

## Great Ends of the Church: God's Justice and Our Commitments©

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*"Affluence, exploitation, and the profit motive were the most notable features of the society which Amos observed and in which he worked. The rich were affluent enough to have several houses apiece (3:15), to go in for rather ostentatiously expensive furniture (6:4) and not to deny themselves any bodily satisfaction (3:12; 4:1; 6:6). On the other hand the poor were really poor and were shamelessly exploited; they suffered from property rackets (2:6-7), legal rackets (5:10-12) and business rackets (8:5). The defenseless individual with no influence came off worst every time. When the poor could not contribute to the rich, they were simply ignored and left for broken (6:6). Moneymaking and personal covetousness ruled all: the men lived for their offices (8:5), the women lived for excitement (4:1), the rulers lived for frivolity. When Amos turned his gaze on the "church" he found a religion which was very religious, which adored what was traditional, but had shaken free from divine revelation. Religious centers were apparently thronged (4:4; 5:5, 21-23; 8:3, 10), sacrifices were punctiliously offered, the musical side of worship was keenly studied. But it had no basis outside the mind of man.... Standards had gone to pot. Authority and the rule of law were despised (5:10, 12), and national leadership, while reveling in the publicity and dignity of position (6:1) and quick to score debating points (6:2), was not facing the real issues (6:3a) but seemed even to be contributing to the complete breakdown of law and order (6:3b) by allowing personal likes and dislikes to take primacy over caring for the nation (6:4-6). Public standards of morality were at a low ebb: Amos could speak of sexual indulgence (2:7), transgressions and sins (5:12) and commercial practice (8:5-6) as matters on which he could not be proved wrong. These things, which provided him with grounds for both speaking and writing, also provide us with grounds for considering [his message. For] these are things that mark our society also: some more, some less. None is true of everyone; each is true of someone. Amos might as well have been walking through any of our cities."*

— J. A. MOTYER (*THE DAY OF THE LION*)

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### AMOS 5:18-6:14

#### I COMING DISASTER (18-20)

{18} A Alas for you who desire the **day of the LORD!**

Why do you want the day of the LORD? It is **darkness, not light;**

{19} B as if someone fled from a lion, **and was** met by a bear;

B' or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, **and was** bitten by a snake.

{20} A' Is not the **day of the LORD darkness, not light**, and gloom with no brightness in it?

#### II WHAT GOD HATES (21-23) (*See Dorsey for this form*)

{21} I hate, [1] I despise your festivals, and

[2] I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

{22} [3] Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and

[4] grain offerings, I will not accept them; and

[5] the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon.

{23} [6] Take away from me the noise of your songs;

[7] I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

{24} [+1] But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

#### III THREAT OF EXILE (25-27)

{25} A Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness,  
O house of Israel?

{26} B You shall take up Sakkuth your king,

B' and Kaiwan your star-god, your images,  
which you made for yourselves;

{27} A' therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the LORD,  
whose name is the God of hosts.

**IV THE SEVENFOLD WOE (1-6) (See Dorsey for the form in A')**

- {6:1} A **Alas** for those who are at ease in Zion,  
and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria,  
the notables of the first of the nations,  
to whom the house of Israel resorts!
- {2} B Cross over to Calneh, and see; from there go to Hamath the great;  
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.  
Are you better than these kingdoms?  
Or is your territory greater than their territory,
- {3} B' O you that put far away the evil day,  
and bring near a reign of violence?
- {4} A' [1] **Alas** for those who **lie** on beds of ivory,  
[2] and **lounge** on their couches,  
[3] and **eat** lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall;
- {5} [4] who **sing** idle songs to the sound of the harp,  
[5] and like David **improvise** on instruments of music;
- {6} [6] who **drink** wine from bowls,  
[7] and **anoint** themselves with the finest oils,  
[+1] **but** are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!

**III' THREAT OF EXILE (7)**

- {7} Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile,  
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

**II' WHAT YAHWEH HATES (8-10)**

- {8} A **The Lord GOD** has sworn by himself (says the LORD, the God of hosts):  
**I abhor** the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds;  
and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.
- {9} B If ten people remain in one house, they shall die.
- {10} C And if a relative, one who burns the dead,  
**shall take** up the body to bring it out of the house,  
C' and **shall say** to someone in the innermost parts of the house,  
B' "Is anyone else with you?" the answer will come, "No."  
A' Then the relative shall say, "Hush!  
We must not mention **the name of the LORD.**"

**I' COMING DISASTER (11-14)**

- {11} A **See, the LORD commands**, and the great house  
shall be shattered to bits, and the little house to pieces.
- {12} B Do horses run on rocks?  
Does one plow the sea with oxen?  
C But you have turned **justice into poison**  
C' and the fruit of **righteousness into wormwood--**
- {13} B' you who rejoice in Lo-debar, who say,  
"Have we not by our own strength taken Karnaïm for ourselves?"
- {14} A' Indeed, I am raising up against you a nation, O house of Israel,  
**says the LORD**, the God of hosts, and they shall oppress you  
from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi Arabah.

- I The Book of Amos, like the Book of Hoseah, offers God's message of warning to the northern kingdom of Israel during the latter part of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. With the rule of Jeroboam II, key leaders of Israel had grown powerful and wealthy and had become corrupted by it. The rich trampled on the poor and social injustice was everywhere.
- A Structure of the book according to David Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Baker Books, 1999) 278.
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|-----------|------|---|
| 1:1-2:16  | I    | Coming Judgment on Israel— As Guilty as its Neighboring Nations           |
| 3:1-15    | II   | The Prophet's Compulsion: Destruction of Cultic Worship Centers           |
| 4:1-13    | III  | Condemnation of Wealthy Israelite Women: Empty Activity                   |
| 5:1-17    | IV   | National Call to Repentance   |
| 5:18-6:14 | III' | Condemnation of Wealthy Israelite Men: Empty Activity                     |
| 7:1-8:3   | II'  | The Prophet's Compulsion: Destruction of Cultic Worship Centers           |
| 8:4-9:15  | I'   | Coming Judgment on Israel and Promise of Future Restoration Among nations |
- B. One striking feature of the book is its 23 instances of Amos' pairing of collections of 7 agreements +1 counter-agreement (see Dorsey, 277-78)
1. See vss. 5:21-23
  2. See vss. 6:4-6
  3. Notice that the book is neatly organized with a balance in 7 divisions. Is a 8<sup>th</sup> "But?" implied as the appropriate response of faith?
- II Consider the famous section at 5:21-24
- A. "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream."
1. the demand for justice (*mishpat*) and righteousness (*szedaqua*)
    - a. Righteousness— *szedaqua*<sup>3/4</sup> is the rightness of **behavior** that belongs to those who fulfill the responsibilities which inhere in their social relationship to others— "rightness of life according to authoritative norms."
    - b. Justice— *mishpat*<sup>3/4</sup> is specifically associated with the courts at the gate of a city, where decisions about social order in the city are made— the judicial **process** whose integrity ought to be maintained by righteousness; Justice is the fruit of righteousness.
  2. Amos consistently uses "justice" and "righteousness" as terms for the qualities that ought to be present **in the social order** (6:12; 5:7, 15) of a Godly community.
- B. Two metaphoric images:
1. the swiftness of God's judgment like a flash flood after a hard rain
  2. the persistence of God's judgment like those wadis and streams that do not fail in a summer drought.
  3. God's response will swell with sudden force but its effect will remain unabated.
- C. "But you have turned **justice into poison** and the fruit of **righteousness into wormwood**"
1. The Godly **process** becomes poison
  2. The Godly **behavior** becomes bitter
- III Amos speaks his word in the context of a theocracy: a world in which the government of the people was decreed to be the government of Yahweh's counsel. We do not live in a theocracy. And we now live in a, clearly, Post-Christian culture. Therefore, how binding is such a call upon Christians today?
- A. A collateral voice:
- Micah 6:6-8— {6} "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? {7} Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" {8} He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to **do** justice, and to **love** kindness, and to **walk** humbly with your God?
- B. Some psalms of God's concerns in social relations: Psalm 12:5; Psalm 35:10; Psalm 68:5-6; Psalm 69:30-33; Psalm 109:30-3; Psalm 140:12; Psalm 146:1-10; Amos 8:4-8; **Isaiah 58:1-10**
- C. Some Basic Questions:
1. Do Amos and other prophets simply indict people who live well? Are we automatically indicted simply by being an American at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
  2. Is it necessary for every person who wants to worship to take on the work of Isaiah 58:6-7

{6} Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? {7} Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin

2. Isn't faith in God enough? Does a person have to care about "social injustice" in order to be a faithful follower of Jesus?
- C. The tension of Kingdom involvement: Two fallacies to be avoided
1. One approach is reject the social order and retreat into a Christian isolationism, retreat into the church. The response treats involvement in caring for social problems as if the world is just too complex or too compromised.
  2. A second approach is to conform to the social order. Here one acts as if the Gospel has nothing to do with how we use our money, make our money, or act out our ethical values toward others
  3. What might a middle way look like? How does Amos

Acknowledgment: The primary symmetrical division in this text is from Dorsey (282). The internal construal of each division is mine.