

## The Abuse of Privilege Insights from Amos

**Intro:** Amos prophesied during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (c. 755 BC). During this period the two kingdoms had enjoyed a reprieve from the menacing conquest of the Assyrians. Both kingdoms used the time to advance their territory and increase their material prosperity; but with these times of relative comfort and success came great temptation.

Throughout all Amos' discourses is one prevailing theme captured in these words:

*"You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos 3:2)*

**Israel had been the sole nation in covenant with God; but instead of honoring Him in faithfulness they had abused the privileges of their relationship with God. Israel had abused their privileges three ways.**

### **Abuse of the privilege of prosperity**

*Israel took their blessings as a sign of God's favor and remained impenitent; but Amos could see that they had misinterpreted and misused their prosperity. In his words you see the images of a man who lived in the rugged wilderness around Tekoa. He tended the indigenous sycamore-figs which served as food for the poorer classes. In the country he had learned the values of hard work along with simple and principled living; but he comes to preach to people that were lazy, extravagant, and unprincipled.*

*Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria, the distinguished men of the foremost of nations, to whom the house of Israel comes. Those who recline on beds of ivory and sprawl on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who improvise to the sound of the harp, and like David have composed songs for themselves, who drink wine from sacrificial bowls while they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. (Amos 6:1,4-6)*

***It was not just that Israel's upper classes were living in luxury, they were doing so while neglecting the poor and needy around them!***

*Therefore, because you impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them, though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, yet you will not live in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, you who distress the righteous and accept bribes, and turn aside the poor in the gate. (Amos 5:11-12)*

***What a valuable lesson for us! It is so easy to accept our national or personal prosperity as a reward rather than a gift. Like Israel we may be saying that God must look with favor on us because we are doing so well, when in reality we are abusing the privileges of prosperity—we are indulging ourselves and forgetting others!***

So let us all remember that prosperity is not a birthright, but a privilege. It is a sacred trust which we must use for the advancement of the kingdom of God. Our goal should be not to “lay up treasures on earth” through the misuse of our prosperity, but to “lay up treasures in heaven” through the use of our prosperity.

Amos’ message is a contemporary indictment of those who use their wealth selfishly and forget about the needs of others.

### **Abuse of the privilege of power**

***The wealthy had enriched themselves through misuse of power and corruption.***

Israel’s ruling class had become politically corrupt and had ignored the principles of righteousness to feather their own nests (sound familiar?). Thus says the Lord, “For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment, because they sell the righteous for money and the needy for a pair of sandals. (Amos 2:6)

“And on garments taken as pledges they stretch out beside every altar, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined. (Amos 2:8)

Behind the male rulers were self-indulgent women who insisted that their husbands provide for them luxurious houses and banquets.

***Amos calls for justice toward the poor and the needy.***

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

***And so today, it matters to God not only what we do with our wealth, but how we have attained it!***

It is bad enough to use wealth selfishly, but it is even worse if it is gained at the expense of others.

Amos’ message is a contemporary indictment of those today who abuse their power to get their wealth.

### **Abuse of the privilege of worship**

***Behind Israel’s abuse of prosperity and power is a more fundamental problem—abuse of the privilege of worship. God had chosen Israel to be His people and to allow them to enter into covenant with Him. Yet they had abused the privileges of knowing and worshipping Him.***

Amos lived in the country. He was drawn to the simple and yet awesome manifestations of God’s power. He could see the glory of God in nature and in his words you sense his awesome fear of the Almighty God he served!

*For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what are His thoughts, He who makes dawn into*

*darkness and treads on the high places of the earth, the Lord God of hosts is His name. (Amos 4:13)*

*He who made the Pleiades and Orion and changes deep darkness into morning, who also darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is His name. It is He who flashes forth with destruction upon the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress. (Amos 5:8-9)*

But in contrast, the city folk were getting along just fine without God. They were actually helping Him out by bring their regular offerings to the designated places. He should be glad that He has such people worshipping Him! The goal of Israel's worship was self-serving. They came to worship, but they had altered it to become an idolatrous, immoral, and self-indulgent banquet.

*Enter Bethel and transgress; In Gilgal multiply transgression! Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, make them known. For so you love to do, you sons of Israel, declares the Lord God. (Amos 4:4-5)*

God's response:

*I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. (Amos 5:21-23)*

*God rejected Israel's worship because it did not have any effect on their daily lives!*

***I'm glad we're all here to worship God today; but we too must not abuse the privilege of worship.***

We can't allow ourselves to ever think that we are doing God a favor when we show up for church! We are here not because He needs us; but because we need Him!

We need to bring with us the memories of our own personal observations of God's greatness and influence in our lives; and when we leave we should have been made better by our time together. What good is worship on Sunday that does not have an impact on what we do Monday to Saturday?

In this culture, you can put in your time, hear a feel-good lesson about how glad God is just to have you show up and then retreat from the entertaining performance to return to business as usual. If Amos were alive, he might very well have a few words for the "cultural church" that professes to acknowledge God but in reality only entertains themselves and lives as they please!

**Conclusion: Few people in our day would be able to call the name of a one of the Minor Prophets, but I could wish that everyone in our land could read and**

**understand the message of Amos. We are a people of such privilege, but with that privilege comes the responsibility. Our wealth, our power, our knowledge of God are all sacred trusts to be used for His glory!**