

Amos 2:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes;

Analysis

Having condemned six nations and Judah, Amos pivots to his primary target: northern Israel. The prophetic formula and numerical pattern ("for three transgressions...for four") establish the same certainty of judgment. But Israel's sins differ from pagan atrocities and Judah's law-rejection. The specific charge: "they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes." This describes systematic economic oppression and judicial corruption.

"Sold the righteous for silver" (makhar tsaddiq bakesef) depicts courts perverting justice to favor wealthy creditors against innocent debtors. The "righteous" (tsaddiq) means those in the right legally—people falsely condemned through bribed judges. "For silver" indicates bribery corrupted the judicial system. Exodus 23:8 and Deuteronomy 16:19 explicitly forbid such corruption. Israel's judges, who should have protected the vulnerable, instead sold justice to the highest bidder.

"And the poor for a pair of shoes" (evyon ba'avur na'alayim) intensifies the condemnation. The Hebrew evyon denotes the truly destitute—those with nothing. For something as trivial as shoes (or the debt represented by shoes), the wealthy enslaved the poor. This may reference debt-slavery where minor debts resulted in selling family members into servitude (Leviticus 25:39-43). The covenant prohibited such oppression, but Israel's greedy elite ignored God's law for profit.

This prepares for Amos 5:24's call for "judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Historical Context

Archaeological evidence from 8th century BC Israel reveals stark economic inequality. Excavations at Samaria show monumental architecture, luxury goods, and imported items for the elite, while typical Israelite homes were small and modest. The book of Amos describes houses of ivory (3:15), beds of ivory (6:4), and summer/winter homes (3:15)—all confirmed by archaeology. This wealth concentration came at the expense of the poor.

The Mosaic law contained extensive provisions protecting the poor: interest-free loans to fellow Israelites (Exodus 22:25), release of debts every seven years (Deuteronomy 15:1-6), prohibition on taking essential items as collateral (Exodus 22:26-27, Deuteronomy 24:6, 10-13), and automatic land return at Jubilee (Leviticus 25). Israel's wealthy class ignored these protections, creating a exploitative economy God condemned through Amos.

The phrase "pair of shoes" may reference the legal custom of removing a sandal to finalize property transactions (Ruth 4:7-8). Thus "the poor for a pair of shoes" might indicate seizing land or selling people into slavery for trivial debts formalized by this symbolic act. Regardless of precise mechanics, the moral point is clear: Israel's elite valued profit over people, money over justice, and oppression over covenant faithfulness. Such systematic injustice demanded divine intervention.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's concern for economic justice and fair courts challenge purely "spiritual" understandings of holiness?
2. What modern economic systems or practices parallel Israel's selling the righteous for silver and the poor for shoes?
3. How should Christian business practices and political engagement reflect God's hatred of oppression and injustice?

Interlinear Text

ה כ ר מ א	ה ה י ה ל	שְׁלֶשֶׁת	פְּשָׁעִים	יִשְׁרָאֵל	עַל
H3541 Thus saith	the LORD H5921	For three	transgressions	of Israel	H5921
H559	H3068	H7969	H6588	H3478	
ה ה י ה ל א ר ב ע ה	אֲשִׁיבֵנִי ל	עַל			
and for four H3808	I will not turn away H7725	H5921			
H702					
מְכַר מ	בְּכָסֶף	צַדִּיק	אָבִיו		
the punishment thereof because they sold H4376	for silver H3701	the righteous H6662	and the poor H34		
H5668 בְּנָצְבָּע וְ	נְאָלִים:				
for a pair of shoes H5275					

Additional Cross-References

Joel 3:3 (Parallel theme): And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.