

# Amos 8:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail,

## Analysis

**Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail**—Amos addresses economic oppressors with the imperative **Hear this** (שמעו-זאת, shimu-zot), demanding attention. The phrase **swallow up the needy** (השאפים אכין, hasho'afim evyon) uses violent imagery—sha'af (שאף) means "pant after, gasp for, swallow greedily," like a predator devouring prey. They don't merely neglect the poor but actively pursue their destruction with predatory hunger.

The parallel phrase **to make the poor of the land to fail** (ולשכית עני-ארץ) (velashbit aniyyei-arets) intensifies the accusation. Shabbat (שבת, "cause to cease, destroy") means complete elimination—not just exploiting the poor but annihilating them as a class. The phrase "poor of the land" (aniyyei-arets) refers to vulnerable populations: widows, orphans, immigrants, debt-slaves (the very people covenant law protected—Exodus 22:21-27, Deuteronomy 24:17-22). These oppressors systematically destroyed God's protected classes.

This verse introduces Amos 8's sustained critique of economic injustice (verses 4-6), specifying the sins bringing "the end" (verse 2). The wealthy didn't merely ignore charity but weaponized economics to consume vulnerable populations. Their sin wasn't passive neglect but active predation. This connects to James 5:1-6, where the rich hoard wealth by defrauding laborers, and Proverbs 22:22-23's warning: "Rob not the poor... for the LORD will plead their cause." When human courts fail to protect the vulnerable, God Himself becomes their advocate and avenger.

## Historical Context

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Israel's prosperity under Jeroboam II created massive economic inequality. The wealthy accumulated land through debt foreclosure (violating Leviticus 25's jubilee provisions), enslaved fellow Israelites for debts (violating Deuteronomy 15:1-18's debt forgiveness laws), manipulated markets (8:5), and corrupted courts (5:10-12). Archaeological evidence from 8th century Samaria shows luxury goods (ivory furniture, imported pottery, fine jewelry) alongside modest dwellings—confirming stark wealth disparities Amos condemned.

The phrase "poor of the land" references covenant provisions protecting vulnerable classes: gleaning laws (Leviticus 19:9-10), debt forgiveness (Deuteronomy 15:1-11), fair wages (Deuteronomy 24:14-15), honest scales (Leviticus 19:35-36), and impartial justice (Exodus 23:6-8). Israel's elite violated all these protections, making them worse than pagan nations—they knew God's law but defied it systematically.

## Related Passages

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**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

## Study Questions

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1. How do modern economic systems sometimes "swallow up" the vulnerable, and what responsibility do believers have to oppose such predation?
2. What's the difference between legitimate economic activity and the predatory "swallowing" Amos condemns?

## Interlinear Text

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שָׁמַע אַת־זֶה שְׁאָגִים לְשָׁבֵית אָבִי וְלִתְּנִי

Hear H2063

this O ye that swallow up

H8085

H7602

the needy

H34

even to make

H7673

H6035

אֶרֶץ:

of the land

H776

## Additional Cross-References

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**Psalms 14:4** (Parallel theme): Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the LORD.

**Proverbs 30:14** (Parallel theme): There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.

**Amos 5:11** (Parallel theme): Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them.

**Psalms 140:12** (Parallel theme): I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.

**Psalms 12:5** (Parallel theme): For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.