

## CHAPTER SIX

# TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE BOOK OF AMOS

Having analyzed the relevant texts rhetorically, this chapter now tries to construct a theology of social justice from the book of Amos. In contrast with the modern approach, for instance, Barr's proposal in his work *The concept of biblical theology: An Old Testament perspective* (1999), begins with contemporary problems and then looks to the Bible as one of a number of factors to be considered in solving the identified problems (see Bellis 2001:234). This approach is in accordance with the formal and traditional approach of doing a biblical theology—in this case, rhetorical approach—by departing from the interpretation of the biblical text(s) and then inductively arriving at the formulation of the theological conclusion(s). According to Jung (1988:168), such an approach may be called “the revelation-historical method,” that is, studying the Old Testament theology on the basis of what the Old Testament (the Hebrew texts) itself witnesses about its contents.

However, before proceeding to the construction stage, it is important to explain briefly the end purpose of the theological method used here. In the introductory chapter of this research, it was said that my research will similarly follow the same line as Brueggemann's approach, particularly in his usage of rhetorics to construct an Old Testament theology. The different voices of the Old Testament may be read as different manners of speech about and by God. Meadowcroft (2006:42) asserts that Brueggemann bundles all of these types of speech into the central metaphor of the courtroom. The different voices of the Old Testament are then read as different voices in a courtroom drama. The gradual disclosure of God

through the rhetoric of scripture occurs partly by means of what is called “counter-testimony” and “unsolicited testimony,” his denotation of those parts of scripture that seem at odds with Israel’s “core testimony.” In my consideration, his method is more appropriate, than the alternative rational method, as a heuristic tool for doing biblical theology (cf Olson 1998:171).

Admittedly Brueggemann’s theology is done through a rhetorical process of interpretation, a rhetorical enterprise, because “Old Testament theology is essentially a rhetorical analysis of the actual, concrete utterance of the text to see what Israel says about YHWH and how it is said” (Brueggemann 2002[a]:428). The *leitmotif* behind his approach is clear, “the God of Old Testament theology as such lives in, with, and under rhetorical enterprise of this text, and nowhere else and in no other way” (Brueggemann 1997:66). Therefore, paying attention to the artistic details of the text—as suggested by this approach—is very important because, as Brueggemann says, “this approach focuses not upon the ‘cognitive outcome’ of the text (though there finally are cognitive outcomes) but upon the artistic process that operates in the text and generated an imagined ‘world’ within the text” (2002:360).

In dealing with the purpose of constructing a biblical (Old Testament) theology, one should not stop at the analysis of the text but rather go further to the issue of ideology or theology. For one who wants to study the word of God, a question should be raised, “What vested interest is operative in this text?” The answer may be a truth claim offered in good faith, or it might be a theological conviction stated with passion, or it might be a bad faith assertion serving political, economic interests; but, the purpose of the question is “to help one consider the ways in which ideological forces are at work in our best theological claims and in our most faithful interpretation” (cf Brueggemann 2002[b]:362). It means that at the end of all analysis of the text, one should arrive at a central theological theme of the Hebrew Bible, God himself and his passion for human beings. It is a task of determining the theology of a “given text.” However, unlike Brueggemann who puts much emphasis on the “utteredness” of the text at the expense of ontology, discussion in this chapter will take a position that is similar to what Bellis asserts

“The text itself points to a God whose power is not dependent on any human utterance or other human form of power” (2001:233).

In this connection, the implication is that the artistry of biblical text (exposed by rhetorical analysis) and theology are closely related. Brueggemann (2002:362) proposes that there are three elements present in it: the force of imagination, the hosting of intertextuality, and the pondering of ideology, of which the first two can be attained from rhetorical analysis. Unfortunately, some do not believe in such a relationship. Brueggemann, in his article “At the mercy of Babylon: A subversive rereading of the empire” (1991:17-19), found it even in the work of Muilenburg, a pioneer in biblical rhetoric, as he says, “neglecting the inevitable political power (“ideological pondering”) of all rhetoric.” Although some became sceptical about such a relationship and questioned, “Isn’t rhetorical analysis so enamoured of style that it neglects theology?” Tribble (1994:233-235) asserts and shows in her work (*Rhetorical criticism: Context, method and the book of Jonah*) that both are closely related to each other, and a biblical theology can be constructed properly from rhetorical criticism.

Following the above propositions, my research will thus deal with the issue of theology, and as far as this research is concerned, propose a theology of social justice in the book of Amos. Under the governing question, “whose vested interest is voiced here?” my theological proposal will focus on YHWH, through the prophet Amos, and his passion (interest) for social justice. Although, the words studied came through to the prophet, it is YHWH who spoke through his messenger. His passion was caught by the prophet and then passed it on to the audience (the Israelites) through prophetic speech (in the mode of rhetoric) in the context of social injustice. Brueggemann argues that “in an endless variety of textual utterances, Israel’s testimony is to the effect that YHWH’s passion for justice, for the well being of the human community, and for the *shalom* of the earth will refuse to come to terms with the power of death, no matter its particular public form or its ideological garb” (1997:710; see also Knierims’ [1984:43] emphasis on the dominion of YHWH in justice and righteousness as the “ultimate vantage point” of Old Testament theology).

What is more, the use of the whole method of rhetoric, the analysis of the text and its theology, should finally arrive at the response of the audience. It is based on the very purpose of the use of rhetoric, that is, not only to state competing ideological claims (cf Brueggemann 1997:64), but also to seek intentionally to appeal to its audience in a convincing way. The prophet Amos, through his prophetic rhetoric, purposively seeks to stir the audience's feeling of fear. Thus the impact is on emotion and passion rather than on reason because they can move people to do or act as a response to what has been spoken (see Gitay 1994:222). A good example of this is the significant terminology used in the texts analyzed, "to seek YHWH" (Am 5:1-17). This cry is a compelling factor for salvation or deliverance that YHWH proposed and it should be responded to properly by the audience in the midst of the coming punishment and catastrophe, as Amos announces, "A lion has roared! Who will not fear?" (Am 3:8).

## **6.1 RELATIONAL ASPECTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE BOOK OF AMOS**

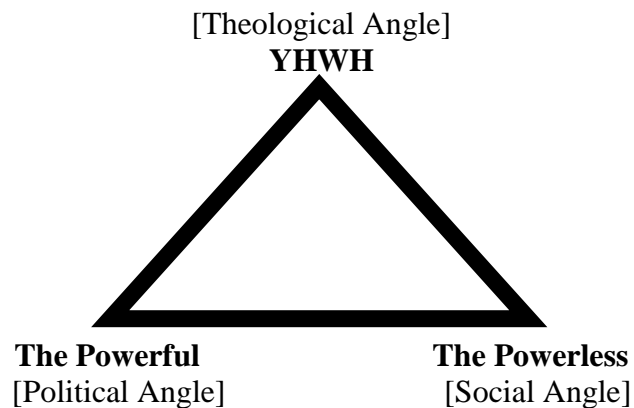
This section specifically deals with aspects of social justice, that is, factors that form a theology of social justice in the book of Amos. As theology is displayed in the developing relationship between God with the world (in general, the nations and the created order), and in particular with the people of God (cf Sailhamer 1995:13-15), the idea of social justice must also be understood in the light of this relationship, especially "the covenanted relationship" between God and his people, and the relationship among his people. Donahue (1977:68-69) asserts that, as it is seen throughout the Old Testament, social justice is overwhelmingly related to the idea of relationship and the life of the community; thus justice in biblical thought concerns "fidelity to the demands of relationship," to God and to the neighbour. In the same vein, Knierim (1984:36; from a canonical perspective, referring to Childs 1978:46-55) insists that the Old Testament, strictly speaking, does not speak about YHWH, but rather it speaks about the relationship between him and the reality of human's life. Brueggemann (1997:735), considering Israel as YHWH's partner, also emphasizes that the burst of YHWH into world history,

as a theological *novum*, is to establish justice as a core focus of YHWH’s life in the world and Israel’s life with him. Thus, the concept of justice in the context of the YHWH-Israel relationship is determined by the human relationship which honours YHWH.

In the book of Amos, it is noticable that divine-human and human-human relationship stands in the centre of social justice. Conversely, it also must be admitted that such a relationship is described in a more negative sense in Amos. One observes a lot of tension when dealing with this matter in the book, for example, by doing social injustice the people of Israel said “no” to YHWH, and, in reverse, YHWH says “no” to them by announcing the coming judgment (cf Hubbard 1989:108; cf Noble 1997:329-340). According to Cook (2005:61-62), the central message of Amos has two dimensions: God’s intimate involvement with the people and the people’s unfaithful response to God’s care, especially in worshipping with empty gestures and engaging in unjust, oppressive dealings with one another. Therefore, although tension existed in the relationship between YHWH and Israel, the ideal was that the issue of social justice should be viewed in a positive light from a divine-human relational perspective.

In this regard, to narrow down the discussion, this relationship will be viewed from the model I am about to propose: “a triangular relational model of social justice,” as can be seen in the following diagram:

**A Triangular Relational Model of Social Justice**



This triangular model provides a more dynamic inter-relationship (“trialectics”) between the angles. As used in a prophecy, the genre of the body of the texts in the book of Amos shows a strong “dialectical” element (cf Houston 1993:186; cf Carroll 1979:16ff). It thus connotes that the concept of social justice in the book of Amos may be thought of in the framework of the covenant relationship between God-his people and among his people, or specifically the triangular relationship between YHWH, the powerful and the powerless.

The above figure suggests that the function of the YHWH’s covenant to his people is relational (Walton 1994:20). The covenant relationship between YHWH and his people is described in a triangle which consists different, and yet interrelated, angles. In the theological angle, YHWH may be thought of as the main and only source of social justice. The other angle, the socio-political one, represents the powerful, such as the officials, the judges, the rich and the merchants—who have all the power to control others and are expected to have a sense of solidarity in living together with others, especially the unfortunate. The last one, the social angle, is “the powerless” (following Limburg’s term [1988:92] for those who lack power in society), those who are poor, weak and marginalized. The reason for calling this angle “social” is that the powerless must be taken care of as God (and God’s people) granted favour on them. The next discussion intends to elaborate each perspective more comprehensively. In the end, the connection between these points of view will be examined.

### **6.1.1 YHWH: The Theological Angle**

According to Kapelrud (1961:37), modern points of view (such as Meihold’s and Löhr’s) hold that the idea of God seems to have less character in Amos, for they think that God to Amos was identical with only the ethical standards he preached. In contrast, there are ample proofs given by other studies verifying that Amos’ preaching has a deep religious background (cf Kapelrud 1961:38; see also Barstad 1984). Rhetorically, the use of repetitive phrases such as “what the LORD says,” “who the LORD is,” “seek live” and “seek justice” (Am 5:1-17) creates a

concentric form that functions as focusing or highlighting devices. This forces the audience to ponder on YHWH. The concepts about YHWH in the book of Amos will be discussed in the following cases.

### **6.1.1.1 YHWH is the God of the Universe**

As discussed in previous rhetorical analyses, YHWH is prominently pictured as *God of the universe*. Zimmerli (1995:434) indicates that three different hymnic pieces (Am 4:13; 5:8; 9:5-6) speak of YHWH's creative power, describing it participially, and all climaxing in the phrase, "YHWH is his name." In these pieces, YHWH is described as the Almighty (5:8; 9:6; 4:13; 9:5) as well as the Creator, who is sovereign over mountains and the wind and who condescends to communicate with human beings (4:13). It seems that he manifests himself as the sovereign God of the cosmos who is able to overcome a disobedient people (cf Brueggemann 1997:152).

YHWH does not only have all power to give rain, crops, health and peace (4:6-11), but also to maintain order even in such opposites as heaven and earth, blackness and dawn, night and day, sea and land (cf VanGemeren 1990[a]:132). Moreover, his power is not only seen in creation but also in cosmic destruction he made in order to maintain justice. It is proper to say that he is not only "the Lord who ensures the world order, he is equally able to bring about cosmic cataclysm" (Martin-Achard 1984:43; cf Jeremias 1998:91-92). In other words, the same God who is responsible for creation is also active in the world and may intervene to bring destruction if the behaviour of the people requires it (cf Pfeifer 1984:478-479). The omnipotent God therefore is described as the Creator and controller of the universe as well as the destroyer or the one who strikes down the strong.

One may see that a passage such as Amos 5:1-17 indicates a relationship between YHWH, the Creator and the creature. The chiasmatic form of the said passage indicates that the focus of the speech is mainly on the doxological part (Am 5:8-9). Its position in the center of the speech implies and the use of the language



of praise and honour may function as a call to realize YHWH as the Creator of the universe. The imperative “hear!” affirms that God has absolute authority over the creature. In this case, the creature must hear and obey what the Creator wants to say.

### **6.1.1.2 YHWH Concerns and Controls the Nations**

If so, it implies that *he is concerned about nations and is able to control them*. The seven sayings directed against other nations (in the oracles against the nations [OAN]) seem to tell us that God is concerned about the events on the international scene (Am 1-2) (cf Lang 1983:76; Raabe 2002:666-667). However, He is not only interested in international politics, but also in the national (local) issues in Israel, having particular concern for the powerless individuals. Limburg (1988:91) says that this “bipolar way of speaking about God, describing God’s majesty and might in working in the international scene on the one hand and God’s care and mercy in dealing with [the] individual (in a nation) on the other hand.” One may notice that the mentioning of other nations surrounding Israel (Am 1-2) suggests that Amos holds the notion of “universalism” (cf Rathinam 2002:725-738), the idea that God’s concerns are widespread, that he cares about other nations in addition to Israel, as opposed to “particularism” which presents God as solely concerned with Israel (Zucker 1994:119; cf Kapelrud 1961:38-47).

Amos then makes it clear that YHWH is the God of all nations and that Israel is subject to the same “moral responsibility” (Joyce 1994:221). No nation is able to run away from his absolute control over her. This can be seen in divine utterances spoken through the prophet against the nations (see particularly Amos’ OAN in Am 1:3-2;16). Because of their wrongdoings, treating others inhumanly, all nations mentioned cannot escape God’s judgment, much more his own people, Judah and Israel. Using a highly rhetorical skill called “rhetorical entrapment,” Amos proclaimed divine judgment that will finally reach its climax in Israel. While the other nations are judged by God on the basis of conscience, the people of God (Judah and Israel) are judged on the basis of revelation. The prophetic



utterances delivered reflect a judicial or a forensic sphere. All the nations mentioned in the OAN seemingly were standing in the presence of the Judge, YHWH, and waiting for a verdict. At the end, through such a rhetorical strategy, Amos, as a mouth-piece of YHWH, declared that they are guilty of violating “the law of YHWH” and deserved to be punished for what they have done. Unexpectedly, the judgment upon Israel was even more severe than any other nation that defies God’s demand for justice (cf Simundson 2005:149).

### **6.1.1.3 YHWH is a Warrior God**

In this regard, the oracles against the nations (OAN) also have a nuance that YHWH is *the warrior God* (cf Am 1:3-2:16). It thus suggests that the OAN is connected with war oracles. Hayes (1968:81-92) argues for a “warfare” motif as the original *Sitz im Leben* for the Israelite oracle against the foreign nations. However, in Amos, these oracles become a literary mode, a vehicle of divine judgment, which has the central motif of God as the “Divine Warrior” (Christensen 1975:17). Such a theological motif can be seen clearly in the expressions used in the texts (God kills [2:3; 4:10; 9:1], destroys [2:9; 9:8], and sends fire [1:4, 7, 10, 12; 2:2, 5], pestilence [4:10], and famine [8:11]), where the destructive activity of God is emphasized. In this connection, Gowan (1996:345) asserts, “War dominates the thought of the book, and God is directly involved as the main participant in many passages, with twenty-eight different verbs being used to describe the divine role as warrior and destroyer.” Through this kind of oracle, the prophet Amos proclaims a theological cause-effect relationship which the people understand and affirm, and it has a rhetorical effect that hammers home the message in a way which cannot be avoided. God has spoken; the nations have committed great sins; they will be held accountable for their inhumanity to man; God will destroy these centres of power and the leaders who do such things (cf Smith 1989:68-69; see also Dempsey 2000:10).

#### 6.1.1.4 YHWH is the God of the Covenant

YHWH is also *the God of the Covenant*. It is debatable about whether Amos has a covenant frame of thinking (motif) or not in delivering his speech. One may notice that there is no such term used throughout the book of Amos. There is no explicit mentioning about the term “covenant” in this book. However, a closer reading of it shows that while speaking to the people of Israel, Amos seems to demand from Israel social justice based on the book of the Covenant (cf Von Rad 1965 [2]:136; for a recent study, see Sprinkle 1994). Albeit he announces the coming judgment to all Israel’s neighbours, the prophet actually underscores the universal character of the Covenant (cf Robertson 2004:206). In the same vein, Mays (1969:7) reminds us that although Amos never speaks directly of a covenant between YHWH and Israel, it must have been some form of the covenant tradition which lay behind and gave content to the relation implied in “Israel my People” (cf 2:9-10). Bergren (1974:182-183) also shows that the words Amos used, particularly in his accusations, reveal several parallels with the Mosaic Law. Many of the details in his announcement of judgment correspond to the covenant curse of judgment threats in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 (Stuart 1987:xxxi-xl). Accordingly, such a covenant contains Israel’s first call to social justice (see Malchow 1996:32).

In a more detailed discussion, the issue of social justice in the book of Amos is interconnected with Israel’s covenantal laws or codes: to begin with, the Code of the Covenant (Ex 20:22-23:33). The “covenant code,” or sometimes called “book of the covenant” (Ex 24:7), was “a portion of an independent legal collection or law code before being incorporated into the Bible” (Sprinkle 1994:27). Originating at the time of the tribal confederacy and reflecting the agricultural life of that period, this code is considered as Israel’s earliest text on social justice (cf Malchow 1996:21). It deals mainly with instructions that provide stability and order for the Israelite community, emphasizing the importance of social justice and holy lifestyle consistent with a nation living in the presence of God and assuring the needy of a minimum legal protection and a minimum of material assistance (cf Hendrickx 1985:30).

Next, is the Deuteronomic Code of law (Dt 15:1-18)). One of the main concerns is the issue of Sabbath, particularly the sabbatical year. This is the time when a release of slaves or borrowed lands at the end of every seven years is granted. In this year, the people of Israel should open their hands to the poor and the needy in the land believing that YHWH would bless all their works. It is based on the *shemittah* law where the people of God must order their economy with full regard for the needs and rights of the poor (cf Cairns 1992:147). The intention of these stipulations is to reach the covenant ideal of equality before God and among them, and it is expressed in the phrase “there will be no poor among you” (Dt 15:4), although the actual life of the people mostly show a quite different quality, “the poor will never cease out of the land” (Dt. 15:11) (see Glass 2000:28). Along with the Sabbath, this code is concerned with several practical things such as giving of tithe (Dt 12:6; cf Cairns 1992:145), sharing one-tenth of the harvest with and caring for the foreigners, orphans and widows (Dt 14:28-29; 24:19-22; cf Millar 1998:153), using right measures in commerce (Dt 25:13-15; see Mayes 1991:331), and practicing fairness and justice in the law court (Dt 24:17; 27:19) especially for the poor, the widows and the aliens (cf Tigay 1996:228).

Last, is the Holiness Code embodied in the book of Leviticus (Lv 17-26). This contains instructions on how to practice social justice in the community. The code emphasizes that real holiness has its social dimension, a social holiness. Accordingly, holiness and pollution systems (i.e., clean and unclean), along with their associated ritual and theology, are to become agents of social transformation in the interests of a wider human freedom (cf Budd 1996:38-39). It practically implies the prohibition of having transactions that would result in taking advantage of the weaker and helpless people (see Hendrickx 1985:34), the care for sojourners (Lv 19:33-34; 24:22; cf Levine 1989:134; Hartley 1992:322), the observance of the Sabbath and Jubilee year, particularly in relation with “the liberty” (see Amit 1992:59 and Weinfeld 1995:152-153) of the poor and the slaves (cf Brin 1994:20-89), and the repayment of interest with a loan as well as paying it in advance (Lv 25:35-37), because these loans are essentially charitable (see Wenham 1979:321-322). For example, they enable a poor farmer to buy enough seed corn for the next season (cf Ex 22:24; Dt 23:21).

### 6.1.1.5 YHWH is the Judge of Israel

YHWH also is *the Judge of Israel*. He is the Supreme Judge who fairly judges not only the covenant people but other nations, too. Accordingly, the people were asked by the prophet to “maintain justice in the gate” (Am 5:14f). The gate, “as the centre for judicial process,” must be characterized by “justice.” Thus, the word “justice” here must be understood judicially, that is according to the right judicial standards, the right judgment, or right and honest sentences. Kapelrud (1961:66) insists that these right ethical standards are “in conformity with ancient written rules for life within the Covenant with YHWH.”

Moreover, the divine role of God as judge is justified by the prophet’s use of reason-announcement oracles, which has as its formula “because . . .” (1:11; 2:6; 5:11). Here, it can be seen that the idea of God, as the upholder of justice, is to be deduced instead from the particular reasons for God’s action. At this juncture, Amos’ intention in delivering his message (for instance in Am 5:1-17) is to make his audience, the Israelites, realize that the sinful acts they have committed, particularly in perverting justice, had lead them to the presence of the real judge, YHWH himself. Therefore, as Gowan (1996:346) writes, “God’s primary role in this book is to be the judge and the executioner of those persons who have refused to obey divine standard of justice—to which it is assumed God also adheres.”

As the ruler of the universe and the supreme divine judge, YHWH does have the right to intervene in human affairs (Martin-Archard 1984:20). This intervention is well expressed in YHWH’s speech or utterance, through the prophetic word formula. The formulas “Thus says YHWH” (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה) at the beginning and “Says YHWH” (נֹאֵם יְהוָה) at the end of the oracles or divine speeches are frequently used in the book of Amos (1:3ff; 2:1ff; 3:11f; 4:3ff; 5:3ff; 6:8; 7:17; 9:8f). Accordingly, since YHWH is the one who sends the prophet as a messenger, the oracle becomes a divine way of communication presented through an intermediary (Sweeney 2005:36-37). However, although using a mediator, he indeed speaks as the first person speaker, as Wolff (1977:92) says, “When YHWH comes to the fore in the messenger speech, it is consistently as the first person

speaker.” It thus means that YHWH is indeed the God who communicates or relates himself to his created people.

#### **6.1.1.6 YHWH is the Personal and the Living God**

This concept also connotes that YHWH is a *personal and living God*. He who speaks is the personal God who is alive. It is intentional when Amos calls for “seeking YHWH” putting it in parallel with “seeking life” (Am 5:4-5), because this saying indicates that YHWH is the living God and the source of life, and whoever seeks him will find life. A consequence of people’s seeking centres of cults (Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba) for national celebration of blessings—it is done for the reason that these sanctuaries are visible symbols of divine election and protection—is that YHWH offered them two options, life or death. Therefore, the focus is on escape or survival from the coming judgment versus complete destruction (cf Carroll R 1992:227). Auld (1999:64) argues that the phrase “seek me and live (5:4) can be a shorthand for “seek me in order to live.” Seeing a synonym between the words *בַּקֵּשׁ* (in Dt 30:6) and *שָׁרַף*, Stuart (1987:346) similarly believes that to seek YHWH is what leads to the ability to live. Since this is a matter of survival, the people are expected to give the proper response to this call, and at the same time, acknowledge that YHWH is the living God as well as the source of life.

These qualities of YHWH point to the fact that there is a “personal and living” God who wants to relate himself with his people. This is expressed in a relational description used by Amos (Am 5:1-17), a relationship between the performer and the spectator. Through the prophet’s speech, YHWH signifies himself as an orator who convinces his audience, the people of Israel, to act something essential, repentance in the sense that they turn back to YHWH unreservedly, stop sinning immediately and do justice accordingly. Moreover, Amos’ use of this description also gives evidence that God stores a strong desire to build up relationship through an effective communication between him and his audience, and through this interaction, he expects a positive and yet, personal, response from Israel’s side,

the change of their attitude and conduct. However, by doing social injustice, the Israelites broke the covenantal relationship between themselves and YHWH.

### **6.1.1.7 YHWH is the God of (Social) Justice**

YHWH is the *God of (social) justice*. According to Gowan (1998:33), the people of Israel must have been taught long before about the character of the God of the exodus, the upholder of social justice. It can be seen from the teaching that, in bringing the Israelites into their land, YHWH had championed Israel, then the weak and needy, against the powerful inhabitants (for example, the Amorites), just as he had against the powerful Egyptian oppressors at the time of Exodus. He is a God who had delivered the poor and the afflicted from Egypt and a God who hears the cry of all who suffer in similar straits of any age (see Sklba 1990:82). In Amos' time, YHWH then continues to champion the weak and needy, but now the oppressors are found among his own people. As a result, his own people must be punished (Am 2:13-16). The catalogue of what YHWH has done for Israel, given now as a basis for condemnation, means that they were expected to learn how to behave from the divine example (cf Jensen 2006:80-81). It thus suggests that YHWH commits to be consistent in his words and deeds to maintain (social) justice in the land, because it is naturally in accordance with his very own character as the God of social justice (cf Simundson 2005:157).

YHWH is consequently concerned with social justice. The prophecy of Amos can be heard as YHWH's response to the cry of the oppressed, for the weak and poor are special objects of YHWH's compassion and concern (see Mays 1969:10). He seems to be very sensitive to the cry of the powerless, the victims of unjust acts. The God of justice is particularly concerned that the poor and vulnerable receive justice from the powerful, whether in business transactions, political acts, or judicial decisions (cf Simundson 2005:155). There is a notion of securing justice on the part of YHWH. It is the will of God that justice is maintained in the land. Conversely, failure on the human side to respond properly may negatively result in the destruction of society. As Ward (1991:203) says, "oppression of the weak

is defiance of the will of God and a violation of the true spirit of the people of God. It is destructive of the fabric of Israelite society, and therefore jeopardizes the nation's integrity and survival.”

However, YHWH is not only the God who is concerned but also the God who acts on behalf of the oppressed. YHWH's acts of justice may be seen, on the one hand, in giving reward to the obedient acts of the people. The cause-effect pattern is very clear in some texts of Amos (Am 5:4-6, 14-15). Repentance in obedient faith (“Seek YHWH and good [not evil] if you want to live”) is a means of survival for the people in the face of political catastrophe which seemed imminent (cf Soggin 1987:87). Generally, in other prophetic books, the realization of divine social justice depends much on the efforts in maintaining access for every member of the nation to the natural source of all production, the land without at the same time reducing the individual to the status of a tenant, dependent on the governing authority of the moment, or taking from him the liberty to manage his own affairs and enjoy the fruits of his own labours (cf Eichrodt 1961:97). These were done by the people of Israel based in their religious conviction, their firm understanding of the will of God as implying an even handed justice, and the determined attempt to introduce this understanding into the nation's law.

On the other hand, God's justice may also be seen in punishing those who are disobedient to his law or statutes. For instance, God threatens to withhold the produce from the people, and it should be considered as punishment (Am 4:6-11). YHWH is the God who is just and does not act arbitrarily to punish; there is always a good reason. God is an active participant in the execution of justice. According to Simundson (2005:155), the punishment does not come automatically but only because God has acted to make sure that it happens. The reason for this coming misery can clearly be found in the present disregard of God's commandment to love and protect others (see Wolff 1983:19). God fights for the people against their enemies, bringing fire and destruction on those who oppose YHWH (see Simundson 2005:162). The end result of such a divine action of justice is that this punishment will affect the land's fertility in two basic forms: natural calamity and the aftermath of war (see Nogalski 2007:128).



### **6.1.1.8 YHWH: The Determinative Factor of Social Justice**

From the theological angle, YHWH becomes the determinative factor in dealing with social justice. As seen throughout the book of Amos, YHWH is the Creator, the Ruler, the Warrior and the Judge. Based on his own character, words and deeds, YHWH can be thought of as the God of social justice. He gives the absolute standards of justice, and, furthermore, he judges and acts according to this standard. He champions social justice and seriously wants it implemented in the land, as the prophet declares, “Let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream!” (5:24). Consequently, this metaphor suggests the moral demand is part of the divine to the nation. Instead of overturning justice and casting down righteousness, the nation is to let them flow in an eternal torrent. Thus, the call for justice is affirmed as immovable and in line with YHWH’s holy character (Carroll R 1992:248-249).

### **6.1.2 The Powerful: The Political Angle**

During the time of the eighth century BCE prophets, there was an emergence of the ruling elite, the powerful, in the society of Israel. This socio-political phenomenon was a result of a shift from a tribal to a monarchic society. Such a condition created the commercialization of property by the powerful and made uneven progress (inequality) which prompted strong rural resistance throughout monarchic times (cf Gottwald 1993:136). One should give special attention to the link between power and wealth in advanced agrarian societies and the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of the few. This results in what can be called a command, as opposed to demand, economy. The forces of supply and demand are much less important than the arbitrary, self-serving decisions of the elite (see Coote 1981:25-26).

At this juncture, it is important to identify who the powerful in the book of Amos are. In the book of Amos, one can consider the powerful as a certain social class, or governing class, consisting of the kings, the judges, the official prophets, the

rich, and the merchants. They can also be identified with some groups of people, for instance, the priests, the false prophets, and the elders (see VanGemeren 1990[a]:302), or “all titles for person who had roles of authority and power in the social and administrative structure of Judah and Israel” (Mays 1987:148). Coote (1981:25) explains that they are the ruling elite comprising from 1 to 3 percent of the population, and they typically own 50 to 70 percent or more of the land. On the basis of these disproportionate land holdings, they control by far the greater amount of power and wealth in the society, and their positions of power exercise domain over the peasantry (see Glass 2000:31).

### **6.1.2.1 The Elders and the Leaders in the Community**

Motyer (1993:62-62) proposes that the elders and the leaders in the community are respectively the legislative and executive arms of government. One may notice that when Amos notes that “violence and robbery” were stored up in the palaces (Am 3:10), he seems to use these terms to refer to the royal buildings (cf Wright 1990:107). It points out that the powerful are those who are within the monarchy. Different from Gottwald’s view (see Dempsey 2000:7) that considers Amos’ attack as mostly directed at the upper class, Carroll R (1992:195) argues that “the guilty cannot be defined as the upper classes, but rather those in power within the monarchy. Thus, the one responsible is not simply a *social stratum*, but the *socio-political system* itself.” In other words, they are the kings, the judges and official prophets (who give the king the good prophecy he seeks), the officials in the monarchy who supposedly have great power and influence in the society. Miller (2000:532) additionally indicates that these last two groups had access to king and court and thus to wealth and the use of both and influence to increase their personal growth, property, and capacity for luxurious life.

### 6.1.2.2 The Leaders in the Monarchy

Yet, those who are in the leadership position in the monarchy are also called to administer justice. In the Davidic kingship tradition (1 Sm 17:34-35), it is required for the kings and other officials (the leaders) of the monarchy to take great responsibility to guard and promote justice, because this kind of leadership will determine the health and the wealth of the community (cf “the city” Jr 22:8). They are responsible in giving right decisions as well as maintaining the right prescriptions or orders. Moreover, according to Bright (1965:145), the Davidic monarchy (1 Sm 17:34-35) had the obligation under God in establishing justice in the society, specifically defending the rights of the helpless as demanded in the covenant (Ex 22:20-23). At least, one can see such just quality in the life and reign of his descendant, the king Solomon (1 Ki 3:11, 28; cf 8:59; 10:9). Therefore, the idealism and the requirement of the kingship in Israel can be stated as such: the leadership has great responsibility to guard and promote justice. This leadership determines the health and wealth of the community (“the city” in Jr 22:8).

The point is quite clear that *Rechtsentscheidungen* (“decisions”) and *Rechtsbestimmungen* (“prescriptions” or “orders”) made by the king or any other administrator of justice should be fair, for example as stated in Exodus 21:31 (Koehler & Baumgater 1985:579). The reason for saying this is because these concepts are derived from God himself, specifically from his character. In addition, this implies that the powerful should have compassion for those who are unfortunate. This expectation is based on social teaching as written in the law and the covenant. Mays (1969:10) argues that the obligation of his people to protect and respect the weak in their helplessness is a theme of every survey of covenant norms preserved in the Old Testament. Therefore, YHWH requires that the strong should come to the aid of his deprived neighbour (Martin-Archard 1984:23).

### **6.1.2.3 The Wealthy and the Merchants**

Another major oppressing group is the wealthy and the merchants. Accordingly, the successes of political expansion and economic stability in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II brought economic prosperity to many in the nation (cf Stuart 1987:283; Cohen 1965:153; Schottroff 1984:28). As a result, there was an emergence of a new class of royal officials who controlled the strategic trade routes. The control over trade routes and lively commerce consequently nourished the rise of the wealthy class, including the merchants, who lived luxurious and comfortable lives. To portray the luxury and extravaganza of the wealthy, as Smith (1989:2) explains, Amos describes that they were living in the new wealth and access to expensive ivories and furniture (Am 3:12, 15; 4:1-3; 6:4-6).

In a more concrete way, these people were living in their summer and winter palaces adorned with costly ivory, sleeping in the gorgeous beds with damask pillows, reclining at their sumptuous feasts, and drinking expensive wine. The unscrupulous behaviour of the men in their political and business affairs (Am 5:10-12; 8:4-6) was significantly motivated by the ambition and greed of their wives or women (symbolized as “the cows of Bashan”)—in the background (cf Kleven 1996:215-227). As the fortunate, in terms of material wealth, these groups of people should show how to do justice to those who are unfortunate, for example, not cheating them in doing business with them, but rather giving a fair price (Am 8:5).

### **6.1.2.4 The Powerful: The Irresponsible Elites of Israel**

In Israelite religious conviction, particularly in the Deuteronomic theology, there is a belief that economic or material prosperity (“a land of Israel as a gift of YHWH”) is a sign of YHWH’s favour towards the people (cf De Vries 1995:192). For the powerful, they consider themselves as having no problem with God. They live as any wealthy or “normal” people have lived, “business and enjoyment as

usual.” As the nation experienced economic advancement, there was also an increase in religious activities, building religious physical objects (Bethel and Gilgal) and doing religious rites (Am 4:4-5). Such religious eagerness seems to be the expression of the people’s gratitude toward the divine blessing and favour upon them. In fact, unfortunately, these theological conviction and practical worship were done from wrong perceptions, because such a theology (“divine blessings”) requires divine justice, and the cult offered at religious shrines is therefore not a product of divine decisions but of human, and therefore it is illegitimate (cf Soggin 1987:71).

However, the emergence of the ruling class (the officials within the monarchy) or the affluent (both the rich and the powerful) does not grant all people in the society experience the same advancement. Instead, they manipulated the administration of justice to their own benefit and to the detriment of those without power, or, they use corrupted justice, at the expense of the poor and powerless, for their own gain (see Simundson 2005:153, 172-173). In a more concrete way, they perverted justice (Am 5:7) by crushing the needy, taking possession of the land of those who had fallen into debts or subjecting them to slavery (2:6), denying justice in the lay courts at the city gates (2:7; 5:10, 12), and profiteering usurious commerce through the cheating use of false weights and fraudulent merchandise in the marketplace (8:5-6). In short, the powerful live their lives without compassion for the oppressed (the poor and the needy). Amos (5:7) uses wordplay in order to underline the social sin of the powerful (“YHWH look for ‘justice’ but found ‘bloodshed.’ YHWH sought ‘righteousness’ but heard a ‘cry’). At this point, the powerful perverted justice by murdering the poor instead of giving them justice (Malchow 1996:42).

As a consequence, the powerful (the merchants and the indifference of authorities; see 4f; 6:1ff; 8:4ff) of the Northern kingdom are condemned for having repeatedly violated justice in contempt of the rights of the most deprived; and so it witnesses to the contempt in which it actually holds God himself (Martin-Archard 1984:9). It is announced that a sinful kingdom will be destroyed by YHWH. There is no explicit connection between this assertion and the prior assertion that Israel has

the same status in YHWH's eyes as other nations, so we can only infer what connection may have been intended. It appears to be that, since Israel has the same status before YHWH as all nations, Israel should not expect to be exempted from the ordinary execution of divine justice (Ward 1991:206).

The powerful, from a political perspective, refers to the groups of people who have both political and economic power (influence) to maintain social justice in the land. As seen in the book of Amos, this idealism was never realised. Rather, as Coote (1981:32) argues, "A tiny ruling class, driven by their need for power and wealth, impose an oppressive fragmentation of rentals on the Israelite peasantry, turning titles of income into titles of debts, including debt slavery." It thus shows that, instead of defending the poor and the needy, the main activity of the powerful was to maximize their benefits from their taxed domain over the peasants. The higher social stratum implies authority or power, and it may positively influence the lower ones. However, such a thing may also negatively be distorted into abuse of power. As wealth was accumulated by the powerful (the political and economic ruling classes), they consequently become more powerful and tended to be corrupt. As a consequence, the power of YHWH will fall upon the powerful, who abused the power granted to them. Wolff (1969:103; see also Cook 1996:20) pinpoints that YHWH's dealing with this abuse of power is in the form of "his advent which Israel will experience as a destructive blow."

### **6.1.3 The Powerless: The Social Angle**

The prophet Amos does not intend to trace the origin of "the powerless," or to explain the causes that put them in a hard situation. It seems that they just suddenly appear on the scene of the rhetorical speeches of the prophet. However, in the book of Amos, the concept of "the powerless" occurs in a general and broad sphere. On the one hand, it may refer to several groups of people as indicated by several terms. The most common terms used to identify them are צדקים (the righteous), אביונים (the needy), דלים (the poor) and ענויים (the afflicted) as seen in

Amos 2:6-7 (cf 4:1; 5:11, 12; 8:6). Soggin (1987:20-21) admits that it is not always easy to distinguish on the semantic and sociological level between the “poor,” the “humble,” and the “oppressed.” Thus, one may assume that such a distinction existed and that the terms are not synonymous.

### **6.1.3.1 The Innocents and the Needy**

Finley (1991:127) differentiates the terms in a sense of the effect experienced by the persons in the social structure, for example, צַדִּיק (“innocent” or “guiltless”) point to the victimization of the poor by their oppressor, אֲבִיוֹן (“needy”) refers to people who need money, power and legal recourse in the courts. Lacking these things, they are merely a means for others to get rich (cf Pleins 1987:61-79). While דָּל (“poor”) is a term of comparative need, implying a standard of wealth and abundance against which to compare the lack of wealth, the term עֲנִי (“afflicted”) indicates that power is a point of comparison between the rich and the poor, or the powerful trample on the powerless (helpless). Kleven (1996:218) indicates that the import of the initial criticism on the powerful is financial, and wealth is preferred to justice. Smith (1989:84) concludes that these people are severely oppressed, helpless, weak and unable to defend themselves against the rich and the powerful.

### **6.1.3.2 The Servant Girl/The Maidservant**

On the other hand, it may point to other groups of people mentioned in this book. Amos mentions נַעֲרָה (“servant girl” or “maidservant” [2:7]). This is a general term for a young woman, who is victimized by the powerful (the father and the son) who are in lack of basic moral conduct, degrading this maidservant and depriving her of her right to be treated fairly and properly (Fendler 1973:42-43). Paul (1991:82) emphasizes that this “young woman” belongs to the same category as that of “the poor” and “the afflicted,” one more member of defenceless and



exploited human beings in northern Israel. Another oppressed group is the עֲנָוִים (Am 2:7) translated naturally as “tenant farmers,” those who are subject to be abused because of their normal activities as farmers (cf Rosenbaum 1990:56).

### **6.1.3.3 The Nazirites and the Prophets**

Besides these, the prophet mentions religious people such as the Nazirites (2:12), the prophets (2:12) and the prophet Amos himself (7:10-13). They can be grouped under the category of “the oppressed.” These religious people supposedly represent God and his will to the people, but who are now corrupted by wine and have become severely dysfunctional. In the case of Amos, he is threatened by both political (the king) and religious (the priest) authorities. He is accused of meddling in the business of state, and warned of the most serious consequences; and forbidden to speak in the name of YHWH (cf Noble 1998:429). The prophet’s own experience (Am 7:10-17) at the sanctuary in Bethel, and also his lament (Am 5) as a personal (emotional) involvement with Israel’s fate and the rejection of the people of the One who sent him (Am 4:6-12) clearly speak of personal suffering endured by Amos in carrying out his prophetic ministry (Cleary 1978:58-73). Therefore, Amos’ defence seems to be silenced by “the last word” of the powerful, a prediction of destruction for the individual who has sought to stand in the way of God’s purpose (cf Auld 1999:28).

### **6.1.3.4 The Peasants and The Oppressed**

Although it is difficult to explicitly identify these people, Amos concludes that the powerless are preferentially marginalized and oppressed by the political and economic ruling elite. They are seemingly the main targets to be cheated and exploited by the powerful. In a more specific way, Coote (1981:26) identifies these powerless people as “the peasants,” who made up from 60 to 80 percent or more of the typical agrarian society during Amos’ time. In contrast, they

transferred the surplus of the cultivation of their land to the ruling elite. Such a surplus flows steadily from countryside to city in payment of rents, taxes, tributes, tithes, interests on debts, fines, and “gifts” to the powerful people. Therefore, almost universally the peasants live on the margin of subsistence (see Coote 1981:26). Soggin (1987:21) then adds that often these people, when they were innocent or at any rate had the right on their side, were completely at the mercy of the powerful and their judgments, even in the law courts (Am 2:7-8; 4:1b; 5:11).

The oppressed in Israel are also being denied their rights in the gates or legal courts (Am 5:10-13) by people wealthier and more powerful than them—people ridiculed by the prophet for their self-indulgent greed and self-serving religiosity (Ward 1991:205). In ancient Israel, indicated as “locus of legal issues” (Hayes 1988:162-3), the gate area is the public place where every person in the society can bring his or her legal case(s) to be heard (cf Klingbeil & Klingbeil 2007:161-162; cf Gowan 1996:390; Paul 1991:170-1; Boecker 1980:21-52). However, the prophet emphasizes that the oppressed cannot find justice in this place, because the administrators of justice (judges or tax collectors) practice corruption, particularly in terms of bribery. Unfairness exists in the legal court because the rich can buy justice to defend their cases (the crimes they have committed), while the poor do not have a chance of fair hearing in the court (Finley 1990:239). Furthermore, Carroll R (1992:232) asserts that the evil at the gate extends beyond the purely legal realm, because it is indeed related to morality, a corrupt public administration. As a result, “hopelessness” exists on the side of the powerless.

### **6.1.3.5 The Powerless: The Victims of Social Injustice**

From a social angle, the powerless are those who are the “victims” of social injustice. Such an injustice is taken by the prophet as the gravest crime of the Israelites. Amos depicts them as a class of people in Israel who lack any share in the wealth of the kingdom of Jeroboam II, who lack the basic necessities of life, and who are suffering as innocent victims (see Schottroff 1984:35). The poor in the Israelite society fell deeper and deeper into debt to rich landowners and were

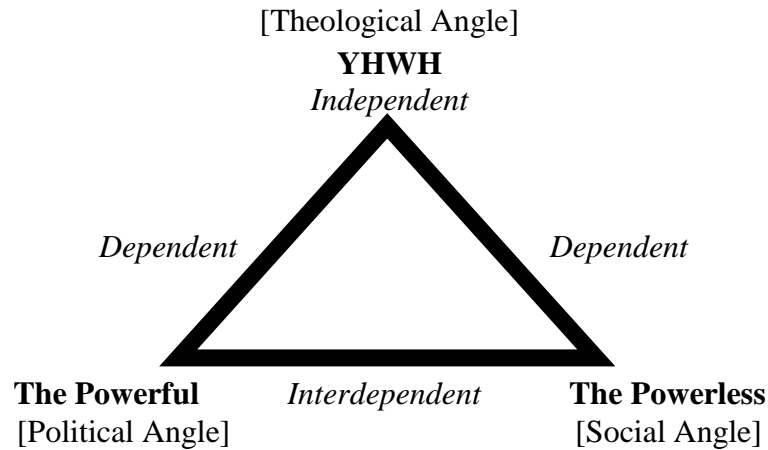
finally forced to sell their property to them, losing all that they had. Moreover, “the actions of Israel’s business community are leading to the extermination of the poor” (Limburg 1988:120). They were indeed the victims of the powerful, who heap up wealth and display it gaudily in a lavish “conspicuous consumption” economy (cf Gottwald 1985:356). These less fortunate members of society do not have the money, power, influence, or advocates to protect themselves and ensure that they are treated justly.

It is tempting for the rich and powerful to take advantage of such persons or simply to ignore them, to be indifferent to their suffering, to pretend that they do not exist (Simundson 2005:177). Whereas, the covenant between YHWH and Israel demands compassion directed towards them. The innocent should be acquitted, the needy fed, the poor respected, and the afflicted comforted (Finley 1985:415). The oppressed conclusively have lost their economic, social and legal rights (as mentioned in the covenant), and therefore they severely suffered (as victims) from practices of injustice done by the powerful.

#### **6.1.4 The Dynamics of the Relational Aspects of Social Justice**

As mentioned above, these angles (theological, political and social) are interrelated with each other. This interrelationship can be explained in the following way: YHWH (the theological angle), as the sovereign and just God, is independent of his people. This is a determinative factor where God’s activities and relationships with his people are usually described by verbs of communication, destruction and blessing (see Smith 1989:11). Opposed to this, his people, either the powerful or the oppressed, are dependent upon him. However, every member in the community, again, either the powerful or the oppressed, is interdependent with each other. This means that the previous should consider the latter as fellow citizens in such a community. Amos is clear in saying that the ideal conditions in Israelites society are those where responsibility is taken up by all citizens, both men and women, to treat others in justice and righteousness.

In this interdependency, ideally speaking, there must be an implication or assumption of mutual equity and liberty. Such idealism can be seen in the diagram below (modified from Allen's [1992:152] cone-shape structure of relationship and response):



This triangular model is an idealistic model of covenant relationship between the divine and his people, as stated in Leviticus 26:12, “and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be My people” (JPS). This relationship resulted from God’s election of Israel. It is a bond that begins with YHWH’s love of the Israelites (Dt 7:8). Hanson (1992:366) insists that the qualities Israel was to embody in its community were justice and love, because “Israel was to be a righteous and compassionate people, because God was righteous and compassionate.”

This model also suggests that although YHWH is relational in nature, as the theological angle, he is indeed *independent* from his people. It means that He is the absolute God who is most powerful (Am 5:8-9) and not dependent on anything in the universe including human beings. In reverse, his people should remain in dependency on him. The effect of such a condition is that among the people of Israel, both the powerful and the oppressed, there should be a relational interdependence between each other. This implies that there is no tensional relationship between the angles. As long as the covenant is not frustrated, or this ideal state is maintained, social justice will prevail in the land.

The ideal covenant relationship has its realization in historical momentum(s) throughout the history of God's people (nation), Israel. Such a relationship has been developed for ages in several concepts. Although the book of Genesis already told about the relationship between YHWH and human being in general, a specific mentioning of the "nation" (גוי) first occurred in the stories of Abraham (Gn 12:2) and his descendants, later called the "people" (עם [Gn 25:8]; cf Ex 3:7). At this early stage, "God was actively involved in, and ultimately responsible for, the creation of the people Israel" (McNutt 1999:41). It began with a promise and was passed down through Abraham's succeeding generations. Other books in the Pentateuch (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) then reported the liberation of this created people from the bondage in Egypt and the exodus experience.

Having been liberated from Egypt, the people of Israel were led by YHWH into a closer relationship with him (in feasting and serving יהוה) in the wilderness, as frequently declared in the book of Exodus (5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3). At Mount Sinai, God made a declaration pertaining to the establishment of relations between God and Israel (Lv 25-26) due to the promises made to Abraham and his descendants (Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim & Petersen 1999:151; Rendtorff 2005:438, 443). Moreover, the *shemmitah* or the Sabbatical year (Lv 25:1) announced at this mount is considered an act of equality performed by God-King at the beginning of his reign over Israel, and it may be associated with ceremonies of renewal of the covenanted relationship with Israel (as Weinfeld quoted from Muffs' and Tsevat's, 1995:243-244). Even though the people fail to keep their part—they certainly did in the wilderness period—God promises not to break his covenant (Dt 4:31). Thus, from Israel's ancient history, it is clear that YHWH has created, owned, inaugurated and maintained the covenant relationship with his "people" ("nation"), Israel.

Analyzing from the social, political and ethical perspectives, Gottwald (1979:685, 688, 692) proposes another concept, that of Israel as the "tribes of YHWH" who have a special relationship with God. YHWH here was historically concretized among them in being the primordial power to establish and sustain social equality

in the face of counter-oppression from without and against provincial and non-egalitarian tendencies from within society. At the end of the book of Joshua, the narrative recounts an assembly of the united tribes who make a covenant at Shechem, over which Joshua presides.

However, such a concept is not common in the biblical records. Rather than using the word “tribe,” the Scripture uses more explicit terms, for example, “the household of Jacob” (Ex 19:3). The word “household” (בֵּית) here connotes that the Israelites are the “children of Israel (Jacob).” This also relates to the word “clan” (שִׁבְט) as used in Psalms 74:2. On this, Goldingay (2006:173-174) explains that a clan may consist of several “families” (מִשְׁפָּחִים). A number of clans afterwards will be large enough to be political entities, and form a tribe, or even a nation. In such groups there would always be some who, by reason of misfortune or handicap, are unable to maintain their own support and status in the group (cf Mays 1987:154).

Albeit its terminological differs, the concept of Israel as “the people of God” is quite clear that they have a special kind of relationship with YHWH. Amos seems to have these historic-theological concepts while delivering his rhetorical speeches to the Israelites. He also consistently uses the same terms as above, for example, “Children of Israel” (Am 2:11; 4:5; 9:7), “family” (Am 3:1), “house of Jacob (Israel)” (Am 5:1, 25), and “My people (of Israel)” (Am 9:10, 14) in order to underscore the necessity or importance of such a relationship.

According to Hanson (2001:152-153), Amos’ prophetic discourse, presupposing YHWH’s covenant with Israel and Israel’s commitment to the laws of Mosaic covenant, is closely related to a Yahwistic faith, a belief in a notion of community in which all humans are precious to YHWH and protected by the laws of the covenant. Consequently, as the climax of the book focuses on YHWH and his judgment, it is impossible to discuss the idealism of the covenanted relationship without properly placing YHWH in its centre. Dempster’s (1991:187) study on the structure of “YHWH is his name” (elongated divine appellation) proves that the frequent occurrences of the term “YHWH” in the book of Amos (1:2; 1:3-

2;16; 3:1-15; 4:1-13; 5:1-17, 18-27; 6:1-14; 7:1-9:6; 9:7-15) makes the important point to the audience that YHWH and only he has the centre stage. Based on this “divine-centred” covenant relationship, the prophet Amos rhetorically delivered his critical message on the issues of social justice.

The ideal state of social justice thus can be fully realized under one condition: all parties involved in the covenant shows their loyal commitment to it. It is a state where “YHWH is the God of Israel, and Israel is the people of YHWH” (Goldingay 2006:173). YHWH’s covenant with Israel includes both what YHWH does as well as Israel’s appropriate response. On the one hand, YHWH must act in accordance to his covenant with his people. Covenant relationship (included in it grace and blessing) depends only on the unchangeable character of the One who makes it, because, at Sinai, YHWH declared that Israel is his own possession among all peoples “if you obey my voice and keep my covenant” (Ex 19:5). Seen from Israel’s history, YHWH has proven himself as the faithful God of the covenant by showing that his acts of provision in the past bring with it promises to his people for the future. These provisions and promises (YHWH is *their* God) are means by which God initiates and sustains their relationship with him (they are *his* people) (see Hafeman 2007:36). It seems to be proper to say that whatever action God performed, including his dealing with social justice, it must be seen as divine “covenantal gesture(s).”

On the other hand, the people of Israel have to be faithful to YHWH and his covenant. It is to be a life of trust and faith in him who calls. As they are called to a special relationship with God (Ex:19:3-8), Israel is to be God’s own people, set apart from other nations for his service just as priests were set apart from other men, and marked as such by a quality of life commensurable with the holiness of their covenant God (Childs 1974:367). Israelites are called to have a deeper fellowship with him. As YHWH declares “I will establish my covenant . . . to be God to you” (Gn 17:7) they should understand it as a call to worship and to serve the One (Absolute) God. The covenant itself implies that the Israelites must show specified loyalty to YHWH as a basic requirement, acknowledging that YHWH was their overlord and sovereign, for being a covenant people of God (See



Martens 1981:78). Moreover, in terms of religious motifs, they should love and obey God wholeheartedly, as written in conjunction with Israel's *Shema* (שמע ישראל), "Hear O Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH is one! You shall love YHWH your God with all your hearts, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Dt 6:4-5; cf 30:19-20). Brueggemann (1997:420) insists that Israel's obligation is to be fully responsive to, complementary to, and in full accord with the character of YHWH, so that the way in which the obligation is understood is commensurate with the way in which YHWH is construed.

The loyal obedience to YHWH is not the only requirement to maintain this covenant relationship, but also to treat other people of God fairly or justly. Israel's covenantal responsibility, according to the prophet Hosea (4:6; 5:3; 6:4; 8:1; 13:4), is closely related to both the terms "steadfast love" (חסד) and "knowledge" (דעת) which was not merely a vertical relationship but was also worked out in a horizontal development of communal living (cf Allen 1992:152). Since the covenant contains a dimension of human-human relationship, therefore YHWH demands that his people must have social concern or compassion to others, especially the poor and the weak such as widows, orphans, and strangers (Dt 10:17-19; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:19-21; 26:12-15) (see Patterson 1973:223-334; Fensham 1965:129-139).

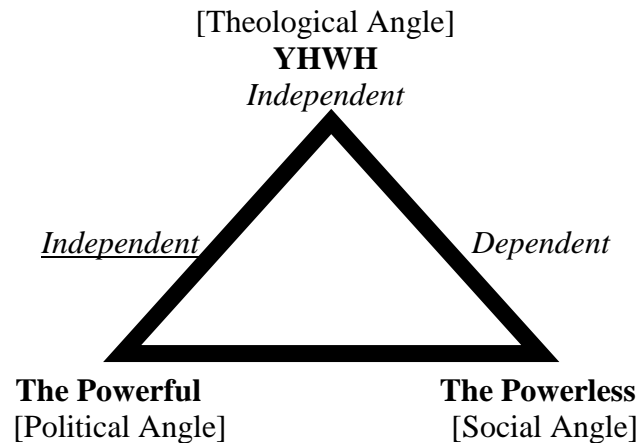
Additionally, the calling of the people of God points out to a kind of ethical monotheism—the concept that there was only one God, who demanded ethical behaviour or moral order of the world (Cf Koch 1985:58). Fundamental to this, YHWH is a God of moral perfection, and he requires moral behaviour of all his people. The election by YHWH carries responsibility to live according to his revealed will as it was regulated in the laws (see McConville 2002:174), and this concern of Israel's relationship with God focuses on the responsibilities of human beings to a deity who is believed to be both creator and redeemer (cf Bailey 1995:80-81; Flanders, Jr, Crapps & Smith 1988:176).

Amos seems to have this concept in mind as well. The prophet assumed that YHWH has a special relationship with his people (the Israelites), as he states,

“You only have I known of all families of the earth” (Am 3:1-2). The word “know” (יָדַע) used in this text implies that it is a covenant relationship bound by a stipulation), that is, Israel “alone” (רַק) is YHWH’s particular covenant people (cf Stuart 1987:322). It is also stressed that every participant in the covenant must keep the ברית faithfully, particularly, on the part of the Israelites. Amos calls them to seek “YHWH” and to seek “life” (Am 5:5-6) in order to, again, have a right vertical relationship with YHWH. These two admonitions are not new commands, but rather the summary statements of how to live in relationship to their God, YHWH (cf Cook 2005:57).

What is more, the people of Israel have their horizontal obligation to have concern and to care for the unfortunate (Am 5:7, 24; 6:12). Amos emphasizes that as YHWH has shown his mercy to them, they also should accordingly show merciful acts of justice to the underprivileged. Consequently, it was the responsibility of the elders (the powerful) to maintain the social equilibrium within the community by ensuring that proper relations prevailed among the members of the community. For example, it was their task to defend by means of the law those who were too poor or weak to defend themselves (Newsome 1984:28). There was a direct link between the will of YHWH and right relationship within the community (cf Allen 1992:153). Lastly, it is also suggested that, even within their obligation to have a right relationship with other human beings, they must still be dependent on YHWH.

However, in the book of Amos, the description of the covenant relationship is no longer in its ideal form. One may notice that, firstly, the powerful become unfaithful and rebellious to YHWH. Although they seem to show religious activities (worshipping the deity [Am 4:4f; 5:4-5], and feasting [worshipping God] in the sanctuaries [Am 8:4]), it is indeed superficial, only outward empty rituals. From the outset Amos has criticized God’s people, Judah and, particularly, the northern kingdom Israel, for breaking this vertical relationship. The structure then is changed as can be seen in the following:



In reality, the Israelites had violated the sanctity of the house of their God (Am 2:8), and YHWH's servants, both Nazirites and prophets, had been forced into disobedient acts (Am 2:12). They also performed feasts, assemblies, sacrificial offerings, and songs that actually are worthless in YHWH's sight (Am 5:21-25; cf 8:9-10). Amos' (also his contemporaries') well-known attacks on sacrifice and ritual (Am 4:4f; cf Is 1:10ff; Mi 6:6ff; Jr 7:1ff) appears now to be *ad hoc* formulations within an invective and directed to certain religious abuses, although it is not ideologically based on an anti-cultic principle (cf Childs 1985:173). In fact, Amos points out specifically to Bethel sanctuary as the major cause that turns Israel away from YHWH and that must be removed (see Sweeney 2000:191).

As a result, the powerful in Israel become independent from YHWH, as portrayed in the diagram above. Such an independency can be clearly seen in their wilful rebellion toward the covenant. The point is clear: at the heart of covenant breaking is idolatry. When Israel turns away from YHWH, they, of necessity break YHWH's standards. Although they seem to present elaborate rituals as proud exhibitions of piety (Am 4:4-5), they perverted, misunderstood and rejected their own theological conviction. Barstad (1987:127-38) argues that these religious sins are rooted in their worshiping other deities, or it is more proper to say, in their syncretistic attitude, mixing up their traditional belief in YHWH with other foreign beliefs of other deities.

Moreover, the powerful became hypocritical, for on the one side, they are doing religious performances and elaborations, while, on the other side, they are

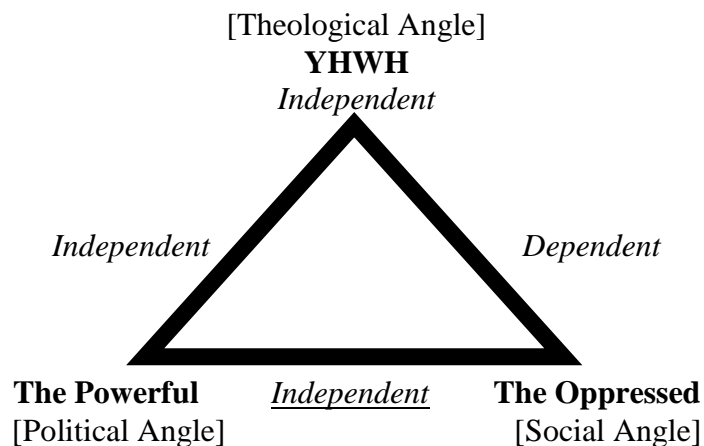
neglecting the very important substance of their faith, believing or trusting YHWH alone, as often cited in שמע ישראל. Such religious hypocrisy makes the people's worship useless because it is conducted without faith (Am 2:7) (cf Mathews 2001:71). They seem to take for granted their special status as God's people. They did not realize that Israel's privilege means not indulgence but special demands, greater responsibility. Amos puts a God-centred emphasis (4:1-13) in contrast to the self-centred abuses of worship and social order which he condemns (Joyce 1994:223-225). Consequently, YHWH rejected them and prepared judgment or punishment for them (Am 3:14; 4:4-5; 5:4-5, 22-24). It is YHWH's absolute big "No!" to such religious misconducts (see Hubbard 1989:108; cf Crenshaw 1975:247).

Secondly, the powerful (political, economic, and religious leaders) of Israel became indifferent to their fellow humans, especially the poor and the weak. In contrast to what is expected of them, they not only left no gleanings for the poor, they also "plundered" what meagre possessions the poor had; giving nothing, taking everything. The present lack of justice is not due to the wickedness of its inhabitants but to that of its leaders ("rulers" in Mi 3:1, 9; and "princess" in Is 3:14). The centre of the accusations is specifically aimed at the problem of injustice by the leaders who practice bribery (Micah accuses the "heads" of judging for bribes. While, Isaiah claims that "everyone loves a bribe"), and did not properly take care of orphans and widows in handling their legal affairs. Stansell (1988:113) describes this situation wherein "Leaders of Jerusalem are corrupt, they take bribes; weaker members of society suffer." In the same vein, VanGemenen (1990[a]:302-303) asserts that the leaders are largely to be blamed for this corruption; they had become self-centred and had corrupted God's righteousness and his just kingdom ideals by their own ideals, by corruption of justice, and by oppressions (cf Jr 23:1-2; 9-11; see 2:8; 10:17-22; 13:18-20).

Mays (1987:151) similarly points out that the central political issue of the crisis was the administration of justice, especially unfair treatment of the marginalized on the legal sphere. In ancient Israel, the law court may be found at the gate of towns (cf Am 5:12, 15) where law cases were judged (Is 29:21; cf Matthews

1996:37). Ironically, justice was distorted by the officials in these sites. On the other hand, the officials who administer justice deprived the right of the poor. The prophet Isaiah (Is 10:1-20) spoke against those who were responsible for maintaining the laws of the country who were doing justice—by either promoting new and oppressive law or of unjust decisions based on existing law—in such a way as to enrich themselves at the expense of the helpless (Oswalt 1986:259).

This is rooted in the empty religiosity of the powerful. It seems that the religious rituals were juxtaposed with the greed and inhumanity of the people. The detachment from YHWH vertically resulted in the disengagement from other human being horizontally. Brueggemann (1978:17) argues that—in the case of prophetic imagination (the prophets of Israel are attached to the ideal prophet, Moses in a Mosaic movement)—one cannot understand the meaning of it unless he or she sees the connection between the *religion of static triumphalism* (vertical aspect) and the *politics of oppression and exploitation* (horizontal aspect). This trajectory may be schematically seen as follows:



Throughout the book, Amos reported Israel's lack of covenant loyalty, showing that her outward display of worship failed to compensate for her lack of compassion and humanity that the Mosaic covenant demanded (cf Finley 1990:114). Moreover, it is not just a lacking of covenant loyalty but also a breaking of the covenant relationship. Amos thus provides a clear definition of covenant breaking. It is committing adultery, doing acts of violence, lying, oppressing others and perverting justice (cf House 1998:363).

In Amos' indictments, the people's (the powerful's) sins are related to the law of YHWH. Although no direct citation is made from it, the elements of these are present, including the care of the poor and the needy, administration of justice, use of just weights in commerce, and above all, the obligation to worship YHWH alone. The primary assumptions of such indictments is that Israel knew right from wrong on the basis of the traditions of their faith, whether transmitted within the cult, the written law, for example "The Book of the Covenant" (Ex 20:21-23:19), or the humanitarian teachings of the clan elders (cf Hubbard 1989:112). Eventually their record of broken covenant promises become so virulent and long-standing that God invoked the curse of the covenant, sending the prophets with their call to repentance and their announcement of the coming judgment.

The negative effect of such a vertical broken relationship is that the oppressed are cornered into a marginal position. There is no ideal structure that existed in the society where the covenant relationship is breached. The powerless are not being taken care of by the powerful according to the covenant law (Dt 10:17-19; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:19-21; 26:12-15). The demands to have concern for the oppressed basically is rooted in history. The Israelites (especially the powerful ones) should remember from the past that once they were slaves in Egypt. Only through the mercy and compassion of YHWH were they brought out of that bondage, led through the wilderness, and were given possession of the land of the Amorites (Am 2:10).

In contrast, the Israelites (the powerful) denied such a historical remembrance, forgot YHWH's merciful deeds, and treated their neighbours oppressively. Besides, in reality, there was no access for the oppressed to justice in a formal and legal way. The "gate," where the elders (judges?) met to decide what is right and wrong (Am 5:15) and where Israel's fate will be decided, was corrupted by illegal and unjust practices, such as briberies and similar transgressions. The corruption of the "gate" was the source of evil, its renewal the only hope (Miller 1987:57). As the oppressed suffer social injustice from the powerful, they have lost not only all resources in order to sustain their lives, but also, most importantly, lost their economic, social and legal rights. This means that the weak, foreigners and the

excluded will not have any possibility of survival (see Gerstenberger 2002:240; Mays 1987:151).

The prophet Amos did not explicitly describe the “feelings” of the oppressed, because it is not his intention to do so in his speech. However, as the oppressed experienced great suffering, one may infer that in this situation, the only hope for the oppressed in this preferential angle is in YHWH at the theological angle. Simundson (2005:155) writes, “the weak, vulnerable, oppressed, who see no relief from human sources, can be assured that God will act to help them.” This oppressive situation may bring them to a theological reflection of their past saving experience in the history, to the original existence of the people, that is, when they were slaves in Egypt. Moreover, they should remember that the land had come into their possession as the climax and outcome of the history of deliverance (cf Mays 1987:150).

The narrative of Exodus 2:23-24 tells how the children of Israel groaned because of bondage, so they cried out; and their cry rose up to God because of their bondage (see Limburg 1988:122-123). Therefore, God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He looked upon them and acknowledged them. Amos’ prophecy should thus be understood within a larger *Heilgeschichtliche* framework, the Exodus tradition (cf Childs 1979:409; for Amos’ attack on Israel’s false concept of exodus, see Hoffmann 1989:181). Hanson (1992:366) insists that “the remembering of the exodus tradition was so important” for the people of Israel (as to the Deuteronomists) because it determines the life and death of the nation (Dt 8:1-20). That YHWH is indeed the upholder of justice and the advocate for the helpless is to be deduced from God’s saving action of the oppressed (Am 1:11; 2:6; 5:11; cf Gowan 1998:33).

Breaking the covenant by rebelling against YHWH and performing social injustice to others is not without negative consequence. It could, in some sense, make the Israelites cease to be the people of God (Ex 19:5). It was in the tension between these two affirmations that Israel lived under the Mosaic covenant, and this covenant alone makes their subsequent history understandable. In this regard, Amos also emphasized the “booth of David that is fallen” (Am 9:11-15). The



kingdom of Israel was “failing.” This occurred in the loss of the land to the Assyrians and the payment of tribute to Assyria by Jehu, as Amos announced that “injustice will mean exile ‘away from his land (Am 7:7), a land that will be ‘parcelled out by lot’ to aliens (Am 7:17)” (Habel 1995[a]:83).

Beyond doubt, the punishment revealed by YHWH through Amos foretold the fall of Samaria as well as of Judah. The message about the end is therefore exactly the same thing as the message about the inescapable encounter with God. In the tension between the present and the future, the powerful of Israel see too little if they only consider themselves. This implies that the right relationship among men and women is being destroyed because the moral law of God was being ignored, and this destruction was being carried out at the very “grass roots” of Samaria’s life (cf Newsome 1984:28). The connection between present behaviour and future destiny takes on a new dimension. Therefore, the encounter with YHWH (the theological angle), the Incomparable Effective, is the fundamental element of the irresistible word (see Wolff 1983:18).

### **6.1.5 Summary**

The theological concept of social justice in the book of Amos cannot be separated from the idea of the covenant, especially the covenant relationship between God and God’s people (cf Gottwald 1959:276). It is proposed that such a relationship can be comprehended in a form of “a triangular relational aspects of social justice.” This triangular model consists of three different and yet related angles (theological, political and social points of view) representing YHWH, the powerful and the oppressed. The ideal of social justice will exist as long as the structure is maintained that YHWH is independent, being the absolute and determinative factor of social justice, and on the other hand, the people of Israel (both the powerful and the oppressed) remain dependent on YHWH. Meanwhile, as fellow members of the covenant community, the people of Israel, especially the powerful (the economic, political and religious leaders), should act according to their call as “instruments of the covenant” (see Eichrodt 1987:289-452),

particularly in maintaining (social) justice, to have concern for and take care of the underprivileged (Ex 22:21-24; Dt 10:17-19; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:19-21; 26:12-15).

It is believed that the theological basis of social justice in the book of Amos is closely related to the issue of the covenant. According to Howie (1959:280), YHWH demands of his people, as part of the covenant, the elementary duties of honesty, integrity, justice, humane treatment of the weak and poor. It follows then that the basic arena for expression of the religion is in the common life. That, of course, is the substance of the covenant concept. The consequence of this covenantal status attached to the Israelites is that when the chosen people of God can not live in justice and truth, they actually break the covenant—especially the Sinaitic Covenant—irrevocably (cf LaSor 1988:60), and at this point, they are in a state of death. Gowan (1998:25-30) once introduces the theology of the prophetic books as “the death and resurrection of Israel,” especially when he identifies Amos 5:1-2, 16-17; and 8:1-10 as a funeral song, the lament over the virgin Israel.

On the other hand, the prophetic theology is also a theology of resurrection. God wanted his people to be resurrected or restored spiritually as well as morally, and this condition might result in a renewal of the covenant. He has shown mercy to his people and took sides with them by making himself the advocate of the oppressed and the defender of the poor. At this point, the prophet Amos, as it is written in Amos 3:9-10; 4:1; 8:4-6, was showing the demands of the God of the covenant, and for the first time, “displaying what is to become one of the dominant features of the religion of the writing prophets” (Prévost 1998:36-37). As a result, YHWH, through his prophet, challenged the people of Israel to seek him in order that they may have life (Am 5:4-5).

As required from the covenant relationship, YHWH keeps his part (his promise) because of his love and because he is God. He then may punish Israel for disobedience, and may even punish the whole generations for their stubborn disbelief. But his covenant remains in force—simply because of his nature. On the other hand, Israel is obligated to keep the covenantal requirements—not to put YHWH in debt to Israel, but because Israel is his people and so should behave

accordingly (Dt 8:1-6). Bergant (2001:81) thus points out that the teaching of social justice in Amos (5:24) underscores one of the most significant aspects of ancient Israelite religion, that is, the connection between one's covenant commitment to God and one's covenant responsibilities towards other covenanted neighbours. YHWH is particularly concerned that "the poor and vulnerable receive justice from the powerful, whether in business transactions, political acts, or judicial decisions" (Simundson 2005:155).

## 6.2 ESTABLISH JUSTICE IN THE LAND

The prophet Amos undoubtedly functions as "a mouth piece of YHWH" in proclaiming the divine words about Israel's sin of injustice and its judgment (cf Wolff 1983:11; Gottwald 1993:114). As both "a mediator of the covenant" (Van der Woude 1982:38-39) and "a prophet of doom and destruction" (as one of the *Unheilspropheten*)" (Clements 1996:192; see also the concept of "prophecy of disaster" of Koch 1969:210-220; Overholt 1979:532), Amos plays an important role in the divine attempt to establish social justice in the land. The prophet rhetorically speaks about social justice as YHWH called and commanded him to do. The prophet was the primary instrument of YHWH, who introduces the unprecedented *New* into the history of Israel, the future end has come to "my people Israel" (8:4; cf Wolff 1987:20). In the shadow of the economic and political developments of the eight century BCE Israel, Amos also revealed the real structure of poverty in the society: the poor are "at the mercy of the arbitrary expectations and demands of the rich" (Wolff 1977:104). This structure, as Amos speaks, gives the audience an unusual insight into the material conditions of the time, and also gives substance to the prophet's call for justice (cf Pleins 2001:369).

However, theologically, it is not Amos who speaks about social justice but YHWH himself who speaks through his prophet. The prophet is only a mouth-piece of God who does not speak for himself. Therefore, to answer the question mentioned in the introductory part of this chapter, "What (whose) vested

interested is operative in this text (the book of Amos)?” It is indeed God who has vested interest in the issue of social justice. In the above triangular model, one can infer that in the theological angle, YHWH himself is the determinative factor of social justice. YHWH is the only figure in the book of Amos who is absolutely responsible to maintain justice in the land. Through the prophecy of Amos—who could never expect the Israelites to understand—God roars to the people about the consequence of abandoning justice (Am 3:8) (see Linville 2000:73). In other words, Amos persuasively directs the audience to the subject of social justice. Berquist (1993:54) insists that the “justice and righteousness” (Am 5:24) Amos prophesied do not refer to the human activity that God prefers, but to God’s own activity to purge the community of its failings in order to provide justice and righteousness for all people.

The main charge of Amos’ rhetorical speeches, in accordance with YHWH’s objective, is to maintain social justice in the land (המדת). Before discussing it further, it is important to note that although similar to the phrase “establish justice in the gate!” (Am 5:15), this aim (the title of this research) is not quite the same as what is intended with such a phrase. The reason is that to establish social justice in the land has a wider scope than just maintaining it in a locality, the legal court. However, it is universal in its extent for it deals with the surrounding nations (Am 1:3-2:3; 3:9; 6:1, 2; 9:7, 9) of Judah and Israel (see Paul 1971:397-403). Amos portrays God as King of the universe, who has sovereign power over the world (Am 4:13; 5:8-9; 9:6), including the nations mentioned in the passages. Therefore, the whole world becomes YHWH’s legal court, because he is indeed “the Judge of all the earth” (Gn 18:25) (cf Niehaus 1992:326). As the real Judge, YHWH is the guardian of justice and righteousness, and, in reality, he is not a God who may be satisfied with sacrifices only, but he also demands justice and righteousness (Kapelrud 1961:48). Therefore, whenever the word “land” is used in this study, it may both refer specifically to the land of Israel, “the subject of the covenant between YHWH and his people or the actual ground on which Israel’s bond with המדת lives as the foundation of its life” (cf Koch 1985:37), and all the earth (nations), in general.

### 6.2.1 The Context: *Realpolitik* and the Covenant

The maintaining of social justice must take place within the setting of the land. Amos clearly mentions that the nations, particularly the nation of Israel, are the focus of his addressed speeches. A question may be raised and specified to “What was happening in the land?” so that YHWH had to perform his activities in such a locus. First of all, one may notice that there is an existence of the *Realpolitik* (cf VanGemerén 1990[a]:154) in Israel’s society, for example, the using of power (in a socio-political sense) based more on practical rather than ideological considerations. Lederach (2005:59-60), from a secular political perspective, explains that this kind of politics is blind to the existence of social spaces, relationships, ideas and processes, and the worst is that it has the abysmal records of destroying rather than building a dynamic justice and peace: public confidence and authentic public engagement. The praxis of such a political model can be related to social, economic and political issues that occurred in Amos’ time, as seen in the practical abuse of power and wealth by the powerful.

It is argued that the picture of the relation of the prophets, including Amos, to society as a whole, more specifically, to the state or the ruling power(s) and to the cult, that is, to the social, political, and religious institutions, is quite complex (cf Miller 2000:517). For instance, the socio-economic context of YHWH’s activity seems to be contradictory. On the one hand, under Jeroboam II of Israel (in the eighth century BCE) the northern kingdom reached the zenith of its political stability and economic prosperity (cf Cook 2005:46). But, on the other hand, as this condition was no longer maintained, inequality and oppression occurred. Urbanization and surplus farming become acute, and brought a shift in the economic structure. Competition among the farmers who had larger crops and those who had lesser resulted in a loss on the side of the latter. According to Pleins (1999:369), “Amos points out quite clearly that Israel’s success story included in its cast of characters a hosts of people victimized by the rise to the top of a few urban dwellers.” Thus, such inequality and oppression can be seen as “a grave societal evil” (see Cook 2005:50).

The shift of social structure does not only influence the rich-poor relationship but also the relationship between the leaders and those who are led in the society. As mentioned above (see discussion on “The Powerful: The Political Angle” in this chapter), the powerful are the leaders in economic, political and religious spheres, for instance, the kings, the judges, the official prophets, the rich or the merchants. Those who are in a leadership position in the monarchy are expected to administer justice (cf Matthews 1991:204-216). While those who are business practitioners should implement just or fair economic dealings. Most of all, whoever they are, the people of God are called to show compassion to the poor and weak as stipulated in the covenant.

Unfortunately, the powerful did not live according to such requirements. The existence of the covenant does not have much effect on the powerful. Huffmon (1983:109) reports that there was a change of traditional order in eighth century BCE Israel, because new territory, new population, and new prosperity must have meant an increasing disparity between the urban elite of the administrative and religious centres and the village population. Such increasing development of socio-economic is likely to produce “economic instability” (Glass 2000:34) and social tension within the order in the society. In reality, the powerful elite trampled on “justice” and “righteousness” in the courts and elsewhere (the sanctuaries, the markets and others) (Am 5:7, 24; 6:12; 2:8; 4:4; 5:5-6; 8:4-6), where these important words should triumph (cf Soggin 1987:20). It is unthinkable that the powerful who are responsible to take care of and to defend the poor and the weak did just the opposite. They treated their fellow citizens very badly as seen in the use of a sevenfold structure of “sins” indicated the completeness the sin of this group of people (Am 8:4-6).

What is more, the context of Amos’ message on social justice is theological, because, as discussed above, it is related to the issue of the covenant. Hubbard (1989:112) asserts that, for Amos, the demands of the covenant (covenant relationship) were summed up in two words “justice” and “righteousness” (5:7, 24; 6:12). One may notice that the book of Amos includes several classic references to the covenant norms of justice and righteousness. If the covenant

stipulations (in the covenant laws) involve specific behavior, the book of Amos attests to particular misdeeds which have occurred in the religious (Am 2:8; 4:4; 5:21-24), economic (Am 2:6; 5:11; 8:5) and legal spheres (5:15, by implication). Amos seems to indict the northern kingdom for violating God's covenant, but with special attention to social justice issues (see Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim & Petersen 1999:302-303). The people, at this point, had broken the covenant of YHWH and the God of the Covenant had to punish them for it.

Brueggemann (1978:39), in addition, relates such a covenant theology (in Mosaic tradition) with creation theology. The link between the two traditions (theologies) is that both of them are characterized by a concern for universality and order. YHWH, in the covenant tradition, through his prophets, delivered a critique of the present order and a call for a moral and social transformation, as he had shown in Israel's exodus experience. In the same way, creation theology has its social function to establish, legitimate, and advocate order at the cost of transformation (cf Brueggemann 1988:101-121). In another occasion, Brueggemann (1988:101) adds that "creation theology is allied with the king, the royal liturgy, and therefore with reasons of state. The outcome is to coalesce the royal ordering of economic distribution and political power with the goodness and reliability of God's intended order, thereby absolutizing the present order as the very structure God has decreed in and for creation." The powerful in Israel supposedly are to be the agents of universal social transformation as YHWH intended them to be (as modelled in the exodus experience). Middleton (1994:266) thus argues that God's purpose in exodus—to establish the Creator's name in all the earth—was not limited to Israel, but was cosmic in scope. Doing social injustice to other created human being(s) is thus a violation of the intended purpose of creation (creation theology), order and justice.

In this connection, discussion of social justice in the book of Amos should also be placed in a religious context. Amos explicitly mentions religious sites (the sanctuaries) and religious rites including feasts and animal sacrifices (Am 4:4-5; 5:25). As the people of the covenant, the powerful in Israel seem to outwardly and regularly keep their religious duties. One can infer that by doing these they



give an impression that they know the theological as well as practical function of such religious endeavors, to facilitate the covenant relationship between them and YHWH. However, religious sites and rites merely function as a religious symbol or identity. Amos despised their hypocritical attitudes by revealing their dishonesties while worshipping YHWH.

Conclusively, Miller (1987:58) asserts that Amos' critique of this recalcitrant condition of his people centred on, at least, three consecutively sequences, from "complacent theology" (YHWH was always "with them"), to "soporific worship" ("doing all the religious rites joyfully"), and ended in "a callously affluent lifestyle" ("the indolent wives, luxury-loving husbands, and expensive ivory inlaid furniture"). Ironically, at the same time, the people of Israel "know little about right conduct" (Am 3:10). Thus, the context of Amos' rhetorical speech seems to be a complex process in which the basic social institutions of the Israelites society are seen as no longer upholding YHWH's moral (and religious) order (cf Dearman 1988:20). Thus, upon the hearing of the verdict, the people of Israel can'to escape or look for an excuse. All that the prophet had been spoken in his oracle was solely in the context of convincing audience and proving their wrongs.

## **6.2.2 The Reason: Breaking of the Covenant**

All the facts presented in the context of the eight century BCE Israel may lead one to the *raison d'être* of what lies behind YHWH's intention to establish social justice in the land. The basic idea is that justice above all is what YHWH requires of his people (5:24). It is rooted in the experience of Israel's salvation history. Through the history of salvation, God has acquired the land for Israel; but in such a way that he continues to be bound up with the forces of the land itself. Every Israelite peasant who makes a living for himself and his family from his toils with the soil, so acquiring freedom of action, will only retain that freedom as long as he respects the fact that this soil belongs to God, and gives thanks to God

and his salvation history. But this also means respecting his fellow-country-man on the land which God has granted to his particular kindred (see Koch 1985:62).

Israel is admonished to be like YHWH. Amos and other prophets saw the whole people of Israel stamped with a purpose and destiny that demanded the expression of divine nature in its total life (cf Gottwald 1959:276). This shows concretely in the practice of the ancient community justice, a fair distribution of the opportunities in the life within one's own faith group. The weak, foreigners, the excluded are to get their fair share of possibilities of survival. This means that a special covenant relationship with YHWH involves firm obligations. This also means having a strong position over against enemy nations and neighbours, with YHWH's help (cf Gerstenberger 2002:240).

Amos seems to be aware of the wonderful way YHWH has helped Israel to escape from Egypt (Am 2:10; 9:7) and conquer Canaan (Am 2:9). It is absolutely evident to him that Israel's life in this land was to be guided and controlled by certain firm standards of right and wrong (Am 2:6-7; 3:2) as written in the covenant law (see Wright 1990:25-28). However, in reverse, the crux of the problem afflicting the Israelite society of Amos' time is that there was no "justice," and "righteousness" (cf Miller 1987:55). One should note that Israel's predicament was a result of covenant breaking. Accordingly, the prophetic insistence on justice and righteousness was rooted in the covenant traditions of Yahwism and addressed a society that, according to those traditions and standards, was in crisis, although the crisis was hardly self-evident to many within the community of Israel. The prophets (including Amos) perceived the reality differently and so called for a measure of justice in the society that was largely absent (see Miller 2000:520).

Discussion of the triangular model above shows that the elite of Israel (the powerful) become independent of YHWH. It means that they willfully disobeyed YHWH and his will. Disobedience simply indicates that the covenant relationship between God and God's people is halted. It is clear from the analysis of the given texts that the prophet Amos stands against the breaking of the covenant committed by the powerful, perverting the idealism of social justice. Amos, as an exponent of moral law, believes that "justice and righteousness" are the terms which have

meaning only in specific, familiar relationship, and the particular meaning is determined by the particular relationship (see Napier 1962:207), and this implies that to breach this relationship is to break the covenant. The breaking of the covenant becomes an inescapable result for the powerful for particularly violating the special covenant relationship that has been established between God and the people (cf Cook 2005:64).

Amos' speeches (Am 2:6-7; 5:7, 10, 12; 8:5-6) expose the powerful who violated their covenant responsibilities through social injustice perpetrated against their own people (see Bergant 2001:81; Cook 2005:64). The prophet based his criticism on the actions of those who willfully disobeyed YHWH and his law (against YHWH himself and their neighbours). In other words, he emphasized that the response of the people towards YHWH is quite central in this covenant relationship. Those who fear YHWH, who remember what YHWH has done, and who turn to YHWH for help and strength, will find instruction and hope in the midst of life. While those determined to go their own way should know that this God of compassion does not leave the guilty unpunished. It seems that the great and terrible day of YHWH functions as both warning and comfort, depending upon what one has learned from this history (cf Nogalski 2007:136).

The breaking of the covenant in the form of disobeying YHWH and mistreating the oppressed is considered as sin, namely social and religious sin, against YHWH. Amos used the word פִּשְׁעַי to describe the present existence of Israel. The meaning of such a term is related to "a sacrilegious rebellion" (Am 4:4f), where people brought a stinking, poisonous cloud to the sanctuary, and so the abomination accumulates there, because this is the place where the whole of Israel is gathered together (cf Koch 1985:62). Koch (1985:62) continues that, as contents of the main charge, the word also belongs to the sector of "constitutional law;" but underlying it is the ontological trinity of God, country and people. Attacking the laws of the land, dispossessing the דְּלִיִּם, means rising against the Almighty and the order he has created through salvation history; and it is this order alone which provides the conditions and possibilities for a successful and harmonious life. The word פִּשְׁעַי therefore does not only mean rebellion against the

Almighty. It is at the same time a stupid demolition of the foundation of one's own life (see Koch 1985:62).

The covenant people, conversely, break the covenant by doing injustice to other covenant fellows. The breaking of the covenant may be seen clearly in the acts of the people in their unjust treatment of others. From the reading of the texts of Amos, it is clearly seen that there are several major issues of social justice that the prophet addresses. The people of God, especially the powerful, sell the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes, and suppress the poor and the powerless in many ways (Am 2:6f). Injustice to the poor is taken by the prophet as the gravest social crime of the élite of the Israelites (Lang 1983:114). The powerless sank deeper and deeper into debt to rich landowners and were finally forced to sell their property to them losing all that they had (cf Kizhakkeyill 2006:89). It is believed that the establishment of the covenant creation with all creatures and a recreation in the covenant of Noah required respectful treatment for all human beings. Such crimes are considered as violations against the covenant of YHWH (see Niehaus 1992:340).

The prophet Amos also accuses the powerful (“the wealthy women of Samaria”) for oppressing the poor and crushing the needy (Am 4:1). It is clear that these “cows of Bashan” come under special fire from the prophet. Wolff (1987:23) indicates that at the expense of the poor the powerful get enormous luxury and throw raucous feasts (cf Am 5:11; 6:1-7). In the same vein, Chisholm (1990:87) argues that these women maintain their luxurious life style at the expense of the poor. They demand that their husbands satisfy their cravings, thus encouraging them to continue their exploitation of the poor, whose stolen money and land was necessary to support such extravaganza. Amos' contemporary, Isaiah (3:16-24) also deals with a similar group, the women of Jerusalem who love ostentation and luxury and, through an abundance of possession, attempt to enhance themselves. This situation seems to reflect the problem of all humanity (2:11; 3:9) that parades its self-sufficiency across the stage of the world (cf Oswalt 1986:140). Similarly, Micah (2:1-3, 9-10) also criticizes the rich and their luxurious lives. Stansell writes that “Micah's language emphasizes that the overpowering oppression and

ill-treatment of those who lose their house and land; passionately he accuse the state owners of coveting, robbing taking, oppressing, or driving out the women from their homes” (1988:129). Therefore, the underlying sins of the powerful are the sins of pride and ostentation, as well as greed.

They also pervert justice and righteousness (Am 5:7). The motif of perverting justice by the leadership of the nation is “the abuse of justice and power” (Sweeney 2000:235). They are changing sweet justice into bitter injustice. Accordingly, in order to become a right and just society, there must be both “justice” and “righteousness.” It means that there must be fairness in the courts and, more broadly, order in the society guided by divine moral principles. However, justice is often overthrown and righteousness is cast to the ground by the powerful. As a result, chaos exists and the judgment of God must follow to set things right again (cf Smith 1995:100). Similar to Amos, the prophet Micah also coarsely speaks to the powerful responsible for legal justice (Mi 3:1-3). He uses imagery of cannibalism to elaborate the violation of the leader’s responsibility with respect of justice and their perversion of justice (cf Hagstrom 1988:34). Isaiah (Is 1:17, 21, 23) describes this perversion by using the term “the absence of justice” (see also Jeremiah’s poetical critiques on “disoriented heart of the community” in Jr 5:26-31). Thus, the problem of perverting justice (as also seen in Dt 16:18-20; 24:17f) is indeed systemic and the neglect is social, because the outcome of Israel’s infidelity to the covenant is a society rapacious exploitation, supported and legitimated by institutional structure (cf Brueggemann 1998:68).

The powerful take the wheat of the poor for debt (Am 5:11). Amos explains that landed property is often cultivated by small tenants liable to tax who are ruthlessly exploited by the landlords so that they can build beautiful houses of hewn stone and plant pleasant vineyards—possibly for letting them out on lease (cf Lang 1983:124). In the threat of judgment, the culprits are once again addressed directly, and the case against them is amplified to include harsh practices of taxation of the peasant share croppers. The parallelism of the clauses describe the greedy crime of charging tenant-farmers too much for the use of land which may

well have been taken away from the rightful owners by fraud (in violation of the letter and spirit of Lv 23:13-38; cf Hubbard 1989:172). Because the powerful have profited by the taxation of the agricultural produce of the poor, interestingly, they will be punished by a curse against their very own plantations (see Paul 1991:173).

They also take bribes from those who could afford to pay so that the poor did not get their right (Am 5:12). Accordingly, Amos' references to "(justice) in the gate" (Am 5:7a, 12b, 15a) concern the hearing of court cases and the administration of civil suits (see Hayes 1988:162). Unfortunately, unfairness exists in the legal court because the rich can buy justice to defend their cases. Soggin (1987:92) argues that these judges have private interests which are manifestly incompatible with the exercise of public function or with the cases that they are hearing. It seems that through the corrupt courts they exploit the poor economically and then use their ill-gotten gain to build extravagant houses and plant vineyards (cf Chisholm 1990:91). This situation is in contrast with the code of the Covenant which explicitly prohibits lending at high interest and giving bribes to judges and authorities (cf Hendrickx 1985:30).

The powerful of Israel trample down and cheat the poor in every possible way (Am 8:4f). Their social sins may be seen in the forms of trampling the needy, bringing to an end the poor, reducing the bushel's size, enlarging the shekel weight, defrauding by deceitful scales, buying the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the refuse of wheat (cf Dorsey 1999:284). Amos' contemporary, the prophet Micah, also has the same concerns about the merchants, the false balances and the practices of deceit (Mi 6:9-13). He particularly accuses the people who run businesses (Mi 6:11) in Jerusalem of doing injustice, especially of using wicked scales, giving small measures, and charging exorbitant prices (cf Smith 1984:53).

Basically, such practices are strongly condemned by the covenant law, especially the law on measure (Dt 25:13-16; cf Lv 19:35-37). This is a commercial practice where the merchant uses a heavier weight for buying than for selling. By doing this, the merchant can easily defraud his customers for his own profit (see Mayes

1991:331). As a result, weak members of society are struck a double blow, getting fewer goods and paying more. Conversely, the administration of justice must conform to the highest moral standards (Dt 16:18-20) and commercial activities must be conducted in accord with rigid ethical principles. The merchant must have only one set of scale for both buying and selling, which is to be in accord with the legally ordained size (cf Craigie 1976:317). The reason underlying this principle is clear that cheating a brother with his wealth for personal benefit is completely unacceptable within the nation of Israel. In fact, Millar (1998:142-143) clarifies that the Deuteronomist has gathered legislation demanding integrity in business.

However, the cruelty practiced in Israel has not only a marked social character but also a religious one. The people of Israel, while treating others unfairly, have indeed turned their back upon YHWH. It seems that they did not realize that keeping their religious practices or cultic feasts, for instance, by bringing sacrifices and honouring YHWH in that way, while, at the same time, they oppress others socially, may negatively affect the God-human relationship. Thus the prophet here addresses the major covenantal crimes of Israel (cf Sklba 1990:79), and such crimes indeed do break the Covenant, as well as undermine the relationship, because the term “covenant” could just as well be substituted for “relationship” and vice versa (cf Jensen 2006:74).

Such religious and social sins also connote the worst of all possible misdemeanors (cf Koch 1985:51). The imitation must have seemed to be pure mockery, as blasphemous as if we were to use a parody of a verse in the Bible in order to criticize religion. Israel’s offense against the Lord took two main forms, oppression of the poor and the worship of “other gods” (Eaton 1997:24). Amos is also clear in emphasizing that the injustice shown to the poor is human sin, not God’s will. Therefore, bad things happen in the world, people do hurtful things to each other, and this is not God’s will but is, rather, defiance of God’s intention for humanity (cf Simundson 2005:156). Thus, in short, the concept of sin committed by God’s people was a deviation of God’s will, a breach in the relationship with the Lord and other fellow citizens.



Amos clearly presents a comprehensive view of Israel's sin (cf Limburg 1988:100). Sin is not defined, but rather is shown by concrete examples. For Amos, sin involved a breaking of relationships, that is, the relationship with God by breaking relationship with other people. Sin could be seen in the way the people of Israel related to God and to one another. In relation to God, the people of Israel saw the Lord as a god to be appeased rather than the Lord to be worshipped and served. Israel appeared not to know the nature of the Lord. Israel's worship divorced ritual fidelity from justice and righteousness. In relation to other people, Israel committed sin by refusing to live according to the just commands of God. God desired justice and righteousness, but people afflicted the righteous, took bribes, and pushed aside the needy in the gate (Am 5:12, cf Bailey 1995:81-82).

It is for the world's sake that YHWH is going to act in the world that is tormented, divided and destroyed by wickedness (cf Koch 1985:72-73). It is seen that where the sin (פֶשַׁע) of Israel spreads out in wave after wave, YHWH will no longer hold back. He will consequently visit his people with affliction. As frequently said, YHWH will not let the sinners go unpunished. Gowan (1998:32) similarly states that the mistreating of the widow, the orphan, or the alien, those without "clout" to be able to maintain their own rights, is the basis for the single motive clause that speaks of the wrath (judgment) of God. In this regard, Amos sees this visitation as imminent; divine judgment upon Israel is inescapable.

According to Mays (1969:7), the theology of Amos, then, is a function of his message. Amos understood YHWH to have a well-defined character: compassion and zeal. He is not only a compassionate God who showed the Israelites his kindness and graciousness (Ex 20:2; 34:1-7; Am 2:9) but also a zealous God (Ex 20:5; 32:16; 34:14) in the sense that he wanted his people to have no other gods (Ex 20:3; Dt 5:7) (see Miller 1987:27). Anything which is against his character will have its definite consequence. Through the older theological traditions of Israel's religion, the prophet spoke to vindicate and disclose the God of the new and unexpected word. While in Hosea's speeches, justice and righteousness were first transferred to the people in the context of the goal of salvation history—the

giving of the land to Israel (Hs 12:5, 7; cf Koch 1985:59), in Amos' words, the salvation-history turns into judgment history (Am 2:21ff). The Israelites, then were still YHWH's people, but YHWH was not Israel's God—not at least in any of the current interpretations put on the possessive by the popular theology in Israel (cf Mays 1969:8).

To sum up, the substance of Amos's critique against the northern kingdom was the absence of justice and righteousness in the land (Miller 2000:533), therefore establishing them seems to be the main intention and priority of YHWH. Through his critique of covenant breaking, Amos helps us to recognize our own involvement in this life which is so often marred by failure. Above all, he opens our eyes to see that in the end, as we have deserved, we shall meet God himself (cf Wolff 1983:21). It also can be seen that God and Amos are the "voice" for the victims of injustice. YHWH is portrayed as a God who does not just verbally condemn the horrendous situation; God will do something about them (cf Dempsey 2000:21), especially the death of the nation. Amos (5:1-3) does not bewail the actual death of a human being but warns the people of their imminent destruction. The prophetic dirge is a mocking of the prophet directed against a foreign power (cf Dell 1995:49-50). Ironically, although the prophet concludes in a statement that the leadership of Israel and Judah is not grieved over "the ruin of Joseph" (Am 6:1-6), the powerful are initially referred to as "at ease" and "secure" (6:1), but they do not look after the security of the state (see Sweeney 2000:245).

### **6.2.3 The End Results: Judgment and Hope**

Under these conditions, the prophet Amos comes to them to accuse and to warn them of impending judgment as the consequence of the people's disobedience (cf Chisholm 1990:18). Scholars (Brueggemann 1965:1-15; Boyle 1971:338-362; Snyder 1982:158-166) have argued that, in accusing and warning his audience, Amos uses the covenant lawsuit pattern, particularly as applied in Amos 3:1-4:13. Accordingly, both Amos and his audience seem to have had knowledge of the law of YHWH, the exodus, the wilderness and the conquest tradition (see Am 2:4-16),

as these were fundamental to the nation's understanding of its past. This also assumes that the people of Israel know and generally accept the law of God. Therefore, as Smith (1989:71) writes, "The covenant idea is implied at some points, but for the most part it seems to remain in the background" (cf Sailhamer 1974:435-451; Snyder 1982:158-166). YHWH's rejection is thus based on the violation of the right behaviour in the Covenant (or the covenant's teaching within the Covenant), the right way of living before God and together with one's neighbours (cf Kapelrud 1961:65).

According to Wolff, "How people treat the poor and the weak always provide the standard for prophetic judgment" (Wolff 1987:23). Mistreatment of the oppressed, theologically seen as Israel's breaking of the covenant, brought Amos to Israel—under divine appointment—in order to bear a strong message of judgment (cf Smith 1995:30). The people's unfaithfulness to God, shown in their lack of knowledge, empty worship, and oppressive treatment of the vulnerable, evokes God's punishing destruction (Cook 2005:64). Amos also reminds the powerful about the accountability of those who have been chosen by God. Divine election cannot be used as an excuse; if anything, the Lord must deal more severely with those whose disobedience is willful rather than out of ignorance (cf Finley 1990:114; McConville 2002:174). Thus, one may see clearly that, through the above triangular model, central to Amos' thinking are the three interconnected points: God's ruler-ship over the universe, God's special relationship with Israel, and God's holding Israel responsible for having broken the covenant (see Zucker 1994:120).

The prophet Amos plays his role as YHWH's representative, along with other prophets of the eighth century BCE, to proclaim YHWH's sentence of death upon Israel. Moreover, in so far as his message made Israel's obduracy still stronger, he actually joined the band of executioners (cf Von Rad 1967:12). Tucker (1987:27-40) argues that the verdict delivered (the prophetic announcement of the future) is linked logically to the accusation against the addresses. Fundamental to the prophetic role in Israel was the utterance of God's word for the future, announcements of punishment with or without reasons and announcements of

salvation. This role is basically rooted in the prophet's explanation of YHWH's role as the inflictor of punishment on Israel, and such divine role will increase until YHWH controls the scene completely. In this regard, the visions and hymns of Amos (7:1-9; 8:1-3; 9:1-4; hymns 4:1-12, 5:1-7; 9:1-4) show how Amos' role changes from a mediator against God's judgment to an instrument of God's judgment (to convince his people of the appropriateness of YHWH's judgment in order to bring them back to repentance) (cf Paas 2002:274; Brueggemann 1997:621ff).

In the book of Amos, the judgment of YHWH is described in several ways. To begin with, divine judgment is described as "the roaring of the lion" (Am 1:2; 3:8). Amos was called to do, or more properly, to channel YHWH's "roaring," which brings drought and desolation (see VanGemeren 1990[a]:131). The nations (Judah and Israel) which are the objects of this judgment stemming from Zion have one common factor, that they are all members of the Davidic empire (under the image of the "booth of David"), but soon will be destroyed (cf Dumbrell 1984:154). Next, in the context of judgment upon the nations (as seen in the OAN unit), including Israel, Amos used a graduated numerical saying (Am 1:3-2:16). The fundamental point is that the future judgment announced by YHWH is inseparably related to the present enumeration of crimes where the acts which in themselves illustrate a violated moral order (see Dearman 1988:18). Finally, God announces the sending of divine judgment that will destroy the people like uncontrollable waters (Am 5:18-24). A statement of the coming of YHWH's justice and righteousness is not an imperative or an exhortation for the Israelites to perform justice, but the activities of YHWH that will result in the destruction of the people (cf Berquist 1993:61).

This divine judgment is concretely to take form as a military invasion by a foreign superpower. In chapter 7 the prophet uses the phrase "The Lord God called for conflict by fire" (Am 7:4 NKJV, similar translations in RSV, JB, NEB and NAB). Accordingly, such a phrase must be properly translated as "YHWH was calling for the making of a complaint, to be followed by sending of fire." Studying the significance of the word "complaint" (רִיב) in relation with "judging" (נִשְׁפֵט) as

also found in Jeremiah 25:31 (cf Is 66:16), Limburg (1973:349) asserts that YHWH seems to use fire as a weapon against Israel. This suggests that “fire(s)” may be referred to as “an army carrying out a holy war and thus functioning as YHWH’s historical agent for punishing the offending nation (cf Miller’s view [1965:259] as quoted by Limburg 1973:348)).

Moreover, in the succeeding texts (Am 7:7-9), the prophet also uses terms such as “a wall of plumb line” (חומת אֵנֶךְ) and “a plumb line” (אֵנֶךְ) to support the idea of judgment through great military strength, meaning the impending Assyrian invasion (see Niehaus 1992:456). A more recent study emphasizes that אֵנֶךְ (“a plumb line”), a *hapax legomenon*, may refer to “pickaxe” or “a weapon” that symbolizes YHWH’s “warfare” against his people (cf Clements 1996:24-25). In the interpretation and narrative sequel that is given to the third vision of Amos, it is clear that the prophet envisaged and spelled out “the end” of Israel (cf Achtemeier 1999:166). Thus, Amos seems to provide a clear, or better still, “a concrete” picture of the punishment that Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28 threatened (House 1998:363).

Interestingly, divine judgment illustrated in the above discussions is thought of in the context of the day of YHWH (firstly introduced in Amos 5:18-27; cf Smelik 1986:246-247). Amos does not think of seeking YHWH in heaven but the mark of God is his earthly multivolipresence, to us a theological term. In other words, his presence whenever and wherever he wills it, in this case, at the cultic centres of the earth (Koch 1985:71). The prophet also employs a different set of images to portray the unexpected nature of God’s judgment with the background of the day of YHWH (cf Newsome 1984:21). In Amos’ time, there was a popular belief among the Israelites that the day of YHWH (יִום יְהוָה) is the moment of hope when the people would experience a day of deliverance from their enemies. However, in Amos’s speech this day would instead be a day in which Israel would be conquered and exiled by and among its enemies (see Stuart 1987:356). The description seems to be showing God’s patience is exhausted and the destruction of the Northern Kingdom is inevitable (7:7-9).

Amos maintains that Jeroboam's kingdom is subject to punishment for crimes of religious and social abuses (Am 2:6-16) (cf Sweeney 2000:214). On this, Amos has a despairing belief that the nation will never turn from its evil ways (Newsome 1984:25), because divine punishment which would devastate the national structures appear inevitable (Am 8:1-2) (Eaton 1997:26). Violation to humanity is a serious matter in the sight of YHWH. Accordingly, the Old Testament divides humanity into two categories: the ones fallen outside God's special relationship with Israel, and the others fallen but marked with the potential for knowing the will of God, a knowledge that sadly cannot preclude disobedience. Thus, with the special relationship (Am 3:2) comes also special judgment (cf Seitz 1998:276). Such a future judgment Amos envisaged for the Israelites in their contemporary situation, although he did not see the event himself. It remained a coming judgment in the day of YHWH (cf Otto 2001:221; Paul 1991:113; see also the concept of *Naherwartung* by Schmidt [1968:95-97]).

One may argue against such "a violent God" by asking how come YHWH will unmercifully punish his own people. In contrast, this is not the real case, because whenever the prophet uses literary devices such as "woe-oracles" and "covenant lawsuit," he meant them as divine efforts in maintaining the order of society (cf Gerstenberger 1962:262) and in establishing his divine council (through the indictment of Israel for breaching of the covenant) (see Huffmon 1959:295). De Roche (1983:572-573) adds that the prophetic *רִיב* oracles ("lawsuit oracle") used were to express that YHWH acts as both the plaintiff and the judge. Whenever YHWH saw Israel has broken the covenant relationship he took it upon himself to take action in the form of threat, a plea, or even a punishment. Although God's action seems to be violent, it is actually the consequence of human violence. God does not simply give people up to violence, but chooses to become involved in violence in order to bring about good results; thereby he may prevent an even greater evil (see Fretheim 2004:374-375). YHWH thus controls the violent effect of sinful human activities and makes possible a non-violent future for God's people.

Is there any hope for God's people? In order to answer this, one should recognize a problem before deciding whether there is hope or not for the Israelites in Amos' rhetorical speeches. On the one hand, many of Amos' interpreters have tended to characterize him as a prophet of doom, with a note that any hint of the possibility of hope for a future for Israel has been explained by them as the work of a later editor/redactor (Wolff 1977; cf Mays 1969). In the same vein, Newsome (1984:21) believes that Amos (7:1-9) has given up hope that Israel will repent, and the judgement of YHWH is now assured. This position seems to imply that the final passages on the unit of Amos 9:1-15 is inauthentic, because it is not rooted in the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet himself.

On the other hand, others believe that Amos was also a prophet of hope. Hasel (1991[b]:118) notes that there are many interpreters (such as: Eichrodt, Zimmerli, Hammershaimb, Watts, Heschel, Reventlow, Clements, Von Rad and others) who have supported the authenticity of the final hope passage in Amos (9:11-15). It is believed that beside divine judgment and punishment, the prophet Amos is also called to deliver the message of hope (cf Smith 1995:30). If one reads Amos 9:7-10, it seems that YHWH will not completely destroy the house of Jacob, because the texts points out that only the sinners of his people will die. Accordingly, because YHWH is a God who keeps his promises, his prophet knew that ultimately he must redeem his people, restore them to the land, and establish the king on the throne. House (1998:363) insists that, although God will punish the covenant breakers, the good news is that renewal lies beyond this devastation. The God who roars will eventually also be the God who heals. However, one should also notice that, in the larger context, the hope extended by Amos for Israel's future restoration is only for a remnant of the nation (Smith 1995:32-33).

Because of these end results, both the "possibilities" of the judgment and of the hope (cf Brueggemann 1997:171), it is understandable that the prophet called his audience to repent and to experience restoration with YHWH. The prophet assumes it is possible for people to change when they are confronted with the different choices, either to seek YHWH and be saved or to seek sanctuaries and perish (Am 5:4-5, 14-15). A choice between what they do and the way of



righteousness. The powerful, still, could use power in concern for the welfare and rights of others. The court could uphold justice, and the cause of the poor could be recognized and met. The social instruments at hand could serve the “love of the good.” It would not be a perfect society, but no society escapes the character of the people who shape and control it. However, it may be organized, in the long last its quality would depend on people who knew what was one’s limitations and dependence (cf Mays 1987:156). Amos’ call to repentance (Am 5:4-6) was therefore expressed not very much as exhortations to get back to a moral code, but as appeals to come back to a relationship with the Lord (see Eaton 1997:25).

Unfortunately, the “chance” to escape divine judgment and wrath was closed for the Israelites, because it was willfully denied by the powerful. In reality, they had chosen their destiny by disobeying YHWH, practicing idolatry and social injustices. In reverse, Amos’ use of parenthesis (in Am 5:1-15) seems to serve as a warning to the people to adopt his recommended course of action: rejection of the northern sanctuaries and leadership and return to YHWH in Jerusalem, including both the Temple and the House of David. It is thus clear that Amos’ condemnation of the abuse of justice and wealth attempts to point to the corruption of both the religious and the political leadership of northern Israel and those in Judah who acquiesce to Israelite rule (cf Sweeney 2000:232).

By committing these religious and social sins the powerful had intentionally blocked God’s justice from achieving its ends on earth. Divine intention remained unfulfilled, as the society’s leadership oppressed the poor. In this context, justice and righteousness will arrive like dangerous waters as pronounced in Amos 5:24 (see Berquist 1993:61). The fall of Samaria in 722 BCE by the invasion of the mighty army of Assyria proves that Israel’s rejection to repent to YHWH surely has resulted to her destruction and exile. Every abusive economic practice that deceives and exploits the powerless is considered serious sin because it stands against YHWH and his characteristic fondness of social justice. Therefore, YHWH’s demand for obedience should be taken with utmost seriousness, and disobedience will be dealt with seriously (cf Brueggemann 1997:373).

#### 6.2.4 Summary

YHWH is concerned with the provision of justice and righteousness. Through the rhetorical speeches of his prophet, Amos, God attempts to establish justice (social justice) in the land of Israel. This indeed suggests that justice and righteousness is primarily rooted in YHWH himself, specifically in his will and purpose for the goodness of all of his creations. Justice and righteousness are a special concern and responsibility of God, “who establishes and upholds justice and righteousness” (Hayes 1988:161; cf Paul 1991:192). This implies that human beings actually do not perform justice, because they can only allow it to happen in the society, to set aside a space for justice (cf Berquist 1993:23). Thus, Amos succinctly emphasizes that YHWH has to be the *prima causa* for justice and righteousness to be established in the land.

The context(s) of establishing justice is quite complex. It does not only involve economic and political (social) bearings but also theological (religious) expression. Amos shows that there is an existence of *Realpolitik* in the society. It is the abuse of powers and wealth by the powerful in order to gain more profits, luxuries and influence. It indeed points out the common attitudes of the powerful that are self-centered in nature and these are built upon the misery and suffering of the oppressed, those who are poor and weak. Moreover, such practices are rooted in theological and religious scheme. The thought and practice of social justices is closely related to the covenant, the treaty that YHWH made between himself and his people, and as was purposefully meant by such a concept, “YHWH will be the Israelites’ God and the Israelites will be YHWH’s people.” This implies that God’s people, especially the powerful, should maintain their right (covenant) relationship with both YHWH and other fellow citizens, including the oppressed. They must always remember that once they were oppressed and, by the grace and loving kindness of God, they were delivered and became a free nation.

Establishing justice in the land is also correlated to the keeping of the covenant. However, instead of living in the right covenanted relationship with YHWH, the Israelites violated the covenant by disobeying him and mistreating fellow citizens, especially the oppressed. The powerful leaders committed religious as well as

social sin against YHWH and other human beings, showing “hypocritical religiosity and injustice” (Sawyer 1993:124). In relation to the latter, Israel is admonished to be like YHWH. As divine representatives in the land, they should demonstrate divine character (particularly his justice) by performing acts of social justice. However, they did not act accordingly, and in so doing, the core of the problem is the absence of “justice” and “righteousness” in the land. The powerful abused their power and wealth and oppressed the poor and the weak. By doing these they break the covenant. The main intention of YHWH thus is to establish justice, because the covenant was breached by the people.

As a consequence, establishing justice will also mean receiving judgment. The coming of divine judgment caused by the people’s breaking of the covenant, particularly by being religiously idolatrous and socially unjust (see Pleins 2001:374) should be anticipated by the breakers of the covenant. Ironically, expecting the coming of the day of YHWH popularly believed to bring hope of more prosperity, the oppressors did not realize that such a day that Amos announced was indeed a judgment day (cf De Vries 1995:187; see also Scharf 2007:144-146). This is the day when YHWH will punish all sinners who intentionally violate his covenant. In reality, this is the moment when YHWH uses his agents of destruction, the mighty Assyrian army, to defeat and put Israel into a state of death. However, there is still a chance for the people to have hope in YHWH, because he offers a possibility for them to be restored (cf Brueggemann 1997:257), or this may be seen as “a hope under judgment” (Williamson 2000:291-306). For this very reason YHWH calls them to give the proper response, and that is repentance. In the end, the book of Amos does not explain this issue, whether Israel repents or not, but her history tells clearly that they rejected the opportunity to be saved and restored. As a result, Samaria fell under the Assyrian siege.

### 6.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Undoubtedly the book of Amos presents the principles of social justice in both theological and practical tones. The prophet Amos uses a term such as “justice” (also “righteousness”) in accordance to the broad or general meaning of it. It is used primarily in reference to the attribute of YHWH, who is a supreme and righteous Judge. The term has also practical implications, especially in the two dimensions of the life of God’s people, in legal or judicial as well as in social systems. It is related to the process of making a fair judgment or decision in the court. This implies that the administration of justice has to reflect God’s justice, because the court was entrusted to maintain order, protect the rights of the innocent and preserve justice (cf Smith 1994:49). Moreover, the term “justice” has a dimension of mystery, especially when it is related to the issue of theodicy. One may not see a clear vision or manifestation of justice when he or she is in trouble or suffering. Therefore, justice and righteousness are not empty terms, nor are they vague concepts. They refer to the concrete and specific actions of persons in relationships when they accord others what is due to them. They are the foundations of society at its best (see Mays 1987:164).

The concept of justice (also social justice) in the book of Amos has its root in the codes of law (Code of the Covenant, Deuteronomic Code of law, and Holiness Code). On Mount Sinai, YHWH made a covenant with the Israelites that he will be Israel’s God and Israel will be his people. Based on this, the laws demand that social justice, among many others, must be practiced by the community. Practical rules about sabbath, sacrifices, release, forgiveness, and social responsibilities of leadership in Israel related to the treatment of the poor and the weak are set in accordance to the vision of social justice of YHWH. In addition, the message of social justice is interconnected with the same issue in the prophetic writings, particularly in the writings of Amos’ contemporaries, such as Micah and Isaiah. Although these prophets had their post in Judah (Jerusalem), they had similar concerns and passions with Amos in responding to the crisis of social justice which exists in their era.

The book of Amos also uniquely exposes that at times, the people of God, particularly the powerful, use religious activities to cover up their irresponsible attitude and actions toward social issues, an incompatibility with justice which results in social sins and iniquities, and a failure to give dignity to other human beings (cf Rathinam 2002:727). This incompatibility suggests that if its acquisition and possession cost the economic freedom and welfare of others, it is called violence and oppression. If it fostered conspicuous consumption of a level of luxury that is enjoyed in heedless unconcern for the needy, it is wrong. If it is gained by violation of the rules of righteousness which set the values of personal relations above profit, it is iniquitous. If wealth becomes the dominant motivation of those responsible for social-being because they hold power, that is sin (Mays 1987:154). To cover up these wrongs, the powerful become more religiously excited in offering sacrifices and feasting in sanctuaries. Thus, in Amos, a rich and profound message can be understood in two dimensions: God's intimate involvement with the people and people's unfaithful response to God's care. They worship with empty gestures and engage in unjust, oppressive dealings with one another (Cook 2005:62).

It is recognizable that, compared with the rest of the books in the Old Testament, there is a theological significance or emphasis regarding the issue of social justice in the book of Amos. For the prophet Amos, YHWH is not ignorant to the predicament(s) of his people. In response to such a condition, he seems to primarily emphasize the establishment of justice in the land on the side of Israel's deity. The principles and practices of justice written in the covenant laws must be established, because it has been breached in Israel's society. In a theological sense, this deviation means a violation to the covenant, a breaking of the covenant. It means that the covenanted relationship is no longer kept by the Israelites. What is more, justice will disappear when it is disconnected from the past memory of the people, the exodus tradition (see Brueggemann 1997:178). Only the awareness that justice is dependent on the openness of society for the forces from beyond time, or as Scheiker puts it (as quoted by Schroeder [2001:14]) "justice is dependent on society's ongoing and adequate interaction with powers that it does not control," can justice become a possibility and reality.

Justice is a very sensitive condition. It disappears when people ignore God as the giver of life and instead rely on their own wisdom. It is present and can become reality only if people open themselves to this force from beyond time. In such a purpose, YHWH sent Amos as his prophet to announce divine theological intention, to establish justice in the land.

In this regard, my research proposes a theological concept of social justice based on the dynamics of a covenanted relationship between the divine and human beings (his people), and, by implication, between human beings and other human beings. These relationships can be schematically understood in “a triangular relational model of social justice.” It is assumed that there are three angles (aspects) interrelated in these relationships, the theological angle (YHWH), the political angle (the powerful) and the social angle (the powerless [the oppressed]). The covenanted relationship requires that YHWH is independent from his creations (human beings or God’s people). Meanwhile, in reverse, human beings must be dependent on God. On this, Amos, and other prophets too, are very clear about the concept of *theonomy*, a word that has been used to indicate the theocentricity of the prophet’s worldview. This implies that Israel cannot live apart from its centre, because “humanistic autonomy is a manifestation of self-destructive heteronomy” (Terrien 2000:267).

Such a dependency should not be an end of this relationship, but it must be extended to an interdependent relationship among human beings, “a right relationship between all members of the society” (Bovati 1994:19). This means that the oppressed need the powerful and vice versa. On the one hand, the oppressed need the powerful to care and to protect them in order to survive the hardships of life. On the other hand, the powerful need the oppressed to actualize their calls as the responsible receivers of divine covenant and promises. Both the powerful and the oppressed should interdependently meet together and hold fellowship with each other so that the oppressed receive and the powerful give.

This scheme also suggests that YHWH’s living rule of Israel was exercised through the charismatic office of the Judge—a figure strangely combining qualities of king, judge, prophet and warlord (Holladay 1987:124). He demands

the powerful to be and to act as his representatives, especially to be responsible for the establishment of social justice in the land. According to the standards of the time, protection from hostility and oppression is also part of justice for the spiritual and political leaders (Gerstenberger 2002:240). In contrast, instead of becoming divine agents of social justice, the powerful turned out to be the practitioners of social injustice. Neglecting the spiritual aspect of their call as Israel's leaders and the bearers of divine social vision and mission, they severely abused the power and wealth given by YHWH and oppressed the poor, the weak and the defenseless. They become independent both from YHWH and the oppressed. In such a state, covenanted relationship was broken. Moreover, the oppressed were in a position of hopelessness. They experienced and suffered social injustice and become victims of it, because they have lost their economic, social and legal rights.

As a response, through the prophet Amos, YHWH takes concrete action. In Amos's rhetorical speeches, YHWH is introduced as the fierce protector of what would now be called "human rights," the firm corollary of the covenant faith in the one God was the brotherhood of all Israelites (Gottwald 1959:288). In the same vein, Gerstenberger (2002:240) indicates that "because hostility and oppression recurred time and time, and threats, defeats, dependent relationships seriously damaged self-confidence and often enough also brought physical misery and death, the just God was obliged to defend and avenge the community in the same way as a tribal and national deity." The God of Amos is the God of the lowly, the victims who were crushed without pity in the economic machinery of Israel (cf Schottroff 1984:40). It is important to emphasize here that YHWH is "the subject of social justice" (Berquist 1993:54-56) who is responsible for maintaining justice as his single intended activity in the book of Amos. Thus, establishing justice is indeed the divine's cause.

The establishment of justice also implies an implementation of divine judgment on the day of YHWH. YHWH will not let religious and social sinners go unpunished, because he is the one who "punishes injustice by intervening in history" (Sawyer 1993:48). Amos clearly announces the punishment of the



breakers of the covenant, the doers of social injustice. This punishment takes form in a military invasion, the coming of the mighty Assyrian army that brought severe destruction to Israel. However, although YHWH offered an opportunity for the people to repent and recover as the prophet called to seek YHWH and the good—it can be considered as “a little hope” offered (Linville 1999:41)—in reality, his people rejected him by consistently rejecting justice and righteousness to be established in the land (cf Brueggemann 1997:197). As a result, the future end of Israel is at hand. The capital city of Israel, Samaria, was besieged and torn down, its people captured or scattered. This was the death of the northern kingdom Israel, as Blenkinsopp (1983:96) firmly asserts, “A society which neglects justice and righteousness does not deserve to survive.”

Viewed from the perspective of Brueggemann’s theological method, the dynamics of the covenanted relationship (as seen and discussed in a triangular model of social justice above) and the intention to establish justice in the land reflects the “testimonies” of the utterances about social justice. As “a core testimony” (Brueggemann 1997:117-144), YHWH is definitely in the centre of the prophet’s message. YHWH, as the theological angle, is the primal subject of a theology of social justice. He has laid a theological foundation of social justice in the covenant of creation and of redemption (see Berthout 2005:99-109). Amos’ social messages are the speeches about God (indeed as spoken by God to Israel) and may be considered as a core testimony about God. In the book of Amos, YHWH is not only described as “subjects,” for instance, the Creator, the King of the universe, the Warrior, and the Judge but also as “adjectives,” such as powerful, sovereign, dangerous and just, as well as “verbs” (“testimony in verbal sentences”): he creates, rules, opposes and judges.

In addition, one cannot discuss such a core testimony without relating it to a discussion of the Israelites. Divine-human relationship must be placed in the context of the Covenant, the covenanted relationship between YHWH and his people. God’s exists in a notion of “in-relationship with,” a personal relation with his creation. Thus, the scope of a core testimony is widened in YHWH’s economy, the maintenance of the order of society. The Israelites, consisting of

both the powerful and the powerless, who have made a covenant with him are called to reflect the nature of YHWH and to act according to his nature (Am 5:15, 24). When the powerful and the powerless of Israel dependently put their trust in God and relate to each other interdependently, the ideal state of social justice is maintained.

However, the utterances also testify that the core testimony must be cross-examined by different realities of YHWH, particularly his *hiddenness*, *ambiguity* or *instability*, and *negativity*. Amos' speeches aim to display a God who is in hiding. He seemingly leaves the powerful politically and economically oppressed the powerless during the acts of social injustices (Am 2:6-8; 5:10-13; 8:4-6). This may raise a question of theodicy ("How long or why?") and a complaint on behalf of the oppressed. YHWH is described as ambiguous or contradictory, because, on the one hand, he commands the Israelites to come to the national cultic sites (Bethel and Gilgal) to sin and transgress (Am 4:4-5). On the other hand, he appeals to them not to seek these sites (to seek YHWH and to repent instead [Am 5:5]). Besides, YHWH's "negativity" can be seen in his coming judgment in the form of destruction of the nation. The Israelites think this would never happen to them. They firmly held a popular belief of "divine favoritism," YHWH would never punish them. It is clear that, in the book of Amos, YHWH is described differently from the core testimony in terms of "his popular nature." This description is called by Brueggemann as "counter testimony" (1997:317-319).

In this research, the tension between "core testimony" and "counter testimony" is very apparent. When the powerful become independent from YHWH and break divine covenant, YHWH appears as "a hostile God" to them. This can be seen in all the accusations spoken by Amos against the powerful and in divine announcements to punish them. According to Brueggemann (1997:317-318), the counter testimony is not intended to obliterate the core testimony. Rather, in the disputatious propensity of Israel, core testimony and counter testimony belong to each other and for each other in an ongoing exchange. The rhetorical speeches of Amos, particularly on the "negative" side of YHWH ("counter testimony"), intentionally aim to complement "core testimony." The escalation of such a

tension is needed so that his audiences, the powerful of Israel, are directed to a point where they may realize their predicaments and return to YHWH in repentance. The tension is needed to reach the main intention of the utterance, to establish social justice in the land.

The prophet's message about establishing social justice in the land is a call for the powerful (also the whole community) to return to their nature as YHWH's partners (Israel, the human persons, the nations and creation; see Brueggemann's "unsolicited testimony" [1997:407-564]). The covenant that YHWH made with his people requires "participation" on the side of the latter. There are covenantal obligations for the Israelites both "to listen and to do justice," because the most characteristic and the most distinctive characteristic in the life and vocation of YHWH's partner is the remarkable equation of love of God with love of neighbor. This research shows that, although there are "threats" (Am 2:13-16; 3:12-15; 4:1-3, 6-13; 5:16-27; 6:6-8; 8:7-9:10; see the concept of *Prophetenspruch* which indicates punishment and "woe oracles" that indicates death in Snyman [1995:47]) from the divine (these may also be considered as "counter testimony"), indeed YHWH's original love for and commitment to Israel prevails. It is proven by calling the wrongdoers of Israel "to seek YHWH and live" (Am 5:5-6) and giving "a little hope" about the escape from the coming judgment in the day of the Lord (Am 9:11-15).

The prophet Amos, as a mediator for YHWH (see Brueggemann's "embodied testimony" [1997:622-649]), has played his role consistently. It is believed that the prophet speaks because he is compelled by an inexplicable force known only as the summons of YHWH. In the case of Amos, he is called to respond to and to evoke crisis, a crisis of social justice. His use of rhetorical devices brings his audiences' imagination to a courtroom drama. As if he is standing in "the divine council" (cf Brueggemann 1997:628; see also Allen 1969:43-45), as a mediator with divine authority given to him (notice the repeated use of the prophetic formula "Thus says YHWH" [Am 1:3, 6, 9, 10, 13; 2:1, 4, 6; 3:12, 5:3, 4, 16; 7:17] in his speeches), and judging the powerful for their sins on behalf of YHWH and the powerless. Referring to the above "trialectics" (YHWH—the powerful—

the powerless in the triangular model of social justice), Amos seems to be in the middle of the relationships carrying the prophetic speeches of judgment and hope.

This study shows that the prophet Amos successfully mediates the theological intention of YHWH, as seen in his utterances, to establish social justice in the land of Israel. Divine justice is established either in the form of defending the powerless from social injustices and never letting the sinful powerful go unpunished. Therefore, Amos' rhetorical speeches are indeed performative speeches, because "the utterances do what they say" (Patrick & Scult [1990] as quoted by Brueggemann [1997:703]).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

This research aims to propose a theology of social justice in the book of Amos. To accomplish this purpose, my study employs a rhetorical analysis. The reason for using this analysis is that “all religious system are rhetorical because they strive to communicate truth” (O’Rourke Boyle 2001:662) Using this method, my analysis deals with the literary composition, structural patterns and literary devices of the texts related to the issue of social justice: Amos 2:6-8; 5:1-17; and 8:4-8. In addition, my analysis also deals with the question of how the literary devices used in the passages function as a means of persuasion. The rhetorical analysis used in this research tries to focus on both the literary artistry of the text as well as its persuasive effects on the original audience. In other words, the rhetorical approach used in this study tries to analyze the literary units and to articulate the impact of the literary unit on its audience as well, because “biblical rhetoric reveals that reason is a language of communication and persuasion” (Gitay 2009:55).

Because of the limitations that rhetorical analysis has, this research aims at complementing what is lacking in this approach. Rhetorical analysis is a purely synchronic method. It accepts and examines the biblical texts only as the final form. Conversely, my research tries to complement this identified lack by also addressing the historical aspect of the texts as used in a “common and traditional” rhetorical approach. It is assumed that rhetorical study should also pay attention to the historical contexts, including the author, the original readers, and the historico-political, as well as socio-religious contexts of the text. Therefore, this analysis follows both the synchronic and diachronic approaches. Synchronically, this research deals with the literary or stylistic devices of the texts, or the elements

that formed the texts to be the final texts as presented. Diachronically, it deals with the historical issues of the texts, for example, the historical resources that produced the texts that are analyzed.

Recognizing the limitation of rhetorical analysis to comprehensively deal with the text, this research also involves other forms of complementary analyses for instance, the historical (including the historic-grammatical), literary, and form analyses in its discussions. The main purpose of employing these analyses is that, in my opinion, a rhetorical approach should gain the benefits from other approaches as well, because such an approach cannot stand on its own. This means that this research strives to be consistent with a more complete or comprehensive way of doing exegesis. Thus, as a whole, this research uses a complementary approach in analyzing the given texts.

In order to construct a theology of social justice, this research is intentionally and yet critically modelled after the approach of Walter Brueggemann (particularly his work, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, dispute, advocacy* [1997]) with his pluralistic approach. This approach means that one should consider a pluralism of faith affirmations and articulations of YHWH in the text itself; a pluralism of method, that has displaced the long-standing hegemony of historical critical approaches, and a pluralism of interpretive community. In dealing with this, Brueggemann focuses on the processes, procedures and interactionist potential. This is expressed in his use of “a courtroom trial” metaphor or imagery which focuses on the processive, interactionist modes of assertion and counter assertion to find the truth. It was found that his method leads one to the concept of presenting the utterance of the theological claim—as a *testimony*—embodied in the biblical text itself. Out of this form comes a verdict, an affirmed rendering of reality and an accepted version of truth (as a *dispute*), and of promoting a rendering of truth and a version of reality against other renderings and versions (as an *advocacy*).

However, Brueggemann’s method is indeed not free from pitfalls. His emphasis on the “utteredness” of the text at the expense of ontology might result on a dependency on Israel’s testimony as generated in the text. Accordingly, it is

somewhat misleading, because the texts or the speeches are only the means to reveal God, and not the reverse. It is proper to think that the text itself should point to a God whose power is not dependent on any human utterance or human form of power. Moreover, his method seems to be non-historical, especially when he stresses the unavailability of historical data behind the text. His method thus abandoned the history and the possibility of knowing anything about the world behind (or even) around the text analyzed. To complement the deficiencies of his method, this research intends to focus both on the function of the texts in order to signify what or who the signifier is (God himself and his intentions) and the historical issues of the text.

When considering the diachronic aspect, this research finds that there exists some difficulties in deciding who the real original author of the book is, a person (or a group) that produced the ideology revealed in the texts analyzed. The existence of “third-person language” (Am 7:10-17), often thought of as “the other author,” indicates another author of the book besides Amos. Against the view that argues that the book was composed gradually in several stages coming from different sources, this research holds to the possibility that the original author was the prophet Amos himself (see Pfeifer’s concept of *Selbstverständnis* [1984:479]). The reason in maintaining this view is that it is probable that the author of the book used different styles of writing and compositions for his rhetorical purpose. It seems to be impossible to think that different sources or authors coming from different times can produce a single and unified literary outcome. Moreover, the use of a rhetorical strategy in reaching a single rhetorical purpose, to persuade the audience, requires a single mindset from an author, in this case, the prophet Amos himself.

Amos was originally known as both a sheep-breeder, one who owned cattle, and sycamore trees. Amos originated from Tekoa, in the southern kingdom of Judah and seemed to have been economically self-reliant and had a high status in society rather than being an ordinary shepherd or a worker of sycamores. However, he was called to prophesy as was usually practiced by the professional prophets. Although confessing that he was not a prophet and not the son of the prophet (Am



7:14), he indeed was a prophet sanctioned by YHWH. He may not have been a prophet at the time when God gave him the commission to prophesy to Israel, but, on the basis of his call, he later became one. Thus, he was a layman under divine order to perform the function of a prophet, to announce judgment or salvation. Similar to the speeches of other eighth century BCE prophets, Amos' speech dealt with the same basic theme and shared some central assumptions: God expects justice and righteousness, in history and in human society, and, moreover, God is about to act to execute his will (cf Tucker 1987:170).

Amos went northwards to prophesy in the context of the kingdom of Israel in its political and economic zenith, particularly during the reign of Jeroboam II (King 1983:3-15). Politically, Israel was stable and at this stage was busy expanding her territory as her enemy, the Syrian kingdom of Damascus became weaker, and the southern kingdom of Judah became an ally. Meanwhile, the economy of Israel had reached its peak, because the control over trade routes was in Israel's hands. This resulted in growing profits through international trade. As expected, such stability and prosperity were interpreted as signs of YHWH's favour. This fact was supported by what is called the "religious awakening," where religious shrines were enthusiastically constructed, animal sacrifices were abundantly offered, and religious feasts were routinely celebrated.

Unfortunately, although they outwardly practiced these religious activities, inwardly, the Israelites did not observe the religious demands in a correct relationship with YHWH and with their neighbours. Worshipping the deity in Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba was identified by the prophet as an empty and sinful religion because they neglected the horizontal (social) dimension of their belief. Political, economic and religious successes were not consistently followed by social accomplishment, the advancement of the good and the welfare of the whole population. Prosperity was experienced only by a few people in Israel, particularly the ruling elites (the king, the religious and judicial officials, the rich and the merchants). This situation created a sharp contrast between the luxury of the rich and the misery of the poor. The rich exploited the poor in terms of appropriating their property and enslaving them for debts they could not pay.

They also used their resources to bribe judges and other officials in order to obtain unjust judgments against the poor and strip them of their property and other rights. As a matter of fact, they were practicing social injustices by means of oppressing and abusing the poor and the weak.

Against this backdrop, Amos delivered his message of social justice to the people of Israel. Albeit considered as a paradigmatic social justice prophet, Amos was also a master of rhetoric who used language and imagery brilliantly to persuade his Israelite audience to love God and their neighbour (cf Sharp 2009:34). On the other hand, as an angry prophet, he condemned the people of Israel for their misplaced worship practices and social injustices. In condemning these, Amos used a rhetorical strategy that is designed to draw in a crowd, not drive the people away (cf Matthews & Moyer 1997:137). He intensely and creatively used his impressive rhetorical skills as a means of persuading his hard-hearted audience (see Cook 2005:61). In general, the book of Amos itself is organized rhetorically to present an argument for the overthrow of the sanctuary at Beth El and serves as exhortation to seek YHWH. Specifically, the rhetorical strategy of the prophet in his indictment of Israel (as well other nations, in the case of OAN) is clear. He aims to to condemn transgressions and thereby “to win over his Israelites audience to obedience to God” (Sweeney 2005:184-185).

Accordingly, great communication skills are required if one hopes to transform the way people think and act. As an effective communicator, Amos tried to persuade his audience to accept the principles he outlined to them before they applied them (Am 1-2). He also used logic (Am 3:1-8), sarcasm (Am 4:4-5), and repetition (Am 4:6-11) to make his points. In response, it was expected that the audience would listen to those who weep for them rather than yell at them (5:1-17), to those who intercede on their behalf (7:1-6), and those who balance the bad news with the good (9:11-15) (cf Smith 1994:65). Sharp (2009:34) additionally argues that Amos used irony found in Israel’s ancient traditions to compel his audience not to take God’s favour for granted. He also employed ambiguity to force his audience to think more deeply about the life of faith. The way he utilized doxologies is intended to bring them to a new place of encounter with the

Creator. In other words, the messenger must seek the best means to persuade some, as Smith (1994:65) pinpoints, “The unpopularity of a message does not excuse the messenger from speaking, but it will test the messenger’s character and speaking ability.”

In order to convincingly persuade his audience to end “the practices of social injustices,” Amos seems to pull out all the literary (rhetorical) and theological stops available to play this negative theme at full volume (Hubbard 1989:108). This implies that the prophet had freedom in his techniques to employ all possibilities in an attempt to create something new; but at the same time he also demonstrated the bounds within which he was working (see Dell 1995:61). Theoretically, as Gitay (1994:227) proposes, the prophetic speech is a religious discourse that responds to political and social situations as a proclamation of God’s judgment or reward. The speaker seeks to affect the audience’s behaviour, hence the prophetic speech employs numerous means of appeal, which reveal prophetic oratory as rich, elaborate as any discourse. Thus, the prophetic rhetoric is considered as an argumentative art of appeal that avoids abstractions and rhetorical statements in favour of lively, concrete and colourful examples. The rhetorical genres and techniques Amos employed are primarily threats and invectives. Through his words, these styles are most fully developed.

To expose Amos’ rhetoric on social justice, this research utilizes the basic rhetorical steps proposed by Kennedy (1984:33-38) and combines them with Black’s (1965), Kessler’s (1974:22-36), and Wuellner’s (1987:448-63) proposals. This combination uses the following method: it begins with establishing the rhetorical *unit*, rhetorical *situation*, *invention (inventio)*, *disposition (dispositio)*, and ends up with identifying the rhetorical *techniques*. It is important to note here that, within each unit, there is a certain structure which has three essential elements: introduction, accusation and retribution. Moreover, this can be elaborated in complete rhetorical elements: introduction [*exordium*], statement [*narratio*], body of the speech [*probatio*], and conclusion [*peroratio*]). From the rhetorical analyses of Amos’ texts related to the issue of social justice (Am 2:6-8; 15:1-17; 8:4-8), it was found that YHWH, throughout the prophet’s rhetorical

speeches in these units, opposed the practices of social injustice; specifically social oppressions of the poor and the weak (Am 2:6-8), perversion of the ideal principles of justice and right religious practices (Am 5:1-17), and economic exploitation, as well as manipulation of the unfortunate by a certain group of people (Am 8:4-6).

Amos used every possible rhetoric device available in order to appeal to his audience in each unit analyzed. In the first unit (2:6-8), the notion of opposition from YHWH occurred in the use of a “war oracle” towards the nations (OAN) accused for their common immorality. The prophet specifically employed “rhetorical entrapment” (as seen in OAN [Am 1:3-2:16]) in order to corner the Israelites so that they could not escape from divine accusation (cf Partlow 2007:23-32). They form the climax of the series of oracles. In this regard, the formula N+1 is also used to expose the totality of Israel’s transgressions. While, in the second unit (5:1-17), Amos used the “chiastic form” to direct the audience starting from their sins, then turning toward God, and lastly ended with them again. Other literary devices were intentionally applied to draw the listener to the core of the prophetic message. For example, he used inclusion and progression, woe oracle, dirge or lament, wordplay, hymn, wisdom techniques, imagery and a sevenfold structure. Finally, in the last unit analyzed (8:4-8), Amos made use of the “Hear this” formula to call attention and establish authority for his speech. A sevenfold structure, again, was utilized to indicate the comprehensiveness of Israel’s sins. Use of the chiastic form was made to direct attention to the central point, the means used in abusive economic practice. The most important literary device found in this unit is “quoting what the accused have said.” The purpose of using this tactic is to carry out an argument with the adversaries by using their own words against them.

In a rhetorical sense, one should consider Amos’ use of such literary devices as law court imagery. Such a judicial imagery significantly occurs both in the analysis of the second and third unit of this research. Amos’ messages can be categorized (based on Kennedy’s proposal [2001:43-50]) as, first, *epideictic rhetoric*. This means any oral or written discourse that seeks to enhance

knowledge, understanding or belief, often does it through praise and blame, whether of persons, things or values (for example, in the doxology, “YHWH is his name” [5:8-9]). Second, it can be categorized as *judicial rhetoric*. This can be understood as a means suited to defending or condemning specific actions and to accusing (justifying) someone (as seen in the condemnations, “Israel’s perverting justice” [5:7, 10-11], and “The Merchants’ abusing the poor and the weak economically” [8:4-6]). Third, it can be described as *deliberative rhetoric*. Such a speech genre intends to concentrate on an assessment of actions. The audience was urged to respond in a more concrete way, to take a certain action in the future (“Seek YHWH and live” 5:4-6, 14-15). The point is clear that the use of these different kinds of rhetoric implies different kinds of associations, especially between the speaker and the audience. Thus, these rhetorical genres suggest the relational substance between those people who are involved in this judicial imagery.

Amos utilized rhetorical strategies in order to serve his, or more properly YHWH’s, theological intention. This research assumes that the main objective of the prophet’s message was to establish justice in the land of Israel. Based on the exilic and Deuteronomic traditions, which emphasize the importance of the Covenant, the prophet championed the ideal of social justice, a social hero or a champion of the oppressed, indignant at injustice, proclaiming new ideals of equality and freedom (cf Wright 1990:107). He became a mediator of justice between YHWH and his people, specifically as an agent of social justice to mediate the divine will and to call on God’s people to show a positive response to that will. The theological idea of social justice in the book of Amos is in line with the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures (*Tanakh*), especially the codes of law (in Israel’s Torah) as well as the writings of eighth century BCE prophets (Amos’ contemporaries). In these pieces, the issue of social justice is primarily based on the idea of YHWH, the advocate of justice, who is concerned with the abusive conduct of the powerful and the fate of the powerless (see Gowan 1998:33).

This research finds that the theological concept of social justice is closely related to the covenanted relationship between YHWH and his people. To make such a

concept more understandable, “a triangular relational model of social justice” is proposed. The triangle consists of YHWH, the powerful and the powerless. It is assumed that the ideal of social justice will exist if the three angles are properly interrelated to each under all conditions. YHWH, from a theological angle, was described with the metaphors of governance, Judge and King, Warrior and Father (cf Brueggemann 1997:233-266). He is independent from both the political (the powerful) and social (the powerless) ones. On the other hand, both the powerful (political) and powerless (social) angle in the triad should be dependent on God (the theological one). They share the same status, both being God’s creation and redeemed people (see Berthout 2005:99-109). They owe their very lives to YHWH, the source of all life, as well as justice, for they had all been delivered from the slavery and bondage of Egypt.

As a result of this ideal divine-human (independent-dependent) relationship, it is expected that both the powerful and the powerless (the unfortunate) should be interdependent with each other. The weak needed the powerful to care and to protect them in order to survive the hardships of life, while the powerful needed the weak to actualize their calls as the responsible receivers of the divine covenant and promises. It is assumed that there is no freedom without the politics of justice and compassion, and there is no politics of justice and compassion without faith in the freedom given by God (cf Brueggemann 1978:18). Thus, this balanced trajectory would have established an ideal condition of social justice.

However, in the book of Amos, the condition was far from this ideal. Considering it as a “breaking of the covenant,” the people of Israel, particularly and predominantly the powerful, did not live in accordance with the ideals of the covenanted relationship. They broke the covenant by religiously (spiritually) disobeying YHWH (“profaning him”) and mistreating their neighbours (“abusing the weak socially”). Disobedience toward YHWH reflects the independency of the powerful from the divine. At the same time, mistreatment toward the weak also reflects their independency from the powerless. They are not only wrong but sinful, because being independent connotes not only spiritual rebellion against God but also immoral abuse toward the weak, as Reddit (2008:244) asserts, “For

Amos, the issue is morality, not legality. He holds God's people to a higher standard than mere legality." It is important to note that once the powerful became independent of the powerless, the powerless were in the position of being marginalized and hopeless, because they have lost all their social, economic and legal rights.

In response to this predicament, that is, the brokenness of the covenant relationship, YHWH remains responsible for establishing justice in the land of Israel. The theological intention, as well as the key, to security in the land was the maintenance of justice and righteousness, a responsibility that fell first and foremost upon the powerful (see Miller 2000:539). In order to realize it, through the rhetorical speeches of the prophet Amos, YHWH announced both judgment and hope. In the context of judgment, he proposed threats and punishments against the powerful for profaning him and abusing other humans. Nogalski (2007:136) stresses that "When the people worship gods who do not control the world, consequences ensue. When people treat the poor as commodities, consequences ensue." Focusing on the issue of social justice, YHWH additionally is in the position of punishing the powerful and defending the oppressed (marginalized). The God of Amos is the subject of social justice, because he protects those who are victims of social injustices and never lets those who religiously and socially sin go unpunished.

It is clear that, against the disobedience to the divine instructions, stands the authority of God over the state and the responsibility of king and leaders (along with the rich and the merchants, or simply, of the powerful) to bring every Israelite to obey the word and will of the Lord (cf Miller 2000:533). It might be inferred here that there was a certain "hierarchy" of power. Dempsey (2000:21) puts it right when he says, "Certain humans and nonhumans are oppressed by those who are more powerful than they, and the powerful are then punished by an even more powerful God. . . . God is portrayed as a male involved in power play for the sake of justice." Therefore, YHWH states opposition to cultic actions executed without justice and concluded with a threat to exile the people beyond Damascus (Am 5:18-27) (cf Sweeney 2000:238). Within this frame of thinking,



stands the notion of the “Day of YHWH” understood as the day of divine judgment.

In the context of the previous, there was “a little hope” offered (cf Van der Woude 1982:33; Lang 1983:74-75). YHWH gives opportunity for the people who transgressed the covenanted relationship to repent and recover. This seems to be a hope toward restoration of the fortune of God’s people (Andrew 2000:343). Although the prophet’s oracles emphasized judgment against the northern kingdom, they also include calls to seek YHWH (Am 5:4, 6) indicating the prophet’s ultimate intention (see Sweeney 2005:184). This offer was basically rooted in the intended plan of YHWH to save his people, as Preuss (1991:171) proposes, “The concept of Divine justice involves YHWH’s historical acts of salvation, acts that he extends to his people, to individual person, and even to this world.” It is suggested that righteousness and justice—how one relates to God and human beings—are the hallmarks by which humanity in general, and God’s people in particular, shall be evaluated. The prophet Amos, along with other eighth century BCE prophets, challenged God’s people in times of crises in order to elicit a change in their behaviour (cf Nogalski 2007:136). Unfortunately one learns from Israel’s history that the people of God did not choose “YHWH and live” but they chose their own way of death instead.

According to Amos there are several basic aspects that the notion of social justice can be understood (cf Mays 1987:147): first, social justice is a theological term. Its priority is rooted in their knowledge of Israel’s God, who is himself just and requires justice from his people. Second, social justice is a moral value. It frequently appears in synonymous relation with “righteousness.” Righteousness is a quality of intention and act, a characteristic of persons. Third, social justice could be done. It was possible to act justly in the courts and in the economy. Limburg (1988:107-108) also added three dimensions to the prophetic notion of doing social justice: first, social justice is a dynamic notion (like a surging, churning and cleansing stream). It is more like an onrushing torrent than a balanced scale. Second, social justice is the expected response of God’s people to what God has done for them. Third and finally, to do social justice means to act

as an advocate for the powerless. There can be no doubt that if a prophet had not believed these crucial things, his criticism of his contemporaries and the judgment he announced upon them would not have made any sense. Amos' condemning words of those who enjoy what money can provide without regard for the vulnerable, and his constant reminder of God's loving concern speak eloquently and urgently to these concerns (cf Cook 2005:67).

Relating this research to Brueggemann's theological method, Amos' utterances contain a number of "testimonies." YHWH and his covenantal relationship with his people are considered central to the prophet's message of social justice. The triangular relational aspects of social justice shows that YHWH, as the theological angle, is the determinative factor in maintaining social justice among his people, the powerful (the political angle) and the powerless (the social angle) in Israel. This ideal covenant relationship means that YHWH is independent from his people, while his people (the powerful and the powerless) are dependent on him and interdependent among them. The result of this idealism is the establishment of social justice in the land. These angles and their relationship thus explain "a core testimony" of the prophet's utterances.

However, descriptions about YHWH (the Creator, the King, the Warrior and the Judge) are not only seen in a "positive" way but also in a "negative" one. At times God seems to be hidden, ambiguous or instable, or even negative. In fact, the oppressed might question his presence in times of crisis, a crisis of social justice. They also might be confused with the "command" of the divine, to seek YHWH and to sin in the centres of national cults. For the powerful, the angry God and his accusations against them are totally different from their popular belief in "divine favouritism." These different realities of YHWH cross-examine the core testimony of Amos' utterances. In Brueggemann's view, this is considered as "a counter-testimony" of Amos' utterances.

There is a tension between the core testimony and the counter-testimony in this research. Although they seem to be contradictory, however, both testimonies are complementary to each other. The counter testimony is needed to reach the main intention of the utterances, to maintain justice in the land. Because of the

breaking of the covenant, YHWH should come to final actions, to defend the powerless and to punish the evildoers, the powerful in Israel. This “negativity” is also intentionally pronounced in order to call the powerful to repent (“to seek YHWH”) and to give “a hope” of deliverance from the coming judgment in the day of the Lord (cf Paas 2002:274). The *leitmotif* of establishing justice is that Israel will be, once again, YHWH’s partner (“unsolicited testimony”). The prophet Amos seems to play his “social function” (Smith 1994:50-53) consistently as a mediator (“embodied testimony”), mediating between YHWH and his people.

The prophet’s message to walk in the path of justice and righteousness and to care for the poor and the weak has everlasting meaning and value (see Carrol R 2001:87-91). Even after more than twenty centuries since the prophet Amos preached social justice, that social justice has not come about in any society all over the world (cf Watts 1991:205). Many of the injustices mentioned in the book of Amos not only occurred in the past but also continue to occur today. As seen in our society now, the rich continue to exploit and oppress the poor and the weak. The upper class people look for all possible luxuries of life while millions of people still live in abject poverty. A glance at today’s society tells us that the prophetic words of Amos are more relevant today than ever before (see Kizhakkeyil 2006:103-104). In the same vein, Dempsey (2000:21) argues that, read in the context of this present age, the ancient texts clearly point out that the human community still uses power abusively, and it is still in need of much healing and transformation.

Nash (1993:270-271) expansively proposes that the morality of the book of Amos is grounded in a re-imagining of God as the advocate who intervenes on behalf of the powerless and the oppressed within contemporary human society (for example, survivors of all forms of abuse and violence; hungry children; people with AIDS; all who are objectified as “other” on the basis of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation) and throughout the world (for example, Muslim women raped and impregnated by Serbian soldiers, the starving people in Somalia and Sudan, or the Palestinian refugees). Such a vision is made possible by, again and again, reclaiming the exodus and the covenant as foundational sacred stories

that generate theological thoughts to inspire and motivate public policy makers in promoting and doing social justice in worldwide societies today. It can, thus, be concluded that “the matter is how one relates the worship of YHWH to how one lives out one’s life with justice and mercy for all, especially the poor and the most vulnerable members of society” (cf Hutton 2004:16).

At last, the issue of social justice was not only crucial for the Israelites in their socio-political setting thousands of years ago but also for twenty-first century people. In the same way, at present, it is one of the crucial issues for two third countries like Indonesia. Since 1997, this country has experienced economic devastation which later triggered multi-dimensional crises. Consequently, according to Jacquand (1999:389-401), since the population of the poor sharply increased by 37.5 million and rose to 18.2% of the total population, the situation could be beyond relief if this was not carefully controlled. One of the main reasons for this was the abuse of power by the ruling authority. The elements of governmental offices were very flaccid in implementing law enforcement and the constitution. They did not function as was hoped, and sad to say, they were the ones who championed the practices of corruption, collusion and nepotism. Instead of putting efforts into bringing welfare to the majority of the people, the government gave more opportunity and protection to the conglomerates to expand their kingdoms of businesses so that through monopolies and abusing cheap labor, they became wealthier than ever.

As a consequence, distribution of wealth and resources was disproportionate and a large social gap became more pronounced in society—the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. Suwito (*Global Future* 2001:9) describes the critical situation like this, “Today, power struggles among political elites, bloody ethnic and religious conflicts, rising separatism, chronic corruption, and poor law and order continue to plague the country . . . the government is powerless to solve one of its crucial concerns: coming to the aid of the poor who number 50-100 million. Many of them, especially the children find themselves succumbing to the worst nightmare.” The problems are getting worse especially when related to the negative impact of globalization. It has resulted in new forms of exploitation,

dependence, and the impoverishment of a larger number of people. Most of the people are now facing a social, economic and political situation that is becoming increasingly explosive. Consequently, the majority of the people in the regions are now experiencing, as Harahap (2001:61) indicates, “the unequal distribution of wealth, inter-religious tensions and violence, cultural and environmental destruction and political instability.”

In this regard, as the theme of social justice was very crucial to the people of God in the past, so it is also very crucial to the people of Indonesia in the present. This critical issue must be raised and a solution found for the future of the people, especially for those who are poor, alienated and victimized, depends on the effort to establish social justice in the society. It is hypothesized that achieving social justice is the key to change and to bringing prosperity to the society in this particular country. Moore (*Global Future* 2001:1) believes that social transformation is one of the world’s crucial and urgent needs today, remembering that the majority of its people (especially those who are in developing countries) are living in poverty, injustice and suffering.

This research expectedly can be used as a foundation for doing theology and practice of social justice in the future, especially in places where poverty, injustice and suffering exist such as in Indonesia. As God intended to establish social justice in Israel and other neighbouring nations in the past, he also intends to establish it in Indonesia today. In this regard, Christian churches, as the people of God, in Indonesia are responsible in carrying out the message of social justice to their own context. They can be an instrument in the hands of God to manifest divine (social) justice to other peoples. There are, at least, two things that they can do, firstly, to clearly hear again and to faithfully obey the message of social justice spoken by YHWH through the book of Amos. It means that such a message should be persuasively preached, taught and studied both in the pulpit and in the classrooms, and secondly, as its consequence, they should live what they heard and understand for themselves, for their Christian community, and for their fellow citizens. This should be done until justice is established in this nation.