

A significant figure in Israel or Judah died, prompting a number of dignitaries from both nations to come together. Amos 6:1–7 describes the funeral wake, calling the crème de la crème to task for their pampered prosperity and boisterous banquets that led them to ignore the cries of the poor.

Amos's first item demonstrating that these "movers and shakers" have way more than they need is "ivory beds" (Amos 6:4). These status symbols have been uncovered by archaeologists in an excavation of the city of Samaria. They found truckloads of ivory, which also confirms Amos's earlier words about "ivory houses" (Amos 3:15).

Next, the prophet rebukes the rich for eating the choicest meat. For the "rank-and-file," meat was probably consumed only three times a year at the major festivals (cf. Deuteronomy 12:17–18).

The privileged classes in Zion and Samaria were living the high life, just like kings. In fact, in Amos 6:5, the prophet points out that these partygoers considered themselves to be as pious and godly as King David. What a farce! David did create many songs (2 Sam. 23:1), that's for sure, but these were songs to glorify the Lord (1 Sam. 16:16, 23) and were matched by his righteousness and justice for all people (2 Sam. 8:15). Israel's leaders were living a lie; they were as far away from David's piety as possible.

In Amos 6:6, the prophet moves from discussing lounging, eating, and musical-merry-making to describing the people's excessive drinking. A modern analogy might put it this way: these partiers were forgoing cups and drinking straight from the bottle. "Their god is their belly", as St. Paul would say in Philippians 3:19. They didn't serve **God**; they fed their **own** appetites (Romans 16:18). Those who were part of the choicest of **nations** (see Amos 6:1) were also anointing themselves with the choicest of **oils**.

In the midst of their "party hardy" atmosphere the leaders remained oblivious to the ruin of their nation. So, Amos dropped the bombshell. They were "not grieved over the ruin of Joseph" (Amos 6:6).

The prophet describes Joseph's ruin in Amos 4:6–11, as well as in the military defeats depicted in Amos 5:3; 6:9–10. These catastrophes impacted the impoverished people in significant ways. But the people most responsible, the aristocrats, were apathetic to the entire mess. They acted as though nothing had happened. Their attitude was, "The poor we will always have with us. What's the big deal?" It was business—in this case **party** business—as usual. They refused to repent (Amos 4:6–11).

So why does Amos call the down-and-outs “Joseph”?

You remember the story. Joseph was his father’s favorite, but his brothers despised him. His dad gave him a coat of many colors, but his brothers ripped it off and sold Joseph to some Midianites coming from Gilead on their way to Egypt (Genesis 37:19–28). Joseph went to work for Potiphar, a high-ranking Egyptian official, and ended up in charge of everything. Genesis 39:6 says of him, “Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.” So, Potiphar’s wife says, “Come to bed with me” (39:7). But Joseph responds, “How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (39:9). This spurned woman then goes for Joseph’s jugular. And since there was no one to plead his case, Joseph was condemned (39:20). While in prison, he and Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer made arrangements to break out. The cupbearer was freed but forgot about Joseph for two years (ch 40). Then Pharaoh had two dreams that no one could interpret until the cupbearer remembered Joseph (ch 41). Through it all, **twenty-three years** to be exact, Joseph finally became second in charge over Egypt.

It is fitting, then, that Amos speaks of “Joseph’s ruin” because it was Joseph who cried out in distress when his brothers threw him in the pit (Gen. 42:21). While Joseph wept, his brothers sat down and ate a meal (37:25). In the same way, Israel’s leaders were too busy lounging on couches, enjoying their food and drink, and strumming away on their musical instruments to care about “the ruin of Joseph.” They “ate, drank, and were merry” much like Joseph’s brothers when they cast him into the pit.

So “Joseph,” symbolizes the poor and oppressed people throughout the book of Amos (e.g., Amos 2:6, 7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4) who were, together with the elite, in the same family called Israel. The Lord rescued the nation so that, among other things, it could be a community of **brothers**.

Jesus tells a parable about a rich man, one of the “notables” of His own day, who wore only the best clothing and consumed only the finest food (Luke 16:19–31). Outside the door of his home lay a man named Lazarus, who was hungry and poor. The rich man did not persecute Lazarus, nor did he drive him away. **He was simply indifferent to him.** The leaders of Amos’s day exhibited a similar attitude. They ignored God’s call for justice and righteousness and instead mouthed pious words about religion (cf. Amos 4:4–5; James 2:16).

Frank Layden, the former coach of the Utah Jazz in the 1970’s, once had problems with a basketball player. He summoned the talented but troubled man to his office. Looking the player in the eye, the coach finally asked, “Son, I can’t understand it with you. Is it ignorance or apathy?” The player responded,

“Coach, I don’t know, and I don’t care!” Far too often ignorance and apathy describe *our* lives. We see wrecked and ruined people, and we say under our breath, “I don’t know, and I don’t care!”

Kitty Genovese was a young woman who was murdered in a New York residential section while at least thirty-eight neighbors watched from their windows. During the course of the 30-minute assault, no one even telephoned the police. Studies have uncovered some surprising facts about these people. Interviews revealed that they were not totally indifferent. The main reason nobody did anything was that each person thought someone else would take the initiative to get help.

The solution to ignorance and apathy comes in one who was treated just like Joseph. He was also despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus our Lord was mocked by the crowd, betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, forsaken by the ten, unjustly accused in a kangaroo court, sentenced to death by a weak-willed Roman governor, crowned with thorns by those who spat upon Him, and scourged by musclemen just short of death.

Christ’s love is just the opposite of the partygoers described by Amos. Instead of indifference, in Baptism our Savior pours grace upon us. Instead of neglect, in the Eucharist He gives us a foretaste of heaven. Instead of unconcern, through the Gospel we share His victory. Instead of divine apathy, **(shout it out)** we are redeemed in the blood of the Lamb!

Our Savior’s love empowers us to gain the victory over apathy and unconcern. We not only grieve over Joseph’s ruin, we will attend to the hurting people in our world. Indeed, motivated by Christ’s love, we care for those among us who are the least, the lost, and the last! Amen.