

THE 'MAN OF GOD WHO CAME FROM JUDAH' (2 KINGS 23:17-18):

IN SEARCH OF THE FATE OF AMOS?

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Abstract

The prophetic book of Amos is widely studied yet one question remains unanswered: What happened to the prophet? This article attempts to answer this question. This article notes the brevity of the ministry of Amos as an indicator to a bad ending. By analyzing the narratives in 1 Kings 13 and 2 Kings 23, this article highlights similarities between Amos and the unnamed man of God such as place of origin, name of reigning king, centrality of Bethel and the lion. It is argued that on the balance of probabilities, Amos was a martyr. Through this analysis, this article argues that from Amos, Christians can learn from word and deed. Such an end is instructive for contemporary Christians faced with the options of being good neighbours or faithful believers. Overall, this article contends that while Christians must not actively seek persecution, they cannot compromise their faith to avoid persecution.

Key Words: Amos, Justice, Fairness, Persecution, Theology, Faith, Martyrdom

Introduction

The prophet Amos is a divisive figure, his book is largely ignored in church circles while attracting great attention in academic circles. The book of Amos has provided Old Testament scholars and students with the necessary excuse to dabble in very sensitive national issues from political, economic, social and religious spheres. These famous themes have made Amos one of the most studied prophets, yet not much attention has been paid to his fate. The prophet tried to force the elites practicing “hypocritical religiosity and injustice ... to widen their horizons and open their eyes, on the one hand, to the plight of the poor in their land, and at the same time to the vulnerability of Israel” (Sawyer 1987:112) during that time. The prophecies of Amos demanded a transformation of the Israelite state. For challenging the status quo, this article asks the question: What became of the prophet? Not only is his fate interesting in its own right; his fate may also present us with more lessons, possibly with the same effect of the written words of his book. Did Amos “participate in the witness of the body?” (Fowl 2011:44).

Some scholars have already suggested that Amos was executed for his scathing attack on the structural system of his time – a system engaged in mass production of poverty (Sawyer 1987:112, Kaufmann 1972:276), and the massive creation of wealth without regard to ethics (Rendtorff 1986:220). However, the death of Amos has never really been a central issue among scholars. The book itself says nothing about the fate of the man whose

vision clearly shows that humanity has not gotten any wiser, because his diagnosis of the central human problem remains as valid today as it was back then. Werner Schmidt (1990:196) writes that Amos came from Judah and he was sent back to Judah (cf. Am.7:12).¹ This article agrees with Julius Wellhausen and James L Crenshaw that there are some fundamental points of contact between the prophet Amos and the unnamed man of God (1 Kgs 13) (Crenshaw 1971:41). I therefore argue that Amos is a martyr, epitomizing the fact that prophets “played an active part in the political and spiritual life of the people” (Kaufmann 1972:277).

That Amos is a martyr should not be understood to mean Christians must search for persecution and martyrdom. Christians are not supposed to be suicidal! However, Christians must never tone down their faith to avoid persecution! The fate of Amos is a subject for distressing situations as the political, economic, and social meltdown in Zimbabwe and other nations across the universe. Can the Church’s mission be guided by a critical study and reflection on the fate of the prophet Amos?

‘Amos has conspired against you ... Jeroboam’ (Amos 7:10)

The confrontation between Amaziah and Amos is used when discussing the identity and profession of Amos and in dating his ministry. However, in this article, I am interested in the implications of the confrontation on the fate of the prophet. Unlike Hosea and Isaiah, whose ministries went on for at least two decades that of Amos apparently lasted a “short time, perhaps a few months” (Schmidt 1990:196). Why was his ministry so short when other prophets went on for decades? Even though the time of Amos was characterized by “relative peace and prosperity” (Sawyer 1987:112, Schmidt 1990:196), the prophet attacked the leaders for abusing that peace and prosperity to exploit fellow Israelites and justifying the oppression as divinely ordained. By attacking the king, the prophet challenged the semblance of unity and health of the community symbolized by the king (Gnuse 2009:191). Having touched on these critical issues, the prophet simply disappears on the radar much in the same way that he appeared on it – abruptly!

As noted in the introduction, Schmidt (1990:176) basing on Amos 7:12 concluded that the editing of the book of Amos “took place in the southern kingdom, from which Amos had come and to which he was sent back.” That most redactions of the book were carried out in Judah after the destruction of Israel does not necessarily mean that Amos himself returned to Judah. It is plausible that despite the fact that his ministry was short, Amos may have gained followers for challenging the elites. This is one of the factors behind the confrontation between Amos and Amaziah. People are coming to Bethel and are listening to Amos thereby creating a fertile environment for popular uprisings. To protect his own bread Amaziah advises Amos to “flee and return to Judah” (Am.7:12), this in itself is not evident enough to conclude that Amos was allowed to return to Judah. If anything, the confrontation between Amaziah and Amos clearly shows the seriousness of the threat posed by the prophet to the Israelite elites including the king, Jeroboam.

The speech of Amaziah appears as a charge sheet, articulating the offences committed by the prophet. In verse 10(b), the charge is outlined by Amaziah “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words.” Amos is accused of conspiracy to topple the monarchy because his revolutionary words had a “generally subversive effect” (Fosbroke and Lovett 1956:834). His vision could only be

¹ Biblical references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRS).

realized by overturning the status quo, that is dethroning the king. Conspiracy is an offense punishable by death in many societies the world over, both ancient and contemporary. There is no reason to suspect that in ancient Israel, it was treated any differently. The second accusation is that his words have the potential or are already causing widespread dependency among the citizens. This has the potential of instigating a revolution against the sitting authorities, hence the declaration “the land is not able to bear all his words.” The words that are considered so dangerous are words of justice! “Whatever the verbal shape, it [justice] connotes a complex of meanings like equal, fair, right, good, which however modulated, constitute a focus of value that is understood to be essential to social well-being” (Mays 1987:145). In short, justice in Amos is a theological concept that manifests itself in society. Finally, it is considered a heinous offence to proclaim that “Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land” (Am.7:11). The confrontation shows that Amos was prophesying at Bethel, the royal sanctuary, possibly Jerusalem’s rival. Bethel therefore held a lot of significance in the religion of Israel hence in verse 13, Amaziah ordered the prophet “but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.” The concept of royal sanctuary cannot be entirely surprising since “kings could function as priests, even though they usually did not belong to the priestly guild” (Gnuse 2009:191). Alternatively, Rieger (2007:27) characterizes it by noting that the royal sanctuary “legitimized the emperor and his empire” as well as “actively constructing the empire.” Understood this way, the words of Amos verge on treason.

Amaziah is convinced that Amos’ words are treasonous as he prophesies against not only a royal sanctuary, but also the person of the king. The words of Amaziah, especially when he appears to be sympathizing with Amos betray what Amaziah knew. If Amos continued with his ministry or even if he simply continued to live in Israel, he would be killed for attempting to lead or instigate an uprising. This makes it plausible to suspect that Amos was murdered for his prophecies, since:

The empire does not like the kinds of mirrors that reflect the realities of repression. The only mirrors that are readily available in empire are the two-way mirrors of its panopticons (those in power can see out, those without power cannot see in) and the gold-anodized exteriors of its skyscrapers, both of which deflect the view from that which hurts and from that which inflicts pain (Rieger 2007:10).

This prophetic resistance is so powerful that the powers that be will resort to open persecution of its messengers. Clearly therefore, “Amos was God’s prophet to prosperous Israel; [Israel which was] steeped in religiosity, immorality and complacency” (Jensen 1981:402-4). These are manifestations of unbalanced power relations, whose beneficiaries throughout history have killed to protect such privileges. The words of the prophet are revolutionary and powerful and offer insights into prophetic oppositional theology (Albertz 1994:368-70). Since cultic centers were teeming with people then, the prophet was offering a daily service of hard-hitting theological reflections. Instead of two or three pastoral letters throughout the year, frequency was critical for the prophet Amos!

‘What is yonder Monument that I see?’ 2 Kings 23:17

According to the narrative in 2 Kings 23, Josiah attempted to assert monotheism and a centralized shrine by removing “all the heterodox cultic paraphernalia and structures in Jerusalem and its vicinity (vv. 4, 6-7, 10-12) ... the idolatrous priests (vv. 5, 8-9)... local sanctuaries and all things associated with them (vv. 8, 13-15)” (Keck 1999:285). After

cleansing the cult in Judah, Josiah took his reform movement into the territory of the former Northern Kingdom. After destroying the altar and cultic center at Bethel, he asked the question: "What is yonder monument that I see?" The people who lived around Bethel responded, (v. 17); "It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and predicted these things which you have done against the altar at Bethel." What is clear from this text is that in years gone by, a man of God had appeared at Bethel, he came from Judah, prophesied the destruction of the cult at Bethel (a prediction Josiah had just fulfilled), and he died and was buried in Bethel. In 1 Kings 13 we have the narrative of the man of God who came from Judah, prophesied the destruction of Bethel and the end of Jeroboam's dynasty. This man of God was eventually killed after falling for the false pretenses of a local prophet. A closer analysis of the legacy of the man of God shows that he had spoken harshly against the royal sanctuary of Bethel. I am aware of the text in 2 Chronicles 9:29, which lists "among the sources of the Chronicler 'the visions of the seer Iddo concerning Jeroboam son of Nebat', the same seer is called Jadon by Josephus" (Curtis and Madsen 1965:360). This text is post-exilic in origin, hence possibly an attempt at reworking theology and history in order to strengthen the post-exilic desire for an uninterrupted Davidic divine reign – something already largely agreed to be the scheme in Chronicles. This story will therefore not play a significant part in this article. While "the man of God from Judah is unnamed, Wellhausen rightly saw the influence of the Amos narrative upon the story" leading scholars to argue that "1 Kings 12:32-13:32 is a secondary insertion not to be ascribed to the Deuteronomistic compiler" (Crenshaw 1971:41, Gray 1970:319).

There are several reasons why scholars doubt the authenticity of 1 Kings 13, as Cogan and Tadmor (1988:299) observe, "in its present rendition, that prophecy can only be considered a *vaticinium ex eventu*." A similar position is advanced by John Gray (1970:326,332) who argues:

The naming of the reforming king Josiah is either a *vaticinium post eventum*, or, more probably, a later gloss... The reference to Samaria as a province obviously dates from at least after 734 [BCE] ... more probably the situation after 722 [destruction of Israel by Assyria] and specifically in Josiah's reformation when local shrines were suppressed.

Clearly, this prophecy is an editorial addition, possibly from the time of Josiah or later by Judeans who were participating in the continuing pan-Israelite ideology centered on the house of David. In that case, "the prophecy serves as the ideological basis for Judah's triumph over the rival northern kingdom" (Cogan and Tadmor 1988:299-300). However, a closer reading of the text shows that there "is a kernel of historical fact in the story" (Crenshaw 1971:41), which may have been misplaced or ideologized. Further, if one removes the prophecy of Josiah, one message stands out from this text (1 Kgs 13:2-3) "And the man cried against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, 'O altar, altar ...² This is the sign that the LORD has spoken: Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out.'" While the reason for the oracle against Bethel is not clear in this narrative, what is clear is that the man of God sees total destruction as the obvious climax of life in Bethel.

Having proclaimed the destruction of Bethel, the authorities wanted to kill the prophet and he is subsequently killed through the deceit of another prophet. In 1 Kings 13:24 we are

² The missing text in my quotation, which is the prophecy of Josiah appears not to disturb the critical message against Bethel. The prophecy says: "thus says the LORD: 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and he shall sacrifice upon you the priests of the high places who burn incense upon you, and men's bones shall be burned upon you.'" And he gave a sign the same day, saying..."

told that “as he went away a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his body was thrown in the road, and the ass stood beside it; the lion also stood beside the body.” Several scholars have understood this incident differently; Keck (1999:108) argues the lion killed the man for his disobedience to the word of God not to eat or drink in Bethel. Walsh and Begg (1990:169) contend that “the man of God moves tragically from obedience through unwitting disobedience to death and alien burial.” Montgomery (1967:261) argues that “the story has its moral in the theme of the disobedient prophet.” The manner in which the man of God ‘is killed’ makes it all the more suspicious hence the assumption that the lion could be a cover-up.

Amos and the Unnamed Man of God: Points of Comparison

There are several points of convergence between Amos and the unnamed man of God in 1 Kings 13. First and foremost, both Amos and the man of God can be seen as prophets. The title ‘man of God’ was used to refer to prophets in Israel (1 Sam 2:27; 9:6; 1 Kgs 20:28), especially when one considers the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 17:24; 2 Kgs 1:10, 12). The title man of God therefore is a title that was used to refer to prophets. On the one hand, the ‘man of God’ came from Judah (1 Kgs 13:1) (Crenshaw 1971:41-2) making him a cross-border prophet. That the man of God came from Judah implies “that the Lord was not at Bethel. Rather, the word of the Lord was brought by someone from Judah” (Keck 1999:106). On the other hand, Amos came from Tekoa, a small village in Judah (Am 1:1). As if to confirm the absence of the Lord in Israel Amos declares: “The Lord took me from following the flock, and said to me, ‘Go! Prophecy to my people Israel’” (Am 7:13). Amos was the earliest among the classical prophets and was a prophet without borders, as he came from Judah. This distinction makes Amos a candidate among those who could be remembered easily by his land of origin hence the man of God, who came from Judah, is a title that perfectly describes Amos.

The second point is that the man of God prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam. Studies on the book of Amos confirm that he prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam as well. The difficult question is: since there are two kings named Jeroboam, which one is meant in each case? Alternatively, is it the same Jeroboam? Amos is associated with the reign of Jeroboam, the descendant of Jehu who was king of Israel around 786 to 742 BCE. This Jeroboam is popularly called Jeroboam II. While Chronicles identify Jeroboam, the son of Nebat as the king during the time of the man of God, that identification is late hence suspicious. This is especially so, since the books of Kings do not identify this Jeroboam and because the narrative is clearly an insertion in 1 Kings 13.

The third point is that the man of God ministered especially at Bethel, the royal sanctuary of Israel. Similarly, Amos’ prophecies are mostly associated with Bethel suggesting the prophet was resident or ministered mainly at Bethel. Both Amos and the man of God have no kind words for Bethel. While the man of God proclaims destruction, Amos sends out a chilling invitation to the Israelites:

Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days; offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel! says the Lord GOD (Am 4:4-5).

A centre generally associated with holiness and righteousness is now understood as a center where all sins are permitted. Going to this center is another addition to the sins of the people. The failure to reconcile religious to other spheres of human life is the basis for the

scathing attack on the cult; Yahweh had been recruited to serve the interests of the elites. For that reason, Amos pronounces judgment “that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground” (Am 3:14 cf. 1 Kgs 13:3). There is no strong reason for doubting that this prophecy against Bethel fits neatly into the concerns of the eighth century prophet. The cult had been sucked into the conspicuous consumption economy, which saw the rich getting richer while the poor became poorer. And typical of advanced agrarian societies, the wealth accumulated at the top, leaving the peasant workers trying to fend off debt – or worse, becoming landless and destitute (Talbot 2008:103). As James Sanders (2007:146) puts it “Amos argued that Israel was treating the poor in its land the way Israel had been treated by Pharaoh when they were slaves in Egypt (Am 2:6-10).” This conspiracy, which threatened the credibility of Yahweh among the victims of man-made structures of sin – structures which were ruthless in their pursuit of profit – warranted a new beginning hence the prophet sees destruction as the only way of correcting the wickedness of Israel. Since Bethel was the royal sanctuary, its mention may also have been representative of all Israel.

Finally, the man of God met with resistance and was eventually killed by a lion after disobeying God’s command not to eat or drink in Israel (1 Kgs 13:4, 21, 24). The lion is a central figure in the book of Amos (Am 1:2; 3:4, 8, 12; 5:19), is it not ironic? On the basis of these points, it is possible that there is more to the similarities than merely the influence of Amos, to having the narrative being Amos’ misplaced narrative.

Was the Narrative Deliberately misplaced to serve a Theological and Political Interest?

I noted above the similarities between the unnamed prophet and Amos, and the possibility that these two could actually have been one. Assuming this is the case: Why was the narrative misplaced in the books of Kings and Chronicles? Was the misplacement deliberate? What purpose would it serve to misplace the narrative? The challenge to this story lies in the fact that Amos ministered around 760 BCE, while the narrative of the man of God is placed during the reign of Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 13; 2 Chr 9:29), the man who allegedly led the breakaway from the united kingdom of David and Solomon. Can this anomaly be explained away?

To begin with, there is nothing in the text to tie this narrative to Jeroboam I in a way that would clearly exclude the possibility of Jeroboam II; for instance, the king is simply referred to as Jeroboam in the Kings’ narrative (1 Kgs 13:1). It is possible therefore that the compilers may have mistakenly put the narrative together with others from Jeroboam I, when the narrative itself actually belonged to the time of Jeroboam II. This is not far-fetched for ‘the pan-Israelite movement’ beginning in the time of Hezekiah (Finkelstein and Silberman, 2006:259-285) – a time not too distant from the time of Amos. The Kings’ narrative does not clearly identify the king because in the history of Israel, there are two kings by the name of Jeroboam, both of them towering figures in the history of the north. The only claim to certainty is given by the suspicious text in Chronicles, which appears to suggest the existence of some written records (2 Chr 9:29) “... are they not written in the history of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the *visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat?*” While Nathan and Ahijah are known in the books of Kings, Iddo is not known from the books of Kings. Josephus associates this Iddo with the unnamed prophet of 1 Kings 13 (Curtis and Madsen 1965:360), while Japhet Sara (1993:645) argues that “rather than reflecting on independent tradition, Josephus is simply applying information from Chronicles to 1 Kings 13.” Since

Chronicles is very late in origin, Jeroboam II, the king who presided over Israel's golden age maybe the one referred to.

Alternatively, the narrative was deliberately misplaced by compilers and editors to serve a particular purpose. Since this narrative is now embellished with the prophecy on the birth and reforms of Josiah, it clearly betrays the fact that the editors were connected to the house of David, during the reign of Josiah or immediately afterwards. Placing this narrative at the beginnings of the Bethel cult under Jeroboam I would assist in building the case for a single nation of Israel under the house of David, a project which would have begun with Hezekiah immediately after the destruction of Israel (Finkelstein and Silberman 2006:269-279). In order for Bethel to cease to be a rival to Jerusalem, it had to be condemned from the beginning hence the deliberate misplacement of the narrative of Amos to an earlier period is not without its reasons. It was meant to create the impression that the Lord was never at Bethel, but was always in Judah (Keck 1999:106) making the prophecy the ideological basis for Judah's claim to dominance over the northern kingdom (Cogan and Tadmor 1988:299-300). Therefore the politics of Judah and the house of David are behind the appearance of this narrative where it appears now. It clearly betrays the theological and political interests behind its placement in the larger narrative on Israel and Judah. The man whose prophecies are possibly among the best synopses of the human problem in our contemporary societies was possibly executed. He paid the ultimate price for daring to liberate Yahweh from the clutches of crooks and criminals, for not compromising on his faith in a just and fair God.

Lessons from the Martyrdom of Amos

Frequently, Zimbabwean Christians have compromised their faith for the sake of good neighbourliness. This has not been helped by the existence of a divided Church (Vengeyi 2010:159-178, Machingura 2010:331-354). The situation in Zimbabwe is so complicated that Bishop Julius Makoni of the Anglican Diocese of Manicaland (2011:1) wrote:

Every Sunday we yearn for fellowship, edification and spiritual growth, but all we hear are cries for help from congregations who have been forced out of their churches, churchwardens and priests who have been arrested by police.

But even then, such cries have not always received assistance from fellow Christians. The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) commands a lot of respect because of their pastoral letters. In 2007, the ZCBC (2007:4) proclaimed:

The '*structures of sin*' are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. And thus they grow stronger, spread and become the source of other sins, and so influence people's behaviour'... in order to understand the reality that confronts us, we must '*give a name to the evils which afflict us*'.

Many Christians look aside from the calls made by the ZCBC because others have preached that Christianity has nothing to do with the rulers of this world. 'The rulers of this world will kill you', I hear from many Christians! Can the fate of Amos be of any help to Christians in Zimbabwe and other societies facing similar challenges?

Assuming that Amos is the unnamed man of God who died a martyr, what lesson can this give to contemporary Christians, most of whom hardly read the book anyway? Throughout Christian history some people have realized that Christianity was following the wrong path and sought to reform it, leading to their persecution. Such individuals fought against a deliberate "toning down of Christian faith." The absence of persecution of

Christianity in an era where all the ingredients have been put in place, through the multiple failures Zimbabwe has experienced since black Thursday of 1997 is surprising. As Gunda (2006:28-32) argues there cannot be persecution of a Church that treats injustice as merely this worldly and not theologically indefensible. This observation begs the question: Is the absence of persecution a sign of the righteousness of the elites who control Zimbabwe or is it because religious leaders are part of the elites? Could it be that, Christians have lost the essence of being followers of Christ? Discovering the essence of Christianity "amounts to nothing less than a revolution" (Rieger 2007:51), and can best be summed up in the proclamation by Jesus that "many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Mk.10:31). There appears to be historical and theological connection between Jesus and Amos, in which God is understood as interested in justice, justice understood as having a legal and moral dimension. While Amos is renowned for being 'the prophet of justice', this clearly is central to Jesus who also "opposed the exploitative political economy of Roman Palestine while advocating economic values based on general reciprocity and redistribution, especially for the poor" (Talbot 2008:104). "Additionally, Jesus' call for justice was more characteristic of Amos than Moses" (Talbot 2008:105) or Isaiah. An analysis of Amos and Jesus shows that justice is a theological concept.

Assuming that Amos was executed for proclaiming the truth of his faith in Yahweh, it shows "how radical the prophets and Jesus were in their critiques of the cultures and governing elite of their times" (Sanders 2007:151). Capital punishment is the ultimate price revolutionaries have had to pay in the history of mankind. Amos, then Jesus, paid that price for realizing how God had been manipulated in a theological construction that only served to mask the structures of sin. Not only were they executed, but suffered in various other ways, as did those that sympathized with them. If there is any figure that can be rightly pointed out as pre-figuring Christ, it is Amos, who not only shared with Jesus the explicit demand for justice and fairness but possibly also being executed by the elites. The insistence by the Church that Jesus was killed for preaching about heaven, or that he was innocent is one of the reasons why Christianity has failed to exert any meaningful influence in our societies. The essence of Christianity lies in its potential to criticize the *status quo* directly and to propose alternative systems and structures (Rieger 2007:6). Such Christianity invites the ire of those benefitting from the prevailing structures of sin. The presence of the elites within the Church has seen the Church becoming especially compromised. Focusing on heaven and the comforts of this world has driven Christians away from the prophecies of Amos and the ministry of Jesus; hence few can ask like Paul: "And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? I die every day!" (1 Cor 15:30-31). The idea is not to seek death actively; rather Christians must understand that:

The offering of living bodies may result in martyrdom, but the primary dispositions and activities that follow from offering oneself to God as a living sacrifice are directed at how believers are to conduct themselves in the world (Fowl 2011:46).

A third lesson for the African Church is indeed that our conception of prophecy has been affected by the existence of a similar office in the traditional set-up, but whose essence we did not fully appreciate. The traditional spirit medium always doubled as a diviner and healer and it is this aspect that most scholars (Sundkler 1961, Oosthuizen 1968, Amanze 1998) have emphasized. This aspect has tended to relegate one of the most critical roles of traditional spirit mediums. They have always acted as the conscience of the people, giving direction to traditional chiefs on how they should govern in order to maintain harmony in their communities. This critical role of mediums makes them closer to a prophet such as Amos, individuals who even though clearly under the spirit, go on to address social,

economic and political issues of their day. This dimension of prophecy has been conspicuous by its absence in the populist prophets we have witnessed from AICs and lately Pentecostals³ who have perfected the art of skirting such issues such as why some people have too much, yet others have nothing. “Jesus’ call for prophetic ideals of economic justice had also to target political and domestic economies saturated by elitist patron-client exchange systems that reached all the way down to peasant patriarchal households” (Talbot 2008:100). If Jesus clearly took sides, why has our theology and religion moved in a different direction? I concur with Rieger (2007:33) that “any theology in a highly politicized situation that claims to be apolitical deceives itself” and this apparently applies to the populist ministries and their prophets, whose interpretation of apolitical means sustaining the status quo (Gifford 2002:302). This is the dimension that separates Amos and spirit mediums from contemporary types of prophets and diviner-healers, populist prophets are co-opted into the structures of sin, hence they have failed to play the role of Amos or Jesus, which is to champion the search for “a society that encourages and rewards hard-work while at the same time discouraging and punishing those who seek to benefit even where they did not labor, a society that promotes fairness and equality” (Gunda 2010).

Conclusion

The book of the prophet Amos is one book that is preferred by Old Testament scholars who are especially interested in justice and fairness. Reading the book, one is left with one critical question, what happened to the prophet after delivering such powerful condemnation to the highest offices in Israel? In this article, we make reference to three narratives, in 1 Kings 13, 2 Kings 23 and 2 Chronicles 9, in which we argued that the narrative in 1 Kings 13 fails to identify the king absolutely. While the narrative now comes under that of Jeroboam I, I argued that this was a deliberate misplacement by the ‘pan-Israelite movement’ from the time of Hezekiah. This article argues that on the basis of the analysis carried above, the “unnamed man of God who came from Judah” was actually the prophet Amos. This conclusion will go a long way in explaining the brevity of the prophet’s ministry, and the dexterity of the prophet’s condemnations. It is also a lesson for contemporary Christians, to seek the God of justice and fairness in all human endeavors. In essence, while Christians are encouraged to avoid harm’s way when living in volatile situations, Christians can never be encouraged to “tone down their faith” in order to avoid harm in such situations because the truth of the faith has to be proclaimed. Christians are not called to be suicidal, neither are they called to compromise their faith to avoid persecution. The situation in Zimbabwe where corruption, repression and immorality are rampant among leading Christians in politics, business and the Church, suggests that:

should Christians overcome their current divisions to the degree that they can offer an articulate witness to the gospel, the principalities and powers will work to create the sort of hostility to the faith that will make martyrdom a realistic scenario for believers (Fowl 2011:60).

³ Ezekiel Guti has amassed many titles in his long career as founder, prophet, apostle, servant of God, Doctor and lately, Professor. The new kid on the block, Emmanuel Makandiwa started off as Prophet Makandiwa and he literally has taken Harare by storm. While calling themselves prophets and possibly rightly so, there is a fundamental difference between these prophets and Amos.

Refusing to tone down Christian faith will likely be met with some hostile responses, especially because such hostile responses have been given to other groups by the powers that be. Should Christians then tone down their faith to preserve their bodies?

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