

# The Prophet Amos, the Apostle Paul, and the Preacher Martin Luther King, Jr. First Corinthians and the Shape of a Proper Liberation Theology

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## Introduction: Let Justice Roll Down

Two phrases have resonated with me for years. The first phrase comes from Martin Luther King, Jr. In his famous *I Have a Dream* speech on August 28, 1963, Dr. King said, ‘We cannot walk alone, and as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights: “When will you be satisfied?” We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro’s basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating “For Whites Only.” We cannot be satisfied so long as the Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and the Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied and will not be satisfied until *justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.*’ That last phrase comes from the prophet Amos (5:24), who was very concerned about social injustices (2:6 – 7; 3:9; 4:1; 5:11 – 15; 5:24 – 6:8; 8:4 – 6). It is one of many prophetic visions of God’s coming justice and restoration repeated in many books of the Old Testament.

The second phrase comes from N.T. Wright, from the fall of 1999 when I sat in a class that he taught at Harvard Divinity School. He was teaching material that would later become massive books in his *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series. This particular class was on the resurrection of Jesus. Close to the beginning of the semester, Dr. Wright made a short but obviously well-thought out comment about liberation theology, the broad category of theological work partnered with social activism on behalf of the poor that emerged in Latin America and black America in the 1960’s. He said, ‘*If liberation theology had been anchored in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, it would have found better footing.*’ Since that time, I’ve wondered about Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, because it explores Jesus’ resurrection more than any other book. Corinth had one of the largest slave markets in the Roman Empire, so Paul’s teaching on the body and slavery (1 Cor.6:18 – 7:40) takes on new significance. Corinth had many rich-poor, high status and low status dynamics, so Paul’s teaching on power and greatness, especially surrounding the Lord’s Supper and the unity of the body (1 Cor.11:17 – 36) are very significant. Corinth was also a hotbed for Greek philosophies which sought to devalue the body and elevate the soul, thus undermining any meaningful framework for social justice. As Paul brought the proclamation and implications of the bodily resurrected Jesus to the Greco-Roman world, he cut clean through those philosophies.

Then, I read Kenneth E. Bailey’s commentary on 1 Corinthians<sup>1</sup> with great excitement. In it, he argues that Paul had the prophet Amos in mind when he wrote 1 Corinthians. The connections deepened, not only between these two books of Scripture, but also as they touch and join deeper and firmer threads in the great tapestry of Scripture as a whole. I seek to expand on Bailey’s work, uniting it with insights of my own and others. Then I will circle back to explain how liberation theology (though my understanding of it as a broad movement is sorely limited), can draw on the resurrection of Jesus, and 1 Corinthians in particular, in a fresh, exegetically solid, and powerful way. Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream in and through the resurrected Lord Jesus!

## Overview: Paul’s Engagement with the Prophet Amos

When the apostle Paul joined the other apostles and the elders in Jerusalem to reflect on the incorporation of the Gentiles into the body of Christ, they cited the promise of God stated by the prophet Amos (NASB):

Amos 9	Acts 15
<p><sup>11</sup> In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins</p>	<p><sup>15</sup> With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, <sup>16</sup> ‘After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it,</p>

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011)

And rebuild it as in the days of old; <sup>12</sup> That they may possess the remnant of Edom And all the nations who are called by My name, Declares the LORD who does this.	<sup>17</sup> so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, <sup>18</sup> says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago.
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The apostles and elders probably considered more biblical texts than this.<sup>2</sup> Many other passages, implicitly or explicitly, tied God's promises to restore the fortunes of the house of David with the conversion of the Gentiles: Isaiah 2:1 – 4; 42:1 – 4; Micah 4:1 – 5; Zechariah 9:5 – 8; Psalm 2 and 110; etc. Almost certainly Luke as a storyteller has economized in his storytelling; he probably felt that he has called attention to other passages of Scripture elsewhere in the Gospel and in Acts. Regardless, Bailey establishes a clear historical connection between the apostle Paul and the prophet Amos shortly before the time of Paul's ministry among the Corinthians (Acts 18:1 – 18). The Jerusalem council has been dated to about the year 49 or 50 AD. Paul was in Corinth in early 51 AD. So historically, Paul had clear reasons to be thinking about the prophet Amos. Can we establish clear theological, literary, and pastoral reasons for why Paul might have been thinking of Amos?

Kenneth Bailey notes that there are extensive connections between Amos and 1 Corinthians. First, Paul in his greeting appears to recall the language of Amos:

Gentiles Called by God: Ending of Amos	Gentiles Called by God: Beginning of 1 Corinthians
<sup>9:11</sup> In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David... I will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old; <sup>12</sup> That they may possess... <i>all the nations who are called by My name</i>	<sup>1:2</sup> To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

Second, Paul makes very strategic use of the motif of building, as Amos 9:11 also notes that God will 'rebuild' the house of David and its inheritance. Paul sees Christian ministry as an act of building. He builds by laying a foundation – that of Jesus Christ – and others build on it, too (3:9 – 17). The parable of himself as a builder and the people of God as the true Temple of God fit comfortably in Amos 9:11.

<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, there could be an additional reason that the apostles, at the occasion of the Jerusalem council, were drawn to this text in addition to the reasons which Kenneth Bailey gives. John H. Sailhamer, Old Testament Theology (), p. contributes a very helpful insight into the canonical placement of Amos and Obadiah together. The hinge upon which Amos and Obadiah turns is the subject of Edom. Amos closes his prophetic book by saying that the house of David will one day 'possess the remnant of Edom' (9:12). Obadiah begins his 'vision' with a word 'concerning Edom' (v.1). The Edomites gloated over the conquest of Judah and its exile, and subsequently looted cities and attacked survivors (v.10 – 14). In response, on the eschatological 'day of the Lord,' the house of Esau will be consumed by fire and there will be no survivor (v.18). In that day, the house of Jacob 'will possess the mountain of Esau' and other geographical territories of Esau (v.18 – 21). Now that the apostles were accustomed to reading God's promises to Israel as being fulfilled in the true Israelite, the messianic representative of Israel, Jesus, they would have had no problem seeing Jesus as the one who would possess the 'mountain of Esau.'

What did happen to the Edomites historically and theologically? Obadiah's reference to there being 'no survivor of the house of Esau' (v.18) is curious. King Herod the Great was an Edomite, so the house of Esau was still in existence by the time of Jesus. While it may be true that the descendants of Esau become extinct by the time of Jesus' return, I support another interpretation. Paul refers to the Corinthians Christian as Gentiles no longer. Paul speaks of their history as the time when they were led astray by mute idols (12:2), in great contrast to the God who speaks life. The NASB translates this word 'pagans,' but the Greek word is indeed *ethne*: 'when you were *ethne*.' Henceforth, in Christ, these *former* Gentiles are part of Israel's story and have become spiritual children of Abraham and Sarah. Indeed, when Paul discusses the Exodus event, he includes the former Gentiles in the family of God: '*Our fathers* were all under the cloud' (10:1). In any case, Amos parallels the possession of Edom and 'all the nations that are called by the Lord's name.' The parallel between Edom and 'all the nations' suggests a similarity in the way God treats them. The Edomites are not ethnically eliminated from the earth in some kind of slow or quick death, but rather lose their previous identity *qua* Edomites and gain a new identity as the Messiah's possession. So will many other peoples. Hence the vision of Amos interacts with the vision of Obadiah, perhaps because (as I suspect) Obadiah was not as specific about the fate of Edom. The vision of Amos, which begins with God's judgment upon the nations roundabout the Jews, spilling into the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel, ends with God's restoration of the house of David and its messianic possession of the nations.

Third, as Amos 9:13 – 15 makes very strategic use of agricultural motifs as well as the building motif, so also does Paul to explain Christian ministry:

Amos	Paul in 1 Corinthians
<p><sup>9:13</sup> ‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD,  ‘When the plowman will overtake the reaper  And the treader of grapes him who sows seed;  When the mountains will drip sweet wine  And all the hills will be dissolved.  <sup>14</sup> Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel,  And they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them;  They will also plant vineyards and drink their wine,  And make gardens and eat their fruit.  <sup>15</sup> I will also plant them on their land,  And they will not again be rooted out from their land  Which I have given them,’  Says the LORD your God.</p>	<p><sup>3:6</sup> <i>I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.</i> <sup>7</sup> So then neither the one who <i>plants</i> nor the one who <i>waters</i> is anything, but God who causes the <i>growth</i>.  <sup>8</sup> Now he who <i>plants</i> and he who <i>waters</i> are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.  <sup>9:7</sup> Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who <i>plants a vineyard</i> and does not <i>eat the fruit of it</i>? Or who <i>tends a flock</i> and does not use the <i>milk of the flock</i>?... <sup>10</sup> the <i>plowman ought to plow in hope</i>, and the <i>thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops</i>.  <sup>15:20</sup> But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the <i>first fruits</i> of those who are asleep.</p>

Fourth, the subject matter of Amos’s prophecy probably provided a reason for the Jerusalem council and subsequently Paul to reflect on it. I will demonstrate that below.

### A. Major Theological and Ethical Concerns

Amos	Paul in 1 Corinthians
<p>Creation: Amos reminds his audience that God ‘forms mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what are His thoughts, He who makes dawn into darkness and treads on the high places of the earth’ (4:13). Also, God made the stars and constellations (5:8). These reminders help support Amos’ point that when God acts to repair and replant in a fresh ‘new garden’ (9:11 – 14), that He is able to do this because He is the author of the original creation.</p>	<p>Paul more than in any other letter treats the subject of creation. The quotation from Genesis 2:24 serves to undergird both God’s original vision of sexuality within marriage, but also the assertion that the human body was made for the Lord, as a temple for his Spirit (6:13 – 20). Marriage is a subject that Paul treats extensively (7:1 – 40). All things were created by God through Jesus (8:6). When Paul parallels himself in his service to the Corinthians to an ox serving human masters, he draws from a creational paradigm (9:3 – 12). The vision of men and women speaking and serving together in worship comes from both creation and the transfiguration of that creation in Jesus’ resurrection (11:2 – 16). Then the great resurrection chapter, ch.15, includes a comparison between Adam and Christ which of course is a reaffirmation of the original creation design for human beings (15:20 – 23, 45 – 49); a quote of Psalm 8, which is a reflection on the Genesis 1 creation and humanity’s place in it (15:25 – 28); comparisons drawn from creation to illustrate the future resurrection body (15:35 – 42); and the victorious shout at God’s future triumph over death, which was never intended for humanity from creation (15:54 – 58). Creation serves as the anchor point for resurrection, which affirms and transfigures it.</p>
<p>The Gentiles: God has a covenant with Israel but He also gave the gift of a homeland to the Ethiopians, the Philistines, and the Syrians (9:7). And for Amos, all the nations will be invited into the reign of the coming Davidic king; God will replant and rebuild that</p>	<p>Paul’s primary concern in 1 Corinthians is the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God. He introduces his letter by referring to ‘all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1:2). He speaks of Jews and Greeks in his long poetic section on preaching the cross (1:17 – 2:2). Paul’s mission includes both Jews and Greeks (9:19 – 22). But his special concern in 1 Corinthians is battling Greek ‘wisdom’ which denigrates the body, helping the Corinthians</p>

<p>kingdom (9:11 – 14).</p> <p>This ending in Amos provides the counterpoint and historical resolution of God’s judgment on the Gentile nations surrounding Israel (1:1 – 2:3). God will incorporate people from the nations into a possession of David’s house.</p>	<p>understand Jesus’ resurrection and how to live with resurrection hope and power.</p> <p>Paul also is aware that Jesus’ coming triumph over the rulers and powers of the Gentile world is guaranteed and is coming (15:24 – 28). He is aware that those who align themselves fundamentally with those powers, and especially with the forces of sin, death, and the Jewish Law, will face the judgment of God in some form. Thus, he desires people to be incorporated into the body of Christ as Christ’s possession. The motif in Amos of judgment on the Gentile nations and their reconstitution as the possession of David’s house must have been in Paul’s mind.</p>
<p>God knows His people: Amos speaks of God’s intimate knowledge of Israel: ‘You only have I known (chosen) of all the families of the earth’ (3:2)</p>	<p>Paul speaks with deep concern that the Corinthians not only know God, but are known by Him (8:3). In the resurrection, Paul says, ‘but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known’ (13:12).</p>
<p>The day of judgment: Amos speaks of ‘the day of the Lord’ (5:18 – 20) as the event in which God sorts out darkness from light, and may find the northern Israelites on the side of the darkness.</p>	<p>Paul repeatedly orients the Corinthians around ‘the day of our Lord Jesus Christ’ right from the introduction (1:8) as the event in which Jesus sorts out the content of each minister’s work (3:13; 4:5), and saves people (5:5). The semantic word ‘day’ is connected to the conceptual ‘day of Jesus’: the return of the resurrected Jesus will be a day of testing and judgment (6:2 – 3; 7:26, 29, 31; 10:11; 15:24 – 28) when he swallows up death in victory (15:51 – 58). The day of judgment is anchored in Jesus’ judgment upon the corruption in his own flesh, throughout his life but especially at his death; this is what Paul has in mind in his long chiasmic statement about the cross (1:18 – 2:2).</p>
<p>Secrets/mysteries: God has revealed his secrets to his servants the prophets (3:7)</p>	<p>God has revealed secrets, hidden wisdom, and mysteries to the apostles (2:7, 10; 4:1)</p>
<p>Incest: Amos criticizes incest in the northern kingdom of Israel: ‘And a man and his father resort to the same girl in order to profane My holy name.’ (2:7)</p>	<p>Paul addresses in great depth a case of incest: ‘A man has his father’s wife [a stepmother]’ (5:1). This similarity would surely have made Amos come into Paul’s mind, along with, perhaps the sheer number of ethical issues shared in Amos and among the Corinthians.</p>
<p>Slavery: Amos condemns Gaza because ‘they deported an entire population to deliver it up to Edom’ (1:6) as slaves. He also condemns the northern kingdom of Israel ‘because they sell the righteous for money and the needy for a pair of sandals’ (2:6).</p>	<p>Corinth was one of the slave trading centers of the Roman Empire. Paul brings the topic of slavery (7:20 – 24), the ownership (in greater and lesser degrees) of one body by another, under the criticism of the strong Christian theology of the body, in which Christ’s claim as Lord over the human body and the Spirit’s indwelling within the believer’s body (6:12 – 20) provide a theological qualification on the institution of slavery, broadly speaking. Because Paul’s concern is to ‘secure undistracted devotion to the Lord’ (7:35), he sees a certain resemblance between slavery and marriage, not in all aspects, of course, but in that in both institutions, someone else has a claim on the believer’s body. It must be quickly added that Paul regarded marriage positively and as part of God’s original creation order, whereas slavery was not.<sup>3</sup></p>
<p>Idol worship: Amos is deeply concerned about idolatry (2:4; 5:26 – 27; 8:14)</p>	<p>Paul is deeply concerned about idol worship. He spends a large section on this topic, saying ultimately that what is worshiped in idols temples are demons (8:1 – 11:1; 12:2)</p>

<sup>3</sup> See my paper *Slavery in the Bible*; <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-slavery-in-the-bible.pdf>

Sacrifices: Amos notes that the people bring their sacrifices ‘every morning’ (4:4) but in inappropriate ways.	Paul refers to Jesus in the language of sacrifice: ‘Christ, our passover lamb, has been sacrificed’ (5:7). Paul stresses Jesus cleansing his own humanity of the corruption within as the basis and model for cleansing the body of Christ of the corruption of the incestuous man (5:1 – 13).
Desecrated worship: Through Amos, God declares, ‘I hate, I reject your festivals,’ assemblies, offerings, and songs (5:21 – 23). They have become ‘noise.’	Paul addressed the issue of desecrated worship at the Lord’s supper, which was meant to display the unity of the body of Christ. The Corinthians’ strife with each other is so bad that Paul says, ‘It is not the Lord’s supper that you eat’ (11:20). The meal has become something else.
The weak and strong, poor and rich: Amos is very concerned about the defense of the poor against the rich, the powerless against the powerful (2:6 – 7; 3:9; 4:1; 5:11 – 15; 5:24 – 6:8; 8:4 – 6).	Paul is concerned for ‘the weak’ in conscience being overshadowed by ‘the strong’ and the poor who ‘have nothing’ being neglected by the rich (8:9 – 13; 9:19 – 22; 11:22).
Mourning over sin: Amos is shocked by the northern Israelites who ‘are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph’ (6:6). Amos called for mourning and fasting (5:16; 8:10).	Paul is very disturbed by the Corinthians who do not ‘mourn’ (5:2) over the sins being committed in the community and are not ashamed (6:5) over the lack of godly mediators who can adjudicate conflicts in the church. Instead, they are arrogant (3:18 – 4:7; 4:18; 5:2, 6).
Drunkenness: Amos condemned excessive drinking (4:1; 6:6).	Paul faced the problem of drunkenness among the Corinthians and condemned it (5:11; 11:21).

## B. Rhetorical Style in Amos and 1 Corinthians

Amos	Paul
<p><i>Encirclement rhetorically and geographically<sup>4</sup></i></p> <p>Amos pronounces judgment upon the citadels of nations roundabout the northern kingdom of Israel: Damascus in the northeast (1:3 – 5), Gaza in the southwest (1:6 – 8), Tyre in the northwest (1:9 – 10), Edom in the far south (1:11 – 12), Ammon to the east (1:13 – 15), Moab to the southeast (2:1 – 3), the southern kingdom of Judah to the immediate south (2:4 – 5), and then finally the northern kingdom of Israel (2:6 – 16). Amos encircles Israel. The Israelites must have first heard this progression with enthusiasm, then realized with surprise and perhaps horror that God’s was encircling them by His word. God will judge Israel (3:1 – 4:16) but ultimately raise up the house of David through the messianic king and restore both Israel and the nations (9:11 – 15).</p>	<p><i>Encirclement rhetorically</i></p> <p>Paul teaches correctively and sharply in four major essays, all involving ‘the body’: the corporate body and unity in it (1:10 – 4:17); our individual bodies, sex, and our future bodies (4:18 – 7:40); our individual bodies, the corporate body, and the mission of Jesus (8:1 – 11:1); and the corporate body and worship (11:2 – 14:40). He has been moving toward and circling around the central and final topic, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which he regards as the central pillar of the faith (15:1 – 58). In this section, Paul expounds on the risen Jesus, heir of David. In 15:27, Paul quotes Psalm 110, which is about the messianic heir of David. Paul has thus built up the Corinthians’ emotional investment in, and theological-conceptual dependence upon, the bodily resurrection of Jesus.</p>
<p><i>Unfavorable comparison to Gentiles</i></p> <p>‘In Amos 1 – 2, the prophet heightens Israel’s guilt</p>	<p><i>Unfavorable comparison to Gentiles</i></p> <p>‘It is actually reported that there is immorality among you,</p>

<sup>4</sup> The motifs of encirclement in both Amos and 1 Corinthians reflect my own thought

<p>by portraying her as worse than the surrounding nations. Israel's indictment is the eighth and final, longest and most detailed judgment oracle.<sup>5</sup></p>	<p>and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles...' (5:1)</p>
<p><i>Inverted parallel (chiasm):</i></p> <p><sup>5:4</sup> Seek Me that you may live.  <sup>5</sup> But do not resort to <i>Bethel</i>  And do not come to <i>Gilgal</i>,  Nor cross over to <i>Beersheba</i>;  For <i>Gilgal</i> will certainly go into captivity  And <i>Bethel</i> will come to trouble.  <sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD that you may live</p> <p><sup>2:14</sup> <i>Flight</i> will perish from the swift,  And <i>the stalwart</i> will not strengthen his power,  Nor <i>the mighty man</i> save his life.  <sup>15</sup> <i>He who grasps the bow</i> will not stand  his ground,  <i>The swift of foot</i> will not escape,  Nor will <i>he who rides the horse</i> save his  life.  <sup>16</sup> Even <i>the bravest</i> among the warriors  will <i>flee</i> naked in that day</p>	<p><i>Inverted parallel (chiasm):</i></p> <p><sup>20</sup> But now Christ has been raised from the dead,  the <i>first fruits</i> of those who are asleep.  <sup>21</sup> For since <i>by a man</i> came death,  <i>by a man</i> also came the resurrection of the dead.  <sup>22</sup> For as <i>in Adam</i> all die,  so also <i>in Christ</i> all will be made alive.  <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the <i>first fruits</i>,  after that those who are Christ's at His coming,</p> <p>There are many others in 1 Corinthians. I have looked quite extensively at chiastic structures in biblical literature, and find that none of Paul's other letters even come close to having the same number of chiastic structures.<sup>6</sup> Quite likely Paul is dependent on a strong contingent of Jewish Christians, like Crispus, the former leader of the synagogue at Corinth (Acts 18:8), to read his letter and interpret it well for the Gentile Christians.</p>
<p><i>Rhetorical questions in a list:</i></p> <p><sup>3:3</sup> Do two men walk together  unless they have made an appointment?  <sup>4</sup> Does a lion roar in the forest  when he has no prey?  Does a young lion growl from his den  unless he has captured something?  <sup>5</sup> Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground  when there is no bait in it?  Does a trap spring up from the earth  when it captures nothing at all?  <sup>6</sup> If a trumpet is blown in a city  will not the people tremble?  If a calamity occurs in a city  has not the LORD done it?  <sup>7</sup> Surely the Lord GOD does nothing  Unless He reveals His secret counsel  to His servants the prophets.  (resolution)  <sup>8</sup> A lion has roared! Who will not fear?  The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?'</p>	<p><i>Rhetorical questions in a list:</i></p> <p><sup>9:4</sup> Do we not have a right to eat and drink?  <sup>5</sup> Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife,  even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord  and Cephas?  <sup>6</sup> Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from  working?  <sup>7</sup> Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense?  Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it?  Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?  (resolution)...  <sup>10</sup> the plowman ought to plow in hope,  and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.</p> <p>While Paul does use rhetorical questions both in isolation and in other lists, for example in Romans (2:3, 4, 21 – 23, 26 – 27; 3:1 – 9, 27 – 31; 4:1, 2, 9, 10; 6:1 – 4; etc.), there is a density here in this section that is notable. This similarity is suggestive that Paul is stylistically drawing on Amos' own rhetorical strategies, though other influences can surely be detected.</p>

<sup>5</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Donald A. Carson, editor, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 2010), p.199

<sup>6</sup> See my outline here: [http://nagasawafamily.org/paul\\_1corinthians.chiastic.structure.mako.pdf](http://nagasawafamily.org/paul_1corinthians.chiastic.structure.mako.pdf)

### C. Imagery in Amos and 1 Corinthians

Amos	Paul in 1 Corinthians
<p>Cities, buildings, houses, temples: Amos pronounces judgment upon the citadels of Damascus (1:3 – 5), Gaza (1:6 – 8), Tyre (1:9 – 10), Edom (1:11 – 12), Ammon (1:13 – 15), Moab (2:1 – 3), Judah (2:4 – 5), and most of all, Israel (2:6 – 16). In the north, God will destroy the luxury houses of the rich (3:15), the fortress of the strong (5:9), and the houses of well-hewn stone which were built by those who taxed the poor (5:11). Amos refers to corruption in the place of judicial decisions, the gate (5:10, 12, 15). As a result, God will pass through the city of Bethel, capital of the north, and judge it (5:16 – 27). A ‘great house’ will be smashed to pieces (6:9 – 11). Amos’s opponent Amaziah told him to prophesy no longer at the royal city of the north, Bethel (7:13). So Amos prophesied doom on that city (8:3). Yet God will raise up the house of David and the ruins of its city, Jerusalem, as well as the cities roundabout (9:11 – 15).<sup>7</sup></p>	<p>Corinth as a city was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC. The Romans rebuilt it as a Roman colony in 44 BC. ‘The rebuilding must have been extensive. A contemporary Western wooden house can be built quickly. Stone houses, built without the benefit of power equipment, take years. Paul probably arrived in early AD 51, and due to the economic prosperity of that time, there must have been considerable construction underway across the city. Each construction project would have had a stonemason, called a ‘master builder,’ in charge. Paul used that image astutely to describe himself in this letter. He could not have reflected on Amos 9:11 – 12 without noticing the double reference to the rebuilding of ruined cities and the inhabiting of them (Amos 9:11, 14). Indeed, the labor of building and the resulting houses and temples are important images for Paul. He constructs a parable around this theme (3:9b – 17; 6:19; 9:16).’<sup>8</sup></p>
<p>Mountains: Amos uses general mountains and specific mountains (e.g. Zion) as part of his prophecy. It is from Mount Zion that the Lord utters His voice (1:2). God calls foreigners to sit on the mountains of Samaria to see the injustice there, as well as God’s coming judgment (3:9 – 15). Then, on Mount Gerizim, ‘the mountain of Samaria’ which was the north’s substitute for Jerusalem in the south, there are wealthy women and men whose injustice and greed draw God’s judgment (4:1 – 13). Amos describes God’s creative power by citing mountains as an example (4:13), but in this context, Amos intends to scare his audience. He reminds them that God ‘treads on the high places of the earth’ and that mountains are not sacred fenced off zones, safe from God’s judgment. Both Mount Zion and the unnamed ‘mountain of Samaria’ (6:1) will be judged for the sins committed thereupon. The ‘high places of Israel will be desolated’ (7:9). Yet as part of God’s renewal of the covenant with Israel, Amos describes mountains that will drip with sweet wine (9:13).</p>	<p>Mountains appear explicitly in 1 Corinthians only once (13:2); the phrase ‘remove mountains’ probably refers to miraculous spiritual gifting. But even this incidental occurrence is related to the wider theme of the church being the new Temple of God, which displaces the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem on Mount Zion. Jesus claimed to be the new Temple of God explicitly (Jn.1:14; 2:13 – 25; 4:20 – 24; 7:38 – 39; 14:1 – 21) and implicitly by drawing on imagery like the twelve loaves of bread that were in the holy place of the Temple (Jn.6:1 – 21) or claiming to be the light of the world, the menorah in the Temple which recalled God in the burning bush (Jn.8:12 – 9:36). Jesus said, referring to himself, that something greater than the Temple is here (Mt.12:6) because God dwelled in him. This explains why Jesus referred to ‘moving mountains’ as moving the presence of God from the Temple on Mount Zion to wherever the disciples go (17:1 – 13; 21:21; 28:16 – 20). Paul now understands the followers of Jesus to be ‘in Jesus’ by the Spirit, and therefore part of God’s new Temple (3:10 – 17; 6:18 – 20) who eat in communion with the Lord in a way that is similar to Israel’s eating at the altar (10:16 – 18).</p>
<p>Fire of judgment: The image of fire as God’s judgment, and the image of burning appear frequently in Amos (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5; 4:11; 5:6; 6:10; 7:4). The fire motif is joined by the sifting or sieve motif (9:9), corresponding to the use of fire as a refining fire in other biblical writers (Isa.4:5 – 7; 6:1 – 8; 29:6; 30:27 –</p>	<p>Fire, for Paul, is an image of judgment by refinement and purification, by destruction of what is improper (3:13 – 15). God’s goal is to cleanse the whole by burning away the imperfect parts. Richard B. Hays notes that the following thought from Amos corresponds to Paul’s thought in 3:13 – 15: ‘I overthrew you, as God</p>

<sup>7</sup> This section is my expansion on Kenneth Bailey’s original observation that Amos deals with buildings and houses

<sup>8</sup> Bailey, p.503 – 504

30;66:1 – 24; Ezk.22:17 – 22; Mal.3:2 – 3; Ps.29:7; 50:3; Neh.9:12; Heb.12:29). All of this is rooted in the Torah’s imagery of God present in fire in the burning bush (Ex.3:2; Acts 7:40) and as fire on Mt. Sinai, which Israel was afraid of entering (Ex.19:13; Dt.5:5). <sup>9</sup>	overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze; yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares the LORD.’ (Amos 4:11) <sup>10</sup>
Light and darkness: Amos uses this image to illustrate God’s power in creation, as it will relate to God’s power in redeeming Israel (4:13; 5:8).	Paul uses the same imagery of Jesus turning darkness into light to disclose people’s secrets and motives (4:5).
The farmer: Amos warns that in God’s judgment of exile, the farmer will plant vineyards and not drink its produce (5:11). Then, in the messianic future, the farmer will plant vineyards and will drink its wine (9:14).	Paul compares himself to a farmer who plants crops (3:6 – 8). He also compares the role of the apostle to a vineyard planter who should eat the fruit of the vineyard, meaning receive financial support (9:7).
The shepherd: Amos was a shepherd (1:2). The pastures of the shepherds mourn (1:2). The shepherd rescues small parts of a sheep from the lion’s mouth (3:12).	Paul says that the shepherd who tends a flock has the right to some of its milk (9:7)
Wild animals: lions (1:2; 3:4, 5, 8; 5:19), bear (5:19), snake (5:19)	Paul speaks metaphorically of facing ‘wild beasts’ (15:32)
The trumpet and other musical instruments: Amos hears a trumpet sound twice (2:2; 3:6), as a signal of battle. Amos refers to other musical instruments (6:5).	Paul refers to a trumpet sound accompanying the return of Jesus (15:52) and incidentally refers to a trumpet as a call to battle (14:8). He also refers to other musical instruments (13:1; 14:7).
The thresher: Threshing is mentioned negatively as an image of cruelty (1:3)	Paul uses the image of the thresher, but positively as one who is harvesting grain (9:10)

#### D. Divine Calling and Expressions of that Calling

Amos’ Calling	Paul’s Calling
Called by God: <sup>7:14</sup> Then Amos replied to Amaziah... <sup>15</sup> But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, ‘Go prophesy to My people Israel.’ <sup>16</sup> Now hear the word of the LORD...	Called by God: <sup>1:1</sup> Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God... <sup>9:1</sup> Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?... <sup>16</sup> I am under compulsion... <sup>17</sup> I have a stewardship entrusted to me...
Amos faced opposition: <sup>7:12</sup> Then Amaziah said to Amos, ‘Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying!	Paul faced opposition: <sup>9:1</sup> Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? <sup>2</sup> If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.
Amos had a lowly profession: <sup>7:14</sup> I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a	Paul had a lowly profession: ‘Paul supported himself as a tentmaker. Intellectuals and leaders among the Greeks

<sup>9</sup> This section reflects my own thought; see my essay *Hell as Fire and Darkness: Remembrance of Sinai as Covenant Refusal in Matthew’s Gospel*; <http://nagasawafamily.org/matthew-theme-fire-and-darkness-as-hell.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Richard B. Hays, *1 Corinthians: Interpretation – A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), p.56



<p>grower of sycamore figs.<sup>15</sup> But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, ‘Go prophesy to My people Israel.’ ‘Sycamore figs have a very low sugar content, almost no taste and are only eaten by the poorest of the poor. Amos’s profession was not respected in the community but that fact did not faze him.’<sup>11</sup></p>	<p>were not expected to work with their hands. Part of the pressure on Paul to accept financial assistance from the Corinthians was probably related to the fact that they were not happy to have their founder working with his hands at ‘humdrum, often despised labor.’<sup>12</sup> Further, apostleship itself was humbling and dangerous (4:8 – 13)</p>
<p>Audience was the northern kingdom of Israel, outside the Davidic covenant and by that standard, ‘Gentile’</p>	<p>Audience was mostly Greek, new to faith in Jesus, messianic heir of David, and previously Gentile</p>

### The Human Body and the Importance of Social Justice

The theology of the body. If the body matters, then social justice matters for every person and towards every person. This is rooted in an ethic of human responsibility and obligation. Human rights exist, but only because human obligations exist.

MORE TO COME

Marxism and liberation theology:

- The Marxist hermeneutic that history is driven by class struggle, and human nature can be boiled down to materialistic desires alone, is false.
- The tendency for some liberation theologians to espouse an ethnocentric or even violent ethic is false.

MORE TO COME

### The Church and its Role in Social Justice, and What Kind of Social Justice

The church is a *restorative and reconciling* community, not divided by the powers which divide the world or succumbing to those powers. The church calls people to be restored in Jesus and reconciled to God, and restored and reconciled to each other.

Examples of Christian non-violent resistance movements:

- Leo Tolstoy in Russia
- Ahn Chang-Ho in Korea
- Mohandas K. Gandhi in South Africa and India
- Martin Luther King, Jr., James Lawson, Fanny Lou Hamer, etc. in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement
- Corazon Aquino in the People Power Revolution in the Philippines in 1986
- Lech Walesa and Solidarity in Poland, 1995
- Trevor Huddleston and Desmond Tutu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa

MORE TO COME

The church is a *judicial* community. Sharing in God’s judicial responsibility goes back to God’s original commission to human beings to have ‘dominion’ (Gen.1:26 – 28). When God formed Israel in their wilderness wandering to enter a new type of ‘garden land,’ and become a partial restoration of Adam and Eve in the original garden land, He shared his judicial responsibility with Moses, who then shared it with other elders in Israel (Ex.18; Dt.1:9 – 17; 16:18 – 22) and, in some regards, the whole community (Dt.17:1 – 13ff.). After Israel was exiled from the garden land, languished in exile, and waited for ‘the kingdom of God’ to arrive, the prophets envisioned a retelling of the first and original story. The prophet Daniel (7:22) envisioned that the messianic age would come with ‘the Son of Man’ ascending on the clouds to be enthroned, and ‘the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.501

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.501

kingdom' to share in the role of judging. 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One' (7:27).

Jesus, as the Son of Man prophesied by Daniel, who inherits 'all authority' (Mt.28:18), shares his authority to judge with his people, most notably here in 1 Corinthians 6:1 – 8. 'The saints will judge the world... and angels' (1 Cor.6:2 – 3). But this idea occurs elsewhere (Mt.19:28; Jn.5:22, 26; 2 Pet.2:4; Jude 6; Rev.20:4). This development mirrors Israel's history after the Exodus when God shared the responsibility for judgment with the elders and the people of Israel. Paul indicates this in 1 Corinthians by the way he positions the Corinthian Christians into the narrative of Israel during their wilderness wandering. He refers to Christ our passover (5:7) as a motif for understanding Jesus' launching believers out from an old allegiance to a new one. Jesus as a passover lamb also speaks of him cleansing of this own personal, physical body, then extending the responsibility to cleanse his corporate body of impurity (5:2 – 8). Then to punctuate his point about corporate responsibility, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 17:7, 'Remove the wicked man from among you' (5:13). Paul then gives a list of ten sins (6:9 – 10), like Moses did in the wilderness. Later, Paul places the Corinthians explicitly in a parallel to Israel's wilderness narrative (10:1 – 13). More evidence abounds. Given God's creation order as a foundation, the partial restoration of that creation order in Israel shown in the case law style of the Mosaic Law, and the restoration of 'new creation and new humanity' in and through Jesus, the church has access to a wise and just tradition of God's ethical stances and judgments.

How might that look within the church? In biblical Israel, law and judicial judgments were not a derivative expression of the state. In fact, law existed independently of the state for centuries and continued to operate quite independently even while the state was present. Law was an expression of the will of God given to Israel as part of the covenant, and God was regarded as the one who adjudicated conflicts in Israel on an ongoing basis. Thus, in Israel, law was not a growing code of precedents which was meant to be applied with absolute consistency in formal courts. Such was Rome's judicial environment, but not Israel's. Instead, judgments were given by all manner of people who represented YHWH: local elders, Levitical priests, individual prophet-judges on circuit like Samuel, the Davidic king, and after Jehosaphat's reform, royally appointed judges in towns with a court of appeals in Jerusalem (2 Chr.19). Indeed, one gets the clear impression that these bodies of adjudication were rather spontaneous and ad-hoc: David's son Absalom judged cases (1 Sam.15:1-6), a group of elders rallied to exonerate Jeremiah over against a death sentence declared against him by Jerusalem's princes, priests, prophets, and officials (Jer.26), and Jesus was asked to adjudicate a dispute over land inheritance (Lk.12:13). This proves that law in Israel operated independently of the state even while the state was present. All these trials were spontaneous and – with the exception of Jesus, who declined to arbitrate – were conducted by a judge or a judging body who sought out the truth from witnesses who came with evidence (Deut.17:6), not by lawyers acting for the prosecution and the defense.

To varying degrees, the decision-rendering judges were considered to be informed by God (e.g. Solomon in 1 Ki.3:28, Ps.72) – or at least this was the ideal (Ps.82) – and they had a certain amount of discretion (Dt.16:18 – 20, 17:8 – 13). Their goal was not to abide by or accumulate a codified body of common precedents and procedures, but rather to make a decision fairly, impartially, and without being influenced by bribery or favoritism. A decision was effective because the parties involved submitted themselves beforehand to whatever verdict was handed down. This is a completely different forum for adjudication than the rational, institutional state of Hume, Locke, and the Enlightenment. It was a voluntary covenant between two parties to submit to the verdict of a third party within an overarching submission to God, a method clearly favored by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:1 – 8.

#### MORE TO COME

The church is an *influential* community. Each portion of the body of Christ would, on occasion, influence the cultural and judicial practices of the society in which it lives, demonstrating the church's ability to heal areas of brokenness in that culture, and also demonstrating the gospel's ability to capture what is good about each culture. No guarantees can be made about the permanence of that influence, but influence was sure to happen on occasion.

I have been encouraged to imagine a complex scenario that would have been very likely in the early church, and I find it helpful. Let's say a Roman Christian husband physically abuses his wife. Roman law, which granted freeborn women a remarkable level of freedom and protection, forbade the domestic abuse of women. Either one of them could initiate a divorce under Roman law. A woman would leave the marriage with her dowry, since under Roman law, her family of origin ties her dowry to her individually, and technically she is still under the protection of

her own father. But in this case, since the wife comes from a poor background (she is not a freeborn aristocrat but was formerly enslaved) and her parents have died, she has very little dowry and almost no economic support. If the husband divorces her and leaves her with nothing, would that be a form of theft? But this couple had recently professed faith in Jesus, been baptized, and joined the church. She comes to the church elders in accordance with Jesus' instruction about church accountability in Matthew 18:15 – 20 and 1 Corinthians 6:1 – 8 and reports how she tried to work this out with her husband. He had not listened. The elders rule that although Jesus only spoke of adultery as a legitimate cause for Christian divorce in certain conversations about sex (e.g. Matthew 19:3 – 12), he would have included repeated physical abuse as a legitimate cause as well if asked. They conclude this, in part, based on how seriously God took physical abuse in the Sinaitic Law. Three times physical abuse was said to require a mark on the offender's body of equal significance: Exodus 21:27 – 28 (although a ransom amount could be substituted); Leviticus 24:19 – 20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. In addition, the text Deuteronomy 23:15 – 16 describes the case of the runaway slave/servant who fled, ostensibly because of abuse. In that case, the Israelites were to help the fugitive with safety, provision, and permanent relocation. Whatever financial debt that the servant was trying to work off was ostensibly cancelled. Since the Sinaitic Law treated a vulnerable servant that way, the church elders reason (rightly, in my opinion) that a physically abused spouse should be treated that way all the more. They invite the Christian husband into a process with two of them. After a rather lengthy process, the husband and wife reconcile.

The Christian community there also starts reflecting on their cultural practices of dividing household wealth in the case of divorce. They note that, long before the Roman laws on women enshrined the principle, Moses protected wives through dowry laws in Exodus 22:16 – 17, where a male suitor gives a bride-price to the bride's father who then gives it to his daughter as her own, which is the assumed context of Luke 15:8 – 10; since the gift passes through the hands of the bride's father, it stays with the bride in the case of divorce. They further note that deliverance from slavery put everyone in Israel on equal footing in terms of social class, contrary to the strong Roman distinctions between freeborn, freedmen and women, and enslaved classes. Moreover, they perceive that the land practices of Israel, even though land was passed down from father to son, were fairly egalitarian by family, and this meant that even a divorced woman would be cared for economically by her family of origin in roughly the same way as within her marriage. In their reading, they struggled to translate this into a new non-Mosaic context, but they believed this impacted ideas about socio-economic class. The Roman Christian husband, seeing the concern of love behind the practice, and appreciating being in a new place intellectually, actually becomes a critic of the standard Roman practice. Just as interestingly, their non-Christian acquaintances, business associates, family members, and friends observe this play out. One was a judge in a court of Roman law, along with his wife. They decide that they too had been concerned enough about the abuse of power that they begin to question the legal status quo.

It would be years – in fact, centuries – until there was a significant enough momentum to change views of marriage and divorce rights as they were impacted by social class, and even that, only incrementally. One such moment was with Empress Theodora. The Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, in his famous code of law, still upheld the Roman *patria potesta* in name, but not entirely in substance. For his persuasive and strong-willed wife Empress Theodora successfully convinced him to change many laws concerning women. She persuaded him to pass laws outlawing forced prostitution. Many brothels were closed as a result. She started a convent called Metanoia ('repentance'), where ex-prostitutes could live and support themselves through a legitimate trade. She expanded the rights of women in divorce laws and property ownership. She successfully advocated instating the death penalty for convicted rapists. She forbade the exposure of unwanted infants, who were mostly girls or deformed children. She extended mothers some guardianship rights over their children. She forbade the killing of a wife who committed adultery. The influence started. It was a long process, full of hiccups and setbacks, and never guaranteed permanence, but the role of the Christian as a cultural influence was very clearly displayed here.

Secular sociologist Lewis Mumford, who has no interest in flattering Christian faith, begrudgingly admits, 'What was involved in a realization of the Christian city? Nothing less, I submit, than a thoroughgoing rejection of the original basis on which the city had been founded: the renunciation of the long-maintained monopoly of power and knowledge; the reorganization of laws and property rights in the interest of justice, free from coercion, the abolition of slavery and of compulsory labor for the benefit of a ruling minority, and the elimination of gross economic inequalities between class and class. On those terms, the citizens might find on earth at least a measure of that charity and justice that were promised to them, on their repentance, in heaven. In the Christian city, one would suppose, citizens would have the opportunity to live together in brotherhood and mutual assistance, without quailing before arbitrary power, or constantly anticipating external violence and sudden death. The rejection of the old order

imposed originally by the citadel was the minimal basis of Christian peace and order.<sup>13</sup> This was the impact of mainstream European Christians, not just the Christians off to the margins in the monasteries.

MORE TO COME

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<sup>13</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), p.317