

Greetings church,

In this third chapter, Paul R. Raabe continues the work of both of his colleagues. They appear to be bound and determined to remove the concept of biblical justice from the public square and leave it solely to the Christian community. As I noted in my review of chapter 1 the author sought to show and prove that the justice that the scriptures speak of, the justice that God is interested in, is limited to an interpersonal relationship between God Godself and each individual Christian. Here in chapter 3 Mr. Raabe continues his colleagues' argument.

Mr. Raabe decides to take the tactic of attempting to re-adjudicate the meaning of key Hebrew phrases. “The Hebrew noun *mišpāt* is usually translated ‘justice.’ ... I will translate the noun ‘rightly-distinguishing-judgment.’”<sup>1</sup> It is my opinion that this is a perfectly appropriate working definition of the noun. Rightly-distinguishing-judgment is something that is needed, and hopefully, practiced across cultures across the centuries. The capacity to practice judgement that is rightly-distinguished, from that which is wrongly-distinguished, is something that all societies and cultures should strive for. Who of you reading this would *want* to live in a society or culture in which judgments were *not* rendered in such a manner so as to distinguish right from wrong? Live in a society where judgments are rendered inconsistently and arbitrarily based upon how the person rendering said judgement feels that day? Such a desire, and the ability to do so, is not strictly limited to those who refer to themselves as the people of God; Christian, Jewish, or otherwise. As such, it is unreasonable to limit Amos’ call for “rightly-distinguishing-judgment” solely to individual hearts and minds. Many individuals, together, form a society. Even if it were limited to individuals the need for rightly-distinguishing-judgment would eventually make its way into the broader society as individuals continued to interact with one another and form connections.

After his word study, Mr. Raabe concludes, “Amos was not calling for secular “social justice” but for God-pleasing actions that flow from repentance and faith in the God of Israel”.<sup>2</sup> My question in return for Mr. Raabe is, are not calls for social justice just that? Calls for God-pleasing actions based in repentance for harms done? With his work in Amos, Mr. Raabe was specifically seeking to challenge the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s reference to Amos in his “I Have a Dream” speech. I contend that “God-pleasing actions that flow from repentance and faith in the God of Israel” is exactly what MLK was calling for. Segregation and Jim Crow are the opposite of God-pleasing actions and these are what Dr. King was speaking out against. To my mind, to legislate *against* segregation and Jim Crow would absolutely be “God-pleasing actions”. Mr. Raabe goes on. “By seeking Yahweh these individual Israelites may ‘survive’ the upcoming devastation.”<sup>3</sup> (This would turn out to be both the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria and the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon as Amos preached and prophesied in the years leading up to the fall of Israel.) Why would God, and his prophet Amos, desire only for some individuals to be saved? This seems out of character for God. Genesis records Abraham arguing in favor of saving the entire city-state of Sodom, to which God agrees. Jonah records God relenting and sparing the entire city-state of Nineveh. Jesus makes repeated references to salvation being for all even though it comes from the Jews. And the New Testament letters consistently re-enforce and expand upon what Jesus himself

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<sup>1</sup>Raabe, Paul R. *Justice in Amos* in Let Justice Flow Like Water: Toward a Theology of Biblical Justice. Editors Joshua M. Greever, D.A. Horton, and Justin McLendon. B&H Academic, Brentwood, TN; 2025. pp 59 & 63

<sup>2</sup>ibid, p 80

<sup>3</sup>ibid, p 80

said about the expansiveness of salvation. Bearing the entire scriptural context in mind, Mr. Raabe appears off base in his assessment.

He concludes his argument this way. “The call for *mišpāt* from Amos moves to the Christian life and the internal conduct of churches, not to the governmental and economic systems of America.”<sup>4</sup> The analogy that comes to my mind is Pilate. What Mr. Raabe seems to be suggesting is more akin to the actions taken by Pontius Pilate at the crucifixion of Jesus than to the actions of Jesus the Messiah. I hear Mr. Raabe saying, get our own affairs in order and then sit back, relax, and wash our hands of what is occurring in society and culture. Even if it is oppressive or de-humanizing as long as Christians treat each other with “rightly-distinguishing-judgment” to hell, quite literally, with everyone else. I whole heartedly disagree. This is not the Jesus way. This is the Pilate way. “The question of ‘social justice,’ of equitable distribution of wealth and power and influence, should be considered on the basis of human reason and political-economic wisdom.”<sup>5</sup> I have questions. Why? Why would any society or culture want to leave the crucial questions of wealth, power, and influence to broken, sinful human reason and broken, sinful political-economic wisdom? It makes no good sense to me. Why is Mr. Raabe limiting the scope of social justice to wealth, power, and influence? Does not social justice also include morality, the cessation of people being taken advantage of, and the lifting up of people out of their desperate and oppressive circumstances? Finally, even if social justice has only to do with the equitable distribution of wealth, power, and influence, I would like to know why that is so bad in light of the biblical concept of jubilee? (Lev. 25)

It is my opinion that where Mr. Raabe falls desperately short in his attempt to persuade me to his view of things is in his failure to read the prophet Amos within the context of the broader scriptural canon. I am willing to say that he may very well be correct in his assessment of Amos if Amos existed in a bubble as a stand alone text. But it does not. Amos is but 1 book of 66 and must be read and interpreted within that much broader scriptural framework and scope.

In Christ’s Service,  
Pastor Eddie

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<sup>4</sup>Raabe, Paul R. *Justice in Amos* in Let Justice Flow Like Water: Toward a Theology of Biblical Justice. Editors Josha M. Greever, D.A. Horton, and Justin McLendon. B&H Academic, Brentwood, TN; 2025. p86

<sup>5</sup>ibid, p 86