

ORACLE AGAINST ISRAEL'S SOCIAL INJUSTICES: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF AMOS 2:6–8

Authors:

Ferry Y. Mamahit¹
Pieter M. Venter¹

Affiliations:

¹Department of Old Testament Studies, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Correspondence to:

Pieter Venter

email:

pm.venter@up.ac.za

Postal address:

Department of Old Testament Studies, University of Pretoria, Lynnwood Road, Hatfield 0083, South Africa

Keywords:

Amos; judicial rhetoric; prophetic oracle; social injustice; rhetorical analysis

Dates:

Received: 28 Oct. 2009
Accepted: 12 Mar. 2010
Published: 06 Sept. 2010

How to cite this article:

Mamahit, F.Y. & Venter, P.M., 2010, 'Oracle against Israel's social injustices: A rhetorical analysis of Amos 2:6–8', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66(1), Art. #729, 11 pages.
DOI: 10.4102/hts/v66i1.729

This article is available at:

<http://www.hts.org.za>

Note:

This article is a reworked version of a section of the PhD dissertation 'Establish justice in the land: Rhetoric and theology of social justice in the book of Amos' under the supervision of Prof. Dr Pieter M. Venter, Department of Old Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, 2009.

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ABSTRACT

This article applied rhetorical analysis to an analysis of Amos' prophetic oracle against Israel's social injustices in Amos 2:6–8. The prophet uses a major rhetorical genre, namely judicial rhetoric, and several smaller rhetorical devices including the oracle against the nations, geographical chiasmus, numerical formula (the *N+1* formula), the sevenfold structure, rhetorical entrapment, repetition, the war oracle, parallel structure and chiasms. These devices are utilised by Amos to make a persuasive appeal to his audience to respond to divine indictment.

INTRODUCTION

In celebrating the 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth (1509–2009), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches called upon its members to promote social justice (see Nyomi 2008, particularly the introduction). The purpose of this call was to commemorate Calvin's legacy of promoting social justice in Geneva during the Reformation and to re-actualise God's word in today's world. Long before Calvin, however, Amos, a prophet living in the eighth century BCE, had already been concerned with the issues of social injustice in the northern kingdom of Israel, using his rhetorical skills to deliver God's indictments to his audiences who were committing social injustices towards the oppressed. In Amos 2:6–8, for example, Amos uses several rhetorical devices to appeal to the minds and hearts of the Israelites to persuade them to change their ways.

This study presents a rhetorical analysis of Amos 2:6–8. Rhetorical criticism has two foci, namely to determine the boundaries of the larger unit in order to pinpoint its start and end to avoid 'the danger of fusing together separate elements' (Röphe 1997:45) and to describe rhetorical devices that unify particular texts (Kessler 1974:25–26; Kuntz 1982:141). The analysis follows the rhetorical method of Kennedy (1984:33–38) in particular. His method seems to present a lucid and systematic model for rhetorical-critical exegesis underpinned by classical erudition (Möller 2005:690). Some modifications of the terms normally used, however, are needed, such as 'rhetorical techniques' (for Kennedy's 'rhetorical genre[s]' and 'rhetorical strategy') and 'review of analysis' (for 'rhetorical effectiveness'). These terms are combined with terms used by other scholars, such as *inventio* (invention) and *dispositio* (disposition) (Black 1965; Kessler 1974:22–36; Roth 1999:296–298; Wuellner 1987:448–463). The main purpose of this approach is to reveal the intrinsic meaning of the text that is analysed.

Amos 2:6–8 should be studied within the context of Amos 1:3–2:16. The latter forms a large unit in the book of Amos known as Oracle Against the Nations (OAN). This unit comprises several smaller oracles found in subunits 1:3–5, 1:6–8, 1:9–10, 1:11–12, 1:13–15, 2:1–3, 2:4–5 and 2:6–16. The division can be indicated as be indicated as reflected in Table 1.

This division shows that each of these oracles can be considered as an independent subunit with a specific subject. Each of the sub-subunits in 2:6–16 can also be considered as an independent or complete rhetorical unit, such as Amos 2:6–8, which deals with the specific sins of the Israelites.

An oracle against a nation is generally composed of stipulations (in the treaty), penalties and curses and delivered by a prophet as part of the royal-court procedure (Hayes 1968:91). The OAN is an independent literary genre usually employed in prophetic writings. This means that the appearance of an OAN is found not only in Amos, but also in other prophetic parts of the Hebrew Bible, such as later prophetic

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| כה אמר יהוה | Thus says YHWH |
| על־שלושה פשעי ישראל | For three transgressions of Israel |
| ועל־ארבע לא אשיבנו | and for four, I will not revoke the punishment |
| על־מכרם בכסף צדיק | because they sell the righteous for silver |
| ואביין בעבור נעלים | and the needy for a pair of sandals |
| השאפים על־עפר־ארץ בראש דלים | they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth |
| ורדך ענוים יטר | and push the afflicted out of the way |
| ואיש ואביו ילכו אל־הנערה | father and son go in to the same girl |
| למען חלל את־שם קדשי | so that my holy name is profaned |
| ועל־בגדים הבלים יטר | on garments taken in pledge |
| אצל כל־מזבח | they lay themselves down beside every altar |
| ויין ענושים ישתו | wine bought with fines they imposed |

BOX 1
Literary Unit

TABLE 1
Divisions in the book of Amos 1:3–2:16 Oracle against the nations

| Subunit | Syria (1:3–5) | Philistia (1:6–8) | Tyre (1:9–10) | Edom (1:11–12) | Ammon (1:13–15) | Moab (2:1–3) | Judah (2:4–5) | Israel (2:6–16) |
|-------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|---|
| Sub-subunit | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | Description of specific sins of the Israelites (2:6–8) |
| | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | Rejection of God's acts for the Israelites (2:9–12) |
| | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | Punishment of destruction upon the Israelites (2:13–16) |

writings (Is 13–23, Jr 46–51, Ezk 25–32, Zph 2, Ob 1–6, Nah 2:14–3:4 and Hab 2:6–17 and 3:7–15) (Raabe 1995:236). Compared to other prophetic oracles, Amos' OAN is considered unique because it is the first oracle of this type in the Bible and no other book among the Old Testament writing prophets begins with such an OAN (Hasel 1991:57).

Although many scholars have devoted themselves to the study of this OAN, they are not in agreement on some of the issues, particularly on the unity and authenticity of Amos' OAN. Auld (1999:41–49), for example, is of the opinion that the most important question is that of the unity of 1:3–2:16. This is important because a major break before 2:6ff should not be neglected. Compared to the previous oracles, the last part of the oracles (the oracles against Israel) differs in both length and detail. Hayes (1995) indicates this by saying that

the Israel section (2:6–16) differs from all preceding oracles, possessing both a lengthy statement of offences (2:6b–12) and a lengthy pronouncement of coming disasters (2:13–16) as well as two attributive formulas ('says YHWH' or declares 'YHWH ne'um YHWH).

(Hayes 1995:153)

In the study of the forms of prophetic speech, such a formula is usually called the 'messenger formula'. Accordingly, its appearance at the beginning or end of a speech indicates that the prophet's message comes from God, highlighting the divine origin of the prophet's words (Cook 2005:17). In this regard, it may be noticed that all messenger oracles, including those of Israel, share the same form, comprising five common elements: the introductory messenger formula – כה אמר יהוה ('Thus says YHWH'); the certainty of deserved punishment; the evidence (the specifications of crimes); the announcement of a curse (punishment); and the concluding formula – נאם יהוה או אמר יהוה (Stuart 1987:308–309). Smith (1989:34) reduces these elements to four, namely the source of the message, the indictment, the punishment and the concluding divine confirmation formula. Smith's points are similar to those offered by Mays (1969:23): the messenger formula; the indictment; the announcement of punishment; and the concluding messenger formula. The purpose of this speech, however, is clear: YHWH has spoken and the people must listen.

Next to the indicated shared elements of the oracle against Israel, there are also several differences when compared to the preceding series. This uniqueness is found in the length and details of the contents. Hayes (1995:163) points out several aspects, such as the expansion of the description of the wrongs (vv. 6–8 and 12), the depiction of the coming judgement (vv. 13–16), the accusation being no longer concerned with international matters but with domestic ones, the reference to specific events in the past, the interspersed of the second and third person and the stylised announcement of judgement – ושלחתי אש ביהודה ואכלה איבנות ירושלים – ('I will send fire and it will consume the fortress') – being dropped. The sharing of common forms, while simultaneously showing unique aspects, indicates that each oracle is an independent and a complete literary unit.

As seen in the division of the units above, Amos 2:6–8, as a subunit of the oracle against Israel (Am 2:6–16) and a sub-subunit of the OAN (Am 1:3–2:16), is an independent literary unit. Forming a complete unit, this section starts with the introduction, followed by the content of the oracle and ending

with the conclusion. The messenger formula – כה אמר יהוה ('Thus says YHWH') – is considered as the introductory part of the section, introducing the content of the oracle. In ancient Near Eastern cultures, this type of introduction was used to introduce letters and proclamations (Gowan 1996:353–354) or simply to serve as an announcement introducing messages. It means that these words mark the beginning of a new unit.

After elaborating on the contents of the indictments, Amos uses the closing formula – נאם יהוה ('Says the LORD') – which subsequently closes the oracle. This is called 'the divine oracle formula' ('oracle/utterance of YHWH') and, in the case of Amos, this oracle or utterance that he delivers appears in the form of a speech. According to Wolff (1977:92), this speech 'always stands at the end of an oracle, in order to distinguish it in a solemn way as speech of YHWH'. It is important to note that this closing formula is inseparable from its twin, the introductory formula. Both are considered as definite boundaries that limit a section as a whole unit and demarcate it from other sections. The oracle against Israel therefore forms one independent speech unit here that can serve as a rhetorical unit.

The text of Amos 2:6–8 is a subunit of the larger unit in 2:6–16 called 'the indictment'. This section, however, does not constitute a complete statement because the theme of wine is continued in verse 12 of the next subunit. This section (2:6b–8, continued in 12) is accordingly the most difficult part to be analysed because the crimes committed by the Israelites are accounted for in verses 7, 9 and even 10, depending on how the units are arranged. However, 'if allowance is made for the virtually synonymous parallelism throughout and the sins are viewed conceptually, only four crimes appear' (Chisholm 1990:193). In the same vein, telescoping an $N+1$ (N representing a number, usually 3 or 7) pattern in the book of Amos, O'Connell (1996:60) maintains that the author deliberately and consistently uses a 3+1 pattern in presenting the indictments against Israel, such as the oppression of the poor (2:6b–7a), cultic profanity (2:7b), the abuse of pledges and fines (2:8) and Israel's disrespect for prophets and Nazirites (2:12).

In contrast to this, others prefer to see verses 7b–8 as not being parallel because 'the elements are not identical and therefore no two are quite parallel, and it is simply thought that this section is structured in a total of seven charges (2:6b–8), which the adding of another accusations (v. 12) would then constitute the eighth wrong' (Hayes 1995:163). It is important, then, that, whatever forms the enumeration takes, this section (2:6–8 and 2:12) should be viewed as inseparable and considered as a whole unit. Although the reason for punishment (vv. 6b–8) is interrupted by a historical retrospective (vv. 9–11), Gowan (1996:365) insists that 'that actually leads to a concluding accusation in v. 12, so vv. 6b–12 should be taken as a whole, leading to the announcement of judgement in vv. 13–16'. To conclude, it seems that Amos 2:6–8 forms a subunit along with the other subunits 2:9–11 and 2:12–16 and, most importantly, should be read in conjunction with 2:12. This unit will therefore be the main material to be analysed in the discussion of the issue of social justice.

RHETORICAL SITUATION

After the rhetorical unit has been determined, it is important to concentrate on the context 'behind' the speech, especially of the

people, circumstances and events that led to the composition of the specific text. The creative speech of the prophet is essentially not delivered in a vacuum; it is his reaction to a specific situation. In doing a rhetorical analysis, it is therefore necessary 'to trace the problem which gives rise to the given discourse' (Gitay 1980:296). As mentioned before, the original audience of the book as a whole is the Israelites. The question then is, 'What does *ישראל* mean?' or, more specifically, 'Does it refer to the state or to the people?' Based on the study of the term as it occurs in the book of Amos, Wolff (1977:165) explained that 'when Amos says "Israel" he intends to level the following accusation against the people of God'. The term 'Israel' may therefore refer to a group of people who have a special relationship with YHWH as expressed by the parallel term *עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל* (7:8, 15-17) with its first-person possessive pronominal suffix.

This term, however, is contradictory in the sense that it stands in opposition to reality. Instead of being the people who are very dear to him, God is now accusing these very people of wrongdoing. Although this frequently occurs in oracles against other nations (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4), the term *פְּשָׁעֵי* (cstr pl. of *פָּשַׁע*), which may literally be translated as 'transgressions' (ASV, RSV, NASB and NKJV), has a special meaning in the context of this oracle against Israel. It may express 'the completeness of Israel's sinfulness' (Hayes 1988:107), as supported by the use of the enumeration ('three . . . and four') formula and, most importantly, indicate the excessive rebellion against a covenant or divine law (Smith 1989:65). The words of Amos may cause the hearers to think, 'Is it true that YHWH will punish us?', since they consider themselves to be God's chosen people, with all the accompanying privileges.

The OAN (Am 1:3-2:16), as the context of Amos 2:6-8, has its background in the situation of Israel and its surrounding nations during the eighth century BCE. The mention of other nations, enemies of the Israelites, may cause the hearers to feel confident about their existence. One after another, Israel's neighbours are included in the list of judgements. The charge, after all, is directed at Israel herself. The listener may think that Judah forms the end of the list and that

his captive northern audience, who must have been enjoying every minute of it, would psychologically be in a state of mind which would lead them to believe that he had reached his climax with his fulmination against Judah.

(Paul 1981:197)

Moving from foreigners (Aram, Philistia and Tyre) to blood relatives (Edom, Ammon and Moab) and on to Judah, Israel's sister kingdom to the south (Am 1:3-2:5) may create some excitement among the hearers. As Chisholm (1990:189) indicates, they 'must have listened with delight to this series of messages, especially when their long-time rival Judah appeared, like a capstone, as the seventh nation in the list'. Although the prophet addresses the oracles to other nations, these oracles are, in fact, introductory to the main target of his message – the Israelites. He intends to surprise the Israelites after their enjoyment at hearing the accusations against the other nations without realising that it is they who are, in fact, the intended audience. Dorsey (1992:306-307) thus concludes that the previous seven oracles against the nations in Amos 1:3-2:5 'presumably [function] as a foil for the unit's main objective, the stinging message of Amos 2:6-16', adding that '[t]he 7+1 pattern here would have served a clever rhetorical function, viz., to ensure the surprise effect'.

The mention of Israel at the end of this list of nations may also mean that the nation was the culmination or centre point of the judgement of YHWH. Paul (1981:197) argues that the prophet Amos resorted to this alternative pattern for a complementary reason: to express finality and climactic culmination. In the context of religious polemics, Barstad sees this section (Am 2:6-8) as 'the pronouncement against Israel [which] closes the climactic list of words of judgment toward other nations' (1984:11-15). Chisholm (1990:72) also says that '[c]hapters 1-2 include a series of oracles against various nations, culminating in splendid rhetorical fashion with a judgement against Israel'. Hayes (1995:163) indicates that Amos, 'after this rhetorical and

geographical circumambulation, hones in on the center, his actual audience' – namely, the Israelites.

On hearing this indictment, the audience cannot argue against the accusation addressed to it. It leads the people to realise that they are not better than other nations because the oppressive acts committed by them equal the terrible war crimes committed by the neighbouring nations. The use of the structure of the oracles is thus effective in cornering the listeners because 'the disturbing and shocking message is that the nation's socio-economic offences are comparable to violent acts perpetrated by foreign nations against Israel and other peoples' (Wood 2002:24).

In addition, Amos seems to challenge the common belief of his listeners that they are the chosen people of God, who therefore enjoy more privileges from God than any other nation on earth. In this regard, Barton (1980:47-48) specifically infers that there were some popular beliefs held by the audience during 8th-century BCE Israel: that the Israelites had a specially privileged position and were hence indemnified against punishment; that they did not expect their prophets to proclaim judgement against them; and that they had mutual obligations as individuals rather than observing the conventions of war as a nation. Because of this deemed special status or privilege, they ignore their moral and social responsibilities of treating the lowly in the right way. In their mind, it is hard to believe that YHWH will punish his own people even though they mistreat their fellow citizens.

Amos, however, makes a specific effort to convince his audience that things are not what they seem. By using a rhetorical strategy, namely 'a rhetoric of entrapment' (Alter 1985:144), the prophet mentions the preceding seven oracles with the eventual intention of focusing the accusation on Israel. Chisholm (1990:189) pinpoints that '[r]ather than being self-contained pronouncements of judgment, the earlier messages set up the climactic denunciation of the prophet's primary target group, the sinful Northern Kingdom'. Therefore, Israel cannot hide its own status in the presence of YHWH because it does, in fact, violate the covenant by mistreating others.

The formula 'for three ... and for four ...' (Am 2:6a), repeated several times in the preceding oracles, functions not only to bring the people to realise that they are the main target of God's judgement, but also to prepare them to respond to it. In the case of Israel, God cannot tolerate the transgressions of his people, which has reached this climax and has to take an action of punishment (v. 6a) against them to reveal his divine justice (Am 2:13-16). In these verses, Amos dramatically describes the military panic that will overwhelm the Israelites.

It is important to note here that, rhetorically, this formula is not only aimed at a response but also intends to initiate a kind of debate. The prophetic utterance, as Möller (2000:510) describes, is 'a form of speech done in the context of presenting readers with debate between the prophet Amos and his 8th-century audience'. In his extensive rhetorical study on the book of Amos, Möller (2003:2) insists that the prophet intentionally uses the rhetoric of persuasion in the sense that 'the presentation of the debating prophet is the primary rhetorical means employed by the book's authors or final redactors in order to achieve their communicative aims'. Whether this section is viewed as a surprise, a climax or a debate, the bottom line is that the texts are rhetorically arranged or structured to prepare Amos' audience to hear the charges.

RHETORICAL INVENTION

Rhetorical analysis is also concerned with the way in which the author persuades his audience, for example the mode and manner that he uses to convince (Gitay 1980:297) or simply 'the proofs' of a speech or writing, called *inventio*. Before stating the indictments, Amos has to establish his position as a prophet of YHWH; he has to use the messenger formula '[t]hus said

the Lord' (כה אמר יהוה – Am 2:6) to settle his authority. From the beginning of his oracle, Amos considers himself a prophet speaking to the Israelites on behalf of YHWH. There must therefore be a link between what he prophesies and YHWH as the source of his authority. The verb *היה* is thus intriguingly translated not only as 'saw' but also as 'envisioned in visions' (NAS) or even as 'prophesied' (JPS).

This implies that the words of Amos should be understood as divinely inspired because they are revealed directly by YHWH to the prophet. Mays (1969:20) indicates that this is 'a conventional way of saying that his words were received as revelation before they were spoken', as also experienced by other prophets, such as Isaiah (1:1; 2:1) and Micah (1:1). The source of all utterances by the prophets, particularly by the prophet Amos, is YHWH, who roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem. Wolff (1977) suggests that the use of this formula is

strictly tied to those commissioned from YHWH and on this principle is formulated in the divine first person ... When YHWH comes to the fore in the messenger speech, it is consistently as the first person speaker.

(Wolff 1977:91–92)

The words of Amos are thus the words of YHWH given through divine revelation and, as a result, have divine authority and origin (Smith 1989:22).

In Amos 2:6–8, the enumeration formula of the transgressions (ועל ארבע ... על שלשה) committed by the people may function as a preliminary pointer to the 'proof' of the accusation and, by elaborating on their wrongdoings, the people will soon realise that they are culpable. According to Mays (1969:24), the prophet's use of the formula is 'in order to present the coming action of YHWH as a response to an accumulation of offences that has outrun the tolerance of God'. Amos points out that there is a relationship of cause and effect between Israel's sins and God's punishment. He applies a kind of 'action and reaction' or 'sow and reap' principle for, according to Blenkinsopp (1984:88–89), there is a close link between indictment (Am 2:6–8) and verdict (vv. 13–16).

Jeremias (1998:34) also notes that the sequence of the listed transgressions possibly underscores a continual increase in culpability, since all the listed transgressions seem to expose not only the total or complete quantity of the rebellion but also the quality of the 'sins' (NIV). In this context, the enumeration formula also expresses the seriousness of the transgressions in the eyes of YHWH because it points to 'the multiplicity and intensity of the atrocities committed by the nation' (Kim 1996:40). By elaborating on the wrongdoings of the people, Amos is most likely trying to state that his charges are not going in the wrong direction.

The use of the word *פשעים* (pl. of *פשע*) in Amos 2:6a may indicate that the prophet rhetorically envisages what the sins are. The word translated as 'crimes', moreover, cannot be understood as merely crimes in an ordinary sense but also as crimes in a moral sense, a rebellion against authority. Paul (1991:45) considers it to be a revolt against YHWH when he said that 'for such crimes they are found guilty of revolting against the Lord of history, who, in turn, holds them directly accountable and executes punitive action against them'. In a more concrete way, Andersen and Freedman (1989) argue that

... offences against conscience in days long before any declarations of human rights as such, or more specifically wilful violations of formal agreements ... made them directly answerable to YHWH himself.

(Andersen & Freedman 1989:231–232)

The word 'crimes' here is therefore closely related to sins against YHWH, the God of the covenant.

This implies that all the violations committed by the Israelites are actually actions that break the covenant established by

YHWH, being acts of 'rebelliousness against YHWH's sovereign law' (Stuart 1987:310). Based on a study of Ancient Near Eastern treaties, Niehaus (1992:340) specifically points out that the rebellious acts committed by the nations, including those by Israel, were seen as violations against the covenant of YHWH, who had established the covenant of creation with all creatures and conducted a recreation in the covenant of Noah, which demanded respectful treatment of all human beings as creatures created in God's image. These views are therefore in agreement with the use of the word 'crimes' in a covenantal framework, as used here by the prophet to prove his charge against the people of the covenant.

As opposed to other oracles, the prophet points out Israel's crimes in a long and detailed list of indictments. Listing the crimes in such an extended form seems to demonstrate that he intends to prove the wrongs using a concrete and all-encompassing description. It actually needs more than eight lines, even if Amos 6:12 is included, with its sevenfold sinful acts – following Dorsey's suggestion (1992:277) to explain all the crimes of Israel (Am 2:6–8). In comparison with other oracles, the multiplication of Israel's transgressions is used to describe the sins in a more tangible way.

Coote (1981:16, 32) argues that the oracle is quite distinctive because all the indictments contribute to a single basic message: the powerful in Israel are oppressing the powerless, the ruling elite are oppressing the poor. With a clear picture of the societal conditions prevailing in the time of Amos, the terms of his announcement take on a new concreteness. In the same vein, Dorsey (1999:278) maintains that '[b]oth its accusation section and its punishment section are several times longer than those preceding oracles, serving to highlight this oracle' (italics added).

The extended list also aims at portraying the totality of Israel's sins. When related to the use of the 'sevenfold' pattern in the section, the prophet seems to propose an all-inclusive notion of completeness. Rosenbaum (1990:55) reminds us that 'whatever one decides about the formula "three, yea four" in the oracles against other nations, in the Israel oracle three plus four equals seven – the number of completeness, even if used in negative situations'. Paul (1991:30, 76) similarly argued that Amos' use of a series of wrongdoings in an elaborated and extensive way aims at conveying the concept of totality and that the reason behind this is that the Israelites have received abundant ongoing blessings from YHWH (vv. 9–12). Consequently, there is no way of escape for, or self-justification by, the audience on hearing the charges that the prophet puts against them.

RHETORICAL DISPOSITION

In order to expose the charges, the author of the book organises the materials carefully. Before looking more closely at the text, it is necessary to see how Amos 2:6–8 is structured poetically in Table 2.

From the perspective of rhetorical analysis, the first verse line (יהוה אמר – v. 6) may be considered as an introduction (*exordium*), since it contains an introductory formula (first strophe). The second and third verse lines – *לשלשה פשעי ישראל ועל ארבע לא אשיבנו* [– indicate the statement (*narratio*) of the transgression in the form of a 'three and four' formula (second strophe). In the third line, a conclusion (*peroratio*) is drawn in the short phrase *אשיבנו לא*, connoting the result of these indictments. At the end of the unit, the body of speech (*probatio*) is elaborated upon in each succeeding line (Am 2:6b–8), as seen in the fourth strophe – *נשים – על מכרם בכסף צדק / ואביון בעבור* ('categories of people mistreated', such as *השופים על עפראין בראש דלים / ודרך עניים ישו* ('selling people for nothing' and 'discriminating against the lowly') and in the fifth strophe, 'cultic profanation', such as *למנון הלל אדשם קדש* (insulting the name of YHWH through profanation) and *ועל הנהרות חבלים ישו / אצל כל מנובה / ויין ענושים ישו* (repeating the deed and place of profanation at cultic places). It is clear that all the strophes and verses form one stanza point to the central idea of the unit: 'God will punish the multitude of sins done by the Israelites.'

TABLE 2
Poetic structure of Amos 2:68: Announcement of God's punishment for a multitude of sins, e.g. abuse of powerless people and performance of heathen practices

| Verse line | Verse | Strophe |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| כה אמר יהוה | a. YHWH announces | a. Introductory formula |
| על-שלושה פשעי ישראל ועל-ארבע לא אשיבנו | b. For three/four categories of transgression I will not revert my punishment | b. Indictment |
| על-מכרם בכסף צדיק ואביון בעבור נעלים | c. They sell people for nothing | c.1) Categories of people mistreated |
| השפלים על-עפרארין בראש דלים ודרך ענוים יטו | d. The lowly are discriminated against | |
| ואיש ואביו ילכו אלהנערה למען חלל את-שם קדשי | e. Their profanation brings shame to YHWH's name | c. 2) Cultic profanation |
| ועל-בגדים חבלים יטו אצל כל-מזבח ויין ענושים ישתו בית אלהיהם | f. Repeated pattern: deed and place of profanation at cult places | |

The careful introduction at the beginning of the unit (Am 2:6a) is stunning. The introductory phrase *כה אמר יהוה* ('Thus says YHWH'), also occurring at the start of the other oracles to the nations, does not simply introduce the contents but also affirms divine origin and authority. According to Frye (1983:212), this is considered to be a divine speech formula that expresses the biblical 'voice of authority'. It thus refers to the One who is sending the message (Smith 1989:43), that is YHWH himself. The term 'YHWH' has a specific religious meaning in the hearts and minds of the Israelites. The *tetragrammaton* יהוה is considered to be the most sacred name because it refers directly to the God who has established a covenant with his people. Kapelrud (1961:47) says that 'YHWH and Israel were standing in a special relationship to each other, that of the *bērit*, the Covenant'.

In the context of the OAN (Am 1:3–2:16), however, this name can be related to God's control over the universe. The word itself, according to Wright (1965:225–237), connotes that YHWH, the God of Israel, holds universal claim and exercises universal *imperium*. This means that YHWH has total sovereignty over all the nations. As Smith (1989) argues,

God has spoken; the nations have committed sins; they will be held accountable for their inhumanity to man; God will destroy these centers of power and the leaders who do such things.
(Smith 1989:68)

When the audience hears the word 'YHWH', it heeds the message. Smith (1989:64) added that 'the audience's acceptance of the word of God as authoritative for others enabled the prophet to gain maximum advantage'. The audience still thinks that its relationship with YHWH is unshakeable, but the words that follow force it to rethink this notion because it is now clear that God actually intends punishing his own people.

In addition, from Hayes's study (1968:87), which argues that the OAN is used in multiple contexts in ancient Israel, such as in 'cultic services of lamentations' and at 'the royal court', it can be inferred that it is possible that such an introductory formula is used in the context of Israel's religious and authoritative sanctuary. Kapelrud (1961:75–76) infers that the denunciation of Israel as a whole for its sins goes far beyond anything that would have formed part of a regular ritual pattern. The choosing of both this place and the word 'YHWH' is not accidental because it is the most effective way of attracting the attention of the audience. In the setting of the sanctuary, the people hear what the prophet has to say, especially the phrase 'Thus says YHWH'.

Upon hearing such a formula, the people may be expecting to hear a 'blessing' from God as reward for what they have done, but they then realise that this is not the case. On the contrary, it is an announcement of both an accusation and a declaration of punishment that is addressed to them. Dorsey (1992:306) argued that 'in each oracle the formulaic introduction is followed by a prophetic utterance containing the same two elements, always presented in the same order, (1) accusation against the nation and (2) declaration of YHWH's intended punishment upon that nation'. Amos therefore intentionally uses this introductory formula in the context of the sanctuary because 'the rhetorical effect of this highly stylized oracles hammers home the message in a way which cannot be avoided' (Smith 1989:69).

Amos uses the phrase *על-שלושה פשעי ישראל* ('for three transgressions of Israel, even four') as a statement of the case or as *narration*, purposely setting the direction in which the following literary proofs will go. The enumeration formula points to the word *פשעי*, which – also used in the other oracles against the nations – is generally translated to mean 'transgressions' or 'crimes' (Stuart 1987:310). Chisholm (1990:75) also uses this in the same way: '[The word] suggests that the sins of various nations shared the same basic character.' If attention is given to its context, particularly to that of the other oracles against the nations, the word may refer to a sort of criminal act; Soggin (1987:46) translates it as 'the innumerable crimes of Israel'. As already stated, the word in itself is not specific enough to explain the multiplicity of crimes committed by the Israelites. It is too general, in the sense that it may refer to any kind or any quantity of wrongs.

The word 'crimes' thus cannot be well understood without the elaboration of its counterpart in the succeeding verses. This implies that the formula is programmatically used by the prophet to set the direction for proving his case. It is a common literary technique used in the Old Testament in proposing lists to follow a graduated numerical saying by a list of items corresponding to the second number. In the case of Israel, it points to the crimes specified in the following verses (Chisholm 1990:74). By stating his case in this way, the author seems to build up his speech to the crescendo of the corruption of the people.

In Amos 2:6–8, the prophet explains the contents of his speech or writing (*probatio*); this is part of the section where the indictments are emphasised. To begin with, the prophet accuses the Israelites of selling the innocent and the needy into debt-slavery (v. 6b) (to understand the concept, see Chirichigno 1993:145–185). The first clause of the text – *על-מכרם בכסף צדיק* – may be translated literally

as 'they sell the righteous for/on account of silver/money' (the American Standard Version translates the verb as 'have sold'). It is not quite clear, however, what action is intended here. Scholars differ in their explanation of the meaning of the phrase. Most focus on the proper meaning of *בכר*. The 'silver or money' may indicate several things, such as a debt owed to a creditor (Mays 1969:45), the purchase price of a slave (Fendler 1973:38; Soggin 1987:47) or a bribe given to a judge in the courts (Hammershaimb 1970:46).

The majority of interpretations, however, hold the first to be unlikely. The reason for this is that this view does not fit the meaning of the verb *בכר* ('to sell'). Smith (1989:82) maintains that the concept of bribery or court injustice is not preferable because 'the term "to sell" when used of the needy is always in the context of debts and slavery (Ex 21:7-8; Lv 25:39-40; Dt 15:12-14)'. The *צדיק* ('righteous' or 'innocent') is being sold into slavery either because he cannot repay his loan or he is falsely charged for owing money or a small debt that is insignificant (Paul 1991:77). The victim is therefore accused of being unable to repay his debts and is sold into slavery, even though the accusation is false.

The second clause – *ואביון בעבור נעלים* ('[and] the needy for the sake of a pair of sandals') – follows the first in a connecting line. This means that the innocent is not the only one who suffers injustice but that it is also the *ואביון* ('the needy'). Wolff (1977:165) defines this person as the one who is 'in need' of help. This may imply that a needy person cannot defend her or himself from being forced into debt slavery. The needy has no money, power or legal recourse in the courts. Lacking these things causes her or him to be used as a means for others to get rich (Finley 1990:164). The placement of *ואביון* along with *צדיק*, however, has associating effects, so that both may be called 'the righteous needy' (Stuart 1987:316). Moreover, since the line *נעלים בעבור* stands in parallel with the next line, *ואביון בעבור נעלים*, both these lines naturally share the same thought or concept. If this is the case, the righteous needy, in reality, is sold into slavery not only for the sake of 'silver' but also for the sake of 'sandals'.

Understanding the term *נעלים* is quite difficult. Translating it as 'a pair of sandals' seems to be insufficient. Hayes (1988:109–110) explains that others argued that the text has nothing to do with sandals. For example, the Aramaic Targum understood it as 'possession of them', while the medieval Jewish exegete Rashi understood it as 'a field owned by a poor person', located between two fields owned by a judge, being forced to sell it to the judge so that the property can be secured and 'lock[ed]' (from *נעל*, 'to lock/to close') in. Giving another conclusion, Paul (1991:78–79) insists that the term should be derived from its root – *נעל* ('to hide') – and that it thus refers to a 'hidden gift' or 'payoff'.

This view, however, seems even more problematic, as it may imply a bribe (1 Sm 12:3; Gordis 1971:213–215) and, as discussed above, the idea of bribery is unconvincing. Even the translation of 'hidden gift' is no improvement. It is therefore advisable to consider that *נעלים* 'probably indicates hyperbolically the ridiculously low price for which they were sold' (Stuart 1987:316). Moreover, in his textological notes on the text of Amos 2:6b–7a, Orel (1997:411) argued that the sandals may still be connected with the legal transfer of land and/or slavery and be a symbol of social status, as in Egypt, where even a specific role of sandal-bearers and keepers of the sandal bag existed. He concludes that, whatever the judicial meaning of *נעלים*, in Amos 2:6b–7a, it becomes a symbol of the rich and powerful, being a striking indication of the prophet's political poetic agility. Therefore, the issue in both accusations in this verse is evidently the unreasonable and unjust sale of the innocent and powerless into slavery by the rich and powerful.

Next, the Israelites are accused of abusing the poor (v. 7a). In this respect, it is important to note that the long clause *בראש דלים על-עבר ארץ* has a difficult syntax. The problem lies in how to read the clause, since neither *שָׁאָף* ('pant/gasp') nor *שָׁחַף* ('trample/

crush') can be the root of *השאפים* ('Those who pant/gasp after the dust of the earth, on the head of the poor'/'those who trample/crush the dust of the earth, on the head of the poor') and the two translations lead to different meanings.

The former, as De Waard and Smalley (1979) point out, implies three things:

(a) as a picture of extreme greed: the rich landowners even long to own the small quantity of earth people throw on their heads as a sign of mourning; (b) as a picture of the way the poor people are pushed down: the rich are only satisfied when they see the poor in a miserable condition; and (c) as they long for land at the expense of the poor.

(De Waard & Smalley 1979:48)

The latter is also possible because it is in order to read *השאפים* as 'they trample' if *שחף* is its root (Stuart 1987:307). Smith (1989:83) similarly argues that the latter is widely accepted because the imagery is similar to that in Amos 4:1 ('who crush the needy') and Isaiah 3:15 ('What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?')

To solve this problem, it is preferable to reconcile both roots because their meanings are almost the same, namely 'to trample'. This can be explained by considering that [t]hey are either bifurms (BDB [Brown, Driver and Briggs]) of each other or possibly the *aleph* has been inserted through the linguistic process of mixing or as a vowel letter' (Finley 1990:132). The word 'trample' here connotes that the Israelites 'step upon the heads of the poor as though they were stepping on the ground. This means that they treat the underprivileged with contempt and abuse' (Paul 1991:80). The Israelites are therefore charged for their mistreatment of the poor and weak by exploiting them socio-economically.

Parallel to the above clause stands the short phrase *ודרך עניים ישו* ('and turn aside the way of the humble'). This phrase is directly parallel to verse 7a, because the main idea of these paralleled lines is the same: the poor cannot defend themselves against the actions of their oppressors. The phrase may therefore have an additional meaning, especially if it is understood in a legal sense. Mays (1969), for example, insists that the meaning of the phrase is 'a locution for the perversion of legal procedure' because, he says, "'Way" (*derek*) is a synonym for "justice" (*mišpāt*); see also *hittah mišpāt* in Exodus 23:6, and *hittah saddiq* in Isaiah 29:21. Both verses 6b and 7a are charges made that the courts are being used to oppress the poor instead of maintaining *mišpāt* (1969:46). In the same vein, De Waard and Smalley (1979:48–49) suggest that the phrase may also be translated as 'they keep the miserable from getting justice'.

Understanding the phrase in a legal context, however, is not necessary because it may be interpreted in another way. If the word *עניים* is translated as 'tenant farmers', the actions of the oppressors may include perverting the normal behaviour of tenant farmers (Rosenbaum 1990:56). The phrase may also figuratively mean to 'turn aside the way', being similar to 'push off the road', which figuratively expresses

the idea that the underprivileged class is bullied and oppressed by the wealthy, who deprive and block them from obtaining the privileges and prerogatives to which they are naturally entitled.

(Paul 1991:81)

The above discussion shows that whether the meaning of this phrase is a legal, natural or even figurative one, the point is clear: the oppressor manipulates the way of life of the afflicted in an inhuman way, where the former 'push them [the latter] around, control their life, determine how they will live, and deprive them of their rights (Pr 22:22; 30:14)' (Smith 1989:84). Rhetorically, it seems that Amos is using clear and derogatory imagery in this text (v. 7a and b) to show the factual sin of the Israelites – that is, their violation of human rights and dignity. They cannot escape divine judgement for these transgressions.

The second half of verse 2:7 describes another kind of transgression committed by the Israelites: *התעננה/לבנן חלל את-שם קדשי*

ואיש ואביו ילכו אל (‘and a man and his father go into the same maid in order to profane my holy name’). The key to understanding this phrase is the word הנערה (‘the maiden’), which literally means ‘young woman’ (BDB:655). Commentators, however, vary in their identification of the meaning of the word. The word may have several interpretations, such as a secular prostitute who has no relation with any cultic connotation (Gordis 1979–1980:216), a cultic prostitute because such a word is ‘a current term for sacred prostitute, and is therefore a synonym of *q'dešāh*’ (Soggin 1987:48) or a waitress at a house of feasting, that is ‘a pagan religious meal or banquet’ (Barstad 1984:33–36).

Unfortunately, these views all seem to be speculative, since the explanations presented are far removed from the context indicated. Chisholm (1990:82), Gowan (1996:365) and Mays (1969:46), for example, argue against these views and maintain that the term does not connote either cult or prostitution: ‘Though fitting nicely with verse 8, the view that the girl is a cult prostitute is unlikely, since the Hebrew word here translated “girl” never refers elsewhere to a prostitute.’ Another possible meaning for it is ‘a slave girl’ because ‘nowhere in the Old Testament does the word “girl” mean “prostitute”, nor anything equivalent in ancient translations’ (De Waard & Smalley 1979:49) that is similar to ‘a female servant’ (Stuart 1987:317) or ‘someone who is minor, or is personally dependent on a master’ (Jeremias 1998:37).

Since there are many options for interpretation, it is preferable to take into consideration a literal meaning of the word. Both Wolff (1977:167) and Paul (1990:82–83) agree that נערה should have a more specific connotation because it literally means ‘a young woman or maiden’ and that it should be read together with the previous paired words, such as דלים and עניים. ‘A young woman’ here simply points to an oppressed person, one of the members belonging to the defenceless and exploited human beings in northern Israel. Such a young woman suffers injustice. The use of the verb ילכו (Qal impf. 3 m. p. from הלך, which literally means ‘to go, come or walk’) probably implies that ‘illicit sexual acts are involved here’ (Soggin 1987:48). Based on his observation of the term in Acadian occurrences, Paul (1982:492–494) indicates that the word should be understood in a sexual sense: ‘[T]he interdialectal semantic and cognate equivalent of Hebrew אל הלך, has the same idiomatic meaning, “to have sexual intercourse”’.

Paul (1991:82) continues convincingly that ‘The semantic development is also attested in Aramaic, in which the expression אול אול (= Heb. הלך אל) is employed in Talmudic and Geonic literature for sexual intercourse’. Since this act was performed by both איש (‘a man’) and אביו (‘his father’), it is clear that there was sexual adulteration, where both a son and his father made the same young woman – possibly ‘a slave female’ – an object of sexual intercourse. Stuart (1987:317) observes that such a practice is ‘made all [the more] odious by the possibility that it may be involuntarily on the part of the woman’.

In the context of the law, the practice of sexual adulteration, where more than one person has sex with the same person, is strongly prohibited and condemned (Lv 18:8, 15; 20:12; Dt 22:23–29; 27:20). The description that Amos uses here, according to Wolff (1977:167), is ‘a radicalizing of the apodictic stipulation’. This practice consequently desecrates the holy name of YHWH: לנען הלל אתשם קדשי (‘thereby profaning my holy name’). Since the particle לנען expresses result or purpose (‘in order that’; BDB:775), Amos most likely wants to emphasise that ‘when you violate this girl, you thereby pollute my Holy Name as well’ (Finley 1990:131).

Amos 6:8 describes the final wrongs of the Israelites, that is the exploitation of the destitute for pleasure (Smith 1989:86). The indictment is divided into two parts.

The first part of the indictment relates to the exploitation of debtors (v. 8a) ועל בגדים הבלים יש/אצל כל מזובה (‘and on garments seized as pledges they stretch out themselves beside every altar’). The act of taking someone’s בגדים (large ‘cloaks’ or ‘garments’) in

pawn and keeping them until the next day is illegal in terms of the law because it is probably the only thing that is available to that person as a cover for her or his body and should therefore not be kept as pledge overnight (Ex 22:26[26]; Dt 24:12–26[27], especially in 24:15: the widow’s garment may not, under any circumstances, be taken in pledge).

This illegal act by the Israelites is aggravated by their use of these garments as reclining mats upon which to ‘stretch out themselves’, as the word יש (Hi. impf. 3 m. p. of יש) literally means. Paul (1991:86) suggests that the use of the preposition על ‘makes clear that the garments are not being spread out, but that they are stretching themselves ‘upon’ (על) these very garments’, including at orgies, the wild parties characterised by excessive drinking and sexual activity (Soggin 1987:49; see also Niehaus 1992:367).

Some argue that this practice possibly took place during cultic ceremonies or feasts (Smith 1989:86; see also Gowan 1996:365), particularly when related to the succeeding phrase ‘beside every altar’ and ‘drinking wine’. Niehaus further emphasised that כל-מזובה may refer to multiple altars of YHWH’s and that these ‘were at various locations: Bethel (3:14), Dan (8:14), Gilgal (Hs 12:12 [11]), and other local sanctuaries (Hs 8:11; 10:1–2, 8)’. The indictment thus indicates that the prophet intends

to condemn wealthy creditors who, rather than providing their own lounging materials while enjoying a meal of sacrificial flesh, were using garments belonging to debtors with no respect for their poor owners who could not afford the pleasure of such sacrifice.
(Hayes 1995:164)

The second part of the indictment relates to the abuse of debtors’ property (v. 8b): ויין ענושים שח/בית אלהיהם (‘and wine purchased from those fined, they drink in the house of their god’). It is difficult to identify whether ויין ענושים (‘wine purchased from fine’) was legal during that time. Mays (1969:47) reminds us that ‘[t]he line between legality and illegality of these practices would be difficult to draw in a technical sense from the material available’. Those who were fined therefore probably paid their fines in money, which was then used to purchase wine, or in wine, which was seized because they could not pay their fines in money. Hayes (1988:114) give a probable explanation for this unclear use of the verb ענש, which could refer to the fine imposed on a man who, while struggling with another, bumps into a pregnant woman, causing her to miscarry (Ex 21:22), or to a man who is convicted of slander against his new bride and her parents (Dt 22:19; Pr 22:3; 27:12).

In either case, the former is fined in violation of the law by a rich official, while the latter violates the law to hold an orgy. This is continued at בית אלהיהם (‘the house of their god[s]’). The term בית is an ambiguous word that can be used to denote a variety of places of divine worship but that, in practice, can also be used to denote economic, cultural and civic centres (King 1988:90).

To sum up, Amos denounces actions that go beyond the prescription of law, that is, those in power who unjustly extort money legally (or even illegally) and use it to indulge in malpractices; this is considered to be the absence of moral conscience and social compassion.

It is important to note that the structure of the section (Am 2:6–8) shows an unusual arrangement. Instead of the conclusion (*peroratio*) – לא אשיבו (‘I will not turn [its] punishment back’) – being placed at the end, it is placed at the beginning. The prophet probably did this with a specific purpose in mind. As a complete sentence, such a phrase cannot be separated from the preceding על-שלושה/שבעי ישראל/ועל-ארבע (‘for three transgressions of Israel, even four’) because the latter gives exact meaning to the former. This phrase is then descriptively elaborated on in the successive verses, particularly at the end of the stanza (vv. 13–16). Interestingly, the term אשיבו is commonly used in the

context of a covenant or treaty. The phrase *לֹא אֲשִׁיבוּ* means that YHWH intends not only to punish Israel but also to terminate the covenant with his people (Barré 1986:630).

Other views are also proposed to explain the meaning of the phrase. Based on the study of the object marker *ל* (the plene version of *לֹא*), which is needed for the word *שָׁב*, Andersen and Freedman (1989:233) believe that it may be meant as a rhetorical question: '[s]hall I not withdraw it?' In the same vein, Muraoka (1985:118–119) argues that, although the phrase does not use the interrogative *ה*, the rhetorical question may point to incredibility, irony, sarcasm or repugnance and that the negative question may be somewhat emphatic.

Another view holds that it is a withdrawal of God's intention to punish Israel. As Linville (2000:424) writes: 'YHWH may be speaking of withdrawal of his word of punishment, the impending of punishment or some other related concept ... In the end, however, YHWH relents (9:11–15).'

These differences are important in underlining the fact that the placing of the phrase at the beginning has a rhetorical impact on the listeners to shock them. The overall effect is not only to produce surprise in the intended audience but also to elicit horror (Barton 1980:3) because of the intended universal act of divine punishment (Raabe 1995:667). The phrase *לֹא אֲשִׁיבוּ* at the beginning of the section (v. 6a) implies that, because of the gross sinfulness of God's people, the punishment is definite and final.

RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES

The author uses certain techniques to persuade his audience. The whole oracle against Israel (Am 6:6–16), particularly the indictment section (Am 6:6–8), uses a rhetorical genre called *judicial rhetoric*, all the accusations being wrapped in courtroom language. It seems as if, through the prophet, YHWH, as the prosecutor, is bringing a case into a legal court against the Israelites and delivering words of indictment against them. As the prophet internalises the words that he receives, he delivers them as if YHWH himself were speaking these exact words directly to the audience. Wolff (1977) argues that

demonstrations of guilt and disputations have merely an ancillary function [where] the irreducible force, which inspirationally overwhelmed Amos, enabled him to reshape received forms with the view toward his directly threatened audience.

(Wolff 1977:100)

The accusations themselves are directed at sins of the past only, at the sinful acts already committed by the people, as is shown by the use of some perfect forms of the verbs.

The structure, however, denotes not only the 'already' but also the 'repetition and duration' aspect of the actions. There is an alternating syntactical structure in the description of the sins in this section, for example it begins with the perfect infinitive (6b), followed by a perfect participle (7a) and then shifting to the imperfect (7ab–8). Jeremias (1998) suggested that

[t]he temporal sequence implied by the infinitive and participle is unspecific; by contrast, the imperfect shows that ... no particular, exceptional, one-time deeds are being portrayed, but rather the typical, enduring behaviour of the inhabitants.

(Jeremias 1998:35)

This technique seems to be effective in explaining the urgency and seriousness of the case to be dealt with.

Prior to the announcement of the contents of the oracle, namely the indictment and punishment, the message delivered by Amos to the Israelites uses the reason-announcement form, which is a widely used genre in the prophetic tradition (Westermann 1967:142–176). This can be seen in the use of the numerical formula *עַל-שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּשָׁעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* ('For the three transgressions of ...'), followed by *וְעַל-אַרְבַּע לֹא אֲשִׁיבוּ* ('and four I will not turn it back'),

which is considered to be a teaching technique used in wisdom literature (Job 5:19–26; 33:14–18; Pr 6:16–19; 30:15–31; Sir 23:16–31; 25:7–11; 26:5–6, 28; 50:25–26). The numbers mentioned, however, do not mean 'for three sins of [the specific nation] I will forgive; but for four [that is, the fourth] I shall not', as medieval Jewish commentators have understood it (Paul 1991:29), neither are they simply an addition of three and four to get 'a perfect number of seven', as some have suggested. Instead, they point to 'the multiple offences' of wrongs (Gowan 1996:354).

It should be understood that the numerical formula has not only a literal sense, but also a symbolical one. Following the numerical formula, Amos then lists the indictments and punishments in a highly stylistic way. The list itself is carefully and effectively arranged to form seven-fold structures, such as the seven transgressions of Israel (Am 2:6–8, 12) – selling the needy, trampling upon the poor, turning away the afflicted, sexually exploiting a young woman, keeping garments taken in pledge and drinking wine taken in payment of fines – and the seven consequences of the punishments (Am 2:14–16) – the swift will not be able to flee, the strong will be weak, the mighty will not escape, the bowman will fall, the fast runner will not escape, the horseman will not escape and the stout-hearted will flee naked (Limburg 1987:217–222; see also Dorsey 1992:277).

Amos 2:6–8 (and 12) also contains the technique of word repetition when describing Israel's sinful condition. The paragraph begins with the construction *עַל* (in the causal sense of 'because'), infinitive construct and pronominal suffix (used as subject). The purpose of this arrangement is 'to state a specific accusation or introducing a list of charges against the nation' (Chisholm 1990:191), which is common in the first paragraph of the indictment of each oracle. This is modified and extended to a 'עַל plus a specific wrong' pattern. This pattern then appears repeatedly throughout the whole paragraph. The use of this repeated pattern may raise curiosity because it seems to be arranged deliberately for a certain purpose.

Although the intention of the author in repeating this pattern is usually to give 'a literary boundary' or to set the paragraph of indictment as a complete rhetorical unit, as Smith (1989:75) suggests – '[this repetition] rhetorically held together' a paragraph – it is necessary to give attention to the work of Christensen (1975:69–71), who extensively studied this pattern and tentatively concludes that this repetition might refer mainly to 'a single crime' – that is, the Israelites perverting justice. It means that, although the crimes are multiple in nature, they actually point to one single idea. In other words, although the pattern is expanded with the repetition of the preposition *עַל* ('because of') and of what follows, it actually focuses on one single idea. The repetition of this pattern throughout the section has a rhetorical effect on the audience and advances the clarity of the case.

To convince the Israelites of the consequences of their sins, the prophet also uses the 'war oracle' form to confirm that they themselves are currently one of the enemies of YHWH. The expression *עַל-שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּשָׁעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל-אַרְבַּע לֹא אֲשִׁיבוּ* ('because of three and because of four I will not turn back my wrath'), for example, as it occurs in the other OANs of Amos, seems to use the language of war or, at least, draws from the context of warfare. Hayes (1968:84) proposes that 'the recognition of warfare as an original *Sitz im Leben* for Israel's oracles against foreign nations is supported by the use of oracles and curses against the enemy during military undertaking in other Near Eastern cultures'. When it is used by YHWH, it is connected to 'the Holy War tradition'. Christensen (1975:12–15) also believed that the language of war, such as oracular divination (Jdg 1:1–2; 7:9–14; 20:23–28; 1 Sm 14:18–19; Hs 4:12), summons to battle (Nm 14:41–43; 21:34; 31:1–4; Jos 6:1–5; 8:1–8; Jdg 19–20), summons to flight (Dt 28:25) and the prophecy of victory or defeat (Nm 24:15–24), is used in pre-Amos material.

Barton (1980:9) reminds us that, although it is valid to think that there was such a tradition, it 'has played no part at all in shaping these oracles'. It means that the Holy War concept probably

influenced Amos but was not taken directly from earlier known war oracles. According to Smith (1989:30–31), '[t]he terminology and rhetoric of the oracle may include political war propaganda in order to gain audience acceptance, but the climax is a clear break from expected tradition'. The war oracle used in the Israel section therefore serves as a rhetorical challenge from YHWH, who stands against his foe, the Israelites, because their transgressions violate his covenant.

The elements of accusation are also uniquely arranged, not only in a stylistic way but also in a rhetorical way. The Israelites' transgressions are listed in a parallel structure following the pattern of *על-שלושה ... ועל-ארבע*. The arrangement of paralleled lists may vary from one to the other; it may, for example, as Christensen (1975:66, 71) argues, refer to four crimes. The parallels should therefore be seen more from a conceptual point of view rather than from the formal use of the verbs, which makes the number of crimes total eight. In this case, the enumeration is three plus one, which equals four. This also has significance in Hebrew thought. Jeremias (1998:34) proposes that the transgressions of Israel enumerated in the texts (vv. 6–8) – which he divided into four – stand *pars pro toto* for a thoroughly selfish society.

The list itself, however, may refer to seven – derived from the structure of *parallelismus membrorum* – where the two numbers ('three' and 'four') represent the most natural components of the number seven. This would show clear traces of psychological and rhetorical elements and, in Hebrew, express a 'sense of totality' (Weiss 1967:419–422). In the same vein, the study by Limburg (1987:222) shows that the 'three and four' is simply 'three plus four' or seven, as listed in the Israel oracle, and that it possibly means 'a totality of transgressions'. Although the meaning of the enumeration is different in each case (four or seven), depending upon how the text is divided in that specific case, the enumeration itself can be understood as stipulation (cf. Hayes 1995:163). Both seem adequate in exerting rhetorical impact on the audience because, whatever approach is used, the enumerative pattern is intentionally used 'to aid imagination' (Niehaus 1992:340) and arranged 'to emphasize that Israel's guilt surpassed that of its neighbours' (Chisholm 1990:197).

The indictment of Israel (Am 2:6–8) also contains a chiasmus, the chiasmic pattern generally being quite common in Amos' work. De Waard and Smalley (1979:189–214) remark that the entire book of Amos is organised as a chiasm. In contrast, Wendland (1988:1–51) argues against this opinion because it is too forced; the chiasmic pattern cannot be applied to the entire book of Amos. In Amos, the chiasmic structure has its own purpose. Ryken (1993:334) identifies that the chiasm in the book of Amos, as a specific genre, could be categorised as 'the major work of informal satire in the Bible' and later believes that it 'utilizes a rhetoric of subversion' (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 1993:342). This means that the chiasmic structure is used by the prophet to attack the institutions and society of Israel.

More specifically, the chiasmic structure appears, especially in verse 7, in the form of ABB¹A¹:

| | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| השופים על-עפר-ארץ | בראש דלים |
| A 'they who crush against the dust of the earth' | B 'the head of the poor' |
| ודרך עניים | ישו |
| B ¹ 'the way of the meek' | A ¹ 'they pervert' |

Niehaus (1992:366) suggests that this structure of the bicolon elegantly articulates a horrible fact. By stating it in a chiasmic form, both social and sexual evils come under the spotlight of God's judgement; it seems as if the author intentionally highlights Israel's predicaments. Thus, whether it is used in the whole book of Amos or only in a section of it, the function of the chiasmic structure is always the same, that is to expose clearly the crimes of the Israelites and to accuse them firmly. In other words, to use discourse-analysis terminology, the structure is arranged to highlight the wrongdoings of Israel (Dorsey 1992:306).

In addition, seen from the aspect of the artistry of writing, all the oracles (Am 1–2) take the form of a geographical chiasmus: Syria to the northeast (Am 1:3–5), Philistia to the southwest (Am 1:6–8), Tyre to the northwest (Am 1:9–10) and Edom, Ammon and Moab to the southeast (Am 1:11–2:3), then Judah to the south (Am 2:4–5) and, finally, Israel at the centre (Am 2:6–16) (Niehaus 1992:323; see also Stuart 1987:290–291). Among other nations, Israel becomes the focus of attention. In other words, this chiasm intends to highlight the nation of Israel as the centre of divine judgement, where the accusation finally hits its main target.

Still focusing on the geographical arrangement, Steinmann (1992:683–689) insists that all the oracles are arranged in certain patterns by the author, such as geographical orientation (from northeast to southwest to northwest to southeast, before moving to Judah and then to Israel) and the nature of the state (from city-state to nations to special nations).

Whatever the case, it is clear that these arranged oracles all point at Israel as the main or central focus of divine accusation. A long elaboration of Israel's sinfulness (Am 2:6–8) probably supports the authorial intention in the use of this geographical chiasm.

In this connection, as quoted above, Stuart (1987:309) affirms that 'the oracle against Israel is longer and more detailed than any of the others because it constitutes the climax to the entire group of oracles'. This means that, seen from the perspective of the writing, the oracle against Israel can be considered as a continuation or even a culmination of other oracles, since all the nations are guilty in the sight of YHWH. Additionally, the listing of nations, ending with Israel, most likely indicates that YHWH is the only ruler of the universe because it is believed that YHWH, the God of Israel, holds universal claim and exercises universal *imperium* and therefore 'he not only condemned his faithless people Israel but also executed wrath against all who display opposition or indifference to the divine will (Nah 1:2–8)' (Raabe 1995:243).

According to its genre, this unit is a judicial rhetoric suited to condemning specific actions as judgement on the past (Kennedy 1999:4). The language of Israel's indictment (Am 2:6–8) may be thought of as the language of the courtroom; the judge in a court of law judges past actions and is concerned primarily with justice. Here, YHWH stands as the supreme judge who accuses the nations and particularly God's own people, the Israelites, of sinful acts committed in the past. As indicated above the prophet Amos, as a channel of divine utterance, speaks on behalf of the source of all utterances, YHWH himself, who roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; Van der Wal (1983) considered that

a series of oracles against 8 nations, is framed by the combination of the verb š'g 'to roar' with the noun 'ryh 'lion' in Am. 3.8 or Yhwh in Am. 1.2. Both terms ryh and Yhwh are used in synonymous parallelism.

(Van der Wal 1983:109)

REVIEW OF ANALYSIS

Because of their sinfulness, because of their treating others inhumanely, none of the nations mentioned in Amos' OAN (Am 1:3–2:16) will be able to escape God's judgement; this includes Judah and Israel. The judgement will, in fact, reach its climax in Israel. As Mays (1969:23) observed, 'the style is that of reports for general announcement from a court which has already deliberated and reached its verdict'. In addition, using a sequential technique leading up to a climax, the oracle against Israel is the author's way of turning 'the usual climax of positive words about Israel against the nation into a sweeping and extended misuse of the oracles to the nation form' (Dell 1995:55). This changing of the customary form of accusation against the nations into its opposite is exactly what is done in the context of the judicial accusation against the abusive people.

Möller (2000:510) similarly asserts that prophetic utterances delivered in a courtroom are a form of speech in which the

prophet addresses his audience using oracles in such a way that it presents readers with the debate between the prophet Amos and his eighth-century BCE audience (Gitay 2000:173–187). More specifically, Barstad (1984:11–15) views this section (Am 2:6–8) in the context of religious polemics, where the pronouncement against Israel ends the climactic list of the words of judgement against the other nations. As a speech, this form of utterance thereby seeks to draw the attention of the audience to a forensic sphere; the intention of Amos in delivering his oracle to Israel is without doubt to convince his audience that it is guilty of violating ‘the law of YHWH’ (Noble 1993:74), particularly as far as the issues of social justice are concerned.

Some of the Israelites are committing serious crimes – namely, practising social oppression against their fellow Israelites, such as selling the innocent and the poor for financial profit (v. 6), oppressing the weak (v. 7a), abusing the defenceless (v. 7b), profaning God’s name by mistreating a low-ranking (female) servant or slave through sexual abuse (v. 7b) and exploiting debtors and misusing their property for pleasure (v. 8). Smith (1989:92–93) argues that ‘the oppressors in Israel do not take advantage of some foreign individuals in a time of war but turn their own brothers into slaves, their own servants into objects of abuse for their own pleasure, and their legal system into a shameful affair (Am 2:6–8)’.

As a result, divine reaction against Israel is clear. The Israelites must be punished because they are responsible for what they have done: as God’s chosen people, they had received the truth written in the Mosaic Law and therefore knew the consequences of violating it because it gave explicit regulations and prohibitions for each crime (Finley 1990:17; see also Sailhamer 1974:438–439). The people are abusing the covenant of YHWH and the God of the covenant must punish them for it. Upon hearing the verdict, the audience thus cannot escape or hide behind an excuse. The sole purpose of all that is spoken in the oracle is to convince the audience and prove its wrongs.

Using a literary device called rhetorical entrapment, the prophet appeals to the audience in both a rational and an ethical manner (Partlow 2007:23–32). The audience most likely first enjoys hearing the accusations against the neighbouring nations, agreeing that they all deserve to be punished. The concluding accusation, however, is unexpectedly pointed at them, the main target of the indictment. The prophet begins the OAN by arguing against the nations based on the common sense of morality that all people are supposed to have through conscience, but concludes by condemning the last two nations – Judah and Israel – on the basis of revelation. According to Smith (1989:92), ‘[i]f God’s judgment was valid on the basis of acts contrary to conscience, how much greater is the responsibility for those people who have specific divine revelation on how to live’, adding that ‘[a]ccountability and severity of justice are both related to the degree of responsibility’. It is unreasonable to think that the powerful, who are responsible for taking care of and defending the poor and the weak, do precisely the opposite.

In addition, the crimes listed in this section (Am 2:6–8) relate to social justice within Israel. They focus mainly on the issue of moral ethics, particularly the lack of social compassion described as the maltreatment of other people in daily practice and the misuse of the worship service for excessive celebration (Dietrich 1992:321). The prophet warns the people that the oppression of the weak is, as Ward (1991:203) said, ‘destructive of the fabric of Israelite society, and therefore jeopardizes the nation’s integrity and its survival’, further noting that ‘it is clear that Amos’ oracle proclaims one of the central ethical ideas of the prophetic canon’. Consequently, the prophet is trying to convince them that what they are doing to others is reasonably and morally wrong in the sight both of YHWH and of all human beings. It seems that the rhetorical strategy used by the prophet in this section may achieve its purpose: to appeal deeply to the heart and mind of his audience.

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