

# THE PROPHET AMOS ATTACKS MONSTROUS ECONOMIC EVIL

Contributed by Jim Jordal  
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## THE PROPHET AMOS ATTACKS MONSTROUS ECONOMIC EVIL

A Bible Study on Economic Justice

By Jim Jordal

**BACKGROUND:** Amos, whose name means "burden bearer") was not of noble or priestly descent, but was an agricultural worker from Tekoa, a small village about 10 miles from Jerusalem. Called to deliver God's message mainly to the northern tribes of Israel, he spoke eloquently and forcefully concerning the rampant idolatry and economic injustice prevalent in society of that time. Note: The New Moon mentioned was a feast day on which all work or commerce was prohibited, as was the case on all Sabbaths. The phrase "selling the bad wheat" refers to creating economic conditions of scarcity and poverty under which bad wheat filled with chaff or other impurity could be sold as good wheat, for the same or even higher price.

**CONTENT:** READ ALOUD AMOS 8:4-6:

Hear this, you who swallow up the needy,

And make the poor of the land fail,

Saying:

"When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain?

And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat?

Making the ephah small and the shekel large,

Falsifying the scales by deceit,

That we may buy the poor for silver,

And the needy for a pair of sandals---

Even sell the bad wheat?"

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What unjust market practices at that time was Amos complaining about?
- What did Amos indicate was the intent or goal of these practices?
- What modern market practices might Amos complain about if he lived today?
- In the larger sense, how are the "scales" often falsified today?
- Scripture speaks often of just weights and measures. Could inflation and deflation be examples of unjust measures? How?
- In the U. S. the Federal Reserve System instigates monetary policy. What does this mean?
- How can modern monetary policy create situations where the "shekel" becomes large? (Think "tight" money).
- Can you name any historic examples of this? With what effects?
- How does easy credit and debt threaten the middle and lower classes?
- It sounds as if Amos thinks these damaging policies are created deliberately. Are they today?
- What does God say concerning foreclosure for debt? ( See Lev. 25 and Nehemiah 5.1-8).

#### PRINCIPLES FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Manipulating markets (money, goods, or services) to create poverty or oppress people is sinful.
- Never should government or its quasi-institutions be used for oppressive purposes.

- "Tight" money has in past times served to oppress the poor.
- The Bible opposes usury (interest) because it transfers wealth from debtor to creditor.
- The Bible places strict limits on foreclosure for debt of homesteads and needed personal property.

REFERENCES: Lev. 25, Neh. 5, Ps. 10:8-11, Prov. 11:1, Prov. 28:8, Isa. 10:1-2, Deut. 23:19-20, Deut. 25:13-15.