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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.

PREREQUISITES: 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 8th and 7th 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. Preparation of short assignments for class discussion and class participation. Evaluative criteria: comments and questions show a familiarity with assigned readings, clear and complete preparation of assignments, and a readiness to apply knowledge to interpretive questions and insights.
3. 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.

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For students taking the class for academic credit:

For students taking course for 1.5 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 rather than massive research.

- 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: 2500-3000 words, typed double spaced. Due August 3, 2026.

For students taking the course for 3 credits:

Add at the beginning of the above paper:

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. Your later 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: 4,500-5,000 words, typed double spaced. Due August 3, 2026.

REQUIRED READING:

Lenski, Gerhard, *Power and Privilege*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Coote, Robert B, *Amos Among the Prophets*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005, c1981

McNutt, Paula, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999. Chapter 5 assigned.

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

READ: selections from *Power and Privilege*, by Gerhard Lenski

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

READ: Paula McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, chapter 5

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

READ: “Amos A” in *Amos Among the Prophets* by Robert Coote
Amos passages as assigned

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

READ: “Amos B” in *Amos Among the Prophets* by Robert Coote
Deuteronomy passages as assigned

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. If you know someone in the class and want to team up ahead of time, that's fine.

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.

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.