

Social justice in the book of amos



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I :: Historical Context : Social Justice

Homer Hailey once said, “ back of all moral, social, and political corruption, there lies a basic cause: religious decay and apostasy”.^[1] The Prophecies of Amos were written in a time this statement reflects all too well. The Life in the Spirit Study Bible^[2] describes the nation of Israel, under Jeroboam II, as being in its “ zenith”: it had expanded its borders the farthest the nation had ever seen, no one was waring with the nation, and their economy was doing very well. When Israel expanded its borders, it basically took a monopoly on the most popular trade route in the region, the King’s Highway. And like any identity with a monopoly, they took advantage of it, and added fees to the route.

As Amos himself states in chapter three, the Israelites began living a life of luxury: some owned two houses (3: 15), some built stone mansions (5: 11), some had houses of ivory (3: 15), and some are described as lying on beds inlaid with ivory (6: 4). Unfortunately, this was only a small minority, and the wealthy got greedy and started manipulating the poor and taking what they had, leaving the poor poorer. Pride was a common thing among the wealthy, and they became religious in their activities forgetting the God behind the activities (5: 21), and therefore becoming corrupt and unjust.

II :: Textual Analysis : AMOS 2: 6-8

The first part of these verses accused the Israelites of selling out justice with bribes or intimidation. Proverbs 17: 23 states that “ a wicked man accepts a bribe behind the back to pervert the ways of justice”, a fair lesson that the people of Israel would have done good to remember. Later in the book of Amos it relates that the oppressed couldn’t even get a defense in many

<https://assignbuster.com/social-justice-in-the-book-of-amos/>

situations: the nation had lost all compassion for those in need. Then the second part of these verses discuss all out injustice and cruelty to the poor in regards to taking garments. The “ clothes (begadim) are the large outer garments which formed poor men’s dress by day and cover by night...” and commonly were used as security deposits in this era.[3] Exodus 22: 26 and Deuteronomy 24: 12 both, address this issue and state that the garment must be returned by nightfall so that the man could be protected from the weather. But, “ the powerful in Israel were spreading the clothes out as beds for themselves beside the altars, in a show of empty, merciless piety”.[4] They used other people’s source for protection as a means of comfort to lay on.

There are two trains of thought when it comes to Amos’s reference to sandals. The first suggests that a pair of sandals means little or nothing, referring to the fact that sandals are common, used for trampling the dirt, and so forth. 4 This idea would translate into putting even less worth on already poor people. The other train of thinking would say that in this time period, sandals were becoming a sort of trend, and various types of them were extremely expensive. 3 This would translate into the idea of all out materialist mindsets taking anything they could get there hands on for better shoes.

Another issue that presents itself in these verses is the sacrifice of purchased wine from stolen money to their (lower case) god. It indicates that the people lost the mindset of working and enjoying the fruits of their labour. According to the Pulpit Commentary, the land at the time was very fertile, and extremely good for growing grapes. 3 The Law of Moses required them to

offer up the first fruits of this land up to God. But, they themselves did not attend to these fields. This meant that there was no fruit being grown, and no fruit left no first fruits, and no sacrifice to God. So they purchased wine but unfortunately, it was again bought with money stolen from people who were probably already without much: a grave situation. And when they finally had their “ sacrifice” they offered it up to their own god, not the Lord their God.

III :: Amos Reacts : AMOS 2: 6-8

Two reactions are seen as Amos gives an account of what the Lord told him and what he saw in a vision. When he is delivering the list of sins that the nation had been committing, he was full of disgust and truly wanted to see justice come about. He had to have known that he would not receive a very warm response to his message, but “ he was what he was—God’s messenger for His hour to call the nation Israel to awaken to its responsibility and accountability for the national sins which it had committed against God”.^[5] He maintained the Word of the Lord and delivered it to the nation as such.

Yet, in Chapter 5, Amos begins his own lament, his showing his own sorrow for what is to come of Israel. And then, as God shows Amos in a vision what he will do with Israel, Amos intercedes for them, and gets God to relent twice, before God ultimately shows him their wickedness. “ The basis of Amos’s petition lay in the true assessment of Israel’s position. They were not large and strong, as they thought; rather they were small and weak”. ^[6] But when he was confronted by Amaziah the priest, Amos stuck to what the Lord had shown and told him; he did not waiver.

IV :: The Modern World & Church : Application

<https://assignbuster.com/social-justice-in-the-book-of-amos/>

In no way should the words of the prophet Amos be disregarded as irrelevant to the world and even the Church as a people today. Much of what one nation was developing (greed) in Amos's time, has expanded to a global epidemic. Western Nations are centered around "self" and many times overlooks the plight of the third World Nations. Amos Chapter 4 tells of the disasters God sent the people of Israel to try to get them to return: basically creating opportunity after opportunity for the nation to reflect on herself and fix things up. Unfortunately, they didn't take advantage of this, and continued to trample on true justice. Today, much can be related to that. All around the world, social issues are being brought to light, and opportunities given to pull past decisions and make appropriate corrections. Government endorsement for abortion, euthanasia, and even same-sex marriages are being debated in parliaments and senates worldwide. They are issues that cause the nation to look within and see what the moral structure of that nation is: and if social injustice is present, it is going to stand out like a sore thumb.

Even the Church as it exists today can be measured up to Amos. Many churches exist as country clubs to make people feel good about the lives they are living, and couldn't care less about the condition of the neighborhood they're in (unless it makes the church look bad- and then they'll just have to move). It remarkably resembles the ivory couches described in Amos. And all too often, church services are about show- who's there, what they're wearing... the list goes on, somewhat like Amos chapter five. The Church needs to exist to correct social injustices, not create them. And ultimately, the Prophecies of Amos need to be considered again today

as a warning: God gives opportunity for correction, but he is also a just God and will stand up for those being crushed by the society.