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"Go Ye and Learn What That Meaneth"

Mercy and the Law in the Old Testament's Prophetic Literature and in the Gospels

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One day, as the Savior sat at dinner in Capernaum with tax collectors and sinners, a group of Pharisees approached his disciples and asked, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matthew 9:11).[1] In his response, Jesus described his mission in therapeutic terms and appealed to the Old Testament prophet Hosea: "The healthy do not need a doctor, but the sick do. Go learn what this means: 'I want mercy and not sacrifice'; because I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12–13; cf. Matthew 12:7).[2] The main point of the response is that Jesus sits with the morally and socially "sick" because his mortal mission is to them, and they are in greater need of the healing power of his presence and message. This explanation, however, bookends a rather peculiar quotation of a passage from Hosea that seems to denigrate temple sacrifices. The quotation appears again in Matthew 12:7. After the Pharisees have condemned Jesus's disciples for plucking and eating

grain on the Sabbath, the Savior recalls that David ostensibly violated the law when he entered the temple and ate the Bread of the Presence (1 Samuel 21:1–6) and that priestly work also seems to violate the Sabbath, yet this work is required.[3] Jesus continues, "But if you had understood this—'I want mercy and not sacrifice'—you would not have condemned the innocent."[4]

In each of Christ's first two disputes with the Pharisees, Matthew (and Matthew alone) then has the Savior using this prophetic critique to frame his rejection of their complaints. At first blush, the quotation seems to be a passing rhetorical jab at the harsh legalism of the Pharisees,[5] and Church scholars and curricula have largely treated it as such,[6] but the rhetoric fits into a much broader pattern of prophetic critiques of power that seemingly subordinate the temple and its ordinances to the interests of justice. This pattern has largely gone overlooked within the Church. Matthew has the Savior twice insisting that the Pharisees misunderstand the meaning of a specific scripture, but as modern students of the scriptures, are we exempt from Jesus's charge to "go learn what this means"?

This paper will tug at the loose thread of this rebuke in search of a clearer picture of the particular prophetic critique that rebuke deploys, the role of the law according to that critique, and its adaptation to the Gospels' circumstances, rhetorical exigencies, and understanding of the law. The paper begins with a discussion of ancient Near Eastern conceptualizations of cosmic order, justice, and the law. These concepts operated quite distinctively in the ancient Near East, and properly situating the prophetic critique of power will necessitate orienting our perspective to their conceptual frameworks. At that point, we will move on to the socioeconomic circumstances of the eighth century BC—the time when that prophetic critique emerged—to the content and rhetorical goals of that critique, and, finally, to its deployment by Gospel authors. Many generalities in this interrogation will be inescapable, just as many contexts, exigencies, and perspectives will be irretrievable. Nevertheless, we can still approximate a clearer understanding of "what this means."

Cosmic Order, Justice, and the Law in the Ancient Near East

The term *justice* is common to the Latter-day Saint lexicon today, and in that context, it is most saliently framed as an outcome of judgment, whether to the blessing or punishment of the individual. According to this usage, the semantic focus is not on the actions of the individual or on the circumstances they bring about but rather on the consequences brought about by God's system of reward or punishment.[7] Anciently, however, justice was understood differently, and it fit within a quite distinctive conceptual framework related to social roles and their connection to maintaining cosmic order. Ancient understandings of righteousness and mercy also grew out of this conceptual framework.

The foundation of that framework was the cyclical nature of time. In the ancient Near East, each new year was not simply a new point along a linear timeline, but each year marked the resetting of the previous year's cycle of seasons and the restarting of that cycle for a new year.[8] The continuation of the cycle was not necessarily a given and was dependent on several factors. In a successful yearly cycle, order had to triumph over chaos, which allowed the seasons to transition normally, floods and rains to occur where they were supposed to occur, crops to grow, and families, villages, and nations to meet their needs and be at peace. Order was associated with functionality, and in the broader ancient Near Eastern world, it was thought to have been initially established through a primordial patron deity's victory over a chaotic deity who was usually linked with symbols associated with uninhabitable spaces, such as serpents, monsters, and the sea.[9] While the leading deities and their divine council were understood to most directly influence the subsequent maintenance of that order through the continual suppression of the forces of chaos, the behavior of humans—particularly their performance of rituals and their maintenance of a social equilibrium—was an additional means of helping that order to be maintained.[10] According to this worldview, if

deities grew unhappy with the people of their nations, either because of failure to perform the proper ritual acts or because of disorder in their communities, the maintenance of order could be withdrawn as a means of punishment or instruction.[11]

The king was the main point of contact between the human world and the divine and thus was the human with the most influence over the maintenance of both the social and cosmic order. The king's two primary responsibilities to his divine patrons were the facilitation of the rituals and festivals of the temple cult—what we might call the vertical relationship—and the establishment and maintenance of social order—the horizontal relationship—most commonly symbolized by justice (*mišpāṭ* in Hebrew). Kings in the ancient Near East rhetorically emphasized the proliferation of justice in their kingdoms as a means of asserting the divine approbation of their administration, legitimizing their rule, and mitigating discontent and rebellion.[12] An example of this proliferation is the epilogue of the famous law code of Hammurabi (ca. 1792–1750 BC), which states that the gods Anu and Enlil established Hammurabi's rule "to make justice prevail in the land, to abolish the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak."[13]

Justice, according to this understanding, constituted "the privileges owed to each citizen as member of a family unit with a certain recognized socioeconomic status."[14] While we tend to speak of an individual's *rights* in contemporary jurisprudence, the ancient model viewed an individual's *duties* to others as more salient, likely because of the significance of everyone's actions to the broader social order, at least in reflective reasoning about the law. It was not necessarily the suffering of the victims and the violation of their rights that were the main concerns, but it was the broader prosocial implications of the actions of the offender. In the case of violations, justice required the restoration of the social balance. In this sense, the same kind of order that was obtained within the cosmos and among the roles that comprise it must also be obtained among the different social roles within society. The latter could be understood as a reflection of the former.

Because kings could not directly oversee all activity in their kingdoms, two mechanisms were developed for ensuring the maintenance of both types of relationships. Rituals (more directly overseen by priestly classes) maintained the vertical relationship, while law codes (more directly overseen by councils or by individuals who had been designated as judges) were the primary mechanism for maintaining the horizontal relationship and ensuring the maintenance of justice.[15] To the degree that the kings upheld justice within their purviews and facilitated the proper performance of the requisite ritual acts, the gods ensured cosmic order within their own jurisdictions. Scholars have identified multiple discrete collections of laws in the Old Testament, including Exodus's Covenant Code, the Holiness Code in Leviticus, the Deuteronomic Code, and others.[16] The most common types of laws were casuistic, or "case law," which identified a specific kind of situation or case and then prescribed a specific resolution.[17] The Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:2–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21 are what are known as apodictic laws, or laws that absolutely require or prohibit certain actions, independent of the circumstances. Apodictic laws are far less common among ancient laws.

The law collections of the Old Testament are distinct in several other ways from the other legal collections of the ancient Near East. Because the Old Testament is concerned with presenting Jehovah as Israel's ultimate king, the laws do not originate with the human king but with Jehovah. As a result, there is no boasting about the king's own establishment of justice. Instead, Jehovah is presented as the pinnacle and the ultimate source of justice and righteousness. Additionally, in the way they have been preserved, the laws do not exist as independent collections but are embedded within historical narratives that assert their divine origins.[18] They also employ conventions associated with vassal treaties, with Jehovah in the role of suzerain (or dominant party).[19] Thus the laws are accepted by covenant and demand faithfulness.[20] Ritual and festival requirements are also included alongside the more secular laws. Because Jehovah is the originator of the laws,

violation of those laws represents not only a threat to the social equilibrium but an offence directly against Jehovah.[21]

The socially marginalized were the focus of the majority of the legal concerns for justice but not because they were the most common day-to-day victims or complainants. Morris Silver explains, "The Ancient Near East designated victims by terms more or less conventionally translated as 'orphan,' 'widow,' 'poor person,' and 'peasant.' The referents are much less real-world social groupings than intellectual constructs. That is, the terms refer to the *ideal victim*."[22] These groups functioned rhetorically as a diagnostic indicator of the presence or absence of justice, and the most acutely marginalized—widows, orphans, and the poor—became the proverbial canaries in the coal mine of justice. Vulnerable groups already experienced greater hardships, but the laws drew a rhetorical line in the sand regarding the exploitation of the groups past which there would be trouble.

Jehovah's law obligated each member of the community to care for and actively seek the well-being of others in the community, particularly the most vulnerable. Under the conceptual umbrella of this obligation, the terms *righteousness* (*ṣedāqâ*) and *mercy* (*ḥesed*) in the Old Testament referred to different dimensions of fidelity to the community and to the maintenance of justice within it.[23] Righteous people were those who were loyal to God, to the community, and to the preservation of justice, and—if they had the authority—corrected or removed violations of or threats to that justice. Today we tend to think of righteousness as a strict fidelity to the law, but anciently, the scope of righteousness did not stop at the law—it extended beyond the law to the outcomes it was intended to produce. Proverbs 29:7 explains, "A righteous person knows the legal claim of the poor; a wicked person does not understand such knowledge." The law was not an end unto itself, it was a means to an end, and righteousness was concerned with the latter.

Operating within this same conceptual framework, mercy (*ḥesed*) referred to actions that averted danger from members of the society who were not in a position to avert it themselves.[24] Mercy was to be a

regular aspect of righteous individuals' engagement with their community—particularly with vulnerable members of the community, to whom the righteous individuals were expected to extend refuge and aid and over whom they should not exploit a harmful advantage. Like righteousness, mercy also widened its gaze beyond the law to the prosocial outcomes at which the law was aimed.[25] The story of Ruth is a wonderful illustration of this. Boaz, himself a righteous man, was happy to marry Ruth because of her multiple acts of *ḥesed*. She not only offered to remain with Naomi despite having no obligation to do so, but in seeking out a *gôʾēl*, or "redeemer," for marriage instead of marrying whomever she pleased, she could carry on her deceased husband's line, thus perpetuating Naomi's lineage and bringing glory to her.[26] In each case, Ruth (herself a marginalized member of society) did for others what they could not do for themselves, overturning their unfortunate circumstances not because the law required it—it didn't—but because she loved Naomi.[27]

Israel and Judah in the Eighth Century BC

With this rough understanding of the broad orientation of justice, mercy, and law in early Israel, we can focus on the circumstances to which Hosea and the other prophets were responding. Early in the eighth century BC, imperial pressure on the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah from larger regional powers like Assyria and Aram briefly withdrew, allowing the kings who reigned throughout the second quarter of that century—Jeroboam II in Israel (ca. 781–745 BC) and Uzziah in Judah (ca. 781–747 BC)—to exploit their especially lengthy reigns to undertake significant reforms that increased their economic power and their military ambitions. Prior to the eighth century, and with some few exceptions, urban and rural settlements were mostly small and scattered, and much of the agricultural production was limited to subsistence farming and some surplus for mostly local trade.[28] To expand their kingdoms, both kings needed to intensify agricultural production to increase their

surplus supplies—particularly olive oil, wine, and wheat—for international trade, primarily with Phoenicia. The northern kingdom had a larger and more organized administration and was also better suited for agricultural production, so they would have taken the lead in this process and would likely have mediated trade for the Southern Kingdom.[29]

As their administrations grew larger and more complex, both kingdoms increased in urbanization and in number of cities.[30] These changes would have fundamentally restructured life for those working the land. Subsistence farmers would have grown whatever was needed to provide for their households and would have spread out risk among a diversified number of agricultural products. The failure of one crop could be compensated by the success of another that was less affected by whatever went wrong. In this way, farmers prioritized the security that a diverse range of crops provided rather than the efficiency of a single crop. On the other hand, the "command economy" that was being implemented by the monarchy would have involved leveraging taxation, debt, or military protection to compel farmers to grow increasing volumes of whatever was most efficient for the region's soil and climate, as well as whatever was most profitable to the administration.[31] While this would increase the flow of wealth and luxury goods to the urban elite, the tax burden and the restructuring of the farmers' livelihoods would dramatically increase the risk to those living precariously off an unpredictable land. In a more subsistence-based society, a low yield resulting from drought, accident, or some other circumstances could be mitigated through no-interest "survival loans" offered by other members of the village, who were well aware that they themselves could be on the business end of such circumstances before too long. In the command economy of the eighth century BC, however, funds for loans were frequently available only through the wealthy landlords from the urban centers, who usually loaned silver bullion at interest, often required the property as collateral, and usually required payment during the harvest, when the value of grain was at its lowest. In these circumstances, defaults

would be common. The result would be an increase in debt slavery, foreclosures, and the prevalence of land consolidation on the part of the elite,[32] all of which would have increased insecurity and instability among the lower classes.

The Prophets Respond

The elite of Israel and Judah found many ways to exploit the poor, and they were fiercely condemned by prophets of the eighth century. Amos's rhetoric is perhaps the most thorough and condemns such exploitation as oppressive taxes (Amos 5:11), abuses of loan securities (2:8), debt slavery (2:6), and manipulations of the mechanisms of trade (8:5–6).[33] Amos presents those engaged in these practices as those "who trample the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land" (8:4). Similarly, Isaiah condemns those who "make widows your prey, and orphans your spoil" (Isaiah 10:2), and rhetorically asks, "What do you mean by crushing my people, and grinding the faces of the poor" (Isaiah 3:15)?

The prophets particularly excoriated the wealthy and the privileged who exploited the vulnerable in order to enrich themselves. Isaiah 5:8, for instance, pronounces woes upon those engaged in some corrupt manner of land consolidation: "Woe to those who join house to house,[34] / who attach field to field, / until there is no space left, / and you are left to dwell alone / in the midst of the land."[35] Micah 2:2 addresses the same practice: "They desire fields, so they snatch up— / houses, so they take away; / they oppress a man and his house— / a person and his inheritance." The reference here to "inheritance" draws attention to the Mosaic law's concern for keeping land within the family line. While not always consistent, the various laws related to the transfer of land in the Old Testament prioritize a patrimonial system in which the land is inherited based on lineage.[36] The importance of keeping land within the family line is punctuated by both Leviticus's law of land redemption (Leviticus 25:25–31) and Deuteronomy's law of levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5–10), both

of which require the redemption of property for the original owner or their progeny. Land consolidation severed these ancestral ties, violating a foundational principle of the nation of Israel and throwing the integrity of the community into disarray.[37]

Corruption was found not only among those who were directly cheating the poor of their property and their goods. The court system, which was supposed to be a means of redress for the marginalized, was also rife with corruption according to the prophets. Isaiah condemns a long list of wicked people who have "ignored the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 5:24), including those who "acquit the guilty because of a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights" (Isaiah 5:23). Isaiah 10:1–2 warns such corrupt leaders: "Woe to those who enact iniquitous statutes, / and who write oppressive decrees, / to shove aside the poor from judgment, / and to rob the afflicted of my people of justice; / to make widows your prey, / and orphans your spoil."

Here the broader undermining of justice comes into greater focus. Amos 5:7 accuses Israel's rulers of turning "justice into wormwood" and of bringing "righteousness to the ground." Verses 10–12 of this chapter embed a critique of oppressive taxation ("you trample the poor, / and exact taxes of grain from them") within a denunciation of corrupt elders who facilitate that oppression by ignoring the pleas of victims inside the city gate ("you takers of bribes, / while the needy in the gate / you shove aside"), the traditional site of legal proceedings. Micah 3:11 expands on this criticism, again highlighting the hypocrisy of exploiting the poor and obstructing justice while relying on the protection of the Lord, whose continued presence in Israel was not unconditional: "Her [Israel's] rulers give judgment for a bribe, / her priests instruct for a price, / her prophets divine for silver; / still they lean upon Jehovah, saying, / 'Is Jehovah not in our midst? / Can any harm come upon us?'"

For the prophets, the willingness on the part of the privileged to participate in the requisite sacrifices, offerings, festivals, and feasts (despite their oppression of the marginalized) and their willingness

to make offerings from illicitly gotten gains represented a gross perversion of the law and an abdication of the responsibility to facilitate justice.[38] In this regard, the rituals and festivals associated with the temple had devolved into self-serving, credibility-enhancing displays—ways for the wealthy to signal to others their commitment to important Israelite values and ideals so that they could continue to benefit from membership and prominence within the social in-group, even as they knowingly violated the law's requirements associated with the maintenance of justice. The performance of ritual acts based on such selfish motivations and the use of exploited goods was considered by the prophets to be an affront to Jehovah, not only because it neglected parts of the law associated with justice but also because that neglect represented an existential threat to the cosmic order. For the prophets, the law had a broader purpose beyond just the imposition of certain fines and punishments and the realization of certain sacrifices and festivals. For the wealthy to pick and choose aspects of the law whose fulfillment served their own sociocultural exigencies, while abdicating the broader responsibility to effect justice and to maintain the cosmic order, was a violation of the law as a whole.[39]

This conceptual and rhetorical framework contributed to Hosea's statement about mercy and sacrifice, a statement that occurs within the broader context of the prophet's condemnation of the Israelites for their hypocrisy and their failure to maintain fidelity to Jehovah and his covenant. Hosea 6:5–7 describes the woeful state of both Israel and Judah: "Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, / I have killed them by the words of my mouth, / and my judgment goes forth as light.[40] / For I want mercy, and not sacrifice, / and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. / And they, like Adam, transgressed the covenant. / See, they have acted treacherously against me!"[41] Here Jehovah suggests that offering sacrifices and burnt offerings to him is not the ultimate fulfillment of the law and that to offer those sacrifices while violating his covenant and his principles of justice is precisely sin. Hosea 8:13 explains the following regarding Israel's sacrifices: "Jehovah does not accept them."

Other eighth-century prophets engage in similar rhetorical flourishes.[42] The opening chapter of Isaiah is perhaps the most vociferous:[43]

11 “What does1 the multitude of your sacrifices matter to me?”
    Jehovah says,
“I have had my fill of burnt offerings of rams and of the fat of steers.
    I do not delight in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.
12 When you come to see my face,[44]
    who required it of your hand
to trample my court?
13 You will bring no more vain offerings;
    incense is an abomination to me.
New moons and sabbaths, the convocation call—
    I cannot tolerate a sinful assembly.
14 My soul hates your new moons and your festivals.
    They have become a burden upon me
I am weary of bearing.
15 And when you spread out your hands,
    I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you multiply prayers,
    I will not hear.
Your hands are full of blood.”

The verse following has a famous pair of imperatives that frequently appear in Church lessons independent of the context of justice: “Wash you, make you clean” (KJV). This passage and verse 18 (“Come now, and let us reason together” [KJV]) most commonly appear in Church messaging about repentance and the Atonement, but in Isaiah these passages bracket serial imperatives in verse 17 that make clear the intention in the context is to reorient Israel to caring for the disadvantaged: “Learn to do good, / seek justice, / guide

the oppressed, / give justice to the orphan, / plead the cause of the widow!"

It is not only the vertical relationship with God that was being neglected but also—and just as importantly—the horizontal relationship with the underprivileged and the marginalized. Here is the heart of the concern with the prophetic critique: the law does not only require Israelites to appropriately worship God; they are also equally responsible to act righteously, to aid the poor and the needy, and to contribute to the maintenance of a just society. Indeed, a healthy vertical relationship is precluded by neglect of horizontal relationships. In verse 20 Isaiah holds the threat of social disintegration over the heads of the privileged if they fail to obey Jehovah's call to justice: "But if you refuse, and you rebel, / by the sword you will be devoured, / for the mouth of Jehovah has spoken." Ultimately, according to the prophets, Israel and Judah failed to heed their warning, and after the larger Northern Kingdom attempted to throw off Assyrian vassalage, it was destroyed in 722 BC following a lengthy and destructive siege, as prophesied by Isaiah.[45]

While the precise circumstances of the eighth century would not be realized again for the nation of Judah, the economic centralization of the nation in Jerusalem embedded a stark social stratification that would offer other opportunities for the socially privileged and the powerful to further exploit the poor and the marginalized and thus threaten the cosmic order that sustained Jehovah's people. Space does not allow for a thorough interrogation of each set of circumstances and the specific framing of the critique, but some brief comments will be included that illustrate the deployment of the same critique by prophets outside the eighth century BC.[46]

Jeremiah, for instance, warns that Judah's negligence regarding the law will result in Jerusalem's destruction. In Jeremiah 6:19, Jehovah warns of impending doom for neglecting his instruction.[47] Jeremiah 7:4–7 offers the possibility of deliverance, again highlighting the folly of trusting in the protection of the temple while neglecting justice: "Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple

of Jehovah, the temple of Jehovah, the temple of Jehovah is here!' For if you truly improve your ways and your deeds, if you act justly, one with another, if you do not oppress the refugee, the orphan, the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow after other gods, to your own harm, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave to your ancestors from eternity until eternity." The sacrificial rites are also subordinated to obedience to all of Jehovah's commandments in Jeremiah 7:22–23: "For I did not speak to your ancestors and did not command them in the day that I brought them out from the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this thing I did command them, saying, 'Heed my voice, and I will be your God, and you will be my people, and you shall walk in every way that I command you, so that it will be well for you.'" These texts drive home the point that it is not the temple or its offerings that facilitate God's protective presence but the presence of justice.

In the latest canonical setting in which the critique appears within the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi condemns the postexilic Jewish community as well as their priests for profaning the ordinances of the temple, stating in Malachi 1:7–8, "You are offering defiled food upon my altar, then you say, 'How have we defiled it?' By insisting the table of Jehovah be despised. And when you offer the blind in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer the lame and the sick, is that not evil? Try offering that to your governor. Will he be pleased with you, or show you favor? says Jehovah of Hosts." In verse 10, Jehovah insists he will not accept offerings from the hands of the priests, and Malachi 2:3 warns, "I will rebuke your offspring and spread entrails on your faces—the entrails of your festivals—and you will be carried off with it."

The most sustained, emphatic, and significant use of this prophetic critique, however, occurs immediately before or during catastrophic social disintegration. As we saw above, among the eighth-century prophets who initiated this critique, it preceded Assyria's destruction of the northern kingdom. Jeremiah's warnings precede

Jerusalem's destruction at the end of the seventh century and Judah's exile to Babylon. The people cannot expect to long neglect their duty to care for those in need and remain free and independent. Similarly, the Savior's own deployment of this prophetic critique against Judaism's ruling classes is set only a few decades prior to Rome's destruction of Jerusalem. The next segment will discuss the circumstances and rhetorical purposes of that deployment.

Justice and the Prophetic Critique in the Gospels

This paper began with Jesus's references in Matthew to Hosea's succinct employment of the prophetic critique, but it is taken up in other places in the Gospels. To better understand the rhetorical goals of the Gospel authors' appeals to this particular critique, a brief discussion of the socioeconomic circumstances of the region in the first century AD is necessary. After the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, his kingdom was divided up among his sister and three of his sons, with his son Herod Archelaus ruling as ethnarch over Samaria, Judea, and Idumea. Archelaus's cruelty and rank incompetence compelled the Jewish community to appeal to Rome for the empire to take over direct rule, which the emperor Augustus did in AD 6, creating the Roman province of Judea. The area had been subject to client rulers for some time before that, which had spurred tension between the more conservative elements of the Jewish community and those who were willing to compromise in the interest of gaining influence and power, and this tension included a class dimension.[48] Under Roman rule and as clients of the empire, local aristocrats were trusted to oversee urban centers, while rural populations were largely left alone since they were thought to be too disorganized to cause any significant or lasting trouble.[49] These aristocrats had to defer to Roman authorities, who frequently abused and oppressed the masses, leading to significant social unrest, particularly in Jerusalem.[50]

The central economic force of Judea was the Jerusalem temple, which attracted money and goods mostly from pilgrimages to the

temple and from economic activity taking place beyond Judea (though Jerusalem also produced some of its own goods).[51] This disconnected the agricultural populations from the wealthy in Jerusalem, but as in the eighth century BC, it also made the former highly reliant on loans from the latter when times were tough, which they frequently were. While interest was evidently charged at times,[52] lenders appear to have been predominantly motivated, as in earlier periods, by the potential for foreclosure and land consolidation. They could further benefit if they could convince the borrower to stay on as a tenant instead of selling the land to pay off the loan. This proliferated tenant farming and its attendant poverty. There is even evidence that first-century borrowers could be required to publicly declare that they would repay the loan even after the Sabbatical year cancelled the debt (in direct violation of Deuteronomy 15:7–10).[53] These and many other practices contributed to significant insecurity and intense class divisiveness in Judea up through the conquest of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70.

The Gospels present Jesus as directly addressing many of these dynamics during his ministry, though the rhetoric is slightly different from that of the prophets, as the target audience of the Gospels was not the social elite as it frequently was for the prophets. Rather, the message was often addressed directly to the poor and so offers them encouragement and consolation as frequently as it condemns their oppressors. The most prominent example of this message is the first beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3) and the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20), which announces that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor. Here Luke refers directly to a socioeconomic circumstance, but Matthew refers to the "poor in spirit," which is a rhetorical contrast to the proud and haughty.[54] Matthew is referring primarily to the humble, but the socioeconomic dimension cannot be ignored, particularly in light of the rhetorical impact of the contrast being drawn between those who are expected to possess the kingdom of heaven and those whom Jesus announces as the possessors.[55]

The socioeconomic dimension is also relevant in light of Jesus's emphasis on the obstacles the wealthy have to humility; obstacles that are not faced by the poor.[56] Gaining and maintaining wealth too often crowds out concern for the "weightier aspects of the law." In Matthew 19:24, Jesus declares that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven." Mark shares the same warning via the parable of the rich young man. After telling the rich young man to sell all he has and give the money to the poor—only to have the young man depart in sorrow—Jesus looks around and proclaims, "How difficult it will be for those having wealth to enter the kingdom of heaven!" (Mark 10:23). Luke 12's parable of the rich fool criticizes the tendency of the wealthy to prioritize maintaining their wealth over and against serving the broader needs of their community and condemns the proverbial rich person to death, declaring, "So it is with people who stores up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21). The classic expression of this difficulty is Jesus's discourse on wealth in the Sermon on the Mount, which begins by declaring, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will also be" (Matthew 6:21), and ends with the franker warning in verse 24, "You cannot serve God and money."[57]

Matthew also criticizes the wealthy for their oppression of the poor. Jesus most explicitly takes up the prophetic critique in condemning the scribes and Pharisees for their prioritization of the wrong commandments: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, for you tithe the mint, dill, and cumin but neglect the weightier aspects of the law: justice and mercy and faith. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others" (Matthew 23:23). In other words, they meticulously and conspicuously observed select minutiae of the law but neglected its more important prescriptions. Here the author of Matthew—who seems concerned that the importance of the law of Moses would not be emphasized—avoids the rhetorical excesses of the prophets regarding those aspects of the law that the societal elite were fulfilling. The Gospel of Mark is not as concerned with exalting the law and makes explicit the prioritization of the broader goals of

the law over and against ritual requirements, although those broader goals are put into the mouth of a scribe, who comments in response to Jesus's identification of the two great commandments, "And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the might, and to love the neighbor as oneself is more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:33). The narrator comments that Jesus saw this as a wise answer. If we return to Matthew, the telling of the same story there is careful to remove that marginalizing rhetoric about burnt offerings and sacrifices (Matthew 22:35–39). Jesus makes the generalization from the particular laws, not the scribe, and quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 ("Love Jehovah your God") and Leviticus 19:18 ("Love your neighbor"), summarizing, "On these two commandments hang the whole law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40).[58] The reference to "the whole law and the prophets" makes it clear that he is referring not just to the discrete law of Moses found in the Pentateuch but to all Jewish scripture;[59] it is all subsumed within the author's care for both the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with humanity.

Conclusion

This interrogation of the prophetic critique has shown deep and abiding prophetic concern for the law's facilitation of justice, particularly in regard to caring for the marginalized and the oppressed. Social stability could not be maintained with the escalating insecurity and unrest that comes from the widespread exploitation of the poor on the part of the elite. According to the prophets, engaging in this exploitation while performing the public requirements of the law in order to be seen of others and to advance one's own personal interests is a profoundly hypocritical subversion of the purposes of that law. The law did not exist as an end unto itself, but as a means to a more elevated end: a heart changed by God and filled with love and mercy that would help unify and perfect the people of God. A temporary realization of this goal in the Book of Mormon is found in

Mosiah 5:2: "And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually."

Jesus's deployment of this critique is similarly aimed at those who would make the law an end unto itself in order to serve their own interests, but the circumstances and audience in Matthew are different. Both of Jesus's quotations of Hosea 6:6 come in response to criticism of Jesus's ostensible indifference to the then contemporary standards regarding table fellowship with sinners and detailed parsings of Sabbath restrictions, but in neither case was Jesus directly defending the poor or the oppressed. He was instead criticizing the scribes and Pharisees for leveraging rather marginal legal considerations in order to condemn the going about and doing good of him and his disciples. In the earlier instance (Matthew 9:13), Jesus was fellowshipping with sinners who were in greater need of his ministrations than were the righteous. In the latter (Matthew 12:7), Jesus rejected the notion that Sabbath restrictions are an end unto themselves and highlighted the priority taken by temple sacrifices over those restrictions. In the verses that follow, Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath and declares, "It is lawful on the Sabbath to do good" (Matthew 12:9–13). With these quotations of Hosea 6:6, Jesus deploys a generalization of the prophetic critique of temple sacrifice and applies it to other situations where the priority of the law might undermine or obstruct more important duties toward God and neighbor.

This is not to say the Savior was not concerned with the kinds of circumstances that catalyzed the original critique in the eighth century BC. On the contrary, the Gospels demonstrate that Christ was overwhelmingly concerned with the treatment of society's most vulnerable and repeatedly championed their needs, excoriating those who marginalized and oppressed them. These matters of the law were "weightier" than the ritual minutiae that facilitated the credibility-enhancing displays of the leaders and prominent members of

the Jewish community. The law for these leaders was not a path to creating a more godly and more just society. It was a tool they used for their own personal interests, and as the Savior clearly stated, when the law exists to facilitate being seen of others, "they have their reward" (Matthew 6:2, 5).

This is an easily overlooked and frequently dismissed aspect of Christ's gospel, and perhaps it is this rhetorical point from the Savior that offers us the greatest opportunity for self-reflection following this discussion. Does our love for God compel us to help justice "flow like waters, and righteousness like a constant stream" (Amos 5:24)? Do we strive to love our neighbor as ourselves? Do we maintain that love is one of the weightier matters of the law, or do we exploit the law as an excuse to prioritize our own interests? In a period of such extreme instability and of continued injustices committed against marginalized groups, where are our hearts? Has the Spirit "wrought a mighty change . . . in our hearts," so that we, like the Savior, seek "to do good continuously" (Mosiah 5:2)? Do we see God's commandments as a means of being seen of others and of exercising influence and control, or do we see them as a means to turn our society into Zion and generate hearts full of mercy?

Notes

1. All translations are my own (unless otherwise noted) and are rendered to prioritize clarity and accessibility.
2. The quotation of Hosea 6:6 comes from the ancient Greek translation of the Bible (Septuagint), which renders the Hebrew *ḥesed ḥāfaṣtî* ("I delight in mercy") with the Greek *éleos thélō* ("I want mercy").
3. Scholars suggest that the responsibilities to prepare the Sabbath offering as outlined in Numbers 28:9–10 represent the clearest violation of the Sabbath that is required of the priestly office. For example, see Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 250. Rabbinic commentary, such as the Talmudic tractate *Shabbat* 132b, states that temple service "overrides" (*dôḥâ*) the requirements of the Sabbath.

4. In Mark's telling of this story (Mark 2:23–28), the Savior's response does not echo the prophetic critique of the cult, but rather is limited to the assertion that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Thus, the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath" (2:27–28).
5. For a discussion of the interpretive difficulties with Matthew's quotations of Hosea 6:6, see David Hill, "On the Use and Meaning of Hosea VI. 6 in Matthew's Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 24, no. 1 (1977): 107–19.
6. For example, the Old Testament teacher's manual for the Gospel Doctrine class has said the following for years about the passage in Hosea, "Christ twice referred to this verse to answer criticism from the Pharisees." *Old Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 169. The manual instructs teachers to review the passages in the New Testament and discuss what they mean. According to the New Testament manual, Jesus "wanted the people to focus on loving others, not merely on performing public religious ceremonies." *New Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 41. Jennifer Lane comments that Jesus "is challenging their fundamental conception of holiness and the law by questioning their focus on their own ritual purity while ignoring the spiritually sick among the covenant people." Jennifer C. Lane, "Hostility toward Jesus: Prelude to the Passion," in *Celebrating Easter*, ed. Thomas A. Wayment and Keith J. Wilson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2007), 145.
7. The Church's Guide to the Scriptures, for instance, describes justice as follows: "The unfailing consequence of blessings for righteous thoughts and acts, and punishment for unrepented sin. Justice is an eternal law that requires a penalty each time a law of God is broken (Alma 42:13–24). The sinner must pay the penalty if he [or she] does not repent (Mosiah 2:38–39; Doctrine and Covenants 19:17). If he [or she] does repent, the Savior pays the penalty through the Atonement, invoking mercy (Alma 34:16)." The only two Old Testament passages cited in the entry are Ezekiel 18:4 (paraphrased as "The soul that sinneth shall die") and Micah 6:8 ("What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly").

8. For a discussion of how this changed over time, see Zev I. Farber, "Israelite Festivals: From Cyclical Time Celebrations to Linear Time Celebrations," *Religions* 10, no. 5 (2019): 1–19.
9. Sometimes this battle is associated with creation, as in *Enuma Eliš*, and other times it is not, as in the Baal cycle. See Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of "Chaos" in the Hebrew Bible* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005); David Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 143–46; John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 184–95. One of the biblical relics of these early mythological stories is the Leviathan (Isaiah 27:1; Psalm 74:14; Job 3:8). See also John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
10. "The temple was the control center for order in the cosmos and that order had to be maintained. The deity needed to be cared for so that he/she could focus his/her energies on the important work of holding forces of chaos at bay. The rituals, therefore, served not simply as gifts to the deity or mechanical liturgical words and actions. The rituals provided a means by which humans could play a role in maintaining order in the cosmos." Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 130.
11. Regarding Egypt, Rolf Gundlach explains: "The royal performance of the cult, generally speaking, invoked the sacred power for the preservation of *maat*, the order of the world." Rolf Gundlach, "Temples," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald B. Redford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3:365.
12. For a discussion of this rhetoric in the ancient Near East and its alteration in the Hebrew Bible to subordinate the king to God, see Bernard M. Levinson, "The Reconceptualization of Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History's Transformation of Torah," *Vetus Testamentum* 51, no. 4 (2001): 511–34.
13. Martha Roth, trans., "The Laws of Hammurabi," in *Context of Scripture*, 3 vols., ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger (Leiden: Brill, 2003),

2.131:336 (hereafter COS). Hammurabi goes on to assert, "I established truth and justice as the declaration of the land, . . . I enhanced the well-being of the people" (p. 337). Similarly, the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon (681–669 BC) was extolled in one text as having "revived the one who was guilty and condemned to death; you have released the one who was imprisoned for many [ye]ars. Those who were sick for many days have got well, the hungry have been sated, the *parched* have been anointed with oil, the needy have been covered with garments." "226. The King's Reign Is Good: Petition for Urad-Gula," in *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, ed. Simo Parpola (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993), 178; emphasis in original.

14. Raymond Westbrook, "Social Justice in the Ancient Near East," in *Social Justice in the Ancient World*, ed. K. D. Irani and Morris Silver (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995), 161.
15. On the oversight of law codes, see Raymond Westbrook, "Introduction: The Character of Ancient Near Eastern Law," in *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1.29. The Laws of Ur-Namma, the earliest surviving of ancient Near Eastern law collections, dates to around 2100 BC. These collections flourished in the second millennium BC with the publication of the Laws of Lipit-Ishtar, the Laws of Eshnunna, the Laws of Hammurabi, Hittite Laws, and the Middle Assyrian Laws. English translations can be found in the second volume of *The Context of Scripture*: Martha Roth, trans., "The Laws of Ur-Namma (Ur-Nammu)" (COS 2.153); Martha Roth, trans., "The Laws of Lipit-Ishtar" (COS 2.154); Martha Roth, trans., "The Laws of Eshnunna" (COS 2.130); "The Laws of Hammurabi" (COS 2.131); Harry A. Hoffner Jr., trans., "Hittite Laws" (COS 2.19); Martha Roth, trans., "The Middle Assyrian Laws" (COS 2.132).
16. On these codes, see Ze'ev Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times: An Introduction* (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1964); Michael Walzer, "The Legal Codes of Ancient Israel," *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 4, no. 2 (1992): 335–49; Tikva Frymer-Kenski, "Israel," in Westbook, *History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, 1.975–1046; Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2008); David P. Wright, *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

17. Perhaps the most famous example of ancient Near Eastern case law is the law concerning the "goring ox," which comes from the Laws of Hammurabi but is found also in the Laws of Eshnunna and in Exodus 21:28–31. According to this law, if someone's ox should escape from the enclosure and gore someone to death, the owner is not liable. If the ox is a "habitual gorer," however, and the owner has been warned but fails to keep the ox restrained, the owner is liable for the value of the lost life, which differs according to the deceased's social role. For a brief discussion of the similarities and differences between the two laws, see Wright, *Inventing God's Law*, 7–8.
18. See Richard H. Hiers, *Justice and Compassion in Biblical Law* (New York: Continuum, 2009); Assnat Bartor, *Reading Law as Narrative: A Study in the Casuistic Laws of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010); Gershon Hepner, *Legal Friction: Law, Narrative, and Identity Politics in Biblical Israel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).
19. See Bernard M. Levinson, "The Neo-Assyrian origins of the canon formula in Deuteronomy 13:1," in *Scriptural Exegesis: The Shapes of Culture and the Religious Imagination. Essays in Honour of Michael Fishbane*, ed. Deborah A. Green and Laura S. Lieber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25–45; Bernard M. Levinson and Jeffrey Stackert, "Between the Covenant Code and Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty: Deuteronomy 13 and the Composition of Deuteronomy," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 3 (2012): 123–40.
20. Deuteronomy adds the demand that the people love their suzerain with all their hearts, which corresponds to similar demands from the vassal treaties of the Neo-Assyrian Esarhaddon (681–669 BC). On this, see Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of "Monotheism"* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).
21. Proverbs 14:31 warns, "He that oppresses the poor insults his Maker."
22. Morris Silver, "Prophets and Markets Revisited," in Irani and Morris, *Social Justice in the Ancient World*, 182–83; cf. Charles Fensham, "Widow,

Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21, no. 2 (1962): 129–39.

23. The Egyptian term *m3ʿ.t*, usually translated "truth," conveys a similar sense. "Maat is right order in nature and society, as established by the act of creation, and hence means, according to the context, what is right, what is correct, law, order, justice and truth." Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, trans. Ann E. Keep (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 113.
24. This description draws in part from Carsten Ziegert, "What Is חֶ֫סֶד? A Frame-Semantic Approach," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44, no. 4 (2020): 711–32. "Mercy" is just a convenient gloss for the term *ḥesed*, but the English word does not capture the full semantic depth and range of the concept as presented in the Old Testament. Additionally, other Hebrew terms can be glossed the same way but refer to different concepts.
25. In the postexilic book of Zechariah, Jehovah commands Israel in the second person plural: "Render true justice, and show mercy and compassion one to another" (Zechariah 7:9).
26. See André LaCocque, *Ruth. A Continental Commentary*, trans. K. C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 28–32, who understands Ruth to be "characterized by *ḥesed*" (p. 32), which he describes as "the virtue of excess" that helps people "accomplish commandments beyond the letter" (p. 28). Edward F. Campbell Jr. similarly describes Ruth as "basically about extraordinary caring and concern, kindness that is above and beyond the call of duty." Campbell, *Ruth. A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 110. For another treatment that situates Ruth and *ḥesed* within Jewish *halakhah*, see Yossi Prager, "*Megillat Ruth*: A Unique Story of *Torat Hesed*," *Traditions* 35, no. 4 (2001): 15–22.
27. See Kerry Muhlestein, "Ruth, Redemption, Covenant, and Christ," in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, ed. D. Kelly Ogden, Jared W. Ludlow, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 187–206.
28. Leviticus's law of land redemption does draw a clear distinction between "houses in villages that do not have walls around them" (*batê haḥăṣêrîm*

'ăšer 'ên-lāhem ḥōmâ sābîb), which may be redeemed at any time or must be released at the Jubilee, and a "dwelling-house within a walled city" (*bēt-mōša 'ir ḥōmâ*), which has a window of redemption of one year and is not required to be released at the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:29–34). For a discussion of urbanization in ancient Israel, see Lester L. Grabbe, "Sup-urbs or only Hyp-urbs? Prophets and Populations in Ancient Israel and Socio-Historical Method," in *'Every City Shall Be Forsaken': Urbanism and Prophecy in Ancient Israel and the Near East*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 95–123.

29. For more on the status of the north during the eighth century BC, see Gilad Itach, "The Kingdom of Israel in the Eighth Century: From Regional Power to Assyrian Provinces," in *Archaeology and History of Eighth-Century Judah*, ed. Zev I. Farber and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 57–77; Israel Finkelstein, "Jeroboam II in Transjordan," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34, no. 1 (2020): 19–29. For the status of Judah, see Avraham Faust, "Society and Culture in the Kingdom of Judah during the Eighth Century," in Farber and Wright, *Archaeology and History of Eighth-Century Judah*, 179–203.

30. The northern kingdom is estimated to have had a population of around 350,000 people prior to Assyria's invasion, with the southern kingdom about a third that size. Magen Broshi and Israel Finkelstein, "The Population of Palestine in Iron Age II," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 287 (1992): 47–60. See also Faust, "Society and Culture in the Kingdom of Judah," 180–84.

31. Marvin L. Chaney, "3. The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty: What the Eighth-Century Prophets Presumed but Did Not State," *Journal of Religion and Society* 10 (2014): 39–40.

32. For more detailed discussions, see Andrew J. Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets: The Conflict and Its Background* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 18–57; D. N. Premnath, "Latifundialization and Isaiah 5.8–10," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40, no. 1 (1988): 49–60; Stuart Love, "Failing to Do Justice: The Quandary of the Poor in Eighth Century Israel and Judah," *Leaven* 1, no. 2 (1990): 11–17; Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield:

Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 125–29; Chaney, "Political Economy of Peasant Poverty," 39–42. See also Silver, "Prophets and Markets Revisited," 179–98.

33. A discussion of these different practices is found in Love, "Failing to Do Justice," 11–17.
34. The generic Hebrew term *bayit* usually means "house," but it can also be used to refer to a house and its associated property, the property by itself, or metonymically to the members of the household. Here the most likely sense is that reference is being made to the dwelling place and the property.
35. For this reading, see Dearman, *Property Rights*; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 47; H. G. M. Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1–27 in Three Volumes. Volume 1: Commentary on Isaiah 1–5* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 351–54; Ivan D. Friesen, *Isaiah* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009), 55; J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 78–79.
36. For discussions on the laws of land inheritance, see Richard H. Hiers, "Transfer of Property by Inheritance and Bequest in Biblical Law and Tradition," *Journal of Law and Religion* 10 (1993): 121–55.
37. This is an ideal that descends from the broader role of ancestral property rights in the constitution of the nation of Israel. Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *The Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 135–48. Genesis 23 presents Abraham as refusing to accept property as a gift from the Hittites so that he could bury Sarah. Instead, he insists on paying full price as a means of securing rightful ownership and ensuring that the property remains in his line, with the burial sites functioning as an additional witness to ownership for future generations (Genesis 23:13–20; 50:13).
38. Jonathan Klawans summarizes, "The prophet critique of contemporary cultic practice stemmed from the fact that many sacrifices were being offered by those whose property was unduly earned, being proceeds from the exploitation of the poor. Because proper sacrifice presupposes due ownership, a thieving society cannot render due offerings, at least not in the prophetic understanding of these matters." Jonathan Klawans, *Purity,*

Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 249.

39. This concern for the law's broader purpose is not found in the Old Testament outside the prophetic literature, which may stem from the monarchy's patronage and oversight of both scribal and priestly classes, who would have been responsible for the Old Testament's legal and historical literature. Many Old Testament prophets operated independent of that monarchy and were frequently critical of it. Note that Jeremiah echoes the prophetic critique (Jeremiah 7:22) and also criticizes the king (Jeremiah 21:1–7) and the "lying pen of the scribe" (Jeremiah 8:8).
40. The Masoretic Text reads "your judgment," but this is widely understood as a corrupted reading. My translation follows the Septuagint's use of the first-person singular suffix.
41. "See" renders the adverb *šam* (meaning "there"), which usually has a locative function, but the usage here suggests a more deictic function similar to *hinneh* ("look") that signals the reader to what follows.
42. In Amos 5:21–24, Jehovah announces, "I hate, I despise your festivals, / and I will not smell the aroma of your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer burnt offerings to me, and grain offerings, / I will not except them; / and your peace offerings of your fatted animals / I will not look upon favorably. Turn away from me your noisy songs, / and the melody of your harps I will not hear. But let justice flow like waters, / and righteousness like a constant stream."
43. See Bohdan Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension of Cult in the Book of Isaiah* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 75–115; Theresa V. Lafferty, *The Prophetic Critique of the Priority of the Cult: A Study of Amos 5:21–24 and Isaiah 1:10–17* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).
44. This refers to the commandment found in Exodus 34:24 and Deuteronomy 16:16. Almost all translations render "when you come to appear before me," but this phrase is based on the Masoretic Text's manipulation of the vocalization of the consonantal text. The root *r/ʾ/h*, "to see," appears unambiguously in the infinitive qal stem, which is the active stem. At some point anciently, however, discomfort with that reading catalyzed a substitute reading of the active infinitive as a passive niphal, which would require

the addition of a preformative *he* that is absent from the text (*lr'wt* appears in the text, but the niphal would be *lhr'wt*). The Masoretic scribes imposed (most of) the vowels of the passive stem upon the consonants, giving us the reading *lera'ōt*. The direct object of that seeing, *panāy*, "my face," also lacks a preposition necessary to make sense of a passive reading of the verb (cf. 1 Samuel 1:22; 1 Kings 11:9).

45. There has been significant debate on the circumstances surrounding the fall of Samaria. On this debate, see John H. Hayes and Jeffrey K. Kuan, "The Final Years of Samaria (730–720 BC)," *Biblica* 72, no. 2 (1991): 153–81; Bob Becking, *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); K. Lawson Younger Jr., "The Fall of Samaria in Light of Recent Research," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (1999): 461–82; cf. Itach, "Kingdom of Israel," 66–69.

46. In the earliest canonical setting in which this prophetic critique is found—prior to the eighth century, but likely composed after—the central concern is actually not for justice but is extended to obedience to all of Jehovah's commands. In 1 Samuel 15:22–23, the prophet Samuel condemns King Saul for taking animals from the possessions of the Amalekites to offer as sacrifice, despite the explicit command that they were to devote those animals to destruction. The prophet rhetorically asks, "Does Jehovah delight as much in burnt offerings and sacrifices, / as in heeding the voice of Jehovah? / Look, heeding is better than sacrifice, / and listening is better than the fat of rams."

47. The KJV reads "law" here, but the Hebrew *tōrâ* means "instruction," not "law." It derives from the root *yrh*, which means "to instruct, teach."

48. The books of the Maccabees, found in the Apocrypha, focus on these conflicts in the second century BC. Perhaps the most extreme example of this tension is represented by the Essene community that separated themselves from other Jewish communities and, along the shores of the Dead Sea, set up a community that opposed the control of the temple by what it considered a corrupt and impure administration. See Eyal Regev, "Abominated Temple and a Holy Community: The Formation of the Notion of Purity and Impurity in Qumran," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 10, no. 2 (2003): 243–78; Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Qumran and Jerusalem: Studies in the Dead Sea*

Scrolls and the History of Judaism (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 81–97.

49. For a discussion of the dozen or so different Jewish messiah figures from the first century who gathered followings that challenged Roman hegemony, see Trevan G. Hatch, *A Stranger in Jerusalem: Seeing Jesus as a Jew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 107–09.
50. Josephus documents several such abuses in book 18 of his *Antiquities of the Jews*.
51. A great source for the socioeconomic circumstances of this period is Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt against Rome A.D. 66–70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also Martin Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World: Collected Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 59–67.
52. Some rabbinic criticisms indicate this. See, for instance, *Bava Metzia* 5:11 and *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 3:3.
53. This was called the "prosbul." For a discussion on the topic, see Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea*, 57–58.
54. The phrase "poor in spirit" occurs in the War Scroll, from the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QM 14:7), where it stands in contrast to the hard of heart. Isaiah 61:1–2, which is the text read by the Savior in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:18), also sits in the background of this beatitude.
55. One of the central rhetorical frameworks of the Sermon on the Mount is the stark contrast between what was commonly expected regarding the kingdom of heaven and what Jesus announces. His vision of that kingdom turns the most predominant expectations of the day on their heads.
56. Alma 32 also discusses the relationship between poverty and humility at some length.
57. The KJV's "mammon" is a transliteration of the Greek word *mamōnas*, which itself is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word *mamon*, "money, profit." The Aramaic word doesn't occur in the Old Testament but appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 6:2; CD 14:20) and in the Targum and is also attested in Mishnaic Hebrew.
58. For a brief discussion of Rabbi Hillel's hermeneutical rule regarding generalizing from the particular and particularizing from the general,

see Matthew L. Bowen, "Jewish Hermeneutics in the New Testament Period," in *New Testament History, Culture, and Society: A Background to the Texts of the New Testament*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 97–98.

59. While the New Testament does refer to a tripartite division of scripture (Luke 24:44), it is more commonly reduced to a binary (Matthew 5:17; 7:12; Luke 16:29–31; Acts 13:15; 24:14; Romans 3:21). As many scholars have noted, the tripartite division does not seem to have been important in the first century. See, for instance, Timothy H. Lim, "The Alleged Reference to the Tripartite Division of the Hebrew Bible," *Revue de Qumrân* 20, no. 1 (2001): 23–37; John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 22–23.