

Amos 6:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock:

Analysis

Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? (הֲרָצוּן בַּסֵּלַע) hayrutzun basela susim im-yacharosh bab'qarim)—two rhetorical questions about absurdities: horses can't gallop on rocky cliffs; oxen can't plow stone. Yet Israel's behavior is equally absurd: **for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock** (כִּי־הִפַּכְתֶּם) ki-hafachtem l'rosh mishpat ufri tz'dakah l'la'anah)—they've inverted justice (מִשְׁפָּט, mishpat) into poison (רֹאשׁ, rosh, literally 'head,' meaning poisonous plant or gall), and righteousness's fruit (צִדְקָה, tz'dakah) into wormwood (לַעֲנָה, la'anah, bitter poison).

This indicts moral inversion: making justice serve oppression and perverting righteousness into wickedness. When legal systems meant to protect the vulnerable instead exploit them, society commits absurdity worse than horses running on rocks. Isaiah 5:20 pronounces woe on such moral confusion: 'Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil.'

Historical Context

Amos repeatedly attacks Israel's corrupt legal system (Amos 5:10-15). Courts that should have defended the poor instead took bribes and ruled for the powerful. This judicial corruption was systemic, not isolated—making judgment inevitable.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What modern legal or political systems pervert justice into oppression while claiming righteousness?
2. How do Christians sometimes invert biblical values—calling tolerance 'love,' compromise 'wisdom,' or comfort 'blessing'?
3. What does it mean to restore justice and righteousness when systems have become thoroughly corrupted?

Interlinear Text

הִרְצוּ run H7323	בְּסֵלַע upon the rock H5553	סוֹסֵי יָם Shall horses H5483	אִם H518	יִחַר וְשֹׁ will one plow H2790	בְּבִקְרֵי יָם there with oxen H1241	כִּי H3588
הִפְכֶּתֶם for ye have turned H2015	לְרֹאשׁ into gall H7219	מִשְׁפַּט judgment H4941	וּפְרִי and the fruit H6529	צִדְקָה of righteousness H6666		
לְלֶעֱנָה: into hemlock H3939						

Additional Cross-References

Amos 5:7 (Righteousness): Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth,

Hosea 10:4 (Judgment): They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field.

