

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 6, Amos, Social Sins

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is lecture 6 on the Book of Amos, Social Sins.

We are continuing to study the book of the 12 and we're focusing on the message of the prophet Amos.

At the very beginning of the book of Amos, we have this powerful image of God that really, I think, is kind of foundational to the message of Amos. He says the Lord roars from Zion. He utters his voice from Jerusalem.

The pastures of the shepherds mourn and the top of Carmel withers. Amos is going to portray God throughout this book as a roaring lion and an approaching storm. In light of the historical circumstances and background of Amos' ministry that we talked about in our previous session, the Assyrian crisis, this powerful army that is about to invade Israel, we understand why he portrayed God in this way.

These people have begun to take God for granted. They have imposed upon God's grace. They have taken God's grace for granted.

They have taken the blessings that God has given to them for granted. So, God sends Amos, leave your home, leave your prosperous business in the South, leave the enterprises that you're doing there. I want you to go to the North and warn the people of Israel that their disobedience, unfaithfulness, and apostasy are going to cause God to send judgment.

If you were a prophet, if you were the prophet, Amos, what kind of message would God give you to say to these people? What would it be like to proclaim that message? Well, as Amos preaches to the people of Israel, and as he warns them about God as a roaring lion and an approaching storm, as he tries to wake them up about the seriousness of what is about to happen in their history in light of the oncoming Assyrian invasion, what issues and what problems and what concerns? Why is God a roaring lion? Why is God so concerned about what is going on in the lives of their people? We're going to see in the book of Amos that the prophet Amos is going to focus on three specific issues with regard to the people of Israel. In many ways, I think these issues and these themes and these concerns are very representative of the message of the prophets in general. We could take Amos, and I think the message of Amos and the theology of Amos, and look at this book as representative of what prophets in both Israel and Judah, the Assyrian crisis, and the Babylonian crisis are trying to say to the people.

I think the first theme and the first emphasis that we see in the book of Amos is that Amos is giving a warning to people who had become complacent in their wealth. Amos is giving a warning to people who had become complacent in their wealth. We saw this in the last video.

God had blessed Israel in an incredible way. God had expanded their borders and their territories under Jeroboam II. International trade had expanded because of the contacts that Jeroboam had created for the people.

During this time of incredible wealth, instead of that blessing leading them to be thankful and grateful for what God had promised them, instead of serving him out of gratitude because he had given them this incredible land and had blessed them in these special ways, they forgot about God. They treated their wealth as the ultimate source of their security and significance. They put God on the backburners of their lives, and they became obsessed with their possessions and the things that God had given to them.

The Old Testament law said that the ultimate command was to love God with all of your heart, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. The serious issue here is that wealth had interposed on both of those covenant responsibilities. Instead of loving God, they loved their wealth.

Instead of loving their neighbor as themselves, as they had more and more opportunities to be generous and selfless in the way that they treated each other, they became more greedy, more selfish, and more materialistic. There are a number of passages where Amos is specifically going to focus on the issue of the greed and materialism of the people of the Northern Kingdom. One of those passages is found for us in Amos chapter 4, verses 1 to 3. Amos is going to begin this by, in a sense, sarcastically addressing the wealthy women of the Northern Kingdom.

He says this: Hear this, you cows of Bashan. Bashan was this prime agricultural place in the land of Israel. The strongest, fattest, most valuable livestock was from this particular part of Israel.

That's the terminology that Amos uses to address the wealthy women of Samaria. Any preacher who has the courage to say that about women in his audience is a man that I respect. I do not plan to imitate him at any time in my future ministry.

But, hear this word, you cows of Bashan. They don't have a weight problem. They have a prosperity problem.

He says, Who are on the mountains of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, Bring that we may drink. What we have here is a

picture of these women who are only concerned about their own needs and their own pleasure. They are oppressing the poor at the same time that they say to their husbands, bring us more alcohol to drink so that we can satisfy our needs.

God says that he is going to deal with this issue and deal with these people. Here's the judgment that he will bring against them. The Lord God has sworn by his holiness that behold the days are coming upon you when they will take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fish hooks, and you shall go out through the breaches, each one of you ahead, and you shall be cast out into harmony, declares the Lord.

For these women who have experienced this incredible prosperity, you can look at Isaiah chapter three and the way that he speaks to the wealthy and prosperous women of Judah there, and he says essentially the same thing to them. They are going to be taken away in exile. They have lived in luxury.

They have ignored the needs of other people. They have taken advantage of the poor. As a result of that, they are going to experience all of the horrors of exile.

It says they are going to lead you away with hooks. We have images and we have inscriptions and reliefs from the Assyrians that actually portray the Assyrian kings or the Assyrian commanders leading their captors away with hooks through their noses or their mouths. That is going to happen to the rich women of Israel that have been consumed with their own wealth and their own pleasure.

Amos addresses this issue in chapter six verses one to seven. He is actually even going to speak about people in Judah who have the same problem. They have enjoyed the prosperous reign of Uzziah the second.

Again, instead of leading them to the Lord, it has led them away from God. Amos says in chapter six, verses one to seven, woe. Whenever that word is used in the prophets, the idea of woe is an announcement of death.

This is a woe oracle. It is almost like a funeral lament for someone. Amos is saying, look, death is coming because you have ignored your neighbors.

You have lived at ease in Zion. I like the way the Net Bible translates this woe oracle idea. Those who live in ease at Zion are as good as dead.

They have an opportunity to see their funeral before it ever happens. If they do not change their ways, if they do not give up this greedy, materialistic outlook on life, then God is going to ultimately judge them. Woe to those who are at ease in Zion and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria.

You imagine the wealthy and prosperous southern kingdom of Zion, Jerusalem. In the north you have the wealthy prosperous city of Samaria and the rich and the wealthy people that live there. Those that were associated with the king and the bureaucracy and had enjoyed all the benefits of both the reign of Jeroboam the second and Uzziah.

Those are the people that are targeted by God for judgment. They're described in the rest of verse one as the notable men of the first of the nations to whom the house of Israel comes. In spite of this lofty position of leadership, in spite of the lifestyle that they've enjoyed, God targets them as the ones who are going to experience judgment.

We will provide a further description of this as it continues. This oracle continues in verse four, woe to those, again, an announcement of death. There's a funeral coming, and the funeral is going to be these rich and wealthy people.

Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches. So, we can imagine these people just in the lap of luxury who eat lambs from the flocks and calves from the midst of the stall. They have plenty to eat.

They eat the most wealthy and expensive meat. In verse five, they sing idle songs to the sound of the harp. And like David, they invent for themselves instruments of music.

Who drink wine by the bowlfuls and anoint themselves with the finest of oils, but they are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. And so, you can imagine people here, again, they're living in the lap of luxury. They're on their beds of ivory.

They have plenty to eat. They sing songs. They play music.

They drink wine by the bowlful. Their lives are consumed by pleasure. And as a result of this, they do not understand the ruin that is going to come upon Joseph that the prophets are warning them about.

Verse seven says this: therefore, they shall now be the first of those who go into exile. And the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away. We've emphasized this.

God does not capriciously judge people. God's judgments are not random. God's judgments are not unfair.

There's a real sense here in which the judgment that Amos is warning these people of, the punishment fits the crime. Because they have lived in luxury and ignored God and ignored others. Those people are going to be the ones that are specifically

targeted for the judgment of exile and all of the horrors and deprivations that are going to occur when the Assyrians take them over.

The word in verse seven that is translated in the ESV says the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away. The Hebrew word there is the word *mirzah*. As we look at this particular cognate word and the root word as it's used in other languages and in literature outside the Bible, there were these specific feasts and festivals called the *mirzah* festivals.

They involved the worship of pagan gods, lavish amounts of food and drink and alcohol, pleasure, and sexual immorality were often associated with that. And it was often done in the context of worshipping other gods in these pagan contexts. The fact that Amos uses this particular word to talk about the revelry I think it gives us another understanding of what we have in verse four: lying on their beds of ivory, singing songs, eating meat, and drinking wine by the bowlfuls.

It's not just an extravagant lifestyle, but it's actually buying into the paganism of the culture that's around them. Amos and the prophets want us to understand wealth in and of itself is not evil. I think that's a biblical perspective.

Everything that we have in life, God gives us to enjoy, but there is a danger in wealth and in materialism that ultimately draws us away from God when that becomes the focus of our lives. God often blesses people in the Old Testament, like Job and Abraham, with great wealth, but that wealth can become an obstacle. Deuteronomy warned the people of Israel that when you enjoy the wealth and the benefits and the blessings of the promised land, that's going to have a tendency to draw you away from God.

Paul warns us in his letter to Timothy, warn those who are rich to be careful about the dangers. Money itself is not the root of all evil. Paul says that the love of money is the root of all evil.

I think we see that idea here in the book of Amos as well. God is going to judge those who have become complacent in their wealth. Now I want us to think about eighth century Israelites and Judahites that are being drawn into that and think about us and compare that to our culture today.

When I look at the typical representation or drawing of a house during the Iron Age in Israel, what I see there is a very simple structure. It's not a place that I would want to live. I wouldn't even want to have that as my college dorm room.

They shared their domicile with their livestock. Those people who lived in those kinds of structures were tempted by the dangers of materialism. If that is true of them, then what chance do we have today in the West with all of the possessions, all of the

wealth, and the incredible things that we enjoy? This is a real temptation that we need to take seriously.

When I look at the things in ancient Israel in the eighth century the city of Samaria, for example, would have been used as a status symbol. It was not a 50-inch TV. It was not a new car.

It was not those kinds of things. It was expensive jewelry, or it was ivory carvings that might be on your house or on your furniture. If those people struggled with materialism, how much more do we need to be careful of the dangers that are there for us today? There's a good warning.

These people have simple life. We would look at the wealthiest Israelites, and they live at a standard that would be in some sense below what we would live. If those people were tempted by this, what chance do we have? If these people were tempted by the enticements of pleasure and personal indulgence, how much more do we have to be careful with that when we live in a culture that is obsessed with sex and sexual fulfillment, alcohol, and living for the next high? John tells us to love not the world and that the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are going to be the things that are going to draw us away from God. That does not encourage us to draw up our own list of legalistic things that we do and do not do.

But it does remind us that pleasure and wealth and personal indulgence and the enticement of sex and drugs and alcohol, all of those things are things that we need to give attention to. Those of us that are parents need to remind our children of those kinds of things. I think the eighth century prophets have some things that are very relevant for us today to think about.

Amos gives a warning to people that were complacent in their wealth. Now, the second thing that Amos is going to focus on, and this is very closely related to what we just talked about, Amos is going to give a warning to people who are not practicing justice toward the poor and the needy. I think most of us who know anything at all about the prophets, we know that the theme of social justice is a recurring idea in the message of the prophets.

The reason for that is because of things that were going on in the eighth century, as Israel had experienced this incredible prosperity, instead of being the kind of society that God wanted them to be, where they loved their neighbor, where they generously loaned things to their neighbor, where they took care of each other, where they looked out for the needs of others above themselves, they had become a society where they were obsessed with wealth to the extent that they took advantage of their poorer neighbors. So, Amos chapter 2, verses 6 and following are going to focus on all the various ways that the people of Israel were not practicing justice toward their neighbors. The prophet says, thus says the Lord, for three

transgressions of Israel and for four, I will not revoke their punishment because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals.

They trample on the heads of the poor into the dust of the earth. They turn aside the way of the afflicted. A man and his father go into the same girl so that my holy name is profaned.

They lay themselves down beside every altar on garments that are taken in pledge, and in the house of their God, they drink the wine of those who have been fined. So, when Amos wants to give us a list and a catalog of the sins of the people of Israel, the list that he gives us focuses specifically on the ways that they have taken advantage of the poor. They are so obsessed with wealth that they are willing to sell the righteous for a pair of shoes.

They take advantage of these poor servant girls in that father and son are both sleeping with this woman and sexually taking advantage of them. They worship God while they sit on the garments of these poor people, and they see no inconsistency with that. And so, there's an emphasis, and there's a message throughout the book of Amos that they have ignored the needs of the poor.

We saw that in chapter 4. The fat cows of Bashan, who are consumed with themselves, they oppress the poor and take advantage of the needy as a way of lining their own pockets. In chapter 5, where there are these recurring calls to repent on the part of Amos to the people, he's going to say in chapter 4, seek me and live. Verse 6, seek the Lord and live.

Verse 14: seek good and not evil. Well, in verse 15, we get an idea of exactly what Amos means by seeking good and not evil or seeking the Lord. Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate.

It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. The only potential, the only way that Israel is going to experience God's mercy and grace and forgiveness, is if they abandon this way of life where they're taking advantage of the poor. In verse 24 of chapter 5, Amos is going to say, let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

So, when Amos talks about repentance, he's not just talking about going into a room and praying and confessing your sins to God. He is specifically telling the people of Israel that they need to revise their behavior toward each other. They need to get back to the place where God had called them to care about the poor and the needy, to love their neighbor as themselves.

As we're looking at this, and as we're thinking about the message of Amos in light of the Old Testament as a whole, I think what we understand is Amos is reminding the

people that they had become exactly the opposite of what God had designed the people of Israel to be. God had designed Israel to be a prototype, a model, an example for other nations to demonstrate to them the way that society was supposed to be. For us today, that does not mean that we put the Old Testament law into practice, but it does mean that even as Christians and as believers, and even though we are no longer under the Mosaic covenant, we look at the Old Testament for the values, the priorities that were important to God as he established the society, as he established a holy nation that was going to be a model and a light to other peoples.

This is what this society, this is what this culture was supposed to be about. What God emphasized for the people of Israel is that they were to be a people of justice. The Hebrew word is Mishpat.

But what justice means in Israel and what justice means in the Old Testament may not be exactly what we think of. We normally think of justice and we think that justice involves giving people what they deserve. It means living according to the principle of the law and that's an important part of justice.

But in the Old Testament, justice is something more than that. Justice is not simply just giving people what they deserve. The Bible expands the idea to say that true justice involves being willing to give people what they need as well.

Justice in a society as God has designed it and the way God has set up and the way that God designed the people of Israel meant that those who had more than they needed would ultimately be willing to give to those who did not have enough. The problem is that when wealth becomes the focus of your life, when that becomes the idol that you live for when that becomes the thing that determines your ultimate security and significance, it becomes so important that you will do anything that it takes to get that. And so, if wealth becomes my ultimate good, if personal indulgence, if pleasure, if satisfying my needs becomes the ultimate good in my life instead of good, instead of God himself, I will do whatever it takes to satisfy those longings.

Instead of trusting God to meet my needs, I will trust in myself, my own efforts, and my own endeavors to get that. And if I have to commit violence or if I have to commit injustice or I have to take advantage of someone else, that God that I'm pursuing is so important to me that I'll do that. And so, Amos is going to emphasize the importance of practicing justice.

Also, chapter 5, verse 11 and 12, it sounds very much like the list in the catalog of sins that we see in Amos chapter 2. The people of Israel, let me begin in verse 10, hate him who reproves and negates. They abhor him who speaks the truth. They

don't want people reminding them of what God expects from them because that's not what they want to do.

Instead, they trample on the poor. They exact taxes of grain from him. You have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them.

You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine, for I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins. You who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, who turn aside the needy in the gate.

Therefore, he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time for it is an evil time." So again, they're taking advantage of the poor. God's judgment, the punishment will fit the crime because he's going to take away the things that they have extracted from others either through dishonest practices or through oppression or through greed, and their own avarice and sin. What Amos says is exactly what Isaiah is going to say in chapter 5, verses 8 to 10.

Woe to those who add field to field and house to house. Because you've done that, you're never going to have the opportunity to live in those houses because you have taken the fields that God gave to the individual Israelites as their heritage and their inheritance from the Lord, and you've made it your own in a dishonest way. I am going to cause that land not to produce, and you're not going to enjoy its benefits and his blessings.

That's the message of the prophet Amos. He is warning these people that have failed to practice justice that there is going to be an accounting for the way that they have treated their neighbors. Again, as we put Amos in the context of the Old Testament, it is a reminder of all of the ways that Israelite society in the eighth century was exactly the opposite of what God had designed.

I want to go back to the Old Testament law, back to the Pentateuch and the Torah and just remind us of some of the things that God had said to the Israelites about the way that they were to treat each other. I want to take those ideals and those designs and what God intended, and I want to place them beside what we've just looked at in Amos. I think the difference here is obvious.

God had told the people of Israel in the Torah that they were to care for the poor and the needy in some very specific ways. Whether this was a law code that they were to follow in exact detail or whether this was something that merely taught them an ideal, a deep concern for the poor and needy is something that's part of the ethic of the Torah. In Exodus chapter 22, verses 25 and 27 tell us there that if an Israelite gave a loan to another Israelite and took a pledge for that loan, if that person was so poor that the only thing that they could give as a pledge would be their own cloak or their coat, the rich neighbor was to go to his poor neighbor who

had given him the cloak as a pledge and was to allow him to have that overnight so that he didn't get cold.

You were supposed to be so concerned for this poor person that you would go back every night and give the cloak. I think the ultimate design of that law was that you don't take the cloak as a pledge to begin with. Do you see the difference between that and what's going on in Amos? In Amos, it says in chapter 2, verse 8, they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge.

Instead of living by the standards of the Torah, they were coming to the sanctuary and laying out the pledge that they had taken from their neighbor, the garment. They were using that as their pallet while they worshiped the Lord. There's something fundamentally inconsistent and incoherent with this.

Exodus chapter 23, verse 6, does not deny justice to the poor in legal proceedings. Do poor people always get a fair shake in the courtroom? That didn't happen in ancient Israel. It doesn't happen in our culture, but that was what God designed for the people of Israel.

Deuteronomy chapter 15 verse 1, every seven years the Israelites were to cancel all of the debts. God did this so that people would not have to live in sustained systemic poverty that was passed on from one generation to the next. If a person did go into debt and did have to become a debt servant, there was the opportunity at the end of that process they could become free and go back to having a viable lifestyle.

Some of my students have asked, couldn't we practice this with student loans? Deuteronomy 15 would be a great passage there. But God had designed this as a way of making sure that poverty wasn't something that continued for generation after generation. Leviticus chapter 19 and Deuteronomy chapter 24, if I was a landowner and if I had been blessed by God with crops, ultimately, those crops didn't belong exclusively to me.

They were ultimately a gift from God, and as a result of that, I was to allow the poor to glean in my fields. This was an ancient welfare system. It wasn't simply a handout.

The poor would have to work for this, but I took what I had been blessed by God with, and I was willing to share it. The poor person could glean in the corners of the field or when we were harvesting grain and there were there were stalks of grain that were left in the field, I was not to go back over that. I was to leave that for the poor person.

Deuteronomy chapter 15 verses 12 to 14, release your Hebrew debt slaves every seven years. The Israelites were not to permanently enslave their fellow Israelites.

We know from the book of Jeremiah in Judah in Jeremiah chapter 35 that in the city of Judah, the Jews there had not followed this custom of releasing their debt slaves.

When the Babylonians are about to attack the city, they temporarily let their slaves go as a way of trying to gain God's favor. When the political and military pressure of the invading army is released, they take their slaves back. I think we can imagine that the same kind of thing was going on in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Deuteronomy chapter 23, do not charge interest on loans that you give to your fellow Israelites. You were allowed to do that with foreigners, but you were not allowed to do that with Israelites. Your focus in giving a loan to another person was not on the interest that you could get from them.

It was on helping your neighbor and helping him in a time of need and crisis. Deuteronomy chapter 10, verse 18, shows justice and compassion to widows and orphans. In many ways, they were at the bottom of the ladder.

They were the most needy people in this culture. God was a God who showed compassion to widows and orphans. God cares about Ruth when she's an alien in the land of Israel.

The Israelites were to care about that as well. They were to reflect the character of God. Instead of taking advantage of the needy, they were to help the widows and orphans.

Deuteronomy chapter 15, I think is a key chapter and something that was to provide some guiding principles for the Israelites as they thought about how do we respond to our fellow Israelites when they are in need. I think this is a key passage in teaching us the ethic of the Torah. I want to look at three specific verses in Deuteronomy 15.

Deuteronomy 15 verse 4 says this, but there will be no poor among you. For the Lord will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess. We look at this and say, what could this passage possibly be talking about? There will be no poor among you.

We read in Amos that there definitely were poor people among them. We see that in every period of Israel's history. There were people who were poor and needy.

But Deuteronomy 15 verse 4 gives us an ideal. It reminds us that the blessings of the promised land are going to be so extensive, and God is going to bless his people in such an abundant way that if they had lived in the way that God had designed for them to live, there was no need for anyone to be poor. Because there would always be Israelites who had more than they needed, who would be able to share with their neighbors who did not have enough.

That's what justice was. This was not provision that I had earned in my own. This was something that had come to me from God, and I had a responsibility to share it with my neighbor.

Chapter 15, verse 11 in Deuteronomy, here's a second principle. In some ways, it sounds like a contradiction of what we just read in Deuteronomy 15, verse 4, but that's the ideal. Here's the reality.

Verse 11 says, for there will never cease to be poor in the land. Ideal, there never will be poor. You're going to be blessed enough by God that, really, as a society, there's no need for there to be poor people.

But the reality is there will never cease to be poor in the land. I think there is a tendency sometimes to read that verse and to stop and say, well, that's just the reality. That's just the way life is.

There's nothing we can do about it. Let's just accept that. But actually, God gives them a command and an instruction that's based on the fact there are always going to be poor people among you.

Therefore, here's the inference, I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy, and to the poor in your land. You are not to be tight-fisted toward your fellow Israelite. You are to be generous because the Lord is going to bless you.

There are always going to be poor in the land. You have a responsibility to meet that need. Then I think a verse that even goes beyond all of this and ultimately explains the why and what the motivation of why the Israelites were to treat the poor people in this way is that there is a reminder from God that comes in Deuteronomy chapter 15 verse 15.

The Lord says there, as the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. I'm talking about when you release a debt slave from slavery, and you're not just supposed to let him go and let him be free. You're to give him provisions so that he can start his new life as he lives in freedom.

You shall give to him, and you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you. Therefore, I command you this day. What's the ultimate motivation? God had saved them from slavery.

God had blessed them in every way possible. They were to be generous to those who were in need as they remembered what God had done for them. I think we're

reminded in the rest of the Old Testament, and we're particularly reminded in the eighth-century prophets that this is not the kind of society that Israel had become.

They were not taking care of the poor and needy because God had blessed them. They had experienced incredible wealth and prosperity. It had turned around and had become a pretext for their own greed, their own materialism, their own selfishness because they had made this their God.

If I have to oppress, if I have to commit violence, if I have to take this away from someone, I am so obsessed with this. This has become the focal point of my life to where I have to have this. And so I think it's very interesting and one of the things that you may do as you teach the prophets, I think it's very interesting to take Deuteronomy 15 and lay out these three principles.

There's no need for there to be poor among you. However, there always is going to be poor among you. Therefore, open your hand, and then you are to give to the poor, and you're to give to the needy because God has blessed you.

And then to lay that alongside, look at the things that are going on in 8th century Israel. Look at the fat cows of Bashan and ask, how did these women match up with Deuteronomy 15? Look at chapter 6 and what it says about those who are at ease in Zion and who are living in comfort and taking part in these Mirzah festivals and feasts in Amos chapter 6. How do they look when we compare them to Deuteronomy chapter 15? There's a reminder in all of this that, again, Israel was called to be a model and a paradigm to the other nations of what a society was supposed to look like. The reality is that when they wanted to have gods and kings and rulers like all of the other nations, the thing that followed from that is that their lifestyle and their behavior became like the other nations as well.

When Ahab and Jezebel promote the worship of Baal, you have an entirely different God being brought into Israelite society. You have gods who are just like humans. Greed, materialism, violence, drunkards, all these kinds of things.

When you worship a god like that, you ultimately follow in their lifestyle. There's a difference between worshiping a god whose great act in the Old Testament is rescuing a group of people out of slavery and bondage. That's the ethos of the God of Israel.

He cares about the poor and the needy. That is different from the ethos of the God of the Canaanites, who kill, murder, commit adultery, sleep around, and do whatever because their needs are the ultimate thing. When you serve one of those gods, it ultimately leads down a different path than serving the God of Israel.

That's what's happened in Israel. Jezebel and Ahab, when they want the land of Naboth to make that a vegetable garden, they have the right to take that land and to kill because that's the ethos of the gods that they follow. That's the behavior of their god.

When you follow the behavior of the God of Israel, when you share his values, when you share his priorities, that changes the way that you live. It changes the way that you look at other people. I think the application and the carryover to the New Testament it's pretty clear and obvious to us.

James, who I think in many ways has just deeply imbibed into the ethos of the Old Testament, says true religion and undefiled. It's not the rituals, and it's not the activities. It's caring for the poor, visiting those that are sick and in need and living an unstained life in the world.

So, for people who think that the message of the Old Testament prophets is irrelevant to our culture and our society today, we understand that the prophets are warning the people about wealth. They're warning the people about the ethos that grows out of that. I think the behavior, again, in eighth-century Israel, when I look at what the prophets are saying to these people, it often sounds exactly like they are speaking to our contemporary culture today.

There's not a lot of difference. Sin hasn't changed. The hearts of people haven't changed.

So the application issues that grow out of this, I think, are very real. In many ways, evangelical Christianity, I think, has lost its understanding of the need for caring for the poor and taking care of the needy. I think one of the reasons that that has happened as we look at this historically may be that we have not made either the Torah or the Old Testament prophets enough of our own personal spiritual diet as we're reading God's word, or it may be something that we have just simply not taught enough in the churches.

We have a number of writers and speakers; I think of David Platt and his book, who began to talk about the importance of taking care of the needy as not inconsistent with preaching the gospel. We do not have to go the way of the social gospel and make that simply the focus of our ministry and our message, but God has not just called us to take care of preaching the gospel in people's spiritual needs. If we are interested in people's spiritual needs, we are going to, first of all, minister to their physical needs.

Often in many countries, the only way that we're going to have a real open door to preach the gospel is that we're going to have to begin by meeting people's needs and taking care of the poor. This is not something that is secondary to our mission. It's

something that goes right along with the preaching and the proclamation of the gospel.

And so, I think one of the reasons that we've lost sight of that, it's not just the influence of the social gospel and wanting to avoid that. It's often that we have ignored how much the Old Testament informs our ethic, our values, and our priorities as Christians. A book that has helped me with this, Christopher Wright has written a book called *The Old Testament Ethics for Today* and reminds us that the ethos of the Torah, it's concern for the needy it's concern for the poor.

That's something to be reflected in our values and our ethics as Christians. We can look at the book of Deuteronomy, and we can see in chapter 15 that there should be no poor among you. However, there is going to be poor among you.

Therefore, open your hand and be generous to your neighbor. We can look at that and as we go to the New Testament, I think it informs our reading of the book of Acts. We see in Acts chapter 4 and in Acts chapter 5 that the early church shared all things in common.

There were those like Barnabas who had more than they needed, who were willing to sell or to give that away, to bring that to the apostles so that they could meet the needs of their poor neighbors. What is happening there is that I think the book of Acts is emphasizing the point that the church is beginning to function. The church is a model here of what God designed Israel to be from the very beginning.

Often, through their history, they had failed to be. As God is working and making this new community in the church, they are fulfilling what Deuteronomy 15 had talked about. Think about how the prophetic message is relevant for us today as we deal with these two issues of wealth and greed and materialism, and then the way that that bleeds over into our ethos of justice.

I want to look at Isaiah chapter 5 and listen to a message. Isaiah is a younger contemporary of the prophet Amos. He is from the same century.

He's a prophet to the kingdom of Judah. Again, listen to what he says to Judah in the eighth century and the various sins that he's going to document. Verse 8, Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.

The Lord of Hosts has sworn in my hearing; surely there are many houses that will be desolate, large, and beautiful houses that will be left without inhabitants. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a hummer of seed only one ephah. So, they're greedy and materialistic and they're seizing lands and doing these things in unjust ways.

Does that sound like things that go on in the corporate world today? Verse 11: Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them. Do we know anything about a culture that's obsessed with personal pleasure, drugs, and alcohol, and that becomes a struggle? Hey, that's our culture. That's our society.

Look at what it says in verse 18, Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sins around as with cart ropes, and say, Let God be quick and let him speed his work that we may see it. Do we know anything about a culture where people defy God to punish them for their sin? Woe to those who call good evil and evil good. Do we ever see that on radio or television talk shows where there's moral confusion? This is our society.

Chapter 5, verse 21, Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes. Chapter 22: Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine. So, for those of you who are pastors and are involved in a ministry of teaching God's Word to other people, I want you to understand how relevant the message of the prophets really is to our society and culture today.

There are several key themes that are going to run throughout the book of Amos. The first one is that Amos is going to confront the people. They are complacent in their wealth.

That's become the focus of their life. The second message that he's going to give them is that they have not practiced justice toward their neighbor. They have not lived out the principles and ideals of Deuteronomy chapter 15.

There are some things here in this book that should also cause us to examine our heart and to look at our churches and how much we reflect the ethos of a God who cares about the poor and the needy and become a community who remember how important that really is to God. I hope our study of the book of Amos will help us to be reminded of that.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is lecture 6 on the Book of Amos, Social Sins.