

• *God speaks to Israel*

Now after speaking to seven nations, Amos reaches the eighth: Israel. He began his survey of the nations by talking of Israel's seven neighbours. Now he has completed the circle and he comes to Israel itself. Israel was no different from the others!

*'This is what Yahweh has said:
 "For three transgressions by Israel,
 and especially for four,
 I will not reverse My decision.
 Because they sell the righteous for money,
 and they sell the poor for a pair of sandals. ^{□1}
 They trample the head of the helpless into the dust of the
 ground¹
 and they push the poor out of the way.
 Not only the son, but even the father goes after the
 servant-girl,²
 in order to desecrate My name. ^{□2}
 I will not reverse my decision, because they spread
 out beside every altar the garments taken as
 security for a loan.
 In the house of their God they drink the wine taken
 As a fine."^{□3}*

□1 2:6

□2 2:7

□3 2:8

Poverty and Injustice

It is clear from the book of Amos that land was taken from the poor, then clothing, and that finally the poor fell into slavery because of their debts. When the poor tried to get justice in the law-courts they were pushed aside and judges were bribed. The Mosaic law defended the poor and needy in various ways, but at this time in Israel's history wealthy people within Israel had enough power to bribe the judges.

(i) The poor sold into slavery

Many sins are mentioned here.
 (i) Selling the poor into slavery. ^{□1} The righteous person falls into debt. He owes a minutely small sum, the value of a pair of shoes. He cannot pay, and the man owed the sum sells him into slavery.

□1 2:6b

(ii) Justice withheld from the poor

(ii) Withholding justice from the poor. ^{□1} 'They trample the head of the helpless into the dust of the ground' refers to rough treatment in which the poor man is knocked to the ground by those who are rich, powerful and corrupt. 'They push the poor out of the way' refers not only to ill-treatment but to the withholding of justice. As in 5:12 the poor person is pushed aside when he is on the way to a court seeking justice.

□1 2:7a

(iii) Ill treatment of slave girls

(iii) Ill-treatment of servant-girls. 'Not only the son but even the father goes after the servant-girl'. It is not a reference to the same girl (the word 'same' does not occur in the Hebrew), but to the fact that both father and son are guilty of the same sin. They forced into immorality girls who could not easily resist the pressures of those who were powerful.

(iv) Contempt for Yahweh

(iv) Contempt for Yahweh. They followed their lusts knowing that what they were doing was offensive to God, They acted deliberately *'in order to desecrate'* God's revealed character as the holy God.

(v) Poor deprived of warm clothing

(v) Depriving the poor of their last warm clothing. According to Exodus 22:26–27 when a poor person fell into extreme debt he would leave, during the daytime, his warm outer garment with the person owed the money. It was a sign of his indebtedness. But it was only a formality and the law demanded that the poor person should have his warm outer garment given back to him in the evening, It was illegal to keep the warm outer garment overnight. Yet the wealthy in Israel were taking the warm outer garments of the poor.

(vi) Luxurious and sensuous lifestyles

(vi) Following a luxurious, lazy and sensuous lifestyle. They would spread out the blankets taken from the poor beside the altars where they went for their late-night parties at their idolatrous sanctuaries. The money they had taken from the poor in corrupt legal cases they then used to buy their wine, for their sessions of heavy drinking.

Sins against grace

• Ingratitude for special blessings

The terrible thing about all of this was that it was deep ingratitude. God had done so much for them. They had received a great salvation. Unlike the six nations of Amos 1:3–2:3 they had experienced at a national level God's redemption given to them by the blood of a lamb.

• Consequences

Amos 2:6–8 lists the sins of Israel. Amos 2:9–12 shows how their sins are sins against grace, sins against the great things God has done for them. Amos 2:13–16 will go on to tell of how because of their wickedness God will bring a great tragedy into the life of Israel from which no one will escape.

• Both Judah and Israel

What mighty things God had done for them! Amos refers to the time when God had brought them out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan. He has the whole nation (Judah and north Israel combined) in His mind.

"Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedar-tree, and who was as powerful as the oak trees. I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath."¹

¹ 2:9

• Amazing God-given victories over the Canaanites

'Amorite' is another word for 'Canaanite'; it refers to the original inhabitants of the land of Canaan (as in Genesis 15:16). God had enabled Israel to defeat all its enemies. As they had come into the land of Canaan, God had given them victory over Heshbon and Bashan, the first two Canaanite (or 'Amorite') nations which they met. Then God gave them victory over Jericho and the various fortresses of Canaan. The Israelites were simply a mob of ex-slaves, and the towns of Canaan were strong and powerful, *'like the height of the cedar- tree... as powerful as the oak trees'*. But God gave them total and amazing victory and their Canaanite enemies were conquered thoroughly. God *'destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath'* until there was nothing left!

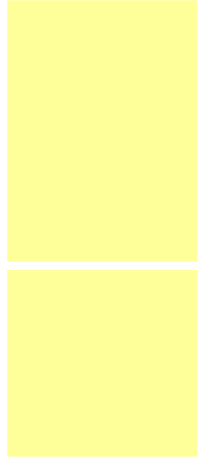
• **Sins against grace are worse than sins against conscience**

God wants us to be grateful for our redemption and to work out our redemption in the way in which we live. When the pagan world sins, it sins against conscience. When the people of God sin, they sin against grace. They sin against the great things God has done for them. Nothing could be more terrible. It is worse to sin against grace than to sin against conscience.



Footnotes

1 I take it (i) that hashsho'aphim derives from sh-'-ph, 'to crush, trample', (ii) that 'head...' is object of the verb, and (iii) that 'upon dust of the ground' is in Hebrew a locative phrase.

2 The Hebrew word refers to a servant-girl and is never used (despite some expositions) of the temple-prostitute of pagan religion.



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 <p>slices.org.uk</p>	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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