

**An Exegetical Study of Amos 5:10-15, with Particular Reference to Promoting
Social Justice in Lesotho**

By

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for a degree.

Signed: Peter Koono Tefo

31 December 2018

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Abbreviations

ABC	All Basotho Convention
AIC	Amnesty International Charter
BCP	Basutoland Congress Party
BNP	Basutoland National Party
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CCL	Christian Council of Lesotho
ERV	Easy-to-Read Version
GNT	Good News Translation
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDHR	International Declaration of Human Rights
JB	Jerusalem Bible
LCD	Lesotho Congress Party
LCS	Lesotho Correctional Services
LDF	Lesotho Defence Force
LEC	Lesotho Evangelical Church
LHDA	Lesotho Highlands Development Authority
LHWP	Lesotho Highlands Water Project

LNWMGA	Lesotho National Wool and Mohair Growers Association
LXX	Septuagint
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
OT	Old Testament
RCL	Reformed Congress of Lesotho
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SSA	State Security Agencies
TRC	Transformation Resource Centre
UN	United Nations

Abstract

Lesotho's stagnant economic growth, political instability, social corruption and appalling state of unemployment are signs of the wide-spread poverty that has plagued the country since her independence from Great Britain in 1966. This situation has remained a national challenge becoming even more critical in 2012, when, after the historic elections, the government was led by losing parties. Whenever corruption becomes common-place in the public service, when citizens are denied participatory rights and anti-corruption policies and accountability mechanisms fail, it is the masses that suffer the most.

In an attempt to address the present socio-political corruption in Lesotho, this research seeks to find relevance in the biblical text of Amos 5:10-15. This passage highlights Amos' indictment of Israel's socio-political and religious evils during the eighth century B.C, Israel's heyday of great wealth and luxury, the oppression of the poor and the moral decay.

The research strategy reviews scholarship pertaining to social justice/injustice in the Old Testament, specifically in the book of Amos, and also in the wider modern world context. It uses an exegetical approach to survey the historical and literary contexts of Amos 5:10-15, and the book's overall theological themes. It also makes use of other features of critical study to determine its significance and original message. The relevance of the message of Amos is looked for in the notable incidents of social corruption in Lesotho following the inception of the coalition government in 2012. The mapping of the political situation that led to the establishment of coalition governments gives the background to the form and the trends of corruption currently found in all sectors.

The perpetual suffering of the poor in Lesotho is a clear sign of a life-long crippled justice system and a rejection of human rights. A system where the wealthy and the

socially powerful lord it over the poor has created a dilemma that can only be challenged by faith communities. Amos' prophecy against the social injustices of Israel of his time is still relevant to the injustices of our time.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Title

An exegetical study of Amos 5:10-15, with particular reference to promoting social justice in Lesotho.

1.2 Background

Lesotho is a religious country, having received the first seed of the Gospel back in 1833. The primary issues of concern in Amos' prophecy are not dissimilar to those to be found in Lesotho's past and present. These issues include the following: (1) evidence of corrupted governments throughout the history of the nation, (2) evidence of perpetual social, religious and political corruption, (3) oppression of the poor and the marginalized, (4) a huge gulf between the rich and the poor, (5) people living in abject poverty because of a high rate of unemployment, (6) court cases taking many years before judgment is made, and (7) poor service delivery in the government sector. In spite of all this, the God of justice and righteousness has been preached in Lesotho for a very long time.

Moshoeshoe I¹ was a true statesman with fine leadership qualities, together with undisguised humility and a heart obedient to the will of God. This statesmanship led to Lesotho standing uniquely in world geography as an island, totally surrounded by one other country - God has saved Lesotho. Since the introduction of Christianity into Lesotho, this country has never been ruled by non-religious governments or non-Christians. Why, then, has corruption in all its phases become the order of the

¹ Moshoeshoe I was the founder of the Basotho nation.

day? I therefore find it relevant to use an interpretation of Amos 5:10-15 to throw light on the current state of social injustice in Lesotho.

The history of the Basotho² is marked by significant milestones in terms of civilization in general, but there has never been any significant improvement in addressing social, religious and political issues. These form the basic foundation on which the overall societal stability of a nation should rest. The text of Amos 5:10-15 is an important and very relevant topic in relation to social justice issues in Lesotho today; issues such as oppression of the poor and the marginalized, the huge gap between the rich and the poor, and the high rate of unemployment. These are phenomena which merit reflection in the context of Amos 5:10-15.

1.3 Review of scholarship

The claim that the Lord is the God of justice presupposes that, whatever the situation, the word 'justice' is connected to doing right, especially in terms of relationships. Stott (1999:175) is one of those scholars who, at the threshold of the 21st century, stressed that 'justice' is central to God's rule and the pivot around which God's relationship to the world revolves. He maintains that before defining "human rights" one must attempt to define "a human being".

In the book, *The Justice Project* McLaren, Padilla and Seeber (2009:175) have drawn readers' attention to the concept of "justice and human rights" in the 21st century. This book highlights that God created the world so that it should be fruitful and yield its produce to feed the righteous and unrighteous alike, the rich as well as the poor. This is the God who chose the oppressed over the oppressor, the God who gave, to the world, His only begotten Son as a token of His love for all humanity, regardless of their social and political status.

I believe that Amos 5:10-15, my chosen text for this exegetical study, is central to the entire message of the book of Amos. Theological interpretations, as well as in-depth critical analyses of this text have been well explored and each period of devoted study of it brings forth fresh ideas ready to be expounded to challenge a new generation. One of the most challenging issues is to critically find the relevance of

² Basotho means the people of Lesotho collectively while the term Mosotho refers to an individual.

Amos' message for today's present predicaments in the social, political and religious spheres.

This chapter focuses on God's concern for the people of Israel and the challenging statement of Amos in 3:2 that Israel would suffer more severely than the rest of the world because Israel's knowledge of the true God of salvation surpasses that of all other nations. This statement implies that Amos was conversant with the covenant relationship God made with Israel at Sinai. Eaton (1998:38) queries the fate of Israel: was Amos preaching total doom as God's ultimate punishment for Israel or was there still room for a repentance that might persuade God to stop the intended punishment? This idea is based on the general understanding of 5:14, with its opening appeal: "Seek good, and not evil, that you may live"; followed by verse 15, "Hate evil, love good ... perhaps the Lord Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph".

However, another scholar Barton (2003:1287) questions this concept of "hope". He critiques the last part of verse 15, "...perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph" and asks whether the phrase, "remnant of Joseph" refers to those who shall survive the judgment, as stated in verse 3 or whether the idea of hope applies only to the survivors of the judgment. If this is not the case, then it might not be too late for Israel to repent.

The idea that the hope of salvation is only for the people who would earnestly desire the rule of God's justice among them, is embraced, among others by Smith who argues that Amos 5:10-15 is a small unit, contained in what is generally viewed as a "lament song"³. Traditionally, he argues, lament songs were sung to mourn the death of an individual's loved one or of the nation (Smith 2001:312). So, the lament song might have been offered because the recipients of Amos' accusation, uttered in the previous chapters, had turned a deaf ear to the appeal. Therefore, the God who does not rejoice in punishments and sorrows is always ready to forgive and to withhold the pronounced punishment. Smith sees in this lament a little light of hope for salvation.

³ Smith refers to Amos 5:1-17 as a lament song.

Lessing (2007:293f) regards the idea of hope negatively. He finds no hint of God's intended repentance. He argues that this lament song is similar to that of David over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:19-27), and thus follows the normal pattern of lament songs: (1) a description of the tragedy, (2) a call to respond, (3) a direct address to the deceased and (4) a call to lament. He points out that the Amos passage is the lamenting of a corpse which is still alive.

Chisholm (2002:390f), on the other hand, argues that in spite of the fact that Gilgal, Bethel and Beersheba are traditionally held sacred by Israel, these places could not redeem Israel from God's anger, but only genuine repentance could. Verses 4-5 should best be correlated with 14-15. This spells out what the Lord desires of Israel in clear terms, that is, repentance.

Lesotho is one of the youngest societies in Africa, as compared to other African nations which have inherited a longer history. Historically, Lesotho was constituted or formed as a nation in the eyes of the world only in 1824 when Chief Moshoeshe I, the founder, arrived at Thaba-Bosiu with a few hundred people (Pholo 2013:xiii).

Lesotho had no national constitution prior to 1868, the year in which it attained the status of a "British Protectorate". Lesotho's first constitution was entitled *Molao oa Lerotholi* (the Law of Lerotholi). This means that it was only during the chieftainship of Lerotholi⁴ that Basotho began to be ruled by the law. This law was traditional and very patriarchal. For example, a woman was not entitled to the allocation of land, nor was she entitled to inherit her late husband's property (Ellenberger 1992:272f).

After attaining independence from Britain in October 1966, the Basotho acquired their constitution (Machobane 2001:8). The present constitution, introduced in 1993, has since been expanded by various amendments and new laws. Since 1993, when Lesotho's governance shifted from a dictatorship to a democratic government, relatively good progress in building a constitution that is aimed at promoting good governance and moulding a society that is free from political and socio-economic injustices has been made. In general, although the present constitution of Lesotho does not meet all the international standards, it is on the right path.

⁴ Moshoeshe's grandson.

Makara's (n.d) paper on "Restorative Justice" presented to the Justice Sector conference held on the 26-30 July 2004 is one of the many legal documents and conference reports that the justice system in Lesotho has produced. This document explains that the concept of restorative justice was established with the aim of providing or awarding a fair judgment between the offender and the victim and the community. It lays out fair and balanced principles, whereby the victim who has suffered physical, emotional or spiritual damage should be compensated in a way that will help restore the normal relations with the offender.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a significant role in helping to promote socio-economic justice, the rule of law and democratic governance in Lesotho. Among these NGOs, the Transformation Resource Centre⁵ (TRC) has been exclusively passionate on issues of justice and the economic order. They have been working closely with government to secure the rights of the communities affected by the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP). They are working to secure fair compensation packages for the displaced communities as the direct beneficiaries of the project (Thamae 2006).

In the TRC report by Akindele and Senyane (2004), it becomes clear that there is still evidence of practices of unfair compensation by LHWP and also some reports of ill-treatment of displaced persons by LHWP officials.

1.4 Objective

The main objective of this thesis is to discover, by means of an exegetical study, the significance of Amos 5:10-15 for contemporary Christians in Lesotho thus enabling them to promote meaningful social justice in their country. This main objective requires the answering of the following three subsidiary questions:

- 1) What is the historical-cultural and literary context of Amos 5:10-15?
- 2) What was the author trying to communicate to his readers through Amos 5:10-15?

⁵ Transformation Resource Centre (TRC) is a non-governmental organization established in 1979 in order to foster political stability, social and economic freedom in Lesotho. TRC has since 1993 engaged in collaborating with the government of Lesotho in Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP).

- 3) What is the significance of Amos 5:10-15 for contemporary Christians in Lesotho with respect to promoting social justice in their country?

1.5 The passage and its delimitation

I have concentrated on Amos 5:10-15 because I believe it forms the centre around which the prophet's appeal for social justice in Israel revolves. It is remarkably applicable to Lesotho's contemporary situation in the light of its need for social justice.

1.6 Purpose

This research aims to determine the significance of Amos 5:10-15 for contemporary Christians in Lesotho as they seek to promote social justice in their country. When doing this, I am aware that one of the attributes of God is that He is just, and because He is a just God, He demands that justice prevails in every sphere of life. At the end of this research, I wish to understand the meaning of Amos 5:10-15 and how it could be significant for contemporary Christians in Lesotho.

1.7 Design and methodology

1.7.1 Design

The research uses an exegetical study of a biblical passage with particular reference to promoting social justice in Lesotho. The design of this research is divided into three literary tasks: the first task deals with the context of the book of Amos. Here I will explore aspects such as: the general background of the book which includes the authorship, date and recipients of the book; the historical context of the book which deals with the occasion and purpose of the book; the literary context of the book which involves the book's structure and argument as well as the theological themes of the book which will include a survey of the major themes and motifs of the book of Amos. I will then examine the meaning of Amos 5:10-15 by looking at: (1) a preliminary analysis which involves textual criticism and translation, whereby I will produce my own translation of the Hebrew text, (2) a contextual analysis in which I will seek to determine the historical circumstances the author was addressing as well as the literary context of the passage, (3) a verbal analysis in which I will do lexical and grammatical analyses, (4) the literary features of Amos 5:10-15 and conclude

this part with (5) an exegetical synthesis in which I will begin to pull together my exegetical findings in order to answer the question: what was the author trying to communicate to his readers through the text? Finally, the significance of Amos 5:10-15 for contemporary Christians living in Lesotho will be spelt out and explained by applying the text and its theology to the social justice issues of Lesotho.

1.7.2 Methodology

This research will be divided into three main steps. The first step will be an analysis of the context of the book of Amos. The second will be an in-depth study of the meaning of the selected passage. The last step will be an examination of the significance of Amos 5:10-15.

Step 1: The context of the book of Amos

In order to examine the context of the book of Amos, I will employ the following methods: (1) a study of the general background of the book. Here I will explore issues related to authorship, date and recipients of the book. (2) The historical context of the book will be analyzed in order to explore the occasion and purpose of the book and to explain aspects of the historical setting of the book that are crucial to understanding its message. (3) The literary context of the book will be investigated for the purpose of examining the structure and argument of the book. (4) An examination of the theological themes and motifs of the book will be made to facilitate an analysis of what the whole book teaches about themes relevant to Amos 5:10-15.

Resources to be consulted in order to deal with the context of the book of Amos will, among others, include the following: Bitrus (2006), Brueggemann (2003), Chisholm (2002), Crossley (2002), Motyer (2009) and Simundson (2005).

Step 2: The meaning of Amos 5:10-15

The second step will provide an in-depth analysis of Amos 5:10-15. Here I will engage with the original Hebrew text of Amos 5:10-15. In this step I will employ the following methods: (1) provide my own translation of the passage (2) use historical and literary analysis to determine the underlying historical circumstances the author

was addressing and to analyze any historical or cultural allusions in the text (3) use lexical and syntax analysis to look at significant words and grammatical features in order to discover the original meaning of Amos 5:10-15. (4) Literary analysis will also be employed to identify the genre, structure, composition and rhetoric of the selected passage. Finally (5), I will employ exegetical synthesis whereby I will begin to pull together my exegetical findings regarding what the author was trying to communicate to his readers.

In this section the primary resources will consist of the original Hebrew Sacred Scripture. I will use the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS).

In this study I will also employ secondary resources which will, among others, include the following:

(1) Hebrew lexicons: I shall consult Koehler, Baumgartner, Richardson and Stamm (1995), Gesenius and Tregelles (2003) and the new Brown Driver Briggs Gesenius (1979).

(2) Hebrew grammar: I will use Simon, Resnikoff and Motzkin (1992), Gesenius (2003) and Arnold and Choi (2003) and Joüon and Muraoka (2005).

(3) Biblical commentaries: Here I will employ several commentaries for example: Crossley (2002), Motyer (2009), Bitrus (2006).

(4) Bible translations: I will consult English modern translations for comparison. Such translations include the following: NASB, KJV, ESV, NET, NIV, and the NLT.

(5) I will also consult Bible dictionaries, Old Testament surveys, and theological books as well as relevant theological journals, articles and research papers.

Step 3: The significance of Amos 5:10-15

The significance of Amos 5:10-15 will be the last step. In this step I will explore issues related to the theology and application of the passage itself. I will also apply the passage to contemporary Christianity in Lesotho, specifically to draw attention to

how the original meaning of Amos 5:10-15 can be explained to Christians in Lesotho and how I can help them connect with the truths of the text. I will also attempt to identify how the text applies to today's situation. Here I will focus upon the life of Christian communities.

Resources to be consulted in this last step will include two primary resources: (1) articles from theological journals and research papers which will, among others, include the following: Lessing (2007), Carol and Daniel (2001), Mamahit (2009), Pholo (2013), Qhubu (n.d), Makara (n.d). (2) Books on social justice will be consulted which will include the following: Akindede and Senyane (2004), Keller (2010, 2015), McLaren, Padilla and Seeber (2009), Thamae (2006) and Volf (2006, 2011).

1.8 Overview

Chapter 1 presents the outline of the research: the background to the research problem, a literature review, a statement of the objective together with the subsidiary questions, delimitations, purpose of the study, and the design and methodology to be employed in the study.

Chapter 2 discusses the context of the book of Amos: the general background, that is, the author, date and audience, as well as its historical background, occasion and purpose. The chapter also includes discussions on structure and argument, and finally, its theological themes and motifs.

Chapter 3 undertakes an exegesis of Amos 5:10-15. Here I have provided a working translation of the text together with discussions on textual variants, contextual analysis, verbal analysis, and literary analysis. Finally, I have provided an exegetical synthesis of the passage.

Chapter 4 discusses the significance of Amos for contemporary Christians living in Lesotho with respect to promoting social justice in their country. Here, focusing on the significance of the passage, I seek to apply the meaning of the passage to Lesotho today in relation to social injustice.

Chapter 5 gives the findings of the research process and how the research findings have unfolded throughout the research process. In the conclusion, I have given a summary of the research.

Chapter 2

The historical cultural and literary context of Amos 5:10-15

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is intended to examine the historical, cultural and literary context of the book of Amos. Scholars have dealt in detail with the book of Amos, however, in this chapter, I want to look specifically at what they have said about Amos 5:10-15 in relation to the context of the book as a whole. In discussing the historical and literary context of Amos 5:10-15, I will address the general background of the book of Amos, the authorship of the book and the date in which it was written, as well as those to whom the book was addressed. Under the historical context I will discuss the occasion on which the book was written and its purpose. In order to address the issue of the historical and cultural context of Amos 5:10-15, the chapter will examine the structure of the book as well as the flow of the argument in the book.

2.2 General background of the book of Amos

A look at the general background of the book of Amos covers aspects such as who the author of the book was and the date in which the book was written as well as to whom it was written.

2.2.1 Authorship

Amos was from the southern kingdom of Judah, from the town of Tekoa (1:1). This was a town in the hill country about twelve miles south of Jerusalem. Though he was from the southern kingdom of Judah, he addressed his prophecies to the northern kingdom of Israel. Amos insisted that he was not born into a prophet's family but was called by God to be a prophet. Amos had a specific job before he was called by God.

He had been a rancher and a farmer, breeding sheep and caring for sycamore figs (7:14-15). Since sycamore fig trees do not grow in the highlands around Tekoa, Amos must have also worked in the warmer lowlands and fertile oases in the Jordan Valley as it approaches the Dead Sea (Bitrus 2006:1033).

In Dillard and Longman III's view (1994:375, 376), the book of Amos tells a lot about the man Amos who lived in the first half of the eighth century during the reigns of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) in Israel and Uzziah (791-740) in Judah. They identify Amos as a man of humble status, a shepherd and a migrant orchard worker who was counted among the poor and exploited classes and who was a member of those lower strata of society on behalf of whom he spoke. They admit that there are different views among scholars regarding the status of the man Amos as to whether he was of a low status or one of the wealthier members of Israelite society. They argue that Amos speaks of himself as "following the flock" (7:15), for instance, as would a shepherd, hence the traditional understanding of him as a shepherd is to be recommended.

Dillard and Longman III (1994:377, 379) point out that traditional pre-critical views of the book identified its first person oracles as written by the prophet himself; even 7:10-17, which is a third person narrative, was associated with the prophet himself or with someone who was an eyewitness in his own generation. Some critical studies question the connection between the prophet and the book. Meanwhile, after much discussion of the various developments regarding the book, they stress that there are recent approaches pertaining to the book of Amos which are less fixed on how the book came to be (diachronic questions) and focus rather on the meaning of the book as it exists (synchronic issues). This approach tends to view the book as essentially the product of one individual, either Amos himself or an editor who had been a colleague of the prophet and who unified and integrated the materials into a coherent whole. As a result, it is not clear whether Amos is the author of the book or someone else.

2.2.2 Date

Finley (1990:106-107) bases his argument on the date of the book of Amos on the fact that Amos' ministry took place "in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel" (1:1). He mentions that there are

overlapping regnal years of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel which are between 767-753 B.C. Stuart (1987:283) agrees with Finley when he says that Amos' travels from his native Judah into Israel took place in the first half of the eighth century B.C. when Jeroboam II (786-746) was Israel's king. In order to justify his point, Stuart makes reference to the book's introduction (1:1) and maintains that it confirms this dating as does the account of Amos' encounter with Jeroboam's chief priest, Amaziah, at Bethel, (7:10-17). He further concurs that the king of Judah during Amos' ministry was Uzziah (1:1), who lived until 742 but brought his son Jotham into co-regency with him in 750. Furthermore, the absence of any mention of a successor to Jeroboam or Uzziah in 1:1 suggests that Amos was not active as a prophet beyond the 750s.

Brueggemann (2003:224) suggests that the book of Amos was written in the middle of the eighth century, perhaps about 752 B.C during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom. This was matched by the equally prosperous reign of Uzziah in the southern kingdom (1:1)

On the other hand, Hubbard (1989:89-90) points out that all the markers in the book of Amos itself point to a date toward the end of the reign of Jeroboam II, who occupied the throne at Samaria as co-regent with his father, Jehoash, and as sole ruler for forty-one years (793-753 B.C; 2 Kings 14:23-29). He maintains that a date between 760 and 755 B.C. seems to have gained almost unanimous support among scholars. His reason for this is that it accords well with what is said about the military expansiveness and what is implied about economic prosperity in 2 Kings 14:23-29. He asserts that the actual date of the book, as we have it, is a more complex matter, dependent on a reconstruction of the process of composition. While Niehaus (1998:316-317) agrees with the scholars cited above regarding the period during which Amos prophesied, he argues that the precise dates of Amos's prophetic activity cannot be known for certain, but it is likely that he prophesied late in Jeroboam's reign, perhaps in the early 760s and a date around 760 is generally accepted. In order to support his argument, he makes reference to an earthquake, which has been dated to this period. In my opinion, I agree with the majority of scholars who contend that the precise date of Amos' ministry in Israel cannot be determined. It is also acceptable beyond reasonable doubt that Amos' ministry was

short-lived, and the fact that in the opening verse of the book of Amos 1:1 Jeroboam's successor is not mentioned, indicates that Amos prophesied towards the end of the reign of Jeroboam. So, he should have prophesied between 760 and 755 B.C.

2.2.3 Recipients

According to Crossley (2002:657) Amos, as the 'burden bearer', is the messenger of God sent to deliver serious and sober words to a self-indulgent and godless age. Amos is sent to the nations who are Israel's close neighbours and who are to be punished for their gross sins. He is also sent to Israel, the people peculiarly owned and blessed by the living God, and who face the greatest condemnation. The reason for this is that since they are chosen people they should know better, but they choose to disobey the Lord. Israel has sinned so severely religiously and morally towards God and humanity that, as a result, they will receive the most severe punishment: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (3:2). The Israelites were idolaters, immoral, self-indulgent and complacent. Therefore Amos denounces them and warns of God's impending judgment. The audience here is primarily Israel (Amos 1:1; 7:15). The inhabitants of Bethel should have been Amos' target audience. Bethel (7:12-13) having been a town with little significance during the reigns of David and Solomon, regained its religious prominence when Jeroboam I ruled the northern kingdom (1 Kings 12:26-32). However, there are references to southern Judah as well (Amos 2:4-5; 3:1; 6:1).

In the main the author of the book of Amos is identified as Amos himself or someone who was very close to him. There are, however, arguments that some material in the book was not written by Amos. The date in which Amos wrote the book is associated with the time of the reign of Jeroboam king of Israel and Uzziah king of Judah. However no exact date is ascribed to the writing of the book except for dating the book during the time of the above mentioned kings. The book was mainly written for the northern kingdom Israel but also for the southern kingdom Judah as evidenced in the discussion above.

2.3 Historical context of the book

This section discusses the historical context of the book of Amos and focuses on the reason for the book being written, as well as on what was taking place at that point in time which prompted the writing of the book. This section also aims to look at what Amos had in mind when he wrote the book.

2.3.1 Occasion

According to Finley (1990:107,109) the prophetic words of Amos were very much related to the political situation in Israel under Jeroboam. He was the fifth king of the Jehu dynasty which brought about unusual political stability and expanded Israel's territory. In his reign, which included his ten-year co-regency with his father Joash, he managed to restore Israel's borders to Lebo-Hamath (the entrance to Hamath) in the north, to the Dead Sea (the Sea of the Arabah) in the south (2 Kings 14:25). The political events in Amos' day weakened Aramean power and in the wake of Assyrian ineffectiveness and the civil wars of the Arameans, Jeroboam II was able to reassert Israelite control. Finley argues that peace in Judah led to great prosperity and unhindered commerce along the major trade routes through the two countries.

Both Stuart (1987:283) and Dillard and Longman III (1994:375) agree with Finley that Amos prophesied in the northern kingdom against the backdrop of the highly successful reigns of Jeroboam and Amaziah. This was a period of unprecedented prosperity for the postschism kingdoms during which the two kings expanded their territories to include almost all the land held during the empire of David and Solomon, just as Jonah had prophesied in reference to Jeroboam (2 Kings 14:25). As a result of the military successes and territorial expansion (2 Kings 14:25-28; 15:2; 2 Chronicles 26:6-8), great wealth accrued to the two kingdoms. This brought about a powerful and profligate wealthy class in Samaria and the abuse of that wealth, power and privilege by the elite. This formed the focus of much of Amos' preaching. However, this period of material and military success was to be only a brief and glorious sunset for the Samaritan and Judean kingdoms since the Assyrians were already building their empire to the north and both kingdoms would soon fall under its sway. Thus Amos' preaching occurred under the ominous shadow of a threatened invasion (Amos 3:11; 5:3, 27; 6:7-14; 7:9, 17; 9:4).

Simundson (2005:153-154) argues for the fact that Amos delivered his message when Samaria, the kingdom of Israel, was in the midst of good times, in the middle of the eighth century. At that time, political success had fuelled national pride and optimism about the future of God's people. He explains that it was also a time of prosperity for some. So, Amos' critique of the indifference of the affluent to the needs of the poor illustrates the gap between those who were doing well under the system and those who were not. The rich and the powerful manipulated the administration of justice to their benefit and to the detriment of those without power.

Simundson, agreeing with Stuart (1987:283-284) emphasizes the point that excessive wealth led to the creation of a leisured upper class who increasingly adopted a decadent lifestyle (2:8; 4:1; 6:1-6). He also mentions that there were other forms of unfaithfulness to the covenant which were rampant as well, including sexual immorality (2:7) and idolatry (8:14). He maintains that it was the exploitation of the poor and defenceless by the rich and powerful that God particularly exposed through Amos' oracles and which contribute to a remarkably frequent theme in the book. There are references to judicial corruption as well (2:7; 5:10-12) which make it evident that a genuine breakdown in the delivery of justice to the citizenry had occurred in Israel in Amos' day. Furthermore, toward the midpoint of the eighth century, Israel was enjoying peace, prosperity and a measure of international prestige. A confident nation (6:8) took comfort in its military prowess (6:13) and ignored its exploitation of the needy and the growing disparity between privilege and poverty. As a result, religion was enthusiastically practised (2:8; 5:21-23) but by a people whose fidelity to the covenant was a sham. It was a nation characterized by religious hypocrisy; it was a people often orthodox in style of worship but disobedient in personal and social behaviour.

2.3.2 Purpose

Brueggemann (2003:224) believes that the immense prosperity enjoyed in both kingdoms was based on the disastrous practice of the rich oppressing the poor which was sure to be unsustainable. The prophet had to assertively condemn the illegitimacy of such social practices and to anticipate a coming judgment from YHWH in the form of the Assyrian invasion and subsequent devastation. Though he was from Judah, the prophet worked in the northern kingdom and proclaimed a powerful

social critique, rooted in a vigorous Yahwistic sense of what is required and what was possible in a covenantal society. Hence the judgment that is sure to come is voiced as the Day of the Lord when YHWH's governance will be fully and harshly enacted (5:18-20).

Motyer (2009:178-179) maintains that in Amos 7:16-17 Amos defines a prophet's work. This occurs first through the mouth of Amaziah: 'Prophecy not ... do not distil your word' and then in his own rejoinder: 'Thus Yahweh has said' (NKJV). He insists that the work of the prophet is to speak. Hence the word of the prophet is heaven-sent, and is as a gently dropping rain and it is the inescapable word of the Lord. He summarizes Amos's message (1:2) by emphasizing that it speaks of impending judgment. He compares that message to the roar of the already-pouncing lion (Judges 14:5). The message is directed to all creation, from the lush valleys, where the shepherds pasture their flocks, right to the top of Mount Carmel. The roar is that of Yahweh from his mountain home in Zion: literally, 'Yahweh from Zion keeps roaring and from Jerusalem he utters his voice'. The words 'Yahweh' and 'Zion' combine to focus on the holy God in his holy place and this prepares the ground for the ensuing message of inescapable, just judgment. In addition, Zion was also the place of propitiation where the appointed sacrifices provided 'a way back to God from the dark paths of sin'. It was also the chosen seat of David, the place of the promise.

The purpose of the book of Amos is to deliver a prophecy about the impending doom and captivity of the nation of Israel because of her sins. The book describes how the Lord will judge the nations for their respective sins and Israel for the breach of the covenant. Israel's breach of the covenant included the oppression of the people, empty religious ritual and arrogant self-confidence. The purpose of the book is not only to expose the judgment of Israel, but also to proclaim a time of restoration and blessing, after the judgment, upon the remnant.

2.4 Literary context of the book

The study of the literary context of the book of Amos involves structure and argument. According to Stuart (1987:286-287) the structure of the book of Amos may be broken up into five major parts in order of quantity: (1) sayings spoken by the prophet himself, (2) first person accounts of visions, (3) a third person account of the

opposition Amos experienced at Bethel, (4) excerpts from an old Yahwistic hymn and (5) the title. He maintains that the book opens with the title (1:1) and moves immediately to a large block of prophetic sayings of various types (1:2-6:14) in which two hymnic fragments are inserted (4:13; 5:8) in both instances as a means of strengthening the impact of the respective oracles. The vision accounts begin in chapter 7. There is a close connection in structure between 7:1-3, 4-6 and 7-9 followed by the sole third person narrative about Amos. The wording of the third vision strongly relates to the reaction of Amaziah the priest of Bethel and may indeed have partly occasioned his reaction. The fourth vision account (8:1-3) is structurally similar to the first three and demonstrates, rather graphically, by its placement, that Amos' preaching of doom had not really been stopped. Thereafter, sayings resume until 9:1-6, which contains the fifth and final vision account in a format different from the previous four and not nearly so pictorially oriented. The account concludes with the third and final hymnic fragment (9:5-6) again employed to intensify the audience impact of the oracle. 9:7-15 is the final segment, which completes the book. The book's structure is considered to be a relatively simple one: (1) first group of oracles, 1:2-6:14; (2) visions with related narrative, 7:1-8:3 and (3) final group of oracles, 8:4-9:15.

Niehaus (1998:317-318) argues that unlike the oracles of earlier prophets (except those of Joel) Amos' words, like those of his contemporaries Isaiah, Hosea and Jonah, were preserved in writing. This was essential as these great covenant-lawsuit messages were not only reminders of Israel's history but also set forth promises of restoration and redemption relating to the nation. He maintains that Amos' book falls naturally into three sections: chapters 1-2, 3-6 and 7-9. He indicates that the first two chapters are essentially introductory with a brief superscription and introduction, followed by a lengthy poem against the chief nations bordering on Israel and against Israel itself. The next four chapters consist of three covenant lawsuits and ancillary oracles of exile and judgment. The last three chapters comprise a series of five visions followed by longer or shorter explanations and interrupted by an autobiographical account of Amos' confrontation with Amaziah, the high priest at Bethel. Hence the book has a purposeful structure since Amos is a covenant-lawsuit messenger and it is appropriate that his words take the form of covenant-lawsuit addresses.

Chisholm (2002:377) argues that Amos presents a macrostructure of sorts in his book. He stresses that, following the heading and introductory portrayal of the Lord as judge (1:1-2), there is a series of judgmental oracles (1:3-2:16), each beginning with the words, "For three sins (name of city) even four, I will not turn back my wrath." The list culminates with the northern kingdom, Israel. Moreover, the prophet delivers three judgment speeches to Israel, each of which begins with the summons, "Hear this word" (3:1-15; 4:1-13; 5:1-17). There are also two oracles of woe which lend strength to these speeches (5:18-27; 6:1-14). A series of visions in 7:1-9; 8:1-3 followed by a biographical account of the prophet's encounter with Amaziah the high priest inserted between the third and fourth visions (7:10-17). The first, second and fourth visions begin with these words, "This is what the sovereign LORD showed me", while the third begins with "This is what he showed me." The last section of the book contains a judgment speech (8:4-14), another vision to which a judgment is attached (9:1-10) and a portrait of a time beyond the coming judgment when God would restore the prestige and prosperity of His covenant people (9:11-15).

According to Dillard and Longman III (1994:379) the book of Amos is divided into three sections. The sections are: the oracles against the nations (chapters 1-2), a series of judgment speeches against Israel (chapters 3-6) and a group of vision reports culminating with an oracle of salvation (chapters 7-9).

From the above discussion on the issue of structure and argument, it is evident that both Niehaus and Dillard and Longman III agree that the structure of the book of Amos is divided into three basic categories: chapters 1-2, 3-6 and 7-9. Stuart, from the above discussion, argues for five major parts which can be summarized in the following manner: (1) first group of oracles, 1:2-6:14; (2) visions with related narrative, 7:1-8:3 and (3) final group of oracles, 8:4-9:15. Finally, Chisholm brings a slightly different approach to the structure and argument, though the argument is essentially similar. From this, I can infer that there is no single structure considered to best suit the book of Amos. The approaches of the scholars above offer a sound argument for their chosen structures of the book.

2.5 Examination of theological themes and motifs

This section is not intended to exhaust theological themes and motifs found in the book of Amos. However, some of the major theological themes and motifs found in the book of Amos are discussed below.

2.5.1 Monotheism

Motyer (1990:179) stresses that the theology of 'governmental monotheism' dominates the book of Amos. When saying this, he does not imply that Amos invented the idea of monotheism since the idea is as old as biblical thinking as in Genesis 18:25. He argues that in 1:3-2:3, Amos reviews the surrounding pagan nations and pronounces them answerable to Yahweh who is the only true God of all the earth. The extension of Yahweh's rule is from Damascus (v. 3) in the north-east to Gaza (v. 6) in the south-west, from Tyre (v. 9) in the north-west to Edom (v. 11) in the south-east and out to the two eastern nations of Ammon (v. 13) and Moab (2:1). This kind of God condemns Damascus for practising inhumane cruelty in war and Gaza for practising inhumane cruelty in commerce, Tyre and Edom for betraying brotherliness and Ammon and Moab for having outraged the unborn, the dead and the helpless who deserve respectful protection.

2.5.2 The sovereignty of God and judgment

According to Niehaus (1998:326), the depiction of God in the prophecy of Amos is similar to the depiction of Him found in the first pages of the Pentateuch. Amos portrays God as the kind of God who possesses sovereign power over the visible and invisible world. This sovereignty is due to Him because He has created the whole world. God is sovereign because He formed the mountains and made the wind (4:13). He draws water from the seas to bring rain upon the earth (5:8; 9:6). He makes the night day and the day night (4:13; 5:8). He formed the Pleiades and Orion (5:8). In the invisible realm, God has built His temple in the heavens (9:6). He made humans in His image and He alone is God. As a result, God will not tolerate idolatry (5:26) which in reality is the worship of demons (Deuteronomy 32:16-17) for God does not want the people whom He has made in His image to abase themselves before demons. God is also the Lord of the nations. He is also Judge. He can, and does, raise up one nation against another in judgment (1:3-2:3) a process that will continue until the Lord's return (for He is now, as always, "the Judge of all the earth")

[Genesis 18:25]). The Lord is also Judge of Israel, His covenant people to whom He gave the Torah and commandments, which they did not obey (2:4). Although He had given them Nazirites as emblems of holiness and prophets to keep them in His way (2:11), the people frequently responded in rebellion. When God finds His people guilty of covenant breaking, He raises up another nation against them (6:14). He is sovereign Lord over all; He is able to do this as Judge of all the earth. On the other hand, He is a loving God who desires the life, not the death, of His sinful people. Above all, He desires a relationship with His people, such as the intimate one experienced by Amos. The Lord and His prophet are like two who walk together (3:3).

2.5.3 Amos and the covenant

The issue of covenant is primary in the book of Amos. In the book, Amos carefully develops Israel's lack of the covenant loyalty demanded by the Mosaic covenant. Israel's failure to keep the covenant is a wilful one and it is inexcusable. As a result of this disobedience, the Lord must deal more severely with Israel than with those without the knowledge of the covenant. The stubbornness of the people appears in their consistent rejection of the prophetic word. As a result, Amos defends his authority as God's spokesperson, and his duty to proclaim a message of judgment, throughout the book. However, God's judgment is not final because of His eternal covenant with His people. According to Amos the Lord has shown Himself to be full of compassion and mercy throughout the history of His dealings with Israel. The future, however, will mean the complete destruction of the northern kingdom, in which no one will escape that awful sentence, if they fail to repent. Meanwhile, Amos holds out hope for a restoration of God's people in a new Davidic era whereby a righteous remnant will always exist to inherit the promises of the glorious messianic kingdom (Finley 1990:114; Stuart 1987:288).

2.5.4 Idolatry and immorality

According to Dillard and Longman III (1994:382) Amos' message of divine judgment is directed at two particular areas: idolatry and social injustice. The issue of idolatry was common during Amos' time (2:8; 5:5, 26; 7:9-13; 8:14). The worship of Yahweh had become corrupt. It was a religion content with the external and perfunctory fulfilment of sacrificial duty (4:4-5; 5:21-26) and Sabbath commands (8:5) while the

other commandments of God were openly defied (2:7-8). Stuart (1987:292) states that there is the explicit mention of idolatry in 5:26 and 8:14. He sees this as the adulteration of Israelite religion. He emphasizes that Amos' oracles reflect the presence of plenty of regular heartfelt worship experiences in the lives of the people (5:21-28; 8:3), but in the absence of orthodox, covenantal religion and in the presence of idolatry and personal/social immorality, this religion was hateful to God (5:21).

2.5.5 Judicial corruption

Stuart (1987:291-292) argues that during Amos' day, juries of community elders probably decided most civil and criminal court cases in Israel and, according to Stuart, many of their decisions reflected an apparently prevailing attitude that the Mosaic covenant protections against loss of inherited land were archaic and needlessly restrictive. The juries felt free to preside over case after case in which heavily indebted farmers had their property confiscated as payment to lenders (2:6, 8; 3:10; 5:12) and they paid no heed to dishonesty in the marketplace (5:11; 8:5-6). He claims that no other prophet was inspired to give such a close scrutiny to the justice system of Israel as Amos was. In the book of Amos, the courts of law or the justice process are explicitly described in 2:7,8; 5:10,12,15 and the general state of national injustice in 3:10; 5:7-24 and 6:12. Israel was guilty of an absence of a sense of what is "right" and what is "just". Throughout the land, the court processes at the city gates should have vindicated the needy against their exploiters, instead it handed them over and by so doing, it turned aside the justice due to them (2:7). Israel deserved destruction because of the injustices inflicted upon the "needy" (2:6; 4:1; 5:12; 8:4,6), the "poor" (2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:6) and the "oppressed" (2:7; 8:4) whom Amos considered to be righteous people whose innocence must be protected.

2.5.6 God is a God of justice

According to Dillard and Longman III (1994:382-383) the material prosperity that had accompanied political and military successes under Jeroboam II had created a powerful and wealthy upper class in Israel (3:12, 15; 6:4-6). That situation brought about new levels of leisure time and disposable wealth which resulted in open vice (2:7-8). Alcohol abuse had become a problem even for women (4:1). There was a problem regarding justice since, for the wealthy, justice could be purchased (5:12)

while those less fortunate were left only with their personal belongings (2:6-7; 8:6) in fact the poor and the needy were crushed by the powerful (2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4). However, God had revealed Himself as the protector of the poor, the widow and the orphan. He would undertake the defence of the downtrodden. The abuse of power and wealth would bring disaster to the northern kingdom. In the midst of all this, God demands justice among His covenant people (5:15), obedience rather than sacrifice (5:18-24).

Regarding the justice of God, Simundson (2005:157) maintains that Amos makes it clear that God is a God of justice. The idea that God is a God of justice is one which one may want to be true because one would like to see the vindication of the innocent and accountability for the guilty. Hope in a God of forgiveness and mercy is also strong. Simundson maintains that even God's faithful ones may not always be the innocent, oppressed, offended, poor and vulnerable. Sometimes the offenders and the supporters of injustice may become aware that they are the problem. As a result they may realize their need for forgiveness and put their hope in a God who is not so ruthlessly intent on meting out justice that there is no place for mercy.

2.5.7 The Day of the Lord

Regarding the "Day of the Lord" Motyer (2009:183) argues that this is not Amos' concept; rather it is a day when the Lord will intervene decisively because of human disobedience. He maintains that it is going to be different from what people would expect in relation to what took place when they were saved as God's favoured nation. In this case they will face the Lord's judgment when He comes on His 'day' as the Holy One whom they have forgotten and no one will escape such judgment. Dillard and Longman III (1994:383-384) agree with Motyer that the "Day of the Lord" will mean judgment for Israel and on that day, the Divine Warrior will bring enemy armies against His own people in judgment of their sin (5:18-20).

The above discussion on the theological themes and motifs in the book of Amos indicate that God is a monotheistic God. He alone must be worshipped. He is sovereign over the entire created order and capable of judging His covenant people when they breach the covenant. He is a jealous God and does not want to be worshipped together with other gods (idols). He detests immoral actions and punishes such acts. He demands that justice be administered in the courts of law

and that the needy and the poor must be cared for. God requires His people to be just. Failure to follow God's decrees brings judgment. But still, in the fury of God's anger, God appeals to Israel to repent. The last two verses of this periscope initiate a turning point on Israel (vv. 14-15). Thus God rejoices in doing good not evil.

This study does not exhaust the theological themes and motifs found in the book of Amos. Certain themes were examined in relation to their frequency in the book particularly those that present God as the only true God whom alone must be worshipped. Such a God abhors detestable acts and requires His people to be like Him. He is a punishing God if His people do not obey Him. However, He is also a loving God who shows mercy to His people if they repent of their sins.

2.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the historical, cultural and literary context of Amos 5:10-15. In order to accomplish this task, the general background of the book of Amos has been discussed with regard to the authorship of the book, the date and the recipients. The chapter also presents a discussion of the historical context of the book, the circumstances in which the book was written and the purpose of writing it. The literary context of the book has also been examined including the structure and argument throughout the book. Finally, theological themes and motifs in which God is identified as the sovereign, just and monotheistic God were discussed. Having dealt with the historical and literary context of the book of Amos, I will now turn to examination of the meaning of Amos 5:10-15 in order to understand it more fully in preparation for application of its message to contemporary Lesotho.

Chapter 3

Examining the original meaning of Amos 5:10-15

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I did an in-depth analysis of the larger historical and literary context of the book of Amos. I have shown how Amos 5:10-15 has been approached by different scholars in order to find its literary connection with the literary funerary lament of 5:1-17. The concluding remark on the literary structure of the entire unit, 5:1-17, was that, though scholars differ on their structural analyses of this unit, there are several common scholarly threads: (1) the characteristic features of a funerary lament are quite obvious (Stuart 1987:344), (2) the judgment oracle is prevalent in this unit and (3) this pericope is one of the most important parts in the entire book of the prophet Amos, and seems to be at the centre of the message of the book. In view of the fact that Amos 5:1-17 is a unit in its own frame of reference, my pericope for consideration must, according to my presupposition, be understood in the context of the unit to which it belongs.

The present chapter will make a careful textual analysis of the text Amos 5:10-15. It will do a critical literary study of this chapter by working on a translation of the text, a tool that will help to lay bare the original meaning of the text. The study will culminate in the intended message for the original recipients. In this chapter I will offer the following: (1) a working translation, (2) an historical and textual analysis in order to determine the underlying circumstances the author was addressing and an analysis of any historical or cultural allusions in the text, (3) a lexical and syntactical analysis to analyze significant words and grammatical features in order to discover the original meaning of this text, (4) a literary analysis in order to identify the genre,

structure, composition and rhetoric of Amos 5:10-15 and finally, (5) an exegetical synthesis whereby I will begin to pull together my exegetical findings regarding what the author was trying to communicate to his readers.

3.2 Translation of Amos 5:10-15

The Hebrew text reads as follows:

¹⁰ שִׁנְאוֹ בַשָּׁעַר מוֹכִיחַ וְדַבָּר תְּמִים יִתְעַבּוּ:
¹¹ לָכֵן יַעַן בּוֹשְׁסֹכֶם^a עַל-זָל וּמִשְׁאֵת^b-כֶּבֶד תִּקְחוּ מִמֶּנּוּ בְּתֵי גְנִית בְּגִיתֵם
 וְלֹא-תִשְׁבוּ בָּם כַּרְמֵי-תְחֵמֶד נִטְעַתֶם וְלֹא תִשְׁתּוּ אֶת-יַיִנָּם:
¹² כִּי יִדְעַתִּי רַבִּים פִּשְׁעֵיכֶם וַעֲצָמִים חִטָּאתֵיכֶם^a צִרְרֵי צְדִיק לְקַחֵי כֹפֶר
 וְאַבְיוֹנִים בַּשָּׁעַר הָטוֹ:
¹³ לָכֵן הַמִּשְׁכֵּל בְּעַת הַהִיא יָדָם כִּי עַת רָעָה הִיא:
¹⁴ דְּרִשׁוּ-טוֹב וְאַל-רָע לְמַעַן תִּחְיֻוּ וַיהִי-לָכֵן יְהוָה^a אֱלֹהֵי-צְבָאוֹת^a אֶתְכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר
 אָמַרְתֶּם:
¹⁵ שִׁנְאוּ-רָע וְאַהֲבּוּ טוֹב וְהִצִּיגוּ בַשָּׁעַר מִשְׁפָּט אוֹלֵי יַחַג וְהָנָה^a אֱלֹהֵי-צְבָאוֹת^a
 שְׂאֲרִית יוֹסֵף: ס

In addition, the Septuagint (LXX) translation reads as:

¹⁰ ἐμίσησαν ἐν πύλαις ἐλέγχοντα καὶ λόγον ὄσιον ἐβδελύξαντο. ¹¹ διὰ τοῦτο ἀνθ' ὧν κατεκονδυλίζετε πτωχοὺς καὶ δῶρα ἐκλεκτὰ ἐδέξασθε παρ' αὐτῶν, οἴκους ξυστοὺς ὠκοδομήσατε καὶ οὐ μὴ κατοικήσητε ἐν αὐτοῖς, ἀμπελῶνας ἐπιθυμητοὺς ἐφυτεύσατε καὶ οὐ μὴ πῖντε τὸν οἶνον ἐξ αὐτῶν. ¹² ὅτι ἔγνωσθε πολλὰς ἀσεβείας ὑμῶν, καὶ ἰσχυραὶ αἱ ἁμαρτίαι ὑμῶν, καταπατοῦντες δίκαιον, λαμβάνοντες ἀλλάγματα καὶ πένητας ἐν πύλαις

ἐκκλίνοντες. ¹³ διὰ τοῦτο ὁ συνίων ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ
σιωπήσεται, ὅτι καιρὸς πονηρὸς ἐστίν. ¹⁴ ἐκζητήσατε τὸ
καλὸν καὶ μὴ τὸ πονηρὸν, ὅπως ζήσητε, καὶ ἔσται οὕτως
μεθ' ὑμῶν κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὃν τρόπον εἶπατε
¹⁵ Μεμισήκαμεν τὰ πονηρὰ καὶ ἠγαπήκαμεν τὰ καλά, καὶ
ἀποκαταστήσατε ἐν πύλαις κρίμα, ὅπως ἐλεήσῃ κύριος ὁ
θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ τοὺς περιλοίπους τοῦ Ἰωσηφ.

What follows is my own translation of Amos 5:10-15 from the original Hebrew:

¹⁰They hate (him) who reproaches in the gate and they abhor him
who speaks the truth.

¹¹Therefore, because you trample upon the poor, and take from him
a portion of wheat, as tax, you have built hewn stone houses and
you shall not dwell in them; you have planted delightful vineyards
and you shall not drink their wine.

¹²For I know many of your transgressions and how great are your
sins, oppressing the righteous, taking ransom and turning aside the
poor in the gate.

¹³Therefore, the one who is prudent will keep silent at the time⁶, for it
is an evil time.

¹⁴Seek good and not evil so that you may live; may it be (so) the
Lord, the God of hosts will be with you as you have said.

¹⁵Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate; perhaps
the Lord, the God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Translation notes

Verse 10 מוֹכֵחַ refers to “the person who is spokesman for the blameless”. The Hebrew is genuinely ambiguous and probably purposely so. This verse begins with the phrase, שָׂנְאוּ בַשַּׁעַר מוֹכֵחַ “they hate (him) who reproaches in the gate”. The

⁶ Meaning, in such time.

word, מוֹכִיחַ with the hiph'il participle is a characteristic of the active which means “rebuke”, “punish” or “reproach” (Brown 1979:406ff). In the context of the typical oracles of Amos, this word seems well suited here. The Hebrew adjective, תָּמִים may render quite a number of meanings. For example, in Brown (1979:1071), it means complete, whole, sound, innocent, having integrity or what is entirely in accord with truth and faith. The verb, תִּעָב, used in the future, third person masculine plural תִּעָבּוּ is better translated “abhor”, which means a complete rejection⁷ (Brown 1979:1073).

Verse 10 begins with the phrase, שָׂנְאוּ בַשַּׁעַר מוֹכִיחַ, “They hate (him) who reproaches in the gate”. HALOT translates the hiph'il participle מוֹכִיחַ as “to rebuke”, “to chasten”, “punish” with reference only to God, or “to reproach” (Koehler, Baumgartner, Richardson and Stamm 2000:410). The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines “reproach” as “an expression of rebuke or disapproval” (2017: online), and this seems well suited to the context of the rest of the verse, וְלִבָּר תָּמִים יִתְעָבוּ. Wellman explains reproach as criticising or showing disapproval or disappointment in others because of their actions. That is, “they have done things or something that deserved condemnation and rebuke or blame” (2015: online).

Stuart (1987:343) argues that the word בּוֹשְׁטִים, meaning “you trample” in verse 11 is an unknown form of an unknown meaning. In this case the word does not seem to offer any solution as to its significance in this context. The speculative meaning of this word may rely on the legal context of Deuteronomy 23:19, whereby the landowners are prohibited from renting out farms on interest (Myers 1959:126-127). Nonetheless, Brown (1979:143) offers “trample” as a probable word to translate the intended meaning here. In the context of the rest of the verse, the verb, בָּשַׁם “trampling” may also mean that the land-rent had become so outrageous that, from the proceeds of what the landowners earned, they built for themselves beautiful houses out of costly materials, while the poor were forced to live in houses constructed with field stones. Those who constructed the more permanent and costly houses and planted luxurious vineyards would have no advantage in the future as they too would be destroyed by the coming destruction. Gelston (2010:83) argues

⁷ Amos 6:8; 1 Chronicles 21:6; Psalm 106:40.

that, בּוֹשֵׁטֶם was, for the first time, written with וּ and then corrected by the addition of the normal . However, the alternate possibility “tax” seems less likely in this ס context. Taxation which resulted in the impoverishment of the debtors is regarded by the prophet as a sin.

διὰ τοῦτο in the Septuagint should better be translated “therefore” or “on account of”⁹. Similarly, in Hebrew, the words are used to justify the announcement of judgment (Barton 2003:1286). In verse 12, the verb יָדַעְתִּי, used here is 1st person singular 2nd aorist active “I know”, demonstrates clearly that it refers to Yahweh since verses 10-13 obviously continue the theme of Amos 2:6-8, where, in the name of Yahweh, the prophet condemned the social sins committed by the wicked. There the subject is the Lord Himself (2:4, 6) (Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie 2003:135).

In verse 13, the word לָכֵן “therefore”, is mostly used before a divine announcement for punishment¹⁰. The word שָׂכַל means “to understand”, “comprehend”¹¹, “have insight”, “make wise” or “insightful”; עֵת means time in a general sense, yet in the context of this verse it means “at that point in time, a specific occasion”. The word מַדְמַד is used here as יָגַד “keep quiet”, “rigid”, and “motionless” or “to stand still”¹² (Koehler et al. 2000:165, 530, 1328-1329, 226).

In verse 15a the following words כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתֶּם translated “just as you have said” in verse 14 were apparently misinterpreted as introducing a quote.

When referring to “the powerless”, meaning those who suffer injustice in the society, Mamahit (2009:194) indicates that the prophet Amos does not intend to trace the origin of the reference nor to explain the causes that put the powerless in a hard situation. Instead, he explains that they just suddenly appear in the rhetorical speeches of the prophet. He goes further to note that the concept of “the powerless” in the book of Amos occurs in a general and broad way. The powerless may refer to

⁸ An example is the combination of וּשׁ in Nehemiah 7:52.

⁹ Cf. Genesis 10:9.

¹⁰ Cf. Exodus 6:6, Amos 3:11 and Isaiah 28:14.

¹¹ Cf. Deuteronomy 32:29; Psalm 64:10 and Psalm 106:7.

¹² Cf. Joshua 10:12f.

several groups of people indicated by various terms. The powerless are identified by the following common terms: צדקים “the righteous”, אביונים “the needy”, דלים “the poor” and ענויים “the afflicted” as seen in Amos 2:6-7; 4:1; 5:11, 12; 8:6. It should be understood in general terms that the powerless refers to the meek, often characterized by lowliness and submissiveness.

3.3 Historical analysis

The setting of this passage should, no doubt, be sought in Amos 7:10-17. According to this text, it was at Bethel that Amos confronted Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. Bethel and Dan were the two towns of the land of Israel (Bethel close to the southern border and Dan in the northern extremities of the land) where Jeroboam II, following the division of the united Israel, established his national sanctuaries. In both sanctuaries, Jeroboam II erected the golden calves as cultic symbols in order to distract the Israelites from going to Jerusalem for religious purposes. It also becomes obvious that, according to Amos 5:11, the most wealthy and socially powerful people, among others, could be found at Bethel.

According to the message of Amos, the national catastrophe which the Northern Kingdom (Israel) experienced by a brutal defeat and merciless deportation at the hands of Assyria in 722/21 B.C was a divine retribution against Israel. Provan, Long and Longman (2015:362) make it clear that the political and economic recovery which Jeroboam son of Jehoash (known as Jeroboam II) gained as soon as he took over the reins of power was due to the quiescence in Syria-Palestine. The prophet Amos seems to have been more interested in the religious and social standing of the Kingdom of Israel because he realized that the recovery of Israel in the political and economic spheres was done at the expense of the religious and social morality of the people. His pronouncement of doom for Israel is articulated in Amos 7:10-17.

3.4 Literary analysis

Stuart's form, structure and setting (1987:348) for this unit as a whole (Amos 5:1-17) is well detailed and, therefore, compels consideration. In general, I embrace the majority of the scholars' affirmation of this unit as a funerary lament. However, I can also notice that there are certain elements within it that are not part of a lament. For example, the doxology (5:8-9) that comes right in the middle of the pericope and

interrupts the smooth flow of the oracle. According to scholars like Soggin (1987:88) and Finley (1990:221), the insertion of this hymn (vv. 8-9) in the middle of the unit, however interruptive it appears to be, plays a significant theological role in the context of this unit. Though I do not intend to go into a detailed analysis of this interruptive piece, its strong theological point is that it holds a common motif with Amos' utterances against the injustices prevalent in Israel and with other units vis-à-vis turning justice into bitterness. Verses 8-9 introduce God's power and ability to make changes in everything just as verses 10-13 show how people, out of their corrupt hearts, have turned righteousness into corruption of various types (Eaton 1989:93).

The pericope has obvious elements that, taken together, bear the characteristics of a funerary lament: (1) a description of the tragedy (Amos 5:2-3, as in 2 Samuel 1:19, 23, 25, 27); (2) a call to react (Amos 5:4-6, 14-15, as in 2 Samuel 1:20); (3) a direct address to those who face divine judgment (Amos 5:7-13, as in 2 Samuel 1:26); and (4) a call to mourn. Some of the important factors that make this song unique are its threefold use of כִּי "for" in verses 3, 4, 5 and another threefold use of לְכֹן in verses 11, 13, 16 (Stuart 1987:344). Stuart further argues that the incorporation of a hymn in verses 8-9 is not to be overlooked since it brings into the entire unit a divine judgmental element in order to make it more than a mere elegy. While Lessing (2007:293) agrees with Stuart about the coherence of Amos 5:1-17 as a unit, he goes on to indicate that the similarities, as outlined above, show that Amos is inverting a genre to suit his rhetorical purposes. Lessing demonstrates that Amos, in this unit, is lamenting the death of a nation that is still very much physically alive! Gelston (2010:83) argues that the first four words of verse 15: שְׂנֵאוּ-רָעַ וְאָהְבוּ טוֹב "hate evil and love good" have been improbably assumed to connect with the last word of verse 14, which is אָמַרְתֶּם "as you have spoken". These words are probably linked to Hebrew tradition.

It has been argued by some scholars that verse 7, though immediately interrupted by verse 8f, seems to connect well with verses 10-13 (Mays 1969:91; Hubbard 1989:195). It is also obvious that the prophet's indictment, which moves from verse 7 to verses 10-13, speaks of Israel's perversion of justice. The verb הִפֵּךְ "overturn" at

the beginning of verse 7 is a definite plural participle which should be translated “those who turn justice to wormwood”. This verse continues the indictment in verse 10, intensifying the prophet’s accusation of Israel by proclaiming God’s judgment. I also observe that verse 13 begins in the same way as verse 7.

Hubbard agrees on a particular pattern in this unit (5:1-17). The pattern moves from accusation to lamentation (Amos 5:1-3, 16-17). These texts pronounce the judgment of doom and of the nation’s death as if there is no turning back to life. However, surprisingly, this judgment is immediately followed by an appeal to repent (Hubbard 1989:221).

Looking at the three opening verses of the pericope (vv. 10-12), Andersen and Freedman (1989:495) observe a certain pattern/arrangement: verses 11-12a being sandwiched between verses 10 and 12b; the latter using third person masculine plural verb forms and the former using 2nd person masculine plural verbal and pronominal forms; **יְתַעֲבוּ שְׁנֵאֵלָו**; the former being the real victim of the divine judgment that would ensue. Mays (1969:96) affirms that the participle **כִּי** “for” in verse 12 is typical of Amos’ style of writing whenever he joins two parts of the announcement of judgment together. According to Wolf (1977:233), it is not quite certain whether the participle **כִּי** was already there in the oral stage or whether it came later in the development of this oracle. Taking verses 10-13 as a block, one observes a text that is resuming a theme cited earlier in 2:6-8, of condemning the social injustices practiced in Israel during the time of Amos. These social injustices culminated in trampling the poor by subjecting them to bribery and condemning them in the courts of law (Barton 2003:1286).

According to Martin-Achard (1984:42), in verses 10-12 the prophet Amos denounces the perpetrators of injustice in a court of law, those who despise honest witnesses and despise those who stand up for justice. In a court of law, a man’s word is very important because it establishes each person’s responsibility and credibility (Deuteronomy 17:6f; 19:16ff; Proverbs 6:19). Furthermore, the prophet accuses the big landowners of despoiling the poor of their meagre resources, especially by putting pressure upon the country folk and by seizing their tenancies. The rich then build for themselves luxury homes and plant the choicest of vines to enjoy their ill-

gotten gains. Because of this violence the landowners are not able to enjoy the fruits of their own labours. In verse 12, the prophet recalls the numerous crimes of those who have power and who abuse it by overburdening the innocent through extorting bribes and turning aside the needy, though the needy are always on the side of Yahweh¹³.

Two English versions are very particular about the manner in which each connects verses 7 and 10-13. The New International Version (NIV) applies the 2nd person singular “you who turn justice into wormwood ...” (v. 7) and “you who trample on the poor ...” (v. 10) and the Jerusalem Bible (JB), though following the same style, has also grouped all verses of this chapter into their thematic categories, for example, doxology (vv. 8-9); threats (vv. 7, 10-13); exhortation (vv. 14-15) (Jones 1966:1483).

3.5 A lexical and syntactical analysis

It is necessary to define certain words used in this pericope as their thematic impact influences its message. Whenever the word **בִּתְי גֵּזֵית** “hewn stone” is used in the Old Testament it refers to the Temple of Solomon and to his royal palace¹⁴. This indicates that the houses of the majority of the people in Israel and the altars, for instance, could not be built of hewn stones. It was too expensive to use hewn stones. Amos uses this expression to show how the wealthy section of the Israelite society use their material wealth to live in luxurious homes with their families, while the poor had not even their daily subsistence. This clearly indicates a wide economic gap between the poor and the rich (Finley 1990:238).

In this passage Amos uses two very important words **מִשְׁפָּט** and **צְדִיקָה**: “justice” and “righteousness”. The two words have a very close connection with the setting of the “gate”. The word “justice” has multiple definitions. It is one of those words which, when used appropriately, applies in many situations. Eaton finds the word “right” as a close synonym of justice. He maintains that when power and authority between people is exercised in conformity with God’s standard of moral excellence, justice is maintained. So, the ultimate goal of “justice” is to do things in the way that pleases God (Eaton 1998:21).

¹³ Cf. Proverbs 14:31; 17:5.

¹⁴ Cf. 1 Kings 5:17; 6:36; 7:9, 11; Ezekiel 40:42.

Achtemeier in HBCE (1971:519) defines the word מִשְׁפָּט “justice” as a phenomenon which originates in the real being of God. Most applications of the word “justice” in the Bible are used with regard to the welfare of the poor and the oppressed¹⁵. It is a great honour to be kind to the poor as articulated in Proverbs 14:31; Isaiah 29:19. It is with this understanding that in Amos 5 we find a close relevance between the “poor”, “justice” and “righteousness.” Amos 5:7 uses the word wormwood¹⁶ as a metaphor to express how “justice” and “righteousness” have been turned into bitterness by the evil-doers. The way the words בּוֹשֵׁסְכֶם עַל-דָּל “you trample upon the poor” in verse 11a and צָרְרִי צְדִיק “you who afflict the righteous” in verse 12 are used is a clear example of how the prophet brings the two words together to express his words of accusation to those whose material prosperity has blinded their eyes so that they are caught in the web of sin.

Eaton’s articulation of the biblical significance of the term מִשְׁפָּט “justice” puts justice at the centre of God’s will. Justice and righteousness can never be understood in their real sense without reference to the real being of God. He maintains that whenever the powerful abuse their power by taking advantage of the weak and the oppressed, God takes the side of the weak and the oppressed (Eaton 1998:24). Amos witnessed evil practices such as the powerful controlling the economy, the needy being deprived of material products and the perversion of justice. This is the basis of the prophet’s pronouncement of God’s judgment against the perpetrators of economic, social and religio-political injustices in Israel.

The word שַׁעַר “gate”, translated “court” in a number of English versions, for example, NIV, GNT and ERV was a place just outside the city entrances (in most places it was well fortified) where all social, religious and legal disputes of the people were settled. In general terms, the “gate” functioned like the modern courts¹⁷. According to Mays’ explanation, the “gate” was not an organized institution as the modern courts are today. All adult males were eligible to enter the place and participate in the proceedings, unless one was not qualified for other reasons.

¹⁵ Cf. Jeremiah 9:23-24; Psalm 10:17f; Exodus 23:6; Deuteronomy 15:4; Job 29:16; 30:25; Psalm 49:2.

¹⁶ A very bitter herb found in Israel.

¹⁷ Cf. Ruth 4:1, 10f; Amos 5:12, 15.

Prominent or respected male citizens could testify to any case, without any merit. This institution could easily lose its integrity depending on the calibre of the people entrusted with the authority of deciding on the disputes. Corruption then gradually penetrated into all sections of society, giving rise to all forms of disorder (Mays 1967:93; Hubbard 1989:169; Fleming 2005).

3.6 Exegetical synthesis

From the beginning of verse 10, the prophet involves a third party. The one “who reproveth at the gate” means that Amos was not the only one who stood up to challenge the unjust judgment done to the poor people at the city gates. This clearly indicates that the accusation had been started earlier in verse 7. To say that those who reprove are always the ones at risk is indicative of the intensity of the social situation at that time¹⁸. The practice of using dishonest market scales and of imposing heavy tax burdens on the tenant farmers, for example, had so escalated that the prophet pronounces God’s ensuing punishment on Israel.

Verse 11 specifies the sin of cheating the weak people in the market by pairing this accusation with the resultant divine punishment. Those who have acquired wealth and who have become rich at the expense of the poor and the vulnerable, and have built luxurious houses and pleasant vineyards with the proceeds, will not enjoy the benefits. As they have deprived the poor of their basic needs so in the same way, even they will lose the material wealth that they had acquired (Finley 1990:237). In the historical background I have indicated that the death of Jeroboam II of Israel was followed by a rapid economic decline in Israel, coinciding with the rise of Assyrian power. In 722-21B.C, Assyria subdued almost all nations in its immediate south and west, save the Kingdom of Judah, which escaped the terror of Assyria by a very narrow margin. I therefore assume that verse 11 might have pointed to this catastrophe.

Verse 12 shows the intensity of the indictment against Israel and now points directly to the sin of bribery at the city gates and the cheating of the poor in the market places. Israel must be ready to bear the consequences of these sins. The act of bribery can be understood in a number of ways. In my understanding of it in the

¹⁸ Cf. Hubbard 1989:196 and Finley 1990:236.

modern world, it is an act whereby two parties are involved in a social corruption that has a massive negative impact on the economy. I assume that modern constitutions look at both the perpetrator and the one who accepts the bribe as being on the same negative side of the law. In the context of Amos, and in his time, the blame of bribery rests only on the perpetrators because they had the power to dominate all spheres of life. The vulnerability of the poor puts them on the side of the needy and defenceless. The poor are categorized as the righteous as opposed to those who take the bribe.

Verses 14-15 which is the last part of the pericope, is an appeal which appears to echo verses 4-5. These verses are specific about Israel's blindness to "seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel" (v. 4). Mays' interpretation of Amos' reference to Bethel and Gilgal is that Israelites should not turn to these religious centres as their hope. They should rather turn to God because Bethel and Gilgal cannot offer them any life. God is their only hope. Verses 14-15 follow on the same track as the ones above: "seek good and not evil, that you may live" (v. 14a) and "hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate" (v. 15a). Here good and justice are paired as two sides of the same coin. This is an appeal at the highest level that the prophet makes to the people who are heading for destruction.

In the imperative statement *דַּרְשׁוּ-טוֹב וְאַל-רָע לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶינָהוּ* meaning "seek good and not evil so that you may live" (v. 14a), the words "seek good" have a very strong overtone. They imply that the God of Israel is a God whose anger only lasts until the sinners turn away from their evil deeds and return to Him. Yahweh is a forgiving God who allows sinners time to change their life-style no matter how slow they are, and he urges them to seek things that bring them closer to their God and redeemer (Eaton 1998:97). The words *דַּרְשׁוּ-טוֹב* "seek good" when taken together with verse 15a *שְׂנֹאוּ-רָע וְאָהְבוּ טוֹב וְהִצַּיְגוּ בַשַּׁעַר מִשְׁפָּט* "hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate" imply strongly that to seek the Lord by doing good requires a practical response. The repentance that the Lord seeks from the people should be demonstrated in action, simply because it is through their evil actions that they have corrupted themselves and so defiled their land. Repentance is not just an abstract word without action (Andersen and Freedman 1989:510). Seeking the Lord also involves a total submission to God's ways, a total transformation of one's life. This

involves changing private and public life as well as religious and secular life into something that will please God (Bitrus 2006:1040).

According to Andersen and Freedman (1989:510), the word **שְׁאֲרִיית** “remnant” is subject to location in terms of “time”: it depends on how far the nation must be diminished before it can be called a ‘remnant’. According to Amos 4:11 and 5:3, the prophet’s mention of “the remnant of Joseph”, does not necessarily mean that this was the last stage of Israel’s capture by the Assyrian Empire. In general terms, I believe that the word “remnant” was applicable while there was still room for the people to turn away from their evil doings (Finley 1990:242).

This pericope, that is, Amos 5:10-15, represents what I may refer to as an OT prophetic indictment of Israel’s corrupted life. Israel had, since the time of Judges, inherited a long life of political, religious and social corruption. God had told Joshua that He would not drive out all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan before Joshua so that “through them I may test Israel” (Judges 2:21-22). The religious and social corruption that had escalated to unprecedented heights during Amos’ time was to a greater or lesser degree influenced by foreign religious practices. The Israel of Amos’ time had become socially corrupt due to the fact that the more the land prospered materially, the more a certain section of the populace became exceedingly rich, while the majority got poorer. Amos’ prophetic indictment of Israel in this passage shows the anger of God at its extreme level. God has sworn to punish Israel by driving her into exile simply because the wealthy of Israel seem to enjoy all the luxuries that the land yields. The poor suffer under the wealthy and there is no one to intervene. Though the passage does represent God’s judgment, it has a strong element of God’s hope for Israel’s potential repentance. If Israel repents, then none of the anticipated judgment will fall on her because the Lord is merciful.

3.7 Theological summary

Looking at the passage as a whole, and its theological motif, I can judge that the prophet does not denounce the religion of Israel per se. Even if religious practices are well observed and everything is done according to the prescribed religious rites, if worshippers turn a blind eye to the maintenance of justice in their social and

political life, their religion is worthless. Religion becomes a blessing and a source of moral life when it harmonizes well with the life of its people (Limburg 1988:103). The fundamental responsibility of people in authority is to secure a good life for all the people regardless of their social, political and religious standing in order to keep the social and political protection of the masses in balance. Whenever the people's rights are trampled upon and moral and ethical values ignored, God sees that as a violation of human rights and of the cosmic order.

Willoughby (1992:206) describes Israel as a religiously blind society. Israel had been overcome by self-deception in terms of its election. The knowledge that they were the elect of God had become the source of this deception. They had neglected their God-given responsibility of being a good example to all the other nations of the world, of being the people of the covenant.

The prophet's condemnation of Israel, because of her sins, closes with a strong word of appeal for repentance. Amos was the mouthpiece of God and his appeal for repentance is a clear sign that it is never too late for the people to turn away from evil even if God's wrath is already felt.

It may appear odd for Amos to utter the words: "... as you have said" (Amos 5:14), but these words go well together with an appeal to love good and to hate evil. A ridiculous element comes in when the prophet knows that by word of mouth even the corrupt religious leaders uphold God as their gracious God who always blesses their sacrificial offerings as they go to Bethel and Gilgal during their religious festive seasons. But words, without true repentance, are an abomination and betrayal of one's God. To seek God is to do good and to hate evil (Stuart 1987:349). In actual fact God cannot be sought in sanctuaries or holy places; it is only when people seek righteousness by doing justice that they can find God.

It becomes obvious that the centre of the message of Amos is the nature and being of God who takes the upper hand. Justice and righteousness become the nucleus around which Amos' personal involvement in the historical and socio-religious affairs of the Israel of his time circulate. His knowledge of the covenant which God made with Israel through Moses, his knowledge of the history of Israel and the surrounding nations and, of course, the prevailing political landscape during the 8th century,

become the medium through which he addresses the situation in the name of God. Issues that will become the main challenge in the development of this thesis will all circulate around social justice, a phenomenon that is timeless. Oppression of the poor and the marginalized, and a thorough investigation of the economic relation between the rich and the poor, will be addressed in the next chapter.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter attempted to provide a careful textual analysis of the text Amos 5:10-15. It began with a critical literary study of this chapter which provided a working translation of the text, a tool that attempted to provide an exposition of the original meaning of the text. As a result, the study brought out the message intended for the original recipients. In this chapter I offered the following: (1) a working translation, (2) an historical and textual analysis in order to determine the underlying circumstances the author was addressing and an analysis of any historical or cultural allusions in the text, (3) a literary analysis in order to identify the genre, structure, composition and rhetoric of Amos 5:10-15, (4) a lexical and syntactical analysis whereby I analyzed significant words and grammatical features in order to discover the original meaning of this text and finally, (5) an exegetical synthesis whereby I began to pull together my exegetical findings regarding what the author was trying to communicate to his readers. Following this is a chapter on the significance of Amos 5:10-15 with particular reference to promoting social justice in contemporary Lesotho.

Chapter 4

The significance of Amos 5:10-15 for Christians with particular reference to promoting social justice in Lesotho

4.1 Introduction

Lesotho is a country in Southern Africa, which is entirely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa (RSA). Its national history goes back to 1824 when Moshoeshoe the Great, the founder of the nation moved with a small group of his people, from his former fortress known as Butha-Buthe to a new stronghold called Thaba-Bosiu, a flat-top natural fortress situated about 15 miles by road east of Maseru, the capital city of Lesotho. Spreading out from this strategic location, Moshoeshoe's followers grew into a strong nation, protected and guided by Moshoeshoe, a far-sighted diplomat and a man with an exceptionally unique character. The socio-political environment at that time was one of incessant tribal wars which had despoiled the entire southern African region. Moshoeshoe's ever-burning desire was to build a nation out of the people of his own clan as well as with those who were fleeing the death and destruction then prevalent throughout the entire southern region. Moshoeshoe understood that people would prosper only when there was peace, an enduring peace, which would bring to an end the conflict in the region. Thus, believing that his quest for peace would only materialize through the presence of the so-called teachers of peace, in 1833 he sought missionaries of the Gospel (Hincks 2009:7).

The national motto of Lesotho is “Khotso, Pula, Nala.” In English it is stated as “Peace, Rain, and Prosperity.” These three words are an embodiment of the Sesotho

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expression of “completeness.” “Khotso” literally means peace; “pula” means rain and “nala” means prosperity. This Sesotho expression implies that when there is genuine peace in the country, there will be rain, followed by prosperity or abundance. Genuine peace, an equivalent of the Hebrew “Shalom”, is characterized by people living together in harmony, caring for the needy and expressing compassionate love to the vulnerable, the marginalized and the downtrodden. In a land that is ravaged by HIV and AIDS and where the gifts of life and their benefits are shared only by the wealthy and by those who enjoy their social standing, where governments turn a deaf ear to the voice of the poor, where there are merciless killings of innocent people while the execution of judgement is delayed in the courts of law for unknown reasons, peace cannot abide. In the absence of peace, there is no life, nowhere on the face of the inhabited world.

Hincks (2009:12) says that the word “ecumenism,” a derivative of the Greek word “oikoumene” which means “house,” “family,” “household,” or “the inhabited world” has the same meaning as the Sesotho word “leaho,” (habitation, dwelling). “Leaho” also translates as “unity,” or “togetherness.” Without it, hatred, jealousy, greed, vengeance, animosity, lust, power thirst, oppression of the poor and the weak, poverty and political instability become the order of the day and social injustices prevail with the perpetual abuse of human rights.

It is also to be noted that Lesotho is a Christian country. When the Christian missionaries came into this land to teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Christianity took root and bore branches which soon spread all over the country. Christianity took the upper hand. Basotho understand well the profound meaning of ‘peace’ and what values it holds for them. Peace stands at the centre of their well-being, their ethical norms. When Moshoeshe claimed that ‘peace’ was his sister, he truly meant that his love for peace was unbounded so that he could willingly give up his life for its sake. When Jesus Christ said, ‘Peace be with you’ (Luke 24: 36; John 20: 19, 21, 26), He wanted them to understand that ‘peace’ was the true guardian and the vehicle through which the Holy Spirit would lead, protect and nurture them always and forever.

One cannot say with certainty that the history of the Basotho as a nation reflects an ever-faithful people with regard to political stability, economic growth, sustainability

or social justice and religious commitment prior to and during the colonial period 1833 - 1868; 1868 - 1966 respectively (Thabane 2017:1). The reason for this statement is that while one may argue that in pre-colonial times Lesotho enjoyed sound political fruit and socio-economic freedom under the leadership of Chief Moshoeshoe, the subsequent period up to 1868 was a period in which Basotho experienced political interference by the Afrikaners and is coloured by the memory of incessant Basotho-Boer strife for possession of the land between the Orange and the Vaal rivers. This and other factors had a serious impact on the political and socio-economic climate in Lesotho as the land strife between Basotho and the Afrikaners resulted in the Basotho losing large tracts of their land (Lelimo 2000:144,197). When the British Government intervened and declared Lesotho a Protectorate in 1868, Lesotho experienced a dramatic economic depression, the situation more or less arising out of the British commercial regulations. The situation went on unchanged until 1966 when Lesotho was awarded independence (Thabane 2017:6).

The aim of this chapter is to identify and analyze incidents related to social justice in Lesotho, focusing particularly on political and socio-economic related events following the establishment of coalition governments after 2012. A brief background will suffice to map the political situation that led to the formation of the first coalition government, in 2012. The chapter will then describe the trends towards general corruption such as corruption in the legal institutions, the extent of corruption in the private sector, the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) and in the political arena, the oppression of the poor in all sectors (this will include killings and the torture-behaviour of the masses by the armed forces), forms of economic offences, the impact of the Anti-Corruption Movements and the Church's involvement. Finally, the chapter will link the current socio-political situation in Lesotho to that of Amos 5:10-15.

4.2 A descriptive analysis of current social justice in contemporary Lesotho

4.2.1 A brief background of the socio-political situation prior to 2012

Following her independence from Britain and the declaration of Lesotho as a constitutional monarchy in 1966, Lesotho was ruled by an authoritarian government under Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan, the then leader of the Basutoland National

Party (BNP). This form of government, in spite of Leabua's refusal to accept defeat in 1970 by his main political rival, Ntsu Mokhehle of the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), continued until 1993 when it was replaced by a democratic government under the BCP. The electoral system that was then employed was such that it was possible for a single political party to rule, leaving other parties with no parliamentary voice. Consequently, there was no representative opposition in Parliament, leading to a growing intolerance among the voters, influenced in the background by opposing political leaders. In 1998 bitter political unrest erupted in Lesotho, resulting in the destruction and burning of commercial premises in some of the major cities. Thousands of Basotho lost their jobs and, as is inevitable when such tragedies occur, the followers of all political parties became political victims and also suffered the consequences of the unrest. That was a serious blow to the growing economy of the country. It would cost the country millions and immeasurable resources to reconstruct the ruined cities. In that climate of political unrest, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) sent troops to help restore order in the country.

Following the 1998 coup the Lesotho government resorted to electoral reforms. The process created more parliamentary seats, so that the number of voters for each political party is proportionally considered and awarded seat/s in Parliament (Ardigó 2014: 2). A high level of competition then ensued, with many new parties coming on board. As a result not even a single party was eligible to form a government by scoring majority votes in the 2012 General Elections. This led to the formation of a three-party coalition government in 2012.

The period of study that I investigate in this chapter, with regard to tracing political-social injustices in contemporary Lesotho, begins with the formation of the first coalition government in 2012.

4.2.2 Political leadership challenges that gave way to injustice

Mothibe (2017:47) notes that political instability in Lesotho became more marked in the period following Lesotho's independence from Great Britain (1966). All the political leaders who held the reins of government, following independence, seem to have failed or seem to have betrayed the hopes and aspirations of the people as well as the pledges made to the citizens of this country. This is seen in the number of coup d'états that occurred during the authoritarian rule of 1966-1993. These years

are well remembered for intolerance and the rejection and torture of citizens who were not members of the ruling party. This was particularly prevalent during the military rule of 1986-1993. At this time two of the former ministers (who served in the BNP regime) were murdered. Lesotho saw bombings, in 1998, of business buildings, residences and other structures that were either owned or controlled by members of the ruling party, in three of the main cities.

The first three-party coalition Government collapsed during 2014-2016. Eventually when its successor, the seven-party coalition was in power (after the snap elections of 2015), Lesotho saw also the assassination of the former commander of the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) and the flight of the three leaders of the opposition parties (Mothibe 2017:48). That government also collapsed. All these examples highlight the fact that Lesotho has been unfortunate in having been governed by leaders who lacked patriotism and zeal for development and who easily fell prey to ego-centricity and selfishness.

4.2.3 General trends of corruption

According to Peshoane (2017:3), Lesotho faces a dilemma epitomized in its violation of human rights. The problem lies, not in the legislative foundations, but in the practical enforcement of the laws and statutes that protect and safeguard human rights. It seems that the failure to implement laws to safeguard human rights is caused by the weakness of the vehicle entrusted with the obligation to do so.

Security forces, on the other hand, seem to have confused their two responsibilities: the provision of public order and the protection of human rights. While security forces perform their rightful and legal mandate to maintain public order, they, at times, cross the line by violating human rights. There is, in Lesotho, a serious challenge with regard to the protection of human rights and the rule of law as opposed to the brutal and inhuman killings and torture. While slightly in agreement with Peshoane, Ardigó (2014:3) deems the police department, and the government officials to be the most corrupt institutions in the country.

Lesotho, as a member state of the United Nations, declared her willingness to accept the human rights bill. All bills in favour of the protection of human rights, whether through the Amnesty International Charter (AIC), CODESRIA, the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), were built on a series of conventions. Every nation that adheres to or conforms to the international declaration confirms that every human being has the inherent right to live does the right thing. Acts of torture and all forms of ill treatment, including killings, are considered direct violations of the international charter on human rights and of the rule of law, especially in a democratic dispensation (Mokhele 2017:16).

4.2.4 The legal system

In Lesotho there are notable incidents where the State Security Agencies (SSA), particularly the Police and the Army have subjected persons suspected of criminal acts to threats, abuse and torture, without the perpetrators having been proved guilty. Some of the cases given here are examples of ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and even killings by the Lesotho Police, while there are very rare cases of the law standing firm to defend victims of ill-treatment by the Police or the Army. One very long inherited trend is the mysterious disappearance of case dockets in the courts of law. When this happens, the suspect who has to appear before the court simply walks away free. According to the latest reports, new electronic systems of filing information have been put in place to avoid the old system of hard and long-hand copies (Liphoto 2018:10).

One outstanding case that reflects how the Lesotho government is taking full control of the judiciary is the one that involves the current Chief Justice. She was appointed as Chief Justice of Lesotho by the Prime Minister of the first coalition government (2012-2015) to replace the previous Chief Justice who was retired by the Prime Minister at his own discretion. The new appointee continued to hold the office of Chief Justice even during the second coalition government. When the second coalition government collapsed in 2017, it was succeeded by the former coalition government (2012-2015) thus forming the third coalition government. The said Chief Justice, who had held office since the time of the first coalition government and continued even during the second coalition, is now frowned upon by the present and third coalition government (her initial appointer). They want her out of office. Meanwhile, the Chief Justice, being supported by four senior lawyers, resists her removal from office. It is a war between the Prime Minister and the judiciary (Liphoto 2018:6). The four senior lawyers mentioned above have also been fighting the Prime

Minister's appointment of another judge to hold the position of President of the Appeal Court of Lesotho a battle that has gone on for almost two years. This is a clear indication of how the constitutional right of the judiciary is being manipulated and used as a political battle field.

Another 'hide-and-seek' game-like drama was the one that involved two senior officials in the Army (Liphoto 2018:1-2). One of them served the Army as Lieutenant General during the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) Government (1997-2012). But as soon as that government was replaced by the 2012-2015 coalition government, the new government demoted the Lieutenant General to the rank of Brigadier and promoted a Brigadier to the rank of Lieutenant General. As the drama unfolded, the former Lieutenant General refused to vacate office for the newly appointed Lieutenant General. Consequently, as long as the first coalition Government was in office, Government and the Army were at loggerheads. When another coalition government was formed in 2015, the one who had been appointed as a new Lieutenant General by the previous government was officially demoted and the previous one reinstated as Lieutenant General. The reinstated Lieutenant General stayed in office until he voluntarily chose to retire during the same term of government as that in which the demoted Lieutenant General was murdered by junior officials, who claimed that he was resisting arrest for the alleged mutiny.

The situation is this: the two Army officials mentioned in the above drama have become a bone of contention and have been used by the two rival political leaders. This situation is also responsible for the spirit of animosity that, to this day, exists between the Army and the Police department, a division that may take time to heal. Lust for power and wealth, the fear of death and a lack of patriotism may be the main reasons why very high-ranking officials have allowed this kind of abuse by politicians to occur.

4.2.5 Corruption examples

Despite the current Prime Minister's claim that "corruption is the worst enemy after AIDS" (Ardigó 2014:2), it is clear that corruption is the order of the day in this country. Reports of bribery and questionable gifts are common phenomena in almost every government department and in the private sector. The Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) is one of the high profile bribery scandals in Lesotho. This

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project, signed in 1986, is a bilateral agreement between Lesotho and South Africa for a certain amount of water to be diverted to South Africa for South African industries and other projects. In Lesotho the water is used to generate electricity and for drinking and irrigation etc. One of the most notorious bribery scandals was made public when a certain Chief Executive of LHWP was convicted of dealing with a number of international companies and individuals to unlawfully grant them tenders. All those involved in the scandal were brought before the courts of law and were eventually judged (Ardigó 2014: 5).

According to Staff Reporter (2018:1-2), a newspaper called “The Post” and a number of other newspapers as well as radio stations announced that the incumbent Prime Minister’s wife, referred to as First Lady, is currently involved in a fraudulent scandal. She established a Trust Fund in order to help the needy in the first months of 2018. Reports state that a certain lady, hired by the Trust Fund to be its Chief Executive Officer (CEO), allegedly used part of the money in the Trust Fund for her personal gain. She was summoned, for investigation, to the Police Headquarters but was reported to have disappeared while there. Her family’s legal representative went to court to urge them to order the police to find her. Reports state that the First Lady is now the prime suspect in that case. She has to appear before the court to respond to the allegations. This scandal is indicative of the pervasiveness of bribery within the government.

Newspapers are full of reports of bribery and, at times, there are reports of businesses selling rotten food. These incidents rarely or never get punished (Liphoto 2018:8). Why is this the case? The present Minister of Trade and Industry reported that a certain Chinese dealer who had been selling rotten food offered him R30,000.00 to silence him (Rakotsoane 2018:4-5). In another incident, newspapers report that the China Geo Company paid 1 Million Rand to the Ministry of Public Works and Transport to award the company a licence to construct a road in spite of the fact that no tender had been submitted!

There is currently a serious war going on between the so-called Lesotho National Wool and Mohair Growers Association (LNWMGA), and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. The over 37,000 Basotho wool and mohair producers, have been dealing with a certain South African broker (BKB) for over 44 years. According to

Molupe (2018:1-2) the BKB has been responsible for buying wool and mohair from Lesotho farmers, for supplying the necessary medicines and for producing high quality breed rams and animal feed during times of severe drought for many years. This year the Lesotho Parliament, at the instigation of the Ministry of Agriculture passed regulations that stop producers selling their wool and mohair to BKB or to other buyers outside Lesotho. The media reports that these regulations were passed by Parliament after a serious debate, nevertheless the farmers feel that they have been unfairly treated by Government, hence their resistance to the selling of their product to local buyers. They claim that they were not formally consulted.

While it is too early to pass judgment on the issue of LNWMGA versus Government, (the dispute has not been solved), the bottom line is that, if the dispute goes unsolved for another year or so, families whose livelihoods depend on sheep and goats will suffer, as will the economy of this country.

Amos decries the same thing, namely, the power struggle between bread-winners and those in power, as in the case above. He says: "Therefore, because you have trampled upon the poor, and taken from him a portion of wheat, as tax, you have built hewn stone houses and you shall not dwell in them; you have planted delightful vineyards and you shall not drink their wine" (Amos 5:11). Amos' sympathy for the poor and the marginalized is uncompromising in all his indictments against the perpetrators of injustice, because it is against God's will that the powerless and the innocent should be trampled on just for personal gain.

In the Lesotho Correctional Services (LCS) prison department some officials reported to the Ombudsman that promotions are done on the basis of political affiliation not on merit (Liphoto 2018:8).

What made the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) and its operational systems very hard to comprehend is the manner in which it was handled at the beginning. Information, which the public had the right to know, was kept secret from them. This included public opinion on replacement as well as compensation packages. Decisions about compensation for dam-affected communities rested solely on the project authorities (Ardigó 2014:6). This situation created loop holes for bribery and all forms of corruption. The Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC) which

owned a very large piece of property at Molika-liko, within the Mohale dam area (phase 1B of LHWP) was affected by the project. According to the initial agreement between LHDA and LEC, the former would erect a new church building and minister's house at a new site as a replacement for the ones which were lost as part of the dam construction. But when action was needed the LHDA complained that it could not pay out, according to the initial agreement. Again, when the Molika-liko LEC school was submerged under water, some communities, for example, Montši, remained so isolated that the children had nowhere to go. The LEC, out of sympathy, had to cater for these neglected children using the money received from impounded property. The LEC legitimately demanded that LHDA should refund that money, but the latter disagreed. This matter of compensation was brought before the Ombudsman, who then decided in favour of the church. This is one example among many that reflects the level of corruption in the water project.

4.2.6 Strikes

The people of Lesotho are notorious for using strikes to draw attention to their dissatisfaction. The main reason for these demonstrations and the most common complaints are related to low wages, unfair and illegal job promotions and other forms of favouritism. The months of July and August 2018, have witnessed nearly all of the teachers' associations, countrywide, going on strike against the Lesotho government's Ministry of Education and Training. Their claims focused on the low wages paid to teachers as compared to the government salary scales used in all other ministries. For example, a qualified primary teacher who holds a Diploma in Education, earns a net pay of R5000.00, while holders of the same qualifications in other government ministries earn R7000.00 (Boloetse and Masoabi 2018:4; Liphoto and Mphutlane 2018:4).

While it is true that the Ministry of Education and Training has the highest number of employees it is apparent, based on the example given above, that the teachers are being treated unfairly. The Lesotho teachers made their claims and expressed their dissatisfaction on a number of issues over two years ago. These were: the absence of gratuity, low pension rates as well as no special allowances. The government turned a deaf ear to these complaints so the teachers went on what they called "go slow". This is a silent killer strike whereby workers do report for work, but do not do

the work. Workers in the Ministry of Health and Judiciary have done the same thing (Phakela 2018:2).

4.2.7 Abuse of power

Lesotho is prone to power phobia. All post independent governments have inherited a non-friendly attitude towards opposition. Without fail the leaders of the opposition have fled the country for fear of death. In 1970 and 1974, when the then leader of the BNP was Prime Minister of Lesotho, the then leader of the main opposition, BCP, and some of his followers, had to flee for fear of their lives. Machobane (2001:26) states that “political misfortunes turned crudely (or cruelly) into personal misfortunes”. This happened following the refusal of the leader of the BNP to accept defeat in the 1970 elections. In reaction, the BNP leader began to threaten the BCP’s followers (Machobane 2001:25). During the military rule (1986-1993) the King of Lesotho (Moshoeshe II) was forced to go into exile for political reasons. For political leaders to flee the country when their rival is in power has indeed become a common practice in Lesotho. The present Prime Minister, together with two other leaders of the opposition, when they were sitting together in the opposition benches during the second coalition government’s administration (2015-2017), had to flee for the very reason that the others did earlier. The current Prime Minister is back in power, meanwhile, the leader of LCD and his deputy, who formed a coalition government together with him from 2012-2015, are now in exile (Zihlangu 2018:6).

4.2.8 Violation of human rights

Human rights are not fully protected in Lesotho. Lesotho claims to be a democratic state which upholds the International Declaration of Human Rights (IDHR) and the AIC on human rights but, in point of fact it does not protect its citizens. A clear example of this is the present Prime Minister, who after his assumption of the office of Prime Minister in June 2017, vowed to promote a culture of human rights in Lesotho (Likoti 2018:10). However, on two occasions, in a political rally, the Prime Minister has ordered the Police to beat suspects of crime as long as the actions were not seen by the public, and to pretend that it was otherwise when in public. Subsequent to these orders of the Prime Minister, there have been numerous reports about members of the Police Department brutally beating and subjecting people to serious torture.

4.2.9 National reforms

The issue of the National Reforms is a burning one these days. These reforms are a consensual undertaking and are seen as a major remedy for reducing political disturbances in Lesotho. This issue was mandated by the SADC intervention, through their representative, during those bitter days when the current Prime Minister, the leader of the All Basotho Convention (ABC), the leader of the Basotho National Party (BNP) and the leader of the Reformed Congress of Lesotho (RCL) were all in exile fearing that the Democratic Congress led (DC) government was planning to kill them. There was appalling political and social unrest in Lesotho at that time (2015-2017). After the SADC appointed commission of inquiry had completed its task it was obvious that Lesotho should urgently prepare to implement national reforms. Now that there is a national feeling that the time to undertake the reforms is due, the present government is taking steps to implement them. Some people, especially the leaders of opposition in Parliament, believe that the government must first set in motion, a national process of reconciliation. Without this, the reforms will be fruitless. According to the opposition leaders, as long as the current leader of the LCD and his deputy leader are in exile the opposition will not participate in the reform process (Zihlangu 2018:6; Staff Reporter 2018:4).

4.3 Amos 5:10-15 as a motivation for social justice in contemporary Lesotho

Justice is a very sensitive and crucial issue. It can be defined in various ways depending on the context in which it is being used. I have demonstrated in the previous chapters that Amos, a simple man who was not even educated in the ways of this world and who was also a stranger in the country where he preached was empowered by God to declare God's Word with boldness before the religious leaders and the common people. From the outset he fearlessly accused those who hated to be reprovved of partiality in the gates (Amos 5:10a). This is very relevant to what is seen today in the Lesotho courts of justice. Cases are either twisted or delayed and this is done at the expense of the poor who are the powerless. It explains too that the words "one who reprovves" means one who has been wronged and then makes his complaint before the court. In a corrupt legal establishment like the Lesotho courts of law, cases are being decided in favour of the wealthy and the

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powerful in society. The one who speaks the truth (reproves) in 5:10a, taken together with 10b, and challenges injustice, is functioning within a completely socially-based relationship. In a society where the economic gap between the wealthy and the poor is wide, there will also be a wide relationship gap. People living with neighbours who differ from them in material wealth, may, in a sense, be living socially in two different worlds. The situation in Lesotho is that some people are becoming richer while others are getting poorer almost every day. This economic gulf is a serious threat to social relationships among the people of God. Amos' message is a socially uniting message. When put into its proper context, the message, as it is, speaks directly to the current situation in Lesotho.

According to Moltz (1998:58), the people of the upper classes are often in danger of falling into the trap of pride, jealousy and power-hunger, so that even those who have lived in a good religious environment all their lives can easily get lost. This is especially true in the social context where a lot of people hardly realize the precious gift God has given us by making us live with neighbours. To be close to a neighbour, means to be close to a gift from God.

Brady (2010:8) is concerned with the need for the appeal for justice to be heard in a world where social oppression abounds. She writes:

We will live in a just society when everyone's basic material needs are met and all people have opportunities to develop their talents and gifts, enabling them to contribute to the common good of society.

She makes an appeal for a penetrating education program on peace and justice to be promulgated especially in the religious academic world where it can become an essential weapon in the fight against all forms of oppression and all forms of injustice. According to her, three major elements are needed: (1) a compassionate heart, (2) an embracing community for the poor and (3) advocacy for a just society. Brady is very particular about how these three instruments can be used effectively to yield better fruits for everyone. She believes that young people, in particular, can be motivated to choose the ethic of peace and justice particularly if it is presented in the field of religious education. The world in which we live is changing so fast that good

must always strive to overcome evil. In an environment where evil has become so common, its true colours are always hidden. To educate young people is a sure investment because if the exercise succeeds lives can change forever.

(1) A compassionate heart

A compassionate heart means a heart that has conquered all feelings of lust, jealousy and selfishness and also has a special concern for the poor of this world. It means that, by the Spirit of God, the riches of this world, in the face of poverty, negligence and injustice, become a mere cipher. Here is a good example: when Jesus saw the weary and the helpless multitudes, "he was moved with compassion" (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; Mark 6:34). When Jesus and his disciples came to the city of Nain and saw the dead man,¹⁹ he was moved with compassion (Luke 7:13). When Jesus longed to enjoy a brief respite in a lonely place, that plan was immediately disrupted when he saw the helpless multitudes that had followed him. A compassionate heart guards one's conscience against luxury, pride and comfort especially if these come at the expense of the needy. This is the kind of teaching that churches and humanitarian organizations around the world are made to embrace: the world is full of poor people and the homeless who struggle on a daily basis to get a simple meal. The world is full of people who live under the yoke of oppressive leaders, who deprive them of their rights to peace and justice. If people in power have become victims of lust, power- thirst and love of riches, the only hope for the world is young people who feel a special concern for the poor.

(2) The support of a community

Without the support of a community, injustice can hardly be overcome. In 1 Peter 2:9 all Christians are given to understand that they are a community of priests. They are responsible for building the kingdom of God on earth by saving the world from the evil forces so prevalent in some social systems. This principle is based on Exodus 19:6a: "And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The functions of priesthood which, in the Old Testament, were understood to rest solely on selected men, are now assigned to whoever claims to be a Christian. In this way,

¹⁹ The dead man was the only son of a certain widow.

communities should feel the responsibility of joining hands to bring about justice in the world (Brady 2010:10).

(3) Advocacy

Institutions of Religious Education should take their responsibility to train students in the importance of advocacy for justice seriously. Justice is a very broad term which, unless it is understood in a religious sense, can be misconstrued. Justice becomes a complex phenomenon when it is translated in terms of different cultures. In general, Christian leaders, Christian communities and Christians at large should become advocates for God's justice, then the world can be freed from the abusive power of injustice (Brady 2010:10).

When looking at the relevancy of the message of Amos, with particular reference to the prevailing situation in Lesotho and all the forms of injustice, we note particularly the apparent dilemmatic tone of Amos's prophetic message in 5:10-15. The fury of God is emphasised by the prophet but so is God's impulse to forgive and to redeem the oppressed. What is fundamental in the whole matter is that God shows and demonstrates compassion to the victims of injustice and without fail His wrath rests upon the perpetrators of injustice. This truth is difficult to grasp if we fail to truly understand who God is. Our knowledge of the Holy God is imperative in this regard. The prophet's exhortative utterance: "Hate evil and love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (5:15) is one of the strongest appeals in the entire prophetic literature, especially as there is the "hope" that there is the possibility of a potential remedy. It becomes clear that in this situation the divine anger can only be redeemed by an act of repentance (Haugen 1999:85).

Hubbard (1989:118) strongly affirms that Amos is "the prophet of our age". Our earlier discussion has made it clear that the present socio-political situation in Lesotho is not unlike that of Amos's time in Israel of the eighth century B.C. The God of justice and righteousness (two prominent designations which characterize the real nature of God) demands the maximum participation of society in its economic, social, political and religious structures. Birch (1991:260) adds: "God then expects these qualities to be reflected in the life of God's people, in their relationship with one

another and with God.” Doing good and abhorring evil involves the people in all sections of the society and that is the basic ingredient of the identity and unity of the people of the covenant.

According to Birch (1991:261), the prophets of Israel had much to say about the manner in which, from the early days of settlement, the economy of Israel was to be distributed without prejudice among the community²⁰. The economy of Israel was structured in such a way that the entire land was allocated by a fair proportion to every citizen, as an inheritance, so that every household should earn enough for its livelihood. This meant that the sole owner of the land was God, and the people only inherited the land as custodians or stewards. The theology behind this structure was that inheritance should become a blessing to Israel and that through its produce Israel should bless the Lord and be participants in the divine saving acts. But according to a description of Solomon’s wealth in 1 Kings 4:22-23, it is clear that the national economy had shifted from being equally shared to being “the economy of privilege” (Birch 1991:222). The king himself and a certain privileged minority enjoyed the larger share of the country’s wealth, hence a life style which impoverished many people. There is no doubt that, when the economic gap widens, many people, such as orphans and widows, find themselves in no time living below the poverty line.

In Lesotho, the situation is slightly different in terms of ownership of the land. The Lesotho constitution stipulates that the land belongs to the King (Constitution of Lesotho 1993:66). But in practice, the King may take to himself certain portions of the land which he deems suitable for his plans and then leave the rest to be distributed to the citizens. The Government is also entitled to use the land, at its own discretion for economic, industrial or educational development. This type of arrangement is well understood in a democratic dispensation where the socio-economic welfare of the people is a top priority for government and is meant to benefit the nation as a whole. On the other hand, in a situation where power-politics has the upper hand, as is the case in Lesotho today, we see politicians promising a better life to the masses during political campaigns, in order to win the elections, but once in power they turn a blind eye to the nation’s welfare. The same thing

²⁰ Cf. Joshua 13:7, 24; 1 Kings 21:32.

happened in Israel beginning with King Solomon. He established a new system of aristocracy, where the elite of the country, a privileged minority, were awarded good and profitable portions of land in recognition of military and administrative services. This way of governance escalated and reached a climax during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (Birch 1991:223).

I have indicated earlier how God's sympathy for the poor and the under-privileged is a major concern and an integral part of God's plan to save the world. It is also characteristic of God's real nature. The fact that God made a covenant with Israel, the chosen among all peoples on the face of the earth through whom God's plan of salvation is to be executed, impels Israel to be the right-hand participant in the salvation plan (Limburg 1988:97). The relationship that God established with Israel at Sinai is that of a covenant, and it is a covenant that originated in God's love. It is also a relationship in which Israel, as the weaker party, will only receive blessings if she abides within the terms and conditions of the covenant: "... obey the voice of the Lord and keep the covenant" (Exodus 19:4). So, if Israel is to faithfully keep to the covenant, she is to fully engage in doing justice²¹. Justice and righteousness are major qualities that determine whether or not Israel is on the path towards attaining God's blessings. The abuse of power, which is now prevalent in Lesotho and is characterized by torture and brutal killings, the violation of human rights of various sorts, the denial of justice in the courts of law (Amos 5:11-12), incidents of bribery and the low wage driven strikes are all reflections of the kind of socio-political situation which Amos saw and denounced in his time. Oppression of the poor is central in all of this²².

The background to my proposal states that "since the inception of Christianity in Lesotho, this country has never been ruled by non-religious governments or non-Christians" justifying the supposition that the majority of Basotho are Christians and thus, have a special relationship with the God who, through Jesus Christ, is the creator and the only source of life. This is the God who also demands justice and righteousness.

²¹ According to Preuss (1996:67), covenant is the result of "election". The pre-exilic prophets speak about election mostly on critical terms. Traditions about election are mostly uttered by them (pre-exilic prophets) when Israel's current conduct seems to contradict the terms of the covenant, hence nullifying their peculiar existence before God (Amos 3:2; 5:14; 9:7).

²² Acts that violate the covenant: Proverbs 14:31; 22:16; 28:3.

4.4 Recommendations for Christian communities to engage with social justice in contemporary Lesotho

In a society where power struggles and the abuse of human rights are deeply rooted and where there is a long history of dominance, there will always be signs of tension among people from different political and religious backgrounds and people of different political affiliations. There is, in that situation, the need for national reforms. The word 'reforms' however raises a very sensitive issue that needs to be approached with great care. Before any steps to implement national reforms can be taken, it is wise for the people to work for reconciliation. This step is very important and it is a necessary mechanism to help allay the fears of the people who have felt for a long time that they have been wronged. The 1994 post-apartheid government of South Africa, very wisely thought that, unless a commission of truth and reconciliation preceded the national reform plan nothing would really succeed. In my opinion, a full national reconciliation is also necessary in Lesotho. A successful process of reconciliation is the essential remedy for the anger of people who see nothing before them but revenge.

According to Keller (2010:82) the one very important thing that people should remember is that all people are made in the image of God. Being made in God's image means that every human being should honour that image in the other person. All people are equal before God since they were all made in that image and are God's work of art or craftsmanship. People in Lesotho, regardless of their differences, whether political, social or economic, must remember that God's purpose for every human being is that they should do good and spread justice to all. If people in Lesotho always saw in others the image of a neighbour, they would not fall into the temptation of thinking that being in power gives them the access to irresponsible living.

After a long period of social injustices and political unrest in Lesotho, one would expect the impact of the faith communities to have made a difference, but that has not been the case. In a climate of fear, it is very likely that even the leaders of the Christian Church have taken refuge under a cover of silence. They have not taken a firm stand like the prophet Amos of Israel in the eighth century B.C. The Christian communities, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations that are

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dedicated to the welfare of the nation, should take the leading role in the affairs of the nation of Lesotho. When the process of reconciliation has been successfully completed, then the reforms will, no doubt, succeed and plans for the way forward will go smoothly. Education and job creation are a national mandate because they can beat all forms of corruption.

Volf and McAnnally - Linz (2016:191-192) maintain that God is a God of justice and whenever justice prevails in our political societies, such societies anticipate God's coming kingdom. There are a lot of Bible commands to do justice, for example, Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Isaiah 1:17; Amos 5:15. Injustices in current political orders are condemned, for example in Isaiah 5:8-10; 10:1-5; Amos 5:10-11; Micah 3:9-12, and praise is given for the rare ruler who is just (Deuteronomy 33:21; 2 Samuel 23:3-4). Christian communities should reflect God's Word by seeking the society that reflects God's justice in Lesotho.

The effort to work for social justice does not only involve a certain group of people and leave others behind. Lesotho is one of the countries that have people who claim to be Christians and who gather together regularly in their churches. This gives these different groups an opportunity to speak out in their different gatherings and to pass on the message about how social justice for all of Lesotho citizens is part of God's plan. The responsibility to promote social justice is not only for those who hold high positions; this is a joint venture that every person living in Lesotho should stand up and enact.

This discussion and analysis of the prevailing socio-political situation in contemporary Lesotho constitutes an appeal for a moment of envisaging and then strategizing the proper moves needed to reclaim Lesotho's former glory. As I indicated earlier in this thesis the dark clouds, pregnant with fury, have been gradually gathering on the horizon since Lesotho's Independence in 1966. In the period of almost fifty years since then (1966-2012), evil forces like power struggles, jealousy and political intolerance have been creeping closer, unnoticed, to become the vicious enemies of Lesotho's new democracy. The climatic political shift that has made matters worse than ever is seen in the fact that not a single party has been able to win sufficient votes to form a government since 2012. This situation is typical of the prevailing political and social instability in Lesotho. This is the situation that

compelled the structures to opt for coalition government. These coalition governments were at first expected to provide a remedy to secure Lesotho's shaking democracy, but none of them has ever completed its term of office. This and many other factors have created a pervasive spirit of political intolerance which seems to be endangering the whole nation.

Therefore, the following recommendations are given to help Christian communities engage with social justice issues in Lesotho:

- (1) Lesotho is facing an urgent need for reconciliation. Reconciliation is eminent, especially in a situation where national reforms are viewed as the only hope of bringing everything back to normal. A well-planned process of reconciliation will help to allay the fears of all Basotho.
- (2) National reforms, based on a carefully strategized structure, will need to be put in place. Reforms may be part of a long-term process, but this does not matter so long as they aim to address real and current problems in Lesotho.
- (3) In Lesotho, Christian communities are represented by the Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL). This body should take the leading role in the reform process and should enlist all local organizations, for instance NGOs which can instruct the nation at large about moral principles.

4.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to clarify the significance of Amos 5:10-15 for the Christians of Lesotho with particular reference to promoting social justice in Lesotho. In the above discussion it is evident that a lot is going on in Lesotho that tarnishes the image of the country. It is clear that various happenings in Lesotho are related to it being an unjust society. In this situation Amos 5:10-15 is relevant and provides the motivation to lift up Lesotho which is in dire need of assistance. All stakeholders in Lesotho are invited to take action to build a new Lesotho that will honour God at different levels by working for justice for all. Social justice is not supposed to be for a certain group of people only, but it requires that all people work together for a just society.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Review of research

5.1.1 Objective

The objective of this study has been to discover by means of an exegetical study, the significance of Amos 5:10-15 for contemporary Christians in Lesotho in order to promote meaningful social justice in Lesotho.

This objective required the answering of the following three subsidiary questions: (1) What was the historical, cultural and literary context of Amos 5:10-15? (2) What was the author trying to communicate to his readers through Amos 5:10-15? (3) What is the significance of Amos 5:10-15 for contemporary Christians in Lesotho with respect to promoting social justice in their country?

5.1.2 Design and methodology

The nature of this research was an exegetical study of a biblical passage with particular reference to promoting social justice in Lesotho. The design of this research was divided into three literary tasks.

(1) The first task dealt with the context of the book of Amos. Here I explored the following: the general background of the book of Amos which included issues related to authorship, date and the recipients of the book; the historical context of the book which dealt with the occasion and purpose of the book; the literary context of the book which involved the book's structure and argument as well as the theological

themes of the book which involved a survey of the major themes and motifs of the book of Amos.

(2) The second task examined the meaning of Amos 5:10-15. Using my own translation of this Hebrew passage I made a contextual analysis in which I sought to determine the historical circumstances the author was addressing as well as the literary context of the passage. I also provided a verbal analysis of the passage in which I did lexical and grammatical analyses and gave an exegetical synthesis in which I began to pull together my exegetical findings in order to answer the question: What was the author trying to communicate to his readers through the text?

(3) Finally, the significance of Amos 5:10-15 for contemporary Christians living in Lesotho was articulated and explained by applying the text and its theology to the social justice issues in Lesotho.

The research was divided into three main steps: The first step was an analysis of the context of the book of Amos. The methodology used in this first step included: (1) studying the general background of the book in which I explored issues related to authorship, date and recipients of the book; (2) analyzing the historical context of the book in order to explore the occasion and purpose of the book and explaining aspects of the historical setting of the book that were crucial to understanding its message; (3) investigating the literary context of the book for the purpose of examining the structure and argument of the book; (4) an examination of the theological themes and motifs to facilitate an analysis of what the whole book teaches about themes relevant to Amos 5:10-15.

The methodology employed in the second step was an in-depth analysis of Amos 5:10-15. Here I engaged with the original Hebrew text of Amos 5:10-15 in which I employed the following methods: (1) provision of my own translation of the passage; (2) employing historical and literary analysis in order to determine the underlying historical circumstances the author was addressing; (3) employing a lexical and syntactical analysis whereby significant words and grammatical features were analyzed in order to discover the original meaning of Amos 5:10-15; (4) employing a literary analysis to identify the genre, structure, composition and rhetoric of the selected passage; (5) employing exegetical synthesis whereby I began to pull

together my exegetical findings regarding what the author was trying to communicate to his readers.

The last step was the examination of the significance of Amos 5:10-15. In this step I explored issues related to the theology and application of Amos 5:10-15. I also applied the passage to contemporary Christianity in Lesotho, specifically giving attention to how the original meaning of Amos 5:10-15 could be explained to Christians in Lesotho as well as how I could help them connect with the truths of the text. I also attempted to identify how the text applies to today's situation in which I focused upon the life of Christian communities.

5.2 Conclusions of research findings

5.2.1 The historical cultural and literary context of Amos 5:10-15

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the historical and literary context of Amos 5:10-15. To achieve this, the general background of the book has been explored with regard to its authorship, its date as well as the recipients of the book itself. In the chapter describing the historical context under which the book was written, I also presented the reason for the writing of the book. The literary context of the book which included the argument and structure has been examined. Regarding the structure of the book, evidence has been shown in this chapter that there is no single structure which scholars agree upon. Lastly, the chapter has offered theological themes which are relevant to the topic under research namely the reason why social justice should be pursued in Lesotho.

5.2.2 Examining the original meaning of Amos 5:10-15

In order to derive the meaning of Amos 5:10-15, I offered a working translation of this selected Hebrew text. I examined the historical analysis in order to determine the underlying circumstances the author was addressing. A lexical and syntactical analysis was given in order to analyze significant words and the grammatical features in the text in order to determine the meaning of such significant words in their original meaning. Also, a literary analysis of the text was offered in order to determine its structure and composition in the book as a whole. Finally I pulled together my exegetical findings about the passage in order to determine what the author was trying to communicate to his readers.

5.2.3 The significance of Amos 5:10-15 with particular reference to promoting social justice in contemporary Lesotho

In this chapter I offered a brief background to the socio-political situation in Lesotho prior to 2012. I then provided information on political challenges that gave rise to injustices of various sorts and I looked at general trends of corruption in Lesotho. I also explored the following issues which relate to social justice in Lesotho: the legal system of Lesotho, corruption of various sorts, recurring strikes, abuse of power by politicians, violation of human rights by those entrusted with the task of protecting such rights and national reforms as a way of mitigating social injustices in Lesotho. The study then moved on to apply the text of Amos as a motivation for social justice in Lesotho. Finally, recommendations for Christian communities to engage with social justice in contemporary Lesotho have been offered in this study. This research has actually revealed that the responsibility for bringing about change rests with the advocacy of the Christians in their neighbourhood, in their places of worship and even where they serve in government in order to build a just society.

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