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SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE BOOK OF AMOS: A STUDY ON THE
ETHICAL AND MORAL STANDARDS AS USED BY AMOS

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ABBREVIATIONS

The style of this paper is based upon *The Chicago Manual of Style: The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors, and Publishers*, 15th edition, Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2003. The abbreviations for biblical books and different versions of the Bible and other ancient texts used in this work have been done according to the book: Alexander, Patrick H. et al., eds. *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical and Early Christian Studies*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999. The following abbreviation does not appear in the book.

ELCT The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Social injustice is a very big problem the world is facing today. The word “injustice” denotes illegal acts that deprive people of their rights. People of moral concern see that these acts are unfair as they allow a wider gap between the rich and the poor, that is: no equal access to basic conditions of life.

On 9 – 13 March 1994, the bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania held a summit on political and economic democracy. The result of the summit was the document called “The Bagamoyo Statement.” In the statement, the bishops clearly stated that;

The economy of this country is still benefiting the people of other countries, and the rich in these countries, who after satisfaction drop the crumbs to us – they force our government to succumb to them, by giving it aid attached with very harsh conditions, thus totally denying us economic rights. Therefore, the severity of poverty increases, when our country has abundant wealth; this allows a clique of people to enjoy the wealth of this country.¹

The church saw that the economic and political democracy do not adequately allow all the citizens to enjoy the fruits of their labour, get protection from their state, and have equal opportunity with regard to education, trade, health services, and power, to mention only a few of them. The idea behind is that only a clique of people enjoy the wealth of Tanzania. The above quotation from the document describes the wealth of Tanzania benefiting the outsiders; however, the whole process starts inside the country by the leaders being the channel to benefiting the people of other countries since by being a channel, they too benefit at the expense of citizen’s labour. Part of the document reads;

In a broad way, corruption has become a chronic problem at all levels of leadership of our country. Receiving and giving bribe, theft through manipulation of accounts, the misappropriation of government property, are some of the actions that have

¹ ELCT, “The Bagamoyo Statement” (Arusha, Tanzania: ELCT Project and Development Department, Democracy and Human rights Unit, 1994), 2.

contributed to the deterioration of the country's economy – thus making the citizen go without a number of services – which are their rights. Those who have been given vocation to lead, have used their positions to misappropriate the resources of the nation, to trample over the rights of weak citizens and turned them into ladders with which to climb to the apex of their affluence.²

This text gives a clear picture of what was going on in 1994. The bishops were bold enough to stand and lay a foundation for the social justice theology in the church. But the document drew a very little response from the public; theologians and the laity. There was no follow up of the document. The above situation still lingers to date. This can be seen in a document prepared by Tanzania Episcopal Conference for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Church in Tanzania in 2009, which states that the gap between the rich and the poor has widened up.³ The prophetic role of the church is put to question. The document was to yield fruits, but the current situation shows that the document is even forgotten and it has not been of help.

The eighth century B.C. was the period in which a few privileged people in Israel enjoyed unprecedented prosperity while most of the Israelites were facing poverty. Amos in his prophetic role condemned the Israelite's upper-class for being unjust and exploitative of the poor. Amos spoke to an oppressed society. His concern for the poor and the oppressed has made him the prophet of all times. He is also the prophet of the twenty first century where the gap between the poor and the rich is great.

It is important to understand that Israel's mission for justice and righteousness appears in the Bible. Abraham was called by God that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him (Gen 18:19). The prophets saw this being fulfilled in the basis of the nation's existence (Isa 5:7; Mic 6:8; Amos 5:24 and Jer 4:2).

Bruce V. Malchow in his Book: *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, has discussed how Israel utilized her neighbour's literature on social justice when she faced her own justice crisis. He has analysed justice issues in the Hebrew Bible law codes, prophetic books,

² ELCT, "The Bagamoyo Statement," 7.

³ This statement is found in the document issued in 2009. It is an educative document sensitizing people to elect the leaders who are responsible and can be the custodians of the constitution and the country laws and not just 'bosses'.

Psalms, narrative works and wisdom literature. He finds it plausible that Israel adopted prior Near Eastern thoughts on social justice to her situation. However, we do not find much about the book of Amos in this book, which to me stands to be important in matters of social justice due to the way Amos deals with the situation in resentment and passion showing how serious it gets when the weak are oppressed. However the book has laid an agenda for further study as it helps discuss themes found in the book of Amos.

Moshe Weinfeld wrote a book: *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*. It deals with the concept of justice and righteousness in ancient Israelite literature. He compared the concepts with that of the Near East. He is not far from Malchow as both see the integration of Near Eastern concern for social justice into the Israelite literature. These books became an impetus for my concern on the subject in the social justice study in the Hebrew Bible because they explored ethical standards from Near East which are similar to “Torah” in the Pentateuch. They did not discuss Amos in details, which is my area of concentration.

The sources of oppression and injustice may look different today. But the question of material prosperity reflects the days of Amos. Thus, the following questions need reflection: what ethical standards does Amos use to point an accusing finger at Israel? Does the biblical concept of social justice from the book of Amos shed light to the prophetic role of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania?

1.2 Aim of the Study

The questions raised above earmark the role of the church as prophet. Therefore, this study aims at examining ethical standards with regard to social justice in the Hebrew Bible with special reference to the book of Amos and applying the results to the prophetic ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT).

1.3 Scope and Limitation of This Study

The book of Amos has the theme of social justice. Since it is not possible within the limit of this study to undertake a detailed exegesis of the whole book of Amos, I intend to exegete chapter five of the book as it crystallizes the theme of social justice.

1.4 Methods to be Employed in this Study and the Structure

“The pursuit of method assimilates reading a text to the procedures of technology: it tries to process the text, rather than to read it. Instead, I propose that we should see each of our ‘methods’ as a codification of intuitions about the text which may occur to intelligent readers.”⁴ I remember when I was doing my bachelor’s programme in theology; the idea that methods are tools to process texts in the Bible was prevalent in that university. That is how I understood them to be. I must admit the quote above gave me a wider horizon of understanding the methods. I am totally convinced that biblical criticism does not belong to natural science but to humanities studies, hence there is no particular method to process the text to attain the truth pertaining to one of natural sciences. I am going to use the biblical methods to aid me to understand the text.

The study shall be aided by biblical methods, namely; literary criticism to help us with the original source of the text that helps with the question of authenticity. Textual criticism will assist in establishing the original wording of the text. Form criticism will aid us to understand the background of the genres in the text. Along with form criticism is tradition history that will help tracing the way in which pericopes entered a larger unit in the canonical book, especially the way they were transmitted from oral form to a written one. Redaction criticism will help in understanding the editing and modification of the sources.

This study is structured into six chapters. The first one is the introduction that gives introductory information. The second chapter is on social justice in the Old Testament perspective. Thirdly I have the chapter on the book of Amos discussing social justice issues. The fourth one is on Exegetical analysis of chapter five of the book of Amos. The fifth chapter discusses the concern of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania on social justice issues. The final chapter is a conclusion.

⁴John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Methods in Biblical study* (London: Longman and Todd, 1996), 5

Chapter Two

SOCIAL JUSTICE: AN OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

This chapter aims at discussing social justice from the point of view of Old Testament studies. Since Israel's social justice concern started somewhere, it is important that I start with Near Eastern concern for justice issues which existed there even before Israel. The study of the Near Eastern literature on justice issues is a complex one and needs its own treatment. Nevertheless, this chapter covers some thoughts from Mesopotamia to have the background of the Israel's concern. This is not done with detailed information due to the length of the paper. I hope the little presented gives light towards Israel's concern for justice issues.

2.1 Israel's Neighbours' Concern for Social Justice

2.1.1 *Near Eastern Texts*

Before we embark on what the Old Testament has to say about social justice, I find it important to consider the Near Eastern concern for social justice. This is because Israel concern for social justice developed from the Near Eastern cultures that surround it. "In fact, protection of the poor, widows, and fatherless children was a common policy in the Near East."⁵ This policy was important for the kings and emperors to gain more attention and thereby strengthen their rule. The discovery of literature concerning social justice in the Near East has helped seeing the similarities between them and "Torah" and the wisdom material. This is why it is important to treat this material first.

"The main deities who make up the Mesopotamian pantheon are exalted, as being enamoured of all that is good and just."⁶ This tells us that the question of the care for the weak started with the gods. Malchow writes, "You create justice for the weak, give

⁵ Bruce V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible: What is New and What is Old* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 1.

⁶ Leon Epzstein, *Social Justice in the Ancient Near East and the People of the Bible* (London: SMC Press, 1986), 3.

judgement to the orphan girl, the weak you make a hero, the insignificant you make rich.”⁷ The kings were considered to be sons of god and thus possessing some divine qualities; they would be worshipped and feared. The gods gave these kings ability to give judgement and create justice: they were the law themselves because there was no law corpus for social justice as found in the Pentateuch.

Another point is from a quotation by Epzstein that talks about “a passage from the great hymn to Shamash ...[that] makes a clear distinction between the bad judge who accepts jars of wine and the good one who protects the weak and prolongs life.”⁸ At this point we find that the Mesopotamian gods showed concern for the weak. These gods were represented by the monarchs to carry out this duty. “Mesopotamians believed that the gods gave divine justice to rulers. They had special responsibility to provide justice for the deprived in the role as highest judge.”⁹ Rulers were expected to carry out social justice in their respective areas. “Sumerian social life was steeped in a need for justice and a respect for the law.”¹⁰

However, this duty for carrying out justice was also extended to the ordinary people. They were required to take care for the weak. “The counsels of wisdom incorporate a lofty sense of justice: Unto your opponent do no evil; your evil doer recompense with good; unto your enemy let justice [be done]”¹¹ This quote tells how a person should behave towards the other. Another concern for the needy is shown in these verses; “Give food to eat, give date wine to drink; the one begging for alms honour, clothe .”¹²

The same concern is found in Assyria. The Assyrian king’s concern for the poor, the sick etc., is given fitting expression in the letter of Adad-Sumi-usur to Assurbanipal, his king:

Why then, since your Majesty has pardoned persons condemned to death for their crimes, and has released those who for many years had been imprisoned, and since those who had been sick for many years have gotten well, the hungry have been sated

⁷ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 1

⁸ Epzstein, *Social Justice in the Ancient Near East and the People of the Bible*, 3-4.

⁹ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 2.

¹⁰ Epzstein, *Social Justice in the Ancient Near East and the People of the Bible*, 4.

¹¹ ANET 426 as quoted by Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 2.

¹² ANET, 426 as quoted by Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 2.

with food, the lean have become fat ... and those who had been destitute have been clothed in sumptuous garments...¹³

These words are not in the form of a sermon or reproof as we find in the biblical literature, but they describe the deeds of king. Therefore, those were ideals for a just and a righteous person. These were the acts of righteousness which were expected of the individual.

2.2 Hittite Text

The ideals for a virtuous person are also seen in the Hittite literature. The following is the Hittite prince a type of a sermon that talks about righteousness and mercy:

Gather them ... anoint them ... put bread in their hands ... have regard for the sick and give him bread and water, when the heat harms him, put him in a cool place, and when the cold harms him, put him in a warm place and so the servants of the king shall not die at our hands; avenge the blood of the servants ... to the hungry give bread (to those who have been abandoned) ... give oil, to the naked give clothing ...¹⁴

These are “instructions of a prince to his ministers with regard to the soldiers.”¹⁵ This text is a command to avenge blood of servants of the king; however the motive underlying these instructions is humanistic since it talks about mercy to the hungry and the naked.

2.3 Egyptian Text

In Egypt, social justice was also a dominant theme. “Social justice was particularly important during the first intermediate (twenty second to twenty-first centuries B.C.E.) and the Middle kingdom (twenty-first to eighteenth centuries).¹⁶ The leaders were asked to act impartially with all and also meet the human needs. Just like Mesopotamia, the gods were seen as the originators of justice. There is a hymn saying,

Amon, lend thine ear
to one who is alone in the court,
in which he is poor, he is not rich.
When the court defrauds him of silver and gold, ...

¹³ Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem Fortress Press, 1995), 225.

¹⁴Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, 224.

¹⁵ Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, 224.

¹⁶ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 2.

May Amon transform himself
into a vizier in order to release the poor.¹⁷

There has also been a call to practice charity to the poor. “Do not be miserly with thy wealth which has accrued to thee as the gift of god.”¹⁸ Then there is an addition of a declaration of innocence that states: “I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, and a ferry-boat to him who was marooned.”¹⁹ There is another wisdom writing which is the instruction of Amenemopet for just behaviour:

Do not carry off the landmark at the boundaries of
The arable land, ...
Be not greedy for the property of a poor man,
Nor hunger for his bread. ...
If thou findest a large debt against a poor man,
Make it into three parts,
Forgive two, and let one stand. ...
Do not lean on the scales nor falsify the weights, ...
Do not accept the bribe of a powerful man,
Nor oppress for him the disabled.²⁰

There are inscriptions on the tombs in Egypt during the same ancient Near East period. These inscriptions were there to glorify the names of the Egyptian princes and officials for their acts of righteousness. Some of the autobiographies on tombs read, “I gave bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, I brought the boatless to land.”²¹ Another inscription from the later Egyptian period reads:

I gave bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked.
I guided the one who had gone astray in the right path, I gave a tomb to him who had none.
I did good to the men of my city;
I saved the poor man from the strong;
I was a shield to the oppressed.²²

¹⁷ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 3.

¹⁸ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 3.

¹⁹ ANET, 414 as quoted by Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 3.

²⁰ ANET, 422 – 424 as quoted by Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 3.

²¹ Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, 223.

²² Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, 223.

So far we see that these were desirable ideals for an individual with regard to assisting the poor and the needy. These concerns are not in a form of a corpus of laws as found in the Old Testament “Torah”, they are either instructions or wisdom material or biographical inscriptions telling about what the king did in his life time. Probably creating a corpus of laws was unnecessary as the king had supreme power over decisions and judgement.

The same ideals are found in Israel. Israel’s neighbours have had concern for social justice even before Israel existed. When she was faced with justice issues, she had to use some of the resources already in place, that is, neighbours’ resources. While in Mesopotamia the kings were laws themselves, in Israel we see the corpus of laws in the Pentateuch and the kings were not above those laws. Of course, the Exodus experience was important to them with regard to justice issues as well.

2.4 The Exodus

I find it important to note that Israel was born out of oppression situation in Egypt. The book of Exodus explains this (Exod 1:11, 13 – 14). “The Egyptians compelled the Israelites to work at arduous tasks against their will. According to the story, the Egyptians accelerated the oppression by attempting genocide next. They tried to kill all Israelites, baby boys who were born.”²³ Then the story continues that they cried for help and Yahweh heard them. Exod 2: 23 – 25 reads:

In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.

This text shows that Yahweh was ready to deliver them and so He became their deliverer. On the basis of the deliverance act, Yahweh established a covenant with Israel. He became their God, and they became His people. Therefore “when Israel faced situations of injustice, it drew its resources for meeting them from Near Eastern thought on the subject which existed

²³ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 5.

long before there was Israel, and from the subsequent Exodus event at the beginning of its history.”²⁴ These resources were modelled to meet the situations the Israelites met.

It is important to note that the book of Exodus has two major parts; the first one is Exodus 1 – 19 which “gives a detailed account of the circumstances under which the deliverance was accomplished. The second (Exodus 20 – 40) describes the giving of the law, and the institutions which completed the organisation of the people as ‘a kingdom of priests’ and a holy nation.”²⁵ This tells us that the first part is God’s delivery act and the second one concerns the delivered people, that is, the responsible Israel.

2.5 The God of Justice

The Israelites recognised Yahweh as their supreme ruler. He was the God who delivered them from Egypt. In Him there was justice and power. There was no difference between what was secular and what was sacred. Everything was sacred in Israel. Every event had a focus on Yahweh. In the book of Judges we read about Yahweh punishing the Israelites after turning away from him and at the same time delivered them when they cried out for help. Theocracy was the rule. Every aspect of life was God centred. The book of Exodus expounds this point. The rulers were Yahweh’s vassals to execute justice. His wisdom was in them so that they could judge rightly (1Kg 3:28; Prov 16:10). This understanding is derived from Israel’s Near Eastern neighbours as already seen above, but the kings in Israel had to use the laws in place which emanated not from the gods as in Mesopotamia, but from Yahweh.

Justice is an attribute of God. He rules with justice and righteousness (Ps 96: 10 – 13). Ps 99:4 reads, “Mighty King, lover of justice, thou hast established equity; thou hast executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.” This verse praises God because he is just and righteous. Psalm 103:6-8 expounds this: “The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious; slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” These verses talk

²⁴ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 6

²⁵ Fuller, A. “Exodus – Ruth” in The Master Christian Library, version 8. under category “Commentaries,” Vol. 2. (Rio, WI USA: Ages Software, 2000), 2.

about acts of God with regard to justice and judgment. In these verses we also find that God cares for the oppressed. Verse eight echoes the revelation that was made to Moses by God. This we read in Exod 34:6 that expresses God's love.

At Sinai, God gave the liberated Israelites rules to help them in their community relationship. This is to say that they were supposed to act like Yahweh, which is, saving the poor from oppression just like what he did to them. Justice became the attribute of God. In Israel's confession, they recounted their salvation history (Deut 26:5 – 10). The mighty acts of deliverance were recounted when they taught their children (Deut 6:20 – 25). And above all, the Exodus event was always appropriated in the present experience (Deut 5:2 – 3).

We can see that the understanding of God in Israel was based on God's liberating acts in concrete events in history. From Exodus to settling in Canaan, the power of God has always been shown to intervene and save the victims of oppression. (Exod 20:2; 19:4; 15:1 – 21 and Deut 4:34).

The covenant in Exodus 19 – 24 becomes the charter of Israel's existence as a nation. God's steadfast love for humankind manifest itself in his justice and righteousness in the covenantal relationship. In this relationship, God is recognised as a unique God of righteousness and compassion; the God who rearranges broken relationships. He was understood to be the supreme ruler who delivered the Israelites from Egypt. Israelites, as liberated people had a role to play in the covenantal relationship.

2.6 Social Concern in Israel

We have already seen that the desirable ideals for the righteous and just person in Mesopotamia and Egypt are how they take care of the weak in the society, especially the poor and the needy. These ideals are found in their literature as previously noted. The same ideals are found in Israel also. Concern for social justice in Israel appears in the law codes unlike in Mesopotamia.

It has been observed that "Near Eastern literature normally expresses its concern for the deprived in forms like confessions, instructions, and hymn-petitions, rather than through legal statements."²⁶ Thus, this tells us the difference in conveying the concern. In Israel, the

²⁶ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 20.

form of conveying the concern was in the form of the law codes nevertheless we find the same content. This may convince me that the Near Eastern literature about the underprivileged may have been part of Israel's legal codes development.

Most of the injunctions regarding the deprived people are found in three basic codes. The oldest is the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:22 – 23:33) which originated at the time of the tribal confederacy and reflects the agricultural life of that period.²⁷ Secondly we have the one in the Deuteronomic code (Deut 12 – 26). The oral form of this was probably used to renew the covenant in the ceremony at Shechem. This code seems to depend on the book of the Covenant. The final collection is the Holiness Code (Lev 17 – 26).²⁸

As to social justice, there are commands that forbid oppressive actions against the deprived. The Israelites had to take care of the orphans and the widows (Exod 22:22 – 24). They were not to oppress the stranger (Exod 23:9). In their daily life, there should not be discrimination against the poor or perversion of justice in a poor persons suit (Exod 23:3, 6) and bribery was prohibited among them (Exod 23:8).

Exodus 22:26 discusses pledges given as collateral for loans that garments taken in pledge should be returned before sundown. Deuteronomy 24:17 prohibits the use of a widow's garment as a pledge. Exodus 22:25 forbids collecting interest from the poor who borrow. Deuteronomy 24:14 – 15 commands that the hired servants should not be oppressed and should be paid his wage on the day he earns it for he depends on it. False witness was prohibited in the court (Exod 23:1-2).

Deuteronomy 15: 7 – 11 instructs the reader to give a poor person freely. This text is basically concerned with loans. The text wants the reader to lend the poor person whatever is required. Leviticus 25:35 – 37 commands that the needy ought to be treated fairly. The poor are to be strengthened and that those who lend them do so with no interest. Leviticus 12:8; 14:21-22 give the economic parity between the rich and the poor. A poor person is permitted to bring less expensive sacrifices.

The kings were expected to establish a just society and lead the society according Yahweh's instructions. An establishment of a just society was through enforcing laws in

²⁷ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 20.

²⁸ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 21.

place. Yahweh was the one who enabled the kings to establish justice and righteousness. Yahweh made Solomon king to establish justice and righteousness (1Kg 10:9). Psalms 72 is a prayer asking Yahweh to give the king justice and righteousness. The king was expected to rescue the poor person from the strong oppressor. At this juncture we can see that the content of social justice concern in Israel is similar to that of her neighbours.

To enforce these laws, there were some motivations, retribution was one of them. This stimulated people to follow the law. In retribution, a disaster was proclaimed if one did not obey the law (Deut 15:9; 24:15). Exodus 22:23 – 24 warns that Yahweh will hear the cry of the afflicted widow or orphan and kill their oppressor. Retribution passages promise blessings if one obeys the law and curse or punishment if one does not obey. Eliphaz represents this thinking in the book Job when he says, “Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed (Job 4:7-9).” Eliphaz plays with logic here. The underlying message being, “what one sows, reaps the same.” This is retribution. This motivation can probably be viewed negatively, but I find it important as a way of enforcing laws since certain immoral acts lead to harmful results.

There were other ways of sensitizing people of the importance of following the laws. In Israel the people were reminded of their history in Egypt and how they suffered. This reminded them how they were sojourners or slaves there and so they had to know the heart of the oppressed (Exod 23:9).

Exodus 22:27 wants the Israelites to be compassionate to the poor since Yahweh is compassionate. The idea behind is to imitate God. Deut 10:17 – 19 reads,

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

This motivates the people to act like Yahweh and thereby becomes one of the motivations to obey the law.

So far, the covenant becomes the framework for preserving the equality and dignity of every person in Israel. The laws attempt to redress the plight of the deprived in the society.

These laws prevent the mistreatment of the poor and demand their improvement by giving and equalizing wealth and privileges. The Israelites promised to do all that God had spoken (Exod 19:8).

2.7 Justice: Old Testament Understanding

In the previous chapter we saw that justice and righteousness are the manifestation of Yahweh's steadfast love. What does the Hebrew Bible say about the two terms "justice and righteousness?" The Hebrew Bible uses two terms when dealing with the word "justice"; **מִשְׁפָּט** which is translated as "judgment" or "justice." Another translation is, "act of deciding a case."²⁹ Another word for justice as used in the Hebrew Bible is **צְדָקָה** which is translated as "righteousness." **מִשְׁפָּט** comes from the root verb **שָׁפַט** meaning "judge" or "govern."³⁰

This judge must not be understood in the modern sense of the terms, namely, as pronouncing a judgment, a 'sentence.' The primitive idea of [**שָׁפַט**] was broader: it comprised all the actions which accompanied or immediately followed the primitive process that took place when two opposed parties presented themselves before the competent authority, each to claim its rights³¹

At this point the judge brings the situation at an appropriate resolution. Thus, controversies are being decided upon and the situation is redressed and hence **מִשְׁפָּט** "is the restoration of a situation or environment which promoted equity and harmony in the community."³² Here we find that **מִשְׁפָּט** is the process which has to deal with people's relationships rather than just pronouncing a "sentence."

As to **צְדָקָה**, the root is **צָדַק**. From this root we also get the word **צָדִיק** denoting "rightness" or "righteousness." I find the idea behind these meanings to be "what is right, just, and normal." In the government, judges, rulers and kings, were supposed to be righteous. The judge was rightly to satisfy the claims of the participants in a trial, brought forward from

²⁹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2003), 1048.

³⁰ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1047.

³¹ Epzstein, *Social Justice in the Ancient Near East and the People of the Bible*, 46.

³² Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 16.

It is important to note that every relationship has specific obligations. We find in the society, the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, children and grown-ups, and leaders and their subjects. How do they relate to each other? Each part owes something to the other. In this relationship, every one has their own rights. It was the work of the righteous judge in Israel to effect one's right to safeguard the good of every one in the community.

משפט and צדקה are inextricably linked to one another and we find this in many places in the Hebrew Bible such as; Gen 18:19; Deut 32:4; 1Kg 10:9; Ps 33:5 and Ps 103:6. The two terms are used in pair. In Ancient Israel, there was no distinction between what was sacred and what was secular. Social equanimity and moral uprightness were two sides of the same coin. In this conception we find the quality of relationship. The pair depicts human moral qualities that God was expecting from Israel. For one to be in right relationship with God, they had to love their neighbour as they loved themselves and this was extended to the aliens living in Israel too. Justice was understood to be the attribute of God. Duchrow and Liedke explain it more by writing:

God's 'judging' does not mean an abstract, neutral, judicial act, but an active, saving rearrangement of broken relationships. In the context of justice, this means 'to save from oppression,' to liberate, to rescue. Also in the Hebrew word [צדקה], or 'righteousness,' is a relational concept. It does not mean good conduct in abstract terms, but 'conduct conducive to fellowship.'³⁴

So far we have seen the ethical concept related to the social and legal life of Israel. The understanding has given us a clue of what the ethical and legal dimension of Israel's life was.

The book of Amos uses these terms: משפט and צדקה in pair. The former being translated as "judgment" or "justice" and the latter "righteousness." "This pair ... has been shown to refer to what we call social justice, or negatively put the elimination and avoidance

³³ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 16 – 17.

³⁴ Ulrich Duchrow and Gerhard Liedke, *Shalom: Biblical Perspective on Creation, Justice and Peace* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989), 78.

2.8 Social Justice in Psalms and Proverbs

2.8.1 *Psalms*

There are a number of passages in the book of Psalms about social justice in Israel. This section discusses a few of them. Firstly, we have Psalm 94:5 – 6 which is a post-exilic Psalm with wisdom elements in it. The text talks about the oppressor killing the needy. “The evildoers probably come from the leadership of the people and kill the deprived through dishonest legal proceedings.”³⁶ Alter writes the following about these verses:

Although some interpreters have taken this as a reference to a national disaster, such as conquest by an enemy, the subsequent reference to the murder of the disadvantaged – proverbially, in biblical usage, the sojourner, the widow, and the orphan – suggests that what the speaker had in view is a practice of criminal, social, and economic oppression within the nation. This rendering is reinforced by the use of the phrase ‘you brutes in [or among]’ the people.³⁷

Another verse that talks about social justice is Psalm 15:5. This Psalm is a “part of an entrance liturgy in which worshippers ask priests what kind of people may enter the temple area.”³⁸ The answer to this question being, “the one who is cares about the innocent.” Alter writes, “The evident meaning is that he takes no bribe to declare the innocent guilty.”³⁹ This

³⁵ Walter J. Houston, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament* (London and New York: T and T Clark, 2008), 61.

³⁶ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 53.

³⁷ Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (New York: W.W. Norton and company, inc. 2007), 332.

³⁸ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 52.

³⁹ Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 44.

point shows that bribery was discouraged; for a person to have acceptable worship, they needed to be pure and virtuous.

Psalms 72 makes the justice of the ruler as defender of the poor and the oppressed. God helps the poor through other people. The Psalm has the theme of the ruler as the deliverer of the poor. This Psalm is a prayer for the king to rule justly and righteously. Mowinckel writes that “the righteousness of the king is the righteousness of the people, his sin is the peoples’ sin (2Sam. 21.1; 24.1ff).”⁴⁰ This explains that when the king fails to execute righteousness and justice, the calamity befalls the whole nation. The king is responsible for the people towards Yahweh. “Through the ‘righteousness’ of the king, fertility of people, cattle and land is secured.”⁴¹ This point implies that leaders were important and effective when working understanding that they were responsible towards Yahweh. When the leader messed up, then the whole nation went into trouble. At this point the office of a prophet became important to criticise the leader and the ruling class when they went against Yahweh’s instructions. For the king to be effective in dispensing justice, he needed divine assistance.

“This prayer acknowledges the existence of oppression in the country and asks that the king may have divine justice to oppose it and fairly judge the poor.”⁴² Verses twelve to fourteen are a significant confirmation that the king is just. The king became the just judge whose duty was to judge rightly the poor and rescue them from the oppressors.

The people were as well responsible to care for the needy. Psalms 112: 5, 9 promise reward for the virtuous person. Amos promises reward too. A reward to live when a person seeks Yahweh as He is the originator of justice and the only true protector of the weak (Ps 146: 7 – 9). The motivation here is that people need to be virtuous.

⁴⁰ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel Worship*, Trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Cambridge, Uk: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 61.

⁴¹ Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel Worship*, 62.

⁴² Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 54.

2.8.2 *The Proverbs*

We also find reference to social justice in the book of Proverbs. Being one of the wisdom books, it has wise advice on how to relate to each other. Longman writes about Proverbs 28: 27 that “Proverbs consistently teaches that those with means must be generous towards the poor. This proverb motivates such generosity with the promise that the giver will lack nothing.”⁴³ This implies that Yahweh would take care of the person that gives. The second colon promises curse to those who do not give. The point here is that people are encouraged to help the poor. The promised curse in the second colon serves as a motivation for people to help the poor.

We also find that the needy have to be given justice. Proverbs 22:22 commands not to rob the poor. “To rob any one is a crime, but to rob the poor, who are already in difficult straits, is particularly heinous (see also Exod. 22:21 – 23; 23: 6; Deut. 24:14 – 15).”⁴⁴ Moreover, oppressing someone who is already afflicted is worse. “To do so publically is a particularly bad thing to do. The reference to ‘the gate’ at least points toward a public setting, and probably more specifically to a legal setting.”⁴⁵ Malchow adds that “this text forbids giving the poor injustice in trials because they lack the prestige and financial resources of the rich.”⁴⁶ This verse gives a general advice to anyone who is supposed to be virtuous.

The rulers are advised to have a just judgement of the poor. Proverbs 9:14 teaches that “the righteous wise are characterised by compassion for the poor. This is particularly the case for the king, who is charged by Yahweh to care for all the socially vulnerable.”⁴⁷ Those who are in power are advised not to exploit the weak. “The king is the human representative of God, who protects the rights of those who lack power (the needy and the destitute).”⁴⁸

⁴³ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 497.

⁴⁴ Longman, *Proverbs*, 416.

⁴⁵ Longman, *Proverbs*, 416.

⁴⁶ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 69.

⁴⁷ Longman, *Proverbs*, 505.

⁴⁸ Longman, *Proverbs*, 539.

The wisdom literature becomes important source of social justice just like the law codes and the prophets as they have concern for the vulnerable in the society. Amos used wisdom material together with the law codes as the source of his ethical standard as given by Yahweh to regulate social affairs in Israel. He knew what was in the law codes and the wisdom from the sages.

2.9 The Prophets and Social Justice

The prophets in Israel were not just mere seers, fortune-tellers or prognosticators, but rather bearers of Yahweh's word. They reminded the people of Israel to worship Yahweh alone, which was the demand of the covenant code that they should not worship other gods but Yahweh alone (Exod 20:2).

The theme of social justice becomes the concern of the prophets due to the violation of certain ordinances in the "Torah" on the part of the Israelites that has to do with loving one's neighbour. This tells us that the prophets knew the covenant code and that their accusations were based on the law codes in place. Therefore, there was a problem of the Israelites' conformity to the law. We shall see this more in chapter three when discussing the book of Amos.

It is evident that the prophets question the validity of rituals and sacrifices while violating the fair and ethical treatment of one another. "The most striking statements on social justice in the Hebrew Bible occur in the prophetic books."⁴⁹ The theme appears in other books but "four prophets have the most to say about this topic: Amos, Mica, Isaiah, and Jeremiah."⁵⁰

Amos criticised heavily leaders of Israel for exploiting the poor as means to increase their wealth (Amos 8:4). He also predicts Israel's fall and eventual exile as a punishment for social and economic injustices (Amos 6:7; 8:11 – 12).

Jeremiah is also concerned with social justice issues. He considers that Josiah's deuteronomistic reforms have failed because of the reigning social and economic injustices in

⁴⁹ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 31.

⁵⁰ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 31.

Judah (Jer 5:26 – 29). Jeremiah, together with other prophets, insisted the need for Judah to understand moral implications of the worship of Yahweh.

We also find criticism of economic greed and exploitation of the poor in the book of Isaiah (Isa 1:13 – 17; 10:1 – 4). There is another powerful passage on a condemnation of the city of Jerusalem (Isa 1: 21 – 27). This verse links righteousness and justice closely. Justice is absent when corruption, bribery, failure to defend the orphans and plead the widows' cause are the social norm.

The role of the prophets was very important in Israel because they announced to the Israelites the cause of their calamities so that they could understand their transgressions and repent accordingly. They emphasized the equality of all the Israelites in the eyes of Yahweh. They called the people as a community to accountability and responsibility in their relationship with God. They helped the people understand what was expected of them in that relationship. “Generally speaking, however, injustice is treated as a social and political theme in the prophets. The oppressors are mostly classes rather than individuals, the oppressed are certainly a class, and the oppressors are representatives of their states.”⁵¹

As already known to us, in the Hebrew Canon, the books called the prophets are divided into two major parts: The former prophets that include the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 – 2 Samuel, and 1 – 2 Kings and the latter prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the book of the twelve. We have so far dealt with the latter prophets who speak the most about social justice. As this study takes the book of Amos as its background and major source of study, chapter three will crystallize the theme of social justice from the point of view of the book.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter began with exploring the social justice thought of Near Eastern peoples. In Mesopotamia and Egypt, the concern for the underprivileged was found in literature. We have seen that in the earliest literary texts from Mesopotamia there is a distinction between the good and the bad judge and praise for the one who brings justice and protects the poor. The law codes embraced various concerns for the underprivileged from the ancient Near East. The discoveries of literature related to care of the weak from Mesopotamia and Egypt have

⁵¹ Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 96.

enabled scholars to see the similarities of form and content between “Torah” and Mesopotamian and Egyptian laws. As monotheism was the main concern of the Old Testament, these law codes were attached to Yahweh.

The history of the Israelites in Exile was to help them treat others with love. They were to care for the weak because they have an experience of how it feels to be weak. The God with whom the people of Israel made covenant was regarded as the source and foundation of justice. The monotheistic rule in the Old Testament reveals that the law of justice must prevail without any discrimination. Thus, taking advantage of the weak or favouring the mighty was not allowed. When the people of Israel could not follow the law, the prophets reminded them what God was expecting from them. We see that the role of the prophets was important in Israel since they showed them the cause of their calamities so that they could repent accordingly.

We have also seen that righteousness and justice reflect the human moral qualities that God was expecting from Israel. This word pair refers to what we now call “social justice.” The word pair is more relational aiming at restoring the situation that promotes equity and harmony. These two terms, “justice and righteousness” reflect the ethical and legal dimension of the Israelite’s social life.

Wisdom literature becomes important source of thought on social justice in the Old Testament. The literary form of wisdom hardly reveals particular crises the wise faced; nevertheless their concern for justice depicts the existence of crises. The wise concern left legacy of social justice thought to Israel. In wisdom material, we find the general advice that regulates morals of people. The people were taught how to live and act in everything they did. We do not find much reference to God in wisdom literature as in other books in the Old Testament. One book which has much reference to God but closer to wisdom material is the book of Amos. The following chapter discusses the book of Amos in general.

Chapter Three

THE BOOK OF AMOS: SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES

We have seen in the previous chapter the general understanding of social justice in the Old Testament, which began with the study of Near Eastern concern for social justice that Israel adapted when she faced justice issues. This chapter discusses, in particular, social justice issues as depicted in the book of Amos. It is important at first to have a general understanding of the book itself with regard to its authorship and composition. I will not go into details here since authorship and composition are a big project which needs lengthy study and this paper cannot do that due to its limitation.

3.1 Date and Person

3.1.1 *The Date*

“According to the book’s superscription, Amos appeared as a prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II (usually dated 787 – 747 B.C.E.), and almost simultaneous with the reign of Uzziah over Judah, who is also mentioned.”⁵² He prophesied against the Northern Kingdom (Amos 1:1b) though he originally belonged to the south in Tekoa in Judah (Amos 1:1).

Martin-Achard writes that Amos “appears during the long and apparently glorious reign of Jeroboam II (around 786 – 746) before the people of YHWH had to undergo their terrible confrontation with Assyria.”⁵³ At this point we can see that Amos’ short prophetic career is often supposed to be roughly 780 – 740 B.C.E. This dating is based upon the kings who reigned during his career – King Uzziah and Jeroboam II.

It happened that during the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel became rich and wealthy. This is because in around 800 B.C., the Assyrians defeated the Syrians in the war. The Syrians were a threat to Israel but they became weak because of the defeat and so they could not do anything to the Israelites. The Assyrians did not take control over Israel also. Jeroboam II

⁵² Jorg Jeremias, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press 1998), 1.

⁵³ Robert Martin-Achard and S. Paul Re’emi, *God’s People in Crisis* (Edinburg: Handsel Press, 1984), 3.

used this opportunity to expand his borders and the country became as big as it was during the time of Solomon and David. Probably Amos 6:13 gives us a clue that the Israelites were proud of their victory in the war. Because of this victory, they controlled all the trade routes and thus became rich.

3.1.2 *The Person*

We have seen that Amos came from Tekoa. This township “lent itself to the rearing of smaller livestock like goats and sheep rather than to agriculture.”⁵⁴ Because of this context, Amos knew nature well;

He is able to observe the shooting up of the latter growth (7:1), he marks the arrival of the locusts (4:9) and the roaring of a lion (3:4); he knows what drought means for the flocks as well as famine for man (4:7f; 8:11f); notices ripe summer fruits (8:1), the bird caught in a snare (3:5), the snake hidden in a hole in the wall of a house (5:19).⁵⁵

He knew all these signs because of the environment he was coming from. He has been among the shepherds of Tekoa. His language “reflects this rural milieu of his surroundings.”⁵⁶

Amos did not study to become the prophet (Amos 7:15). Neither did he join any school or guild (Amos 7:14). Nevertheless he had knowledge of the covenant as seen below.

Amos was familiar with the history of the people of Israel and with the covenant itself. This is clear when he alludes to the law (Amos 2:4, 8, 11; 3:1; 4:7, 9 – 11; 5:11). This knowledge of the law of Yahweh was appropriate to him as, like other prophets, he was primarily covenant-lawsuit messenger. This is more explicit when he itemizes Israel’s corrupt acts: selling into slavery for trivial debts (Amos 2:6; 8:6), excessive fines (Amos 2:8), falsifying weights and measures (Amos 8:5), dishonest trade practices (Amos 8:6), and corrupting the legal process (Amos 2:7; 5:10, 12), this is to mention some of them.

These accusations are not based on his own ethical standards, but they correspond with the stipulations in the Covenant code (Exod 20:23 to 23:19). Let us take a particular

⁵⁴ Martin-Achard, *God’s People in Crisis*, 3.

⁵⁵ Martin-Achard, *God’s People in Crisis*, 3.

⁵⁶ Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 2.

example. Amos 2:8 reads, “They lay themselves down beside every altar upon garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined.” This alludes to the refusal to return the cloak of a poor person by evening, which violates a stipulation in Exodus 22:26 – 27. “If ever you take your neighbour’s garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is his only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.” For me, this verse reveals that Amos was aware of the law codes on which he bases his accusations. What connects the two texts is “garment in pledge” which shows that Amos was aware of what the Pentateuch talked concerning taking the garment from the poor. However, Hans Wolff sees that his presentation of the message shows more closeness to the book of Proverbs, which is a wisdom literature. More of this discussion is treated in chapter four.

3.2 The Book

It is evident that the book of Amos is a collection of his utterances or oracles. However there are some autobiographical elements in the visions of chapters seven and following and the passage that describe the confrontation between Amos and Amaziah (Amos 7:10 – 17). Martin structures the book as follows;

- (1) 1:3 – 2:16; oracles against the nations neighbouring on the northern kingdom and against Israel itself; (2) 3:1 – 6:14; a series of pronouncements against Israel, and in particular against its ‘elite’, real or supposed, (3) 7:1 – 9:10; visions accompanied by statements announcing the end of the state of Israel. These collections are preceded by an introduction (for the title and prefatory material, see 1:1f, and there is a conclusion 9:11 – 15) whose positive tones contrast with what precedes it.⁵⁷

It is plausible that Amos’ words were first spoken and written later; Jeremias notes that “in its present form, the book of Amos comes from the late post-exilic period (9:11 – 15; cf 9:7 – 10). It underwent its constitutive formation after the fall of Jerusalem during the exilic – early post exilic period.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Martin-Achard, *God’s People in Crisis*, 5.

⁵⁸ Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 5.

Martin sees the history in the development of the book. He sees the first collection of the ‘words of Amos’ (Amos 1:1) or (Amos 1:3f) to go back to the prophet himself. In chapter five he describes that there are declarations about the iniquity dominant in the Northern kingdom or visions in chapter seven and following. He writes that the collection has been preserved by his disciples.⁵⁹ Other verses that might have been added are “1:2 which would be from the hand of a Judean disciple of the prophet; and 4:13; 5:8f; 9:5f, which seem to recall a hymn in honour of YHWH. These passages were thus probably introduced into the text later on.”⁶⁰ There are other passages that might have been added later such as declarations of Tyre (Amos 1:9f), on Edom (1:11f), and particularly on Judah (2:4ff). All these texts would be secondary. The conclusion (9:11ff; or 9:13, or 9:8ff) would be the finishing touch of an editor living after the fall of the house of David (9:11).⁶¹

The development of the book becomes important to me as the theme of the book goes with history of the people who make it readable and relevant. It is important to know how the book has been woven together to help us how we understand the message. This edition weaves different pericopes for the clearer flow of the theme.

3.3 The Language of Amos

Wolff observes three basic types of speech in Amos: the first type is the messenger speech which is strictly tied to the commission from God. Secondly, is the ‘witness-speech’ that promotes contact with the listener and it introduces God in the third person. The third one is that of the ‘vision report’ of which it cannot be said with certainty whether is rhetorical or literary in origin.⁶²

In the messenger speech, God comes as the first person speaker. The messenger can also announce that it is God who speaks in the first person.⁶³ Wolff continues that “the messenger formula’ which derives from the language of diplomatic exchange (cf. 7:11), is

⁵⁹ Martin-Achard, *God’s People in Crisis*, 6.

⁶⁰ Martin-Achard, *God’s People in Crisis*, 7.

⁶¹ Martin-Achard, *God’s People in Crisis*, 7

⁶² Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 91.

⁶³ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 92.

used most frequently by Amos.”⁶⁴ Eleven of Amos’s oracles contain the introductory messenger formula “כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה” (Amos 1:3, 6, 13; 2:1, 6; 3: 11, 12; 5:3, 4, 16; 7:17) and five of these also who the corresponding concluding formula “אָמַר יְהוָה” (Amos 1:5, 8, 15; 2:3; 5:17).⁶⁵ Thus, for Amos, it is God who constrains him to proclaim His word (Amos 3:8; 7:15).

Another type is that of ‘witness-speech’ which is firstly characterized by the absence of all framework formulas that designate God as the speaker. In the oracles, God is referred to in the third person. The prophet arouses attention in preparation for the oracle of God that follows as we see in Amos 3:1a “שָׁמַע עוֹ אֶת-יְהוָה בָּרֶ” we find the same appeal appearing in same words in Amos 4:1 and 5:1.⁶⁶ Both oracles show that the appeal does not lead straight to the word of God. Here we see that “the prophet’s own utterance corresponds to a simple form of ‘pedagogical introduction’ of the wisdom teacher.”⁶⁷ At this point we see “the prophet own initiative and the wealth of form of language.”⁶⁸

I find important to note that wisdom literature focuses mainly on giving advice on how to relate to each other. It emphasizes more on humanity. But Amos has a focal point which is God whose holiness separates itself from every evil. At this point, wisdom becomes the tool for Amos to proclaim God’s judgement upon Israel. We need to remember that wisdom has to do with ethical moral standards that are more human. Amos becomes the eye witness of injustices in Israel, with the knowledge of God’s law, he develops his accusation using his skills in different forms of language to get the attention of his audience. And Above all, his closeness to wisdom language gives room for the recognition of Israelite’s neighbouring countries’ moral ethical standards, which for him, they are too, recognised by Yahweh.

⁶⁴ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 92.

⁶⁵ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 92

⁶⁶ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 93.

⁶⁷ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 93.

⁶⁸ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 94.

The last one is the vision report. Wolff writes that “the reports in Amos 7:1 – 3, 4 – 6, 7 – 8; 8:1 – 2 and 9:1 – 4 were perhaps literary compositions from the outset, though it is possible that they were entrusted orally to a small circle of followers.”⁶⁹ For Amos, it is still God who gives him visions and tells him what to do.

3.4 The General Message

Amos pronounced judgement upon the people of Israel and the neighbouring countries. He announced the end of the northern state and told them the reason for their condemnation. He is more a prophet of doom. Amos unveiled the reasons for their judgement;

The hypocrisy of its inhabitants, the venality of its judges (5:10f), the appetite that Samarian’s privileged classes has for the pursuit of pleasure (4:1f; 6:1ff), the extent of social oppression in Israel that brought about the humiliation of the needy, the trampling down of the poor, the cheating of the hapless (2:6ff; 8:4ff).⁷⁰

Amos prophesizes doom because of Israel’s greedy merchants, hypocrisy and indifference of the authorities. (4f; 6:1ff; 8:4ff). The accusation centres on violation of justice in the Northern kingdom. Amos is presenting to the people of Israel who the true Yahweh is; The God of justice and righteousness. He reminds them the God who rules all the nations and that they should worship him alone. However, worshipping Him while they violate His ordinances is nothing and so they become responsible for their violation.

We can see that the message of Amos was not a new invention. He was reminding the people of what they already know. God made the covenant with the people of Israel that he would be their God who would take care of them and they were to abide by his instructions. The people also promised to do all that Yahweh said as we have seen previously. Amos told them they had not kept their promises by violating Yahweh’s instructions and thus they were responsible for their deeds. The people of Israel went to the extent of worshipping other gods apart from Yahweh. This is evident in Amos 5:26; 8:14. This was against the covenant that they should worship Yahweh alone and follow his instructions. In the violation of these instructions, who are the victims and oppressors?

⁶⁹ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 94.

⁷⁰ Martin-Achard, *God’s People in Crisis*, 6 – 8.

3.4.1 *The Oppressors and victims*

The oppressors in the book of Amos are identified by their acts. Houston writes, “Clues to the identity of the oppressors are minimal. They are not identified in class terms. The word rich ... does not appear, nor are any described as ‘elder’ or ‘officer’ as in Isaiah.”⁷¹ Thus, knowing the oppressors depends on what they do: their description. “So we frequently get them described or even addressed with participles (in the Hebrew), even at the beginning of a saying e.g. Amos 5:7, 12b, 18, 6:1, 13. Identifying them therefore depends largely on being able to identify their actions.”⁷²

As to the actions, “the announcement which introduces the indictment against Israel in Amos 2:6a ... accuses Israel of ‘transgression’, ‘rebellions’, using the noun [פֶשַׁע] which indeed means ‘rebellion’ in a political sense. In the priestly vocabulary, it is a deliberate sin against God.”⁷³ Let us look at Amos 2:6-8 which talks about the actions of the oppressors.

6 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה וְהָעֵלֶּשֶׁל שֶׁהָפֵשַׁע עֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל־אָרֶץ בַּעַל לֹא
אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ עַל־מֶכֶר רֶם בַּכֶּסֶף צַדִּיק וְאָבִי יוֹן בַּעַל בּוֹר נֹעַ לַיּוֹם:

7 הַשָּׂא פִּימָה עַל־עַפְרָת־אֶרֶץ בְּרֹאשׁ הַלַּיִם וְדָרְדַר עַל גַּיִם יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה בִּיּוֹם יִלְכּוּ אֶל־הַנֶּעַר רַחֵם לְמַעַן חַלֵּל אֶת־שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי:
8 וְעַל־בְּגָדֵימָה חֲבָלִים וְטוֹ אֶצְלָל כָּל־מִזְבְּחַת וְיִין עֲנוּשִׁים יִשְׂרָאֵל
בֵּית אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:

I can translate the above verses as follows;

⁶Thus YHWH says, upon three transgressions of Israel, and upon four, I will not revoke the punishment because they sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes.

⁷They that trample the head of the poor on the dust of the earth and turn the way of the afflicted, and a man and his father walks towards the same maid in order to pollute my holy name.

⁷¹ Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 64.

⁷² Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 64.

⁷³ Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 66.

⁸And they lay themselves on a garment taken in pledge beside every alter, and they drink wine of the fined ones in the house of their god.

“In [Amos] 2:6-16 the series reaches Israel, the actual audience of the prophet. The listeners had heard the proclamation of Yahweh’s judgement on neighbouring nations whose misfortune would be to their advantage.”⁷⁴ Probably the Israelites thought that when their neighbours are down and weak because of the misfortune declared to them, they would be able to develop more and more and maintain their status as wealthy. But this was not the case, their name is heard and so the next misfortune would befall them too.

In the above sentences we find the messenger formula, כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה, that introduces a long and powerful poem. This formula appears in several places also such as Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6.

In verse six we also find a typical example of ascending enumeration, that is, $x/x + 1$ parallelism. Roth writes about this,

Numerical sayings list a certain number of items which have one or more characteristic features in common. They are made up of two parts: (1) the title-line and (2) the list. The title-line states (a) that which all the items have in common and (b) their number: the list enumerates these items ... in most cases, it is also evident that the numerical saying is not merely a figure of speech but represents an oral and literary ‘Gattung.’⁷⁵

In some other poetical numerical sayings, the second number in enumeration becomes higher than the first one and hence the formula $x/x + 1$. The “examples of the pattern introduced thus are known as *graded* numerical sayings. In all these cases the numerical values are parallel to each other, the second numerical value being the one intended.”⁷⁶ Therefore, as to our verse six here, it does not literary mean three or four sins, but these numbers help to imagine the sins committed. This means that, Israel has not sinned only three or four times, the phrase עַל-אַרְבָּעָה בָּעֵת means sin upon sin and that makes it many sins. This kind of expression reflects the teaching of a wisdom teacher. Amos is not a wisdom teacher himself, but he used this expression to summarize the particular transgressions. He

⁷⁴ James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 43.

⁷⁵ W. M. W. Roth, *Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament: A Form-Critical Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 1.

⁷⁶ Roth, *Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament*, 6.

used this expression not for instructional purposes but to announce Yahweh's judgement upon Israel.

The phrase **עַל-מֶכֶּר רָם** literary means “because of their selling.” “**מֶכֶּר רָם**” may refer to bribery in civil or criminal judicial proceedings. Such practices were explicitly condemned by the law (Exodus 23:6-8; Deuteronomy 16:18-20) and the prophets (Isaiah 1:23; 5:23; Ezekiel 22:12, 29; Micah 3:9-12...)”⁷⁷ another possibility is that, this word possibly refers “to the selling of innocent people into slavery for debt (as in 2Kings 4:1).”⁷⁸

In this sentence there is a mention of a “righteous person” **צַדִּיק** whose “root **צַדֵּק** does not necessarily connote righteousness in a moral sense ... in context of litigation or dispute, the word describes one who is ‘in the right.’”⁷⁹ The example can be taken from Deuteronomy 1:16 with the use of **צַדֵּק** where NIV renders the word “fairly” in its place but it literary means “righteously” and so the law was supposed to be applied impartially to all parties in question regardless whether some one is morally righteous or not.

אֶבְיֹן refers to a “needy person” who was someone “poor” and “powerless.” Their rights were supposed to be protected (Exod 23:6). In the verse the cause of **אֶבְיֹן** was betrayed for a very small bribery. In this context a pair of shoes connotes a trivial price. Niehaus writes;

The issue in this verse is apparently unjust sale into slavery. Slavery itself was a legitimate option among the Israelites, but it was intended as a benign institution that was hardly slavery at all. It was based on general human compassion (Exodus 21:2-11, 20-21, 26-27; Leviticus 25:39-55; Deuteronomy 15:12-18; 23:16-17...⁸⁰

It looks to me that the legal process was being used to exploit and enslave the poor. The courts were corrupt favouring the powerful in the society. The courts helped the rich. They made it easy for rich people to get slaves.

⁷⁷Jeff Niehaus, “Amos” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 365.

⁷⁸ Niehaus, “Amos” 365.

⁷⁹ Niehaus, “Amos” 365.

⁸⁰ Niehaus, “Amos” 366.

As to verse seven, Mays writes, “7a is a parallel restatement of 6b. On the surface it sounds like a general charge that the poor and weak are oppressed. But ‘turn aside the way of the afflicted’ is a locution for perversion of legal procedure.”⁸¹ The “way” [דָּרַךְ] “is a synonym for ‘justice’ [מִשְׁפָּט] ... both 6a and 7a are charges that the courts are being used to oppress the poor instead of to maintain [מִשְׁפָּט]”⁸²

In this verse we find the word הַשֵּׂא פִּימֵם of which the apparatus in the BHS suggests the deletion of א and directs us to compare it to LXX τὰ Πατοῦντα which translates “those who tread on.” Cripps thinks the same way by writing that “[שפִּים], a less common word ... in Genesis 3:15, it is rendered ‘bruise.’ So translate here: ‘who *tread on* to the dust of the earth *the head* (not ‘on the head’) of the poor.”⁸³ However, Niehaus has a different view. He suggests that “there is no need to emend to the root שׁוּף (to bruise) by deleting א ... the homonym שֹׁאֵשׁ (to crush, trample upon), a byform of שׁוּף ... is well attested in biblical Hebrew (e.g., Psalms 56:2-5 [1-2]; 57:4 [3]; Ezekiel 36:3.”⁸⁴ To me Niehaus sounds more reasonable because the form is also found elsewhere in the Bible as shown above. The verb gives a clear picture of the violence against the poor even without emendation.

There is a suggestion by the apparatus in the BHS that שׁוּף אֶשׁ may remain without ב. But Niehaus comes with a different view that “the use of ב to achieve the accusative בְּרֵאשׁ is to be retained, as it occurs with other verbs, for example, בָּחַר and גָּרַע. The verb also achieves the accusative without ב.”⁸⁵ I find this argument to be more plausible as this saying, ‘trampling of a person’s head’ was a familiar symbol of Mesopotamian kings to express their subjugation of their enemies as the language used owes much on what was already in place, that is, the idioms, proverbs and other different expressions in the Near East.

⁸¹ Mays, *Amos*, 46.

⁸² Mays, *Amos*, 46.

⁸³ Richard S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Book of Amos* (London: S.P.C.K., 1969), 141.

⁸⁴ Niehaus, “Amos” 366.

⁸⁵ Niehaus, “Amos” 366.

Amos uses vivid and brutal imagery to convey the socioeconomic evils of exploitation. “עַל־עִפְרָא אֶרֶץ” (against the dust of the earth): the alliteration of עַל־עִפְרָא (against the dust) enhances the poetic impact of this portrayal of a physical evil inflicted on the poor.”⁸⁶ Jeremias observes that “the proverbial trampling of a person’s head was long a familiar symbol on illustrations of Mesopotamian kings for the subjugation of their enemies.”⁸⁷

In this phrase וְדָרְךָ עָנִים יִטּוּ “and the justice (literary the way) of the oppressed they pervert”, the verb נָטָה “to pervert or turn” can be found in Exodus 23:6 and the same idea is found in Proverbs 17:23. Here we find the use of this verb in judicial context. Thus the justice is perverted in the judicial context.

As to לִלְבַּת מִזְעֵן הָאֵל “to pollute or profane”, the point here is that people’s perverted actions result into polluting Yahweh’s name. In this context, Yahweh’s character is polluted as His holiness connotes total separation from any evil acts.

Martin-Achard writes; “His (Amos) message is concentrated on the social disorder that was the rule in Samaria and in the countryside. He denounces a violation of family rights (Exodus 21:7-11; Deuteronomy 22:29ff) that protected a young girl from the arbitrary behaviour of her master.”⁸⁸

The evils explained here come under God’s judgement and they are against God’s instructions. Social injustice is the evil which is violence against the poor and the afflicted who were the Israel’s weakest and most defenceless members. Verse eight illuminate more the character of the oppressors which is set in a cultic environment. Mays writes;

The two lines of verse eight are formulated alike; the first colon of each cites the use of material acquired by legal process (pledged garments, wine of those who have been fined), and second locates their use in sanctuary (alter, house of God). Social practices are set in a cultic environment to illuminate their character.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Niehaus, “Amos” 366.

⁸⁷ Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 36.

⁸⁸ Martin-Achard, *God’s People in Crisis*, 22.

⁸⁹ Mays, *Amos*, 47.

In verse eight we find a phrase **בְּגָדֵי חֶבְלִים** “cloaks taken in pledge”. These cloaks were large square clothes used as garments by day and covering by night. If the cloak was taken in pledge, it was supposed to be returned before nightfall so that the person has it for covering during night. This tradition is mentioned in Israel’s legal tradition, which does not establish it, but sets limit around it.

Exodus 22:26, 27 require that the pledged garment of a neighbour be returned to him before the sun goes down...”⁹⁰ These garments “were used as a legal instrument for securing a debt; the debtor left his cloak with the lender as a surety.”⁹¹ And therefore, “Amos does not attack the institution of taking pledges as such, but rather the pledging of clothes for the purpose of reclining on the pledged garment (in celebration) instead of one’s own.”⁹² A widow’s cloak was never to be taken at all (Deut 24:17). Here we find that the oppressor only looked at the letters of the law for their own interest and never went down to the spirit of the law. What were these laws for? They were not to be a burden to the weak but maintain a harmonious relationship in the society. But these laws were used for the interest of a few rich and powerful people at the expense of the weakest and the most vulnerable in Israel.

The verb **יָטוּ** which is a Hebrew causative voice “could hardly have borne the meaning ‘lay *themselves* done.’”⁹³ But “if verse 8 is to be linked in sense closely to verse 7, it is clear that the sin is made worse in that the ‘clothes’ ... in which the man resorts to this worship, are those held back from some poor debtor.”⁹⁴ It maybe that they are reclining for a feast, as the reference to wine may indicate. The pagans held eating and drinking festivals in their temples (cf. Judg. 9:27).

The word **עֲנוּשִׁים** renders the meaning, “those who have been fined” or “the fined ones.” It is important to note that “wine was part of the sacrificial meal [1Sam 9:12, 13; Deut 14:26]. In this case however, the text seems to mean that the wine had been bought with

⁹⁰ Mays, *Amos*, 47.

⁹¹ Mays, *Amos*, 47.

⁹² Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 37.

⁹³ Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Book of Amos*, 142.

⁹⁴ Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Book of Amos*, 142.

money that had come to the worshipper through securing (presumably unjustly) some fine from his neighbour.”⁹⁵ Niehaus also writes that “people who were fined may have paid their fines in money or in kind. Perhaps the influential officials levied fines that they used to purchase wine (or they used wine that was made in actual payment of a fine) for their orgies.”⁹⁶ This brings us to the understanding that the wine was used in an illegitimate way.

Generally speaking, I find it plausible to note that these actions are a sin against God and humanity also. The point we see is that of violence against the poor. Hunting, trampling or crushing are violent actions. The similes we find in these sentences are important to help us understand how the text views the actions of the oppressors.

In the characterization of the victims of oppression, the following words are used; **אֲבִיּוֹן**, **דָּל**, and **עָנִי**. **צָדִיק** is sometimes used to refer to the poor. There have been arguments over the possible distinction between the three words for “poor”; **אֲבִיּוֹן**, **דָּל**, and **עָנִי**. Houston writes the following about the distinction;

Fleischer argues that the detailed contexts suggest that the **דָּל** (NRSV ‘poor’) was a poor peasant who still possessed some land, as against the **אֲבִיּוֹן** (NRSV ‘needy’), who was propertyless and eked out an existence as a day labourer. **עָנִי** (NRSV again ‘poor’) could refer to either, but connotes especially their claim on the compassion of the better off.⁹⁷

With all these different terms that refer to the poor, the common argument is that, they are all the victims of the act of oppression. They are the people who lack material resources and eventually powerless.

צָדִיק also means “a poor person” in the context of Amos. In the judicial context, the word may mean innocent in a legal sense. In Amos 2:6 above, we have seen that he is the victim of the miscarriage of justice. The term does not refer to poor person’s moral standards,

⁹⁵ Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Book of Amos*, 143.

⁹⁶ Niehaus, “Amos” 367.

⁹⁷ Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 62.

So far, the decision of the court was very important for both parties involved in litigation. The decision of the court was supposed to vindicate the just party. The decision was also important as it had to protect the social order by determining right and wrong and correct what is wrong. Thus, the decision of the court was particularly important in cases where the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the alien, people without power and influence, could not find redress in the community apart from the decision of the court. Due to the Israel's social disorder which has been a result of Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant, Amos utters a lamentation over their fall.

3.5 Conclusion

Amos sees beneath Israel's external prosperity and power that the nation is corrupt; corrupt leadership and oppression of the poor prevailed. Amos begins by pronouncing judgement to the surrounding nations, then upon his nation Judah and finally he gives the harshest judgement to Israel. The visions from God reveal the emphatic message that the judgement is near. Of course, the book ends with the promise of the future restoration of the remnants.

This chapter has also revealed that Yahweh puts his people on the same level with other nations that surround it. We have seen that Yahweh expects the same morality of all of them. Israel's covenant with Yahweh did not exempt them from his standards of morality; Yahweh is the God of moral righteousness and he judges the unjust. The people of Israel were expected to be responsible to live according the law of their God.

Amos used pedagogical expressions found in wisdom material in his prophetic ministry to announce God's punishment. He was not a clan teacher but a prophet sent to proclaim judgement. Wolff writes, "Amos has thereby exchanged the cloak of the clan teacher for that of the prophet messenger of judgement."⁹⁹ Being the messenger of judgement, Amos sees the death of Israel and laments for her death. The next chapter follows

⁹⁸ Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 62.

⁹⁹ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 95.

up discussion about the reason for lamentation and what the Israelites could have done to escape the fate. Exegesis will help us discover the reason and the moral ethical standards Amos used in his judgement.

Chapter Four

AMOS 5: 1 – 27: EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

The previous chapter discussed justice issues as reflected in the book of Amos. It was a more an overview of the whole book. This chapter exegetes Amos 5: 1 – 27 which will continue following up discussion of the ethical standards Amos is using when accusing Israel over injustice. At first, the study begins with textual criticism.

4.1 Textual Criticism and Translation

In verse three, we see that the apparatus in the BHS indicates that a word corresponding to אֲדֹנָי is absent in the Septuagint. It also indicates that the form of that word is a probable conjecture in the Septuagint. The Septuagint has κύριος κύριος in place of אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה. I find this suggestion to be problematic because both אֲדֹנָי and יְהוָה are translated as κύριος when they are separate. The Israelites considered the name of God “YHWH” to be sacred and therefore they did not say it. They read אֲדֹנָי in its place. The vowels from this name were placed to “YHWH” to remind them to read “adonay.” Thus, if both names were placed together, then “adonay” could be heard in both cases. Following this argument, I do not find any problem in the Septuagint version of the sentence.

In verse six we see that פְּנֵי־יָצֵחַ לֶחֶם פְּאֵשׁ בֵּית יוֹסֵף וְאִכָּהּ לֶחֶם “lest he break like fire in the house of Joseph” is ὅπως μὴ ἀναλάμψῃ ὡς πῦρ ὁ οἶκος Ἰωσήφ καὶ καταφάγεται αὐτόν in the Septuagint which is translated as “lest the house of Joseph blaze as fire and it devour her.” This rendering in the Septuagint gives meaning that is however clear as the fire devours the house of Joseph, however we find zero subject here, I mean, the doer of the action. This rendering in the Septuagint might probably be more theological trying to defend God that he is not responsible for the destruction of which, from Amos context, I agree. This is because the Israelites chose the destruction by not complying with Yahweh’s instructions which had two choices: to obey him and live or disobey him and die.

לְבֵית־אֵל “in Bethel or for Bethel”; this adverbial accusative is paraphrased in the Septuagint as τῶ οἴκῳ Ἰσραηλ “the house of Israel”. The apparatus in the BHS suggests the same as the Septuagint which sounds reasonable because the Israelites have been addressed as a nation. “In Bethel” could give the impression of just a local area where they have been going to worship. Therefore the point is a nation as whole and not the area where they went to worship.

In verse seven, the Septuagint reads הֵהָפּוּ כִּים לְלַע נָה מִשְׁפָּט “they that turn justice to wormwood” as κύριος ὁ ποιῶν εἰς ὕψος κρίμα “The LORD that execute judgement in the height/upward” referring to God and not to the oppressors. Probably as also suggested by the apparatus in the BHS, the Septuagint reads למעלה “upward” to fit in the doxology. But the context shows that the address is to those who oppress and thus called into seeking the LORD. Moreover, the parallel text in Amos 6:12b maintain לענה. Thus the reference is hardly to God as the context itself does not allow that use and so I agree with the text in the BHS.

In verse eighteen we find the question לָמָּה־זֶה לָּךְ יוֹם יְהוָה; the NIV has translated this question as “why do you long for the day of the Lord?” And the RSV, “Why would you have the day of the Lord?” But the Hebrew text literally translates, “what is this to you, the day of the Lord?” Translations from NIV and RSV give the impression of asking for the reason as to why the people of Israel want the day of the Lord. But the literal translation has a different impression of which I consider it to be more plausible. The impression is that, the question points to the nature of the day itself and not asking why they want that day.

The Septuagint reads τί αὐτῇ ὑμῖν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου “what is this to you, the day of the Lord?” supporting BHS. הוּא־חֹשֶׁךְ וְלֹא־אֹר “it will be darkness and not light.” The Septuagint adds “and” καὶ αὐτῇ ἔστιν σκοτός καὶ οὐ φῶς “and it will be darkness and not light.” Because of this emendation in the Septuagint, the apparatus in the BHS states that perhaps the clause הוּא־חֹשֶׁךְ should start with ו as καὶ in the Septuagint. But I do not think there should be any emendation since the sentence is clear without the conjunction.

In verse twenty six the Septuagint reads **סֹכֶת** as **סֹכֶת** “hut, tent, booth” and so it has τὴν σκητὴν τοῦ Μολοχ “the tent of Moloch.” Wolff writes, “on the basis of the name of the corresponding Akkadian deity, one should vocalize **סֹכֶת** ; the Mosoretic vocalization **סֹכֶת** probably intends to remind the reader of **שָׂקֶת** (“detesting thing”).”¹⁰⁰ Niehaus sees it as a misunderstanding by the Septuagint.¹⁰¹ **מִלֶּכֶּ כָּם** is read by the Septuagint as Μολοχ.

From the point of Wolff above, it is convincing to retain the Hebrew version of the clause. As to **כִּי יִן** “*Καιφαν* in [Septuagint] is generally regarded as an inner-Greek disfiguration of *καίφαν*.”¹⁰² I also support this line of thinking because the vocalization in the Hebrew text would read to match the Septuagint.

Translation

³For thus says the Lord God, the city that went out a thousand shall leave a hundred, and that which went out hundred shall leave ten to the house of Israel.

⁶Seek the LORD and live, lest the house of Joseph blaze like fire and it devour her and none to quench it in Bethel.

⁷You who turn judgement to wormwood and they put the righteous to the earth.

¹⁸Woe to you that desire the day of YHWH; what is this to you, the day of YHWH? It is darkness and not light.

²⁶And you shall lift up Sikkuth of your king and Chiun of your image, a star of your god which you made to yourselves.

4.2 Literary Issues

Wolff writes about different layers of the book of Amos. He starts by writing about ‘the words of Amos from Tekoa’. In this phrase he refers to the superscription in 1:1 which identifies Amos as the author. According to Wolff, the superscription in 1:1 introduces the

¹⁰⁰ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 260.

¹⁰¹ Niehaus, *Amos*, 433.

¹⁰² Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 260.

collection of oracles in chapters three to four because the oracles in 1:3 – 2:16 are introduced by the messenger formula as words of Yahweh.¹⁰³ Many oracles in chapters three to six “are exclusively ‘words of Amos’ in the basic form of free witness-speech: 3:3 – 8; 4:4-5; 5:7, 10 – 11, 18 – 20; 6:12. Other units in this section are first introduced by a saying of Amos and then, in second position, present an oracle of Yahweh: 3:1a+2, 9-11, 13 – 15; 4:1-3; 5:1-3, 12 + 16 – 17; 6:1-7, 13-14.”¹⁰⁴

It is true that the superscription introduces Amos as the author, but as I see it, it is not exclusively referring to the collection of oracles alone, in every case Amos is told by Yahweh what to say and that does not make it his own words: it is Yahweh’s words through Amos. He presented the message from Yahweh as given to him. The redactor or the person who put together the message of Amos gave authority of the book to Amos in the superscription.

Another layer in the book of Amos is that of ‘the old school of Amos. “The first traces of this early redaction are evident in the second relative clause of the present superscription: ‘which he viewed concerning Israel two years before the earthquake.’”¹⁰⁵ In this case the redaction does not use ‘saw’ as in 7:1, 4, 7; 8:1; 9:1, but rather ‘viewed’ as in 1:1. “This older redaction of the superscription, evident in the second relative clause, can be attributed to the old school of Amos.”¹⁰⁶ This argument is convincing because the redactor reports what Amos saw.

‘The Bethel – Exposition of the Josianic age’ is another layer in the book as presented by Wolff. He writes that “in 3:14a we find a later addition, clearly distinguishable from the context. Employing words found in the earlier form of the verse, it interprets the more general threat of the transmitted oracle to mean retribution against the ‘alters of Bethel.’”¹⁰⁷ In Amos 5:5b there is another threat against Bethel which derives from Amos himself. At this point, it is understood that Josiah destroyed the sanctuary of Bethel (2Kg 23:15). This cultic-political measure “was associated with the appearance of a ‘man of God from Judah’ and was

¹⁰³ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 107.

¹⁰⁴ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 107.

¹⁰⁵ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 108.

¹⁰⁶ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 108.

¹⁰⁷ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 111.

understood as fulfilment of his threat against the altar of Bethel (2Kings 23:17; cf. 1Kings 13). The Deuteronomistic History has quite probably made use here of popular traditions about Amos.”¹⁰⁸

Another layer is that of the Deuteronomistic redaction. “the initial concern of this redaction is to show that Judah and Jerusalem stand under the just judgment of Yahweh – in the same way as Israel was seen by Amos and his school to stand under Yahweh’s will to punish, and especially Bethel was viewed by the homiletics and liturgist of Josianic age.”¹⁰⁹ This is seen in the insertion of “the Judah strophe into the cycle of oracles against the nations in 2:4-4, and by the addition of 3:1b which in essence extends the scope of ‘against you’ in 3:2b to embrace the ‘whole family’ which Yahweh brought up out Egypt.”¹¹⁰ In addition to this point, Amos 6:1a and 1b can be seen as Deuteronomistic additions. Amos 5:25 – 26 is also recognized as Deuteronomistic addition as well.

The last layer as observed by Wolff is ‘the Post Eschatology of Salvation. “After the early postexilic period, when salvation prophecy came to the fore, it was no longer possible to transmit a prophetic proclamation of judgment as one-sidedly harsh as Amos’ without adding a new word of salvation (9:11-15).”¹¹¹ Wolff continues that in doing so, “the very wording of Amos’ own judgment (5:11b) could be adopted, though it had to be transformed into a positive prognosis. Unique assurances of salvation (9:11) stand alongside widely propagated promises (9:15).”¹¹² This addition shows that Yahweh’s death sentence to Israel is not his last word: There is salvation.

“In Amos 5:1 – 17 the most varied oracles are placed together. Only five of them can be assigned with reasonable certainty to the early collection of the words of Amos from Tekoa (vv 1 – 3, 4 – 5, 7 +10, 11, 12 + 16 – 17).”¹¹³ The remaining material: 6 + 8 + 9, 13,

¹⁰⁸ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 111.

¹⁰⁹ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 112.

¹¹⁰ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 112.

¹¹¹ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 113.

¹¹² Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 113.

¹¹³ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 231.

14 – 15 “quite probably belongs to various layers of interpretation.”¹¹⁴ Verse twenty five which talks about sacrifices in the wilderness and verse twenty six that refers to worship of Mesopotamian gods are also regarded as secondary. Wolff writes,

the purely prose style and the transition to specialised theological questions concerning the history of the cultus betray here the hand of a glossator. V 24 already made a transition from the rejection of the cultus to a contrasting positive statement, and so vv 25 – 26 appear to be a later supplement to vv 21 – 23.¹¹⁵

These different layers of the chapter are treated equally as they all result from the people of the same authority: Amos himself and his later school who were involved in editing and interpreting his message. What Wolff has done, is to discuss different layers of secondary material in the book of Amos plus words of Amos himself. We can have two major layers: words of Amos and words considered to be secondary. Wolff went into details at this point, which to me can be helpful as I read the book. What is important to me is not to think that these additions to the book of Amos are less important. In connection to this point, Newsome has an important observation, he writes:

We should not think of these additions to the words of Amos as being made in a false or deceptive spirit by persons who counterfeited the prophet’s words. Our modern concepts of literary authorship were not shared by people in the ancient world, and these expansions are the work of those who honoured the prophet as a spokesperson of God and who wished to give his words new force in the midst of situations which the prophet himself did not live to see.¹¹⁶

4.3 Form and Structure

Chapter five opens with a song of lamentation (verses 1 – 3) and ends with a threat of deportation for the Israelites (v.27). the lament ‘קִי נָהָה’ follows a specific Hebrew poetic form called, ‘the elegiac measure’, “its characteristic rhythm (accentuated 3 – 2, a ‘broken’ rhythm) is associated in the Israelite mentality with death, and so, by extension, with all kinds of distress and calamities.”¹¹⁷ When the Israelites heard this elegy, they knew that a disaster has occurred and so there is death.

¹¹⁴ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 231.

¹¹⁵ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 259 – 260.

¹¹⁶ James D. Newsome, Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1984), 23.

¹¹⁷ Martin-Archad, *God’s People in Crisis*, 39.

“This chapter is divisible into four parts: vv. 1 – 3; 4 – 17; 18 – 20; 21 – 27. Many exegetes have been struck by the lack of order they find in the pericope vv. 4 – 17.”¹¹⁸ Verses 4, 5, and 6 are maintained in verses 14 and 15 while verse 7 has connection to verses 10, 11, and 12. So, J. de Waard convinces us that the editor of this collection might have a structure, namely, ‘chiasmus’ or palistrophe in his mind.

With the recent studies of this passage, A. G. Auld writes that “de Waard was the first to argue persuasively that Amos 5:1 – 17 is an example of palistrophe – this Greek term simply indicates that the passage turns back on itself.”¹¹⁹

To the introductory elegy (A) corresponds the concluding summons to mourn (A`); to the invitation to ‘seek me and live’ (B) corresponds the similar one to ‘seek good and not evil’ (B`); the troublesome complaint in v. 7 (C) corresponds to similar protest three verses (C`); and alone at the hinge joint of these two panels in the ‘doxology’ (D). This gives the pattern:

A (1 – 3)	A` (16 – 17)
B(4 – 6)	B` (14 – 15)
C(7)	C` (10 – 13)
D (8 – 9) ¹²⁰	

The analysis of de Waard helps us recognize the central affirmation on the divine name, ‘the LORD is his name.’ He is the one that owns the covenant, and He is the one who declares judgment to people who broke it. This is reminiscent of Amos whose focus is Yahweh. Wolff did not see this text this way, for him it was different layers of interpretation. With this new attempt to understand the text, de Waard has opened a new agenda which might need more study, but at least for now, it is convincing. I consider this undertaking to be an attempt to understand the text. This is helpful as it lays agenda for further study.

The book of Amos is also understood to have a structure of that of a covenant – lawsuit addresses. I must admit that this in itself is a broad project, but I do it here in a small scale undertaking to show the example of Amos’s techniques on delivering his message from Yahweh. The following is the structure of the covenant – lawsuit as written by Niehaus:

¹¹⁸ Martin-Archad, *God’s People in Crisis*, 38.

¹¹⁹ A. G. Auld, *Amos* (England: JSOT Press, 1986), 51.

¹²⁰ Auld, *Amos*, 51.

- I. A description of the scene of judgement.
- II. The speech of a judge.
 - A. Address to the defendant
 1. Reproach (based on the accusation)
 2. Statement (usually in the third person) that the accused has no defence.
 - B. Pronouncement of guilt.
 - C. Sentence (in second or third person).¹²¹

This covenant – lawsuit form was common in the ancient Near East. “Because these lawsuit documents deal with covenant breaking, their literary form derives from the second – millennium covenant form itself.”¹²² The following parallel illustrates this:

<u>Covenant</u>	<u>Covenant Lawsuit</u>
Introduction to Suzerain	Introduction of plaintiff/judge
Historical prologue	Historical review
Stipulations	Indictments
Summons to witnesses	Summons to witnesses
Oath (= response to a call to obedience)	Call to repentance
Blessings/curses	Judgment (enactment of curses) ¹²³

The above parallel has been observed to work with Amos’s oracles. The example is taken from Amos 5: 18 – 27:

Introduction of defendant	(5:18a)
Introduction of judge	(5:18a)
Judgment warning	(5:18b – 20)
Indictment	(5:21 – 23)
Call to repentance	(5:24)
Indictment	(5:25 – 26)
Judgement	(5:27) ¹²⁴

¹²¹ Niehaus “Amos” 318.

¹²² Niehaus “Amos” 319.

¹²³ Niehaus “Amos” 319.

¹²⁴ Niehaus “Amos” 320.

Moses' sermons in Deuteronomy follow the same covenant-treaty pattern. In Deuteronomy 1-4 Moses sets forth the history of God's gracious dealings with Israel. Then in chapters 5-26 he sets forth the covenant law of God, the stipulations that Israel must keep as God's covenant people. In Deuteronomy 27-28 Moses sets forth the blessings that would result if Israel kept God's covenant, and the curses that would result if they broke his covenant. Then in Deuteronomy 29-30, Moses explains that Israel is going to fail, but that God will restore Israel in the end. And Moses called heaven and earth to witness this covenant (verse 19). And in Deuteronomy 31-34 Moses sets forth the disposition of the covenant for the future, with the anointing of Joshua as Moses' successor as mediator.

Amos ironically reflects on the Exodus where God acts to help the people of Israel and make covenant with them. In this covenantal relationship they had a role to play: obeying him alone and following his instructions. Failure to be responsible, they were promised curse or judgement. Amos techniques left no room for the Israelites not to get what was required of them.

4.4 Translation and Interpretation

4.4.1 Amos 5: 1 – 3

Translation

¹Hear this word which I take up against you in lamentation, oh house of Israel.

²Fallen, no to rise again, is the virgin Israel; forsaken on a land, there is none to raise her up.

³For thus says the Lord God, the city that went out a thousand shall leave a hundred, and that which went out hundred shall leave ten to the house of Israel.

Interpretation

Verse one has a superscription that is contrasted to that of Amos 3:1. However the construction corresponds. In Amos 5:1 we see that the speaking subject is the prophet whereas in Amos 3:1 the speaking subject is Yahweh. The introduction שְׁמַע עוֹ אֶת-יְהוָה בְּרַעַי “hear this word” occurs in Amos 3:1 and it is a solemn command. “שְׁמַע עוֹ” “hear” frequently occurs in context where the translational equivalent “obey” is most appropriate. The forces at

work in these contexts (e.g., Josh. 1:18; Jer. 12:17) invest the word with the sense of listen with attention or give heed to.”¹²⁵

We see that in the clause אֲנִי שׁוֹרֵא אֲנִי כִּי נִשְׂא “that I take up/ am taking up,” the antecedent of שׁוֹרֵא אֲנִי is הַדָּבָר כִּי אֲנִי refers to Yahweh’s spokesperson. This may refer to Yahweh himself in the sense that what the prophet speaks comes directly from Yahweh. But at this point, Amos laments for Israel and so he is the subject.

In this sentence we also see that the verb נִשְׂא is used with קִי נָה. This we can see in Jeremiah 7:29; Ezekiel 9:1; 26:17. “קִי נָה” “a lament” is parallel to דְּבַר “word” and further defines that word.”¹²⁶ And the phrase בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל “oh house of Israel” reflects the people as a whole. The phrase is used synonymously with the “house of Jacob.”

In verse two we see that נִפְלָה “fallen” is a perfect tense which shows the completed action. Thus, Israel is portrayed to have already fallen. This depicts the actuality and finality of the fate of death of Israel. Jeremias observes that “on the surface, it is the lament for a young girl who died all too young and in the blossom of her years. As a ‘maiden’ (בְּתוּלָה) she is yet unmarried, though she may already be promised to a man, and thus engaged (Deut. 22:23f).”¹²⁷ The implication here is that she dies without descendants and without fulfilling her life. This pictures the sad fate of a virgin dying prematurely before realizing her vocation as wife and mother.

The phrase בְּתוּלָה יִשְׂרָאֵל (the virgin Israel) is a construct phrase which does not “indicate possession, that is, ‘a virgin of Israel’ (Deut. 22:19), but apposition, since Israel is the subject of the lament.”¹²⁸ בתלת appears also in the Ugaritic mythology to reflect the sense of consort. “The term is applied to Anat, the consort of El, Chief God of the Ugaritic

¹²⁵ Niehaus, “Amos” 375.

¹²⁶ Niehaus, “Amos” 409.

¹²⁷ Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 86.

¹²⁸ Niehaus, “Amos” 411.

Verse three starts with the particle כִּי that introduces the reason for their fall. “Military disaster will bring about the ultimate demise of the kingdom.”¹³⁰ The numbers found here; עֶשְׂרֵה רִבֵּי מֵאָה אֲלֶיךָ probably do not represent the precise numerical equivalent but military units. With the tenth left, that depicts a catastrophic defeat. “The prepositioning of [verse two] however, makes it quite clear that the tenth returning home from battle bears absolutely no hope.”¹³¹ The tenth that will remain will be ineffective and thus reflects the extent of the catastrophe that is about to befall Israel.

4.4.2 Amos 5: 4 – 6

Translation

⁴For thus says Yahweh to the house of Israel, seek me and live.

⁵But do not seek Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal and pass not to Beersheba, for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall be trouble.

⁶Seek the LORD and live, lest the house of Joseph blaze like fire and it devour her and none to quench it in Bethel.

Interpretation

Verse four starts with כִּי just like verse three. A conjunction in verse four answers the one in verse three. “These particles introduce the broadest of causalities: Israel is fallen (v.2), because (כִּי) the Lord affirms her destruction (v. 3); because (כִּי) of the foregoing the Lord pleads their return to him.”¹³² The verb שִׁרַשׁ “does not mean ‘inquire about’ or

¹²⁹ Niehaus, “Amos” 411.

¹³⁰ Niehaus, “Amos” 411.

¹³¹ Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 86.

¹³² Niehaus, “Amos” 414.

The conjunction ׀ at the beginning of verse five gives us a sense of contrast to the phrase וְחִיִּי וְחִיִּי “seek me and live” in verse four. The direct object is hidden in this clause וְאֵל-תִּדְרָשׁוּ בֵּית-אֵל but the context gives us נִי “me” which stands for Yahweh. בֵּית-אֵל is an adverbial accusative and thus tells where people should not go to seek Yahweh.

The same line of thinking goes out to the phrase לֹא תָ בָאוּ גִלְגָל “and to Gilgal you shall not go.” Here גִּלְגָל is also an adverbial accusative of place that expresses the idea of direction towards. לֹא shows the emphatic negative that is stronger than אֵל in the previous clause.

The clause כִּי הִגְלֵנָה גִּלְגָל לָהּ יָגֵל “for Gilgal wil go into exile” starts with כִּי which gives us the reason as to why they should not go there. This reason is stated through a word play as seen in the clause above to bring the point home. The sound play also attracts attention.

Bethel was one of the two state shrines which Jeroboam 1 established as an alternative to Jerusalem (1Kg 12: 28 – 32). It was taken from the Canaanites as a shrine for the cult of the God of the fathers (Gen 28: 10ff). It became a religious centre and the Israelites have been visiting there. “so it was a religious centre which Israelites had been visiting from time immemorial and it enjoyed in the middle of the eighth century the status attributed to it by its priest Amaziah of being the ‘king’s sanctuary’ and a ‘temple of the kingdom’ (Amos 7:13)”¹³⁴

¹³³ Mays, *Amos*, 87.

¹³⁴ Mays, *Amos*, 74.

“Gilgal was a sacred site with an important role in Israel’s traditions about her entry into the land (Josh. 4-5); Saul was anointed king there (1Sam. 11:14-15).”¹³⁵ This sacred site continued to be used for pilgrimage and offering sacrifices (Amos 5:5; Hosea 12:11).

Beersheba was an ancient holy place in the southern part of Judah’s territory. “Amos remark here and in 8:14 indicate that Israelites still continued to ‘cross over’ Judah’s borders to worship there.”¹³⁶

The people of Israel are forbidden to go to these places. But why are they forbidden to worship there? In answering this question, Martin-Achard writes:

It is with Yahweh that life is to be found, with all the riches that implies, but they diverge about the way one ought to seek the God of Israel. For Israelites, to seek God meant to offer worship to the nation’s divinity, to go on pilgrimage to the holy places, to observe the traditional ritual. For Amos, to seek Yahweh required obedience to his law, making his will one’s own, living in communion with him.¹³⁷

These religious centres are condemned and they had no future because they were misused. This “impending fate of Gilgal and Bethel is announced in sentences which play on sounds and words”¹³⁸ as seen above.

We find that verse six begins with the repetition of the opening exhortation from verse 4b. This beginning still emphasizes the connection between Yahweh and life. The verse does not have prohibition of sanctuaries or announcement of judgement, but a threat to destroy the entire people.

4.4.3 Amos 5: 7, 10 – 12

Translation

⁷They that turn judgement to wormwood and they put the righteous to the earth.

¹⁰they hate him that reproves in the gate, they abhor the one speaking the truth.

¹³⁵ Mays, *Amos*, 75.

¹³⁶ Mays, *Amos*, 88.

¹³⁷ Martin-Achard, *God’s People in Crisis*, 40.

¹³⁸ Mays, *Amos*, 89.

¹¹So because you trample on the poor and take from him burdens of wheat and you built houses of hewn stone but you shall not live in them; you planted pleasant vineyards but you shall not drink their wine.

¹²For I know your many transgressions and your great sins, they oppress the righteous, they take bribe and they turn aside the needy at the gate.

Interpretation

Verse seven starts with the clause **הֵהֶפְּכוּ כִּים** “they that turn justice to wormwood”; “the definite article (הַ) is vocative. Amos continues to speak to those he addressed in verse 6 with the plural imperatives *seek* and *live*.”¹³⁹ In this clause **לְעֵנָה** “is a bitter plant, mentioned elsewhere in prophecy (Jer. 9:14[15]; 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19; see also Prov. 5:4; Amos 6:12).”¹⁴⁰ “It might be possible to regard v. 7 as an introduction to the development of vv. 10ff, for it seems above all that it is the judges who are responsible for the perversion of justice in Israel.”¹⁴¹ Amos accuses them for perverting judgment into poison, something that is bitter. “Those who violated ‘justice’ ... and ‘righteousness’ ... have led Israel on the road to death. This word pair is of central importance in Amos. It recurs in parallel statements in 5:24 and 6:12, and ‘justice’ ... appears alone in the later interpretation at 5:15.”¹⁴² Wolff also observes that “it may be surprising that this word pair is completely unknown in Israel’s ancient legal collections in the Pentateuch. We do meet it in similarly parallel statements, however, in old sapiential material.”¹⁴³ The examples are taken from Proverbs 16:8 **מִשְׁפָּט מְשָׁפֵט** **טוֹב־ מְעַט בְּצִדְקָה מִרַב תְּבוּ אֹת בְּ לֹא צָדִיקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט נֶבֶךְ חָר לִיה נָה מְזַבַּח** “better is a little with ‘righteousness’ than great revenues without ‘justice’”; Proverb 21:3 **עֲשֵׂה עֲשֵׂה** “To do ‘righteousness’ and ‘justice’ is more acceptable to Yahweh than ‘sacrifice’”. “It is therefore not surprising that later the whole of wisdom can be summed up by this word pair ([Prov] 1:3; 2:9; cf. Gen 18:19). The motive force behind Israel’s proverbial wisdom is

¹³⁹ Niehaus, “Amos” 418.

¹⁴⁰ Niehaus, “Amos” 418.

¹⁴¹ Martin-Achard, *God’s People in Crisis*, 42.

¹⁴² Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 245.

¹⁴³ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 245.

thus that people should not lack ‘justice’ and ‘righteousness.’”¹⁴⁴ Thus, “insofar as men call the good evil and the evil good, however, they transform the ‘sweet’ into the ‘bitter.’”¹⁴⁵

As to verse ten, “the perversion of justice about which verse 7 had spoken in a fundamental, metaphorical fashion, is depicted in verses ten and twelve through concrete examples taken from the administration of justice in the gate.”¹⁴⁶

בַּ שַׁעַר “in the gate”; this “was a regular place in which the local courts of Israel towns and cities was held (Ruth 4:1, 10f; Amos 5:12, 15).”¹⁴⁷ The verb יִתְעַבּוּ “they abhor” is stronger than שָׂנְאוּ “they hate.” Wolff writes that “‘to hate’ (שָׂנָא) never occurs in the Pentateuchal texts which regulate behaviour appropriate to litigation. The older proverbial wisdom, on the other hand, speaks frequently of hatred as a response to honest speech.”¹⁴⁸ Proverbs 12:1 אִי־הוּב מוֹסֵר אֱהָב דָּעַת וְשֵׁנִי תוֹכַחַת בַּעַר “whoever loves discipline, loves knowledge, but the one who hates reproof is stupid.” The behaviour “to hate” is also seen in Proverbs 13:5 יֵשׁ נָא צַדִּיק דְּבַר־שֶׁקֶר יֵשׁ נָא צַדִּיק “a righteous man hates a false word.” This explains that “Amos reflects this realm of language when he speaks of those who abhor ‘one who testifies fully’ (דְּבַר תְּמִים). He has in mind hatred ‘in the gate’, in the clan’s place of judgement. Proverbial wisdom also knows of injustice in the gate (Proverbs 22:22).”¹⁴⁹ Wolff concludes that “thus the particular choice of words in this woe-oracle of Amos shows it to have been shaped by an ethos which must have been known to Amos on the basis of his own participation within the circle of the clan elders.”¹⁵⁰ The conclusion sounds reasonable to me because the language in this oracle resembles the language of the wisdom teacher in Israel.

¹⁴⁴ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 245.

¹⁴⁵ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 245.

¹⁴⁶ Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 92.

¹⁴⁷ Mays, *Amos*, 93.

¹⁴⁸ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 246.

¹⁴⁹ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 246.

¹⁵⁰ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 246.

Verse eleven starts with לְכֵן “therefore” which introduces the consequence that follows. It introduces the basis of the court corruption. יַעַן בּוֹשָׁסְכֶם (because of your trampling); “the shift from third person plural in the previous verse to second person plural here is typical of ancient Near Eastern covenant documents.”¹⁵¹ The old institution of the court in the gate is being undermined to make way for the economic exploitation of the weak.¹⁵² The context tells us that the wealthy classes oppress the poor. They build בְּיָתֵי אֲבָנִים חֲזָקִים “houses of hewn stone” which are costly at the expense of the poor. Exodus 22:24 forbids taking interest on money lent to the poor. “Proverbial wisdom has even more to say on this subject, and here too Amos is stands closer to the sapiential than to the legal realm.”¹⁵³ The example is taken from Proverbs 28:8 “He who increases his wealth by interest and usury gathers it for him in kind to the poor.” Therefore, “it is at the expense of their impoverished tenants that the ones here addressed have been able to afford expensive buildings of smoothly hewn stone instead of the clay brick houses that crumble easily.”¹⁵⁴

Verse twelve begins with the introduction of the reason for the threat in the previous verse. אֲנִי יְדַעְתִּי refers to the prophet himself. In this sentence, “first of all, however, Amos affirms in a summary statement that he has indeed learned of ... ‘numerous crimes and formidable wrong-doings.’”¹⁵⁵ The sin of the oppressing class becomes the reason for the threat. This verse accuses the audience of using the courts to oppress the poor. צָרַר יְרֵי צַדִּיק “they afflict the just.” This construction is a continuous action; we can also say ‘the afflictors of the just.’ The Septuagint has the same continuous construction; καταπατοῦντες δίκαιον (trampling underfoot the just/righteous). The poor are denied access to their rights.

Wolff’s emphasis on Amos being closer to the wisdom tradition than the law codes does not rule out the fact that Amos knew the law codes in the Pentateuch. For him, these laws were from Yahweh where he claimed his authority. Amos skilfully uses poetic devices

¹⁵¹ Niehaus, “Amos” 420.

¹⁵² Mays, *Amos*, 90.

¹⁵³ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 247.

¹⁵⁴ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 247.

¹⁵⁵ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 248.

and other genres to present the message from Yahweh to the people of Israel who were not faithful to the covenant.

4.4.4 Amos 5: 18 – 20

Translation

¹⁸Woe to you that desire the day of YHWH; what is this to you, the day of YHWH? It is darkness and not light.

¹⁹like when a man fled from the face of a lion and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall and a serpent bit him.

²⁰(shall) not the day of YHWH be darkness and not light? But gloomy and no brightness in it?

Interpretation

Verse eighteen begins with הוי which is the interjection that was used as a wail of grief over the dead (1Kg 13:30; Jer. 22:18; 34:5). “The woe-cry pronounced over a living audience is found only in prophetic sayings; the prophet, knowing in advance the punishment decreed by Yahweh, would lament the death of his audience as a dramatic way of disclosing the dire consequence of the conduct.”¹⁵⁶ This interjection, in the original text “evoked a tone incomparably more severe than that evoked by our own terms of lament, ‘woe’ and ‘alas’”.¹⁵⁷ And therefore, the interjection “is the central catchword of the funeral lamentation in Amos 5:1 in the manner of a superscription.”¹⁵⁸ The clause הַמְתֵּא יוֹם “you that desire” is a direct address introducing a woe oracle.

As to the “day of Yahweh” (אֶת־ יוֹם יְהוָה); “from the present context of Amos it would appear that in the mouth of the people the phrase ‘day of the Lord’ signified the day distinguished by His activity – ‘day of His judgment, or of His triumph.’”¹⁵⁹ The Israelites

¹⁵⁶ Mays, *Amos*, 103.

¹⁵⁷ Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 99.

¹⁵⁸ Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 99.

¹⁵⁹ Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Book of Amos*, 193.

thought that the day of the Lord would be the day when Yahweh finally gave them victory over their enemies and thus became free. But Amos saw it the other way around that the victory would be on the other nations they considered enemies. This meant that Israel would be defeated by those enemies.

Darkness and light symbolise good and disaster. The audience, that is, the Israelites, viewed their enemies as being in the darkness, but they did not understand their relationship with Yahweh. Therefore, “will be darkness and not light” is the same as saying, “disaster and not prosperity” catastrophe and not salvation.

In verse nineteen we see that “the two interwoven similes from the life sphere of a shepherd ... each begins with the fortunate rescue of someone from the most extreme mortal danger (escape, return home to the protection of one’s house) and ends in the unexpected, deadly actions of an animal.”¹⁶⁰ These similes are drawn from life in the villages. The “lion” (לֵאָוֹן) and the “bear” (בְּרִיָּא) appear together in the simile. “The pattern of this verse is intensely ironic and expresses the unavoidability of a disaster.”¹⁶¹ This tells us that the day is inescapable.

Verse twenty is introduced by a question that expect an affirmative answer; הֲלֹא “will it not”; this question emphasizes the statement in verse eighteen. The verse reads, “the day of YHWH ... will be darkness, and not light,” whereas verse twenty reads, “will it not be darkness, the day of YHWH, and not light?” The answer is obviously “yes the day will be darkness.” “The rhetorical question (v 20a) expects the respondent to agree that only the understanding of the Day of Yahweh as a day of calamity has continued validity.”¹⁶² Wolff also observes that “Amos himself may have derived the practice of using a sharp antithesis, and thereby the contrast between darkness and light, from the wisdom tradition (cf. Is 2:20).”¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 100.

¹⁶¹ Niehaus, “Amos” 428.

¹⁶² Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 256.

¹⁶³ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 256.

4.4.5 Amos 5: 21 – 24

Translation

²¹I hate I reject your festival gatherings and I do not smell in your assemblies.

²²For though you offer me burnt offering and your grain offerings, I will not accept them and the peace offering of your fatlings I will not look upon.

²³Take away the noise of your songs, and the melody of your harps I will not hear.

²⁴But let judgement/justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like ever flowing stream.

Interpretation

In verses 21 – 23, we find that “the essential elements of Israel worship are taken up one after another: festivals (v. 21), sacrifice (v. 22), and praise (v. 23).”¹⁶⁴ This tells us that Israel’s entire worship is rejected. “Theme as well as the formal element of the cultic decision suggest that this oracle was more probably proclaimed at the state sanctuary in Bethel than anywhere else.”¹⁶⁵ Newsome writes, “Many interpreters of Amos have pointed to this text as one of the more important things Amos had to say.”¹⁶⁶

שׁוֹנֵא אֲסַתִּי “I hate, I reject” in verse 21; “these verbs form a hendiadys, compounding the Lord’s indignant rejection of their religions festivals.”¹⁶⁷ The verb אֲסַתִּי “I reject” connotes YHWH’s refusal of תַּגִּיכֶם “your feasts.” הגִּים literary means pilgrim festivals. “In the Old Testament, the term is applied to the sanctuary festivals; especially to those of ‘unleavened cakes’, Exod. 23:15 (or ‘Passover’, Lev. 23:5,6) and ‘ingathering’, Exod. 23:16 (or booth), lev. 23:34).”¹⁶⁸ Thus the term “does not connote feasts in general, but the three major feasts designated by this term: the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of weeks and the feasts of booths...”¹⁶⁹ Newsome writes that “the passage is a poem composed

¹⁶⁴ Mays, *Amos*, 106.

¹⁶⁵ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 262.

¹⁶⁶ Newsome, Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets*, 26.

¹⁶⁷ Niehaus, “Amos” 431.

¹⁶⁸ Cripps, *The Book of Amos*, 195.

¹⁶⁹ Niehaus, “Amos” 431.

וְלֹא אֶרְיַח בְּ “and I do not take pleasure in” is literary translated as “I will not smell.” “The verb ‘to smell’ is followed by the preposition ‘in’ or ‘at’ instead of ... by the direct accusative.”¹⁷² The term אֶרְיַח “comes from the realm of burnt offerings and alludes to ריח ניחוח “smell of sweet savour or pleasing aroma” that ascends from the burning sacrifice.”¹⁷³ “It is a very old word which, along with similar words in other ancient languages, referred to the reaction of God (or the gods) to human worship. The idea behind the word was, of course, that the deity smelled the aroma of the sacrificial smoke and was thus appeased.”¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Amos might not have in mind that God smelled the sacrificial smoke literally but this word has been taken, as in many cases in the Old Testament, from the language of older mythology with the content removed to fit in Israelite’s understanding of God.

“For though” (כִּי אִם); in verse 22 “introduces a protasis whose apodosis is missing; it is possible to find it in the next line (see RSV), though the regular bi-cola of the saying resists this solution.”¹⁷⁵ Soggin writes that something has to be done to complete the apodosis, “something should be inserted like ‘do not please me’ or ‘displease me’ or another similar phrase.”¹⁷⁶ Cripps also observes that “the rhythm of v.22 would be greatly improved if this first clause could be treated as a gloss, the text so read simply, ‘with your [meal] offerings I am never pleased: and upon the thank offerings of your fat beasts I never look.’”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁰ Newsome, Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets*, 27.

¹⁷¹ Newsome, Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets*, 27.

¹⁷² Cripps, *The Book of Amos*, 195.

¹⁷³ Niehaus, “Amos” 431.

¹⁷⁴ Newsome, Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets*, 27.

¹⁷⁵ Mays, *Amos*, 105.

¹⁷⁶ J. Alberto Soggin, *The Prophet Amos* (SCM Press Ltd, London, 1982), 97.

¹⁷⁷ Cripps, *The Book of Amos*, 196.

These suggestions sound reasonable to me as they fit in the context of the book of Amos. One needs to read this text having in mind rejection of the offerings. It happens in some cases in the Old Testament that we need our imagination to fill in the gaps we feel they are left by the authors or redactors of certain books. As I see it, the imagination needs to fit in the context of the whole text in question. As long as the point in this text is the rejection of the offerings, then the suggestions above are plausible. “The whole burnt offerings were acts of sacrifice in which virtually the entire animal was laid on the alter and completely consumed by the flames.”¹⁷⁸ God declares that he will have nothing to do with such sacrifices.

Verse twenty three starts with **הָיָה יָסֵר מֵעָלַי** “take away from me.” “The singular imperative **יָסֵר הָיָה** represents a shift from the plural forms that have characterized the Lord’s general address to Israel to this point. Such shifts, however, are consistent with shifts in person and number in the ancient Near East, in both prose and poetry.”¹⁷⁹ The apparatus in the BHS suggests the emendation from the present verb which is singular (**הָיָה יָסֵר**) to its plural form **הִסִּירוּ** to fit in the whole context where Yahweh has been addressing Israel in plural form. However, if such shifts were normal in the ancient Near East writings, then I find no reason to emend to **הִסִּירוּ**. Soggin writes, ‘depart from me’: infinitive absolute with the value of a finite verb; so a correction to [הִסִּירוּ] BHS and others is unnecessary.”¹⁸⁰ **הָיָה מוֹדִין** “din” “describes the sound of a falling rain (1Kgs 18:41) as well as the roar of a crowd (1Sam. 14:19). The context here describes the people’s song, not in terms of their melody, but the noise they create.”¹⁸¹ This point explains that their songs are rejected because of the oppressive acts prevailing in the society.

Verse twenty four begins with **וְיִגְלוּ** translated as “but let ... roll on.” This form is from the root **גלל** which means “roll” or “roll along.” “The Targum of the present passage mistakes the root, and translate weakly, ‘let judgment be *revealed* like waters’ [**גְּלָהּ** for

¹⁷⁸ Newsome, Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets*, 27.

¹⁷⁹ Niehaus, Amos, 432.

¹⁸⁰ Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, 97.

¹⁸¹ Niehaus, Amos, 432.

4.4.6 *Amos 5: 25 – 27*

Translation

²⁵Did you offer to me sacrifices and burnt offerings in the wilderness forty years, oh house of Israel?

²⁶And you shall lift up Sikkuth of your king and Chiun of your image, a star of your god which you made to yourselves.

²⁷therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the LORD whose name is the God of hosts.

Interpretation

In verse 25 “Recalling the history of salvation, the Deuteronomistic redactor confronts his generation with a fundamental question regarding the cult.”¹⁸⁶ The rhetoric question here expects the answer no. Collins writes that “Amos presumably did not know the priestly laws

¹⁸² Cripps, *The Book of Amos*, 198.

¹⁸³ Cripps, *The Book of Amos*, 198.

¹⁸⁴ Niehaus, *Amos*, 432.

¹⁸⁵ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 264.

¹⁸⁶ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 264.

of Leviticus. The question implies that people could serve God satisfactorily without sacrifices and offerings.”¹⁸⁷ However, Soggin observes that “it is possible that ‘in the desert’, of uncertain syntax, is a later addition.”¹⁸⁸ The observation continues that there could have been a link between verses 25 and 26 making two rhetorical questions: ‘Did you offer me sacrifices and burnt offerings in the desert ... and did you carry Sikkuth and Kewan?’ therefore, in this case one cannot deny that Israel offered sacrifices in the desert; what is implied is that it demeaned the cult of its God to that of other deities.¹⁸⁹ I find this observation convincing because the Israelites were supposed to worship Yahweh alone and follow his ordinances. The redactor probably continues the idea of rejection of offerings and worship. What was important in the cult? For Amos justice and righteousness are ideals that make one’s worship and offerings worthy before Yahweh. The lack of justice and righteousness was likened to worshipping other gods besides Yahweh. Collins has important observation:

The critique of the cult puts in sharp focus the question of what is important in religion. For Amos to serve God is to practice justice. The slaughter of animals and the feasting and celebration that accompanied sacrifice did not contribute to that goal. On the contrary, it gave the people a false sense of security, since they felt they were fulfilling their obligations to their God when in fact they were not. For this reason, sacrifices, even if offered at great expense, were not only irrelevant to the service of God, but actually an impediment to it. The service of God is about justice. It is not about offerings at all.¹⁹⁰

The point of the rhetorical question resembles that of the one posed by Jeremiah in 7:21 – 23. Niehaus also writes that “the point in both passages is the same. The Lord is not saying that he did not give them commands regarding burnt offerings; rather, his chief concern is the proper observance of these rites.”¹⁹¹ Wolff thinks the same by writing that “above all, however, our theologian is dominated by the idea of Hosea and Jeremiah that the time in the wilderness was the time of absolute faithfulness.”¹⁹² From this point of view, “the

¹⁸⁷ John J. Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 158.

¹⁸⁸ Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, 98.

¹⁸⁹ Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, 98.

¹⁹⁰ Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 158.

¹⁹¹ Niehaus, *Amos*, 433.

¹⁹² Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 265.

first generation of Israel abided under God's law, free from the demand to sacrifice."¹⁹³ This understanding leads us to the content of the Israelite's religion. They were supposed to abide by Yahweh's law and by doing so the sacrifices could have been meaningful. The context of the book of Amos centres on the theme of justice and righteousness, this theme becomes important in the Israelite's religion because the rejection of cult is a result of injustice and unrighteousness in the society.

As to verse 26 "If even the sacrifices were absent, then how much more was this true of foreign deities! Since the subject and the tense of v 26 correspond to those of the question in v 25, it seems most reasonable to assume v 26 to be a continuation of the question."¹⁹⁴

In this verse we find the mention of Mesopotamian gods. Soggin writes, "the form of *sikkut* and *kiyun* is a result of pronouncing their consonants with the vowels of 'abomination' (*siqqus*), a scribal device for derogating names of false gods."¹⁹⁵ At this point, "the gods referred to were probably *sakkut* and *kaiwan*, both known from Babylonian sources as names of the astral deity Saturn."¹⁹⁶ In connection to this point Wolff writes, "Mostly likely, the Deuteronomist designates as *Sakkut* and *kewan* those astral deities who probably found acceptance among the inhabitants of the northern kingdom in conjunction with the Assyrian occupation and resettlement (cf. 2 kings 17:29 – 31), and who had become known in Jerusalem."¹⁹⁷ Wolff continues writing that "the foreign deities are rejected merely on the grounds that they are made by human hands. "to make (for oneself)" ([ל] עשה), with idols as the object, is an expression used by the Deuteronomist in dependence on Hosea."¹⁹⁸

In Verse 27, "Yahweh himself will exile the nation; the God who delivered them from Egyptian captivity will bring them into a new bondage."¹⁹⁹ Wolff writes:

¹⁹³ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 265.

¹⁹⁴ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 265.

¹⁹⁵ Mays, *Amos*, 112.

¹⁹⁶ Mays, *Amos*, 112.

¹⁹⁷ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 265.

¹⁹⁸ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 265.

¹⁹⁹ Mays, *Amos*, 113.

Amos' announcement of punishment upon those who 'despise God's commandments and at the same time deceive themselves by presuming to maintain through the cultus a stable relationship with God corresponds to the threat against Gilgal which, extended to all Israel, is explicitly repeated before Amaziah at Bethel (7:17; cf 7:11), namely deportation. In this connection Yahweh introduces himself as the commander-in-chief who decrees the deportation into exile...²⁰⁰

The Israelites are told that they would be taken into exile beyond Damascus. This is the place where the Israelites will go as exiles. Mays notes that "the phrase points to the territory of Assyria and that nation may be concretely in mind here. 'Exile' is a word with implications of horror which outrun the ruin and pain of defeat and capture by an enemy."²⁰¹ He further writes that "for Israel it meant being removed from the land promised to the fathers, displacement from the geographical locus of the unfolding history of election, and so was in effect a kind of excommunication."²⁰²

4.3 Theological Reflection

Amos depicts God in the same way He is depicted in the first pages of the Pentateuch. In Amos, God is portrayed to have sovereign power over the world He created. God formed the mountains and made the wind (Amos 4:13). He made the Pleiades and Orion (5:8). He draws water from the seas to bring rain upon the earth (5:8; 9:6). He makes day night and the night day (4:13). As to celestial realm, he built his temple in the heavens (9:6). He made human beings in his image and does not tolerate idolatry (5:26).

For Amos, God is also the Lord of the nations. He is the judge of the nations (1:3 – 2:3) and Israel too. He brought the Israelites from Egypt to possess the land of the Amorite (2:9 – 10). He gave them "torah" which they did not obey (2:4). God makes the people guilty of breaking the covenant and so he rises another nation against them (6:14). Nevertheless God is a loving one. He desires life and not death. He wants to restore the broken relationship with the people of Israel. He says, "seek me and live" (5:4).

By showing God's work with humanity, Amos presupposes that God is the only God of Israel and of other nations too. For him God is the one who gives laws and people have to

²⁰⁰ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 266.

²⁰¹ Mays, *Amos*, 113.

²⁰² Mays, *Amos*, 113.

follow. That is why he refers to the “torah of Yahweh” (2:4). The structure of Amos chapter five shows the emphasis on God (5:8). We also see that the presence of God is inescapable. In Amos 9:2 we see the same theme as in Psalm 139:8:

Amos 9:2

Though they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.

Psalm 139:8

If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!

In the above texts, both of them portray that no one can ever escape from God as He is everywhere.

Therefore, Amos derives his authority from God himself, who is the saviour and the giver of the law of the people of Israel and all other nations as well. For Amos, God punishes those who do not obey the law, particularly injustice and unrighteousness in the society. For him the worship of God is nothing if the society is unjust. People are punished because they do not practice justice, which is the demand of God. For Amos, to serve God is to practice justice.

I see Amos 5: 21 – 24 to contain more important things Amos had to say. What we see in these verses is about what God was expecting from the Israelites. This passage becomes more relevant to modern readers because of its theme: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like ever flowing stream.”

4.4 Conclusion

Yahweh pronounced funeral dirge against Israel. In verse seven he addressed directly those who corrupted justice for their own gain. We have seen that among all other crimes against God, the lack of justice was a chief concern. The rich were trampling over the poor and the little the poor had, they took it. The people with power abused those who were right in the law, they accepted bribes and they turned away those in need. God asked these people to seek him so that they could live. But if they did not turn away from their evil ways, then

God would punish them and that there would be wailing and mourning in streets. Unfortunately, the effect of this day of punishment would not let the poor untouched.

God hated their feasts and their offerings; he would not even hear their songs. The day of Yahweh was inescapable; they would be carried beyond Damascus because of their injustice acts which tainted the name of God. Amos looked at the Israelite society through the lens of moral and ethical standards as seen in the law codes and wisdom literature, which for him, were given by God. Does the book of Amos have anything to do with the contemporary world? The next chapter discusses this question.

Chapter Five

SOCIAL JUSTICE: CHURCH'S CONCERN

Amos in his function as a messenger of Yahweh understood himself to be a herald of the one who sent him. He was very much aware of his own vocation and mission. In Amos 3:8 he indicates the irresistibility of his divine calling. He diagnosed the nation from the moral ethical lens of being incapable of acting with justice. The terms “justice” and “justice” recur often throughout the book. Corruption of justice seems to be a recurring theme of the book. Amos delivered the message to the Israelites and the neighbouring nations without the fear of criticism. He said what Yahweh asked him to say and not what the people would like him to say.

Amos had interest in commercial, political and legal system. Court system made way for economic exploitation of the weak. We have seen that the poor and the weak were no longer safeguarded by the law and because of the excessive rates of interest, the poor could be sold like slaves for the smallest debts. The rich could afford expensive things at the expense of the weak. Justice was corrupted and Amos saw that religion was an empty shell when the attitude of the worshipper was corrupt. This is the challenge that Amos is giving to the current church. With church here I mean the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

I find it important to have a conviction that we belong together. All institutions that protect human rights will be valueless if there is not any sense of brotherhood. Being in a right relationship with fellow human beings and God yields justice. The prophets have been concerned with human solidarity and dignity. Those with economic power ought to help the powerless instead of enriching themselves. Righteousness and justice have to do with moral character.

So far what we have seen that the book of Amos has to do with moral behaviour. What was happening in Israel was violence, trampling on people's rights and robbery. All these acts were against the law codes. Amos wanted justice and righteousness to prevail. The economic system has to entail human relationships and not just consumption of the products.

Those involved in the economic system need to look into the value of thriving human relationships and thereby improve human dignity.

Amos believes that justice is possible as the world is under the rule of a just God. The justice of God is embodied in human justice and therefore, for any person who believes in God, needs to understand oneself as a vehicle of God's justice. We do not find the expression "social justice" in the Old Testament, however what we see is social relationships regulated by the law codes which, of course, reflects our present use of the term "social justice." it is important for individuals to learn their moral obligation in the society. A moral and ethical life is our loving response to God. How much does the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania involve herself in justice issues in the Tanzanian society?

5.1 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania Concern for Social Justice

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania is the federation of the Lutheran churches in the United Republic of Tanzania located in East Africa. In 1938, seven Lutheran churches, which were operating separately, founded a federation known as the federation of the Lutheran churches in Tanganyika. On June 19, 1963, these churches, under the umbrella of federation, merged to become a single church known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. The church is led by the presiding bishop "Mkuu" together with twenty diocesan bishops representing twenty dioceses of the church, and has a membership of more than 5.3 million in a population of nearly 38 million Tanzanians. The church is affiliated with All Africa Conference of Churches (AAIC), Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The ELCT is an organisation that reaches out to the people of Tanzania offering worship opportunities, Christian education and social services.

5.1.1 Concern for Social Justice

The concern for justice appeared in the document called "The Bagamoyo Statement." The statement stated that Bagamoyo, which is one of the districts in the Coast region in Tanzania, "is a historical place where an African was emancipated from slavery by Christian missionaries more than hundred years ago."²⁰³ The bishops reminded the government

²⁰³ ELCT, "The Bagamoyo Statement," 2.

through the document that “slave trade prospered when our grand parents with their economic and political strengths were sold and taken to develop the economies of other countries, and to benefit the rich in those countries.”²⁰⁴ On this logic, the bishops with one voice stated that the slave trade that was opposed a long time ago has resurfaced in another form as the economy of this country benefits the people of other countries, and that the rich of these countries, after satisfaction, drop crumbs to us because they force our government to succumb to them by giving it aid attached with very harsh conditions and thus totally denying us economic rights.²⁰⁵

Following the denial of economic rights, “the severity of poverty increases, when our country has abundant wealth; this allows a clique of people to enjoy the wealth of this country”²⁰⁶ as a result most Tanzanians do not enjoy the fruits of their labour for their better life. The bishops requested the government to listen and consider the cry of the people whose justice is trampled and “where corruption is contravening the constitution, the misappropriation of government money, the haphazard sale of land and the like.”²⁰⁷ The bishops also reminded the government that the citizens are major producers and tax payers and so, the problems they encounter may make them fail to understand the meaning of political and economic democracy.

So far, the document revealed very important issues to be considered by the government, but as I pointed out earlier in the statement of the problem, the situation still lingers to this day. The gap between the rich and the poor increases and majority are still suffering as a result of economic hardship. We still hear in the media reports of grand corruption of billions of tax payers’ money. Most of the people involved in the scandal are religious! Most of church members do not know the meaning of political and economic democracy and what it means for them, as part of the society to have responsible leaders. What has the church done so far? The following is the responsibility of the church in the society as pointed out by the document.

²⁰⁴ ELCT, “The Bagamoyo Statement,” 2.

²⁰⁵ ELCT, “The Bagamoyo Statement,” 2.

²⁰⁶ ELCT, “The Bagamoyo Statement,” 2.

²⁰⁷ ELCT, “The Bagamoyo Statement,” 3.

The bishops should remind the believers and the whole church leadership that, because the church is part of the society, it has to be directly involved in education for democracy from parish to national level.

However, direct involvement alone is not enough. The church has to be vocal, condemn the evil, and rebuke the society so that it does not plunge into destruction brought about by fracas, theft, robbery, murder, drunkenness, etc.

Further, we recommend that, apart from praying and reconciling our society, the church should be involved in [sensitization], directing and advising society, the government, political parties and individuals on the execution and implementation of human rights.

Therefore, in order to help our country, the whole church should [sensitize] the people to know their rights of voting and to usher them into the culture of democratic participation and not guided democracy. People should be educated on how to identify the right candidate regardless of the political party, colour, tribe, ideology or religious faith.

In order to accomplish this, the church should use various means of media such as radio, newspapers/magazines and TV in order to educate and rebuke immoral methods used by various political parties.²⁰⁸

These duties of the church were very important and if they were implemented adequately, they would have been very useful. The questions here are; how much has the church done, since the release of this document, to help people and communities understand issues and then make decisions in this complex world? There are important questions that confront the people today about justice issues in the world, how much has the church helped the people reflect about their moral and ethical implications?

The questions raised above might have answers in the above duties of the church as stated in the “Bagamoyo Statement.” But there is no document which reveals the teaching of the church with regard to social justice in the ELCT. We find statements resulting from a certain circumstance, but there is no identifiable theology of the church in matters of justice. The lack of the teaching defeats the implementation of those duties that would help people reflect about their social responsibilities basing on moral and ethical standards in the teaching.

The people of Israel knew their duties in the society as stipulated in the law codes and wisdom material. These were handed down from generation to generation. The prophets used

²⁰⁸ ELCT, “The Bagamoyo Statement,” 12-14.

these materials to remind the ruling class and the people to reconsider their ethics. Amos used law codes and wisdom literature as yardstick. These laws, according to Amos, were God-given and thus he was a messenger. Of course we have the Bible, but people need the teaching on social justice from the Bible and other material that talk about justice issues.

The teaching on morality and ethics related to social justice issues will be an opportunity to teach people and to help them to understand the issues by providing some guidance and support for individual Christians living in such situations described in the teaching that they may be able to make decisions concerning these issues.

We need to understand that the teaching can guide the ELCT in looking at how she does things. It can serve as a policy to guide the church in her discussions with the government. When church leaders stand and speak against any injustice, they can do that with full confidence that this is the official position of the church.

The ELCT needs to see the responsibility, as a prophet, to the government as her public witness. At times she needs to denounce injustice and announce the good news that God intended something different. This is a prophetic task. The teaching on justice issues can be a good starting point and that can be followed up by social statements in different situations. The church has a mandate from God just like the prophets, she has to deal with situations of injustices just like the prophets using all her skills to make sure that every one gets the intended message and people see the importance of turning into ethical life.

Amos dealt with justice issues in his own way using law codes and wisdom literature due to the extremity of the situation he was facing. He was very harsh because of the situation. He reminded the people of what God was expecting from them. Probably the church cannot be that harsh but the book of Amos gives her agenda for the concern of the needy and how serious it gets when their rights are trampled. For Amos, to serve God is to practice justice and that God punishes all who are unjust and unrighteous.

The law codes and wisdom literature could have been enough, but why prophets? They stood as messengers of God to teach and remind the people of what was in the law codes. Having the Bible alone is not enough, the church needs to be a messenger of God by teaching and warning people with the Bible and other non-biblical literature as their source of knowledge. This is why I strongly support having the official teaching on justice issues for

every one to read to be reminded of what God is expecting from them. It is high time that the church, with passion for the vulnerable in the society, prepares a social doctrine and preaches it wherever she is.

“The Bagamoyo Statement” would have been successful if there was an official teaching on moral and ethical standard related to social justice issues. Many politicians think that the duty of the church is to preach only and thus polarising what belongs to the spiritual realm and what belongs to a secular world. The official teaching may help educate politicians about the holistic mission of the church and thereby take her social statements seriously without polemics. The church, through her official teaching, will help people know what God expects from them and that the earth is God’s and never to polarise the secular and the sacred. This understanding will be reminiscent of prophet Amos who does not see that difference.

Much of biblical anthropology is the story of sin. What we learn from the book of Amos is that, he speaks the mind of God when he attacks the sins of the nations, Judah and Israel. The story of sin revolves around fallen humanity and rebellious people. The book of Amos attacks two major areas of sin, namely: idolatry and social injustice.

“Justice” and “righteousness” are very important terms in the book of Amos. The first term is related to the Hebrew word “to judge” of which the setting is in the court of law. The council of the village elders had to decide about a problem or dispute in ancient Hebrew community to maintain the social welfare by ensuring that proper relations prevail in the community. It was the task of these elders to defend by means of the law those who were poor and weak and they could not defend themselves. Amos 5:10 shows that this responsibility was not carried out and therefore the moral law of God was being ignored. The book condemns these crimes against humanity and treats them as sin against God.

The book of Amos teaches us that private faith and public conduct are interwoven together. Worship is meaningful if it is backed up with social harmony and justice. God is far more interested in a just and righteous society than in a church worship which is indifferent to social evils. The church cannot pray to the father in the heavens while ignoring the crises of the needy.

Amos looked very harsh in his message because of the extremity of the situation itself. He showed how much God cared for the needy and the weak in the community and

what happens when God is sidelined. The church has a lesson from the burning passion of Amos to the underprivileged. The church needs to develop this kind of passion when she speaks for the poor and powerless.

5.2 Beyond Christianity

Previous chapters have revealed that wisdom literature has influenced the shape and the content of the book of Amos. As the book of Amos stands closer to the wisdom material which has less reference to God, it implies that it gives room to recognise other values besides Christianity.

Wisdom material gives general wise advice on how to live good life. There are also pieces of advice with regard to handling of the weak and the poor in the community. These thoughts are not restricted only to Christianity but are found in other thoughts which teach the same values.

The book of Amos has taught us that Yahweh recognised the values of Israel's neighbouring nations and that is why he proclaimed judgment against them because they did not abide by those values. This point needs to widen the understanding of the church that the God of Christianity recognises moral standards from other religions or thoughts too.

We have seen that Israel integrated Near Eastern thought about social justice in their way of dealing with injustice issues. Justice was the obligation of the citizens and the ruler. Objects of social concern were the poor, orphans, sojourners and widows in Ancient Near East. Moreover the question of bribery and partiality in the lawsuits was the concern in Near East. All these social concerns were incorporated in Israelite's law codes. Can the church integrate thoughts on social justice from non-Christian ideas into her theology of social justice? I admit that this study is also a project on its own, but I have reduced it to a small scale study due to the limited length of my paper.

Sometimes adherents of other religions can have useful ideas that can be incorporated in our theology of the church. Judaism and Christianity are not the only religions that recognise the equality of all human beings. Other religions share the same commitments. the famous "Golden Rule" is a principle of respectful human interaction that is attested in various religions such as Hinduism "Do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you",

Buddhism “Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful”, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism (“Regard your neighbour’s gain as your own gain, and your neighbour’s loss as your own loss”) or Islam (“Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself”). The following quotations show how different religions attest to human dignity;

- Confucianism** Do not do to others what you would not like yourself. Then there will be no resentment against you, either in the family or in the state.
Analects 12:2
- Buddhism** Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.
Udana-Varga 5,1
- Hinduism** This is the sum of duty; do naught onto others what you would not have them do unto you.
Mahabharata 5,1517
- Islam** No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.
[Number 13 of Imam “*Al-Nawawi’s Forty Hadiths*”]
- Judaism** What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.
Talmud, Shabbat 31d
- Taoism** Regard your neighbor’s gain as your gain, and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss.
Tai Shang Kan Yin P’ien
- Zoroastrianism** That nature alone is good which refrains from doing another whatsoever is not good for itself.
Dadisten-I-dinik, 94,5²⁰⁹

The ethical teachings in Islam want a person to lead a simple and clean life which is morally good. Islam teaches the spirit of mutual love and sympathy. “It insists on compassion for neighbours and ordains *infiq fi sabil Allah*, spending in the way of Allah for the

²⁰⁹Teaching Values.com, “The Universality of the Golden Rule in the World Religions.” Available from <http://www.teachingvalues.com/goldenrule.html>. internet; accessed 16 April 2010.

promotion of good and virtue in its widest sense.”²¹⁰ We can also see that Islam develops a “system of social responsibility and national solidarity and provides for the help of the poor and needy irrespective of their faith, colour, race, creed, religion, or country, and protects them from selfishness, greed and exploitation by the vested interests.”²¹¹ This system is required everywhere for the good of the people concerned. I think the church needs to learn from this sense of responsibility for a health and integrated society.

There is the same concern for the healthy society from Hinduism which reveals the responsibility of every person. Narayanan gives typical examples of virtues that all human beings should have: “Remembering a good deed and returning it with another... lack of enmity to all beings in thought word and deed; compassion and charity are the eternal *dharma* of the good.”²¹² In these words we see the care of all human beings. This tells me that these virtues are common to everyone and the church needs to think that her God recognises these virtues.

This is also true in African Religion. Magesa writes that “in African religious ethical understanding, the earth is given to humanity as a gratuitous gift and all human beings possess an equal claim to it and the resources it offers.”²¹³ This point implies that all human beings need to have equal access to the resources on the earth. No one should claim the right to own more while others own nothing. For this to be effective “God’s representative on earth, in the form of the chief or another recognised leader, has the responsibility of overseeing their use.”²¹⁴ The reason to give all these quotations and explanations is to show that the concern for social justice is wider and these religions can contribute to Christian theology of social justice.

Social justice is a world problem which affects every human being regardless religious affiliation. The church as affected, in collaboration with other religions, needs to

²¹⁰ Gwilym Beckerlegge (ed.), *The World Religious Reader* (2nd ed.) (London and Newyork: Routledge, 2001), 173.

²¹¹ Beckerlegge, *The World Religious Reader*, 173.

²¹² Vasudha Narayanan, “Hindu Ethics and Dharma” in *Ethics in the World Religions* (ed., Joseph Runzo and Nancy M. Martin; Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 181.

²¹³ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997) 63.

²¹⁴ Magesa, *African Religion*, 63.

take part in addressing the situation. This approach will help achieve new thoughts and expand the horizon on dealing with social justice.

Handling justice issues can be different from time to time depending on the seriousness of the matter. The prophets like Amos had to speak against social injustice with a sense of resentment and passion not found in the previous literature because of the seriousness of the situation they faced. There is a way of dealing with the situation in this age where injustice is rampant. At times the language of Amos is inevitable basing on the ethical standards we have.

Today we can also see the ideals for social justice in different laws which uphold the dignity of all human beings. Article one of the United Nations Human Rights Declaration assert that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”²¹⁵

The constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania asserts the same commitment. Part three on basic rights and duties states that all human beings are born free, and are all equal. Every person is entitled to recognition and respect for his dignity. The concern for human dignity is found in many places and here for the sake of space, I have mentioned only a few of them.

5.3 Conclusion

Amos dealt with the fallen and rebellious humanity. Social disorder was the problem; it denied people of their dignity and integrity. The image of God was destroyed through disrespect and dishonour of the value of poor people’s lives. The book of Amos shows that God cares for the weak and He does not tolerate any misconduct against them. The church needs to learn from this book as it portrays the God who wants a healthy, harmonious and just society. The major object of the concern is the underprivileged that God loves and protects.

The church in collaboration with other religions and institutions that support human dignity needs to fight social evils and be a voice for the voiceless. Through a teaching on

²¹⁵United Nations, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights” available from <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a1>. Internet; accessed 16 April 2010.

social justice the church will make a step forward in her prophetic role. Let the teaching be the prophetic voice of the church.

The virtues that human beings need to have open more collaboration with other faiths and institutions that are not Christian. The church needs to know that God recognises all these virtues that aim at upholding human dignity and integrity.

Chapter Six

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study began with the thought that there is no equal access to basic conditions of life. There is a wider gap between the rich and the poor and therefore social injustice has been mentioned to be a very big problem the world is facing today. The performance of the people who have been put into office to oversee the distribution of life's necessities is put to question. The attitude of the rich and the powerful towards the poor and weak is also questioned since there is an increase of oppression and exploitation which benefit a few rich people.

The book of Amos dealt with this situation with an eye to the moral ethical standards set for the harmonious and just society. All these acts of violence against humanity have been the reason for the impending judgement in Israel and the surrounding nations. This thesis aimed at examining ethical standards with regard to social justice in the book of Amos and seeing their application to the prophetic role of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

The discovery of literature related to the care of the weak in the Near East has helped the scholars to see the similarities of content and form between the law in Israel and Mesopotamian and Egyptian laws. This study has shown that the care of the weak was the responsibility of the king who was given divine ability by the gods to perform such duties. This care was extended to the other people who were supposed to take care of the poor in the community. The same content is found in "Torah" in the Old Testament, sometimes with some adjustments to fit in the Israelite context. There is the same content in the wisdom material but not in the form of law but general advice for a healthy society.

The exodus event was important to the Israelites because it was a reminder of the experience of oppression when they were weak in Egypt and the joy of being free from oppression. They were reminded to care for the weak because they experienced the same suffering as slaves in Egypt and so they knew how it felt to be oppressed and not taken care of. We have seen that the law of justice was to prevail without any discrimination. Righteousness and justice reflected moral qualities that God was expecting from Israel. These

two terms aimed at restoring the broken relationships with the intention of promoting harmony and equity in the community.

This study revealed that beneath Israel's external power and prosperity, the nation was corrupt. Oppression of the poor and the weak prevailed in courts of law. The law favoured the rich and the poor were left without help. The rich got richer at the expense of the poor. Because of the prevalent injustices, Amos starts by pronouncing judgement first to the surrounding nations, Judah and finally Israel. The visions from God revealed the emphatic message that the judgement was near. God put the Israelites on the same level with the neighbouring nations revealing that He was the God of all the nations and therefore the judgement went to all of them. Israelite's covenant with God did not exempt them from his moral standards. God was understood as the God of moral righteousness and the judge of the unjust since He is justice.

The study has shown that Amos used the language used by the wisdom teacher. Because of this language, the book is seen to stand closer to the wisdom material rather than law codes in the Pentateuch. Amos was not a clan teacher but it seems that he was exposed to the circles of the sages in Israel. He was the prophet in wisdom teacher's cloak who was sent to proclaim judgement to the nations and the Israelites.

We have seen in the exegetical work in chapter four that God, through Amos, pronounced a funeral dirge against Israel. This chapter revealed that the chief concern of the book was the lack of justice. The rich trampled on the poor and took even the little the poor had. Those who were right in the law were abused. Bribery was accepted in the lawsuits and the rights of the poor were taken. Those with power turned away the needy. God asked them to turn to him so that they could live otherwise the judgement was imminent. We have also seen that because of these unjust acts, God hated their entire worship and He could not even hear their songs: they were treated as noise and the judgement was inevitable.

This work has discovered that Amos used moral standards as seen in the law codes in the Pentateuch. He was aware of these laws related to care of the poor because he understood the "garment taken in pledge" in Amos 2: 8 which depicts Exodus 22: 26 – 27. The law codes have instructions with regard to taking care of the poor and the weak in the society. Amos did not use the language as seen in the law codes but the language of the wisdom teacher. Therefore Amos as a prophet was exposed to both the law codes and the wisdom material. He

reminded the people of what they already knew with regard to caring of the weak in the society.

Amos dealt with the fallen and rebellious humanity which is not different from the current humanity. Social disorder which denied people of their dignity and integrity was the problem. This study has revealed that the book of Amos has taught us how God cares for the poor and the weak in the society and how serious it gets when they are oppressed. The church needs to learn from the book in her prophetic role in the society. She has to look at the society as God sees it. God wants a healthy, harmonious, and just society. It is important to understand that the object of the social concern is the poor and weak. Moral ethical standards need to be viewed in the light of God himself as Amos saw it.

The book of Amos gives the church the challenge of collaborating with other non-Christian creeds and institutions that support human dignity and integrity. Amos does so by portraying the God who recognises the moral ethical standards from the Israel's neighbouring nations. God proclaimed judgement when those nations failed to conform to those standards. It is time that the church views God who also recognises those virtues from other religions and institutions.

This study suggested that for the church to be more effective in her prophetic role, she needs to prepare a teaching on ethical and moral standards with regard to social justice in the community. This teaching will help the church in her discussions with the government and be a guideline in her follow up on justice issues in the community. One of the roles of the prophets was to emphasize the equality of all people before Yahweh. The church in her prophetic role needs to assume the same duty of preaching that equality. The teaching on justice issues will help the church in educating the community through media and pulpits and above all in her educational programmes in Sunday schools, confirmation classes and other groups in the church and the whole community at large. The teaching will become the framework for preserving the equality and dignity of every person in Tanzania and beyond.

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