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**HB 612**  
**Confronting Power: Social Justice in the Book of Amos**  
**Summer School 2026**  
**July 13 – July 17, 2026**

The dramatic social and political events of our time call on people of faith to confront issues of justice with insight, clarity and persuasiveness. The ancient prophetic traditions of the Hebrew Bible, especially the Book of Amos, provide perspectives on power, justice and reform that can resource voices for justice today, grounding our words and actions in the values of our faith. This course will examine the theology and practice of social justice from two dialogical viewpoints; that of the prophet as spokesperson of God's justice who names and condemns social injustice and that of the reformer who seeks to embody and institutionalize social justice. The issue of the types and uses of power in both of these viewpoints will be highlighted. Reflections on a current social justice issue will provide a workshop for theory and praxis.

The course will start with study of the uses of social power and a background study of the relevant history and sociology of ancient Israel to clarify the setting in which the dialogue occurs. Then the book of Amos will serve as our basis for defining the dialogical viewpoints. We will examine the strong critique of this prophet against the injustice of his day that ignored divinely inspired right relationships among people. The second viewpoint is contained in the re-composition of Amos' words by later Deuteronomistic editors intent on employing the prophetic critique in a program of national reform. References to the legal and theological parallels in the law code of Deuteronomy will complement the study of Amos.

The viewpoints examined will be seen as forerunners of and metaphors for modern understandings of action for social justice. Contemporary reflections thus will center on the roles, power, and responsibilities of two types of justice-seekers: the "prophet" and the "reformer." Particular attention will be given to the issue of how any person/class/group, both those with and those without institutional power and economic advantage, uses and incorporates the ideals of social justice. Working in teams, reflections on a current social justice issue will provide the sources for theory and praxis.

Prerequisite for those taking the course for academic credit: HB500

**COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:**

In completing this course, a student will be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of a model of the types and uses of power in social relationships and social institutions and apply this understanding of power to the analysis of the social world of ancient Israel and the analysis of a current social justice issue.
- Describe the social context of the book of Amos in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE using historical and sociological analysis and describe the roles of Amos as prophet and reformer in these centuries.
- Describe the theological foundations of the roles of Amos as prophet and reformer in the ancient context.
- Demonstrate the integration of critical biblical knowledge and theological insights with the contemporary practice of ministry or public witness by an appropriate analysis of the roles of prophet and reformer in a current social justice issue.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND EVALUATION:****For all students:**

1. Class attendance and preparation of all required reading before class.
2. Participation in a team analyzing a current social justice issue to apply Amos' perspectives from the prophet and the reformer to your issue.
3. Research before the class begins on a current social justice issue of your choosing. See "Social Justice Issue Selection" below and come prepared with details about the issue you have researched.
4. Two oral reports by your team including preparation of a handout for the class and leadership of small group discussion based on the report. Evaluative criteria: oral reports show ability to present information and interpretation in a clear and organized fashion, explicating a position in a concise and timely way; handout is concise, clear and complete; leadership of discussion shows ability to handle questions, raise new interpretive issues, and guide fellow students in a cooperative learning situation.
5. All course policies as outlined in the VST Student Handbook apply.

**For students taking the class for Certificate credit:**

For this paper, work as an individual. Reflecting on the course material and the social justice issue your team analyzed, describe how Amos' voices of the prophet and reformer provide resources and inspiration for your own social justice actions.

**Length: 1,000 words, typed double spaced. Due August 3, 2026.**

**For students taking HB612 for 1.5 academic credits:**

For this paper, work as an individual. Using the class assignments, the study passages, commentaries, and class discussions, address the following questions. Paper should show reflection on the questions in light of the course materials.

- What are the definitions of justice implied in Amos A and Amos B respectively?
- What are the relationships of the prophet and the reformer respectively to God, to the elites, and to the poor? What are the dynamics of power within these relationships?
- Examine your issue from the prophet's and the reformer's point of view. What would the prophet and reformer each have to say about this issue/concern, given your discussion of the first two questions above? You may use resources from your oral presentation as appendices in the paper, including any oracles or law codes that your team writes, but the paper must include your own narrative description of the prophetic/reformer voices on your issue.

**Length: 2,500 words, typed double spaced. Due August 3, 2026.**

**For students taking HB612 for 3 academic credits:**

**Students taking the class for 3 credit hours will meet with the professor for an extra hour to review the expectations of an exegesis paper.**

For this paper, work as an individual. At the *beginning* of the paper described for the 1.5 credit hour course, you will add a section of exegesis. Using class notes and readings, as well as at least 3 modern commentaries on Amos, accomplish an exegesis of Amos 5:1-24, using standard exegetical tools to explain the meanings of the passage in its original contexts. See the handout, "Exegesis Outline for HB 612 Confronting Power." Your discussion of the definitions of social justice in Amos A and Amos B, and your discussion of your social justice issue from Amos A and Amos B's perspectives must reference your exegesis of Amos 5.

**Total length of paper: 5,000 words, typed double spaced. Due August 31, 2026.**

**For advanced degree students taking HB712 for 1.5 or 3.0 credits:**

**Advanced degree students taking the class will meet with the professor for an extra hour to review the expectations and bibliography for extra research and writing on the topic of the social world of ancient Israel .**

Your paper will focus on one aspect of the social world of ancient Israel relevant to the understanding of Amos' words on social justice, with the topic selected in consultation with the professor. See the document, "Sociology Bibliography."

**For 1.5 credits: paper length 3,750 words, typed double spaced.**

**For 3.0 credits: paper length 6,000 words, typed double spaced.**

**Due September 11, 2026.**

**REQUIRED READING:**

- Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
  - ADVANCED READING: pages 1-7, 22-23, 43-93; 189-296

- Robert Coote, *Amos Among the Prophets*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005. Reprint of Fortress Press, 1981.
  - ADVANCED READING: pages 1-45; 46-109
- Paula McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999. Chapter 5 assigned, pages. 143-181.
  - ADVANCED READING: Chapter 5 assigned, pages 143-181
- Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (Interpretation Commentary), Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990.
  - ADVANCED READING: Introduction, pages 1-17
- Research on your team’s social justice issue, as required to explain the issue.

**COURSE OUTLINE:**

Readings and assignments due each day are noted.

**Day 1 Introduction and Power Analysis**

Introduction to course

Power in Society: Power in societal dynamics; power analysis strategies

Defining social justice issues by teams

**DUE:** your own research on a potential social justice issue for a team

**Day 2 Ancient Israel; The Prophetic Voice**

Lenski power analysis practicum

Eighth century Israel—power dynamics

Amos as Prophet in his ancient context—introduction

**Day 3 Current Social Justice Issues; The Prophetic Voice**

Oral reports: Power analysis of student-selected social justice issues

Amos as Prophet in his ancient context—continued

Amos passages in detail

**DUE:** Oral report on power analysis of your team’s social justice issue

**Day 4 The Reformer’s Voice**

Amos as Reformer in his ancient context

Amos A & B in the text

Deuteronomy as reform movement

Deuteronomy passages in detail

**Day 5 Current Social Justice Issues**

Oral reports: The Prophet’s and Reformer’s voices address social justice issues

Beyond Prophet and Reformer

**DUE:** Oral report on the Prophet's and Reformer's voices addressing your team's social justice issue

### **First Oral Report Topic**

Your team will present a 10 minute oral report on the following topic. Prepare a handout for the class summarizing your presentation.

Using Lenski's definitions and categories of sociological analysis of power, prepare a concise and detailed discussion of your team's social justice issue. What groups and classes are represented within the concerned/affected population? How do these correspond to classes in society at large? Who holds what kinds of power? What are the dynamics of the "distribution system" in the issue?

### **Second Oral Report Topic**

Your team will present a 20 minute oral report on the following topic. Prepare a handout for the class summarizing your presentation. Using the class assignments, the study passages, commentaries, and class discussions, your report should address the following questions.

Examine your issue from the "prophet's" point of view. What would the prophet have to say about this issue/concern? Present an oracle that expresses the prophet's proclamation about your team's issue.

Examine your issue from the "reformer's" point of view. What would the reformer have to say about this issue/concern? Present a re-written oracle or a law code that expresses the reformer's proclamation about your team's issue.

Prepare a report that presents both the prophet's and the reformer's voices, distinguishing carefully between what the two viewpoints have to say on your issue. Use whatever format and media conveys the message of the prophet/reformer—verbal description, poetry, music, drama, video etc. This may require two different media for the two different voices. Make sure the narrative description of what each would say is also clear to your audience if you use an alternate media.

### **Social Justice Issue Selection**

The most important thing to think about ahead of time is picking a current social justice issue on which to concentrate during the course. You will work in teams on a selected issues that you and your team agree upon. You will team up with one or two other people on the first day of class. It is important to do some thinking and research ahead of time about an issue you might want suggest to your potential team.

The issue you pick should be a current issue that involves some aspect of social justice anywhere in the world. Several criteria are helpful in picking the issue so that it "works" in the course.

1. **The issue must be as specific as possible**--"the world banking system" is far too large (even though it may be highly unjust!) "Third world debt" is too large; "tariffs" is too large, "the medical insurance system" is far too large, etc. Even within an issue, say "native land rights" in North America or elsewhere, pick a **specific** example or case to work on.
2. **There must be a clearly identifiable "victim"** for the issue to work for the course. Someone must be being hurt by the actions/decisions of others in a way that is socially unjust, not just morally questionable or wrong. Issues of personal wrong, while horrible, don't work for the course because there is a limited involvement of social systems. So "spousal abuse" is not a workable issue; governmental cutbacks to programs to protect women would be more suitable, especially if you can find out about a particular cutback in a particular location that has affected specific people.
3. **You must be able to identify all the "actors" in the issue and where they stand socially in relation to each other.** Who are the victims, who is functioning at each level of government or other social structures to affect the issue for good or ill, who is advocating for various sides in the issue? The point is not to have exhaustive research on these topics, but to know enough to examine the people and roles involved in your selected case. If you can, bring resources with you that describe the issue--newspaper articles, internet information, etc.
4. It is fine to **use an issue you already know a lot about**. The point is *how we will analyze the issue* during the course, not learning about a new situation.
5. An issue often works if it presents **a specific case of a wider problem**. That way you can work on an important issue but not be overwhelmed.

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Some very successful issues have worked well in the course in the past: an Indigenous land case in southwest Ontario; the slave trade in the Sudan; the "lobster wars" in Nova Scotia; a very local case where a small town was failing to protect a mentally challenged man from abuse; cutbacks to welfare in a particular location at a particular time; closing of a particular mental health care facility by the province without providing other homes for the residents; cutbacks to low-income housing in a particular city at a particular time. Use an issue that affects your own ministry or community if you want—you may know lots about it and want some time to work through a biblically just response. Just change names to protect identities.