



AMOS ON JUSTICE FOR ALL

AMOS—8TH CENTURY PROPHET

- Focus on North Israel
- Numerical memory device for the entire book of Amos
 - 8 international speeches (Amos 1-2)
 - 3 “hear this” speeches (Amos 3-5)
 - 2 woes (Amos 5-6)
 - 5 visions (Amos 7-9)
 - 2 conversations (with God and with Amaziah) (Amos 7-8)
 - 1 remnant (Amos 9)

Amos 5:24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

LIFE IN THE 8TH CENTURY BC

- Israelite four room house
- Two parts of town: Tell el Farah, Biblical Tirzah & Tell en Nasbeh, Biblical Mizpah. Source: J.A. Thompson, *Handbook of Life in Bible Times* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), p. 59, 62.
- “Socioeconomic inequity in the Iron 2 can be inferred from several lines of evidence. To begin with, wealthy people lived in large luxury homes, many of which were furnished with fancy trappings, such as furniture decorated with carved ivory inlays. Fragments of these intricately sculpted inlays dating to the 9th and 8th centuries B.C.E. have been found at a number of sites. Most remarkable are the hundreds of examples found in excavations of the Assyrian destruction level at Samaria...” Jonathan M. Golden, *Ancient Canaan and Israel—New Perspective*. Denver: ABC CLIO, 2004. p 133.

SPECIFIC WRONGS

Amos 2 ⁶Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes -- ⁷ they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same maiden, so that my holy name is profaned: ⁸ they lay themselves down beside every altar upon garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined.

Amos 5 ¹¹ Therefore because you trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. ¹² For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins -- you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate.

Amos 8 quotes the people ⁵ “When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great, and deal deceitfully with false balances,⁶ that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the refuse of the wheat?”

GUILTY DESCRIBED

Amos 3:15 “I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end,” says the LORD.

Amos 4:1 “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are in the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, `Bring, that we may drink!’”

Amos 6:1 “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come!”

Amos 6 ⁴ “Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the midst of the stall; ⁵ who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David invent for themselves instruments of music; ⁶ Who drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!”

AMOS ON THE WEALTHY

- Wealthy not condemned for wealth
- Wealthy depended on oppression to maintain their wealth
- The oppression was unnatural (like riding horses on rocks—6:12)
- Trust in wealth revealed their lack of trust in God.

AMOS DESCRIBES THE OPPRESSED

1. RIGHTEOUS, *SADIQ*, 2:6; 5:12

- Innocent
- Yet some poverty is self-imposed Pro 10:14; 20:13; 23:21
- Poor in Amos are not slackers, but have been cheated in courts, rich took their land, cheated in marketplace

2. NEDDY, *EBYON* 2:6; 4:1; 5:12; 8:4, 6

- Lacking something: Food, Power, Clothes, Parents, Choices
 - Houses: summer / winter or no house
 - Bed: ivory, no beds
 - Food: imported food/beverages, sweepings off floor
- Poor had things, but fewer things than the wealthy

3. POOR, *DAL* 2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:6

- Vulnerability
- Describes have nots, denied, debtors, slaves, Opposite of abundance
- Poor were vulnerable
 - Wealthy trampled on them
 - Rich oppressed them
 - No protection
 - Victims, Easy targets

4. OPPRESSED, *ANAI* 2:7, 8:4

- Pain: afflicted, brokenhearted, distressed, suffering
- Poverty hurts: hunger pains, seeing children denied, watching mate disrespected

ACTIONS THAT HURT

- “Trample” (*šaaḫ*) appears twice (2:7; 8:4) in the phrase, “they trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground.”
- “Oppress” (*ašaḫ*) occurs once (4:1) in the phrase, “you women who oppress the poor,” but is used widely in contexts about abuse and war in the Old Testament.
- “Oppress” (*saraḫ*) appears in 5:12 as “you oppress the righteous.” Often translated as “afflict.”
- “Trample” (*bašaḫ*) is used only once in the Old Testament in Amos 5:11, “you trample on the poor,” where the idea is of a person treading on grapes.
- “Turn aside” (*natâ*)
 - Amos 2:7 NIV “deny justice to the oppressed.”
 - 2:8, “they lie down (*natâ*) beside every altar on garments taken in pledge.”
 - 5:12, they “turn aside the needy in the gate” (NIV “deprive the poor of justice in the courts”).
- “Crush” (*rasas*) in the phrase “crush the needy” (4:1) reflects the struggle of bruising or breaking

AMOS DEFINES INJUSTICE

- Righteous, *sadiq* 2:6; 5:12 Innocent
- Needy, *ebyon* 2:6; 4:1; 5:12; 8:4, 6 Choices
- Poor, *dal* 2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:6 Vulnerability
- Oppressed, *anai* 2:7, 8:4 Pain

MESSAGE OF AMOS

#1--JUSTICE IS THE CONCERN OF ALL

Amos Addresses

- Whole nation 2:6
- Father & son 2:7
- Fast/strong 2:14
- Soldier 2:15-16
- Wealthy woman 4:1
- Suburbs 5:11
- Agribusiness 5:11
- Religion 5:21-24
- People in arts 6:5
- Gov/politics 7:11

- Courts 5:10
- Business 5:11

- Store owners 8:5
- Food producers 8:6

#2—SOLUTION TO INJUSTICE IS GODLINESS

Amos 5 ⁶ Seek the LORD and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, ¹⁴ Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said.

#3—ONE'S OWN INJUSTICE IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO SEE

- Trample the poor oppressed people like soldiers in battle
- Any means to achieve own ends
- Turned aside from poor
- Crushed the poor

#4—NO NEUTRALITY WITH REGARD TO JUSTICE.

Amos 5:12 For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins -- you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate. Therefore, he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time.

Amos 5:24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.