him, You tell me.

What was it that God told you? And he does the job of a prophet. He tells this priest of God, Eli, what God had said.

And it's a word of judgment about his family and about his descendants. So that's what's happening here. Amos is just, he's a prophet appointed by God. He's going to do the job of a prophet. The job of a prophet is to tell the words of God to God's people, no matter what cost.

[24 : 57] Now, let me just help us think about what this means for us. The first point of contact for us is that we are like Amos and Amaziah. In a number of ways.

We too have obligations before God, don't we? Now, the one I want to, there's lots of them I could concentrate on tonight. But I want to concentrate on one found in 1 Peter 2. So in your Bibles, could you turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 2?

Like I said, we could go lots of places, but I think this one sort of matches with the prophecy itself that we've looked at in Amos. So 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 9 to 12.

And let me read them to you. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from desires of the flesh that wage war against them.

That's the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge. Friends, these verses talk about the new people of God.

[26 : 24] Now, they could be the Jewish people of God who've become Christians. I suspect they mean all the people, new people of God, all Christians. And if that's so, these verses talk about us.

These verses are directed to us. The language comes originally from Exodus 19. And it says that we are God's chosen people.

Royal priesthood, holy nation, people belonging to God. He then goes on to say what we are called to do and to be. He says we are called to declare the praises or the mighty acts of him who's called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

You see, we are God's priests in God's world. Do you know what the task of a priest is? One of our roles is to declare to the world the great things that God has done in Jesus Christ, his mighty acts. And then, verses 11 to 12, Peter goes on to tell us what our other priestly duty is. You see, priests aren't only to declare the word of God, but they are also to live righteous lives. And look at what Peter says here.

[27 : 34] He says, live consecrated lives, abstain from sinful desires, live good lives among those who don't know God, amongst the pagans or the Gentiles. Now, what I want you to notice is that both of these activities, that is both declaration and godly living, have an evangelistic focus.

Can you see that? Both have in mind that others might come to recognize 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. And we do this when we mix with people in our family, in our work, in our daily activities.

And we do this when we function as a church. These are the obligations we have before God.

However, I think that there is more that needs to be said than simply laying an obligation on you. It would be very easy to do that tonight.

Say, you know, we're obliged. Get on with it. You see, when I read about New Testament Christians talking about this topic, they make a couple of things very clear. First, they are clear that they are under obligation to make Christ known.

[28 : 53] But do you know what? They then go on and say something additional, which I think changes everything. They go on to say that even if they weren't under obligation, they would still make Christ known. Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 9 when he talks about his own preaching.

He says, you know, he makes clear he's under obligation. But then he says, but I want to do it without cost because, you know, the gospel's free. I want to offer it free.

And that's the reward I'll have that I offer it for nothing. The apostles make it clear in Acts 4 and 5 when they tell people, look, we cannot help but speak of what we've seen and heard. In other words, the authorities say to them the very thing that Amaziah says.

They say, stop telling people about Jesus. And they say, well, you know, who would you obey? God or you? We cannot help speaking about him, about what we have seen and heard.

Can you see what I'm saying? I'm saying that God has called us to be his people just as he's called Amos to be his prophet. He's called us to proclaim his word to his people both in word and deed and to the world in word and deed.

[29 : 58] And that message is both a message of comfort and a message of judgment, just as it was in Amos's hands or on his lips. It announces salvation. It announces a coming day of the Lord when God will come in fierce judgment.

God calls us to be obedient to our calling before him. He calls us to be uncompromising in our presentation of the message of the gospel. Like Amos, we are to be faithful to the word of God, speak the message, warn our world.

And as we do, we are to do it from willing hearts, knowing the greatness of the news that we have to bring. We are not responsible for how people react to it, just as Amos was not.

But we are responsible for doing it. We've been called for this. Friends, I wonder if I could sort of end tonight by telling you of an incident that happened to me today. And normally, you'll know that we, many of you will know that we have a service at 2pm.

Now, we cancelled it today. Because of Australia Day, we sort of had a little vote in our congregation last week at Wednesday at 2. And anyway, the congregation said that they would not be there, so I didn't come either.

[31 : 10] But I thought I might just wait in case some people who weren't here last week turn up. I thought I'd be around just in case. Anyway, at about 2pm, two people did turn up. One was a regular member.

Another was a young guy that I estimate was in his 30s. And he was asked if I was the person in charge. I said, well, yes, I am.

And he said, could we have a chat? I said, yes, I'd love to. He told me that he wanted to be confirmed. I asked him why. And he told me that he was from an unchurched family, but he had realised that something was missing in his life.

And so he thought that confirmation might help him work out what that was. I don't even know if he'd been baptised. That's not what he was after, though. So, friends, let me tell you, this young man lives in our suburb.

And to find out about us, he had to drive into our driveway to that sign that sits up there. He had to stare at the signs outside the building.

[32 : 15] He had to work out when the services were. And then he had to be bold enough to come in. And, friends, as a church, I think we've become too reliant on that process.

We cannot simply wait for people to look us up. No, we must go to them. And we must do what God called us to do as his people. We must declare the mighty works of him who brought us out of darkness and into his marvellous light.

And find every mechanism we can to do it. We must live good lives among the pagans so that they may glorify God on the day he visits. Friends, we are under obligation as God's people.

But let's not do it because we're under obligation. Let's get out there and tell people about Jesus because we cannot help but speak of what we've seen and heard. Friends, will you pray daily for us in this church?

Will you pray that we reach out to others with the gospel? Will you pray for your friends and neighbours? And I know many of you do this rigorously already and take opportunities. Will you pray for this young man and for the many others like him who realise something is missing in life.

[33 : 26] But they don't have the boldness to enter a church or to knock on the church door. Or to sort of hold up the clergy on a Wednesday afternoon. And quiz them on an Australia Day afternoon.

Friends, let's pray. That as a church we might declare what we have seen and heard. So that others might have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we so want others to share that, don't we? So let's pray. Father God, we thank you for the fellowship that you have brought us into.

Fellowship with you. Fellowship with your Son. And fellowship with each other. Father, we thank you for the task you have given us in your world.

To make known your word. So that when your Son comes. He might meet his bride. And glory in it. In her.

[34 : 33] And Father, we pray. That as a church you would continue to make us outward looking. We thank you for the many who have come to know Jesus here. And please help us to excel even more in that.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.