

## **Jorge Jimenez-Mejia**

Amos was called by God to deliver a powerful message of warning and rebuke to the Israelites. The historical context of his time was marked by social and economic inequality, moral decay, political instability, and the looming threat of external powers. Amos' prophetic concerns encompassed various issues. He denounced the prevalent social and economic injustice, where the wealthy elites exploited and oppressed the poor. He confronted religious hypocrisy, condemning the empty rituals and calling for genuine repentance. He criticized the moral decay within society and warned of the consequences if the people did not turn away from their wickedness. Amos also addressed the national arrogance and warned of the imminent Day of the Lord, a time of judgment and darkness for those who remained unrepentant. Amos' life and prophecies serve as a testament to his unwavering commitment to God's message and his call for social justice, moral righteousness, and spiritual renewal in a challenging and tumultuous period of Israel's history.

At the time the Assyrian empire, made up of Israel and Judah, was reaching an age of prosperity. The Assyrian Empire at the start of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE (800-750 BCE) saw Israel and Judah becoming more wealthy and powerful creating a sense of prosperity and peace. During this time the kingdom was seen to be striving in a golden age. Along with that, in its time it was the largest empire in the Near East. Like many great empires, the Assyrian empire faced a shift and a complete reorganization of power. This came from Tiglath-Pileser III ascending into the throne in Nineveh through a sudden, violent, and unlawful seizure of power by killing the entire royal family. Tiglath-Pileser III, after seizing power he began to reorganize the empire with reforms and create the most powerful army in the Near east. This Army would not need to return home to farms for food. Much of Tiglath-Pileser II reforms abruptly ended the empire's "golden age" with challenges against its former politics, economic, social questions and religion to

instead align with the empire's new interests and policies. This shift in power was centered around the Assyrian empire, but seeing as Israel was part of it, God was not happy. Tiglath-Pleser III interests and policies did not align with God's message and hope for his people of Israel.

One of the challenges Israelites faced was social and economic inequality, where a small number of elites had all of the kingdom's wealth and the majority of the population lived in poverty and suffered from injustice. Another challenge faced was moral Decay. The Israelites became spiritually complacent and had lost sight of their moral values. In addition to their challenges, they faced was political instability of division being created within the kingdom, causing for a lack of attention in effectively addressing their problems. Alongside this they faced military threats of conquest and invasion by neighboring powers, creating a sense of insecurity and instability. Lastly and most importantly was religious corruption. They began to do empty rituals all while ignoring the spirit of God's law, creating a corruption in their religious practices. These challenges became God's concerns.

He then calls upon Amos to deliver his message and express these prophetic concerns. "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me 'Go prophesy to my people.'" (Amos 7:14-15). Amos was one of the prophets chosen by God without any legacy or preexisting ties to prophecy. He was a herdsman that lived in the southern kingdom of Judah before becoming a prophet.

Apart from Amos not previously being part of the large community of prophets in Israel, this did change the fact of his large impact that he had made in Israel by holding the kingdom accountable to its moral, ethical, and religious wrongdoings.

One of the first prophetic concerns raised was social and economic injustice. “For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. 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” (Amos 2:6-7). Amos saw that the wealthy elites were oppressing and exploiting the poor. They would buy and sell people (the poor) like they were an article of clothing with no remorse and for their pure benefit. Ultimately creating this concern of moral decay of not knowing right from wrong.

Alongside this concern was that of the religious hypocrisy that would go on. “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your Harps” (Amos 5:21-23). Amos saw the religious festivals of rituals and offerings as an annoyance and reminder of empty practice of worship. Amos believed that true relationship with God will transform one's relationships with others. And true worship would be justice where actions are taken to correct injustice along with righteousness, where there is equity despite social differences.

A Third was a sense of nationalistic Arrogance that they would create for themselves. “Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come!” (Amos 6:1). Amos criticized Israel's pride and arrogance that led them to believe they were invincible. He then warned them that God will punish them for their sins and ultimately humble them.

Which leads me to my last prophetic concern of the coming Day of the Lord. “Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be

darkness, not light” (Amos 5:18). Amos prophesied the day the Lord will come and how it will be a dark day of judgment for Israel's sins. The Lord's judgment would exonerate the righteous and punish the wicked. So, then Amos emphasized his concern and told the Israelites to turn back to God before it was too late.

Well, well, well, if it isn't the moment, you've all been waiting for..... AMOS TODAY! To start off with the first, most important and obvious topic I would say is the social and economic injustice that is still an ongoing concern in our country. To better tie this the racial injustice in our country. Where I would like to begin is Martin Luther King Jr. historic 'I have a dream' speech. Martin Luther King fought for true equality in this nation, for a place where segregation is denounced and frowned upon. Much like the Israelites poor people, people of color in this country were seen as basically an infestation from white people. Like the wealthy elites of Israel white people would treat people of color inhumanely. Martin Luther King was also a minister and, in a way, tried to deliver God's message of justice and righteousness, much like Amos. In his speech he quotes Amos; “Let justice flow like a river and righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24). MLK wanted to see true justice, which meant doing an act to correct the act of injustice that was going on with segregation. Along with this you could find righteousness, being able to treat everyone as equals despite your social differences. Although times have changed, we still face this continued social and economic injustice between minorities in America and their white counterparts where they are more likely to succeed in our system due to the favoritism of the pigmentation in their skin. George Floyd was brutally assaulted, murdered and discriminated against by police. POLICE! The very people were supposed to rely our safety on and expect to protect us. I will say it gave a big awakening to the people of this country and showed the systemic inequality that is neglected. Police brutality against the black community has been going since law enforcement became a thing and his death outraged people, years of

pent-up anger struggle suffrage just all at once ready to speak out against and protest for a demand in change in our society. On top of this to even more current and recent events is the ridiculous law passed by the governor of Florida that faces targeted discrimination against immigrants. Governor DeSantis passed a law into effect fining any undocumented workers and facing possible deportation along with large fine that the company will have to pay for allowing undocumented citizens work. Not only are immigrants a large portion of the Florida's workforce because they're not just hard workers but they do the jobs that no American wants, but they make up the entire workforce of Florida's agriculture which may I mention makes up between forty to almost sixty percent of the U.S. agriculture. This will damage the entire economic and social system that they have. Florida's agricultural companies will need to find workers willing to work in such poor conditions and on top of that find a way to pay them a livable, which then leads to an increase in price of their product so they can pay the workers.

In addition to injustice in today's world, religious hypocrisy in our modern-day world. The Israelites would give offerings of food and money, in which the poor were in dire need of, causing for hypocrisy and this idea that they do good by giving god offerings when in fact they disobey gods law of loving one another and instead neglected the poor. Now to focus on Gods law where you are to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), a large portion of the Christian community has a grudge (which is another law that they break, because they're not allowed to hold grudges) against the LGBT community. Which ironically is a community full of love and acceptance of who you are without discrimination against one another. This community is rooted in love and acceptance which is one of the biggest things you must do to be a Christian and follow Gods message. So, my question is why is there so much hatred towards them? Easy, they don't follow hetero idolatry and just are not used to it. If this was developed (not to say it wasn't cause it 100 percent already was) in ancient times and seen as a normality, we would be

fine. So, it's really just a large hypocrisy of what was least expected in their tinny little world and now just psychological battle and then retaliation to fight something unexpected. Because if there's one thing that humans fear the most is that of the unknown, that is why we have faith and a large desire to learn.

In conclusion, Amos stands as a remarkable figure who was called by God to address the pressing concerns of his time. His prophetic message cut through the social, economic, and moral challenges that plagued ancient Israel. Amos fearlessly denounced the exploitation and oppression of the poor by the wealthy elites, exposing social and economic injustice. He confronted religious hypocrisy, calling for genuine repentance rather than empty rituals. His warnings about the consequences of moral decay resonated with the people, urging them to turn away from wickedness. Amos also confronted the arrogance of the nation and warned of the impending Day of the Lord, a time of judgment for those who remained unrepentant. Through his unwavering commitment, Amos serves as an inspiration, reminding us of the enduring importance of social justice, moral righteousness, and spiritual renewal in the face of challenging times.

In addition, the prophetic concerns addressed by Amos during his time still resonate today in various forms. Social and economic injustice continues to be an ongoing concern, as marginalized communities, particularly people of color, face systemic inequalities and discrimination. The fight for true equality, as championed by figures like Martin Luther King Jr., echoes Amos' call for justice and righteousness. Religious hypocrisy remains prevalent as well, with some using their faith to justify discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, despite the core message of love and acceptance within Christianity. These issues highlight the need for continued efforts to address social and economic inequality and to promote genuine love and acceptance in our society. The struggle against injustice and hypocrisy requires the courage to

confront the unknown and challenge deeply ingrained biases, just as Amos did in his time. By reflecting on his prophetic concerns and recognizing their relevance today, we can work towards a more just, inclusive, and righteous world.