

AMOS AND ISAIAH SOCIAL JUSTICE

By the eighth century a significant disparity existed between the wealthy and the poor. Small farmers in debt to moneylenders faced the loss of their land or even bondage. Amos, a mid-eighth-century prophet, felt a tremendous compulsion to speak out in the name of God against these injustices.

²¹"I hate, I despise your feasts,
and I take no delight in your solemn
assemblies.
²²Even though you offer me your burnt
offerings and cereal offerings,
I will not accept them,
and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts
I will not look upon.
²³Take away from me the noise of your songs;

to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
²⁴But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an everflowing
stream." (Amos 5)

The prophets' insistence that rituals were not the essence of the law and their passion for righteousness are voiced in the Scriptures by Isaiah of Jerusalem, who lived in the mid-

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eighth century B.C. Scholars agree that Isaiah of Jerusalem did not write all sixty-six chapters that make up the Book of Isaiah. Some material appears to have been written by his disciples and interpreters, and Chapters 40 to 55, composed two centuries later, are attributed to a person given the name Second Isaiah. The following verses come from Isaiah of Jerusalem.

¹¹"What to me is the multitude of your
sacrifices?
says the LORD;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of
lambs, or of he-goats. . . .
¹²Bring no more vain offerings;
incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and sabbath and the calling of
assemblies—
I cannot endure iniquity and solemn
assembly.
¹³Your new moons and your appointed feasts
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.
¹⁴When you spread forth your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;

even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.
¹⁶Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
¹⁷ learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
defend the fatherless,
plead for the widow."
(Isaiah 1)

Isaiah denounced the rich and the powerful
for exploiting the poor.

¹³The LORD has taken his place to contend,
he stands to judge his people.
¹⁴The LORD enters into judgment
with the elders and princes of his people:
"It is you who have devoured the vineyard,
the spoil of the poor is in your houses.
¹⁵What do you mean by crushing my people,
by grinding the face of the poor?"
says the Lord GOD of hosts.
(Isaiah 3)