

CHAPTER FIVE

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF AMOS 8:4-8

5.1 RHETORICAL UNIT

Similar to the previous texts analyzed (Am 2:6-8; 5:7-15, 24), Amos 8:4-8 is not an independent unit in itself but it is a sub-sub-unit. It can be seen in the division below (following Smith's structure [1989:246-247]):

UNIT	SUB-UNIT	SUB-SUB-UNIT
Wailing, Not Forgiveness at the End (Amos 8:1-14)	No forgiveness in a vision of summer fruit (8:1-3)	
	The end will bring wailing but no word from God (8:4-14)	Abusive economics actions bring end to the poor (8:4-6)
		Social injustices will bring God's mournful day in the end (8:7-10)
		There will be no new word from God, only death (8:11-14)

However, it is important to clarify in the beginning that the rhetorical unit analyzed will not include Amos 8:9-10 because it is part of the punishment section of Amos 8:7-10. Since the following discussion will not focus on the punishment, this section will not be discussed in this section. Above structure shows that Amos 8:4-8 is part of the larger unit of 8:1-14 and the sub-unit of 8:4-14. Stuart (1987:383-384) points out that prophetic judgment oracles do not normally exist apart from an indictment, God rarely announces punishment for covenant breaking without providing some sort of evidence or reminder of how the covenant has been broken.

While scholars disagree on the division of the book, it is difficult to decide to which unit a passage belongs. On the one hand, a plain reading of the last section (Am 8:4-9:15) shows that Amos 8:4-14 may be seen as part of a larger unit. From the perspective of structural markers, this passage (Am 8:4-14), in parallel with Amos 7:1-8:3, is an independent unit introducing the next part of the prophet's speech (cf Möller 2003:102). It is important to note here that 8:4 has a significant function in this regard. The main reason is that this verse begins a major unit in Amos (cf Stuart 1987:367-370) by using the conventional signal: שמעו + direct object containing "this" (זאת) + vocative identifying the addressees. Along with this, the genre shifts from vision report in 8:1-3 to prophetic discourse. It also shifts from addressing Israel in the third person to second person. All of this signal the beginning of a new unit for the audience (see Dorsey 1992:321).

In addition, the sub-unit of Amos 8:4-14 may be considered as independent because it focuses on a theme called "judgment speech" that consists of both indictment and judgment. It can be clearly seen in the way the prophet sets the opinion that the punishment (Am 8:7-14) exists as a result of covenant breaking and mistreating other fellow humans who are poor and weak (Am. 8:4-6). Chisholm (1990:101) agrees with this and insists that this judgment is addressed to those who were guilty of socioeconomic dishonesty and oppression. Thus, if the unit is viewed on the basis of its structural markers and its theme, it seems to be correct to consider Amos 8:4-14 as a complete rhetorical sub-unit consisting of an indictment and a judgment.

On the other hand, the possibility exists that the texts may be included as part of a much larger unit, Amos 8:4-9:15 because it characterizes a certain literary device. Limburg (1987:215) believes that Amos 8:4-9:15 contains seven divine speech formulas: six נאם formulas (8:9, 11; 9:7, 8, 12, 13) and one אמר formula (9:15). Using a similar analysis, Dorsey (1999:284) argues that there are at least three recurring phrases used by the prophet in unbroken succession throughout the unit, for example, the combination of ביום ההוא ("in that day" 8:3, 9, and 13), which may function as anticipatory to the book's final unit, and הנה ימים באים ("See, days are coming" 9:11-13), the periodic repetition of first-person declaration of

divine future actions, “I will . . . ,” as many as twenty four times, and the אני אדבר (“declaration of [Sovereign] YHWH/Sovereign”) formula (Am 8:9, 11; 9:7, 8, 12, 13). Taking into consideration these literary styles, it would also be correct to say that the unit has a larger range than was proposed earlier.

Despite such differences, it is important to give attention to the context of the sub-unit (Am 8:4-14). Considering the series of five visions (Am 7:1, 4, 7; 8:1; 9:1), the prophet seems to insert different elements among them, such as a dialogue and a series of oracles. This can be seen clearly in the insertion of the conflict between Amos and Amaziah (Am 7:10-17) and the judgment oracles against Israel (Am 8:4-8, 9-10, 11-12, 13-14). Based on such insertions, or put another way “the interruption of the visions cycle”, it is believed that such oracles were inserted by the school or disciples of Amos. Wolff (1977:325) says, “The parallelism between the insertions in 7:9, 10-17 and 8:3, 4-14 leads one to think of Amos’ school as most likely responsible for both supplements.” Against this, Rudolph (as quoted by Paul [1990:256]) critically argues that Amos will indeed be very *Ausdrucksarm* (“poor of expression”) if all these were to be deleted. In other words, there is no differentiation between the visions and the oracles. It is more logical to think that both visions and oracles are indeed the product of the literary ingenuity of the prophet himself in alternating and neatly combining the two.

Since the focus of the research is not on the larger unit(s), 8:4-14 or even 8:4-19, however, this study will give particular attention to the smaller sub-sub-unit of Amos 8:4-8. Since its larger sub-unit (Am 8:4-14) mainly contains two pairs of oracle elements, indictment (Am 8:4-6) and punishment (Am 8:7-14), as Wolff (1977:324) recognizes that among the oracles in these visionary scenes, only Amos 8:4-8 contains a complete judgment speech, with a remarkable broad indictment (vv. 4-6) and an announcement of punishment, characterized by its blandness (vv. 7-8). Amos 8:4-8 is not independent, however, it can be treated as “an independent sub-sub unit” within the larger context because it contains a full elaboration of Israel’s indictment and punishment (See the structure below):

שמעו־זאת	(8:4)	--Indictment--
השאפים אביון		
ולשבית ענוי־ארץ		
לאמר	(8:5)	
מתי יעבר החדש ונשבירה שבר		
והשבת ונפתחה־בר		
להקטין איפה ולהגדיל שקל	(8:5)	--Indictment--
ולעות מאזני מרמה		
לקנות בכסף דלים	(8:6)	
ואביון בעבור נעלים		
ומפל בר נשביר		
נשבע יהוה בגאון יעקב	(8:7)	--Punishment--
אם־אשכח לנצח כל־מעשיהם		
העל זאת לא־תרגז הארץ	(8:8)	
ואבל כל־יושב בה		
ועלתה כאר כלה ונגרשה ונשקה		
כיאור מצרים		

In this regard, it can be remarked that the sub-sub unit of Amos 8:4-8 expresses a single concept of intentionality of a specific group of people in Israel. Accordingly, the sub-sub-unit does not primarily refer to deeds of the guilty, but rather to their plans and their most secret intentions. To this end, the Hebrew text uses a long, uninterrupted chain of infinitives extending to verse 6 that can be hardly imitated in translation. These verses must be understood as forming an inseparable unit, because it has a beginning (v. 4a) and an end (v. 6), with the middle verses framed (vv. 4b-5) introducing a completely new theme into the book of Amos: deceit in commerce, through which the traditional concepts are now interpreted (cf Jeremias 1998:146-7). It is important to add that although Amos 8:4-6 seems to be in parallel with Amos 2:6-8 in terms of the issue addressed, and is sometimes considered as a more elaborate description of the greed and corruption of the former (see Hayes 1988:208), still, the latter has its own significance compared to the previous in terms of the theme addressed, namely cheating in business. Because of this single complete theme, the sub-sub-unit (Am 8:4-8) should be thought of as forming “an independent unit.”

Moreover, this sub-sub unit of Amos 8:4-8 can be still treated as “an independent unit” because of the use of an artful literary device, a sevenfold structure. It may be easily seen in a list of seven sins of the addressed group of people of Israel,

especially the merchants who are rich and powerful. Limburg (1987:220) lists the prophet's accusations against them by quoting the things that they say: (1) When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? (2) And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale? (3) to make the ephah small; (4) to make the shekel great; (5) to deal deceitfully with false balances; (6) to buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals; and (7) that we may sell the refuse of the wheat.

As discussed in the previous chapter, when discussing the meaning of this sevenfold structuring, the number of seven may symbolically refer to a concept of completeness, or simply of wholeness. Therefore, the list of these seven actions of injustice committed by this particular group of people can be thought of as a complete inventory of the crimes against the poor and the needy. For the purpose of the study, this list can be rhetorically analyzed independently apart from the second part in Amos 8:7-14.

Further discussion of the sub-sub-unit analyzed, however, will be presented in close relation with its larger contexts, Amos 8:7-8, 10-14, and even as far as Amos 9:1-15. Since Amos 8:4-8 represents a complete thought, namely an elaboration of the abusive economic actions and its consequences, the focus of analysis on the sub-sub-unit of Amos 8:4-8 in this chapter purposively would be considered and analyzed as “an independent rhetorical unit” (in the following discussion, the term “unit” refers to “sub-sub-unit of Amos 8:4-8”).

5.2 RHETORICAL SITUATION

The unit (Am 8:4-8) expresses the situation the prophet is facing. It is also a real situation where the oppressed people live and struggle. There is explicit mentioning of religious as well as trading terms in these verses. The terms $\Psi\eta\eta\eta$ (“The New Moon”) and $\eta\sigma\beta\alpha\tau$ (“the Sabbath”) indicates that indeed the people are at religious festivals. According to several other Hebrew texts (1 Sm 20:5-6; 2 Ki 4:23; and Is 1:13; Ezk 46:3; Hs 2:13), during the New Moon festival (and also during the Sabbath's) no work is done by the Israelites. Stuart (1987:384) argued

that such a festival was a Mosaic covenant holiday (Nm 10:10; 28:11) faithfully celebrated over the years by the Israelites. The stories in these texts show that one is not supposed to perform any activity, such as going somewhere, except to stay at home and to feast during these days. Moreover, the Decalogue prohibits any activity during the Sabbath day (Ex 20:8; Dt 5:14) because it emphasizes the holiness of the seventh day in order to honour YHWH who rested after he finished creating the world (Gn 2:3).

It is important to note that both events are usually assumed as having a Babylonian origin, because the Hebrew word שבת (“Sabbath”) is not formed from the word verb שבת (“to rest”) but it is derived from the substantive of the Babylonian *šabbatu* which is used as the day of the full moon, that is the fourteenth day of the month when the moon changes (cf Hammershaimb 1970:122-23), or it is a mark of the first day of the moon. This concept was later adopted by the Israelites to be a day of rest and a feast-day. In the context of the book of Amos, particularly in the given texts (Am 8:4-8), Soggin (1987:134) infers that the New Moon and the Sabbath are both pre-exilic festivals of which the observance is formally correct. It was, however, accompanied by prevarication, and this becomes an argument which Amos often pursues in connection with his criticism of the cult (cf. Am 4:4ff; 5:5ff).

The motivation behind this prevarication seems to be economic. It can be proved by the overloaded using of trading terms throughout the passage. The prophet uses some verbs, such as נשבישבירה (Hiphil. imperf. of שביר “to sell”), נפתחה (Qal. imperf. of פתח “to open” which used with בר means “to expose for sale” [BDB:834]), הקטין (Hiphil. inf. cons. of קטין “to make small”), הגדיל (Hiphil. inf. cons. of גדל “to become great”), עות (Piel. inf. const. of עות “to be bent”), and קנת (Qal. inf. const. of קנת “to buy”). These verbs indeed refer to trading activities, where the last four are used in a negative sense. Amos also uses nouns, such as שבר (“grain”) and בר (“wheat”) that point to trading commodities; and איפה (“the measure”), שפל (“the price”), מאזן (“the scales”), כסף (“the silver”), and נעלים (“the pair of sandals”) as trading tools or equipments. In this passage, the prophet

describes what is going on in the public market. Thus, although the central chapters of the book of Amos speak mostly of justice in the gate and in the court system, this passage returns to the marketplace and the world of commerce (cf Gowan 1996:416).

Unfortunately, these are not normal trading activities, because the motive behind such commercial gestures is merely financial profit. What is happening in the community is that an abusive economic action has been undertaken by a certain group of people. The question then is: who are they? The answer may vary from one scholar to another. Those who hesitate to identify these people usually do not mention anything about their identity. In a more specific way, they may refer to the wealthy who make loans of grain to the poor (see Kessler 1989:13-22). They are “a homogenous class of urban elite or the upper class who does not only have power but also have the opportunity to do it ruthlessly” (Mays 1969:142).

Such an argument, however, seems to be oversimplifying because one must consider the complex social setting during Amos’ time. Smith (1989:252) maintains that probably this group of people may refer to the persons who have significant economic control to manipulate things to their advantage. On the other hand, most scholars believe that the using of the terms indicate that the prophet Amos clearly speaks to a certain group of people, the merchants, the traders, the businessmen, or those who practice daily business in the marketplace (cf Hammershaimb 1970:122; see also Soggin 1988:135; Finley 1990:300; Paul 1991:257; Jeremias 1998:147). The last view is most likely more appropriate in describing and identifying who this particular group of people is.

Moreover, the practice of selling and marketing are not only in terms of material things but also of human expenses. The price of practicing such a way of doing business is very costly, because it entails human suffering and indignity. Mays (1969:142) emphasizes that the markets of Jeroboam’s kingdom traded in human misery. The poor are not only being manipulated when they buy something from the traders (Am 8:4b-5) but also being exploited for the sake of money and profit (Am 8:4, 6).

Accordingly, YHWH never tolerates dishonest ways of selling (Lv 19:35-36; Dt 25:13-15, Ezk 45:10-12; Pr 11:1; 16:11; 20:23; Job 31:6). He never accepts the inhuman ways of treating other people, especially human trafficking, because people are protected by God (Dt 24:14-15; Ps 72:12-13; 83:4-5; Is 1:14; 11:4). The situation described in Amos 8:4-6 involves various spheres of life to demonstrate in an exemplary fashion how much greater Israel's sin is than of its neighbours. Jeremias points out that "Amos 8:4-6 grounds the 'end of Israel' with a single, albeit wholly grievous, sin" (1998:147). Such sinful acts as indicated later in the next verses (Am 8:7-8), will be terribly punished in equal weight with their sin. It seems that the prophet considers this issue seriously because of unethical business practices which takes form in commercial cheating and human exploitation.

5.3 RHETORICAL INVENTION

In the midst of this situation, Amos appears and delivers his message. To attract attention he uses a common opening formula of prophetic speech: שמעו־זאת ("Hear this"). This is not the only place where the prophet uses such an opening. In other verses (Am 3:1, 4:1; and 5:1) he also utilizes the same formula. Grammatically, the word שמעו ("Hear!") takes the form of the imperative, which expresses an appeal to the will (categorized as a volitional mood), and it focuses on "the desire or wish for the action to occur" (Ross 2001:149). Here a prompt and proper response from the one who hears is expected in order to know that he/she understood what is being said. Wolff insists that "the first oracle (Am 8:4-6) opens with the simple call of attention" (1977:326). In the same vein, Niehaus (1992:375) broadens the meaning to the extent that such a call frequently occurs in contexts where the translational equivalent "obey" is most appropriate, and the forces at work in these contexts (e.g., Jos 1:18; Jr 12:17) invest the word with the sense of "listen with attention" or "give heed to." Whenever Amos uses this imperative, he seems to be in demand of influencing the audience to respond immediately and accurately to his message.

Again, Amos does not deliver his words alone as an independent individual. As a prophet of YHWH, however, he depends all of his speeches merely on the divine authority. The word שמעו (“Hear!”) is always used in a connection with the context of אמר יהוה (“the Lord said”) and נאם אדני יהוה (“declaration of the Sovereign YHWH”) as seen in its preceding verses (Am 8:2, 3). Although the unit (Am 8:4-8) is different and independent from the previous, still, in the researcher’s opinion, there is always a connection between both of them (the text and its context). Noble (1996:623) insists that this formula functions as “attention marker” that it marks out the material to which it is immediately attached as particularly deserving careful attention and perusal. In fact, it shows that the prophet may have deliberately inserted the oracle in between both divine declarations (נאם אדני יהוה, Am 8:3 and 8:11) in order to gain authority on what he is delivering.

Moreover, his oracle seems to be placed in between two visions from YHWH. Andersen and Freedman (1989:686) argue that the material in Amos 8:4-14, sandwiched between the fourth and fifth visions, should have some relations to the visions, and that there should be a rationale for the arrangement of various elements. Most of all, such an insertion should be considered as a reinforced indictment. Therefore, the purpose is clear that Amos is trying to convince the audience that his message is from YHWH himself.

In order to appeal to the reason of his audience, the prophet also uses the “cause-effect” approach as it usually occurs in a prophetic oracle, indictment and pronouncement of punishment. In a long and plain list of charges, he exposes the wrongdoings of this group of people (Am 8:4-6). It is started with a general description of oppression of the weak, those who are trampled and crushed (8:4). As in Amos 2:6-9, Amos uses the same terms in identifying those who are oppressed, אביון (“the needy”) and עניים (“the poor”) and the same verb in identifying the action of שאף (“to trample”) which is then paralleled or paired with שמד (“destroy” [JPS]).

In addition, these people are not only being trampled upon but are also being bought at a minimal cost (Am 8:6). It is expressed by the using of the term נעלים (“a pair of sandals”). Another accusation, or better thought of as a packet of injustice, is that there is a dishonest practice of trading, particularly using crooked weights and measures in business as seen in the succeeding verses (Am 8:5-6). Thus, by elaborating the wrongdoings of the people involved in trading, the prophet proves that they are in moral as well as spiritual decline.

As a consequence, they will be punished by YHWH (8:7-14). It is interesting that the prophet gives even some more elaboration on this punishment. As part of a judgment speech, it contains an announcement (or threat) of punishment (cf Hubbard 1989:102). The extensive using of *waw* (ו) consecutive before the verbs in this section is very unique because it denotes the continuation of actions done in a sequential way, and it usually appears in the form of the imperfect or a future time indicator both in narrative and prophetic texts (see Ross 2001:136-138). The long list of God’s actions against the exploiters assumes that the bowl of divine wrath is already full and his patience has reached its limit. The prophet seems to describe the anguish that Israel is to experience on “the judgment day” when YHWH pronounces sentence upon her iniquity (Martin-Achard 1984:60). This is indeed YHWH’s response to the audience’s position. Therefore, Amos’ major concern here is to convince his audience that the cause of the punishment YHWH intends to bring is none other than their social injustices.

5.4 RHETORICAL DISPOSITION

Before discussing the disposition of the unit, it is important to note that the indictment section (Am 8:4-6) is not considered to be a complete one, because one cannot discuss it without including verses 7-8. Considering Hubbard’s division of the structure (1989:220), it is argued that the unit may not be limited to verse 6 but it also must include verse 7 (and also 8) in order to form a complete unit. Accordingly, this study takes the account of Amos 8:7 or even up to 8:14, as a

conclusion (or a series of conclusion) of the sub-unit. The structure of the unit is indicated in the following diagram:

[Verse line]	Verse	Strophe	Stanza	
שמעו־זאת	a. The prophet announces	A. Introduction	I. Abusive economic actions brings an end to the poor	
השאפים אביון	b. Oppressing the people	B. Accusations of abuse		
ולשבית ענוי־ארץ				
לאמר	c. Restless impatience	C. Contents of accusation: Methods of economic abuse		
מתי יעבר החדש ונשבירה שבר				
והשבת ונפתחה־בר				
להקטין איפה ולהגדיל שקל	d. Changing the commercial units			
ולעות מאזני מרמה	e. Buying people at inferior prices			
לקנות בכסף דלים				
ואביון בעבור נעלים				
ומפל בר נשביר				
נשבע יהוה בגטון יעקב	g. God's oath because of Israel's injustice		D. Consequence of economic abuse	
אם־אשכח לנצח כל־מעשיהם				
העל זאת לא־תרגז הארץ	h. The land as sign of God's judgment			
ואבל כל־יושב בה				
ועלתה כאר כלה ונגרשה ונשקה				
כיאור מצרים				
				II. God's judgment

Observing the above structure, one may see that the structure itself is well arranged by the author. This stanza begins with the prophet appealing to the audience to hear the accusations (A). This can function as an introduction to the rest of verse 4 up to 8. He then continues with the contents of the indictment which contains first accusations of oppressing the needy (B). In the next strophe (C), he listed the methods of abusing honest merchant rules, dishonesty in buying the victims by merchants and finally cheating with the products they sell. This can be considered as the body of the speech which forms an alternating pattern: people (v.4), commerce (5), people (6a) and commerce (6b). As a result (stanza II), in conclusion, the abusers will reap the harvest of what they have sown. Therefore, this structure has three essential elements: introduction, accusation and retribution which equally match with the structure of complete rhetorical elements, such as *exordium*, *narratio*, *probatio* and *peroratio*.

The unit is introduced by the prophet with an *exordium*, as stated in phrase *שמעו־זאת* ("Hear this!"). Such a phrase may not only function as an opening, or a new beginning, which marks "the abrupt shift in genre from narrative back to

prophetic discourse” (Dorsey 1999:284) but also as a demand to listen what will be said. The word זֶאת (“this”) logically refers to what follows (as also seen in Am 3:1; 4:1; and 5:1), the indictments themselves (see Hammershaimb 1970:121).

Furthermore, such a word may function as the designation for what is to be heard, and it is also found in other several texts in prophetic literatures, such as Micah 3:9 and in the developed call to receive instruction in Hosea 5:1 and Joel 1:12 (cf Wolff 1977:326). It is necessary to note that the absence of the mentioning of the name of YHWH after this phrase causes this judgment oracle to be thought of as a general comprehensive indictment, which according to Paul (1991:256), it must include both the accusation (Am 8:4-6) and later the threat of punishment (8:7-14).

This opening points to the object of the accusation. The prophet makes a statement (*narratio*) that they were הַשֹּׂאֲפִים (“the ones trampling”). Accordingly, he addresses a group of Israelites who have taken advantage of others for economic gain (cf Dempsey 2000:20). The observation of the text, however, indicates that when they were doing this there is a tendency among these people for committing crime, because the participle הַשֹּׂאֲפִים is derived from a verb that means “to crush” or “to trample upon” (BDB:983), or in a Jewish OT commentary it also meant “to swallow up” (Rosenberg 1991:158).

It is supported by the fact that the objects of this action are human beings, particularly אֲבִיּוֹן—differing with its parallel עֲנוּיִם (“the oppressed”) in Amos 2:6-7—that more closely relates to the concept of “the needy” (see the explanation of the same term in section 3.1 [pp. 64-65] of this chapter). It is also important to note that the word הַשֹּׂאֲפִים itself is in the form of active participle which is commonly used to describe “a continuing action” (Bornemann 1998:73). Thus, the prophet seems to emphasize an action which is continuously done by the economic practitioners in terms of exploiting needy people.

In addition, he directs the accusation to the same people who also לְשַׁבֵּית עֲנוּי־אָרֶץ (“do away with the poor of the land”). The word לְשַׁבֵּית connotes that this is the result of the first action (Am 8:4a), since this is used in a Hiphil infinitive form. In connection to this, here we have a form that needs more attention. Since this verb literally means “to cause to cease” or “to put an end to” (BDB:991) it may be thought of as an action of killing or exterminating. Nevertheless, it is not the case because, as Stuart writes, “There is no suggestion that the exploiters were trying to kill off the impoverished. The infinitive לְ can certainly have such a force, but logic suggests that people would not seek to eliminate their source of income” (1987:384). It describes that “the destruction of the poor is the purpose of the trampling of the needy” (De Waard & Smalley 1979:162) and it is specifically done through forceful and shameless treatment by the merchants upon them as seen in the next verse (Am 8:5). In addition, the infinitive plus *waw* (ו), following a verb, expresses an idea of intention, effort, or being in the act of (as GKC §114f indicated; cf Niehaus 1992:470). The crime or sin exists down deep in the hearts of these people, as deep as their wrong motives in exploiting others who were unfortunate.

With the word לֵאמֹר (“to say”) introducing the body of the speech (*probatio*) in Amos 8:5, the prophet directly and elaborately describes the crimes of the merchants. He begins the content of his message by explaining the negative attitude of this group of people towards religious things: מִתִּי יַעֲבֹר הַחֹדֶשׁ . . . וְהַשַּׁבָּת (“when will the New Moon be over . . . and the Sabbath”). As known from Israel’s Law and traditions, the Israelites had to observe the Sabbath in conjunction with the New Moon (Ex 23:12; 34:21; 20:8; 2Ki 4:23; Is 1:13f; Hs 2:11). Both days were times for cessation from normal work (see Mays 1969:144).

However, the question raised by these people implies a negative response toward it. They are irritated by the length of the day leaving them in a position where trade is impossible. Those days of “stop-work” surely irritated the business circles who were in a hurry to continue to sell their merchandize (cf Martin-Achard 1984:58-59). It is noticeable that while observing religious rituals, their

thoughts were not directed towards YHWH as the focus of worship but rather to themselves because the *leitmotif* is to make money, as stated in the following phrases וּנְשַׁבְּרָה שֶׁבֶר (“that we may sell grain”) and וּנְפַתְחֶה-בֶּר (“that we may market wheat”). The prophet’s point here is clear: “the merchants are so greedy that they cannot wait to open shop, thus being incapable of enjoying the respite from business granted by holidays” (Hayes 1988:209).

In a more specific way, the prophet elaborates on the merchants’ actual injustices (Am 8:5b). It is more proper to call these “abusive economic actions.” First of all, it is spelled out by phrases such as לְהִקְטִין אִיפָה (“skimping the measure”), וּלְהַגְדִּיל שֶׁקֶל (“and boosting the price”), and וּלְעוֹת מֵאֲזַנֵּי מֵרָמָה (“and cheating with dishonest scales”). It is an action of “falsifying weights and measures the commercial transactions [that] could result in a substantial gain for the seller” (Smith 1989:254). The first phrase indicates that if the seller uses the volume measure אִיפָה, a unit of dry measure about eight gallons (22 litres), the customer will be given less than they have paid for. In this connection, the next phrases (וּלְהַגְדִּיל שֶׁקֶל וּלְעוֹת מֵאֲזַנֵּי מֵרָמָה) explain why this action is absolutely wrong. Rosenberg (1991:159) explains this phrase, “the אִיפָה with which the merchants sell the grain, they make smaller, and the weight with which they weigh the money they receive for it, they make larger.” In other words, the economic abuse is clearly expressed in these three descriptions, how sellers were unfairly increasing their profits through dishonest trade in basic foodstuffs at the expense of the non-farming urban populace who would pay almost any price for their food (see Stuart 1987:384).

These dishonest practices, of course, were specifically forbidden in the Mosaic Law (Lv 19:35-36; Dt 25:13-15). The legal materials in the Israelite law warned against having separate sets of weights for buying and selling. It thus says that it is not only a matter of common sense for people to hold to these rules, but it is also a spiritual matter because in dealing with daily business, YHWH requires just weights and measures. The violation against divine law is a rebellion against him, and basically it is an act of stealing other’s belonging, as Mays (1969:144) argues, “At root the practice was a breach of the commandments against stealing (Ex

20:15).” As a matter of fact, in the excavations at Tirza, shops were found dating to the eighth century BCE which had two sets of weighs, one for buying and one for selling (cf Mays 1969:144). Dishonesty in buying and selling, overall, seems to have been a common problem in the eighth century.

Other prophets, such as Hosea (Hs 12:7), Micah (Mi 6:9-11), and later Ezekiel (Ezk 45:9-15), were also dealing with the same issue. It seems that such practices are not only prohibited by law, but is also attacked by the prophets. They condemned the using of wrong אִיפֶה because it was against the principle of justice and truth, and toward this YHWH would take an action of punishment. In addition, it is condemned in the wisdom writings (Pr 11:1; 16:11; 20:10, 23; Jb 31:6). Honesty in the marketplace was also a concern of Wisdom instruction (Pr 11:1; 16:11; 20:10; 20:23). Thus, the practice of despising false or deceptive scales is criticized for it will result essentially to stealing what belongs to another person. In other words, by perverting scales the business people make themselves deceitful.

Another expression of social injustice occurs in the Israelite community, as seen in Amos 8:6, לקנות בכסף דלים ואביון בעבור נעלים, (“buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals”) and ומפל בר נשביר, (“selling even the sweepings with the wheat”). According to Finley (1990:259), this verse used to be thought of as an insertion, or at least, a rearrangement (as Wolff [1977:322] proposed) of the text, because it interrupts the flow of the contents. The action of selling “the refuse of the wheat” is in direct juxtaposition with the tampering with weights and standards. Arguing against such a view, it is a mistake to bring these clearly related materials closer together by transposing verse 6b into verse 5, as seen in Wolff’s proposal, because it shows that these people (the merchants) regarded cereals or wheat and human being equal as stocks for sale (cf Andersen & Freedman 1989:804).

Moreover, such an ancient practice in selling bad merchandise as good stuff is inhuman. Since the poor must have foodstuffs for life survival, they can not avoid buying bad merchandise (“an inferior product,” a mixture of chaff and debris

leftover from winnowing [King 1988:114]) from these merchants. They are forced to buy and to consume such inferior products, whether they like it or not. The poor seem to be in an entrapment and they can not find a way out from this situation. This practice is also indirectly related to an active slave trade (see Lv 25:39-43). In order to live, those who can not buy the foodstuffs will be forced to put themselves into slavery. Carrol R (1992:31) writes, “the poor falling into abject dependency on merchants: the inability to pay in the market place results in their being ‘bought’—that is, their losing financial independence by being reduced into ‘slave-like bondage’ to the upper class.” Therefore, this arrangement of sequence, rhetorically, may create powerful effect of condemnation because such practices are not only dishonest but also inhumane.

At the end of the unit, the prophet delivers a conclusion (*peroratio*) started with the phrase *יהוה בגאון יעקב* (“the Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob”) as seen in Amos 8:7. Such a phrase is quite peculiar in the Old Testament, because YHWH “never swears by something or somebody else, but always by himself or by something which is identical with himself” (De Waard & Smalley 1979:165). However, it refers to the divine oath as has already occurred in Amos 6:8 (cf 4:2) that declares the irrevocability of the judgment that follows. Jeremias (1998:148) insists that this oath guarantees that God will continue to be mindful of this sin; that is, the sin will be recalled in full when the perpetrators themselves are punished (cf Is 22:14). Jeremias (1998:149) adds that the using of the terms “the pride of Jacob” creates “a profound irony which means that by his world dominion for the benefit of Israel, dominion which the people of God, by absurdly overestimating their own potential, distort into ‘arrogance’ and thereby forfeit once and for all.” Thus, the sentence may mean that YHWH swears by whom Israel should glorify, that is, in his own name as the opposite of the people’s swearing in the name of other deities.

The content of the oath is *אם-אשכח לנצח כל-מעשיהם* (“I will never forget anything they have done”). It is unusual because this is the only time the expression of *לנצח* (“not forgetting”) is used as a threat where instead of not forgetting divine promise: YHWH says that the people’s sins will not be forgotten (cf Is 43:25; see

Gowan 1996:417). In the same vein, Jensen (2006:89) argues that the words express the degree to which his anger has been provoked. In this part, the Lord would not tolerate injustice acts within the covenant community, which was to be a model of justice and honesty, and he solemnly vowed to bring severe judgment upon the land (Am 8:7) (cf Chisholm 1990:102).

Additionally, from a literary perspective, Paul (1991:260) maintains that the prophet may very well be phrasing the oath in an ironic manner where the Lord swears by the very attribute of the people that he has formerly condemned (Am 6:8), that is by the same pride and arrogance that are exhibited in their very words cited in the previous verses. Therefore, rhetorically the oath itself may be thought of as a kind of sarcasm used by the prophet in order to declare that whoever mistreated fellow humans, including YHWH's own people, will be punished.

5.5 RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES

In delivering his message, the prophet Amos uses different kinds of rhetorical techniques. He used these devices in order to persuade his audience. Below discussions will explore the said literary devices in a thorough way.

5.5.1 A Call of Attention

The prophet begins his message with a call of attention. It can be seen in the using of the formula שמעו־זאת (“Hear this!”). As seen in Amos 3:1, 4:1 and 5:1, this formula may be thought of as a solemn command that frequently occurs in contexts where the translational equivalent “obey” is the most appropriate translation. It implies that the word must be understood in the sense of “listen with attention or give heed to” (cf Niehaus 1992:375). Additionally, in order to emphasize the seriousness of this call, Andersen and Freedman (1989:802), indicates that this appeal, which begins as an exhortation or accusation, may have links with the term “woes.” The reason behind this is that the context, vocabulary,

and participial constructions of this formula are closely related to the issue of vv. 4-6 and to 2:7 and other statements throughout the book that contain such a term. Therefore, upon hearing such a call of attention, the audience must pay “extra” attention to what the prophet says.

5.5.2 Oath Formula

To support such a solemn charge, as it usually occurs in the prophetic literature, the prophet used an oath formula. Hammershaimb (1970:125) argues that the unit contains the words of the prophet against the rich. In the next verse (v. 7), he has YHWH underline with an oath that the divine will not leave their treatment of the poor unpunished. In the same vein, Gowan (1996:416) insists that this herald’s cry was introduced in a particularly solemn way because of its connection with a divine oath (v. 7; cf 4:2; 6:8; for similar uses of the oath, Jr 44:26; 49:12-13).

Such an oath formula, as seen in the sentence לנצח נשבע יהוה בגאון יעקב אִם־אֶשְׁכַּח כל־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, refers to YHWH who has sworn, not by his holiness (Am 4:2) nor by himself (Am 6:8), but by the “pride of Jacob.” Thus, there is a close relationship between the divine oath with injustice done to the poor, where He will never forget (literally, “if I ever forget” [see Niehaus 1992:472]) the deeds of his people. The oath itself has its own rhetorical purpose, to show divine cynicism and permanent opposition against Israel because, according to Chisholm (1990:102, “Here, in biting sarcasm, He swore by something just as permanent and unchanging—Israel’s arrogant trust in her own strength (cf 6:8b).”

5.5.3 Accusation

In this unit, the prophet uses the language of accusation. Wolff (1977:324) indicates that it contains a remarkably broad indictment, paired with an announcement of punishment, and it is a part of a complete judgment speech. It is also clear that when using the third person language in a participle absolute

השאפים (literally “you who trample”), he pointed straight to the dishonest business people addressed in this charge. De Waard and Smalley (1979:162) infer that “it may be better to indicate who the you refers to by saying ‘you merchants.’”

Interestingly, one may observe that the general accusation is not limited to a court setting because, in this section, the accusation is used in one of many settings where ruthless actions were taken against the defenseless (cf Smith 1989:253). Amos here used a general form of judgment pronouncement with a lack of “blood and fire” as it usually occurred in the oracles of the OAN (cf Hubbard 1989:221). In addition, it is not just reproachful language but also disrespectful. If it is related to what the prophet said in Amos 5:8, it is clear that the text mockingly portrays these merchants and traders because in everyday market transactions, they were engaged in deceptive practices (see Pleins 2001:372-73). Rhetorically, it seems that the author intentionally set a situation where the audience will feel guilty for what they have done.

5.5.4 Sevenfold Structure

In order to present the completeness of the economic practitioners’ (in this case, the merchants) sins, Amos used seven pairs or seven fold structures in this unit. The structure can be seen as follows:

השאפים אביון	trampling the needy
לשבית ענוי-ארץ	bringing to an end the poor
ונפתחה-בר להקטין איפה	reducing the bushel’s size
ולהגדיל שקל	enlarging the shekel weight
ולעות מאזני מרמה	defrauding by deceitful scales
בעבור נעלים	buying the needy for a pair of sandal
ומפל בר נשביר	selling the refuse of wheat

The unit, along with Amos 2:6-8, contains a list of seven sins of the wealthy (cf Dorsey 1999:284). The reason for this conclusion is based on the use of the seven verbs that are found the unit. It is fair enough to say that because of its

completeness of sinful acts, the prophet through Amos 8:4-6 grounds the “end of Israel” with a single, albeit wholly grievous, sin (cf Jeremias 1998:147).

In this relation, it is also proper if one pays attention to the result of these sevenfold sins. After the oath formula, in a sense of crisis (cf Brit 2002:37-38), the prophet continued to declare the totality of the coming disaster by using these sevenfold verbs of divine destruction, such as, trembling (earthquake), invasion (an imagery indicates a coming flood of judgment, in the form of invading nation, such as Assyria [see Niehaus 1992:472]), darkness, mourning, famine, drought, and massacre (Am 8:9-14). According to Limburg, this stylistic device can be called a “seven-plus-climax” sequence and this may mean that Israel is totally accused and the effects of her punishment will also be total (Limburg 1987:220; see also 1988:121).

5.5.5 Chiasm

In a minimum way, the prophet uses a chiastic form to expose the corruption of the business practitioners. The reason to say this is that this is the only chiastic structure that can be identified in the indictment part (Am 8:4-6):

5a	A	ונשבירה שבר	B	ונפתחה-בר
		that we may sell grain		that we may market wheat
6b	B'	בר	A'	נשביר
		wheat		we sell

The first line (A) focuses on the verb *ונשבירה* (*wěnašbîrâ*) which is also in parallel with the same verb (*našbîr*) in the end of this section (A' in v. 6b). The noun “wheat” (בר or *bār*) occurred twice in the middle part of the section (B and B') and creatively links the verbs (A-A') together. Accordingly, the last line is in a chiastic arrangement with the preceding statements in 5a, where the verbs are first and the objects last, and as Andersen and Freedman (1989:692) indicate that “two of three words are the same as or nearly identical with words in both parts of 5a, showing that it is a resumption and a conclusion (which often is the function of

chiasm).” Through this structure, one may see the author’s intention in leading the audience to focus on a certain kind of commodity that can be used as an instrument for doing economic injustice.

5.5.6 A Quotation of the Accused

Another important technique employed by the prophet is the use of a quotation (Am 8:5-6). It is a method of direct citation of the audience’s own words: מתי יעבר החדש ונשבירה שבר והשבת ונפתחה-בר (“When will the new moon be over, so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may market?”) by the prophet. Surprisingly, these words are turned (presented) back by him to those who have spoken. Accordingly, Amos either heard people saying similar things or puts words in their mouth on the basis of the behavior he has observed (see Smith 1989:253). Whatever the process was, it is clear that the focus of the citation is to address the deceitfulness in the business of trading grain done by the audience. As a result, Wolff (1977:326) calls this method “a citation of the accused” which means that “in their own speech is to be found the proof of their injustice.” In other words, it seems that the prophet quoted “the guilty person’s own words in the indictment so that they actually condemn themselves” (Simundson 2005:226).

In a literary sense, as Mays (1969:143) infers, “the quotation is a favorite tactic of Amos for bringing to light the deeds of his audience (2:12; 4:1; 5:14; 6:2, 13; 8:14; 9:10); it is a self incriminating testimony to the crime which has provoked YHWH’s terrible oath.” In the same perspective, Simundson (2005:151) argues that “one of Amos methods for carrying on an argument with adversaries is to quote their own words back at them.” Rhetorically, this kind of literary device shows that the prophet knew his audience very well and made them present to the reader and it underscores his message that the people brought about their own condemnation by their own actions (cf Cook 2005:60-61). Thus, by using this tactic, the prophet was probably trying to provide decisive incriminating evidence (see Paul 1991:257) in order to accuse the unethical business of the merchants.

5.5.7 Ethical Reasoning

The prophet also uses ethical reasoning in his message. The exposure of the merchants' unethical business practices is delineated clearly by him. He describes their corrupt employment of weights and measures, for example, making the *ephah* (a dry measure) small (להקטין איפה), and the *shekel* (a weight used to measure the purchase price) large (ולהגדיל שקל). Chisholm (1990:101) explains that "by then altering the scales (e.g., by bending the crossbar) and mixing chaff with the grain, the merchant was able to increase his profit even more." However, these practices will not be left without punishment. He then continues that the Israelites' corrupt and malevolent practices stir up an equally intense action on the part of YHWH.

Consequently, according to Paul (1991:259), "The arrogant quotation of the entrepreneurs receive its due response in the words of the Lord, who swears, 'I will never forget (אם־אשכח לנצח) any of their actions!' (כל־מעשיהם)." The logical consequence behind this ethical reasoning is that the merchants will surely reap what they have sown in the past, especially their unethical business practices. To conclude this, Dempsey (2000:20) pinpoints that "injustice will not go without reprimand; unethical behavior is exposed."

5.5.8 Judicial Rhetoric

Finally, as a whole, the unit can be categorized as judicial rhetoric. Since the main theme of the unit points to the accusation of commercial deception done by greedy merchants, it goes well with the concept of judgment addressed to them. Amos speaks both a prophetic indictment and a pronouncement of punishment (cf Simundson 2005:226) in a more intensive way (see the use of numerous infinitives in the unit) in order to show that YHWH was dealing with the human predicament, that is, human beings as disposable goods for other human beings as a means of increasing wealth (see Jeremias 1998:148). It is supported by the fact that the language used in this indictment (Am 8:4-6) may be considered as the

language of the courtroom, as if the judge in a court of law judges past actions while he is primarily concerned with justice that must prevail. Again, YHWH here is described as the supreme judge who accuses some Israelites, and particularly the deceitful business people, for their unethical practices done in the past and present. The prophet Amos speaks on behalf of the source of all utterances, the very self of YHWH.

5.6 REVIEW OF ANALYSIS

It seems that in this particular unit (Am 8:4-8), the prophet Amos intends to appeal to his audience by exposing the abusive economic actions done by a certain group (or groups) of people and its end results. It is clear that, in terms of its theme and structure, this unit is separated from the previous unit (Am 8:1-3) which deals with the last of the prophet's visions. However, this cannot be separated from the following units (Am 8:7-10; 8:11-14 and, for some, even up to 9:1-15), because it mainly deals with the results of these actions. As a result, in order to present a complete thought, the prophet Amos puts altogether the given unit of indictment and another unit of judgment. In a prophetic literary study, it is known as a complete judgment speech or oracle.

Since the beginning of the unit, the prophet relates the abusive economic actions of the merchants with religious rituals. Although, it may be thought that he was dealing here merely with improper business practices, Chisholm (1990:102) points out that "these greedy merchants impatiently longed for the day to end so that they might resume their dishonest, though highly profitable, practices," their saying *מהי יעבר החדש . . . והשבת* ("when will the New Moon over . . . and the Sabbath") seems to point to another indicator, namely a close relationship between economic and religious matters. Finley (1990:300) argued that this complaint "ties together the two emphases in the book on social injustice and an ineffective religious formalism," and it reveals the fact that they care neither for their religion nor for their fellow Israelites. As a result, the main problem is not merely the economic issue but also the religious, or even, the spiritual one.

The prophet employs certain kinds of literary devices in dealing with this particular sin, that is, religious-economic abuse. First of all, he uses the “Hear this” formula. It is a “direct candour” (Dempsey 2000:20) that is not only delivered to call for attention (cf Limburg 1988:120) from his audience but also to establish the authority of his speech. It seems that he was proposing “the normative presupposition of the indictment” for he is not speaking for himself but on behalf of the covenant law, the very commandment of YHWH, in opposition to the exploiters of the disadvantaged members of society (cf Mays 1967:143). Once the authority has been established, in order to support this solemn charge, he also employed the oath formula. Although this device is not analyzed in the unit, the related following text (v. 7) shows that such a formula has been considered as “a divine solemn vow” in order to bring judgment upon the land. It was YHWH who swore by the “pride of Jacob” showing cynicism and permanent opposition against the abusive economic actions that brings an end to the poor (see Chisholm 1990:102).

He, then, uses a literary device called a sevenfold structure. Aside from its function as indicator of an independent unit, such a structure is used to indicate the completeness of the sins of the Israelites, for instance, trampling the needy, bringing to an end the poor, reducing the bushel’s size, enlarging the shekel weight, defrauding by deceitful scales to buy the poor by silver, buying the needy for a pair of sandal, and selling the refuse of wheat. This points to the fact that there was in existence of what Hobbes calls “*Homo Homini Lupus*,” a condition where a class of urban elite were persecuting the poor. It may point specifically to the middle class merchants who sold and loaned wheat to the poor for planting in times of famine as it was used to be exercised by a rent capitalism system (see Huffmon 1983:100-103 and Lang 1982:58-59 as exposed by Smith [1989:252]). Therefore, as far as the prophet is concerned, as is illustrated in the sevenfold list of sins, it is appropriate to think that these abusive economic actions are very serious crime in the sight of YHWH.

Against such a practice, and in a minimum way, Amos also uses a chiasmic structure to point out the means used by the merchants in their abusive economic

practices. Since one of the functions of chiasm is to direct attention to the central point, or, as Hayes and Holladay (1982:73-74) calls it “the progression of an author’s general thought and specific emphasis” the prophet used it for the same purpose, namely “selling the wheat.” However, this practice was unusual because it involves an exploited action which ultimately resulted in enslavement (v. 6; compare to slavery of Am 2:6-7). Accordingly, the scenario probably unfolded in the following way: the poor could not pay for grain bought to consume or sow; they ran into debt, piled up due interest payments, and had to sell themselves into bondage to work off their liabilities (cf. Lang 1982:56-57). Moreover, Finley (1990:301) says, “Not only do the merchants use false weights, measures and scales to draw the poor into a relationship of dependence; they even dare to sell that part of the wheat that ought to be thrown away as of no value.” Rhetorically speaking, it is a genius of the prophet to attract the attention of the audience to the main issue, the economic injustice through the selling of a commodity such as wheat or grain.

The most important literary device used by Amos is “quoting the enemy’s sayings” or “quoting what the accused have said.” It is actually the audience’s words: “When will the new moon be over, so that we may sell grain; and the Sabbath, so that we may market?” The prophet just quoted it and presented it back to those who have spoken it. The issue here is quite clear that what was in those merchants’ mind while attending worship service was not God but only how to gain more financial profit by deceitfully selling their goods. According to Limburg (1988:120), this quotation technically is framed with reference to “selling,” indicating the first and the last concerns of those addressed (vv. 5-6). In a more elaborated explanation, Rosenberg (1991:159), based on the interpretation of Rashi, argues that this act of “swallowing up” done by businessmen is an anticipation of the time when the grain will be expensive and sold to the poor with interest because those who store away grain can charge higher prices for it and compel the poor to surrender their fields for lower prices, and as a result they will take their fields. In a rhetorical sense, this sarcastic quotation may function like a boomerang for the merchants who are eager “to open markets so they can begin cheating people” (Finley 1990:301).

Additionally, the purpose of using this method can also be considered as a sign of opposition from the prophet. The reason for saying this is that quoting the enemy's saying is one of the methods of carrying on an argument with adversaries (cf. Simundson 2005:151). The motive of doing it is understandable. Besides convicting his audiences in terms of their own sinful plan, he accuses and condemns them for the damaging results of their action, for debt-slavery (cf Chirichigno 1993:145-185). In this context, Pleins (2001:370) proposes that "the opposition Amos raised was not against the system of debt servitude per se; rather, Amos maintained that the grounds upon which many found themselves sold into slavery were illegitimate because 'they had only incurred debt for some minor necessity of life.'" Amos had the same passion God had for defending the poor and the weak so that he raised his fist against such an abusive economic motif and behavior.

Abusive economic practices done by particular merchants are indeed ethically (as well as theologically) wrong. The reason behind it is that these are closely related to violence. Hostteter (1994:86) argues that this kind of social injustice practice may be considered as violence because some business persons paid no heed to the concerns of the peasant population but exploited them. This is the violence of gain at any cost expressed in this statement: "We will make the *ephah* small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances . . . selling the sweepings of the wheat" (vv. 5, 6). Such is called "trampling on the needy and bringing the poor of the land to ruin" (v. 4). In the same vein, Pleins (2001:368) believes that Amos was acutely aware that such actions, questionable economic interests, dominated Israelite society, displacing ethical values rooted in the Yahwist faith. Thus, any abusive economic practice that manipulated and exploited the poor and the weak was considered unethical for it stands against the law of God and his characteristic fondness of justice and righteousness.

Moreover, there is a sense of ethical indictment in Amos 8:4-6, especially if it is seen in the light of Amos 8:7-8. It is a direct response to the accusation in 8:4-6. Accordingly, God swears and binds himself to judgment because "of their actions." God will not pass over or forgive their sins any longer (8:2); he will

never ever forget how they have brutally mistreated the poor (cf Smith 1989:254). It seems that the weight of the sin of the merchants is “amplified to a virtually unsurpassable degree the solemn divine oath” (Jeremias 1998:148). Paul (1991:259) insisted that “The Israelites’ corrupt and malevolent practices evoke an equally vehement reaction on the part of the Deity.” In the same vein, Mays (1969:145) argues that “the invocation of curse invoked with what vehemence YHWH reacts to the market of Samaria.” On the one hand, whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. On the other hand, YHWH himself is responsible to keep his words that people’s sins will not be forgotten. Thus, this oath is spoken of as a threat. The actions which follow are what God swears he will do (cf Smith 1989:255), to punish the sinners for their abusive deeds.

As a consequence, God raised his hands against these people (Am 8:8, 9-14). In the book of Amos, present in all major sections of the book (from 3:3 to 8:3), the indictments of sins are always followed by punishment in a balanced way (cf De Waard & Smalley 1979:161). Uniquely, the actual punishment here is presented in the form of rhetorical question (v.8), assuming an agreement that Israel’s behavior must lead to terrible consequences (cf Simudson 2005:228). Besides such catastrophes that will strike the land, as a consequence of rejecting the word of God spoken through the prophet (vv. 11-12), the people will experience the complete cessation of the divine word in Israel (see Kizhakkeyil 2006:99). According to Smith (1989:254) the reasons for such punishment is clear that “because God cares for the poor and the weak, because God has redeemed his people from such slavery, and because this action is contrary to the law of God, the nation is ripe for judgment. Its end is near.”