

Amos: When Religion Serves Empire

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Shabbat shalom everybody. We are continuing through the prophets and I hope this has been an edifying series for everybody. The Homeward-bound series where we've been following the prophet's vision of exile and return both from the perspective of the southern nation Judah going into Babylon. And then we started last week speaking about the northern kingdom of Israel who wasn't simply exiled. They were replaced and scattered and erased from history. And we've been looking at the character of God through all of this and God's relentless commitment to bring his scattered people home.

And so over the past weeks, we've been exploring this and the different characters of the prophet and the types of people that God used to deliver these messages. But here's what we haven't really fully addressed: what keeps people from coming home? And of course, we're dealing with exile, literal exiles in the Bible, but there's also a sense of a spiritual exile and abandonment of people leaving God and then not hearing the message, hearing the message to return before it's too late, but it not being compelling enough for them to actually turn.

And I feel there's probably enough of us in this room that understand what that feels like, maybe daily or throughout your life seasons. Sometimes we get stuck in routines or patterns or ruts, even pursuits that are not in line with any way, shape, or form where God would want us to be focused on. And we might have the Holy Spirit whispering to us saying, "Hey, you're doing great, by the way. You're doing fantastic." But your pursuit and the way that your mind is painting reality that you find yourself in isn't quite the right portrayal of what's actually going on and what you should be pursuing.

God has called you with a purpose. God has called you to be set apart. God has called you to do something very bold and radical. And that's live for a kingdom instead of an empire. And sometimes we hear those things and the whispers and we see stuff and we're like, "Yeah, that... but" we don't actually commit to turning. We don't make the decision to say, "But I'm really comfortable where I'm at, so I think I'm just going to hang out here."

A Prophet Who Makes Us Uncomfortable

What keeps people from returning, coming home? What makes restoration impossible? What prevents people from actually experiencing that homecoming that God offers? And today we're going to meet a prophet who answers those questions in the most uncomfortable way possible. His name is Amos. And what he saw in the eighth century BC in the northern kingdom of Israel, and what he said about it should make us really nervous and uncomfortable.

And I had a choice to make this a really easy, nice prophet to go through where it's just "yeah, stop doing those bad things, treat people better and it's all good and we can go home and say Shalom, right?" No. If I get uncomfortable by something I read in the Bible, then you get to be uncomfortable with something that you read in the Bible.

So let's introduce you to this shepherd from Tekoa, this city in Judah, to show you what he saw. Here's the opening line: "The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa." We're waiting for verse two to be like, "And here is the pedigree. Here is his college degree. Here is his skill set." Now, this is it. This is all we get.

We don't find anything else about Amos until chapter seven when they finally get tired of him and try to kick him out. And in that he responds, he's like, "Listen, do you think I'm something? Like, look at this. I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd. I was minding my own business. I also took care of the sycamore fig trees. That's a fancy specialty, right?" He poked holes in figs. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, "Go prophesy to my people Israel."

No credentials, no prophetic pedigree, just a guy who takes figs and puts holes in them for wealthy landowners. When I tried to look up what a sycamore fig does, taking care of them: yeah, he messes with fig trees. He watches sheep. He's working class, in other words. He's a field laborer, no one special. He's a field laborer who is commanded by God to go up north and go into the country that's so prosperous, has all this opportunity, and so he has to go north, cross the border into that country, and then tell them why they're doing everything wrong despite how successful and grand they look like they're doing.

I love the setup from the get-go.

The Rhetorical Trap Begins

And Amos gets up there and here's how his visions begin, his prophetic performance begins. The oracles. He starts by bringing the word of the Lord about who God is going to punish because of their sins. "This is the word: What the Lord says: For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not relent punishment."

Damascus. What's the first thing we notice about that? That's not Israel. This isn't so bad. We actually don't like those people. What do you have to say about these people we don't like, Amos, right? Damascus, Arameans, Israel's enemies. Amos lists their violence, their brutality, their crimes. Judgment is coming to them.

Oh, yeah. This is pretty good. We like this Amos guy. What else you got, Amos?

Oh, I got another one. For three sins of Gaza, even for four. Gaza. This is where the Philistines were. Philistine territory. Israel's ancient enemies. They took whole communities captive and sold them to Edom. Judgment is coming. Yeah, get him, Amos. Let's do it. Philistines are the worst.

Then Amos keeps going. Tyre, the Phoenicians, broke a treaty of the brotherhood and sold whole communities into slavery. Judgment. Edom. Their relatives who turned on them pursued Israel with a sword and they showed no mercy. Judgment here. Get them.

By this point, you've got to imagine the crowd's on board. They're stoked. These are all of our worst, right? This is the best prophecy they've heard in years. Finally, someone who gets it. All of their enemies, all the nations that have oppressed them, everyone who has hurt them or even hurt their feelings, taken advantage of them, they're all going to get what they deserve. God sees what's been done to us and God is going to bring judgment to them. This is vindication. God's looking out for us.

The Pivot

Then: "For three sins of Judah, even for four, they have rejected the law." So this would be like—not that God would ever do this to America, right? But this would be like: judgment's coming to Syria for what they did, and judgment's coming to North Korea and China and Russia and we're like, "Yeah!"

And then it's like judgment's coming to Canada—just our neighbor, Judah, right below, and Israel has a relationship like Canada. I mean, they're not really... I mean, right now... but you know what, you know what is what it is, right? Everyone fair enough. Judah sinned. God's going to punish Judah. Canada, sorry guys, you messed up. You know, they could use some correction.

"This is what the Lord says: For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent punishment." Can you imagine how quiet it got? Everybody's cheering. And they're like, "Yeah, this is my God, 'cause he hates my enemies, right?"

Israel. Why Israel? There we go. This is the trick, right?

The Indictment

"What is it with Israel? They sell the innocent for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their God they drink wine taken as fines."

Same formula. It's the same: for three sins even for four. Same judgment. But this time the crosshairs aren't aimed at who they wanted them to be aimed at. They're aimed at them.

Amos has been building up to this moment. The rhetorical trap has been triggered. They've been agreeing to their own condemnation this whole time. And so what did the shepherd Amos, this working-class guy, he didn't excel in the ranks of corporate Judah. He worked in a field. And here's the thing: as many of you know, when you're working class, you start to notice stuff. You start to see how government policies actually impact people.

What the Working-Class Prophet Saw

You start to see other people who have fallen through the cracks in the net below you because you're almost there. You're close down there. Working class, we're close. A couple paychecks and you're out of the house, right? One step away.

What did this man see? Well, when he came north, he saw a very prosperous land. Again, we spoke last night. Northern Israel got the good part of the trade here as far as where the kingdom was and the fertile soil. Everything grows better up north. It's blooming up north. Lots of production, which means lots of things to sell and import and trade. They were booming. Jeroboam II had expanded the borders. Trade was flourishing. Wealth is pouring into the capital.

Archaeological excavations confirm this. We found ivory furniture among the wealthier houses. We found two distinct types of houses: living quarters for the majority of those who lived in northern Israel. There were multi-room and sometimes multi-tier houses for people. And then there were shacks. These are the two demographics we know from archaeology that lived in northern Israel. There's no middle class that we can find. Super wealthy or there's nothing at all. Crawl in, kiss your kids to sleep and good night. But wealth is pouring in, at least to some.

It's a good life for some people. And they're religious. Bethel, the royal sanctuary is packed. The festivals are going on. All the Moadm sacrifices are being offered. By every external measure,

they're successful and faithful. But Amos, the shepherd, he's been watching how the system actually works up there.

Number one, what's the accusation? They sell the innocent for silver. It is debt slavery. Needy for a pair of sandals. Someone needs shoes, a basic necessity. They're poor. They can't afford them, so they borrow. And when they can't pay back, they lose their freedom. Sold into slavery over a price of sandals. Imagine being so desperate to provide for your family that you sign that dotted line. I need something. I need the food. I need the sandals. I need whatever. All in. Hopefully you pay it back.

Selling the Innocent for Silver

[Deuteronomy 15](#) says debts are supposed to be forgiven every seventh year. Every seventh year. But you know, there's one thing about being wealthy that I've come to learn, I think, watching how things work here in this country, is that the wealthier you are, the more loopholes open up for you. They found ways around the protections, and that should sound familiar because that's something we're familiar with. Medical debt bankrupts families. Student loans that follow people for decades. Credit card interest that is intentionally created to keep people in a trap. Payday loans are charged at what, a 400% APR. What do you do if you need it? You got to get it. People lose homes declaring bankruptcy. We're trapped in these cycles. We can't escape these cycles. Things that shouldn't be too hard to obtain—food and water, some shelter.

The irony of all this is the crisis the boomers are facing. Retired people who successfully did the system, worked, went to school, did all the stuff—they're retired, but they're losing their homes. The boomer ratio is increasing in homelessness right now because retirement is no longer enough to offset. Oh, it's fascinating. Didn't see that coming. But we sum it up and we say, "Well, that's just your personal responsibility and you need to figure it out, right?"

Amos calls it out in [Amos 5:11](#): "You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a grain tax on them. Therefore, you have built stone mansions you will not live in." It's predatory taxation. They're taxing basic needs—straw for making bricks and feeding animals, and grain, which is food. The poor are being taxed on what they need to survive, while the wealthy build luxury estates with the revenue from it all. Sound familiar? Sales tax hits the poor hardest while the wealthy park money in tax havens. Regressive taxes on necessities while capital gains get favorable treatment because the people who pay capital gains are usually people who are strategically surviving on debt so they don't have to pay taxes. You got to be pretty rich to do

that. The people who can least afford it are carrying the burden while the billionaires of Israel pay lower tax rates than their secretaries.

Amos saw it 2,700 years ago and it's the same game that everybody's been playing ever since—all about market manipulation. "When will the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat? Skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. Selling even the sweepings with the wheat."

Cheating Scales

Look at the mechanisms here. Cheating scales. So, let's say you pay for a pound, but you only get fourteen ounces. Someone's taking a scoop off the top. Skimping on the measure, so you're shortchanging people. You're price gouging. You're charging more depending on if people are desperate enough, right? And you're marketing something as being healthy when in fact you put a whole bunch of extra chemicals in it. Sorry. Sweepings with the wheat. You mix some sawdust into the wheat or something, a buffer, something to fill it in. And that's how you're feeding people trash and charging them premium prices and making money from it.

Now, I would think someone who does that is a traitor to everybody in their country, but that's just me. But I think Amos feels the same. But notice something. They're religious, so it's okay. They keep the Sabbath. They observe the Sabbath, but they can't wait until the Sabbath is ended. So that's when they can keep exploiting people. That's what it says, man. When will the Sabbath be ending? So that we can go market our wheat, mixed with trash, and sell to people and overcharge. This was the mindset. This was the go-go-go, work-work-work for productivity, try to get rich—the hustle, hustle culture, yeah. We deal with the same thing every year, every day. Scales are still rigged. The wealthy are still skimping on their measure, and we're still selling sweepings with the wheat.

Amos 5: How about judicial corruption? At least we don't have that issue in the world anywhere, right? "There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court, who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the court."

So what this is saying is—his accusation towards Israel is that justice goes to whoever can afford the best lawyer. 2,700 years ago. This is how Israel was operating. The poor plead guilty to crimes they didn't commit because they can't risk the trial. The wealthy get away with anything. Why do the wealthy get away with anything? Well, when you have a system that is not only built on but run by money, it's how it is, right?

It's All by Design

Did you guys know that over the past 15 years, the company has spent 242 million dollars specifically lobbying or donating to our politicians in Congress so that they will not pass tax laws and reform laws to make submitting your taxes easier?

So, how would it be? Wouldn't it be neat if the government sent you an email once every year and it had all of your stuff filled out for you, and you just had to check it and click go? That was proposed, and Intuit argued successfully to our politicians that we elected that it would be an encroachment to make filing your taxes free, that allowing you to file your taxes for free would be an encroachment. We can't pursue something like that. It would impact their profits to their shareholders. They've created a whole market on TurboTax. They spent \$3.75 million donating to specific candidates last year, 2024. I don't know what the numbers are this year. This has been happening for a long time.

Amos is talking about us. He's talking about Israel. He's talking about empire. Empire is always the same. Doesn't that just make you mad? And January and February, you'll get mad all over again when you remember that. Oh, and if you type in the wrong number, we will audit you and send you to jail. Good. This is great.

Yeah, fine. TurboTax, I'll pay you sixty. You want the audit protection plan? Yeah. Another hundred. Yeah. It's all by design. All by design.

The Comfortable Elite

Then Amos uses this phrase: "Hear this word, you bunch of fat cows!" [laughter] You cows of Bashan—which apparently were these big, fat milk cows, I don't know, big and beautiful creatures. He's addressing the women on Mount Samaria: "You women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, 'Hey, can you bring me another margarita?'"

Bashan was known for its well-fed cattle. Amos is talking about the comfortable elite who benefit from the system without questioning even where their comfort comes from. Because there are a lot of people living within that tier that have no idea what's going on in the world, and they don't question it. They see something that they don't like on the other end of the spectrum, they just ignore it. They want their drinks. They want their lifestyle. They want their luxury. And they don't ask who's being crushed to provide it. Just give me another drink.

Amos 6: "You lie on beds adorned with ivory, which is neat because, we do have a lot of archaeological findings that support the Bible. But it is definitely exciting when we find more.

And this is one of them. Like, 'Oh yeah, we found the ivory furniture. We found the stuff that Amos speaks about.' And lounge on your couch. You dine on choice lambs. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph." You're very comfortable while your own people are being destroyed right beneath you, and you're not even sad about it.

We Are the Global Cows of Bashan

And before we get self-righteous and think, well, I'm not wealthy—compared to who? Compared to the garment worker in Bangladesh making our cheap clothes. I love the pants from Bangladesh. They always have a better fit, by the way. Have you noticed that? You don't look at your tags, you just feel the difference. They feel nicer. Or compared to the child who's picking cocoa for chocolate, compared to the warehouse worker who can't take a bathroom break because we got to get that same-day delivery.

I don't know. We are the global cows of Bashan, guys. We know it. We don't like to talk about it. We know it. We celebrate it. That we're the greatest country—like, this is what we were taught, at least in the 90s. This is why and we support this by going to college and doing these things and getting the American dream. And if everybody just pulls themselves up by their bootstraps, we could all be rich. I don't know what's wrong with us. We know it. We're proud of it. We order whatever we want delivered to our doors. We drink craft beers and only pour-over or French press coffee.

God's Chosen People and Their Story

And we don't grieve over the ruin of Joseph because if it's out of sight, it's out of mind. Why? With Israel, they were able to ignore it because they still focused on God, but for an agenda. Israel had a story that they leaned into that really helped them solidify their identity. They're God's chosen people. Like even the north, even though there was a separation between the north and the south, they were still like, "This is God chose us. God delivered them from Egypt, from slavery, from Pharaoh's oppression. God gave them the land. This is their national identity of who they are. Israel came from Jacob's struggle with God.

And Amos seems to think and Isaiah and all the prophets, they've learned to use that story to justify everything they're doing now. We're blessed. God delivered us. Our prosperity proves God is with us. Our success validates our system. It's the same script that's used in prosperity gospel circles. Look at me. I'm wealthy. Therefore, that's how you know God has heard my cries.

And if you have enough faith, you will be wealthy, too. And man, I always wanted that to be true. You know, it's not, but you kind of hope it's like maybe I'm wrong about it. Maybe we can, right? Maybe planting my seed in faith financially doesn't do great and mighty things as far as my faith does to disrupt reality. Maybe it just gets me richer.

Amos calls him out on it. He won't let him hide behind it. He brings it up a couple times. He's like, "I brought you out of the land of Egypt." Or in [Amos 3](#), hear this word. God is speaking. The message is going through and it's reminding Israel: "Hear this word against the whole family. I brought you up. You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth, Israel. Therefore, I will punish you for all of your sins. Your deliverance doesn't make you safe. It makes you more accountable. More is expected of you. Israel, you can't look like the rest of the world. You can't do things like the rest of the world. You can't. More is expected of you because you're the chosen because of your story.

Remember That You Were Slaves

Remember that you were slaves. Because if they had remembered that they were slaves and if they had remembered the story that they were so familiar with and celebrated, then they would have remembered what happened during the Exodus and how the Torah was given. And God gave very strict commands: listen, don't forget who you were because I don't want you to turn into who they were. Do not oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. This is why I give you the command to release the people from right. Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. The pattern is relentless.

You know what oppression feels like. Israel, you were delivered. Therefore, create a society that looks nothing like Egypt. But they've recreated Egypt: Debt slavery, forced labor, exploitive economics. And they were doing this long before this. I mean, King Solomon, it's a great first Kings like 4 through 11. It's just a beautiful piece of literature because it's meant to show you the downfall of the kingdom of Israel, but portray it in a way that celebrates it. And so you're seeing all of these great things that King Solomon did, all the things which are exactly what God said not to do in Deuteronomy.

And one little snippet in there is that he used forced labor, slave labor to build the temple of God. It's just amazing, amazing how their identity got so far from where God had planted them.

God Hates Their Worship

And then God says, "I hate, I despise your mo'ed, your religious festivals, your Passover, your Shavuot, your Yamua, your Sukkot. I hate them. Your assemblies are a stench to me. Away with the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the music of your harps, but let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream."

Oh, the stench. God hates their worship. Why? Because they're singing songs about the God who delivered them from slavery while enslaving other people under them. They're celebrating the Exodus while replicating Egypt's economics. Their religion covers for their exploitation. Same thing Isaiah called out. Same thing the prophets called out.

God is with us. And Amos comes to a place in chapter nine where he confronts that attitude of being elect but using it and leveraging it as a way that is advantageous apart from the mission of the elect. And it's the same tone that John had and Jesus had and Paul had. But he's reminding them: "Are you not Israelites the same to me as the Kushites? Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt? And the Philistines from Caphtor? And the Arameans from Kir?"

You're Not More Special Than the Ethiopians

There's a lot of people in the world that have stories just like you because of me. You're not the only one. You're not more special than the Ethiopians. Let that hit with as much weight as it would have hit 2,700 years ago, especially with a people in a time when everyone was wrapped up and very prideful about their own identity. Yeah. Ethiopians, you're no more special than them. God orchestrated the Philistines migration too. Their story. Your enemies have their own Exodus stories because of God too, right?" [laughter] That makes me uncomfortable. And I'm not an ancient Israelite. I guess you could say I'm a renewed Israelite or whatnot, grafted, but that makes me uncomfortable. And it was not even at me. Yeah.

You cannot use your national story to justify oppression. You came from nothing and now that you've tasted power, you're just like your enemies. And the worst of it all is you try to tie that power over others in obedience and faithfulness to good. You don't care how evil the system is. God is obviously blessing us. God is on our side because we have the Passover story. It's an easy trap to fall into. Believers in Yeshua, we do it all the time. This isn't something that's foreign to us, right?

We will believe God is telling us to do something even though it is absolutely against the ethics of the character of God, but we'll do it because we want to do it. And we can just say that we heard a prayer or that we heard him tell us or yada yada and no one can say that we're not because they don't know whether God spoke to us or not. So we'll just keep on going. No one's

ever pulled that card and played it. We'll let some time pass. I know some people hadn't realized it yet. I don't know. It's easy to do. It's easy to say God has obviously anointed this choice that I want to be the choice. Therefore, we're going to go with it.

Jesus Rejects Empire

Now, 700 years after Amos, another working-class man shows up, a handyman from Nazareth. And before he begins his ministry, he faces the same temptation that Israel and the rest of the world has fallen into. It's when he went out into the wilderness. What's the wilderness represent? Where the Holy Spirit came upon him. So he went out in the wilderness. He's reenacting the Exodus story. He's going out into the wilderness just like Israel did for 40 years. He did it for 40 days, right? No food, no water. And Satan came to test him. And one of the biggest things that Satan offered Jesus is in Matthew chapter 4. He offered him empire.

Well, you can't do that either. [snorts] Devil's not going to mess this. No, we're not. Matthew chapter 4, verses 8–9. There's no slide in there. I forgot it or devil deleted it. I don't know. But it's [Matthew 4:8–9](#). And here's what it says: "The devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world, all the countries, all the nations, all of the borders, all of the flags. All of this I will give to you. This is my specialty. You're in my domain. This is what I do. I will give this all to you if you just bow down and worship me."

What's he trying to give him? He's trying to give him the offer of all of the wealth, all of the power, all of the control. Just merge your worship with political power. Jesus, just use religion to serve wealth. You could have this all. You already know how it works. This is what Israel did. That's what Satan always offers. You deserve to be in power. You've had a traumatic past. You're a victim. You deserve this. God showed you grace. You're chosen. And if you're chosen by God, then who can get in your way?

You obviously have a mission. You need to do this. Shouldn't you build God an empire on earth so that you can thank him for all he's done for you? Jesus says, "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." He rejects empire from the beginning. And that makes sense because it's his own mother that sang. What did she sing? "He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty."

Good News for the Victims

Remember Yeshua's first sermon announces that good news is coming to the poor. Freedom for those who are in prison. The oppressed will be set free. Who's he talking about? He's talking

about the victims in Amos. He's talking about the victims of Judah. He's talking about the victims of Rome. The victims of the systems of empire. Plus, all of those who were pushed back and told you don't have it in you to have a relationship with God. You don't. No. He says, "Blessed are you who are poor." And he says, "Woe to you who are rich."

I mean, is Jesus Robin Hood? Right. Yeah. A little bit. The rich have used the church to assume power and exploit the people. Imagine Jewish leaders standing up at the temple showing an infomercial about how for your convenience and today only you too can buy a priest-approved lamb for your sacrifice today.

Don't Settle for the Lamb

Don't settle for the lamb that you brought all the way across Judea. It has dirt on it. These have already been pre-selected by a specialty three-tier priest. That's what was happening. That's exactly what it was. This wasn't just when Jesus walked into the temple and they were selling. This wasn't like you fell down and broke your lamb on the way here and you need to buy another one. Good thing we have a spare here you can buy for at cost. No. Come on. Come on.

Kosher Guarantees

It would be like going to the kosher grocery store and buying gummy bears. It's nice to know the gelatin in there didn't go oink before it was boiled down, right? You know what I'm saying—stuff you've got to look like the Hasbro ones. If they're made in Germany, they're pork, but if they're made in Turkey, they're—there are hacks you don't have to employ. You just know we can take the stress away. "We can have your sacrifice already set up on the pole when you get here," right?

So we laugh about it because we've never thought about it, but that's exactly what was happening.

When He Overturned the Tables

When he overturned tables in the temple, he was protesting religion that covers for economic exploitation. The temple had become the infrastructure for empire in first century Judea. It's why Jesus was so confident: we're going to tear it down, bulldoze it all, because it has become something that not only doesn't work—it works too well for another purpose.

Yeshua stands in the Amos tradition, and like Amos, he's rejected by the religious establishment because his message threatens their comfortable merger of worship and wealth. They hand him to Rome, naturally, to die, but God vindicates him through resurrection.

What Would Amos Say Today?

Here's the uncomfortable question: What would Amos say if he came to America today?

We're the wealthiest nation in human history. We have more billionaires than any other country. And we are religious. Boy, are we. Churches everywhere, Christian radio, religious festivals. We sing all the songs. We do it. But what does our system actually do?

Well, we have the same mechanisms Amos described. Debt slavery, medical debt, student loans, credit card traps, cycles of people getting stuck, predatory economics—the whole thing. Three Americans own more wealth than the bottom fifty percent. CEO pay is three hundred fifty times higher on average than their worker pay. This person is installed in that role, and their sole purpose is to make shareholders money. And billionaires pay lower tax rates than teachers in this country.

The Same Mechanisms

The thing about the rich in the time of Amos and the rich today, all over the world—they're the same. They own the politicians through legal bribery that we call lobbying or donations to make it sound okay. They own the media that shapes what we think. They own the algorithms that control what we see. And they've rigged the scales, and most of us don't even realize that we're being cheated on the measure.

Remember who Amos was? He was a shepherd. Shepherds learn to watch. Shepherds learn to watch for threats. They spot predators before anyone else sees the danger.

Amos had been watching Israel, and he saw something. The same offer that Satan made to Yeshua in the wilderness was the offer that Israel had already accepted long before. Judah as well. All the kingdoms and all the splendor just bowed down. Israel bowed down. They merged the worship of God and their calling with empire, with economic power, with national glory. They accepted the offer and they called it blessing.

Have We Accepted the Offer?

And I guess the message that Amos would ask today is: have we accepted the same offer? We know the answer. But how do we know? We know that we collectively have accepted the offer when religious language justifies wealth concentration.

"God blesses hard work. God blesses hard work." Or you could say the poor deserve poverty. Prosperity proves God's favor. That means Jeff and Elon are more righteous than anybody else.

We have something we love. The love affair we have in our country is our patriotism when we mix it with our faith.

Flags on Altars

Flags on altars, for example, is a big soapbox of mine. When you see national flags on God's altar, it shows you who's really on top. Period. God bless America, but never God bless our enemies like Paul commands.

The cows of Bashan are drawn to a faith that justifies their lifestyle and their own framing of who God is. They're drawn to supporting political candidates that make their worldly identity feel safe. And they desire to use their faith to control other people instead of helping them.

Signs of Having Accepted the Offer

These are signs if you've accepted the offer. Do you want to use your faith to control people or help people?

Another sign would be if you see exploitation being called freedom. People dying without healthcare—that's just the market. That's just the way it is. Again, the rich paying lower tax brackets than us, and we reward that. We say, "Oh, that's just being smart. When you know all the tax benefits, you're just being a smart businessman." No, you're being someone who paid someone in Congress to make tax laws that enrich you and don't apply to anyone else. That's what Amos was calling out.

And the prophets get expelled. "Don't be divisive. Stop being too political. You must not love your country. Are you Antifa?" It's coming. I don't know what Antifa is. It's coming. That's how you know empire has captured the temple.

How Empire Captures the Temple

Most of us are comfortable enough that we don't ask hard questions. I don't ask enough hard questions. It's easy—far too easy—just to follow the rut in daily life. We defend systems that benefit us. And many of us merge our faith with our system. It's too easy to do what Israel did.

And Amos said, "God hates worship divorced from justice." If you worship and don't even consider the justice of God's kingdom, it stinks to God. He would rather—and that's what the verse means. He would rather see, very last one, all of your music, all of your assemblies, all of your festivals, all of the Passover and the lambs and the yum, all of it. Like that's all great, but what he truly wants to see is justice rolling—unstoppable, unhindered, flooding everywhere with such strength that you don't think it'll ever stop.

Let justice roll on. Righteousness like a neverfailing.

You have to have one of those. Both would be great. But God's saying if you only choose one, it's going to be the difference between whether he wants to spend time in close proximity to you or if he wants to get away because you smell.

Beyond Political Sides

No one can put a pin exactly on where we're at personally in our personal lives. I think it's a great audit. How much are we looking into the topic of justice and righteousness? Outside of political scopes. Outside of political scopes.

Republicans—some stuff I've seen them push, I'm like, "That is a righteous thing to push." Other stuff, I don't think is really righteous. Democrats push stuff. Some of it's righteous. Some of it? That's righteous only because it's advantageous to you. I see that. But I'm not going to dismiss one party entirely and the other entirely when there are real needs. I see those needs. And you're ignoring that, and you're ignoring that.

Citizens of Two Kingdoms

We have to—as Christians, we don't have the luxury of being on a political team. We should be on God's team. [Philippians 3](#) says, "You're a citizen of the kingdom in heaven. You're above all of this."

I have a passport—United States. I show loyalty to my country by paying my taxes. That's how you show loyalty to your country, by the way. So, depending on how many of us are real patriots, right? That's great. But as a believer and a citizen of the kingdom, you have a mission and a job that is far above a popularity contest. Far above having friends who agree with you on

stuff. Far above putting on a red tie or a blue tie. Far above that. That's child's play. It's something we get because we can. That's not a replacement for our job.

And our job says you must have wisdom. You must rely on the Holy Spirit to speak truths to you, even if you don't want to hear them. And you need to ask God every day: "Hey, what am I supposed to be doing in the capacity as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven for the country that I'm in right now, for the neighborhood I'm in right now, for the community I'm in right now?"

And sometimes God's going to call you to do something that one side or the other will be really angry about, and they're going to label you. But you don't have time to give your attention to that.

Learn to Watch

Stay focused in this time, guys. Learn to watch like Amos did. Recognize when the offer is being made, when empire dresses up as a blessing. Be willing to be called divisive. And may we have eyes to see when the offer is being made, courage to refuse it, and faithfulness to say, "I worship God alone."

That's the kind of person Amos was—a bold shepherd who walked into the lion's den and called them all out. And I think that's something we could all take away from.

So please stand as we conclude with worship. Almighty God, our Father, our King. Father, we thank you for this opportunity to dive back into the prophets and explore your prophet Amos as he spoke to Ephraim, the northern kingdom of Israel.

Closing Prayer

Father, I ask that these words would not be trapped in time, but that they would become relevant to us today. I ask that the Holy Spirit would continue doing what it does. Give life, give strength, and allow us to be focused on what we need to do next. Teach us how to live, Father, and show us—give us the lenses to see when Satan is making that offer again. We thank you, Father, in the name of Yeshua, we pray. Amen.

[singing] Ad night [singing] cave my [singing] lay && [singing] && here. O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity.

Blessings and Peace

And may the Lord also cause you to increase and overflow in love for one another and for all people in order to strengthen your hearts as blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Yeshua with all of his holy ones. And may the God of patience and encouragement grant you to be like-minded with one another in the manner of Messiah so that together with one voice you glorify the God and father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah. And may he bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you his peace. In the name of our Sar shalom, our prince of peace, Yeshua Hamashiach, we pray. Amen and amen.

Shabbat shalom family.

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