



Daily Verse and Comment

Amos 2:6-8

(6) Thus says the LORD:

" For three transgressions of Israel, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment*,
Because they sell the righteous for silver,
And the poor for a pair of sandals.

(7) They pant after the dust of the earth *which is* on the head of the poor,
And pervert the way of the humble.

A man and his father go in to the *same* girl,
To defile My holy name.

(8) They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge,
And drink the wine of the condemned *in* the house of their god.

New King James Version

The Israelites' immorality fell into three major areas:

- 1) Indifference to and oppression of the poor.
- 2) Covetousness displayed by placing primary importance on material possessions.
- 3) Unrestricted promotion of self-advantage—doing anything to anyone to get their way.

The Hebrew words for *poor* are very similar to our "underdog." Amos uses two different words, '*ebyôn* and *dal*, to designate the poor (see [Amos 4:1](#)). '*Ebyôn* usually designates the very poor, and *dal* describes the lowest social class. However, both words connote "wanting because of oppression or exploitation" and refer to the weaker members of society. To God the poor are those without the worldly resources or connections to defend themselves. As a result of their weakness, the wicked look upon the poor as fair game to exploit ([Isaiah 10:1-2](#)). Today, "poor" could refer to the small businessman

or consumer at the mercy of the huge corporations, or the "little guy" under the thumb of "big" government.

One of the means of oppression was the courts, and Amos frequently shows how the poor "took it on the chin" within the "justice" system. In a lawsuit the guilty party, one of the "strong," bribed the judge, who found the innocent person—the weak—guilty ([Isaiah 5:23](#)). As so often happens today in America, the ancient Israelites shunned out-of-court settlements. They went to court even over minor matters because their chances for a larger settlement were better.

When a person was found guilty by the court, he, of course, had to pay a fine. If he did not have enough in his pocket to pay it, he could pay in produce. For example, a vintner could pay in wine. The victors then took their winnings—"the wine of the condemned"—and partied ([Amos 2:8](#)). They had turned into self-centered parasites who lived by the code, "get the other guy before he gets you." Israelites can be a mercenary, unmerciful lot of people.

Obviously, God was not happy with this system of justice, and it is even worse now. Today's "wine of the condemned" awarded to the injured party—reaching into the millions of dollars—goes mostly for exorbitant lawyer and court fees. Governments of all sizes include expected fines from lawbreakers in their budgets.

In addition, Israelites coveted real estate to the ridiculous extent that the buyer begrudged the small amount of dust the seller threw on his head to symbolize his grief over losing his ancestral properties ([Amos 2:7](#)). In a similar vein, God accuses the Jews of moving the boundaries between parcels of land ([Hosea 5:10](#)). In those days, instead of driving a stake into the ground to mark their property lines, landowners set up pillars of stones on the boundaries. God pictures the Jews kicking the boundary stones over a few feet when no one is looking. They may have justified it with, "Doesn't everybody do it?" but it was still outright theft.

Because the strong could so easily exploit the weak, land and wealth in Israel fell into fewer and fewer hands. God cries, "Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land!" ([Isaiah 5:8](#)).

It is no different than today's big international combines buying up farmland and displacing farmers, who must then find jobs, usually in urban areas. How soon we have forgotten that small family farms played a large role in keeping the United States economically and socially stable for generations! America's agrarian heartland was the backbone of the nation. We need to be aware that the resulting instability will lead us down the same path of destruction as it did Israel!

"They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge" ([Amos 2:8](#)). Under the Old Covenant, a person's cloak could be taken as security for a loan, but [Exodus 22:26-27](#) shows that it was to be returned every evening if it doubled as his blanket at night. God considers keeping a poor man's coat overnight as taking advantage of him.

Remember, our judgment from God largely depends on *how we treat our fellow man* ([Matthew 25:33-46](#)). Good relationships with others are vital to maintaining a good relationship with God ([Matthew 5:23-24](#)). This means we must always do the right things toward others no matter how much it hurts us ([Psalm 15:4](#)) or how they might react ([Matthew 5:44-45](#)).

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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