

Amos 8:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?

Analysis

That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes—This verse exposes debt slavery as economic strategy. The Hebrew **buy** (לִקְנוֹת, liqnot) means purchase as property, and **for silver** (בְּכֶסֶף, bekheseef) indicates monetary debt as the mechanism. When poor Israelites couldn't repay loans (often at usurious rates), creditors enslaved them—violating Deuteronomy 15:1-18's debt forgiveness provisions and Leviticus 25:39-43's prohibition against treating fellow Israelites as slaves.

The phrase **for a pair of shoes** (בְּעָבוּר נַעֲלָיִים, ba'avur na'alayim) appears in Amos 2:6, emphasizing the trivial debts triggering enslavement—people sold into bondage for amounts worth mere sandals. This reveals predatory lending: the wealthy deliberately loaned small amounts with harsh terms, then seized debtors as slaves when inevitable default occurred. They manufactured poverty to acquire cheap labor. Ruth 4:7-8 shows shoes symbolized legal transactions; here, the symbol becomes grotesque—enslavement for footwear-value debts.

The final accusation: **yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat** (וּמַפָּל בָּר נִשְׁבִּיר, umappal bar nashbir)—selling the sweepings, chaff, and spoiled grain unfit for consumption. Mappal (מַפָּל) means "falling, refuse, waste"—the debris swept from threshing floors, containing dirt, stones, and rotten kernels. They not only cheated on measures (verse 5) but sold contaminated products at full price, poisoning the poor they claimed to serve. This triple evil—predatory lending, debt slavery, and

selling toxic food—demonstrates comprehensive contempt for covenant and neighbor.

Historical Context

Mosaic Law extensively protected debtors and the poor. Every seventh year required debt cancellation (Deuteronomy 15:1-2), prohibition against harsh lending terms (Exodus 22:25-27), and release of Hebrew slaves (Deuteronomy 15:12-15). The Jubilee year (every 50th year) restored ancestral lands and freed all slaves (Leviticus 25:8-55). These provisions prevented permanent poverty and protected family inheritance.

By Amos's time, Israel's elite ignored these laws entirely. They loaned at interest (forbidden in Exodus 22:25), seized land as collateral (violating Deuteronomy 24:6, 10-13), and kept slaves past release dates. Archaeological evidence shows land concentration in few hands—the wealthy accumulated estates by foreclosing on debtors, creating the landless underclass Amos describes. Selling refuse grain added insult to injury: not only enslaving the poor but selling them food that endangered health.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How do predatory lending practices today mirror the debt enslavement Amos condemns, and what biblical principles should guide Christian responses?

2. What does it mean to "sell the refuse of the wheat"—providing inferior goods/services to those least able to afford quality—and how prevalent is this in modern economies?

Interlinear Text

לִקְנֹת	בַּכֶּסֶף	דֹּלֵי יָם	וְאֶבְיֹוֹן	בְּעֵבֶר	נַעֲלֵי יָם
That we may buy	for silver	the poor	and the needy	H5668	for a pair of shoes
H7069	H3701	H1800	H34		H5275
וּמִפֵּי לֶ	בִּרְ	נִשְׁבִּיר:			
the refuse	of the wheat	yea and sell			
H4651	H1250	H7666			

Additional Cross-References

Amos 2:6 (Parallel theme): 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;

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org