

Amos 6:4-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-6/amos-64-7/>

Amos warns the preeminent leaders of Israel of the impending judgment and provides a detailed description of their luxurious lifestyle and their self-indulgence. Since these notable leaders enjoy their riches and disregard God's covenantal laws, their luxury will be short-lived because God will send them into exile at the head of the exiles.

As Amos warned the nobles of Samaria of the impending judgment, he provided a detailed description of their luxurious lifestyle and their self-indulgence. These notable leaders *reclined on beds of ivory*. Beds decorated with *ivory* were part of the furnishings of the houses of *ivory*, and only kings and other wealthy people could afford this luxury in the ancient Near East (Amos 3:15). King Solomon, for example, “made a great throne of *ivory* and overlaid it with pure gold” (2 Chronicles 9:17; 1 Kings 10:18). During the days of Amos, . These rich, who took advantage of the poor, *reclined* or slept on their *beds of ivory*, while most Israelites slept on mats, which were rolled up when not in use. The nobles also *sprawled on their couches*. The verb to *srawl* can be translated as “to hang down” or “to lounge around.” It likely implies drunkenness or laziness.

The rich in Israel were able *to eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall*. The term *stall* refers to a place where animals are often kept and fed for fattening (Malachi 4:2). In ancient Israel, cattle could roam (walk) in the fields when they were not being used. Otherwise, they would be confined in rooms during the winter season or under shelters made of green boughs during the summer, and people would bring food to them. As a result, those animals were well fed, and their meats were often expensive. But for those who could afford it, the best quality meats came from those animals.

While the wealthy citizens of the Israelite society could afford to have gourmet meals, they were not grateful to God and were not caring for their poor brothers among them. Rather than showing concerns and care for the poor, the rich took advantage of them. That is why Amos denounced their wicked behavior.

In verse 5, Amos stated that the upper-class citizens of Israel acted *like David* as they *improvised to the sound of the harp and composed songs for themselves*. The term “harp” [“nēbel”] was a musical instrument with strings (Psalm 33:2; 144:9). The reference to *David* focuses on his musicianship, as the Bible credits him with laying the foundation for Temple music. Many psalms are assigned to him. According to the book of 1 Samuel, David was “a skillful player on the harp” (1 Samuel 16:16) and the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (1 Samuel 23:1).

Amos said that the rich oppressors in Israel pretended to act like *David* in playing and composing songs, spending their time on enjoying themselves with the arts. They were the leaders in Israel, and should have been spending their time endeavoring to improve the lives of the people they led.

Thus, these leaders in Israel were musical like David, but they were not like David in their devotion to the LORD, or their work on behalf of their people. Their entire behavior was focused on their own pleasures. Their overindulgence can be seen in the fact that they used to *drink wine*, not from regular cups, but *from sacrificial bowls*, thus profaning objects that were meant to be used in religious rituals (Exodus 24:6–8; Numbers 7:13). They also *anointed themselves with the finest of oils*. Everything about their lives was self-indulgent.

In biblical times, those who attended banquets were often treated by a generous host of fine *oils*, which would be used to anoint their foreheads. That fine oil was obtained from the first crushing of the olives, which was done in a vat before the pressing process. The prepressed oil—the best and most expensive oil, known today as “virgin oil”—was used regularly by the wealthy people in Israel to show their extravagance. Yet, Amos stated that they had *not grieved over the ruin of Joseph*. That means, they did not care about God’s impending judgment on Israel/Samaria. They simply wanted to receive preferential treatment and recognition in everything without even thinking about the coming day of the LORD.

Samaria is likely referred to as *Joseph* because the largest tribe in the northern kingdom of Israel, or Samaria, was the tribe of Ephraim. Ephraim was one of the sons of *Joseph*. Israel/Samaria is also referred to as “Ephraim” in Isaiah 7:17.

Since these people were the leaders of the nation—*distinguished men* of the Israelite society (v. 1) —Amos predicted that they would also *go into exile at the head of the exiles*. They would be the first to be deported and would experience a reversal of fortunes. As Amos added, *the sprawlers’ banqueting will pass away*. The term *sprawlers* here refers back to Amos 6:4, which speaks of the lazing leaders who sprawled on their couches, rather than working to improve the lives of their people. Those who once lived in luxury would lead the parade of captives being exiled from Israel.

The term translated as *banqueting* is “marzeah” in Hebrew. In Old Testament times, the “marzeah” was a social and religious institution. Sometimes, it was the setting for mourning rites consisting of eating and drinking. It could also include sexual intercourse, as with an orgy.

The “marzeah”-banquet consisted of five principal elements, all listed by Amos in this passage (beds of ivory, gourmet meal, accompaniment of songs and music from the harp, drinking of wine from bowls, and the anointing with the finest oil). Whether the banquets were done as sacred repasts or memorial meals or for other reasons, they lasted several days and were often accompanied by indulgence, especially with respect to wine consumption.

Such a decadent lifestyle would be short-lived, however, because the LORD would intervene to send His disobedient people into captivity, thus putting an end to the self-indulgent culture of the wealthy men amid their very festal celebrations.

It is important to note that Amos did not condemn the rich people because they had many great possessions, or that they enjoyed their possessions. Rather, he condemned them because they were selfish and greedy. Their wealth was gained through exploitation, at the expense of the poor. There is nothing wrong in acquiring wealth if it is done in the proper way; God sometimes

gives riches as a reward for faithfulness (2 Chronicles 1:11-12). But God condemns those who take advantage of others to enrich themselves (Deuteronomy 24:14–15; Proverbs 22:16; Amos 2:6–8).

While the leading citizens had an easy life in Israel, the poor around them were in great need. The rich did not show compassion to the needy. They did not work to make their lives better. Instead, they extracted from them to support their own indulgence. So, Amos told them they had nothing about which they could boast, besides their wealth. But their wealth would also *pass away* when they went into captivity.

Biblical Text

**⁴ Those who recline on beds of ivory
And sprawl on their couches,
And eat lambs from the flock
And calves from the midst of the stall,
⁵ Who improvise to the sound of the harp,
And like David have composed songs for themselves,
⁶ Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls
While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils,
Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.
⁷ Therefore, they will now go into exile at the head of the exiles,
And the sprawlers' banqueting will pass away.**