

Amos 8:4-10 + 9:13-16

This haftarah is paired with the Torah reading of Deuteronomy 15-16, where instructions are given about helping the poor.

In 8th century B.C. Israel, the Northern Kingdom had fallen into idolatry, ignoring God's Law and oppressing the poor.

Amos 2:6-7 - "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 (innocent, honest) for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name:"

to "sell the righteous for silver" refers to the practice of selling debtors into slavery, who were burdened with exorbitant interest rates (despite prohibitions against interest). It could also refer to bribery - he rich pay off the judges for favorable decisions.

"That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor" - not pant but a similar word that means crush or trample. Better "They trample on the heads of the poor into the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed."

Amos 4:1 - "Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters (husbands), Bring, and let us drink."

Usually "strong bulls of Bashan" - but here it is the female "cows" living in luxury.

Amos 5:24 - "But let judgment (justice) run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Martin Luther King Jr. used this phrase effectively in his "I have a Dream" speech: "No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until 'justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.'"

If they repented, justice and righteousness would prevail.

But they did not repent, So that justice/judgment came for Israel when the Assyrians invaded, bursting in like torrent of waters, and carried away the ten tribes of Israel.

Amos 8:4 - "Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with (exterminate) the poor of the land."

Amos 8:5 - "Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?"

Amos 8:6-7 - "That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes (sandals); yea, and sell the refuse (chaff) of the wheat? The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works."

They were eager to "get back to business" instead of wasting time on religious holidays - mixing in chaff with the wheat to rip off the poor, and rigging the balances in favor of the sellers.

Gods retribution for this:

Amos 8:8-10 - "Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day: And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day."

i.e. the earth itself will rise up like the flooding of the Nile in Egypt, but in destruction rather than life giving enrichment. It will be a black day of disaster to Israel.

The rabbis liked to end the Haftarah readings on an upbeat note, offering hope if there is repentance:

Amos 9:13-16

Finally, there is a word of encouragement directly to the poor and weak:

Isaiah 35:3-4 - "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you."