

**A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF EIGHTH CENTURY B.C.E. PROPHETS  
AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN  
PRESENT INDIAN CONTEXT**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF  
THE DEGREE OF**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**IN**

**OLD TESTAMENT**

**BY**

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**2019**



**Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology And Sciences**  
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**CERTIFICATION BY THE SUPERVISOR**

This is to certify that the thesis titled "A Study of the Role of Eighth Century B.C.E. Prophets and its Relevance to the Human Rights Issues in Present Indian Context" submitted to the Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences, Allahabad in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Old Testament is a bonafide record of research carried out by BarkamPremiah (ID:10PHTH104) under my supervision and guidance. No part of this work has been submitted for any other degree or diploma.

Place: Allahabad -


Date: 9-9-2019 -

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## SELF DECLARATION

This is to certify that the research work titled "A Study of the Role of Eighth Century B.C.E. Prophets and Its Relevance to the Human Rights Issues in Present Indian Context" is my own work. The data and information mentioned in the research report has been generated during the work and are genuine and authentic. The information and data obtained from other agencies have been duly acknowledged. None of the findings/information pertaining to the work has been concealed. The results embodied in this research work have not been submitted to any other academic affairs in any University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

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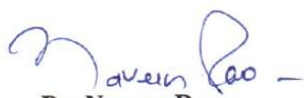
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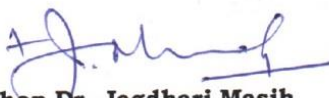
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## **Ph.D. Final Defense Report**

This is to certify that Mr. **Barkam Premiah** ID. No. **10PHTH104** presented the oral defense for his Ph.D. Thesis entitled "**A Study of the role of Prophets of the Eighth Century BCE and its relevance to the Human Rights issue in present context**" on **9<sup>th</sup> September 2019**, at **GPIT Seminar Room** in the **Faculty of Theology** SHUATS, Prayagraj. The results are genuine, have considerable scientific importance and performance of the candidate was found satisfactory.

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**BARKAM PREMIAH**

## **ABSTRACT**

This work is a study of the message of eighth century prophets in the Old Testament and bringing its relevance to the present Indian context. The social circumstances in which the eighth century prophets namely Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah lived are similar to the circumstances in which we are living today. The similarities are basically in terms of injustice, corruption, oppression, and exploitation in the society. The eighth century witnessed great prosperity, which generated economic disparity and social and class distinctions. The affluent class were oppressing and exploiting the poor and were enjoying luxuries at the expense of the weak and the marginalized. People of Israel being God's chosen people broke the covenant and failed to maintain the covenantal relationship with God. In this context, God raised these prophets to address social issues. Prophets denounced the unjust structures of their society and strongly condemned the unethical behaviour of the people of Israel. They exposed human rights violations by the upper class and the corruption that was rampant in the market places, in religious institutions, and in legal proceedings.

The objective of this study is to discuss the background of eighth century B.C. and investigate the message of eighth century prophets focusing on human rights violations. The research also includes the exegetical study of the selected biblical texts and to explore human rights issues in India. The method of research is analytical, theological, hermeneutical and exegetical. In the exegetical analysis, the historical critical method is applied to discover the text's original meaning in its original historical context. Sociological method is also considered to study the relationships among the people in the Israelite society.

The study undertaken has been divided into seven chapters. First chapter contains the review of literature; second chapter is devoted to study the background of the eighth century B.C. and the third chapter explores the message of the four prophets. The fourth chapter presents an exegetical study of selected texts and the fifth chapter aims to discuss the biblical and theological foundations for human rights. The sixth chapter is an attempt to highlight human rights issues in India and the concluding seventh chapter brings the relevance of the study to the present context.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

## General Abbreviations

AWA	Ancient West Asia
ANE	Ancient Near East
BC	Before Christ
<i>ca.</i>	<i>circa</i> (about)
<i>cf.</i>	confer (compare with)
ch(s)	chapter(s)
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> (for example)
ed.	edited, editor/edition
eds,	editors
et al.	<i>et alii</i> (and others)
etc.	<i>et cetera</i> (and others of the same class)
f	following page/verse
ff	following pages/verses
i.e.	<i>idest</i> (that is to say)
ISPCK	Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint
MS(S)	Manuscript(s)
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
p	page
pp	pages
tr.	translated; translator
v.	verse
vv.	verses
vol(s)	volume(s)

## Reference Works and Journals

ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BCBC	Believers Church Bible Commentary
BDB	The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
<i>BibBh</i>	<i>Bible Bhashyam</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BRT</i>	<i>The Baptist Review of Theology</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BST	Bible Speaks Today
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CGR</i>	<i>Conrad Grebel Review</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
<i>HTS</i>	<i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>IntRM</i>	<i>International Review of Mission</i>
IDB	The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>

<i>JIJSS</i>	<i>Jnanatirtha International Journal of Sacred Scriptures</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JES</i>	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>JTSOA</i>	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Old Testament</i>
<i>MJT</i>	<i>Mizoram Journal of Theology</i>
NBC	New Bible Commentary
NDT	New Dictionary of Theology
NCCI	National Council of Churches in India
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>OJT</i>	<i>Ogbomoso Journal of Theology</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>TBT</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>UBSJ</i>	<i>Union Biblical Seminary Journal</i>
<i>VTQ</i>	<i>Vaiharai Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VJTR</i>	<i>Vidyajoti Journal of Theological Reflections</i>
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

## **Books of the Bible**

### **Old Testament**

Genesis	Gen
Exodus	Ex
Leviticus	Lev
Numbers	Num
Deuteronomy	Deut
Ruth	Ruth
1 Samuel	1 Sam
2 Samuel	2 Sam
1 Kings	1 Kings
2 Kings	2 Kings
2 Chronicles	2 Chr
Psalms	Ps
Proverbs	Prov
Isaiah	Isa
Jeremiah	Jer
Ezekiel	Ezek
Hosea	Hos
Joel	Joel
Amos	Am
Micah	Mic
Malachi	Mal

### **New Testament**

Luke	Lk
John	Jn
Romans	Rom
1 Corinthians	1 Cor

For abbreviations for the books of the Bible, *The Holy Bible* New Revised Standard Version, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2000 is followed.

## INTRODUCTION

The eighth century B.C.E. prophets were unique among the Old Testament prophets in terms of their message and the emphasis. During the eighth century Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah addressed social issues of their society. They are known as prophets of social justice. They condemned the people for violating human rights and denounced them for indulging in unethical behaviour. They addressed not only social injustices but also religious apostasy. Prophets were vehement in their message of punishment and judgement because people of God were breaking the covenant that God made with them. God made a covenant with Moses at Mt. Sinai which changed the status of Israelites from slaves to the 'People of God.' The covenant formula reads 'You shall be my people and I will be your God.' This covenant established a strong relationship between God and his people. Prophets indicted the people of Israel for disregarding the Mosaic covenant. As God's people they were expected to maintain the covenantal relationship by loving God and loving their fellow human beings. Prophets encouraged the people to return to the Lord in repentance and seek justice and love good (Isa 1:17; Am 5:15).

Amos and Hosea prophesied to northern kingdom Israel whereas Isaiah and Micah prophesied to southern kingdom Judah. The social circumstances in which these prophets lived are similar to the circumstances in which we are living today; especially in terms of class distinctions, injustice, oppression and exploitation. In biblical times, in Israelite society corruption and injustice was rampant. The eighth century witnessed great prosperity, which generated economic disparity and social and class distinctions. The rich were becoming richer and the poor were becoming poorer. The affluent class were oppressing and exploiting the poor and were enjoying luxuries at the expense of the weak and the marginalized. Corruption was rampant in the market places, in religious institutions, and in legal practices and jurisprudence. Human rights were violated blatantly by the upper class society.

The exegetical study of selected texts from the four eighth century prophetic books will explicate the message of these prophets so as to lay the groundwork for a biblical

theology for human rights. The theology of the prophets is that they portray God as sovereign and also as the God of justice and righteousness. The terms 'justice' and 'righteousness' occur often in the message of the prophets to emphasize that God cannot tolerate injustice. According to the prophets, God saw the oppression of his people in Egypt had heard their cry and delivered them from bondage. He used human agent Moses to carry out this great task of redemption. Based on the paradigm of the exodus, the prophets presented God as an honest judge who executes judgment against oppressors.

A similar situation prevails today in our society. Social and economic distinctions are evident and exploitation of the poor and weak is the order of the day. Human rights are violated at every level and corruption is widespread. The issue of human rights covers all the aspects of human life and is crucial for peaceful human existence, healthy relation and social well-being. This research analyses human rights violations in Israelite society and brings that exploration into conversation with human rights violations in contemporary Indian society, thus demonstrating the relevance of the study for social transformation today.

This dissertation will argue that the Church has a crucial role in addressing the human rights issues in the present context. The Church should raise its voice and play a prophetic role in relation to injustices in the society where she is placed. The phrase 'human rights' as such may not be found in the Bible, but the idea is very much there to compel us to take seriously the concerns of human rights. The Decalogue chiefly concerned with the behaviour of the people toward God and to one another. It portrays the vertical and horizontal relationships of the people of God. Maintaining good and cordial relationships with fellow human beings is as important as maintaining good relationship with God Almighty. And also the collections of several laws contain regulations for the protection of the weak and powerless. This dissertation has a section that deals with Decalogue and other Legal Codes in one of the chapters. It is the need of the hour to study the issues relating to human rights violations in biblical times and present times and to encourage the Church to continue to address human rights issues more effectively and vigorously. A section of the Church may not be inclined towards this cause with 'other worldly' attitude. Such people may be taught that the Church definitely has a role to play as God's agent to bring change in the society. She is placed in this society with a purpose and a task that she can be sensitive to the situations of the people around.

## **JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH**

The Eighth century B.C.E. prophets are known as prophets of social justice. But the human rights issues addressed by them have not been adequately explored before. The concept of justice and violation of human rights are expressed sturdily by the eighth century prophets as the agents of God. In the Old Testament God loved his people and made a covenant with them. But people disobeyed and could not maintain the covenantal relationship with God. They consistently violated human rights which is the essence of the Decalogue and Law. This phenomenon is prevalent today also in our Indian society. Human rights are violated widely which has to be checked by the prophetic role of the Church to bring justice in an unjust society. This research offers to explore the message of the prophets and to bring the relevance of their message to the present Indian context.

## **THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Injustice is very much prevalent in the Indian society today. Poor people are exploited by the rich and justice is denied to them. The weak and the marginalized are oppressed and in turn human rights are violated. It is similar with the Israelite society also in the biblical times. The affluent class imported their own principles or values that created an atmosphere of social injustice.

The eighth century prophets denounced the human rights violations in legal, economic and religious fronts. For instance Amos focuses on the economic injustices and violations in legal places. The responsible people who administer justice at the gate indulged in accepting bribes from the rich and giving judgment in their favor. Illegal taxation and land grabbing was also evident during this period in the Israelite society. Hosea denounces the social crimes such as swearing, lying, stealing, murder and adultery. He also stresses on human rights violations in political and cultic life of Israel. Isaiah highlights the human rights violations by the people and the kings in treating the vulnerable sections of the society such as widows and orphans. He also lashes out at hollow religious practices of the people. Micah exposes the human rights violations in land dealings. The powerful people with their greed covet the ancestral inheritance of the

poor people. Like Amos, Micah also exposes the human rights violations in legal courts. The prophets denounced the unethical behavior and serious human rights violations and challenged the people for enshrining them.

Human rights violations in Israelite society in biblical times seriously affected their covenantal relationship with God and relationships among themselves. True humanity lies in genuine relationships. Thus the violation of human rights and coercion of any single human being is an affront to human reality and dignity. Those violations resulted in social injustices, exploitation, and oppression of the poor by the affluent class of the society which the eighth century B.C.E. prophets addressed powerfully. Although previous scholarship has addressed the topic of ethics and social justice in the biblical prophetic literature, attempts have not been made adequately to apply the paradigm of human rights. Analysis of the biblical prophets through the lens of human rights will bring to bear fresh exegetical, hermeneutical, and missional insights. Those insights may fuel the agenda of the Indian Church so that it might continue to engage vigorously in addressing human rights issues adequately and more effectively.

This dissertation seeks to explore the reaction of the eighth century B.C.E. prophets to social injustices. They reacted strongly against the deterioration of ethical and moral values. They tried to establish the principles of communal life and pleaded with the people to turn from the corrupt and unjust practices.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- To discuss the background of eighth century B.C.E. and investigate the message of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah focusing on human rights violations.
- To study the selected biblical texts and to formulate a biblical and theological basis for human rights.
- To explore human rights issues in India and to expound the response of the Indian Church to Human Rights issues.
- To show how the research is relevant to the present Indian context.

## **FIELD OF STUDY**

The study is basically located in the discipline of Biblical Studies in the area of Old Testament.

## **SCOPE AND LIMITATION**

The research is limited to the teachings of eighth century B.C.E. prophets namely Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah. The study does not take up the human rights concerns expressed by other prophets and in other parts of the Bible. This work does not claim that the selected prophets addressed all aspects of human rights issues. There can be new issues or violations in contemporary society which these prophets did not mention directly. However, it is believed that at least the major human rights concepts and issues that are debated today find an adequate representation in the teachings of these prophets.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The method of research is analytical, theological, hermeneutical and exegetical. In the exegetical analysis, the historical critical method is applied to discover the text's original meaning in its original historical context. Sociological method is also considered to study the relationships among the people in the Israelite society. The method does not consist of any empirical study. The study is confined basically to library research. It includes reviewing the literature, interpreting the authors and exegesis of selected texts.

## **STRUCTURE OF THESIS**

The study undertaken has been divided into seven chapters. First chapter contains the review of literature. A number of works that have explored this area are reviewed to provide a starting point for the present research. Second chapter is devoted to study the background of the eighth century B.C.E. in which the significance and the socio-economic, political and religious contexts of this century are discussed. The third chapter explores the message of the four prophets namely Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah. The main thrust here is to focus on the message of these prophets where human rights are addressed. The fourth chapter presents an exegetical study of selected texts. Two texts from each of the four prophetic books are studied focusing on the human rights violations. The fifth chapter aims to discuss the biblical and theological foundations for human rights. The sixth

chapter is an attempt to highlight human rights issues in India. The concluding seventh chapter brings the relevance of the study to the present Indian context.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **1.1. Introduction**

Consulting the available sources related to the research title is helpful and necessary to get a good beginning to the work that is undertaken. The message of eighth century B.C.E. prophets namely Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah has been widely discussed and debated over the years in theological circles. Considerable research has been done in this area by various scholars to explore the message of these prophets as these prophets are unique among other prophets of the Old Testament. Numerous articles and books were written on the message of these prophets and their emphasis on social justice. But most of the studies concern only with specific aspects of this problem and much has not been done in relating the message of these prophets to human rights issues in India. Few works that are considered as significant related to this topic are reviewed and are cited below.

#### **1.2. Review of Literature**

##### **1.2.1. Title: “The Eighth Century Prophets – Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah.”<sup>1</sup>**

In this book, Anderson describes the core of the prophetic message as religious and political. And he also explains the great themes of these four eighth century prophets: divine judgment, the present and the future, justice and mercy, the covenant, walking humbly with God and waiting for God. The author also demonstrates the timely nature of the prophets’ message for today. Good work by Anderson but human rights concerns and their relevance for today are not discussed.

##### **1.2.2. Title: “Amos: Preacher of Social Reform.”<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson. *The Eighth Century Prophets – Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) pp.111.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph G. Bailey. “Amos: Preacher of Social Reform” in *TBT*, 19 (1981) pp.306-313.

In this article, the author discusses how Amos had seen the exploitation and maltreatment of the poor by the rich as he was travelling as a small businessman. Bailey thinks that the displacement of the peasants from their patriarchal lands was the main concern for Amos. Bailey dwells on the scenario of the rich enjoying their luxuries while the poor sank deeper into debt and slavery. This article definitely points to the human rights violations during eighth century time, but it is limited only to the book of Amos.

### **1.2.3. Title: “Amos among the Prophets: Composition and Theology”<sup>3</sup>**

In this work, Robert B. Coote distinguishes three stages in the growth of the book of Amos. The oracles of the first stage announce the annihilation of the ruling elite in 8<sup>th</sup> century Samaria. These oracles reflect the plight of the peasantry under the ruling class. The oracles of the second stage dwell on the opposition between Jerusalem and Bethel. The third stage updated this document after the Babylonian exile. Its theme is that God’s mercy follows from his justice. It is confined only to the book of Amos.

### **1.2.4. Title: “Economic Injustice in Micah.”<sup>4</sup>**

In this article Carol J. Dempsey describes prophet Micah as a person of bold convictions who condemned the injustices with which the powerful afflicted the poor. Good work but limited only to the book of Micah.

### **1.2.5. Title: “Social Justice in the Book of Amos.”<sup>5</sup>**

In this article Donoso S. Escobar reflects on the social justice aspect of the book of Amos and how this aspect is applicable today. He stresses that the renewed relationship with God needs to be at the heart of the struggle for social justice. It is a very good work on the social justice but confined only to the book of Amos.

### **1.2.6. Title: “Headings in the Books of the Eighth-Century Prophets.”<sup>6</sup>**

In this article David N. Freedman follow a standard form, modified for each individual prophetic book (Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Micah). The main purpose of the

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<sup>3</sup>Robert B. Coote. *Amos among the Prophets: Composition and Theology*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) pp.v-138.

<sup>4</sup>Carol J. Dempsey. “Economic injustice in Micah” in *TBT*, 32 (1994) pp.272-276.

<sup>5</sup>Donoso S. Escobar. “Social Justice in the Book of Amos” in *RevExp*, 92 (1995) pp.169-174.

<sup>6</sup>David N. Freedman. “Headings in the Books of the Eighth Century Prophets” in *AUSS*, 25 (1987) pp.9-26.

publication was to acknowledge the divine judgment for violations of the covenant; to inculcate repentance and a resolution to reform on the part of the people. Here violations of the covenant are discussed but its relevance to the human rights issues in the present context is not brought out.

**1.2.7. Title: “*Dal and Ebyon: The Poor and the Needy in the Book of Amos.*”<sup>7</sup>**

In this article Terry Giles classifies Amos’ use of the technical terms “poor” and “needy”. The powerful who are not directly involve in production, oppress the poor and the needy through taxation, to benefit them and maintain their own lifestyles. They enforce their aims through their control of the judiciary. These exploiters are in violation of God’s will through their treatment of the weak. Amos’ indictment of the powerful is designed to suggest an alternative social reality. This is a good work which reflects on the exploitation of the poor by the rich during eighth century B.C.E. but the study is restricted only to the book of Amos.

**1.2.8. Title: “Justice, Righteousness, and the Social Critique of the Eighth-Century Prophets.”<sup>8</sup>**

In this article Hemchand Gossai has done a comprehensive study on the concepts of “Righteousness” and “Justice”. He maintains that these two concepts have a relationship-oriented nature and form the basis for the social critique of the eighth century B.C. prophets. The author also discusses the role and function of the eighth century prophets as social reformers, revolutionaries, traditionalists, Yahwists and ethicists. He also brings implications for the structure and function of the society especially in the third world. It is a very good work of the social critique of the eighth century and projected the eighth century prophets as social reformers. But the study is not specifically applied to the human rights issues in the present context.

**1.2.9. Title: “Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah.”<sup>9</sup>**

In this work Mark Gray observes that issues of social justice were public matters not confined to private morality. Prophets voiced these concerns in the public square. The

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<sup>7</sup>Terry Giles. “*Dal and ebyon: The Poor and the Needy in the Book of Amos*” in *BRT*, Vol.16, No.1, Feb (1991), pp.12-20.

<sup>8</sup>Hemchand Gossai. “Justice, Righteousness, and the Social Critique of the Eighth-Century Prophets” in *Theology and Religion*, Vol.141 (1993) pp.351-

<sup>9</sup>Mark Gray. *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2006) pp.306.

author opines that social justice is deeply rooted in the biblical tradition. He strongly argues the issues of social justice in the acts of God in the history of Israel. It is a very good work on the issue of social justice but limited to the book of Isaiah only.

**1.2.10. Title: “Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – His Times and His Preaching.”<sup>10</sup>**

In this book J. H. Hayes explains that Amos preached in a time of great national prosperity. The prophet was primarily concerned with the issues of social justice in the Israelite society especially inequities in the judicial system. The author pays special attention to the historical context in which Amos worked. This historical perspective casts totally new light on the work of Amos. Good work by Hayes who strongly emphasized social justice but is confined only to the teachings of one prophet Amos.

**1.2.11. Title: “Seek the Lord: A Study of the Meaning and Function of the Exhortation in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Zephaniah.”<sup>11</sup>**

In his book Vanlier Hunter seeks to assess the importance of the form critical genre “exhortation” for determining the fundamental intention of the pre-Deuteronomic classical Israelite prophets. He does this by examining several texts. The exhortation reveals the intention of prophecy that is to call for the repentance of the people to avert the judgment. Here the judgment for people’s sins is emphasized. Buthuman rights issues and their relevance to the present context is not considered.

**1.2.12. Title: “Liberation in Amos and Micah.”<sup>12</sup>**

John Kallikuzhuppil in this article explains how Amos and Micah reviewed the social milieu of their time. Both prophets denounced the social crimes and evils which spread in the society because of their superficial belief in Yahweh. This vivid picture of the socio-religious crimes was meant to convince the people of the gravity of their sinful condition and to prepare them to accept the judgment of Yahweh. Reflecting on the social, cultural, economic and religious situation and practice of their society, these prophets made critical reflections purely on a religious basis. Here only two prophets reflections are seen not all four prophets of the eighth century.

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<sup>10</sup>John H. Hayes. *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – His Times and His Preaching*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988) pp.240.

<sup>11</sup>Vanlier Hunter A. *Seek the Lord: A Study of the Meaning and Function of the Exhortation in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah*, 1982.

<sup>12</sup>John Kallikuzhuppil. “Liberation in Amos and Micah” in *BibBh*, 11 ( 1985) pp.215-223.

**1.2.13. Title: “Amos and Affluence.”<sup>13</sup>**

In this article Alistair Kee comments on selected passages in the book of Amos. The treatment of the poor is the criterion by which God judges the rich and powerful. This study is limited only to the book of Amos.

**1.2.14. Title: “Corvee System in Israel and the Response of the 8<sup>th</sup> century Prophets.”<sup>14</sup>**

Nesapandian’s study was primarily on the Corvee system in Israel and how eighth century prophets responded to that system. Here specific social issues are addressed but the study is not relating to the several human rights issues.

**1.2.15. Title: “Hosea – A Prophet of Passion.”<sup>15</sup>**

In this article Connell focuses on some primary themes in Hosea: the love of Yahweh, the contrasting infidelity of Israel, and the hope for the future salvation based on the healing and renewing activity of God. It is Limited only to Hosea and human rights violations are not significantly addressed.

**1.2.16. Title: “Amos the Prophet: The Man and His Book.”<sup>16</sup>**

Peifer in this article outlines the literary collections that make up the book of Amos. Peifer states that Amos’s major thrust is an indictment of the crimes of the Israelites against their own brothers and sisters that amounted to a rejection of God by the entire nation. Amos foresees the doom and destruction of Israel. Here also we see the condemnation of human rights violations but limited only to Amos.

**1.2.17. Title: “Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis.”<sup>17</sup>**

In this comprehensive work D.N. Premnath examines the oracles of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah that treat of Latifundialization, that process by which land is accumulated by the wealthy to the detriment of the poor. He concludes that the eighth century prophets addressed the inequitable accumulation of land holding by the wealthy

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<sup>13</sup>Alistair Kee. “Amos and Affluence” in *Fur* 38 ( 1987) pp.151-161.

<sup>14</sup>A. Nesapandian. *Corvee System in Israel and the Response of the Eighth Century Prophets*, 1999.

<sup>15</sup>K.G. O’ Connell, “Hosea – A Prophet of Passion” in *CurTM*, 4 (1977) pp.104-108.

<sup>16</sup>Claude J. Peifer. “Amos the Prophet: The Man and His Book” in *TBT*, 19 (1981) pp.295-300.

<sup>17</sup>D.N. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003).

class. And prophets' assessment of the situation declared this state of affairs unjust. It is a good social analysis of eighth century B.C. but its limitation is it only examines the oracles related to accumulation of land by the rich. It will not deal with the unjust practices at market places, legal proceedings and religious institutions and also relevance to the present context is not brought out.

**1.2.18. Title: “Amos and Hosea: Socio-historical Background and Prophetic Critique.”<sup>18</sup>**

In this article D.N. Premnath addresses strongly the issues of injustice and corruption in Israel during eighth century B.C.E. and highlights how the poorer sections of the society were deprived of their basic rights. This article vividly portrays the corrupt uses of power by the rich to oppress the poor. But here Premnath is not taking all the eighth century prophets into consideration. He limits his study only to Amos and Hosea.

**1.2.19. Title: “Samaria in the Books of the Eighth-Century Prophets.”<sup>19</sup>**

In this article John J. Schmitt examines the eighth-century prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah to determine what the city meant for its contemporaries and inhabitants. All the eighth century prophets picture Samaria negative and focus on its shortcomings. Here the focus is only on the city of Samaria.

**1.2.20. Title: “Let Justice Surge Like Water.”<sup>20</sup>**

John Sowada explains how Amos denounced Israel because she had abandoned the essentials to her faith. He cites Amos 2:6-8 as a series of indictments against Israel. Amos condemns the base of evil that the poor are reduced to economic pawns for the games of the rich and cultic observance is a charade. Here also the study is confined only to the book of Amos.

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<sup>18</sup>D.N. Premnath. “Amos and Hosea: Socio-historical Background and Prophetic Critique” 2008.

<sup>19</sup>John J. Schmitt. “Samaria in the Book of the Eighth Century Prophets”

<sup>20</sup>John Sowada “Let Justice Surge like Water” in *TBT*, 19 (1981) pp.301-305. 1981

### **1.3.Conclusion**

The above works have really contributed remarkably for the understanding of the message of eighth century prophets. The authors made good attempts to look into issues of social justice as well. But however, though they are dealing with the message of eighth century prophets in some angle, they have their own limitations in scope. Some scholars have limited their work only to the message of one or two prophets. Some have limited their works only to the basic message of the prophets and not serious investigation into the social issues aspect. Most of these authors did not focus on relating the message of these prophets to the human rights issues. So to the best of researcher's knowledge there has not been any previous research on the message of all four eighth century prophets presenting its relevance specifically to the human rights issues in present Indian context.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BACKGROUND OF EIGHTH CENTURY B.C.E.

#### 2.1. Introduction

The changing political situation during eighth century B.C.E. is Assyria's increasingly steady advance towards Palestine. After the death of Adadnirari III (782 B.C.E.) Assyria was ruled over by three weak kings, Shalmaneser IV (782-773 B.C.E.), Ashurdan III (772-755 B.C.E.) and Ashurnirari V (754-745 B.C.E.) who presented no threat to Israel and other nations. But about the time that Jeroboam II died, on the contemporary scene a new era of Assyrian conquest began with the rise of Tiglath-pileser III, which affected the life of Israel and the nations of the Near Eastern world of that period. "The significant influence of the nation of Assyria upon the course of Israel's history during the eighth century B.C.E. is quite evident from the extensive references to Assyria by prophets of this period."<sup>21</sup>

The judgment of God upon Israel was drawing closer during eighth century B.C.E. Prophetic morality is God-centred and that God is holy and just. The eighth century prophets understood human sin in the light of God's holiness and righteousness. The personal conception of sin as disobedience to God is an important characteristic of the ethical teachings of the eighth century prophets. The people had been unfaithful to God (Am 5:2; Hos 5:7; Isa 1:21). The foundation for the prophetic message was based upon theological and moral principles that the human being received from God.<sup>22</sup> A prophet interprets events or signs of times in a particular time history, in a particular place in the world, and addresses a particular people. So the prophet speaks primarily to the people of his own time and his message springs out of the circumstances in which he lives.<sup>23</sup> This is true especially if we look at the history of prophecy in ancient Israel. The eighth century B.C.E. prophecy is typical as it laid the foundations of the classical period of prophecy that started with Amos.

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<sup>21</sup>Hobart E. Freeman. *An Introduction to Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978)p.157.

<sup>22</sup>Emmanuel E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2001) p.99.

<sup>23</sup>H.L. Ellison. *The Old Testament Prophets – Studies in the Hebrew Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971) p.14.

## 2.2. The Significance of Eighth Century B.C.E. in Israel

The eighth century B.C.E. was unique in the history of Judah and Israel in several ways. The century witnessed the fall of the northern kingdom from the glory of economic prosperity and international influence to virtual subjugation by a foreign power. It also witnessed the near collapse of Judah, averted by King Hezekiah.<sup>24</sup> This century was a period of incredible political power and economic development unlike any other period in the history.<sup>25</sup> At the same time the eighth century witnessed the rise of one of the most potent moral forces – the writing prophets.<sup>26</sup> Amos was the first among the writing prophets and begins a new era in the history of Hebrew prophecy. First time, the words of a prophet are gathered together and preserved into a kind of anthology.<sup>27</sup> The dawn of the eighth century brought new hope to Israel and Judah.

In the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam II (793 – 753 B.C.E.) came to the throne at almost the same time as Uzziah. The able leadership of Uzziah and Jeroboam brought Judah and Israel to heights of prominence. “The kingdoms prospered financially and at the same time expanded their borders. But as their economic well-being and national strength continued to foster their security, an internal decay was eating their vitals. It was primarily moral because it involved a basic violation of the covenant established by God at Sinai.”<sup>28</sup>

Eighth century B.C. is a significant era in the history of Hebrew people due to the fact that several prominent kings reigned in Judah including Joash, Uzziah, Ahaz and Hezekiah. On the other hand, during this period the last nine rulers of the northern kingdom of Israel reigned prior to its down fall to Assyria in 722 B.C.E. The most notable of these rulers was Jeroboam II.<sup>29</sup> Israel and Judah were greatly successful during the first part of the eighth century B.C.E. The independence as well as the territory of both kingdoms was still intact during the first half of this period. Under Jeroboam II Israel had restored to her sovereignty most of the dominion formerly subject to Solomon (2 Kings 14:25, 28). Judah was equally prosperous under the reign of Uzziah (2 Chr 26:1-15) and attained a considerable prosperity. By the end of eighth century all these achievements

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<sup>24</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. “Amos” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol.7, Ed. By Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985) p.269.

<sup>25</sup>D.N. Premnath. *Eighth Century Prophets – A Social Analysis* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003) p.43.

<sup>26</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. “Amos” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p.269.

<sup>27</sup>James D. Newsome, Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984) p.16.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. “Amos” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p.269.

<sup>29</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to Old Testament Prophets*, p.157.

would be lost, the northern kingdom would fall to the Assyrians and Judah would begin to decline.<sup>30</sup> During this period three great crises confronted the Hebrew nation, each of which involved the nation of Assyria.

### **2.2.1. The Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis in 734 B.C.E.**

Assyria was the dominant military force during eighth century B.C.E. The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser began to campaign in North Syria in 738 B.C.E. occupying Hamath and reducing Damascus and Israel to vassalage.<sup>31</sup> In 734 B.C.E., Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, formed a military alliance to oppose the Assyrian king. Judah, under Ahaz, refused to join this resistance against Assyrian aggression, whereupon Syria and Israel moved against Judah. Ahaz, in alarm, appealed to Assyria for aid in spite of Isaiah's warning to trust in God for deliverance. Tiglath-pileser captured Damascus, the Syrian capital, slew Rezin, its king, and carried its population captive to Kir (2 Kings 15:29). He invaded Israel and carried off many captives and made Pekah a vassal of Assyria.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately Ahaz did not heed the command of Isaiah, and out of fear and lack of trust, he called on Assyria's aid and submitted to Assyrian vassalship. Tiglath-pileser forced him to adopt Assyrian ways of worship. This included a special form of altar to set up and installing Assyrian idols and rites in Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem.<sup>33</sup> By this action Ahaz implied that Assyrian idols were more powerful to be trusted than Israel's own God Yahweh. Amos addressed a situation of great political and economic decline in Israel. Numerous references in the book point to such circumstances (Am 3:11; 4:10; 5:15; 6:6; 7:2, 5).<sup>34</sup> Assyrian activities are anticipated by Amos. Joseph Blenkinsopp carries out a detailed study on the period of Assyrian expansion.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to Old Testament Prophets*, p.158.

<sup>31</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp. *A History of Prophecy in Israel – From the Settlement in the Land to the Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983) p.82.

<sup>32</sup>H.E. Freeman, *An Introduction to Old Testament Prophets*, p.158.

<sup>33</sup>David F. Hinson. *History of Israel – Old Testament Introduction I* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994) p.119.

<sup>34</sup>John H. Hayes, *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988) p.27.

<sup>35</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp. *A History of Prophecy in Israel – From the Settlement in the Land to the Hellenistic Period*, pp.80-86.

### 2.2.2. The Fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E.

The Establishment of the northern kingdom of Israel resulted from the harsh economic policies of Solomon's reign, but it also had roots in the older rivalry and antagonisms between the two major power centres of the Israelite confederation, Ephraim-Benjamin-Manasseh in the north and Judah in the south.<sup>36</sup>In the third quarter of the eighth century, Israel was confronted by circumstances that altered her status decisively.<sup>37</sup>After the dynasty of Omri, Jehu was successful in the coup and founded the third dynasty to rule the north, a dynasty that lasted through five kings and almost one hundred years. Especially during the long reign of the fourth king of the dynasty, Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.E.), the northern kingdom enjoyed a period of growth and prosperity. The voice of the prophet Amos, gave witness to the desperate situation of large numbers of the population, who were suffering from the oppressive policies of the ruling elite.<sup>38</sup>With the assassination of last member of Jehu's dynasty, Zechariah in 745 B.C.E. the northern kingdom began a rapid decline. The main source of its problems was Assyria, who was growing in strength.

Upon the death of Tiglath-pileser in 727 B.C.E., Hoshea the last king of Israel turned to Egypt for help and withheld his annual tribute to Assyria. The new Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V, invaded Israel and laid siege to Samaria. After his death, Sargon II, his successor, continued the siege, Samaria falling to him in 722B.C.E.<sup>39</sup>Most of the ruling classes were deported and resettled in other parts of the empire, while foreigners were brought from these lands and resettled in turn in Israel. Significant portions of Israelite population remained in the territory, however, and presumably continued to worship Yahweh and follow the ancestral customs.<sup>40</sup>But the independent political existence of the northern kingdom as a state came to an end.<sup>41</sup>The fall of Samaria resulted in the utter collapse of the northern kingdom of Israel, and its territory became a part of the Assyrian Empire.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>A. R. Ceresko, *Old Testament – a Liberation Perspective*, p.206.

<sup>37</sup>John Bright. *History of Israel*, (London: SCM Press, 1981) p.269.

<sup>38</sup>A. R. Ceresko, *Old Testament – a Liberation Perspective*, pp.206-210.

<sup>39</sup>Hobart E. Freeman. *An Introduction to Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978) p.158.

<sup>40</sup>A. R. Ceresko. *The Old Testament – A Liberation Perspective*, p.212.

<sup>41</sup>A.R. Ceresko. *The Old Testament – A Liberation Perspective*, p.212.

<sup>42</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to Old Testament Prophets*, p.158.

### 2.2.3. The Sennacherib Crisis in 701 B.C.E.

Hezekiah gradually reversed the pro-Assyrian policies of his father, Ahaz. He began through cultic reforms such as removing the Assyrian elements his father had accepted into the Jerusalem Temple. He gave greater emphasis and to the centrality and worship of Yahweh. The anti-Assyrian policies of Hezekiah took a decisive turn when he became the leader of a revolt by Syro-Palestinian states against Assyrian suzerainty which was opposed by Isaiah.<sup>43</sup> Isaiah saw it as a vain attempt to trust in foreign alliances and counselled Hezekiah to trust in Yahweh and be loyal to his covenant (Isa.30:15). Hezekiah believed that he could gain freedom from Assyrian rule. Two of Assyria's enemies Babylon and Egypt fomented the rebellion against Assyria and promised help to the rebels.<sup>44</sup> Hezekiah refused to pay tribute to Assyria, and formed alliances with Babylonia and Egypt (2 Kings 20:12-13).<sup>45</sup>

Isaiah denounced these intrigues and called the pact with Egypt a 'covenant with death' (Isa 28:15). As Isaiah anticipated, the promised support from Egypt and Babylonia failed to materialize and the revolt was crushed by the new Assyrian king, Sennacherib.<sup>46</sup> Sennacherib rejected Hezekiah's tribute proposal and decided to lay siege to the city and plunder its resources. Then Isaiah was sent by God to assure the king of Judah that the city would stand. In 701 B.C.E. Judah was invaded and devastated but Jerusalem was spared. The angel of the Lord smote the Assyrian army and the humiliated Sennacherib was compelled to return to Assyria (2 Kings 19; Isa 36-37).<sup>47</sup> John Bright does a critical study on the account of Sennacherib's actions against Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13 to 19:37). He opines it presents a difficult problem and he raises a question whether there was one campaign or two. He assumes that there were two invasions by Sennacherib.<sup>48</sup>

Finally eighth century is significant because its first half was the period in which Jonah, a prophet of Israel, was sent to Nineveh the chief city of Assyria with his stern message of judgment.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>A.R. Ceresko. *The Old Testament – A Liberation Perspective*, p.264.

<sup>44</sup>A.R. Ceresko. *The Old Testament – A Liberation Perspective*, pp.264-265.

<sup>45</sup>D. F. Hinson. *History of Israel – Old Testament Introduction I*, p.121.

<sup>46</sup>A.R. Ceresko. *The Old Testament – A Liberation Perspective*, p.266.

<sup>47</sup>H.E. Freeman. *An Introduction to Old Testament Prophets*, p.158.

<sup>48</sup>John Bright. *History of Israel*, p.307.

<sup>49</sup>H.E. Freeman. *An Introduction to Old Testament Prophets*, p.159.

## **2.3. The Socio-Economic, Political, and Religious Context of Eighth Century B.C.E.**

### **2.3.1. The Socio-economic Context.**

The Assyrian policy of mass deportation in order to punish rebellions emptied various territories of their populations and then repopulated by other exiles. This practice will quench all the patriotic sentiments and discourages any ideas of returning to one's original land.<sup>50</sup>In 722 B.C.E., Samaria was filled with a new exile population that was mixed with the Israelite remnants that constituted the ancestors of the Samaritans; this case would stir controversy upon the return from Babylon and until Jesus' time about the land and the ancestry. The mass deportation of 722 B.C.E. was not only a social problem, but also a theological challenge. The first half of the eighth century was a peaceful and prosperous time for both Israel and Judah. Both Jeroboam II and Uzziah enjoyed prosperous and long reign, even though Uzziah got leprosy and left the regency of Judah to his son Jotham. "The belief that the golden age of the early monarchy had returned was fostered further by the economic prosperity of Judah under the rule of Uzziah, a contemporary of Jeroboam II."<sup>51</sup>

Both kingdoms were at peace with each other and extended their respective kingdoms. During this period, the stratification of society started by Solomon attained its summit. Excessive wealth led to the creation of a leisured upper class who increasingly adopted a corrupt lifestyle.<sup>52</sup> The prosperity was not equally distributed. Rather, this period saw the rise of a wealthy merchant class, a class enriched at the expense of the poor. As one small sector of Israelites grew richer, a major sector became increasingly impoverished.<sup>53</sup>The dramatic increase of trade and commerce encouraged the rise of a mercantile class whose principal object was the rapid acquisition of money. Greed and dishonesty in business cast their shadow upon the prosperous northern kingdom, encouraging a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. The upper classes lived in selfish luxury and their attitude made heavy demands upon the already impoverished peasants and farmers.<sup>54</sup>The upper class was a minority made of the king, the royal family and the aristocratic nobility –governors and maintainers of royal estates; and the lower

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<sup>50</sup>John Bright. *History of Israel*, p.271.

<sup>51</sup>R. K. Harrison. *Old Testament Times* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001) p.223.

<sup>52</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31 (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1987) p.283.

<sup>53</sup>Rick R. Marrs. "The World of the Eighth Century Prophets" in *Leaven*, Vol.11, Issue 2, p.65.

<sup>54</sup>R. K. Harrison. *Old Testament Times*, pp.226-227.

class was made of artisans, labourers, and herdsmen such as the prophet Amos who formed the majority. While the upper class was accumulating the wealth, the lower class was starving and extorted.

The family-based farming was transformed into a production for export that benefited only to the upper class. The culture of olive oil was prominent at this time, and exchanged for luxury goods. Those who could not pay their loans were reduced to slavery. The poor were dismissed as an expendable commodity.<sup>55</sup> Because of the small farmers becoming increasingly intolerable, there was an inevitable drift from the land to the cities, thus bringing about a further weakening of the general economy.<sup>56</sup> D.N. Premnath has done a comprehensive study on the social reality of Israel and Judah in the eighth century B.C.E. He describes the social development in Israel during this period using the term ‘Latifundialization’ which primarily refers to the acquisition of small land holdings by the elite class.<sup>57</sup> The local justice like the property rights done by the king and his officers was not without abuses (Mic 2:2). Also, the international trade was a source of substantial wealth. The western coastal trade routes and the south-eastern trade routes were controlled by Jeroboam II. As production increased, consumerism, individualism, greed and overconfidence grew as well. It was this situation, not different from ours today, that Amos (and Micah in Judah) criticized and denounced its moral and religious downfall that would lead to the chaos of 745-722 B.C.E.

### **2.3.2. The Political Context**

Since the 9th century B.C.E., Assyria had changed its policy about the treaties with vassal or conquered nations. Instead of dealing only with the king, the treaties were signed with the whole nation. The people were responsible for keeping the treaties. Therefore, a rebellion brought punishment on the king and the nation; a punishment that consisted of mass deportation. The prophetic oracles were no longer addressed to the king alone, but to the whole people. Later on, Tiglath-pileser introduced the “policy of two-way relocation”.<sup>58</sup> He cultivated military power and administrative skills. He bound vassal states

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<sup>55</sup>A. R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, BCBC, p.230.

<sup>56</sup>R. K. Harrison, *Old Testament Times*, pp.227.

<sup>57</sup>D.N. Premnath. *Eighth Century Prophets – A Social Analysis*, p.43.

<sup>58</sup>Hershel Shanks. *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple – Revised and expanded* (Washington DC: The Biblical Archeology Society, 1999) p.174.

with treaties; and he used mass deportations and resettlement to punish rebellions.<sup>59</sup>The deported nation was replaced by another from a different place. This is what was applied to Samaria in 722 B.C.E. (2 Kings 17:6.24).

Judah under Uzziah (783-742 B.C.E.) and Israel under Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.E.) enjoyed a long period of peace and prosperity. It is during this time that Amos, Hosea and Micah prophesied. In Israel, the moral decline under Jeroboam would result in Zechariah, his son, being assassinated and ending the Jehu dynasty. Menahem (747-738 B.C.E.) would continue with Jehu policy toward Assyria, namely of paying tribute. It was during this period that Isaiah started his ministry in Judah, followed by Micah.

In Judah meanwhile, Hezekiah (727-697 B.C.E.) with the Egyptian backing, rebelled against Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.E.) who, weakened by his victory over Egypt and Judean cities could not sustain the siege of Jerusalem (Isa Chs 36-37). Though the city was miraculously spared, Judah paid a heavy tribute to Assyria until the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.E.

### **2.3.3. The Religious Context**

Under Jeroboam II and Uzziah, the temple of Jerusalem in Judah and the sanctuary of Bethel in Israel were prominent religious centres, places for sacrifices and other offerings. Religious practice was at an all-time high. Regular services were held at all the main centres of worship.<sup>60</sup> Some of the wealth accumulated, such as gold and ivory, furnished these sanctuaries. For the prophets, nevertheless, justice was more important than cultic sacrifices. Under Assyrian vassalage, the Assyrian policy toward local religious cults was ambiguous.<sup>61</sup> Sometimes, the Assyrian cult was imposed and supported by vassal annual tribute. Local cults were destroyed and restored, like in 2 Kings 17:24-28. And the Assyrian military campaigns were conducted in the name of Ashur –Assyrian god; and the treaties of vassalage, called “yoke of Ashur”, were signed in the name of Ashur, the “lord of all lands.”

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<sup>59</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp. *A History of Prophecy in Israel – From the Settlement in the Land to the Hellenistic Period*, p.82.

<sup>60</sup>Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, BCBC, p.229

<sup>61</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp. *A History of Prophecy in Israel – From the Settlement in the Land to the Hellenistic Period*, p.83

For Israel, however, the fall of Samaria was not only a human disaster, but also a theological challenge. Since war between human nations involved, war between their respective deities, whether Yahweh be defeated by Ashur. Also, the loss of the land questioned the relevance of the covenant with Yahweh. For the prophets Amos and Hosea, the fall of Samaria was a logical consequence of the religious and social discrepancies under Jeroboam II. “Though Israel still clung to the essential features of her normative faith – election, covenant, promise – a deep, inner perversion of it had taken place. Yahwism was in danger of becoming a pagan religion.”<sup>62</sup>Hosea, particularly, denounced the religious syncretism that the international trades brought in Israel, advocating for the purity of faith. He believed that the nation was under the covenant curses and doomed to destruction (Hos 7:13; 9:11-17).<sup>63</sup>This syncretism was also observed after 722 B.C.E. as new people were brought in Samaria and mixed with the Israelite remnants. Allen Guenther observes that Israel’s religion, instead of challenging the moral decline, quietly ignored it. Rich people imagined that God’s favour can be bought. Hence, ethics and religion became divorced from one another.<sup>64</sup>

In Judah, the fall of Samaria was not without religious and theological impacts. King Hezekiah initiated series of religious reforms that Josiah would finish after discovering the Book of the Law from the northern kingdom. He fortified the walls of Jerusalem, secured the water supply by building the tunnel of Siloam, and conducted the purification of the Temple (Isa 22:9-11). He destroyed the pagan Canaanite shrines and restored the worship of Yahweh. After recovering the Book of the Law Josiah instituted another religious reformation of a far-reaching character supported by priests, prophets and government officials.<sup>65</sup>These reforms not only enhanced the importance of the temple, but also became the reason of the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the siege of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:35-37). This confidence on the temple and the city would be challenged by the Babylonian invasion in 597 and 586 B.C.E.

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<sup>62</sup>John Bright. *History of Israel*, p.262.

<sup>63</sup>John Bright. *History of Israel*, p.263.

<sup>64</sup>Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos* BCBC, pp.230-31.

<sup>65</sup>R. K. Harrison. *Old Testament Times*,p.239.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

This chapter delineated the background of eighth century B.C.E. and in a special way the political background. The rise of Assyria as super power and its impact on Israel and other nations is mentioned. And the significance of eighth century B.C.E. is prominently discussed in this chapter. Several important events at international front took place and Israel the people of God had to face God's judgment in the hands of Assyria. The fall of Samaria is the result of the disobedience of the Israelite kings. People also are responsible for that catastrophe because they broke the covenantal relationship with their God who is Creator and Sovereign. As it is mentioned, the fall of Samaria is not only a human disaster but a theological challenge. It has religious and theological impacts. The eighth century B.C.E. is significant for several reasons including the rising of writing prophets.

The socio-economic, political, and religious context is another important topic that is examined to certain detail. Because it is important to study that situation to better understand the message of prophets who prophesied during that crucial period which witnessed tremendous political power and economic growth. It has to be agreed the state of economic affluence and political strength of eighth century Israel and Judah. But the economic prosperity brought class distinctions. The rich became richer and poor became poorer and the poor people were exploited by the rich. Religious syncretism was observed. The prophets denounced the unjust practices and religious syncretism strongly and proclaimed serious consequences of divine judgment.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE MESSAGE OF EIGHTH CENTURY B.C.E. PROPHETS

#### 3.1. Introduction

Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah are the eighth century prophets. In the second half of the eighth century B.C.E. the Hebrew prophecy attained its golden age of excellence with the appearance of these great figures who dominated the prophetic activity from 755 B.C.E. to the opening of the seventh century.<sup>66</sup> Amos and Hosea prophesied in the kingdom of Israel; Isaiah and Micah prophesied in the kingdom of Judah. Whenever people break the covenant, the prophets arose with a message, 'Return to the Lord and to the Covenant.' They also proclaimed the concepts of justice and righteousness powerfully in their message. The basis of their message is that God, as righteous and an honest judge executes the judgment of the fatherless and the widow" (Deut 10: 17-18).<sup>67</sup> Eighth century prophets stand out among all other prophets because their words are preserved for us in greater detail. For this reason they are called "writing prophets". "Most of their oracles are oracles of judgment, and they also emphasize similar themes: religious apostasy, cultic idolatry, political folly, and social injustice."<sup>68</sup> The eighth century prophets are thought of primarily as advocates of social justice and critics of the status quo although their message contains the theme of salvation. The prophets deliver their message boldly even if their message was unpopular with the people. Their purpose was to persuade them to amend their ways, so that the future might bring them a blessing not punishment from God.<sup>69</sup> Scott opines that the prophets were concerned with the nature of the social order in which they lived.<sup>70</sup> The prophets indicted the people of Israel for violations of the Mosaic covenant, called for repentance, and warned of coming judgment for continued disobedience.<sup>71</sup> Here the message of four prophets will be studied separately focusing on the theme of social justice and human rights violations in the Israelite society.

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<sup>66</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965) p.304.

<sup>67</sup> Gustaf Wingren. "Human Rights: A Theological Analysis" in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol.27 No.2 Apr (1975) p.124.

<sup>68</sup> James M. Ward. *Thus Says the Lord – The Message of the Prophets* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991) p.201.

<sup>69</sup> Bernard Thorogood, *A Guide to the Book of Amos*, p.8.

<sup>70</sup> R.B.Y. Scott. *The Relevance of the Prophets – An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets and their Message – Revised edition* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1969) p.171.

<sup>71</sup> J. Carl Laney, "The Role of the Prophets in God's case against Israel" in *BSac*, Vol.138, No.552, Oct-Dec (1981) p.323.

## 3.2. The Background of Amos

### 3.2.1. Amos, the Man

There is very little biographical information about Amos in his book and not much is recorded about him in rest of the Bible. Amos appears to be a man of humble status. He is introduced as a shepherd from Tekoa<sup>72</sup> in Judah few miles south of Jerusalem (Am 1:1). In 7:14 Amos gives two designations of his former profession. The first is *boqer* a word closely related to cattle. The second designation has something to do with sycamore trees.<sup>73</sup> Some scholars believe that Amos was counted among the poor and exploited classes in the society, a member of the lower strata of the society.<sup>74</sup> However, J.D. Newsome, Jr. opines that “Amos was more than a day labourer for his literary and oratorical skills imply some formal education and contact with other literature persons. So he may have been the owner of an agricultural enterprise of some kind although it remains doubtful that he was a wealthy man.”<sup>75</sup> The mention of Tekoa has its chief purpose to highlight the agricultural background of Amos since the town is known for its political, cultural and agricultural importance. If Tekoa of Judah was his home territory his work with sycamore fruit could have involved him in extensive travel as an agricultural specialist.<sup>76</sup>

Hubbard observes that “Amos’ knowledge of international events (Am Chs 2-3; 9:7), his acquaintance with patriarchal history, his close observations on life in Samaria (Am 3:9-11) and Jerusalem (Am 6:1) as well as Bethel (Am 2:8; 3:14), his polished skills in debate and his familiarity with a host of literary forms all mark him as a man of uncommon experience, opportunity and sensibility, fully equipped by personal background as well as divine command to carry out his mission.”<sup>77</sup> Some scholars like

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<sup>72</sup>Tekoa is a town strategically situated about ten miles southeast of Jerusalem on a high hill (2800 feet above sea level). Tekoa is mentioned elsewhere in 2 Chr. 11:6 as one of several cities that King Rehoboam (son of Solomon and successor) rebuilt and fortified after the breaking away of the ten northern tribes.

<sup>73</sup>John D.W. Watts. “Amos, the Man” in *RevExp*” Vol.63, No.4, Fall (1966) p.389.

<sup>74</sup>But since 1950s many scholars have argued the exact opposite: that Amos was instead from the upper strata of Israelite society. Amos’s designation as a ‘shepherd’ (1:1) is not the common term for that profession (*roeh*) but rather a different term (*noqed*). So Amos may have been a large scale breeder or a broker of herds.

<sup>75</sup>James D. Newsome, Jr. *The Hebrew Prophets*, p.19.

<sup>76</sup>From the fact that the sycamore fig did not actually grow in Tekoa itself, scholars like Budde and others inferred that Amos was not a native Tekoan, but rather a northern Israelite who had gone into exile in Judah. But Amos 7:12 speaks against this view where Amaziah clearly regards Amos as a native Judaeon.

<sup>77</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel and Amos – An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), p.92.

Douglas Stuart suggest that Amos' travels afforded him an opportunity to see first-hand the inequities of Israel's economic and legal systems, and his prominence in the town gave him first-hand experience as a jurist in court cases.<sup>78</sup> But it is the revelatory power of God that made Amos his mouthpiece.

### 3.2.2. Amos, the Prophet

Amos is recognized as the first of the Israelite writing prophets whose words were assembled in scroll.<sup>79</sup> He was not of the priestly nor prophetic line but was called by God to be a prophet of Israel while engaged in his humble occupation of sheep breeding and sycamore-fig tree cultivation. He himself describes his unique call in his confrontation with Amaziah the high priest: "I was no prophet, neither was a prophet's son; but was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees: and Yahweh took me from following the flock, and said unto me, Go prophesy unto my people Israel (Am 7:14-15). However scholars like Kapelrud argues that Amos also is among cultic prophets.<sup>80</sup> This argument is not well received. Because though the view that prophets were influenced by the cult has obvious merit, it is difficult to accept the thesis that Amos was on the staff of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>81</sup> Amos' call narrative is too short but is part of the narrative of a confrontation between him and Amaziah, the chief priest of the royal sanctuary in Bethel. Amos has been called the prophet of righteousness because of his bold preaching against the moral decay of Israel and Judah.<sup>82</sup> Amos was certainly a prophet. The meaning of his denial of prophetic status is uncertain, but it probably implies that he did not train to be a prophet and was associated with no prophetic guild but was called specially by God from his usual employment.<sup>83</sup> Amaziah viewed Amos as a professional prophet holding permanent office and attached to a shrine or a guild of prophets. But for Amos prophesying is a divine gift not formal office or even personal inclination (Am 3:8).

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<sup>78</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31 P.284.

<sup>79</sup>John Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) p.39.

<sup>80</sup>For further discussion on that see Arvind S. Kapelrud, *Central Ideas in Amos* (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 1961) p.56.

<sup>81</sup>Page H. Kelley. "Contemporary Study of Amos and Prophetism" in *RevExp*, Vol.63, No.4, Fall (1966) p.380.

<sup>82</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p.187.

<sup>83</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.284. Also see James D. Newsome, Jr. *The Hebrew Prophets*, p.19

Some scholars attempted to link the visions of Amos (Chs.7-9) and his call. They feel that the experiencing of these visions was the way in which Amos realized that God was calling him to be a prophet. Others view the visions as prior and preparatory to the call. For Hubbard the call should be treated as an event independent of the visions of judgment. The visions lack any specific word of commissioning, any expression of reluctance to prophecy, any word of the assurance of God's presence in the prophetic ministry. Visions centre on the substance of the message, not in the nature of circumstances of the prophet's call.<sup>84</sup> While thinking in the similar lines, James M. Ward states that discernment of the call and obedient response that matters more.<sup>85</sup>

Amos hails from Judah, in the South, but ministered to the people of Israel, in the North.<sup>86</sup> Yahweh chooses a farmer from Judah to travel to Israel and deliver a scathing polemical message against the wealthy ruling families there.<sup>87</sup> Amos' ministry was exercised at the main religious sanctuary of Israel, Bethel (Am 7:10), although he may have denounced sin also at Samaria (Am 3:9-12; 4:1-3) and at Gilgal (Am 4:4; 5:4-5).

### **3.2.3. The Structure of the Book**

Compared with other prophetic books the Book of Amos is well organized. The book of Amos is composed primarily of material of three distinct types: (1) sayings spoken by a prophet in carrying out his commission; (2) first-person narratives told by the prophet; (3) a third-person narrative about the prophet.<sup>88</sup> The book contains utterances and visions; except a single story about the prophet told in the third person (Am 7:10-17).<sup>89</sup> When we scan the book as a whole, there appear to be at least three distinct parts: Part I opens with a relatively long series of messenger speeches, in 1:3 – 2:14. Here the oracles introduced and concluded with the messenger formula, "Thus says Yahweh". Part II extends through chapter 6 and begins with the phrase, in 3:1 "Listen, Israelites, to this prophecy" followed by additional admonitions to listen. Part III, chapters 7 to 9 includes a rare biographical

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<sup>84</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel and Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.93-94. Also see Klaus Koch. *The Prophets The Assyrian Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) pp.41-43.

<sup>85</sup>James M. Ward. *Thus Says the Lord – The Message of Prophets*, p.204.

<sup>86</sup>The ten tribes who got separated during the reign of Rehoboam son of King Solomon in 931 B.C. are known as Israel and also called Northern Kingdom. Its Southern counterpart is known as Judah.

<sup>87</sup>J. Daniel Hays. *The Message of the Prophets – A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010) pp.287-288.

<sup>88</sup>James Luther Mays. *Amos – A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974) p.12

<sup>89</sup>Werner H. Schmidt. *Old Testament Introduction* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1997) p.225.

anecdote and appears to be organized around personal reports of five visions.<sup>90</sup> Raymond B. Dillard and others see the book falling into three sections: the oracles against the nations (Chs 1-2), a series of judgment speeches against Israel (Chs 3-6), and a group of vision reports culminating with an oracle of salvation (Chs 7-9).<sup>91</sup> However, Peter C. Craigie is of the opinion that the book of Amos appears to have existed originally in two independent collections: a collection of his words (Chs 3-6) and a collection of his visions (Chs 7-9).<sup>92</sup>

### 3.2.4. The Historical Setting of the Book

At the time Amos prophesied, Israel was secure from outward enemies and inwardly prosperous. The words of Amos were dated to the reigns of King Uzziah of Judah and King Jeroboam II of Israel (Am 1:1). Some scholars believe that the exact dates for Uzziah and Jeroboam II vary some two to seven years.<sup>93</sup> More precisely, it was two years before a certain earthquake which has been dated to the year 760 B.C.E.<sup>94</sup> on the basis of archaeological evidence from Samaria and the north-Galilean city of Hazor. This would locate Amos in the middle years of the long, exceptionally prosperous reigns of these kings. By then they had succeeded in extending the boundaries of their kingdoms northward and southward to an unprecedented degree.<sup>95</sup> Jeroboam II was politically and militarily the most successful and recovered Damascus and Hamath which had formerly been subject to Judah in the days of David and Solomon. This military expansion is confirmed by the reference to the capture of the cities of Lo-Debar and Karnaim to the east of the Jordan (Am 6:13).<sup>96</sup>

While discussing the date of Amos, Hubbard observes that a solar eclipse, duly recorded in Assyrian annals, took place in 763 B.C.E. may help to account for Amos' descriptions of cosmic terror in 4:13; 5:8; 8:9.<sup>97</sup> Israel's world was beginning to crumble by 760 B.C.E. Jeroboam II did not realize that Israel's end was fast approaching. But

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<sup>90</sup>John W. Miller, *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, pp.39-40.

<sup>91</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995) p.379.

<sup>92</sup>Peter C. Craigie. *The Old Testament – Its Background, Growth and Content* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988) p.182.

<sup>93</sup>Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991) p.371.

<sup>94</sup>The exact date of earth quake cannot be established. All the attempts to pinpoint the year in which the quake occurred are highly speculative.

<sup>95</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets– A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, pp.49-50.

<sup>96</sup>James D. Newsome, Jr. *The Hebrew Prophets*, p.17.

<sup>97</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel and Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.90.

Amos announced her fall and that of Aram (Am 1:5) and other nations.<sup>98</sup> Some scholars have placed Amos's prophetic ministry after 745 B.C.E. to allow for the rise of Assyria under Tiglath-pileser III. Amos's preaching occurs under the ominous shadow of a threatened invasion (Am 3:11; 6:7; 9:4 etc.).<sup>99</sup> There is general agreement among Old Testament scholars that Amos' ministry is to be dated between 760 and 755 B.C.E.,<sup>100</sup> it seems best to place the prophetic ministry of Amos sometime before 760 B.C.E.<sup>101</sup> Watts places the ministry of Amos between 760 and 750 B.C.E. with the intense final years of ministry probably falling between 752 and 750 B.C.E.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.2.5. Theology of Amos

The central teaching of Amos about God is his divine sovereignty. Yahweh appears as God of the world, and his relation to Israel is viewed as an aspect of his total sovereignty. Yahweh is the God of history. Amos maintained that the Lord was the creator and sustainer of the cosmos, and controls the orderly progression of natural phenomena (Am. 4:13; 5:8).<sup>103</sup> And in common with the other prophets of his generation, Amos maintained that God controlled the destinies of nations and acted as their judge (Am. 1:3-2:3; 2:9; 6:14). Amos proclaimed to Israel that the Creator had entered into a Covenant relationship with her, a privileged position, at the same time involved great responsibilities. Amos more than any other prophet, urged the responsibility of elective privilege. Failure to recognize this, leads to judgment at the hands of Yahweh. Amos stressed the point that violations of the moral law could not be remedied by means of festive rites, offerings. No ritual can substitute for the sincere worship grounded in moral and ethical principles of God as revealed in Torah.<sup>104</sup> Amos is grounded in Mosaic traditions that teach the depth of the Lord's compassion for the poor. The Lord upholds them and sustains them and performs mighty deeds on their behalf. Through the message

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<sup>98</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1990), p.129.

<sup>99</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.375.

<sup>100</sup>Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p.306.

<sup>101</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. "Amos" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.275.

<sup>102</sup>John D.W. Watts. "Amos, the Man" in *RevExp*, Vol.63, No.4, Fall (1966) p.388.

<sup>103</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. "Amos" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.276.

<sup>104</sup>R.K. Harrison. *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991) pp.894-895.

he gives to the prophets, the Lord also means to shake the conscience of the oppressors, to overturn their moral indifference.<sup>105</sup>

According to J. D. Newsom Jr., Amos' theology may be based on three principles: a) Yahweh, Israel's God, is sovereign over the world b) Yahweh has a special relationship with Israel c) and because Israel has broken this relationship, God will judge the nation.<sup>106</sup> For Amos, God makes himself felt in every area of the society of his people: law, ethics, and everyday life all become subject to the divine sovereignty and thus rule out any other field of lordship. The God of Israel is not like the Baal of Canaan; he cannot be placated by the offering of sacrifices.<sup>107</sup> If Hosea stressed true love as a characteristic feature of the divine dealings with people, Amos emphasized divine righteousness which is the most important moral attribute of the divine nature. A righteous God cannot tolerate the violations of moral law. This stand is the spiritual basis for the message of judgment that Amos proclaimed to Israel. He said Day of the Lord is not the day of blessing rather it is a day of judgment. Amos' final word was one of hope and restoration, that repentance and righteous dealing would insure divine forgiveness and blessing. In the context of the possibility that Yahweh could change his mind regarding Israel's destruction by Assyria, Amos offers a call to repentance (Am 5:4; 6: 14). Amos bases his call to repentance upon the identification of the people with the nature and purpose of God himself, a new relationship which could change the course of their history. Amos 9:11-12 also greatly adds to our understanding of hope in the message of Amos.<sup>108</sup>

### **3.3. The Message of Amos**

#### **3.3.1. Amos and the Covenant**

Covenant is the fundamental concept which runs through all of Israel's faith and life. God redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage and by means of a covenant made them his people. The terms of the covenant were - Yahweh would be the God of Israel, and Israel would be the people of God.<sup>109</sup> So the message of Amos presupposes the covenant at Sinai as

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<sup>105</sup>Fred Guyette. "Amos the Prophet: A Meditation on the Richness of Justice" in *JBQ*, Vol.36, No.1, Jan-Mar (2008) p.19.

<sup>106</sup>James D. Newsome, Jr. *The Hebrew Prophets*, pp.23-25.

<sup>107</sup>J. Alberto Soggin. *Introduction to the Old Testament – From its Origin to the Closing of the Alexandrian Canon* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989) p.286.

<sup>108</sup>Donald L. Williams. "The Theology of Amos" in *RevExp*, Vol.63, No.4, Fall (1966) p.403.

<sup>109</sup>Carl G. Howie. "Expressly for our time: the Theology of Amos" in *Int*, Vol.13, No.3, Jul (1959) pp.273-274.

contained in the Decalogue. For instance, Amos' constant references to the injustice which was rampant in the Northern Kingdom against the poor (Am 2:6, 4:1, 5:12) is the logical result of the commandments against stealing and coveting (Ex 20:14,17).<sup>110</sup> Amos never speaks directly of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel but it is implied in the expression "Israel my people". In one text (Am 3:2) Amos speaks of a unique relation which Yahweh instituted between himself and Israel, an election that made Israel liable to Yahweh's punishment for every iniquity, the covenant seems to be in view.<sup>111</sup> The ethics of Amos are based on the covenant relationship between God and Israel. Israel's status as an elect people, a redeemed nation in covenant relationship with Yahweh, is important in the book (Am 3:1-2). Amos saw that the essence of Israel's sin as breach of the covenant. Israel had rejected their covenant Lord (Am 2:4) and rebelled against the covenant requirements.<sup>112</sup> R.E. Clements observes that the earlier prophets had proclaimed the divine judgment on individual sinners within Israel, but the message which Amos brought meant a judgment which embraced the entire Northern Kingdom.<sup>113</sup> The book of Amos is with many allusions to pentateuchal language and also shows familiarity with covenantal ideology.<sup>114</sup> The divine judgments proclaimed against Israel are drawn from the lists of curses in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. Amos urged the people of Israel to walk in the good way. Amos' message has conformed closely to the Mosaic covenant. The covenant perspective governs the content to a substantial degree. The crimes Amos identifies are those the Sinai covenant defines as crimes that include oppression of the poor, denial of inheritance rights, failure to observe sabbatical and jubilee laws etc.,<sup>115</sup> The remedy for national and social evils is that people must abandon their immoral way of life and reflect the qualities of justice, righteousness, and holiness that were typical of the divine nature as revealed in the Torah. Not the formal recognition of the implications of the Mosaic covenant, but the spiritual essence of the Covenant had to become the dominating concern of all.<sup>116</sup> Failure to live in accord with the dictates of the covenant divine retribution overtakes them for their wickedness.

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<sup>110</sup>Donald L. Williams. "The Theology of Amos" in *RevExp*, Vol.63, No.4, Fall (1966) p.394.

<sup>111</sup>J.L. Mays, *Amos— A Commentary*, p.7.

<sup>112</sup>E. E. James, *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.101.

<sup>113</sup>R.E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (London: SCM Press, 1965) p.40.

<sup>114</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.383.

<sup>115</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.288.

<sup>116</sup>R.K. Harrison. *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.887.

### 3.3.2. The Corruption in the Society

The material prosperity that had accompanied political and military success under Jeroboam II had created a powerful and wealthy upper class in Israel (Am 3:12; 6:4-6). For the wealthy, justice could be purchased (Am 5:12) while those less fortunate were reduced to a commodity (Am 2:6-7; 8:6). The poor and needy were crushed by the powerful (Am 2:7; 5:11; 8:4). The rich upper classes had no ethics about the way in which they acquired land and possessions of peasants. The peasants became increasingly poor and were often deprived of their small holdings in an illegal manner.<sup>117</sup> God had revealed himself as the protector of the poor, the widow, and the orphan; he would undertake the defense of the downtrodden.<sup>118</sup> The prophets were concerned with the quality of personal relationships and the worth of life itself.<sup>119</sup>

Affluence, exploitation and the profit motive were the most notable features of the society which Amos observed and in which he worked. The rich were affluent enough to have several houses and the poor were really poor and were shamelessly exploited.<sup>120</sup> During this period, the poor and the godly cried for divine justice. The rich and powerful were complacent with the social, political, and economic structures. They had forsaken the God of justice and followed the mammon and luxury. Both people and their rulers had gone away from the Lord and the covenant values of justice, righteousness and fullness of humanity. On the social front, those people who stood with the ruling class became immensely rich at the expense of the others who became poorer and poorer. While the rich minority lived in extreme luxury, the poor had to survive in atrocious conditions of poverty (Am 3:10-15). The prophet accuses the upper classes of exploitation and oppression of the peasant population. According to Amos, their behaviour deserves a punishment of the most severe kind. He threatens them with a political disaster, mentioning mass-deportation to a foreign country.<sup>121</sup> In this context, the prophets condemned Israel's corruption, apostasy, and hardness of heart and announced God's judgment. They also called for repentance on the part of the rich and powerful and warned

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<sup>117</sup>R.K. Harrison. *Old Testament Times*, pp.223-224.

<sup>118</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.382.

<sup>119</sup>R.B.Y. Scott. *The Relevance of the Prophets – An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets and their Message*, p.171.

<sup>120</sup>J.A. Motyer. *The Message of Amos*, Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974) p.15.

<sup>121</sup>Bernhard Lang. "The Social Organization of Peasant Poverty in Biblical Israel" in *JSOT*, Vol.7, No.24, Oct (1982) p.53.

them of God's wrath and punishment. They voiced their concern over the violations of human rights and the exploitation of the poor by the rich and powerful (Mic 6:12; Am 2:6 etc.,).<sup>122</sup>

The abuse of power and wealth would bring disaster to the northern kingdom. The illegal and unjust gains would become plunder for others, and those who had enslaved their fellow Israelites would become slaves in distant lands (Am 9:4). Father and son who had engaged the same prostitute (Am 2:7-8) would witness wives turned into prostitutes and children dying by the sword (Am 7:17). Those who crushed the poor would be crushed in turn (Am 2:13). A just God demands justice among his covenant people (Am 5:15), obedience rather than sacrifice (Am 5:18-24). Israel may be pictured primarily in three spheres of public life: the administration of justice in the court, the confident affluent life of the upper class, and the worship of God in the sanctuaries.<sup>123</sup>

### **3.3.2.1. Judicial Corruption**

For Amos, the court in the gates seems to have been the most crucial institution in Israel's life. But this judicial institution is the one most severely affected by the loss of integrity. The community elders gather periodically at the "gate"<sup>124</sup> to make decisions or dispense justice regarding civil and criminal cases (Am 5:10). Here righteousness should bear its fruit and justice be established. The weak and the poor should have their defender and find their right. But in the legal proceedings righteousness is discarded and justice is denied to the poor. The judicial process is corrupted by the powerful and rich and was used as instrument of oppression (Am 5:12; 2:7).<sup>125</sup> The poor person had no real access to justice when the only legal recourse was to appeal to the very rich who also sat as judges in the local courts; corruption was rampant.<sup>126</sup> The elders preside over the case in which heavily indebted farmers had their property confiscated as payment to lenders (Am 2:6; 3:10; 5:12) and they paid no heed to dishonesty in the marketplace (Am 5:11; 8:5-6). The

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<sup>122</sup>Willem A. VanGemen. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, p.55. See also George Mathew Nalunnakkal, "Human Rights: A Biblical and Theological Perspectives," in *Struggle for Human Rights: Towards a New Humanity, Theological and Ethical Perspectives*, Vol.2 (Nagpur: NCCI, Urban Rural Mission, 2001), pp.8-9.

<sup>123</sup>James Luther Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.11.

<sup>124</sup>The "Gate" referred to is the place of entry and exit to a walled village or city where the elders of that city meet to dispense justice.

<sup>125</sup>James Luther Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.11.

<sup>126</sup>Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, BCBC, p.230.

courts or justice processes are explicitly described in Amos (2:7, 8; 5:10, 12, 15) and the general state of national injustice also is described (3:10; 5:7-24; and 6:12). Israel was guilty of an absence of what is “right” and what is “just”.<sup>127</sup>The God of Israel is the righteous Judge. The same God requires human judges to follow his example in acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty (Am 5:11-12). The guilty are liable to punishment as they deserve. Only a just society can guarantee basic human rights. Therefore, Amos pleads, “let justice roll on like a river” (Am 5:24).<sup>128</sup>

Instead of vindicating the needy, the court process turned aside justice to them and handed them over to the exploiters. The needy, the poor, and the oppressed in Amos are also the righteous. Their innocence was not protected by Israel’s legal practices. Justice was bought at the shrines of Bethel, Gilgal and other places where Yahweh is not truly worshipped.<sup>129</sup>If there is any hope of salvation from the approaching disasters, it is for those who restore justice at the gate. This shows how highly Amos regards this institution, because the corruption at the gate was the source of all evil.<sup>130</sup>A nation that no longer has even the decency to maintain a fair and disinterested legal system is a nation deserving destruction. Israel, at the height of its power and material prosperity, was so sunken in the depths of corruption. Amos saw Assyria as the instrument of God’s wrath upon Israel’s apostasy.<sup>131</sup>

### 3.3.2.2. Cultic Corruption

Amos denounced Israel’s idolatry because it was a fraudulent means of worship. It was a system of life which in contrast to covenant religion required no personal ethics thus allowing its practitioners to exploit others for their own gain. Idolatry was rampant in Israel and Judah which is a central factor in their apostasy (Am 2:4; 2:8). Idol worship was practiced at Bethel to which Amos was commissioned to go and preach a message of rebuke against transgression and iniquity and to warn of divine judgment. Because the worship was carried on in clear contradiction to the Mosaic covenant (Deut 12:1-9).<sup>132</sup> Consequently, the heterodox worship at Bethel or other covenantally illegal cult sites such

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<sup>127</sup>Douglas Stuart., *Hosea – Jonah*, p.292.

<sup>128</sup>E. E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.100.

<sup>129</sup>William Sanford Lasor et.al *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company , 1987) p.321.

<sup>130</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets– A Beginner’s Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, p.57.

<sup>131</sup>H.E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p.188.

<sup>132</sup>Douglas Stuart., *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.292.

as Gilgal and Beersheba is categorically condemned (Am 3:14; 4:4-5). The ethical ideals of the prophets were taken from life and tradition and impressed on the minds of the people by the moral instruction given at the sanctuaries in connection with the cult.<sup>133</sup>

The covenantal stipulations required loyalty to God and love toward one's fellow human being. Yet the idolatrous worship of their pagan neighbours had infiltrated the two kingdoms, producing strange syncretistic worship. Not only did the people disobey by worshiping idols, but they also violated the social legislation of the covenant. The worship of Yahweh had itself become corrupt, a religion content with external and perfunctory fulfilment of sacrificial duty and Sabbath commands.<sup>134</sup> The poor had to borrow money to pay as a fine for some crime. The greedy exploited them by keeping their garment overnight which the destitute needs for warmth or by using the money paid as fine for carousing instead of using it for restitution.<sup>135</sup>

Amos' oracles reflect the presence of plenty of regular, heartfelt worship experiences in the lives of the people (Am 5:21-28; 8:3). But in the absence of orthodox, covenantal religion and in the presence of idolatry and personal or social immorality, this religion was hateful to God (Am 5:21). Amos was not against the cult as some suggest. He did not reject worship as such, but worship without social justice. His criticism is directed against specific sins in the northern kingdom.<sup>136</sup> The cult was the means of keeping alive the historical memories and sustaining the moral values that constituted them as a community with certain definite characteristics and goals. Amos was convinced that it was no longer serving this purpose.<sup>137</sup> The Lord does not delight in sacrifices at the shrines as much as he delights in justice and righteousness in the courts and markets. Unless a proper relationship is maintained between the worshipper and God and the worshipper and his neighbours, sacrifices are meaningless (Am 5:21-24).<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>J. Lindblom. *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963) p.345.

<sup>134</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.382.

<sup>135</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel and Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, pp.142-143.

<sup>136</sup>William Sanford LaSor et.al *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987) p.325.

<sup>137</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp. *A History of Prophecy in Israel – From the Settlement in the Land to the Hellenistic Period*, p.95.

<sup>138</sup>E. E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.102.

### 3.3.2.3. Commercial Corruption

According to Amos, the transgressions which are inviting disaster on Israel are, not only injustices in the courts but also in the market places. Rich are taking advantage of the weak. They sell the needy for a pair of shoes, trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted. They enjoy their luxuries and are unconcerned about the miseries of the people.<sup>139</sup> Amos' charge on the rich merchants of Israel is that they are rebelling against the rule of God which appears also in oppression, which is the evident counterpart of inequity. Amos' charges are of definite cheating – the use of false measures and the selling of the sweepings of the wheat as good grain.<sup>140</sup> They totally preoccupied with commerce and trade, that communal times of rest and celebration are endured with regret. Their times of worship are taken up with calculating how they can increase their earnings and that measures they need to employ to improve their profits. They buy goods using overweight counterweights. They rig the scales in their favour. They buy people as readily as goods.<sup>141</sup> The urban merchants monopolized the market. They were able to sell to landless peasants at a high price. They had the resources for stockpiling grain, and in a time of poor crops, they were in a position to control the economy completely.<sup>142</sup> They created artificial scarcity and raised the prices. Using false measures, weights, and rigged scales, they cheated the peasants in the sale transaction.<sup>143</sup>

Business people were impatient with the religious holidays when commerce was suspended on the days of New Moon and Sabbath.<sup>144</sup> This is a different angle on the cultic life of Israel and shows more clearly why worship was no substitute for justice (Am 5:24). They were strict in their observation of Sabbath and New Moon, but eager to be able to cheat their customers once business can resume; in this way they “trample” (Am 8:4) on the poor.<sup>145</sup> The volume measure the *ephah*<sup>146</sup> – a dry measure of about 22 litres, was reduced, and the weight measure – the *shekel*,<sup>147</sup> a piece of metal of about 11 grams was

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<sup>139</sup>Hunter P. Mabry. *Christian Ethics – An Introductory Reader* (Serampore: Indian Theological Library, 1993) p.101.

<sup>140</sup>Norman H. Snaith. *Amos, Hosea and Micah* (London: The Epworth Press, 1956) p.46.

<sup>141</sup>A. R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, BCBC, p.348.

<sup>142</sup>J. L. Mays., *Amos – A Commentary*, p.143.

<sup>143</sup>D.N. Premnath. *Eighth Century Prophets – A Social Analysis*, p.159.

<sup>144</sup>New Moon and Sabbath were the two monthly holidays of pre-exilic times. After the exile the Sabbath became a weekly festival.

<sup>145</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.384.

<sup>146</sup>Ephah was a unit of dry measure, here the vessel in which a standard portion of grain was measured.

<sup>147</sup>Shekel was Israel's basic unit of weight.

enlarged so that it took more gold or silver to balance it on the scales. Moreover, the balance itself was bent out of kilter in favour of the seller so that the poor buyers ended by paying more than they should have for less than they thought they had bought. The ‘refuse’ of the wheat is the mixture of chaff and trash left after winnowing; it may have been re-mixed with the clean grain or sold such to the desperate poor in hard times.<sup>148</sup> People became commodities to be used for the advantage of the rich.

This corrupt practice was prohibited by commandments forbidding Israelites to own weights and measures of different kinds (Deut 25:13-16; Lev 19:35f). It was a breach of the commandment against stealing. In the excavations at Tirzah shops were found dating to the eighth century which had two sets of weights, one for buying and one for selling.<sup>149</sup> What appears to be progress and good business to the merchants was disobedience to Yahweh, and Yahweh was a determined protector of the poor.<sup>150</sup>

### 3.3.3. Day of the Lord

Israel had viewed the ‘Day of the Lord’ as the day of national vindication and judgment for her enemies. A popular belief among the Jews held that at some day in the future Yahweh would defeat all his enemies who are also Israel’s enemies and that would be a great day of rejoicing for the people of Israel.<sup>151</sup> Against this misguided theological security of the Northern Kingdom, Amos sought to point out its logical inconsistency. The Day of Yahweh would be a “Day of darkness” that is, destruction and exile. While the idea of judgment is incipient in the Day of Yahweh concept even in its popular interpretation, Amos lays stress upon the factor of judgment: Yahweh was a righteous God who demanded the same righteousness of his people.<sup>152</sup> So the Day of the Lord would mean judgment for Israel and God would bring enemy armies against his own people in judgment for their sin (Am 5:18-20).<sup>153</sup> When one forgets how to treat Yahweh, mistreatment of other people soon follows. Sacred and secular concerns cannot be separated in any effective way.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel and Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.220.

<sup>149</sup>J. L. Mays. *Amos– A Commentary*, p.144.

<sup>150</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, p.384.

<sup>151</sup>S. Kizhakkeyil, “Amos” in *JJSS*, Ed. By S. Kizhakkeyil Vol.VI (July-December 2006), No.2 p.203.

<sup>152</sup>Donald L. Williams. “The Theology of Amos” in *RevExp*, Vol.63, No.4, Fall (1966) p.398.

<sup>153</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp.383-84.

<sup>154</sup>Paul R. House. *Old Testament Theology* (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998) p.361.

Israel was just like the other nations and would fare no better on the day of his wrath. Day of the Lord played an important role in popular eschatology for the expectations of the nation were based upon false foundations. By contrast, the coming visitation of God would be a day of darkness rather than light, one of punishment and sorrow rather than reward and gladness.<sup>155</sup> There has been considerable debate about Amos' eschatology. Some identify the 'Day of the Lord' in Amos as a non-eschatological concept; others regard Amos as making an eschatological pronouncement. The answer to this question depends in part on how one understands 'eschatology'. If one understands it as a universal end time, Amos' use of Day of the Lord is not eschatological, but if one understands it as a reference to a definite, future divine intrusion in judgment, Amos' use is eschatological.

### 3.3.4. Ethical Monotheism

Amos' most significant contribution is his strong 'ethical monotheism' the concept that there was only one God who demanded ethical behaviour. God is absolute righteous and that he requires righteous conduct of his people. God's moral demands are imposed upon all people. He is the God of the nations. The prophet has moved beyond Israel's provincial morality toward a universal ethic. The God of righteousness, for Amos, is therefore the vindicator of universal moral laws, not simply the law-giver for the people of Israel.<sup>156</sup> In the past some scholars felt that it is a new religion that some prophets were introducing, but now many scholars reject that idea and accepting that their words are based rather on the covenant tradition.<sup>157</sup> Yahweh intervened and liberated the people of Israel from the Egyptian bondage and made a covenant at Mount Sinai, in which he revealed the basis of law which was to form the moral foundation of Israel's life.<sup>158</sup> Amos certainly did, referring often to an earlier tradition, and frequently using the covenant name 'Yahweh'.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup>R.K. Harrison. *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.887.

<sup>156</sup>Nolan P. Howington. "Toward an ethical understanding of Amos" in *RevExp*, Vol.63 No.4, Fall ( 1966) p.412

<sup>157</sup>William Sanford Lasor et.al *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.323.

<sup>158</sup>R.E. Clements. *Prophecy and Covenant* (London: SCM Press, 1965) p.17.

<sup>159</sup>"Yahweh" is named fifty- two times; "the Lord Yahweh" nineteen times; and "Yahweh God of Hosts," six times.

The prophet's demands for social justice are mostly a restatement of the ancient covenant laws, not simply applied to individuals, but understood as deciding even national destiny. The idea that Yahweh is God of all nations only extends the Abrahamic covenant to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). And the concept that Yahweh will punish other nations basically extends the Exodus tradition that Yahweh punished Egypt and its gods. A consequence of the fact that Yahweh had chosen Israel to be His people was that Yahweh made certain claims on them. Israel should be a holy people fulfilling Yahweh's holy will, expressed in justice and righteousness.<sup>160</sup> But when Israel failed to remain faithful to Yahweh and obey his moral commands, his love turned into wrath.

### **3.4. The Background of Hosea**

#### **3.4.1. Hosea the Man**

The book of Hosea contains little direct information about the man Hosea. His name appears only in the title of the book (1:1) and the heading (1:2a). He is introduced as son of Beeri. We do not have clear information about his home town and the occupation he was involved in when God called him to the prophetic mission. But it is apparent that he came from the kingdom of Israel and carried out his mission there.<sup>161</sup> R.K. Harrison opines that because of the various agricultural allusions in the book it could be maintained that Hosea was a farmer.<sup>162</sup> John W. Miller also suggests that probably he may be a small farmer from Shechem which was especially sacred to the Levitical priests. Miller further suggests that Hosea may have been a member of the Levitical groups who were living in scattered settlements in the north at this time.<sup>163</sup> He is numbered among the priests because of his intimate knowledge of religious affairs in the northern kingdom and his grave concern for the corruption of the priesthood (Hos 4:5-9).<sup>164</sup> Hosea married to a promiscuous woman in order to symbolize God's relationship with Israel.

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<sup>160</sup>J. Lindblom. *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, p.312.

<sup>161</sup>James Luther Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975) p.1.

<sup>162</sup>R.K. Harrison. *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.859. Hosea's peasant origin seems improbable in the light of his knowledge of history, his grasp of political affairs, and the elegant, well chosen imagery with which his style abounds. From the quality of his sayings, it is obvious that he was a man of ability and culture. However, it has been also assumed that he worked as a baker.

<sup>163</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, p.71.

<sup>164</sup>William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.331.

### 3.4.2. Hosea the Prophet

Hosea himself has not left us any personal report of his calling to the prophetic office. Hosea probably became a prophet while he was still young. He was the only non-Judean writing prophet. When Yahweh first spoke to Hosea (1:2) he was the recipient of four distinct revelations: first during the marriage itself, then on the occasion of the birth of each of three children, and again after his wife had left him for an adulterous affair. The implication is that these revelations thrust him into the prophetic role and were foundational for all his subsequent messages. Hosea knew the prophet as the primary instrument of Yahweh in his dealing with Israel.<sup>165</sup> Hosea's familiarity with the circumstances and topography of the northern kingdom (Hos 5:1; 6:8-9; 12:12) and the fact that he speaks of Israel's king as "our king" (Hos 7:5) are the further confirmation of this fact. Hosea first predicted and later witnessed the downfall and exile of his people Israel.<sup>166</sup> Hosea delivered his oracles probably in the capital city of Samaria and in the sanctuaries of Bethel and Gilgal like Amos.<sup>167</sup>

Hosea was God's messenger to a complacent, self-indulgent, and apostate people. He had a deep sense of mission, of belonging to the prophetic tradition. Hosea also well acquainted with the history and the geography of the northern kingdom.<sup>168</sup> The prophetic tradition goes back to Moses; it was through the traditions of this prophetic succession that Hosea received his understanding of Israel's history as composed of two distinct phases (wilderness and Canaan) and his conception of the prophet as the one who fought for Yahweh against Baal.<sup>169</sup> William Sanford Lasor and others maintain that Hosea's outstanding knowledge of both the political tensions of his own day and the great events of Israel's past; mark him as an unusual prophet. Like Isaiah he was extremely sensitive to political currents and analyzed their implications shrewdly. And also his outstanding literary gifts, particularly his figures of speech are the evidence that he was probably from the upper class.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>165</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, pp.72-74.

<sup>166</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp.176-177.

<sup>167</sup>James D. Newsome Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets*, p.32.

<sup>168</sup>William A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, p.105.

<sup>169</sup>J.L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.2.

<sup>170</sup>William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.332.

### 3.4.3. The Structure of the Book

The book of Hosea consists of two sections which are distinct in size and plan: chapters 1-3 are symbolic narrative, and chapters 4-14 consist of addresses by the prophet. In the first section the prophet's wife and her three children, together with the tragedy of the prophet's married life, are all symbolic of the relationship that existed between God and Israel. In the second section there is a collection of addresses consisting of appeals, denunciations, warnings, exhortations and promises.<sup>171</sup> According to Mays, the first section serves as a kind of introduction to the book. The collector had gathered the material which deals with the relation between Hosea's life, particularly his marriage and children, and his prophecy. Ch 3:1-5 is considered as autobiography written by Hosea himself. The salvation oracles in 2:16-23 contained themes which fit the marriage-children scheme. The second section, chs.4-14 lacks the clear plan of the first. Here the collector is working simply to arrange the rest of the material available to him and he is using common themes and catchwords to organize it.<sup>172</sup>

J. W. Miller in his analysis of the book observes that the absence of identifying phrases "Yahweh says this, "is unique to the first section. Only at the end of ch.11, we read "declares Yahweh" (Hos 11:11). This gives the impression that everything from 4:1 to 11:11 is one long Yahweh-speech. Miller further identifies the third section in the book. The closing off phrase at 11:11 indicates the possibility that an initial collection of Hosea's words may have ended at this point and that 12:1 a third collection begins. The self-disclosure in 12:1 suggests this as well. In summary, there appear to be not just two main divisions to this book, but three: Chs.1-3, 4-11, and 12-14. It has been observed that each of these begins with words of warning, but concludes with words of hope.<sup>173</sup>

### 3.4.4. The Historical Setting of the Book

Hosea's prophetic ministry began late in the reigns of Jeroboam II in the north and Uzziah in the south and ended early in Hezekiah's rule of the south. From the historical record in 2 Kings Chs 14-17 it would appear that Hosea exercised his prophetic ministry in a chaotic period, filled with disorder, bloodshed and strife. Under Jeroboam II Israel had

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<sup>171</sup>Hobart E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.172.

<sup>172</sup>James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, pp.15-16.

<sup>173</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, pp.66-67..

been prosperous and successful, but the sin of idolatry remained. Though there was political stability and peace, impiety, oppression, carnal luxury and moral and spiritual degeneracy were found everywhere.<sup>174</sup> This stability and peace was shattered around 746 B.C. when Jeroboam died and was succeeded by his son Zechariah. After a reign of only six months, the new king was assassinated by Shallum, a army officer. Within a month however, Shallum himself was killed by Menahem who placed himself upon Israel's throne (745 – 738 B.C.E.).<sup>175</sup> Menahem was succeeded by his son Pekahiah in 738 B.C.E., however Pekahiah was soon murdered by one of his officers, Pekah (737-732 B.C.E.) who placed himself upon the throne (2 Kings 15:25). Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea who usurped the throne and at first paid tribute to the Assyrians. But later Hoshea made an alliance with Egypt and discontinued the yearly tribute which was resulted in an invasion by Shalmaneser V, successor to Tiglath-pileser. Hoshea was taken captive, and after a siege of three years Samaria fell into the hands of Sargon in 722 B.C.E. The story of this rapid succession of kings is briefly told in 2 Kings.15:8-16. So the post-Jeroboam II period saw a renewed, powerful, and aggressive Assyria, first led by Tiglath Pileser III (745-727 B.C.E.), then by Shalmaneser V, who eventually began the conflict that led to the total defeat and annexation of the north to the Assyrian Empire in 722 B.C.E.<sup>176</sup>

In summary, from the time of Jeroboam's death in 743 B.C.E. until the destruction of Israelite kingdom in 722 B.C.E. six kings reigned. Four of these kings were assassinated by their successors.<sup>177</sup> Vast numbers of the remaining tribes of Israel were deported to Mesopotamia. Their places were repopulated by foreigners brought in by the Assyrians from Babylon and other places (2 Kings 17:1-24). Such was the tumultuous period in which Hosea prophesied. The moral condition of Israel was exceedingly corrupt. The priests encouraged the people in their sins (4:6-9; 5:1; 6:9). The kings set an example of drunkenness and debauchery (7:3-5). The people confounded the worship of Yahweh with Baal; the nation rejected God and trusted in foreign alliances (8:9-10). Moral and spiritual declension, political chaos, idolatrous worship, and apostasy from Yahweh characterized the nation when the Lord moved Hosea to pronounce His warnings, rebukes and prophecies to Israel.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.177.

<sup>175</sup>James D. Newsome Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets*, pp30-31.

<sup>176</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.356.

<sup>177</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, p.75.

<sup>178</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p p.177-178.

### 3.4.5. Theology of Hosea

Theologically the book of Hosea is the most important of the twelve prophets. Like the other pre-exilic prophetic books, the book of Hosea contains a searching moral critique of the Israelite community, especially of the ruling class and the cultic leadership.<sup>179</sup>

The central thought of Hosea concerns God's covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai. God loved the people and called them his "son" (Hos 11:1 cf. Ex4:22). Through the passing years, however, they had wandered away from God falling into deep sin breaking the covenant (Hos 11:2). Hosea gave more attention to this matter and told of God's love and patience with Israel in her sin (Hos 11:1-4; 14:1-9) in wanting her to return to him. He employed the forceful illustration of the unhappy marriage relationship he experienced with his own wife Gomer (Hos 1:2-3). She proved unfaithful to him, and he told Israel that the people had been unfaithful to God. Hosea's taking Gomer back after she had left him further parallels God's frequent taking Israel back after her many occasions of waywardness.<sup>180</sup> Hosea not only warned the people of coming punishment he included a note of joy that punishment would be followed by a glad time of restoration.<sup>181</sup> But this is conditional; only when Israel surrenders to God and takes refuge in him. The holy God exalted in his majesty above all human thoughts, who nevertheless strives in judgment and grace for the turning of his people to his saving love. This is the real content of the theology of Hosea.<sup>182</sup>

Hosea's theology is a very articulate and specific understanding of Yahweh as God of Israel and Israel as the people of Yahweh. They are inseparably related. Yahweh is known through his acts for Israel and his declaration of his will for them. Israel is defined, identified, and judged in the context of those deeds and instructions. This history of Yahweh's relationship with Israel is the sphere within which the thought of Hosea moves.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup>James M. Ward. *Thus Says the Lord – The Message of the Prophets*, p.215.

<sup>180</sup>Leon J. Wood. "Hosea" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Ed.by Frank E. Gaebelein, Vol.7 (Michigan: Regency Reference Library, 1985) pp.166-167.

<sup>181</sup>Leon J. Wood. "Hosea" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.167.

<sup>182</sup>Walther Eichrodt. "The Holy One in your Midst: The Theology of Hosea" in *Int*, Vol.15, No.3 (1961) p.273.

<sup>183</sup>James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.7.

### **3.5. The Message of Hosea**

#### **3.5.1. Hosea and the Covenant**

As with all the prophets Mosaic covenant underlies and motivates much of Hosea's message. Understanding the message of the book of Hosea depends upon understanding the Sinai covenant. The book contains a series of blessings and curses announced for Israel by God through Hosea. Hosea's task was to warn that Yahweh intended to enforce the terms of his covenant. Israel was continuing a history of covenant breaking, and the Lord had determined to move against his people by unleashing the punishments specified in the law.<sup>184</sup> Raymond B. Dillard comments that Hosea will be explicit about the role of the covenant in his message. The Israelites will experience judgment because they have broken the covenant (Hos 6:7; 8:1).<sup>185</sup> The kings were held accountable for lack of justice and covenant compassion in the land (Hos 10:4).

God loves Israel and expected them to love him in the same manner as they are bound together in the covenant relationship.<sup>186</sup> "In the covenant relationship Israel's love for God had frequently wavered. Repeatedly God had tried to turn his people from their erring ways by sending prophets to rebuke them. At other times he had visited them with calamities and judgments. Still they persisted in substituting offerings for true love and loyalty."<sup>187</sup>

#### **3.5.2. Hosea's Marriage**

Hosea's personal experience with the 'prostituting' Gomer was a profound message he could deliver about Yahweh's desire and ability to heal and love Israel (Hos 14:4). Hosea's marriage with Gomer is used by God to indicate both his disgust and love for his covenant people. Hosea was commanded by God to marry a woman whose unfaithfulness represented Israel's infidelity to God. Hosea was the first to draw a relationship between human marriage and the divine-human covenant which was a close one that continued throughout the Scripture. There are only two relationships that are exclusive: marriage and covenant. Gomer's sexual promiscuity paralleled the Israelites' religious

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<sup>184</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, pp.6-7.

<sup>185</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.360.

<sup>186</sup>E.E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.105.

<sup>187</sup>Samuel J. Schultz. *The Old Testament Speaks* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970) p.389.

promiscuity.<sup>188</sup> God commanded Hosea to marry an adulterous wife for a reason: “because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord” (Hos 1:2).<sup>189</sup> God extended his love toward Israel again and again, though she continually proved unfaithful to him.<sup>190</sup> Hence God could not maintain a one-sided love throughout history.<sup>191</sup> Israel chose a different lifestyle that encouraged greed, passion, riches, and disregard for human beings. They disregarded Yahweh’s revelation as alien and adapted the ways of the nations. Hosea repeatedly condemned the people for forsaking their allegiance to Yahweh for an adulterous commitment to national, economic, and social interests (Hos 4:1-2; 12:8).<sup>192</sup> The theme of the marriage with an unworthy woman and of her forgiveness suggests the love and the depth of feeling which bind Yahweh to his people.<sup>193</sup>

### 3.5.3. Violence

Violence is one theme that is focused on repeatedly in the messages of Hosea. “They break all bounds and blood touches blood” (Hos 4:2). The Hebrew really means “bloodshed”. In support of the accusation that Israel has broken the covenant, Hosea now cites six crimes – cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery. Cursing means wishing evil against someone and it refers to the breach of the second commandment. Lying denotes dishonesty in interpersonal relations, in legal testimony and business dealings.<sup>194</sup> Murder is premeditated violence. The act of killing pollutes the land. When life becomes cheap, all other values diminish. The meaning of being human is lost; killing reduces human existence to the level of beasts of prey. Blood spilled in violence calls out to God from the ground (Gen 4:10-12). Theft is a threat to livelihood. And it refers to the breach of the eighth commandment. Adultery is violations of family intimacy. It addresses the institution of marriage which is a covenant. To commit adultery is to distort the uniqueness of God’s election and call of Israel.<sup>195</sup> These crimes are not simply breaches of general morality, they are acts prohibited by the normative tradition of Israel which

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<sup>188</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.361.

<sup>189</sup>E. E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.103.

<sup>190</sup>Leon J. Wood. “Hosea” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Ed.by Frank E. Gaebelein, Vol.7 (Michigan: Regency Reference Library, 1985) p.166.

<sup>191</sup>Loring W. Batten, “Hosea’s Message and Marriage” in *JBL*, Vol.48, No.3-4 (1929) p.263.

<sup>192</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, p.110.

<sup>193</sup>J. Alberto Soggin. *Introduction to the Old Testament – From its origins to the closing of the Alexandrian Canon*, p.295.

<sup>194</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, pp.75-76.

<sup>195</sup>Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, pp.92-93.

summarizes the will of Yahweh under the covenant.<sup>196</sup> This was the feature of Israelite society with a long history to it according to Hosea. The bloodbath perpetrated by Jehu at Jezreel is one example among many. This violent side of Israelite society is especially manifest in the bloody coups perpetrated by its rulers. Violence was rife elsewhere as well. A murder by priests on the road to Shechem is mentioned in Hos 6:9, and in 7:1 he speaks of houses being broken into by thieves.<sup>197</sup> Shechem was one of the cities of refuge where men who had accidentally killed someone could find safety, yet the gangs of priests there murdered such refugees or pilgrims.<sup>198</sup> This violence by the people of Israel and the priests clearly shows human rights violations. Crimes like stealing, murder are denying the rights of the people to lead a peaceable life. Surprisingly priests also are involved in this violence. They murdered the travellers on the road to Shechem. This way they are denying the freedom to live.

### **3.5.4. The Corruption of the Priests**

The priests were special target for Hosea. He laid much of the blame for Israel's cultic misunderstanding and malpractice at the feet of the priests. The priests had failed in their responsibility to mediate the moral and religious precepts of Yahwism and used their office to promote their own interests.<sup>199</sup> They were as corrupt as the people. Having neglected their duty to teach the law, they were chiefly responsible for Israel's defection (Hos 4:4-9). Their sacrifices and libations were meaningless because the terms of the covenant – righteousness and justice were ignored. Pagan practices were observed side by side with divinely established forms of worship.<sup>200</sup> Hosea's firm conviction is that priests are responsible for the widespread corruption in Israel. This seems to be the point of his analysis in 4:4-9 where a particular priest or priesthood is addressed the one at Bethel. There he charges that "you stumble in broad daylight" in that "you have rejected knowledge and forgotten the teaching (*torah*) of your God". So Yahweh shall reject them from priesthood since they have forgotten the teaching of their God. This is the core of Hosea's analysis of the spiritual decline of his people. The priests in charge of the official

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<sup>196</sup>James Luther Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.64.

<sup>197</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, p.83.

<sup>198</sup>Norman H. Snaith. *Amos, Hosea and Micah* (London: Epworth Press, 1956) p.67.

<sup>199</sup>James M. Ward. "The Message of the Prophet Hosea" in *Int*, Vol.23, No.4 Oct (1969) p.393.

<sup>200</sup>William Sanford Lasor et al. *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.343.

shrines were responsible to teach the people about the knowledge of God<sup>201</sup> which might have prevented their moral decay. But unfortunately the priests themselves have rejected the knowledge of God. There is no loyalty, no faithful love, no knowledge of God in the country, only lying, murder, theft, adultery and violence, bloodshed after bloodshed. This is the violation of a cluster of decalogue-type laws. Hosea believes that real understanding of the basic covenantal stipulations is missing in the Israelite community. People were not willing to be loyal to the covenantal stipulations. The reason for missing this loyalty is that priests are busy in sacrifices instead of teaching. So priests are fostering 'cheap grace' rather than knowledge of God that leads to right living. To Hosea this degradation of the priestly office was the ultimate tragedy of his people.<sup>202</sup>

### **3.5.5. Judgment and Salvation**

Hosea has a reputation as "the death-bed prophet of Israel" because he was the last of the writing prophets to address the northern kingdom before the Assyrian onslaught. His task was to warn the people of Israel with the words of judgment (Hos 6:5) and to call them back to the knowledge of God (Hos 2:5 – 8; 5:4; 6:3) through repentance and covenant renewal. He was a prophet of 'eventual hope' (Hos 2:14-23) and 'immediate doom' (Hos 5:8-9), given his understanding of covenant blessings and curses as outlined in the Torah.<sup>203</sup>

Hosea's message reveals the emotions of God who is free to judge and yet bound by his love for his people. Israel had hurt Yahweh by her refusal to learn from God's goodness. His love for Israel must lead to judgment. Judgment is an act of love, because he seeks a response from his people. Yahweh, Israel's Protector, Lover, Divine Warrior, and Saviour would become Israel's greatest enemy.<sup>204</sup> From the foundation of covenant, which is symbolized by marriage, flows God's judgment of a disobedient Israel and also the hope of God's future salvation. Israel's disobedience manifested itself in many ways but underlying it all was their apostasy. They left the worship of the true God and

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<sup>201</sup>Hosea repeatedly traces Israel's spiritual and moral problems to their lack of knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is not merely knowing about God; it is being properly related to him in love and obedience. Israel did not need more information about God but to respond fully to what was known.

<sup>202</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, pp.83-84.

<sup>203</sup>Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p.360.

<sup>204</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, p.112.

substituted with idols in his place in particular, it is the leaders of Israel – the priests (Hos 4:6; 6:9), the prophets (Hos 4:5), and the political rulers (Hos 5:1; 7:3-7). Thus God threatens to punish them severely. Hosea uses a metaphor taking from the historical traditions of Israel and describes the coming judgment as returning to the wilderness. They will once again wander away from God. In historical retrospect the immediate fulfilment of his prophetic word came first when the northern tribes were defeated by Assyrian forces in 722 B.C.E. and then in 586 B.C.E. when Babylon completely subdued Judah, destroyed the temple, and placed most of the survivors in exile.<sup>205</sup> Israel became like a ‘spreading vine’ from which the Lord expected love, devotion, and righteousness, but instead Israel produced a long history of infidelity, oppression, and injustice which led to paganism (Hos 10:1). Judgment was both imminent and just, because of the people’s continual breaking of the stipulations of the covenant (Hos 12:14). They had broken the covenant of the Lord and had to suffer the consequences (Hos 5:5; 6:4). A manipulative way of life leads to rejection of the revelation of God and bears the fruit of divine curse.<sup>206</sup>

However, Hosea’s message of judgment gives way to a note of hope for the future. In one of the most profound passages of the book, Hosea describes God’s inner turmoil concerning his people (Hos 11:8-9). God will not leave his people under judgment and in exile forever. He will cause Israel to experience a second exodus (Hos 2:14-15). In the end, he will heal Israel of the wounds caused by their disobedience and re-establish them in the land (14:1-9).<sup>207</sup>

### **3.5.6. The Love of God**

Hosea has rightly been called “the prophet of love in the Old Testament. God’s love for Israel is expressed as *hesed* in the Old Testament. This Hebrew term more clearly expresses the unique nature of God’s love for Israel than any other. The root meaning suggests “steadfastness, mercy, and loving kindness”. The usage of the term in the Old Testament indicates that it is always operative within the covenant, and never means simply “kindness” in general to all without distinction. Both parties of the covenant were

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<sup>205</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.361. See also Willem A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, p.112.

<sup>206</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, p.111.

<sup>207</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp.361-362.

to observe loyalty and steadfast faithfulness. *Hesed* became the binding relationship in the covenant. *Hesed* with respect to God's relationship to Israel might be translated as "covenant love". It was *hesed* that the Lord wanted from Israel, rather than mere outward conformity to religious ritual (Hos 6:6). Israel's unfaithfulness is described as a violation of the covenant relationship (Hos 6:7). Hence the prophet exhorts the people to maintain *hesed*. Hosea's own experience with Gomer was illustrative of God's steadfast love for Israel. God's *hesed* for Israel is eternal, steadfast and unchanging.<sup>208</sup>

The tender love and mercy of Yahweh in forbearing with his covenant people is woven throughout the book. This is the classic message of Hosea. God weeps over his people like a mother (Hos 11:8). Israel's early history reveals God's compassion, care and love. He brought them out of Egypt by Moses (Hos 12:13), satisfied their needs in the desert (Hos 9:10), gave them his revelation (Hos 8:12; 12:13) and brought them into Canaan. Hosea employed the Exodus wilderness motif for four purposes. First, it established Yahweh's love, compassion and fidelity. Second, Israel rebelled against the God who loved her. He elected her, dealt kindly with her, and set her up to be his royal nation. Third, Yahweh's promise of the renewal of his love, compassion, and fidelity will be like second Exodus. He will appear to them again after their judgment and deliver them from the nations. Fourth, the Lord had revealed himself as holy and had consecrated Israel to be holy (Ex 31:13; Lev 11:45). Hosea's language of judgment and salvation presents the hearer with a God who loves even in judgment.<sup>209</sup>

### **3.6. The Background of Isaiah**

#### **3.6.1. Isaiah, the Man**

Isaiah son of Amoz lived in Jerusalem and prophesied to Judah in eighth century B.C. at a crucial period of the nation's history (740 – 700 B.C.E.) during an era of great political turmoil (740 – 700 B.C.E.). Isaiah was married to a "prophetess" (8:3) and they were the parents of two sons who bore the theologically symbolic names of "A Remnant Will Return" (*Shear-jashub*, 7:3) and "The Spoil Speeds The Prey Hastes" (*Maher-shalal-hash-baz* 8:1). There is a tradition that Isaiah was martyred by being cut in two during the

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<sup>208</sup>H.E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 174.

<sup>209</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, pp.114-115.

bloody purges of King Manasseh.<sup>210</sup> He must have been a well-educated student of international affairs who spent most of his time in the city of Jerusalem where he was in touch with the national and foreign affairs.<sup>211</sup> From the substance of the book we can infer that Isaiah was a man of some influence in the royal court of Jerusalem.

### **3.6.2. Isaiah, the Prophet**

Isaiah has always been considered as the greatest of all the Hebrew literary prophets and is known as the evangelist of the Old Testament. The name Isaiah was symbolic of his message since it signifies “Yahweh is salvation” or “Yahweh saves.” Isaiah’s father Amoz, according to a Jewish tradition, was a brother of king Amaziah, which would make Isaiah a cousin to king Uzziah.<sup>212</sup> Isaiah’s work appears to have been chiefly in Judah and Jerusalem (1:1). He had intimate access to the royal court of both Ahaz and Hezekiah. The call of Isaiah is recorded in chapter 6 instead of chap.1. Perhaps he wishes to portray the extreme sinfulness of his generation and thus provide the reader with a better understanding of his reluctance in accepting the responsibility placed upon him in his prophetic ministry.<sup>213</sup> In his call experience, Isaiah affirmed that God’s glory which is the symbol of God’s presence, filled the whole earth, and yet he sensed the presence of God and its significance for him in a distinctive way.<sup>214</sup> In this experience Isaiah came to know Yahweh as the ‘Holy One of Israel’ and he realized that he was a sinner and man of unclean lips but he also had the cleansing experience. He was called to be a prophet to the people who are sinners and unclean.<sup>215</sup> Miller presents a summary of Isaiah’s call. He says Isaiah in his vision, experiences three convictions – Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, is truly on the throne of the universe, the sinful condition of the people is so great that there is no hope for reform, and finally, not all is lost he heard Yahweh talking about remnant.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>210</sup>James D. Newsome Jr. *The Hebrew Prophets*, pp.62-63.

<sup>211</sup>Gleason L. Archer, Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p.317.

<sup>212</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, pp.191, 195.

<sup>213</sup>Samuel J. Schultz. *The Old Testament Speaks* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970) p.305.

<sup>214</sup>James M. Ward. *The Prophets* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982) p.51.

<sup>215</sup>E. E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, pp.108-109.

<sup>216</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner’s Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, p.100.

### 3.6.3. The Structure of the Book

The book of Isaiah is one of the most comprehensive of all Old Testament books. The unity of the book of Isaiah is a problem and has been a subject of much discussion over the years by both critics and defenders of its integrity. The question is whether Isaiah wrote the entire book that bears his name. There is no doubt in relation to the historicity of Isaiah, and certainly part of the book was written by him. The critical school with one voice denies the unity of Isaiah, rejecting the Isaianic authorship of chapters 40-66 by assigning them to an unknown author or authors living near the close of the Babylonian exile. Most critical treatments of the book of Isaiah in the twentieth century have separated it into two parts: First (Chs 1-39) and Second (Chs 40-66). Criticism designates chapters 40-66 as second Isaiah or Deutero Isaiah; because these chapters presuppose the exilic setting. Internal evidence indicates that the prophecy (Chs 40-66) was written from the stand point of the exile and return.<sup>217</sup>

Another most popular analysis of the book of Isaiah is the tripart division. The modern scholarship has been able to identify two additional prophetic personalities beyond that of Isaiah of Jerusalem who made significant contributions to the Isaiah tradition and to the literature which represents it. Because we do not know their names, they are referred to simply as the Second Isaiah and the Third Isaiah.<sup>218</sup> According to the modern scholarship, the first Isaiah or Proto-Isaiah who is known as Isaiah of Jerusalem consists of chs.1- 39 and the second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah consists of chs.40 – 55 is attributed to an anonymous author who lived after 580 B.C.E. This writer lived among the captives in Babylonia and reflected exilic conditions in his writings. The third Isaiah or Trito-Isaiah consists of chs.56-66 is attributed to a writer who depicts conditions in Judah during the fifth century B.C.E.<sup>219</sup> The historical allusions in 1-39 are pre-exilic (before 587 B.C.E.), while those in 40-66 are exilic and post-exilic. Chapter 39 brings the first part of the book to a close and points forward to the exile, while chapter 40 is a new beginning, set at the end of the exile.<sup>220</sup> The differences between the prophecies of Isaiah 40 – 55 and Isaiah 56 – 66 reflect the differences between the experience of captivity in Babylon, and the

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<sup>217</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p.196.

<sup>218</sup>James D. Newsome Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets*, p.58.

<sup>219</sup>Samuel J. Schultz. *The Old Testament Speaks*, pp.302-303.

<sup>220</sup>James M. Ward. *Thus Says the Lord – The Message of the Prophets*, p.37.

experience of all that was involved in the return to Jerusalem.<sup>221</sup> This discussion suggests that the book of Isaiah preserves the legacy of not just one, but three major prophetic figures, each of whom lived and prophesied during a quite distinct and unique time period.<sup>222</sup>

#### **3.6.4. The Historical Setting of the Book**

Isaiah began his prophetic ministry in the year the king Uzziah died (740 B.C.E. – 6:1) and continued through the reigns of Jothan, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1). During the early part of this period both Judah and Israel were politically and economically prosperous. Under Uzziah, Judah had attained an unusually high degree of prosperity. Israel, under the reign of Jeroboam II had recovered most of the territory formerly subject to Solomon. The material prosperity of the two kingdoms produced the usual social and moral evils, as well as religious declension, which inevitably results under such circumstances. The wealth and luxury which resulted from their economic prosperity produced an attitude of self-confidence and careless security in the two capitals. Social and economic conditions in this period were greatly disturbed. The political chaos must certainly have been reflected in the breakdown of justice and righteousness that Amos and Hosea reflect.<sup>223</sup> Such was the situation, when Isaiah appeared upon the scene. Isaiah's mission was principally concerned with the rebuke of Judah for her iniquities, oppressions, injustices, foreign alliances and religious hypocrisy. He boldly denounced the sins of the people (Ch 1) and rulers (Isa 7:13) and predicted the overthrow of both kingdoms at the hands of Assyria and Babylon.<sup>224</sup> It was during Isaiah's ministry in 722 B.C.E. that the neighbouring state of Israel was defeated in war by the Assyrians and its history brought to an end.<sup>225</sup>

The book of Isaiah is set against the background of the second half of the eighth century B.C.E. Three grave crises arose during Isaiah's ministry, namely, the Syro-Ephraimitic war in 734 B.C.E.; the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E.; and the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. (see discussion under "The significance of eighth century B.C.E. in Israel"). The historical background for the period of Isaiah is set forth in 2 Kings

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<sup>221</sup>David F. Hinson. *The Books of the Old Testament* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995) pp.134-138.

<sup>222</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, p.92.

<sup>223</sup>John D.W. Watts. *Isaiah 1 – 33* (WBC, Vol.24, Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1985) p.10.

<sup>224</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p.195.

<sup>225</sup>Peter C. Craigie. *The Old Testament – Its Background, Growth, & Content*, p.150.

Chs 15-21 and 2 Chr. Chs 26-33.<sup>226</sup>Isaiah lived during the period of the ascendancy of the Assyrian Empire. Isaiah's prophetic activities were closely intertwined with momentous political and religious events.

### **3.6.5. The Theology of Isaiah**

Many regard Isaiah as the theologian of the Old Testament. His description of God and the divine attributes and acts in history are profound. Isaiah is perhaps best known for his unsurpassed view of sovereign, almighty God. The prophet's presentation of God is not the abstract description but rather his personal encounter with God at the beginning of his ministry. For Isaiah, God is the "Holy One of Israel" who possesses absolute sovereign authority over His covenant people and the nations of the earth and intervenes in history to accomplish His purposes. According to Isaiah, several key figures would emerge in the outworking of God's plan for His people, the most important being the ideal Davidic ruler (Messiah) and the Suffering Servant of the Lord. The theological message of the book may be summarized as follows: The Lord will fulfil His ideal for Israel by purifying His people through judgment and then restoring them to a renewed covenantal relationship. He will establish Jerusalem (Zion) as the center of His worldwide kingdom and reconcile hostile nations to Himself.<sup>227</sup>Isaiah learned about God – his holiness, his transcendent separateness, and his incomparable majesty and character. He also learned that God is King, enthroned above all, eternal and deathless. He is also the Lord Almighty, so that the authority of the supreme King is wedded to an omnipotence that enables him to carry out his every purpose.<sup>228</sup>

J. D. Newsome Jr. arranges the theology of Isaiah systematically. According to him - Yahweh is a holy God who demands justice and righteousness from the people; sin is rebellion against Yahweh; out of love Yahweh calls his people to repentance and faith; the consequence of sin and rebellion against Yahweh is judgment; beyond judgment a remnant will be saved; and finally, a Messiah of the line of David will be raised up by God.<sup>229</sup>According to Dillard and Longman III, Isaiah is not a theologian of the abstract; he

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<sup>226</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, pp.195-196.

<sup>227</sup>Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. "A Theology of Isaiah" in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, Ed.by Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991) p.305.

<sup>228</sup>Geoffrey W. Grogan. "Isaiah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol.6, Gen.Ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Regency Reference Library, 1986)p.12

<sup>229</sup>James D. Newsome Jr., *The Hebrew Prophets*, pp.69-71.

applies his apprehension of God's nature and purpose to the practical issues confronting Israel. Several themes predominate his utterances – God as the Holy One of Israel; God as Saviour and Redeemer; The Remnant theme, The Servant of the Lord; The Spirit of the Lord; and finally God's Rule over History.<sup>230</sup> J. N. Oswalt sketches an outline of the leading ideas in the book of Isaiah. According to him, the thought of Isaiah can be organized under four heads: God, Humanity and the World, Sin, Redemption. These topics may overlap somewhat, but wherever possible this overlap can be minimized.<sup>231</sup>

### **3.7. The Message of Isaiah**

#### **3.7.1. The Holiness of God**

The stress on the holiness of God runs right through the book of Isaiah especially in the phrase “the Holy One of Israel”.<sup>232</sup> Isaiah refers to the Lord twenty five times as the “Holy One of Israel”. He emphasized the absoluteness of divine holiness. In his very first chapter, he challenges his sinful and corrupt people. Isaiah very frequently refers the Lord as the ‘Holy One of Israel’ a title used by Isaiah to God in the Old Testament. This title not only shows Isaiah's emphasis on the holiness of God, but also reflects the book's concern over the seriousness of Israel's offenses against that God.<sup>233</sup> Holiness is a basic attribute of Yahweh. Holiness means separation from evil, sin, unclean, unholy and unrighteous ways. The Hebrew word *qadosh* means, to set apart to, dedicated to sacred purposes; holy, clean, morally or ceremonially pure. Snaith contends that *qadosh* means ‘set part to’ rather than ‘set apart from’, and Israel is “set apart to” Yahweh.<sup>234</sup> Holiness is separation from everything unclean, profane and defiling and at the same time, it is dedicated to everything that is holy and pure. Since we belong to God, we are to be separated from sin and evil in the world and be joined to God in holiness and righteousness. Righteousness consists of justice, mercy, truth and peace. Isaiah's theology of holiness graphically pictures the concepts and themes that he uses, e.g. God using burning live-coal to touch the lips and cleanse him before commissioning him.<sup>235</sup> Yahweh is not only the Holy One of Israel but also the ‘Holy One’ in relation to his redemptive activity. The holiness of Yahweh is not only pertinent to the redemption of the people of

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<sup>230</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp.276-280.

<sup>231</sup>John N. Oswalt. *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39* NICOT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986) p.32.

<sup>232</sup>H.L. Ellison. *The Old Testament Prophets – Studies in the Hebrew Prophets*, p.49.

<sup>233</sup>Andrew E. Hill & John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p.325.

<sup>234</sup>N.H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: 1944) p.30.

<sup>235</sup>E. E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.107.

Israel but also has eschatological significance. The holiness of God demands personal holiness on the part of his people. Against this background we have to consider the ethical character of holiness. Although no moral or ethical quality is implied in the earliest uses of the word 'holy', certainly by the Mosaic period a moral or ethical connotation was intended. At Sinai Yahweh said to Moses: 'You (Israel) shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6)'. This relationship required fidelity to Yahweh their God and obedience to his moral code as specified in the covenant.<sup>236</sup>

In the temple vision, Isaiah realized that the reason for Yahweh's holiness was not a cultic deficiency on the prophet's part, but Yahweh's moral perfection over against Isaiah's own uncleanness (Isa 6:5). His confession of unclean lips did not restrict his consciousness of guilt to his speech<sup>237</sup> alone but to his life, and in Isaiah's view, the life of his people also as their life was unclean.<sup>238</sup> The idea of holiness was deeply impressed upon Isaiah's mind after seeing the vision. His ethics has this emphasis on holiness. The vision has a lasting impression on him and he personally came to know Yahweh as the "Holy One of Israel".<sup>239</sup>

### **3.7.2. The Day of Wrath**

The wrath of God is a dominant word in the oracles of Isaiah spoken in a series of woe and doom oracles. Those oracles are found in 2:6-22; 5:8-24; and 9:8-10:4 each of which is a serial composition. More sombre is 9:8-10:4 which denounces the northern kingdom of Israel for oppression of the poor and needy (10:1-2). Wrath is not primarily a sentiment attributed to God, but a reality of history, the fateful progress of injustice and oppression in social relations and international affairs.<sup>240</sup> This injustice and oppression in social relations is the violation of human rights which attracts the wrath of God. Amassing wealth by the rich through illegal means is the reason for the unjust society. This greed of the rich leads to the oppression of the poor and needy.

Isaiah's supreme expression of wrath is the poem on the day of Yahweh in 2:6-22. The objects of that wrath are human arrogance and its manifestations: militarism, amassing

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<sup>236</sup>William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.382.

<sup>237</sup>To an ancient Israel, speech was never mere words. It was the manifestation of his whole being.

<sup>238</sup>James M. Ward. *Amos & Isaiah – Prophets of the Word of God* (Ashville: Abingdon Press, 1969) p.153.

<sup>239</sup>E. E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p108.

<sup>240</sup>James M. Ward. *Thus Says the Lord – The Message of the Prophets*, p.70.

of wealth, and idolatry. God's righteousness is expressed in wrath against a godless and unjust society. Apart from the reference to the house of Jacob in the first line, this scene involves not only Israelites, but human beings generally. Thus the day of wrath is universal.<sup>241</sup> The oracles against the nations apply God's judgment to Babylon (13:1-14:23), Assyria (14:24-32), Moab (15:1-16:14), Damascus (17:1-14), Cush/Egypt (18:1-20:6), Edom (21:11-12), Arabia (21:13-17), Jerusalem (22:1-25), and Tyre (23:1-18) as representative of all the kingdoms of the world.<sup>242</sup> Isaiah believed that he lived in an age of wrath and his oracles were heavily weighted with moral accusation and divine judgment.

### 3.7.3. Injustice and Oppression

Isaiah prophesied that, since God is righteous, he will certainly punish Israel for her moral unfaithfulness and social injustice. Isaiah emphasized the ethical demands of God upon his people. His ethics has been called "ethical theism" because he pioneered the idea of God in ethical terms and that worship of God should not be separated from right conduct. The God of Israel is pure and righteous and he judges the sins and wickedness of people.<sup>243</sup> Isaiah centers his critique on the powerful, and his verdict is determined by the litmus test of their treatment of the most vulnerable elements of society—the poor, the orphan, the widow.<sup>244</sup> Isaiah condemned the authorities in Jerusalem as 'rulers of Sodom' (Isa 1:10). Because like Sodom, Jerusalem has become a place of suffering, oppression, robbery, corruption and violence – instead of justice and righteousness that used to dwell in her (Isa 1:21-23). Isaiah also denounces the judicial authorities by legislating oppression by decree; that is they were passing laws that would make their exploitative practices technically legal (Isa 10:1-2).<sup>245</sup>

Through Isaiah God demanded equality in the administration of justice (10:1-4). Along with his contemporaries Amos and Micah, Isaiah highlighted the social and economic injustice of his day. This is the gross violation of human rights. The poor were exploited. The rich accumulated the fields and houses (Isa 5:8); controlled judicial procedures (Isa 1:23; 5:23; 29:21); made unjust laws and deprived the poor of their rights

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<sup>241</sup>James M. Ward. *Thus Says the Lord – The Message of the Prophets*, p.72.

<sup>242</sup>G.R. Hamborg. "Reasons for Judgment in the Oracles Against the Nations of the Prophet Isaiah," *VT* Vol.31, No.2 (1981) pp.145-159.

<sup>243</sup>E. E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.110.

<sup>244</sup>James A. Rimbach. "Those Lively Prophets: Isaiah ben Amoz" in *CurTM*, Vol.5, No.1, Feb (1978) p.47.

<sup>245</sup>Christopher J.H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Secunderabad: OM Authentic Media, 2004) p.273.

and oppressed them (Isa 10:1-2). Isaiah denounced these practices and the Lord was deeply troubled and angered by this kind of sinfulness, corruption and immorality of the covenant community.<sup>246</sup>

Isaiah sees the breakdown of Israel to be due to the collapse of justice (*mishpat*). God manifests good judgment and in that judgment brings justice. He longs for the same in his people. In his judgment he will establish justice in the earth.<sup>247</sup> For Isaiah, “righteousness” (*sedeq*) means conformity to God’s way, especially as set forth in God’s Torah. Usually this involves ethical behaviour, but it is not mere ethics. According to Eichrodt, God’s righteousness is his keeping of the law in accordance with the terms of the covenant. The statements about human righteousness refer to social, ethical and religious behaviour.<sup>248</sup> Isaiah pictures the Prince of Peace as the one who establishes his kingdom with justice and righteousness (Isa 9:7) and puts an end to all violence and oppression. Isaiah reports that in Jerusalem righteousness had been replaced by murderers (Isa 1:21) and bloodshed (Isa 5:7).<sup>249</sup>

Chapters 2-4 are reminiscent of Amos in the condemnation of the ruling classes who “grind the face of the poor” (Isa 3:15) and of the society women of Jerusalem whose life-style reflects a lack of concern for traditional values (Isa 3:16-17 cf. Am 4:1-3). The condemnation of social oppression and judicial corruption (Isa.10:1-2) suggest that Isaiah has taken up where Amos left off and intends to apply the message to the kingdom of Judah.<sup>250</sup> Isaiah called for genuine repentance because of the evil and injustice among the people of Israel: “Learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (Isa 1:17). The community should protect and preserve the rights of the socially weak, specially the poor, aliens, orphans and widows.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>246</sup>E.E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.110.

<sup>247</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, pp.391-392.

<sup>248</sup> Walther Eichrodt. *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol.I Trans. by J.A. Baker (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961) p.240.

<sup>249</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.390.

<sup>250</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp. *A History of Prophecy in Israel – From the Settlement in the Land to the Hellenistic Period*, pp.112-113.

<sup>251</sup> David C. Jones. *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994) p.79 cited by E.E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.109.

### 3.7.4. Yahweh as Saviour and Redeemer

Isaiah's name means "Yahweh will save" or possibly "Yahweh is salvation." In Chs.40-55 salvation is also deliverance from foes and oppressors (Isa 45:17; 49:25) and the idea of righteousness is connected with salvation (Isa 45:8; 21). In Chs.56-66 salvation is contingent on doing justice and righteousness and is parallel to deliverance. The parallel to righteousness is also found in 59:17 and 61:10 and to justice in 59:11. Isaiah's idea of salvation is connected with the concepts of redemption, deliverance, righteousness, and justice. The basic idea of *gaal* (redeem) is to recover property (including persons) no longer held by the original owner. In Lev 25:47-49 the 'near kinsman' could redeem a person who had to sell himself into slavery. The kinsmen-redeemer figure is presented in Isaiah with this basic idea. Chs 40-55 offers the most productive study of the root. Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel says Yahweh (41:4; 47:4; 54:5). Isaiah uses the word primarily with reference to redemption from captivity.<sup>252</sup> The Lord says: "I love justice, I hate robbery (61:8), and tell this people: "keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation and deliverance will be revealed (56:1).<sup>253</sup>

### 3.7.5. Servant

The mission of the servant is prophetic. He is to bring justice to the nations and Torah (divine law or instruction) to the remote parts of the world. He is to enlighten the blind and free the captives (Isa 42:7). Thus the mission combines word and action, instruction and justice, enlightenment and liberation. But Israel failed in that mission and hence has to be punished. Yahweh uses the suffering servant to bring his ransomed people into the kingdom of righteousness and justice, the eternal realm of peace.<sup>254</sup> The purpose of a servant is to do the will of the master, and Israel was chosen to do Yahweh's will to bring forth justice to the nations (42:1,4), to be a light to the nations (42:6). The servant of Yahweh receives the Lord's spirit in order to bring forth justice to the nations and he will not fail till he has established justice in the earth (42:1-4).<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.383.

<sup>253</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.392.

<sup>254</sup> James M. Ward. *The Prophets*, p.77.

<sup>255</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, pp.392-93..

### 3.7.6. Spirit of Yahweh

Isaiah has more to say about the Spirit than any other Old Testament writer. Out of moral chaos the Spirit brings order and justice (28:6; 42:1).<sup>256</sup> In the day of desolation the people of Yahweh will wait until the Spirit is poured upon (Isa.32:15), bringing justice and righteousness. In Isa.42:1, Yahweh says he has put his Spirit (*ruah*) upon his servant, that he might bring forth justice to the nations. In 61:1 Isaiah says the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because Yahweh has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives.<sup>257</sup>

### 3.8. The Background of Micah

#### 3.8.1. Micah, the Man

Micah is a shortened form of Micaiah, meaning “Who is like Yahweh”. Micah was a native of Moresheth, a Judean village about twenty five miles southwest of Jerusalem near Philistine city Gath. Several evidences mark him as a country man, perhaps a peasant farmer.<sup>258</sup> Micah seems to have spent much of his lifetime in the provincial areas rather than at the capital city of Jerusalem. Hence he was not in as close touch with international politics as was his contemporary Isaiah.<sup>259</sup> We are not told what occupational group Micah might have belonged to, but since he is remembered as Micah of Moresheth, he may have been an elder of that village.<sup>260</sup> Although Micah lived and worked in Jerusalem he was a citizen of the small town, and still identified with the people there.

#### 3.8.2. Micah, the Prophet

Micah was from Judah and prophesied in Jerusalem. His addresses condemn chiefly the corruptions of Jerusalem. He was direct and plain-spoken, possessed of strong convictions, courage and an uncompromising faith in God. He demanded justice and righteousness among the rich people and sympathized with the poor and oppressed.<sup>261</sup> Prosperity had created a class of rich people who became greedy. The rulers

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<sup>256</sup> Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.280.

<sup>257</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, pp.387-388.

<sup>258</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.356.

<sup>259</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p.312.

<sup>260</sup> John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner’s Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, p.125.

<sup>261</sup> H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p.221.

whom God appointed to safeguard the interests and the rights of the poor failed to do (Mic 2:1-2).<sup>262</sup>

Micah's preaching was preoccupied with the suffering of the common people and peasants in the agricultural areas who were exploited by rich and unscrupulous landed nobility.<sup>263</sup> Isaiah depicts the social crimes of his time from the standpoint of the townsman in the capital; Micah depicts the social crimes from the standpoint of the suffering countryman.<sup>264</sup> The only allusion to Micah's call and commissioning is found in 3:8. The Spirit of the Lord gives him courage and strength to speak out forcefully and clearly. Micah speaks fervently to the issues of his day in terms of Israel's covenant obligations.<sup>265</sup>

### 3.8.3. The Structure of the Book

Many writers divide the book of Micah into three major sections: 1-3 (judgment); 4-5 (hope); 6-7 (judgment and hope). Each of these sections begins with a message of judgment and ends with a note of hope.<sup>266</sup> The first section (Chs.1-3) contains the oracles of the prophet himself. The second section (Chs 4-5) contains the prophecies of salvation, and the third section (Chs 6-7) contains accusation, lamentation and prophecy of salvation. In second and third sections Jerusalem/Zion figures prominently.<sup>267</sup> In the third and closing section of the book Micah's denunciations pass from the leaders to the people as a whole, and the general tone is much gloomier than in Chs 1-3.<sup>268</sup> According to H. E. Freeman, the book consists of three prophetic addresses clearly distinguished from one another by the introductory word "hear" (Mic 1:2; 3:1; 6:1). Threatening and promise, judgment and mercy alternate in these three addresses.<sup>269</sup> Each division contains a description of the present corruption, an announcement of imminent judgment, and promises of a glorious future.

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<sup>262</sup>E.E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, pp.113-114.

<sup>263</sup>Gleason L. Archer, Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p.312.

<sup>264</sup>H.L. Ellison. *The Old Testament Prophets – Studies in the Hebrew Prophets*, p.63.

<sup>265</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.357. Also see John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, pp.125-126.

<sup>266</sup> Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*. WBC, Vol.32 (Waco: Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1984) p.8. See also Thomas Edward McComiskey. "Micah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin, Vol.7 (Michigan: Regency Reference Library, 1985) p.397.

<sup>267</sup> James M. Ward. *Thus Says the Lord – The Message of the Prophets*, p.233.

<sup>268</sup>H.L. Ellison. *The Old Testament Prophets – Studies in the Hebrew Prophets*, p.63.

<sup>269</sup> H. E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p.215.

For Mays, the book is composed of two major parts, 1:2-5:15 and 6:1-7:20. Each part opens with an introductory summons to hear which identifies its audience. The first part is addressed to a universal audience of all peoples. The second is addressed to Israel.<sup>270</sup> Some scholars argue that oracles of hope (Mic 2:12-13; 4:1-5:9; 7:8-20) are later additions; because the oracles of hope were not given by pre-exilic prophets, for that would have weakened the power of their oracles of judgment.<sup>271</sup>

#### **3.8.4. The Historical Setting of the Book**

Micah like his contemporary Isaiah prophesied during the critical period of Israel's history in the latter half of the eighth century B.C.E. a time when Israel and Judah had arisen to heights of economic affluence but had fallen to depths of spiritual dependence. Under the leadership of Jeroboam II of Israel (786-746 B.C.E.) and Uzziah of Judah (783-742 B.C.E.), the territories of both kingdoms became almost as extensive as they were during the reign of Solomon. It was a time of great economic prosperity, fostered for a time by the absence of international crises and by the mutual cooperation of both kingdoms. While Israel and Judah appeared to be strong externally, an internal decay was depleting their strength and threatening to destroy the social fabric of these two kingdoms. The wealthy class was becoming richer at the expense of the poorer classes. The prophet saw this as a violation of the covenantal requirements and thus a hindrance to God's blessing and a guarantee of the dissolution of the nation.<sup>272</sup> Micah gave more attention to the social injustices of the ruling classes. The days of peace were destined to come to an end as Assyria arose and posing threat.<sup>273</sup> At the same time Israel was being torn by internal strife and dissension. Finally under the leadership of Shalmanesser V, Israel was occupied, and several years later in 721 B.C.E. the city of Samaria fell to Sargon II. In Judah, Ahaz's pro-Assyrian policies made her little more than a satellite of Assyria. Assyria continued to threaten Judah under Hezekiah's reign, and the most threatening invasion is

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<sup>270</sup>James Luther Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976) p.3.

<sup>271</sup>Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p.390. The assumption that oracles of hope cannot come from pre-exilic prophet is unwarranted. Because the hope oracles represent a significant theological response to questions about the Lord's faithfulness to his covenant promises.

<sup>272</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. "Micah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.395.

<sup>273</sup>H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p.221.

by Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. which culminated in the siege of many cities but Judah was delivered by divine intervention (2 Kings 19:32-36).<sup>274</sup>

In these critical times the Lord sent Micah with a message for the people. It was a time of both political upheaval and social unrest. Micah ministered during the reigns of three Judean kings Jotham (750-732 B.C.E.), Ahaz (732-716 B.C.E.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.E.). Micah's work may have begun toward the end of Jotham's reign and ended at the beginning of Hezekiah's which is overlapping with Isaiah. The reference to the coming judgment of Samaria (1:6) indicates that Micah's preaching began well before 722 B.C.E.<sup>275</sup> Ralph L. Smith opines that the transgressions of the people involved two primary aspects: perversion of the worship practices (Mic 1:7; 3:5-7; 5:12-14) injustice toward others (Mic 2:1-2; 3:2-3; 7:2-6).<sup>276</sup> The moral and spiritual situation in Judah during these times was low. Religion was a matter of form; the observance of ceremonial ritual was believed adequate to insure divine favour and acceptance. Idolatry was widespread, foreign elements were introduced into the worship, human sacrifice was practiced, and the priests and prophets taught and divined for hire. Nobles fleeced the poor, judges accepted bribes, and the rich took advantage of the poor, widows and orphans. It was against this social backdrop that Micah denounced injustice and false religiosity (Mic 7:5-6).<sup>277</sup>

### 3.8.5. Theology of Micah

The theology of Micah is largely concerned with divine judgment against sin. Israel and Judah both departed from the way of the Lord and angered him by their sin. The sin is cultic (Mic 1:5-7) as well as social (Mic 2:1-2). Israel's civil and religious leaders have rejected the ways of God. But the Lord desires that his people love him and act justly, and come back to him. One of the most moving passages in the book is 6:6-8 which is taken in Jewish tradition as a summary of the law. While judgement against sin is the dominant note of the book, hope is not lacking (Mic 2:12-13; 5:1-2).<sup>278</sup> For Micah God is exalted, incomparable and recognized as sovereign. He is no local or national deity, but

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<sup>274</sup> Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p.391. Also see Bruce K. Waltke. "Micah – An Introduction and Commentary" in *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah – An Introduction & Commentary*, Tyndale COT Commentaries, Ed. By D.J. Wiseman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988) p.142.

<sup>275</sup> Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.398. See also John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, p.126.

<sup>276</sup> Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*. WBC, Vol.32 (Waco: Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1984) p.5.

<sup>277</sup> H. E. Freeman. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p.222.

<sup>278</sup> Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp.401-402.

God of the whole world and all nations. He is a God of justice, judgment, and grace.<sup>279</sup>Yahweh does not dwell on Mount Zion but in his cosmic home, above the earth. From there he comes down to punish the people for their sins (Mic.1:3-5).<sup>280</sup>

The first theological emphasis we meet in the book of Micah is the sovereignty of God (1:2). For Micah God acted within the sphere of the nations to affect their destiny as well as the destiny of his own people. The nations will become subject to the rule of the Lord. Another theological emphasis of Micah is the self-consistency of the Lord. He is committed to his covenantal obligations. While the word covenant is not mentioned by Micah, the terms of the covenant ratified at Sinai are unmistakably present. The God of Micah is supremely the covenant God and bears the covenant name Yahweh.<sup>281</sup>Micah's doctrine of the remnant is unique among the prophets and is perhaps his most significant contribution to the prophetic theology of hope. The nation will suffer the shame of defeat and exile. But that is not the end; for certain triumph and glory lay ahead, not for the whole nation, but only for the remnant.<sup>282</sup>

### **3.9. The Message of Micah**

#### **3.9.1. Judgment**

The judgment motif is so strong in the book of Micah that several scholars have claimed that Micah only preached judgment.<sup>283</sup>Sin is the cause for judgment. Human rights violations are very evident here. Here Sin takes many forms ranging from idolatry to murder and oppression. Abuse of judicial and political power lead to the oppression of the poor (Mic 2:1-2). Lying (Mic 6:12), stealing (Mic 6:11), and turning to the occult (Mic 5:12) are condemned. God is a God of anger and wrath against iniquity and cannot forget wickedness nor acquit the guilty. He is a God who hides his face from disobedient people and comes to judge them.<sup>284</sup>Micah announced that the God who loved them in the past was

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<sup>279</sup> Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi* . WBC, Vol.32, p.4.

<sup>280</sup>John W. Miller. *Meet the Prophets – A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets*, p.125.

<sup>281</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976) p.254.

<sup>282</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. "Micah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp.398-399.

<sup>283</sup>Judgment is seen in the destruction of Samaria (1:6-7), in the coming of an invader against Jerusalem (1:15), in the greedy land grabbers' loss of their land (2:3-5) and in their being abandoned by Yahweh (3:4), in shame for the false prophets (3:6-7), in the siege of Jerusalem and the humiliation of their king, in the cleansing of the land from idolatry and militarism (5:10-14), in the removal of the wicked, the violent, the liars and cheats (6:9-16), and in the judgment on the nations (1:2; 4:13; 5:4-5).

<sup>284</sup> Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi* . WBC, Vol.32, p.10.

coming to establish his kingdom by expelling his covenant people. This announcement shocked his audience who had expected God's blessing. Following the announcement of judgment in which all people are summoned before the bar of justice (Mic 1:2-4), both capitals are indicted as sources of the pollution having contaminated the nation. The judgment on Samaria is spelled out in detail, and then in concise phrases Judah's doom is described. Employing a woe oracle Micah furiously attacks the sins which made the judgment necessary. He was enraged at the heartless oppression of the underprivileged poor by the rich upper class (Mic 2:1-5).<sup>285</sup> The prophet also condemned their lack of concern for one another (Mic 2:1-2; 3:1-4; 6:10-12). Their insensitivity to justice had resulted in anarchy and had even created serious disillusionment with the institution of the family (Mic 7:5-6). Micah stood out against his environment as a courageous, passionate champion of justice (Mic 3:8).<sup>286</sup>

The priests and prophets disrespect the covenant and ministered in the name of Yahweh for personal gain (Mic 3:6-7).<sup>287</sup> The section 6:1-7:7 begins with the word 'hear' and the scene is a court room or city gate. The mountains are called as witnesses to the controversy between the Lord and his people. God wants more than a ritual obedience. Micah demands that human rights to be upheld. Upright conduct; compassion, especially to the weak and poor; devout obedience to fellowship with God (Mic 6:8). Violence, deception, crooked business practices and other unrighteous and unjust deeds will bring desolation and frustration upon the land. Vexed by the total collapse of personal and social values Micah affirms his confidence in the redeeming God who alone is ultimately dependable.<sup>288</sup>

Micah proclaimed that Israel (Samaria) and Judah (Jerusalem) would be exiled and everything comes to an end. Samaria depended on the nations politically, economically, and religiously (Mic 6:16). Jerusalem had adopted paganism and acculturation as the way of life. The people had given themselves to a self-centred way of life without any consideration of the Lord or their fellow human beings. Micah's message of judgment was

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<sup>285</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, pp.360-361.

<sup>286</sup> Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, pp.254-255.

<sup>287</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, p.152.

<sup>288</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, pp.362-363.

probably intended to bring his generation to repentance so that the judgment might be avoided. But for the people of the exile who had already experienced judgment the purpose was to assure them that God had not abandoned them.<sup>289</sup> So Micah preached the oracles of judgment and salvation. Micah maintains that the disaster which has been provoked by the sins of the leaders of Israel can only be nullified by the judgment and grace of Yahweh.<sup>290</sup> Micah's vision goes beyond the judgment of Samaria and Jerusalem to all the kingdoms of the world (Mic 7:16-17). The Day of Judgment is God's expression of wrath against all nations when he will appear in judgment to establish kingdom on the earth.<sup>291</sup>

### 3.9.2. Purification and Hope

The God who destroys is also the God who delivers. To a community experiencing the judgment of God, Micah can bring a word of hope.<sup>292</sup> Yahweh is more than a covenant God of Israel. He is sovereign over the whole world (1:2-4; 5:15). Because he is sovereign he can exercise his grace and forgiveness. God is a saviour (2:12-13), a redeemer (4:10, and a shepherd (7:14). God does not keep his anger forever, but is compassionate and forgiving (7:18-19). God is faithful to his promises (7:20). Hence there is certainly a message of hope in the book of Micah. All three sections (Chs.1-2; 3-5; and 6-7)<sup>293</sup> end with a message of hope.<sup>294</sup> Micah speaks often of the present evil situation. The greed and fraud of merchants, the crimes of land grabbers, and the corruption of spiritual leaders all present a dark picture. But the prophet said that those conditions would not prevail forever. Judgment would come but the faithful remnant would survive (2:12; 4:7; 5:6).<sup>295</sup> The nation will suffer the shame of defeat and exile. But that is not the end; for certain triumph and glory lay ahead, not for the whole but only for the remnant. The people of God will be delivered from affliction and exile by their King and will return with him secure in his power.<sup>296</sup> The historic fall of the kingdom of Judah is interpreted theologically

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<sup>289</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*. WBC, Vol.32, p.10.

<sup>290</sup>Knud Jeppesen. "New Aspects of Micah Research" in *JSOT*, Vol.3, No.8 (1978) p.22.

<sup>291</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, pp.152-154.

<sup>292</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, p.256.

<sup>293</sup>Some scholars are raising a question whether the hope-oriented material is from Micah or from later redactor. Because like Amos, Micah also is remembered as the prophet of doom by the later generations. But this reasoning is widely accepted.

<sup>294</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*. WBC, Vol.32, pp.10-11.

<sup>295</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, p.11.

<sup>296</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. "Micah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.399.

as a divine punishment for the sins of the nation, and the eventual restoration of a religious community in Jerusalem is prophesied as an act of God's grace.<sup>297</sup>

Micah's prayer (7:14-20) functions as a model for each generation of the remnant to look for the righteous establishment of God's kingship. Those who hope, pray, and work for this new order will not be disappointed.<sup>298</sup> Micah proclaimed judgment on both Israel and Judah, but he also foretold them of a brighter and happier day in the future.<sup>299</sup> God brings light and executes judgment, puts to shame the enemy who had mocked Israel in their weakness and returns to shepherd his people. God is pardoning, compassionate, and faithful. So Micah's words are a witness that the final purpose of all God's words to his people is the celebration of his grace and goodness in worship and obedience.<sup>300</sup>

### **3.9.3. Kingdom of God**

According to Micah kingdom is an expression of divine power and sovereignty within the sphere of the nations. The rule of God brings blessing and protection to the children of God. The great King promises to take the "outcasts" and make them citizens of his kingdom (Mic 4:7-8). As citizens they will receive his blessings, live securely, and enjoy the fullness of his promises. The Lord also promises to intervene on their behalf (Mic 2:13). Unlike leaders of Judah (Mic 3:9-11), the great King will establish his rule justly and righteously (Mic 4:2-3). God's kingship will be celebrated throughout the earth, and his people will experience his blessing and his protection. The kingdom will extend to the remnant of twelve tribes and all gentiles who will submit themselves to the Lord (Mic 4:1-4).<sup>301</sup> Micah announces that both Jews and gentiles will share in the glorious messianic age. The messianic community will be the means of blessing to those who submit themselves to the messianic claims. His kingdom will be a universal rule of peace.

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<sup>297</sup> James M. Ward. *Thus Says the Lord – The Message of the Prophets*, p.233.

<sup>298</sup> Willem A. VanGemen. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, p.154.

<sup>299</sup> E.E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.115..

<sup>300</sup> William Sanford Lasor et al., *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, pp.363-364.

<sup>301</sup> Willem A. VanGemen. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, p.156.

The messianic kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom in which the Lord will cleanse the earth of all immorality, idolatry, power play, and corruption (Mic 5:10-15).<sup>302</sup>

### **3.10. Conclusion**

The eighth century prophets recognized the strong ethical foundations lay in the Law. Amos in particular attacked the injustice of the rich and the affluent and the corruption practiced in the judiciary. He was particularly vehement in denouncing the lack of social concern in his time. The erosion of Israel's social structure showed itself primarily in a cleavage between the rich and the poor. The social concern inherent in the very structure of the law was ignored. Amos had taught that disobedience to the word of God would mean punishment and ruin for Israel.

Hosea lamented the absence of the knowledge of God which had been revealed but the priests had failed to teach the law to the people. Isaiah condemned the economic greed, social debauchery, judicial corruption and moral depravity (Isa 10:1-4). Micah proclaims his message with passionate forthrightness and attacks the social evils of his day. Micah's courageous stand for his convictions of God's truth must commend him to believers in every age. Micah, the moral teacher and social reformer, with passion and fearlessness, called Israel to a life of righteousness, meet God's requirements and live. Although the oracles of many prophets were sharply critical of Israelite belief and behaviour, the purpose of their proclamation was redemptive. The message of prophets was the words of life for Israel.

The nation took comfort in its military prowess and ignored its exploitation of the needy and the growing disparity between privilege and poverty. The nation was characterized by religious hypocrisy was often orthodox in style of worship but disobedient in personal and social behaviour. Prosperity had produced its inevitable fruits – pride, luxury, selfishness, greed, oppression and moral decay. The Israelites had failed to fulfil God's purpose. The prophets sort to right the relationship the people had with God, with themselves and finally with their environment. It is when all three of these things are present that the covenant relationship is complete.

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<sup>302</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word – An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, pp.156-158.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EXEGETICAL STUDY OF SELECTED TEXTS**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

After examining the background and the message of eighth century prophets it is appropriate to take up the exegetical study of selected texts in the four prophetic books. It helps to comprehend the message of those prophets in its fuller sense. This study also helps to draw out the biblical and theological foundations of human rights and to offer a basis for examining human rights issues in India, which will be discussed in the coming chapters. The eighth century prophets as it is examined in the foregoing pages denounced the people for their acts of social injustices and pronounced judgment for the crimes they have committed. This chapter aims to do an exegetical study of two texts that reflect human rights violations from each of four prophetic books: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. Since discussion of background, historical setting and general structure of these prophetic books have been discussed in the previous chapter; this chapter presents a more detailed exegetical analysis of the texts themselves.

#### **4.2. Text – Amos 5:10-15**

##### **4.2.1. Translation**

- 10 They hate him who reproves in the gate and him who speaks truth they abhor.
- 11 Therefore, because of your trampling on the poor and produce of grain you take from him, houses of hewn stones you have built but you shall not dwell in them. You have planed beauty vineyards but you shall not drink their vine.
- 12 For I know your transgressions are many and numerous; your sins are oppressing of righteous, taking of a bribe and turn aside the needy in the gate.
- 13 Therefore, he who is prudent in that time will keep silent; it is an evil time.
- 14 Seek good and not evil, so that you may live and so Jehovah the God of hosts is with you as you have spoken.
- 15 Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate. Perhaps Jehovah the God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

#### 4.2.2. Introduction to the Pericope

This is the first of the two texts that are selected for the exegetical study from the book of Amos. This text is one of the best examples of Amos' teaching on human rights. These verses contain the announcement of judgment for blatant injustice in the Israelite society. The accusations levelled here are more specific. However, alongside the message of judgment, there is also a message of hope. Verses 14 and 15 contain the promises of God's grace though they are conditional. There is possibility that God may extend his grace and protect them if they dedicate themselves whole heartedly to the practice of justice.<sup>303</sup>

#### 4.2.3. Literary Features

##### 4.2.3.1. Form

The form of the pericope is lament or elegy. It contains the characteristic features of a funerary lament, adapted to the judgment purpose. It is not a mere elegy but a judgment elegy, a prophetic dirge for Israel in which Yahweh speaks to and against Israel as well.<sup>304</sup>

##### 4.2.3.2. Structure

The selected text is part of a larger pericope of 5:1 – 17. It begins with the announcement of a lament for the nation and ends with a graphic portrayal of the nation at mourning.<sup>305</sup> The following components can be discerned from this lament: (1) a description of the tragedy (Am 5:2-3); (2) a call to react (Am 5:4-6); (3) direct address to the fallen (Am 5:7-13); and (4) a summons to mourning (Am 5:16-17). The present passage has the style and tone of a funeral song throughout. Several factors make this song special: the frequent quotations of Yahweh's word (vv. 3,4-6, 16-17); its threefold use of "for" (vv. 3,4,5) followed by a threefold use of "therefore" (vv. 11,13,16); the heavy use of eschatological language covering both punishment and restoration and its incorporation of a hymnic element.<sup>306</sup> According to Bernard Thorogood these seventeen verses are a collection of short sayings, not a single message spoken at one time. According to him

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<sup>303</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.174.

<sup>304</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.344.

<sup>305</sup>This pericope fits in the major component of 3:1 – 6:14 where judgment speeches/oracles against Israel are found.

<sup>306</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, p.344.

they contain a funeral song (vv.1-3), a call to repent (vv.4-7), part of a song of praise (vv.8-9), a warning about injustice (vv.10-13), a further call to repent (vv.14-15), and a further funeral song (vv.16-17).<sup>307</sup>

#### **4.2.3.3. Setting**

Though we do not know the exact setting of Amos' oracles except for 7:10-17, the 'gate' is the most probable setting for this direct and specific judgment speech which combines accusation (vv.10-11a, 12) and announcement (v.11b).<sup>308</sup> The audience could well have been the residents of Samaria, particularly the officials of the royal court and their favorites.<sup>309</sup> One can imagine the present oracle spoken in Samaria in the light of several features of the text: its address to heterodox pilgrims (v.5) who would presumably be based in Samaria, its national perspective, its allusion to impressive wealth on the part of the audience (v.11), and its assumption of the audience's familiarity with impressive fortifications (v.9).<sup>310</sup>

#### **4.2.4. Theological Comments**

##### **4.2.4.1. Context**

This pericope follows immediately after the second doxology (5:8-9).<sup>311</sup> Amos observed that the people thought that the Lord was with them. They thought their privilege as Yahweh's elect and their lip service to him guaranteed them protection.<sup>312</sup> In this context Amos is continuing his accusation against them especially for their injustices in the legal proceedings at the gate.

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<sup>307</sup>Bernard Thorogood. *A Guide to the Book of Amos*, p.55.

<sup>308</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.171.

<sup>309</sup>James L. Mays, *Amos – A Commentary*, p.91.

<sup>310</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, pp.344-345.

<sup>311</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. "Amos" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.272. There are three doxologies. 4:13 and 9:5-6 are the two other doxologies. Some question the authenticity of the doxologies and contends that they are later additions.

<sup>312</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. "Amos" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.313.

#### 4.2.4.2. Exegetical Study

**V.10.**“They hate him who reproves in the gate” (v. 10a). “They” refers to the people of Israel, the guilty ones. The prophet uses the third person here, but will switch to the second person in the next verse. Verses 10 – 13 along with v.7 give a good summary of Amos’s critique of all that was wrong in Israel’s society. Most of his accusations concern the perversion of justice by the strong against the weak.<sup>313</sup>The passage provides evidence of the failures of communal justice. The denunciation of injustice begun in v.7 is resumed in v.10 adding personal focus describing some chief ways in which justice and righteousness were perverted. The Israelites are accused of trampling on the poor and exploiting them.<sup>314</sup>“In the gate”<sup>315</sup> (בַּשַּׁעַר) refers to the location of most court proceedings where official legal business will be taking place (Ruth 4:1-11; Deut 22:15). It is the regular place in which the local courts of Israel’s towns and cities were held.<sup>316</sup> The wealthy and powerful were corrupting these courts. Scholars like S.M. Paul and Wolf opines that the gate of the city was the place where public hearing took place and justice was administered.<sup>317</sup>City elders administer justice at the city gates. Prophets deliver prophecies there. At the ‘gate’ the “reprovers” and those who spoke the truth were hated during the proceedings. The very fabric of justice had been destroyed.<sup>318</sup>Those who are in the wrong hate those who offer correction at the gates, because they want freedom to act without restraint. They resent anyone who would curtail their greedy ways.

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<sup>313</sup>Daniel J. Simundson. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah – Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005) pp.195-196.

<sup>314</sup>J. Daniel Hays. *The Message of the Prophets – A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, pp.287-288.

<sup>315</sup> The city gate is mentioned three times in this text (5:10, 12, 15) as the place where justice is to be practiced. It was the place where the legal proceedings were carried on and judicial decisions were taken where the heads of families and other elders assembled to hear witnesses, arbitrate disputes, decide controversies and dispense justice. It is a broad, multi-chambered gate area designed as part of city fortifications but used routinely for official legal business. It was a fortified building set in the walls, which protected the entrance to the city and provided a place where the legal assembly convened to regulate the life and property of the citizens according to the accepted ethos.

<sup>316</sup>For further information on the proceedings of the gate, see James Luther Mays, *Amos – A Commentary*, p.93.

<sup>317</sup>Shalom M. Paul. *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, pp.170-171; Hans Walter Wolff, *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.245.

<sup>318</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. “Amos” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p.312.

The hating שֹׂנְאָה that is usually referred to in the Old Testament is the opposition, ill-will and aversion one will have for fellow human beings.<sup>319</sup> Disregard for justice is in fact a hatred of people and not just the needy but those who honestly plead the cause of the needy or decide in their favor. Wicke opines that the one who is hated and abhorred is prophet himself. The prophet and his message are rejected. He is not speaking personally but as Israel's prosecutor.<sup>320</sup> The "person who reproves" (מוֹכִיחַ) is the elder in the jury that renders a verdict.<sup>321</sup> The basic meaning of the verb יָכַח is to "set right", or "show what is right." Forensic usage has its setting in judgment in the gate.<sup>322</sup> The "person who tells the truth" (דִּבֵּר אֱמֻנָה) is the upright witness. It is likely that the word אֱמֻנָה identifies a quality of the speaker. Mays comments that the competence of the court depends on the integrity of the witnesses in speaking the truth. The ninth word in the Decalogue (Ex 20:13) made the prohibition of false witness, and number of stipulations in the legal traditions of Israel are concerned with the integrity of the courts.<sup>323</sup> Those who have no socioeconomic power are regularly denied justice in the courts, where the bribery system favors those in power with money. Yahweh demands of his people that they maintain justice in the courts.<sup>324</sup>

**V.11.** This verse contains both a condemnation and a sentence of judgment. The divine judgment indicator לָכֵן (therefore) is introducing a curse and further specifying the "legal crimes" of the unjust – using the courts to defraud poor people.<sup>325</sup> The symbols of Israel's wealth and greed, her houses and lands are to become the objects of God's wrath. The curse targets precisely those who had been getting rich at the expense of the poor.

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<sup>319</sup>Gerard, Van Groningen. "שֹׂנְאָה" in *TWOT* Vol.2, ed. by R. Laird Harris *et al.* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) p.880.

<sup>320</sup>Donald W. Wicke. "Two Perspectives (Amos 5:1-17)" in *CurTM*, Vol.13, No.2 (Apr. 1986) p.94.

<sup>321</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31 (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publishers, 1987) p.348.

<sup>322</sup>G. Mayer. "יָכַח" in *TDOT*, Vol.VI, ed. by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by David E. Green (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990) p.65.

<sup>323</sup>James L. Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.93.

<sup>324</sup>J. Daniel Hays. *The Message of the Prophets – A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, p.291.

<sup>325</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, p.348.

Here Amos switches from ‘they’ to ‘you’ addressing the culprits directly.<sup>326</sup> The first two clauses describe the greedy crime of charging tenant-farmers too much for use of the land which have been taken away from the rightful owners by fraud in violation of Lev 23:13-38. The Hebrew verb **בָּשַׁם** should be pointed **בּוֹשֵׁסְכֶם** a *qal* infinitive with a second person suffix which means ‘your trampling’.<sup>327</sup> It is commonly related to the Akkadian term *shabasu* which refers to imposing levies or taxation in kind.<sup>328</sup> Amos is violently attacking against the unfair and illegal taxation of the indigent classes. The underprivileged are made to finance the indulgence of the wealthy by paying taxes collected at harvest time.<sup>329</sup> The poor upon whom the burdens were placed were the members of the lowest order of free peasants (Lev 19:15). The wickedness of the greedy rich is made clearer in the announcement of judgment. The prescribed judgment to come upon the oppressors was the loss of property.<sup>330</sup>

Amos is speaking to a group who are steadily driving the landed peasantry away from their earlier solid independence into the condition of slaves. The small farmer no longer owns his own land; he is a tenant of an urban class to whom he must pay a rental for the use of the land. It is the greedy urge to multiply possessions at the expense of the poor which leads to the accusation. Ex 22:24 forbids the taking of interest on money lent to a poor man.<sup>331</sup> Out of the profits from the suffering of the poor they have built houses of hewn stone. They have planted luxuriant vineyards in the fields that belonged to the small farmer.<sup>332</sup> Yahweh’s punishment of these greedy people will correspond to their crime. They will not live in the houses, or drink the wine of the vineyards, because they have profited by the taxation of the agricultural produce of the poor.<sup>333</sup> This pronouncement from Amos fits the category of futility curses, where someone else will gain the benefit of what they had hoped to use for themselves. Such curses are found outside the Bible in ancient

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<sup>326</sup>Hayes notes that the movement from indirect to direct address does not imply a different audience or addressee because such shifts are frequent especially in ‘woe’ speeches (see 5:1 and 6:1-2). See J.H. Hayes, *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988) p.163.

<sup>327</sup>Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The BDB Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1996) p.143.

<sup>328</sup>John H. Hayes, *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching*, p.164. See also J.A. Soggin, *The Prophet Amos: A Translation and a Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1987) p.89; H. W. Wolff, *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.247.

<sup>329</sup>Shalom M. Paul, *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, p.173.

<sup>330</sup>David Allan Hubbard, *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.172.

<sup>331</sup>H. W. Wolff, *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.247.

<sup>332</sup>Most of the Israelites could only afford houses made of sun-baked clay. The stone houses and large vineyards of the leaders showed that they were enriching themselves at the expense of the poor.

<sup>333</sup>Shalom M. Paul, *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, p.173.

Near Eastern treaties.<sup>334</sup> This futility curse constitutes the mechanism of “targeted justice”: the penalty targets the penetrators. Only a statement to the effect that the original victims would benefit from the penetrators’ losses could add greater balance to the equation.<sup>335</sup> God limits the thorough plunder to the fortresses and strongholds, which are the rich sites. However, the Israelites exercise excessive plunder on the poor.<sup>336</sup>

**V.12.** The theme here is again the injustice of the legal system in Israel (as noted in v.10). Amos cites further examples of the sort of injustice identified in v.11. He affirms in a summary statement that he learned numerous crimes and formidable wrongdoings.<sup>337</sup> Amos continues his criminal charge against the upper class for their manifold and multiple offenses. The first charge is that they are the persecutors of innocent people. The second is that they take bribes and thereby distort justice. And the third is accusing the judges of turning aside the needy at the gate. The poor and underprivileged are continually the victims of the local judiciary, who victimize them at the very place where justice should be dispensed.<sup>338</sup> The lament attacks criminals and sinners, including corrupt elders and jurists at the court trials. Consciously, Israelite leading citizens were persecuting the righteous by taking bribe money and ruling in favor of rich defendants against poor defendants (cf. Ex 23:1-8; Isa 10:2; 29:21; Mal 3:5). Such a direct covenant violation is heinous. Amos places great emphasis on the court system in Israel and when it has become corrupt, punishment must ensure.<sup>339</sup> Wolff explains that the word **חַטָּא** (sin, wrongdoing) which is very common throughout the rest of the Old Testament but appears only rarely in Amos, is generally applied without precise distinction to misdeeds of a legal, socio-ethical or cultic sort, but here it merely adds emphasis to the particular crimes in the gate which comprise the specifics of the accusation.<sup>340</sup> Amos calls all these sharp practices as “rebellious acts.” The English versions have the term “transgressions” (**עֲוֹנוֹת**) which may not be a right expression here. The transgressions and sins of Israelites are not occasional

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<sup>334</sup>Daniel J. Simundson. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* – Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, p.196. See also Jorg Jeremias. *The Book of Amos – A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky Westminster: John Knox Press, 1995) p.93.

<sup>335</sup>Mark E. Biddle. “Sinners Only? Amos 9:8 – 10 and the Problem of Targeted Justice in Amos” in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, Vol.43, No.2, Sum (2016) p.168.

<sup>336</sup>Aron Pinker. “Observations on some cruxes in Amos - Part II” in *JBQ*, Vol.29, No.2, Apr-Jun (2001) p.94.

<sup>337</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.248.

<sup>338</sup>Shalom M. Paul. *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, pp.174-175. Also see Daniel J. Simundson. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.196.

<sup>339</sup>Douglas Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, pp.348-349.

<sup>340</sup>H. W. Wolff, *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.248.

lapses but are numerous. The heart of the matter here seems to be bribery, the specific means by which the innocent were harassed and the poor defrauded of their rights.<sup>341</sup> The rich and the powerful understand how to turn the law to their advantage through false statements and through the bribery of the judges. At the expense of the poor, the rich get enormous luxury.<sup>342</sup> The crimes and sins are rebellion against Yahweh and disobedience of his requirements. The three specifications of conduct in 12b all belong to the sphere of judicial practice, the first two using participial phrases and the second a finite verbal form. Here apart from legal injustices Hayes sees political and military wrongdoings also. The verb **נָתַן** generally denotes acts involving violence and confinement.<sup>343</sup> The accused take bribes and decide cases on the basis of profit instead of right. When the poor come to court seeking justice, they are turned away from their only source of help. In times of social conflict the rights and needs of the underprivileged get turned aside.<sup>344</sup> One of the meanings of **נָתַן** is 'turn away'. Amos 2:7 deals with the oppression of the poor, and 5:12 elaborates on that.<sup>345</sup>

The expression 'in the gate' shows that in the whole of v.12 it is the local judiciary proceedings which is in view as in 5:7 and 10. "To turn aside" usually has as its direct object "justice". It is the poor themselves who are laid low, who are denied access to their rights.<sup>346</sup> By paying bribes and by exerting their personal influence, the wealthy and powerful steer decisions in their own interests. In so doing, they become enemies to those who should receive justice from the court and those who lack such power are turned away.<sup>347</sup> For Amos the court in the gate is the central institution in Israel, and the integrity of the members of the legal assembly the most crucial issue regarding Yahweh's authority over society. Yahweh is the God who protects the right of the weak and poor, the widow and orphan.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>341</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, pp.172-173.

<sup>342</sup>H.W. Wolff. "Prophecy from the Eighth Through the Fifth Century" in *Interpretation – A Journal of Bible and Theology*, Vol.XXXII, No.1 (Jan. 1978) p.26.

<sup>343</sup>John H. Hayes. *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching*, p.164.

<sup>344</sup>John H. Hayes. *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching*, p.165.

<sup>345</sup>H. Ringgren. "**נָתַן**" in *TDOT*, Vol.IX, ed. by Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry, translated by David E. Green (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998) p.386.

<sup>346</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, pp.248-249.

<sup>347</sup>Jorg Jeremias. *The Book of Amos – A Commentary*, p.92.

<sup>348</sup>James L. Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.97.

**V.13.** Here again a judgment sentence indicator לָכֵן “therefore” introduces a curse. It will be a terrible time, literally “evil” time (עַתָּה רָעָה הִיא). So great will be the horror, the thoughtful person will either wail or be stunned to silence.<sup>349</sup>In the light of the corruption of the times, the prudent person kept silent, because the reprovers were despised. It was best to avoid any reproof that could lead to even greater injustices.<sup>350</sup>It is not clear whether the ‘prudent person’ refers to the righteous victim or the advocate of justice. The meaning of “in that time” is also not clear, whether it refers to the present time or future time of judgment. Hubbard observes that “in that time” is the time of judgment by exile announced in verse 11. Hayes opines “that time” would refer to the time when the struggle between factions in Israel culminates in civil war and the house of Joseph bursts into flame (see v.6b).<sup>351</sup> That time is called evil (cf.3:6) because of its utter calamity, its total disaster. In that time, the prudent person will quietly comply with the judgment.<sup>352</sup>Some think that the evil day is not a description of past or present evil but is consistent with other references to a day of punishment in 3:14; 4:2; 5:18-20; 8:3.<sup>353</sup>

Mays makes another observation saying that verse 13 is a judicious comment of a follower of Wisdom. In a time when courts are corrupt and the powerful have their way without restraint, the man of wise judgment will keep quiet, knowing that to raise complaint or plead his case will only lead to trouble for him.<sup>354</sup>Wolff comments that the person of insight will keep silent, not with respect to the injustice in the gate but rather with respect to the judgment which Yahweh sends against the land.<sup>355</sup>S.M. Paul, while discussing the meaning of the term מִשְׁכִּיל observes that some have related it to the same word that appears as a superscription to several wisdom psalms to connote a type of hymn. According to this line of interpretation, at that “time of misfortune” such hymns will be silent.<sup>356</sup>Amos’ message was that God will judge the wicked as valid in his own day. A

<sup>349</sup>Douglas Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.349.

<sup>350</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey, “Amos” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p.313.

<sup>351</sup>John H. Hayes. *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching*, p.165.

<sup>352</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989) p.173.

<sup>353</sup>Gray Y. Smith. “Amos 5:13: The Deadly Silence of the Prosperous” in *JBL*, Vol.107, No.2, Jun (1988) p.292.

<sup>354</sup>James Luther Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.98.

<sup>355</sup>H. W. Wolff, *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.250.

<sup>356</sup>Shalom M. Paul. *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, p.175.

prudent person believes that wisdom lies in waiting for the justice of God rather than in appealing to the judgment of people.<sup>357</sup>

**VV.14-15.** These verses consist of imperative exhortations followed by consequence clauses. The exhortations plead with the audience to “seek good and not evil” and “hate evil and love good.” Amos closely identifies justice with God’s character. He calls the people not to seek the Lord but to seek the ‘good’ (דְּרִשׁוּ-טוֹב). דְּרִשׁ here means “to be intent upon, to be concerned for.” The ‘good’ that is sought and loved is much more than a rigid legal system. The posing of the opposites – ‘good’ and ‘evil’, ‘hate’ and ‘love’ add to the intensity of the exhortation.<sup>358</sup> The theological use of דְּרִשׁ is more predominant in the Old Testament than its general use. Seeking God is important and necessary if one is to live. This can be done by doing good, hating evil, and establishing justice in the gate.<sup>359</sup> Here “live” (חַיִּה) is synonymous with “God is with you”. V.14 refers to the national existence of the people of God. As some scholars emphasize, the promise of life is conditional; life is possible only as the consequence of repentance and return.<sup>360</sup> B.W. Anderson opines that the invitation to seek good is repeated (see 5:4 – 6) here with a subtle shift into the area of ethical responsibility. But no assurance is given that the people of God would survive in their present, visible form, owing to their involvement in social injustices and their precarious position in the path of powerful empires.<sup>361</sup> Rector opines that good, according to Amos, is to establish justice in the gate. If Israel accomplishes this, then the Lord will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.<sup>362</sup>

The exhortation is followed by conditional promises; their fulfillment depends on obedience to the exhortations. The promises are formulated in the light of the judgment

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<sup>357</sup>James Luther Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.98.

<sup>358</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, pp.173-174.

<sup>359</sup>S. Wagner. “דְּרִשׁ” in *TDOT*, Vol.III, ed. by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Wills and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988) p.298.

<sup>360</sup>H. Ringgren. “חַיִּה” in *TDOT*, Vol.IV, ed. by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Wills and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980) p.337.

<sup>361</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson. *The Eighth Century Prophets: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah – Proclamation Commentaries; The Old Testament Witnesses for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) pp.31-32.

<sup>362</sup>Larry J. Rector, “Israel’s Rejected worship: an Exegesis of Amos 5” in *ResQ*, 21/3 (1978) pp.170-171.

which Amos proclaims.<sup>363</sup> After the ‘evil’ time, those remaining from the ravages of war and captivity could once again enjoy God’s mercy if they seek him.<sup>364</sup> To seek “good” was the only way the nation could be restored to “life”. To “seek good, not evil,” means to concern oneself with good, to practice good and to reject evil. For the Hebrew ‘hate’ and ‘love’ are not only powerful emotions, but also actions in which person sets himself for or against. The expression “the LORD will be with you” connotes the Lord’s presence to defend and fight for his people. Wolff comments that “Yahweh is with you” is an ancient word of assurance within the context of holy war.<sup>365</sup> But S.M. Paul observes that for Amos, the notion of the presence of the Lord in the affairs of his people is contingent. God’s help and continued presence are conditioned solely on their behavior. Salvation and survival are posited entirely on the ethical-moral dimension of life.<sup>366</sup> “As you have spoken” (כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתֶּם) shows Amos’ ironic observation that the people thought the Lord was with them. They thought their privilege as Yahweh’s elect and their lip service to him guaranteed them protection.<sup>367</sup> Evil shall continue unabated among God’s people as long as their established order continues its policies of exclusivism, harassment, intimidation, and violation of the rights of people.<sup>368</sup>

The people were not only to stop seeking evil, but were to hate evil (שִׂנְאוּ-רָעָה) and love good (וְאָהַבּוּ טוֹב). Mays comments that in Amos’ theological vocabulary, ‘good’ is the middle term between Yahweh and justice. One cannot speak of morality versus religion or ethics versus faith as though they were alternatives. To seek Yahweh is to do good. That is what was required for Israel to live again.<sup>369</sup> For Amos seeking signifies total dedication to the ‘good’. One finds the Lord not in the observance of ritual, but in one’s undivided devotion to the moral dimension of human relations.<sup>370</sup> *Seek, hate, and love* are the imperatives and are progressive. The people were exhorted to seek the Lord, not just in external allegiance to him, but in ethical obedience that involved commitment to him. This alone would bring “life”. If the people fulfilled these conditions, it was possible

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<sup>363</sup> James L.Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p. 101.

<sup>364</sup> Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.349.

<sup>365</sup> H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.250.

<sup>366</sup> Shalom M. Paul. *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, p.177.

<sup>367</sup> Thomas Edward McComiskey. “Amos” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p.313.

<sup>368</sup> Donoso S. Escobar, “Social Justice in the Book of Amos” in *RevExp*, Vol.92, No.2, Spr (1995) p.172.

<sup>369</sup> James L.Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p. 100.

<sup>370</sup> Shalom M. Paul. *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, p.176.

that the Lord would have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. The word “perhaps” indicates that Yahweh’s forgiveness is not guaranteed even if there is an improved behavior on the part of the people. The word “be gracious” in its original meaning expresses the obligation of a master to treat his servant benevolently. The word presupposes magnanimity on the part of the superior, and loyalty on the part of the inferior.<sup>371</sup> “Justice in the gate” would imply order in society and thus denote political more than juridical concerns.<sup>372</sup> The prophet demands that “justice” be “established” (יָצַד) in the gate. This is in contrast to the work of those who “cast down righteousness to the earth.”<sup>373</sup> Von Rad claims that “there is absolutely no concept in the Old Testament with so central a significance for all the relationships of human life as that of צֶדֶק (righteousness). It is the standard not only for man’s relationship to God but also for his relationships to his fellows reaching right down to the most petty wrangling – indeed, it is even the standard for man’s relationship to the animals and to his natural environment.”<sup>374</sup> So ‘justice’ is then, has to do with doing right in the specific social relationships. The Hebrew term יָצַד is in the *hiphil* form which means “to establish”.<sup>375</sup> For Amos everything depends on “establishment of justice in the gate”. Without it, Israel cannot be God’s people, and without it, Israel’s survival is impossible.<sup>376</sup> Even if the people change and God chooses to be gracious, it will be only for the remnant that is left after the destruction has run its course.<sup>377</sup>

The term “Remnant” (שְׁאֵרִית) connotes a portion of something. Several commentators apply “remnant of Joseph” to those Israelites who would survive the Assyrian decimations. Hayes thinks that it suggests that northern territory had already been lost to various members of the coalition.<sup>378</sup> The losses are presupposed and occurred under Tiglath-pileser III in 733 B.,C. If the term “Remnant of Joseph” is understood as a substitute for the northern kingdom, the appeals of vv.14-15 are in agreement with each other. “Remnant” may connote Israel’s insignificance on the world of her day. Hubbard

<sup>371</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.251.

<sup>372</sup>John H. Hayes. *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching*, p.167.

<sup>373</sup>B. Johnson. “יָצַד” in *TDOT*, Vol.VI, ed. by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Wills and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990) p.252.

<sup>374</sup>Gerhard von Rad. *Old Testament Theology* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962) Vol.1, p.370.

<sup>375</sup>Brown, Driver and Briggs, eds., *The BDB Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 426.

<sup>376</sup>Jorg Jeremias. *The Book of Amos – A Commentary*, p.95.

<sup>377</sup>Daniel J. Simundson. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.198.

<sup>378</sup>J. H. Hays. *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet*, p.167.

opines that “Remnant” should be read in the light of Israel’s weakness. It is not so much promise of the future rescue of some faithful Israelites.<sup>379</sup> It is not a theme of hope for the future like the ‘remnant’ of Isaiah’ (Isa 1:24-26). In spite of Amos’s pronouncements of doom elsewhere, he continued to hold out the gracious offer of deliverance, even though only a few would respond.<sup>380</sup>

#### **4.2.5. Findings of the Study**

In this passage Amos is exposing the human rights violations specifically in the legal practices. The main area Amos focusing is the ‘gate’ where most of the legal proceedings take place. He believes that the city gate should be the place where people could expect their cases to be judged fairly. But he saw the leaders of Israel were unjust and corrupt. The wealthy and powerful were corrupting these courts by indulging in human rights violations in several ways:

- i) Those who were responsible to administer justice were accepting bribes from the rich and giving the judgment in their favor thereby distorting justice in the courts. As a result poor are denied justice and their rights are not protected. This is a clear human rights violation.
- ii) Another area where human rights violation is evident is illegal taxation. The indigent classes are made to finance the indulgence of the wealthy by paying taxes.
- iii) The third area where human rights concerns are apparent is the poor peasants losing their land. Amos is speaking to a group who are steadily driving the landed peasantry away from their earlier solid independence into the condition of slaves. This is another example of violation of human rights. The small farmer no longer owns his own land; he becomes a tenant of an urban class to whom he must pay a rental for the use of the land.
- iv) Amos is charging the upper class with more offenses where human rights violations are involved. The charge is that they are the persecutors of innocent people. And the judges are turning aside the needy at the gate.

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<sup>379</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, pp.173-174.

<sup>380</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. “Amos” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, pp.313-314.

As it is noted in the findings, the responsible people in the legal proceedings violated human rights by accepting bribes from the rich and giving judgment in their favor. As a result poor are denied justice and their rights are not protected. The poor are also made to pay the taxes illegally. The rich and powerful are driving the poor peasants away from their own lands and making them as slaves. The upper class was also persecuting the innocent poor people. As a result of these human rights violations, the poor people denied justice, deprived of the privilege of owning the land and to lead a dignified life in the society. The poor and underprivileged are continually the victims of the social judiciary; they are victimized at the very place where justice should be dispensed. The injustices identified are focused on the judicial system, not on occasional practices. At the 'gate' the "reprovers" and those who spoke the truth were hated. Those who dispense justice defraud the poor people in the courts. They are using the courts in order to oppress the poor and are taking advantage of every law process that money can provide. The accusations leveled against the Israelites cover many different aspects and dimensions of their unethical way of life.

Amos is exhorting the people to seek good and hate evil and establish justice in the gate if they want to enjoy the support of Yahweh. The injustice of the people invites God's wrath and his justice. The symbols of Israel's wealth and greed, her houses and lands are to become the objects of God's wrath. Amos condemns those who destroy justice and hate the honest witness. They are using the courts in order to oppress the poor. The social responsibility of a person towards fellow human being is emphasized by Amos.

#### **4.3. Text – Amos 8: 4-8**

##### **4.3.1. Translation**

- 4 Hear this you who trample the poor and to make the humble of the land to cease.
- 5 Saying, when will the new moon be over so that we may buy grain, or the Sabbath so that we may open the wheat to diminish the ephah and to enlarge the shekel and to falsify the balances of deceit.
- 6 To buy the helpless with silver and the poor for a pair of sandals that the chaff of the wheat we may sell.
- 7 Yahweh has sworn by the pride of Jacob, I will not forget for ever all their works.
- 8 Because of this, will not the land quake and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it will rise up like the Nile and it overflows and sinks down like the Nile of Egypt?

#### 4.3.2. Introduction to the Pericope

This is another passage which Amos addresses the human rights violations in Israel. These verses expose the exploitation of the poor by the rich at the market places. These people loved gain more than they loved God and honesty. The sin behind all sin is covetousness, gain for self.<sup>381</sup> These verses depict the insensitive attitude of the rich businessmen towards the poor, needy and helpless. Three separate sins are specified: domination, treating as means and not ends and exploitation. One of their punishments will be a removal of Yahweh's word.

#### 4.3.3. Literary Features

##### 4.3.3.1. Form

The form of the pericope is 'judgment oracle'. The prophetic judgment oracles normally do not exist apart from indictments. God is announcing punishment for covenant breaking. He is also providing evidence or reminder of how the covenant has been broken. Judgment oracles are always predicated on Israel's bad behaviour.<sup>382</sup>

##### 4.3.3.2. Structure

This passage is part of the bigger section 8:4 – 14. Verses 9 – 10, 11 – 12, and 13 – 14 are often isolated as three distinct oracles of doom and are appended to vv. 4 – 8 because of their similar subject matter. These latter oracles all begin with some form of "day"/"time" introducing coming events such as "the time is coming" or "at that time". But if isolated from vv 4 – 8, vv 9 – 10, and vv 11 – 12 lack mention of covenant crimes. Vv 13 – 14 however, contain an indictment as well as a punishment prediction and could therefore be considered isolatable. The passage is structured concentrically in that the indictments (vv 4 – 6, 14) largely surround the predictions of doom.<sup>383</sup>

##### 4.3.3.3. Setting

The most likely setting for the oracle is Samaria's market place. The markets of Jeroboam's kingdom traded in human misery. It was not only in the court in the gates that the officials of the government had found an opportunity for profit. The change in Israel's

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<sup>381</sup>J.A. Motyer. *The Message of Amos*, BST, (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974) p.181.

<sup>382</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.383.

<sup>383</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, p.383.

social structure had created a need for commerce and the upper classes exploited the opportunity with ruthlessness.<sup>384</sup>“The wording gives no hint of a specific location for the original preaching of this oracle.”<sup>385</sup>

#### 4.3.4. Theological Comments

##### 4.3.4.1. Context

The first three verses of this section follow immediately after the fourth vision, but do not seem to be connected with it. This section is concerned with religious hypocrisy. It is strict Sabbath-keepers who are cheating Israel's poor (v.4). Those indicted celebrate religious festivals with their favourite songs. Syncretism is rampant, and the deeds of the people are selfish practices and their observance of religion is limited to worship procedures and does not extend to societal relationship.<sup>386</sup> Like the warnings in Amos 2:6-7, this preaching was addressed to the wealthy people who were making themselves rich by cheating the poor.<sup>387</sup>

##### 4.3.4.2. Exegetical Study

**V.4.** The new element in verses 4-6 is the more elaborate description of the greed and corruption of the mercantile class used in the exploitation of the poor and impoverished.<sup>388</sup> “Hear” in v.4 is a call to attention, a style which is common in the oracles of Amos (cf. 3:1; 4:1; 5:1). The address “you who trample” (הַשֹּׁאֲפִים) is an accusation in participial form. Those addressed are immediately characterized as oppressors of the poor. The needy are trampled in order to suppress them.<sup>389</sup> The trampling of the poor and the transactions of buying them at minimal cost (v.6) recall Amos' first judgment speech against Israel (2:6-8). There the emphasis was on selling the slaves not buying them. The whole indictment has finality in the expression “bring to an end” which literally means ‘cause to cease’ or ‘destroy’.<sup>390</sup> Although the construction עֲנִי-אֲרֵץ is unusual, it is not unique (see Jer 17:10; 44:19). The weak and unfortunate were not to be exploited; they should be treated

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<sup>384</sup>James Luther Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, pp.142-143.

<sup>385</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.383.

<sup>386</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, p.383.

<sup>387</sup>Bernard Thorogood. *A Guide to the Book of Amos*, p.94.

<sup>388</sup>John H. Hayes. *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching*, p.208.

<sup>389</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.326.

<sup>390</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.220.

with respect and concern.<sup>391</sup> Israel's society has developed two economic tiers during the eighth century B.C. At the expense of an increasingly impoverished large lower class, and in violation of the Mosaic covenant (Ex 23:6; Lev 19:10, 13, 15), a monied upper class had emerged. Its members included profiteers, business persons who felt free to take advantage of government policy that favoured the rich and paid no heed to the interests of the poor. Such people were trampling i.e., exploiting the poor with the result that they were apparently dying of starvation, selling themselves into slavery, suffering ill health and other maladies of malnourishment and lack of proper clothing and shelter etc., This was a tragic crime ultimately against Yahweh himself. It should be remembered that though Israel was ethnically Yahweh's people, the poor were economically his special people (Ps14:6; 1 Sam 2:8; Isa 61:1).<sup>392</sup>

**V.5.** A new theme is raised in this verse namely that of deceit in the realm of trade. This verse describes Israelite business people who are apparently strict in their observation of Sabbath and New Moon, but eager to cheat their customers once business can resume. In this way they “trample” on the poor. There was a close connection between the New Moon (חֹדֶשׁ) and the Sabbath (שַׁבָּת) in the religious life of Israel. The New Moon festival<sup>393</sup> was a Mosaic covenant holiday (Num 10:10) faithfully celebrated over the years by Israelites. The Law explicitly forbade marketing on the Sabbath<sup>394</sup> (Ex 20:8; Deut 5:12 – 15) because it involved work. But exploitive profits were so good that sellers could hardly stand to take holidays off.<sup>395</sup> The sabbatical concept in its biblical form is fundamentally an expression of social or socio-economic justice and natural equity.<sup>396</sup> Both days were times for cessation from normal work. Their eagerness to continue their business was the enterprise of betraying their Lord.<sup>397</sup> They wish to sell grain (שֶׁבֶר) and offer wheat for sale, literally “open (store bins) of grain” (וּנְפֹתְחָה־בָּר). Hebrew שֶׁבֶר refers to “grain rations”. The denominative verb שָׁבַר in the *qal* means “to

<sup>391</sup>James Luther Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.143.

<sup>392</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.384.

<sup>393</sup>It is a prominent religious festival throughout the biblical period celebrated once every four weeks.

<sup>394</sup>Sabbath is observed every seventh day.

<sup>395</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, p.384.

<sup>396</sup>William W. Hallo. “New Moons and Sabbaths: A Case-study in the Contrastive Approach” in *HUCA*, Vol.48 (1977) p.15.

<sup>397</sup>James Luther Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.144.

buy grain” and in *hiphil* it means “to sell grain”.<sup>398</sup> Israel’s traditions and laws that were meant to protect the poor and vulnerable have no impact, no relevance, and no connection with the keeping of the Sabbath.<sup>399</sup> The malicious side of the eagerness to do business is revealed primarily in the fact that not only good grain but even “refuse” is offered for sale.<sup>400</sup> מִפָּל occurs only here with this meaning; it must designate a product of inferior quality which, having fallen to the ground, has become soiled and trampled.

The indictment is levelled against those who combine strict ritual performance with daily acts of dishonesty.<sup>401</sup> The *ephah*<sup>402</sup> (אֵיפָה) was a unit of dry measure, and the *shekel*<sup>403</sup> (שֶׁקֶל) was Israel’s basic unit of weight. The merchants cheated the poor by reducing *ephah* (לְהִקְטִין אֵיפָה) and enlarging *shekel* (וּלְהַגְדִּיל שֶׁקֶל). The *ephah* was the measure of grain that was being sold. The *shekel* was the measure of coins that people paid. So by making the *ephah* smaller and the *shekel* larger, the traders made the people pay more money for less grain.<sup>404</sup> The root רָמָה means “to cheat” and “to betray.” The practice was prohibited by commandments forbidding Israelites to own weights and measures of different kinds (Deut 25:13-16; Lev 19:35f).<sup>405</sup> The practice was a breach of the commandment against stealing (Ex 20:15). The grain and wheat together signified food produces in general (cf. Gen 42:2 – 3), not merely certain grains. It was especially foodstuffs that a nonfarm urban populace would pay almost any price. The three descriptions of how sellers were unfairly increasing their profits reflect typical covenant language.<sup>406</sup> Soggin views this fragment as another piece of social invective by the prophet. He describes the traders as greedy and dishonest. The merchants were angry because ‘religion’ ruins their business but they cannot protest openly for fear of ruining their reputation.<sup>407</sup> An evil style of business defrauds the people through false weights, inferior

<sup>398</sup> Brown, Driver and Briggs, eds., *The BDB Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 991.

<sup>399</sup> Daniel J. Simundson. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.227.

<sup>400</sup> H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.327.

<sup>401</sup> Shalom M. Paul. *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, p.257.

<sup>402</sup> *Ephah* was a unit of dry measure of about 40 litres; it is roughly equal to the modern bushel. It was reduced probably by lining the basket.

<sup>403</sup> *Shekel* was a piece of metal about 11 grams. It was enlarged so that it took more gold or silver to balance it on the scales.

<sup>404</sup> Bernard Thorogood. *A Guide to the Book of Amos*, p.95.

<sup>405</sup> In the excavations at Tirtzah shops were found dating to the eighth century which had two sets of weights, one for buying and one for selling.

<sup>406</sup> Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.384.

<sup>407</sup> J.A. Soggin. *The Prophet Amos: A Translation and a Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1987) p.135.

goods, and inflated prices.<sup>408</sup> The use and misuse of weights and measures are common themes in ancient Near Eastern literature.

**V.6.** These unscrupulous traders in grain also trade in human traffic. The first two lines of the triplet comprising this verse recall 2:6b. There the selling (מָכַר) of the poor into slavery is condemned. Here the buying (קָנָה) of them is condemned. People and property represented wealth in those days as well as marketable goods.<sup>409</sup> The purchasers are those who have profited at the expense of the poor and can now buy them as slaves at low prices (“a pair of sandals”), in effect using the very money the poor had paid them to purchase overpriced food. To such hypocrites, people are commodities to be used for one’s advantage. Poor people were desperate enough even to pay for the “sweepings”, the contaminated grain from the bins and wagons.<sup>410</sup> For Amos, mercantile deceit was exceptionally costly for the poor and impoverished since it could lead to indebtedness and eventual debt servitude.<sup>411</sup> Hubbard opines that the clause “refuse of the wheat” (נִשְׁבִּיר וְנִמְפֵּל בָּר) is attached loosely to verse 6 may have been accidentally transposed by scribal lapse from the end of verse 5 where it fits better.<sup>412</sup>

**V.7.** The solemn oath by which God swears to bring Israel's end makes clear that the time for repentance has passed. Israel's sin is so great that it cannot be undone. This oath guarantees that God will be continually mindful of Israel's sin, that God will recall Israel's sin in full when punishing the perpetrators.<sup>413</sup> The difficulty in the verse is the exact meaning of the expression “the pride of Jacob” (גִּאְוֹן יַעֲקֹב) by which God swears. Because otherwise the Lord swears only “by himself” (6:8) or “by his holiness (4:2).” It is a particularly intense form of the announcement of judgment. Kellermann opines that “pride” (גִּאְוֹן) is a self-designation of Yahweh, even if the ironic idea might reflect the

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<sup>408</sup>H.W. Wolff. “Prophecy from the Eighth Through the Fifth Century” in *Interpretation – A Journal of Bible and Theology*, Vol.XXXII, No.1 (Jan. 1978) p.26.

<sup>409</sup>James Luther Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.144.

<sup>410</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, p.384.

<sup>411</sup>John H. Hayes. *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching*, p.209.

<sup>412</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.221.

<sup>413</sup>Craig A. Satterlee. “Amos 8:1 – 12” in *Int*, Vol.61, No.2, Apr (2007) p.203.

presumptuousness and arrogance of the people.<sup>414</sup>In 6:8 the ‘pride of Jacob’ refers to the self-confidence of the nation. But what does it mean for him to swear by “Jacob’s pride”? In 6:8 this term refers narrowly to the nation’s invincibility. In Ps 47:5 it clearly refers more generally to the entire land of Israel. Here also the “pride of Jacob” must represent the land of Israel in some way. For Yahweh to swear by Israel is analogous to a person’s swearing by a valuable possession. The linguistic connection of “swearing” with the Promised Land is so strong as to be almost an idiom of Hebrew covenantal language (cf. Gen 50:24; Num 11:12; Deut 1:8). Thus Yahweh here “swears by” the sworn land, Israel’s most precious possession – Yahweh’s great gift to them.<sup>415</sup> Scholars like Mays opine that the ‘pride of Jacob’ could be a divine title similar to the one in 1 Sam 15:29. The use of this form shows with what vehemence Yahweh reacts to the market of Samaria.<sup>416</sup> Hubbard however observes that the phrase ‘pride of Jacob’ best understood as extreme sarcasm by which Yahweh used the constancy of Israel’s horrible arrogance (cf 6:8) as a measure of his own constancy in keeping his promises to judge.<sup>417</sup> Hayes opines that “the pride of Jacob” refers to the city of Samaria (see 6:8). Yahweh swears that the deeds committed by the mercantile class will never be forgotten, that is, they shall be punished.<sup>418</sup> Wolff sees ironic sense here that Yahweh’s oath is just as unalterable as Israel’s haughty arrogance is beyond reform.<sup>419</sup>This judgment announcement lacked the blood and fire so frequently found in Amos but contained its own quiet terror – the solemn oath that Yahweh would not forget these deeds but hold them accountable for them all.<sup>420</sup> Yahweh will not ever forget (אִם-אֲשַׁכַּח לְנִצָּחַ) anything that they have done (מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כָּל). The poor have a determined protector in Yahweh (Isa 11:4; Deut 24:14 – 15).

**V.8.** Land will be a death trap for its inhabitants. Through a rhetorical question, the hearer/reader receives a prediction of death and destruction (curse type 24; cf Deut 28:20) with some of the overtones of generalized disaster (type 25; cf Deut 29:19). The mourning

<sup>414</sup>D. Kellermann. “גִּבְעוֹן” in *TDOT*, Vol.II, ed. by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Wills and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) p.348.

<sup>415</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.385.

<sup>416</sup>James Luther Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.145; Daniel J. Simundson, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.228.

<sup>417</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.221. See also Shalom M. Paul. *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, p.260.

<sup>418</sup>John H. Hayes. *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching*, p.209.

<sup>419</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, p.328.

<sup>420</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.221.

will be for the dead, not merely because the land shakes. This terrestrial upheaval with all its concomitant destruction and tragedy shall result in the mourning of the entire population. The convulsion of the earth is then potently and picturesquely portrayed by means of a simile drawn from the annual inundation of the Nile.<sup>421</sup> The Nile was well known to rise and sink annually, sometimes causing great harm through excessive flooding and demonstrating God's control of the elements. Hayes comments that the Nile inundation could on occasion be highly destructive. Amos was comparing the state of Israelite society to the pattern and destructiveness of a Nile inundation. Amos is making it clear that the social oppression and economic exploitation under Jeroboam II is the main reason for the agitation.<sup>422</sup>

However, Hubbard thinks that the flooding of the Nile is more beneficial than calamitous and he feels that the point Amos making here is 'massiveness'. It is the most massive and life changing natural phenomenon known to his part of the world.<sup>423</sup> Mays comments that the land will quake bringing grief upon all its residents with its shattering ruin. Earthquake is the only disaster more likely to make ancient person feel himself completely in the power of the divine and grip him with dread.<sup>424</sup> Earthquake is one of the dominant motifs of judgement in Amos (2:13; 3:14; 9:1) and it is the only reasonable response for the injustice and corruption of the merchants. McComiskey opines that earthquake is a striking metaphor represents the calamity Amos has referred to throughout the book.<sup>425</sup>

#### **4.3.5. Findings of the Study**

In these verses Amos is denouncing the powerful upper class for their economic injustices. He is focussing on human rights violations in controlling the land and trading in the market places. Trampling of the poor and human right violations are more evident in the following areas:

- i) As Israel became increasingly urbanized in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. fewer people enjoyed the economic autonomy of owning and farming their own

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<sup>421</sup>Shalom M. Paul. *A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, p.260.

<sup>422</sup>John H. Hayes. *Amos the Eighth Century Prophet – Its Times and His Preaching*, p.210.

<sup>423</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Joel & Amos – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.222.

<sup>424</sup>James L. Mays. *Amos – A Commentary*, p.145.

<sup>425</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. "Amos" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.325.

land. The increasingly powerful upper class secured more and more land for themselves by depriving the poor peasants their right to own the land.

- ii) The dominant classes were in a position to control market costs by holding back produce until the price rose to their satisfaction. So the poor labourers had to buy the overpriced, falsely weighed, contaminated food. In this fashion, the rich and powerful were exploiting the poor and needy.
- iii) The traders were dishonest in weighing and measuring the grain by making ephah small and shekel great. The poor were even made to pay for the contaminated grain.
- iv) The traders were also involving in human slave trading – they were buying and selling the poor as slaves. Human beings became a commodity.

So the human rights are violated when the poor were deprived of their right to own the land. And also the merchants controlled the market costs and as a result the poor labourers had to buy the overpriced food. The dishonest trading made the people to pay more for less grain. Slave trading made human beings a commodity depriving them to lead life with dignity. The perpetrators took advantage of the government policy which always supportive to the upper class. What appeared to be progress and good business to the merchants was in fact disobedience to Yahweh. They observed the holy days but were eagerly waiting for the business to resume so that they can continue to cheat the poor customers. Because of this Yahweh will punish the oppressors for their social oppression and economic exploitation. God remembers the plight of the poor and he is their protector. God originally intended a relatively egalitarian economic life for his people in Canaan. They had land to farm and to enjoy the fruit of their industry. The covenant emphasized in many ways the necessity of equal access to land and continuity of land possession for successive generations. This was designated in part to prevent the few from controlling the many by controlling agricultural production. When a few people control most of the land, social injustice is virtually inevitable because of the natural role greed plays in fallen human nature.

#### 4.4. Text – Hosea 4: 1-3

##### 4.4.1. Translation

- 1 Hear the word of Yahweh, O sons of Israel; For Yahweh has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land; For there is no truth, and no mercy and no knowledge of God in the land.
- 2 Swearing, lying, killing, stealing and doing adultery break forth (in the land) and blood touches blood.
- 3 Therefore the land shall mourn and everyone who lives in it shall languish, with the beasts of the field and with the birds of the heavens, yes also the fish of the sea shall be removed.

##### 4.4.2. Introduction to the Pericope

Chapter 4 opens with two oracles that take the form of God’s covenant lawsuit. This piece of vocabulary drawn from the law court is common in the prophets, who often used legal language to suggest that Israel was under indictment by God for the breaking of covenant. Here Hosea announces first God’s lawsuit against the people of the land (vv 1 – 3) and then God’s lawsuit against the priests of Israel (vv 4 – 10).<sup>426</sup> There is no true religion to be found in the land, but every kind of lawlessness and immorality.<sup>427</sup> The accusation refers to both sins of omission (v 1b) and sins of commission (v.2). God is weighing Israel in the balance against faithfulness, kindness and the knowledge of God; and he found that Israel is lacking at every point.<sup>428</sup> The judgment is pronounced, they suffer drought. In spite of its brevity, the oracle is virtually a paradigm of Hosea’s message of judgment.<sup>429</sup>

##### 4.4.3. Literary Features

###### 4.4.3.1. Form

The general form is the prophetic lawsuit and its sub-category, is the “court speech”. The case is called in the language of a “court speech” – the accusation is made, the evidence is provided, the judgment sentence is pronounced. Yahweh is both prosecutor and judge. Scholars differ in their stand whether this section is phrased in prose or poetry. Stuart opines that this all-encompassing oracle of judgment serves as a prose introduction to the oracles that follow;<sup>430</sup> whereas Hubbard feels that it is phrased in poetry. Hubbard

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<sup>426</sup>Bruce C. Birch. *Hosea, Joel and Amos* (Louseville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) p.46.

<sup>427</sup>Norman H. Snaith. *Amos, Hosea and Mica*, p.62.

<sup>428</sup>Derek Kidner. *The Message of Hosea*, BST, (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981) p.46.

<sup>429</sup>James Luther Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975) p.61

<sup>430</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.73.

further opines that the literary form compresses an argument or quarrel between Yahweh and the people rather than a scene of formal legal charges.<sup>431</sup>

#### 4.4.3.2. Structure

This oracle stands at the beginning of the second major section<sup>432</sup> of the book which in contrast to Chs. 1 – 3 is wholly composed of an arrangement of sayings.<sup>433</sup> Part 1 has provided the narrative framework; part 2 fills in the details of Israel's tragedy. Chapter 4 is composed of four sections (vv 1-3; vv 4-10; vv 11-14; and vv 15-19), each with a degree of unity and individuality. Vv 4 – 10 contain a specification of certain charges on priests; and the next section vv 11 – 14 attacks the northern cult itself. The final section vv 15 – 19 contains the language of warning, evidence, and judgment. Hosea had woven these four independent sections into a single unified oracle. The resulting unit has an overall consistency and a clear logical progression. Transitional elements link the four sections. Most of the chapter is composed in free verse. There is some possibility that certain portions are metrical poetry (esp. vv 4-10, 13-16) since they exhibit a rough correspondence in syllable count and contain synonymous parallelisms.<sup>434</sup>

#### 4.4.3.3. Setting

The emphasis upon the ignoring of the word of God by the priests and the cult suggests Bethel rather than Samaria or another originally heterodox site as the setting of the chapter. It is especially the Bethel altars or sacrifices that will bring this people to shame.<sup>435</sup> The setting is the royal court yard, a public square, a temple area or the gate of a city.<sup>436</sup> Since the oracle is addressed to Israel and even the beasts, birds and fish, the setting of the pericope is cosmic.<sup>437</sup> The dramatic and theological setting is Yahweh's legal process against his people for breach of covenant. In the legal drama on which the saying is based Yahweh plays the role of prosecutor and judge.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>431</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989) p.96.

<sup>432</sup>The book of Hosea divides naturally into two parts, Chs. 1-3 and 4-14.

<sup>433</sup>James Luther Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.61.

<sup>434</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.74.

<sup>435</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, p.74.

<sup>436</sup>Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, BCBC, p.90.

<sup>437</sup>Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea – A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1986) p.334.

<sup>438</sup>James Luther Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.61.

#### 4.4.4. Theological Comments

##### 4.4.4.1. Context

Chapter four begins the second part of the book. Here the personal family experiences of Hosea recede into the background and the nation of Israel takes the center stage. Covenant language and imagery runs through the book. Part 1 alludes to the covenants of God with Noah, Patriarchs, Sinai and David. Part 2 swells our understanding of the complexity and depth of covenant love and of covenant unfaithfulness.<sup>439</sup> Unfaithfulness in the lives of individuals and families only mirrors the values and relationships at the national levels.

##### 4.4.4.2. Exegetical Study

These verses contain a רִיב (controversy or lawsuit) against Israel. Yahweh complains that Israel has contravened the covenant law (vv 1b-2), and therefore decides to destroy the land and all that is in it (v 3).<sup>440</sup> These verses are a complete statement of the indictment against Israel that sounds like a lawsuit that Hosea raises on God's behalf. Many have described these verses as a key summary of the portion of Hosea's message that deals with God's judgment against Israel.<sup>441</sup> In the form of a "covenant lawsuit" God goes to court with his people in the roles of Plaintiff, prosecuting attorney and judge.<sup>442</sup> In this oracle, the indictment is like a catalogue of violations of the decalogue, that is, violations of the stipulations of the covenant at Mt. Sinai.<sup>443</sup> The passage contains a series of negative charges (v.1), which are followed by a series of positive charges for violations of covenant (v.2), and ends finally with a statement of consequences for this breaking of covenant (v.3).<sup>444</sup> The Hebrew terms used by Hosea refer to the kind of "knowledge" or "truth" that is given in the context of personal experience and community relationships.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>439</sup>Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, pp.86-87.

<sup>440</sup>Michael DeRoche. "Yahweh's rib against Israel: a reassessment of the so-called 'Prophetic Lawsuit' in the pre-exilic prophets" in *JBL*, Vol.102, No.4, Dec (1983) p.570.

<sup>441</sup>Bruce C. Birch. *Hosea, Joel and Amos*, p.46.

<sup>442</sup>James A. Wharton. "Hosea 4:1 – 3, exposition" in *Int*, Vol.32, No.1 Jan (1978) p.79.

<sup>443</sup>Herbert Bardwell Huffman. "The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets" in *JBL*, Vol.78, No.4, Dec (1959) p.294.

<sup>444</sup>Bruce C. Birch. *Hosea, Joel and Amos*, p.47.

<sup>445</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson. *The Eighth Century Prophets: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah – Proclamation Commentaries; The Old Testament Witnesses for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) p.55.

V.1. The command “Hear the word of Yahweh, O sons of Israel” (דְּבַר־יְהוָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) (שְׁמַעוּ) launches the second major section of the book and marked by a call to attention. In Hebrew, the imperative שְׁמַע (hear) in this context conveys much more than passive listening. It carries overtones of the call to heed as well as to hear (note the famous *Shema* of Deut 6:4 – 9). It implies a response and could be translated by words like “heed” or “obey.”<sup>446</sup> It is a conventional opening of the ‘messenger’ formula, a traditional prophetic form of speech. This and 1:1 are the only places where Hosea uses the phrase “the word of Yahweh” (דְּבַר־יְהוָה). It reminds that the word is from Yahweh and that Hosea is a legitimate prophet who speaks with divine authority. ‘Controversy’ (רִיב) the same root as ‘contention’ implies the lodging of a case of law against Israel.<sup>447</sup> When the prophets accused Israel of breaking God's law and predicted coming judgment, their message was set against a covenant background. This is quite apparent in the רִיב motif, or the prophetic lawsuit speech, where the prophet, as a representative of Yahweh, indicts the people of Israel for breaking the stipulations of the covenant.<sup>448</sup>

The suit is against “the inhabitants of the land” (יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ).<sup>449</sup> In Hosea's vocabulary ‘the land’ (הָאָרֶץ) plays a crucial role in Yahweh's relation to Israel. It belongs to Yahweh; through it he bestows his blessings under the covenant. This passage announces that Israel has broken the covenant and God now brings the case against her. The inhabitants of the land are the ones who have broken all bounds and committed murder, and crimes of violence involving grievous assault.<sup>450</sup> Israel's breaking of covenant first consists of its failure to observe the qualities of life consistent with covenant obedience. These are the sins of omission. There is no *faithfulness* (אֱמֻנָה), or *loyalty* (חֶסֶד), and no *knowledge of God* (דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים) in the land.<sup>451</sup>

<sup>446</sup>Daniel J. Simundson. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.44.

<sup>447</sup>J.B. Hindley. “Hosea” in *NBC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edt. Ed.by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986) p.707.

<sup>448</sup>J. Carl Laney. “The Role of the Prophets in God's case against Israel” in *BSac*, Vol.138, No.552, Oct-Dec. (1981) p.318.

<sup>449</sup>The ‘inhabitants of the land’ is general and comprehensive. It includes all sectors of the community which include priest, prophet, king, prince, people, man, woman, child, and even beasts, birds, and fish.

<sup>450</sup>Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea – A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1986) p.334.

<sup>451</sup>Bruce C. Birch. *Hosea, Joel and Amos*, p.47.

Israel's offences are summarized in three general sins of omission in covenantal terms followed by six more specific sins of commission (v.2).<sup>452</sup> This verse speaks of the people's threefold lack; they had no *faithfulness* or *kindness*, and *knowledge of God* which are covenant virtues. These are all important words to describe the relationship between God and God's covenant partners. 'No faithfulness' in daily life; or 'kindness' in personal relationships; 'no knowledge of God' that is spiritual ignorance.<sup>453</sup> *Faithfulness* indicates trustworthiness, fidelity to one's commitments. Israel has not reciprocated the trust God has shown. They were untrustworthy, failed to show compassion toward others, and lacked a true knowledge of the being and nature of God.<sup>454</sup> The first of the sins of omission is *lack of faithfulness*. It describes lack of truth-telling and truth-doing which result in instability, infidelity and unreliability.<sup>455</sup> אֱמֶת ("truthfulness," "trustworthiness" "fidelity," etc.) is genuineness, integrity, reliability and it connotes decent, responsible, relations between one person and another and thus among the citizens of a society. רַחֲמִים<sup>456</sup> (*hesed*) is a very significant word for covenant love and faithfulness and trustworthiness. It includes the essential ingredients of kindness and mercy; it suggests the bond of reciprocity that must characterize a true, ongoing personal relationship. It is also used frequently to describe God's covenant commitment as well. רַחֲמִים is the love and loyalty expected of partners in covenant – and this partnership was meant to embrace both the Lord and fellow Israelites.<sup>457</sup> "Loyalty" here indicates the quality that maintains wholeness in relationship. Hosea's charge is that Israel has not exhibited loyalty in her relationship to God or in relationships to one another among the people.<sup>458</sup> *No kindness* speaks to the lack of concern for needy neighbors, which the covenant insists on as the appropriate response to the steadfast love Yahweh has shown to his people.<sup>459</sup> רַחֲמִים is practiced in an ethically

<sup>452</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.75.

<sup>453</sup>J.B. Hindley. "Hosea" in *NBC*, p.707.

<sup>454</sup>Leon J. Wood. "Hosea" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.184.

<sup>455</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.97.

<sup>456</sup>No English word is a satisfactory equivalent for the Hebrew term. Many have been proposed such as love, steadfast love, loyalty, mercy, kindness, piety, religiosity, and devotion.

<sup>457</sup>Derek Kidner. *The Message of Hosea*, p.47.

<sup>458</sup>Bruce C. Birch. *Hosea, Joel and Amos*, p.47.

<sup>459</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.97.

binding relationship of relatives, hosts, allies, friends and rulers. It is fidelity to covenantal obligations.<sup>460</sup>

Faithfulness and devotion are the active virtues which ought to be practiced in the relationship of persons and in the vocabulary of the Old Testament are used of the relationship of Israel to God or of one Israelite to another.<sup>461</sup> אֱמֶת emphasizes the enduring quality of responsible relationships, חֶסֶד underlines its intensity. The meaning here is a lack of community responsibility among those who live together in the land. It has its roots in a lack of *Knowledge of God*.<sup>462</sup> *Knowledge of God*, (דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים) is one of the most central themes in the book of Hosea.<sup>463</sup> “Know Yahweh” is a key term and a key concept in the religion of the Old Testament. The Hebrew words for knowing and knowledge imply more than content. They imply an acknowledgment and participation in relationship. To know God is to acknowledge intimate relationship to God. One of the major charges against the people was that there was no “knowledge of God” in the land. Here the term “Knowledge of God” involves not only knowing what God expects but also accepting his demands as valid and binding. This relationship between God and his people is to be a close personal relationship, much as that between a man and his wife (2:19-20). This lack of knowledge of God is their basic fault and is seen in the lack of faithfulness and steadfast love.<sup>464</sup>

The knowledge of God occurs in this verse is coupled with the moral qualities and the absence of these qualities is amplified by the mention of the crimes, “cursing, lying, murder, theft, adultery.” The prophet first mentions what we may call the “covenant virtues,” then the vices by which the fundamental obligations of the covenant are violated.<sup>465</sup> Wharton defines *Knowledge of God* as the intimate knowledge of *relationship*, to be spontaneously reflected in attitudes and actions toward others.<sup>466</sup> *Knowledge of God*

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<sup>460</sup>R. Laird Harris, “חֶסֶד” in *TWOT* Vol.1, ed. by R. Laird Harris *et al.* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) p.305.

<sup>461</sup>James Luther Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.62.

<sup>462</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the Book of Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) p.67.

<sup>463</sup>Bruce C. Birch. *Hosea, Joel and Amos*, pp.47-48

<sup>464</sup>Phil McMillion. “An Exegesis of Hosea 4:1 – 5:7” in *ResQ*, Vol.17, No.4 (1974) pp.239-240.

<sup>465</sup>John L. McKenzie. “Knowledge of God in Hosea” in *JBL*, Vol.74, No.1 Mar (1955) p.26.

<sup>466</sup>James A. Wharton. “Hosea 4:1-3, Exposition” in *Int*, Vol.32, No.1, Jan (1978) p.80.

appears in parallel with “fear of the Lord” as a description of true religion. To do justice and righteousness and to judge the cause of the poor and the needy is to know God.<sup>467</sup>

The “knowledge of God” is not a purely “vertical” dimension of faith, separated from the “horizontal” dimension of ethical responsibilities in the community.<sup>468</sup> The use of *Knowledge of God* is based upon the root **יָדָע**, a term represents the essence of the covenant relationship between God and his people. To know God is to be in a right relationship with him with characteristics of love, trust, respect, and open communication.<sup>469</sup> “To know” (**יָדָע**) involves both content and relationship. It implies an intimacy with and commitment to what is known. If one’s relationship with God is wrong, misplaced, disloyal, and lacking in knowledge, then sins against one’s neighbor will result. Therefore when there is no knowledge of God in the land, the covenant has been abrogated. This knowledge is more important than sacrifice and its absence will mean destruction for the nation.<sup>470</sup> The lack of knowledge of God is Israel’s cardinal deficiency; it is what Yahweh demands rather than sacrifice (6:6). Israel’s infidelity demonstrates that they had no real commitment to God. Nor did they truly know Him in a living, experiential way.<sup>471</sup> Wolff comments that lack of “Knowledge of God” is a transgression because it has its origin in the rejection of (4:6) and contempt for (8:12) the gift of divine revelation. Thus this part of the verse characterizes Israel’s guilt as an absence of faithful relationships among the members of God’s people.<sup>472</sup>

**V.2.** If covenant relationship with God has been violated, relationships with the neighbor will become violent and dysfunctional as well. In Hosea all the offenses have to do with one’s neighbor.<sup>473</sup> In support of the accusation that Israel has broken the covenant, Hosea now cites several crimes depicted as sins of commission from the apodictic decalogue list (Ex 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-21), the very heart of the covenant stipulations. Swearing (**שָׁבַע**),

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<sup>467</sup>Jack P. Lewis. “**יָדָע**” *TWOT* Vol.1, ed. by R. Laird Harris *et al.* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) p.367.

<sup>468</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson. *The Eighth Century Prophets: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah*, p.56.

<sup>469</sup> Terence E. Fretheim. “**יָדָע**” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, Interpreting the Prophetic Word, Vol.2, p.413 cited by Richard Duane Patterson, “Portraits from a Prophet’s Portfolio: Hosea 4” in *BSac* Vol.165, No.659, Jul – Sep (2008) p.304.

<sup>470</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.75.

<sup>471</sup>Richard Duane Patterson. “Portraits from a Prophet’s Portfolio: Hosea 4” in *BSac*, Vol.165, No.659, Jul – Sep (2008) p.304.

<sup>472</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, p.67.

<sup>473</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, p.67.

lying (שָׁחַד), murder (רָצַח), stealing (גָּנַב), and committing adultery (נָאֵף) are all prohibited in the foundational ethical demands given by God to Moses when the covenant was made at Sinai.<sup>474</sup> The list includes those crimes which destroy relationships within the community, to the point that violence is heaped upon violence.<sup>475</sup> The entire list catalogues attitudes and actions toward other people that reflect the deadly opposite of God's intention for human life.<sup>476</sup>

All these charges are violations of fundamental covenant responsibilities toward the neighbor laid down in the Ten Commandments and reinforced by Israel's covenant law codes.<sup>477</sup> The six laws are cited in summary fashion, not in their decalogue order, the first five each via a single word, in the infinitive absolute ("cursing," "lying," etc), and the last of the six in a clause of its own ("blood touches blood"). "Lying" goes beyond the important matter of simply telling the truth. It was a special problem in maintaining the integrity of the legal system in which justice depends on the solemn commitment to truthful witness. These crimes are not simply breaches of general morality; they are acts prohibited by the normative tradition of Israel which summarizes the will of Yahweh under the covenant. These sins have a common core, and fasten on the crimes that do most harm to other people. A similar series is used in Jeremiah's temple sermon (Jer 7:9).<sup>478</sup>

Three of the six commandment violations are given in the exact root vocabulary of the decalogue (רָצַח "murder"; גָּנַב "stealing"; נָאֵף "adultery"), from the commandments containing only a single verb form and the negative לֹא "not". The other three citations are summaries, using vocabulary that does not precisely repeat the wordings to which they refer. אָלַף means cursing and damning of another person; denouncing or wishing evil against someone. "Cursing" is invoking a divinely caused misfortune on another and it would violate the prohibition of invoking Yahweh's name for vain reasons. שָׁחַד denotes lying, deception and cheating of the neighbor as especially practiced in the law courts and in trade. It was a particular problem in Israel in judicial procedure and as the business

<sup>474</sup>Daniel J. Simundson. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.46.

<sup>475</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson. *The Eighth Century Prophets: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah*, p.56.

<sup>476</sup>James A. Wharton. "Hosea 4:1-3, Exposition" in *Int*, Vol.32, No.1, Jan (1978) p.81.

<sup>477</sup>Bruce C. Birch. *Hosea, Joel and Amos*, p.48.

<sup>478</sup>Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea – A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.337.

economy of Israel developed in trade.<sup>479</sup> It denotes dishonesty in interpersonal relations, the most grievous examples of which are dishonest legal testimony and dishonest business dealings.<sup>480</sup> It violates the personal and legal rights of others especially when it entails false witness in legal deliberations, financial transactions or religious vows (Lev 19:11). Justice is not possible unless people tell the truth in business transactions and in the courts.

רָצַח denotes premeditated murder, the taking of human life without due process of law (Ex 20:13); גָּנַב signifies stealing breaches eighth commandment and originally implied kidnapping and was expanded to include crimes of appropriating the valuable possessions of another (Ex 21:16); and committing adultery (נָאָץ) caps the list as the expression of Israel's spiritual and physical promiscuity (Ex 20:14; Lev 20:10).<sup>481</sup> Wolff comments that Hosea juxtaposes those transgressions that concern one's neighbor and by divine law require the death penalty, because they are totally irreconcilable with the life of God's people. These crimes break out in the land; they fill the vacuum created by the absence of a sense of trustworthiness in the community and the lack of knowledge of God's will.<sup>482</sup> The result of the disregard of God's commandments is that "blood touches blood" (וְדָמִים בְּדָמִים נִגָּעוּ), some scholars translate it as "murder follows murder".<sup>483</sup> One misdeed leads to another. Chaos rules and violence is a constant threat, leaving people in perpetual fear. Wolff translates it as "and there is one deed of blood after another" and opines that it emphasizes that the foregoing series of offenses above all presents crimes against the neighbor's person that require the death penalty.<sup>484</sup> L.J. Wood comments that violent crimes had become so common that one follow another, as if touching it.<sup>485</sup> Snaith opines that "murder follows murder" is an appropriate rendering because the Hebrew really means "bloodshed".<sup>486</sup> Andersen and Noel Freedman comments that 'murder' refers to the shedding of innocent blood by official action, and the crime charged against the nation here, as elsewhere, is the formal sacrifice of human beings, in

<sup>479</sup>James L. Mays, *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.64; also see H. W. Wolff, *A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, pp.67-68.

<sup>480</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.76.

<sup>481</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.97.

<sup>482</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, p.68.

<sup>483</sup>For example see Derek Kidner. *The Message of Hosea*, BST, p.46.

<sup>484</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, p.68.

<sup>485</sup>Leon J. Wood, "Hosea" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.184.

<sup>486</sup>Norman H. Snaith. *Amos, Hosea and Micah* (London: Epworth Press, 1956) p.62.

particular children who are innocent and unblemished, so as to meet sacrificial requirements.<sup>487</sup>

In any event, the shedding of innocent blood is an ultimate crime in the eyes of the great pre-exilic prophets; it symbolizes the ultimate rebellion against God in the destruction of human beings who are made in his image and represent him on earth. This series points to the moral-social character of faithfulness, devotion and the knowledge of God. In the covenant structure the relation of Israel to God is articulated in the *torah* which orders the relation of human beings as covenant partners. Social ethics and theological orthodoxy are interdependent. An Israelite was faithless to God in acting against the rights of his brother.

The proliferation of such deeds shows that the northern state had already sunk to the level of a chaotic society which had no recognizable relation to the divine law. Social violence had become the content of their life; no moment was left free of their crime as one bloody deed followed another. The accusation is a sweeping assertion that Israel has completely broken the terms of the Yahweh covenant and is punishable by the curses which enforced its integrity.<sup>488</sup> Hubbard thinks that the last clauses of verse 2 are troublesome: *they break all bounds* may be the verb for which the previous five words serve as subject. If the verb stands by itself, then it may depict some general yet vicious mayhem that violates human rights in letter and spirit; and if linked with the final clause *murder follows murder*, it may connote either lavish, wanton bloodshed or more specifically the activity of armed troops breaking into households to seize victims for the human sacrifices that fed the altars of the Baals.<sup>489</sup> Hindley opines that ‘murder follows murder’ literally ‘bloods touch bloods’ is an intensive plural for much bloodshed.<sup>490</sup> It indicates that in Israel of that time violence has become the norm. The Hebrew word פָּרַץ for “break out” describes a violent action by God, people, or animals. God can break out of his holy confines in angry destruction (Ex 19:22; 2 Sam 5:20).<sup>491</sup> The malicious deeds

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<sup>487</sup>Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea – A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.338.

<sup>488</sup>James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.65.

<sup>489</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, pp.97-98.

<sup>490</sup>J.B. Hindley. “Hosea” in *NBC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edt. Ed.by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986) p.708.

<sup>491</sup>Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea – A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.337.

mentioned by the prophet show the opposite side of the flourishing economy at the time of Jeroboam II that led to an early form of capitalism and the same time produced a social crisis.<sup>492</sup> The juxtaposition of these two sets of charges by Hosea against Israel is important. There is a necessary interrelationship between the rightness of our relationship to God and the rightness of our relationship to neighbor.<sup>493</sup> YHWH's indictment against Israel begins, with the assertion that the Israelites are failing in their promise of how to relate to others and to God.<sup>494</sup> Hosea charges that exploitation and violence characterizes Israel's life because it is unchecked by a sense of right relationship to God. Without the personal relationship to Yahweh and the presence of genuine reliability and loyalty the covenant stipulations established to regulate mutual social relationships become dysfunctional.<sup>495</sup>

**V.3.** "Therefore" introduces the announcement of Yahweh's coming punishment. Disobedience to God leads to brokenness, conflict and violence among human beings and finally the whole creation will suffer.<sup>496</sup> Hosea announces Yahweh's approaching judgment in the form of a great drought. The land itself will so completely wither that it can no longer support any form of life. Its population will fade away.<sup>497</sup> The verse describes a catastrophe which results in a land devoid of life. This judgment is typically introduced by **לְכֵן** a synonym of **לְכֵן** "therefore". The first verb describes the withering of vegetation (cf. Am 1:2; Joel 1:10). The second verb **אָמַל** in the *pual* can refer to barrenness in child-bearing or of agriculture. The "drought" will be so severe that even the sea will become dry, its fish "takes away". The verb used in this case a common expression for "passing away" or "being buried" is a circumlocution for "to die".<sup>498</sup>

The catastrophe is not merely a drought, but a terrible reduction of life-forces which tends to a total absence of life. When the people of God break the covenant, the whole creation suffers the consequences of their sin (Gen 8:21; cf. Rom 8:19ff).<sup>499</sup> Nature suffers for people's sin. 'The land mourns' either 'the people of the land' (parallel to 'all

<sup>492</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, p.68.

<sup>493</sup>Bruce C. Birch. *Hosea, Joel and Amos*, p.48.

<sup>494</sup>Jeffrey H. Hoffmeyer. "Covenant and Creation: Hosea 4:1 – 3" in *RevExp*, Vol.102, No.1, Wint (2005) p.145.

<sup>495</sup>Carl J. Bosma. "Creation in Jeopardy: A Warning to Priests (Hosea 4:1 – 3)" in *CTJ*, Vol.34, No.1, Apr (1999) p.101.

<sup>496</sup>Daniel J. Simundson. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.47.

<sup>497</sup>H.W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, p.68.

<sup>498</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, pp.76-77.

<sup>499</sup>James Luther Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.65.

who dwells') or the desolation of a neglected countryside. The land as a source of God's blessing becomes a source of God's cursing as a consequence of broken covenant. 'Languish' can refer to loss of human fertility, but also to a disillusioned and disappointed people who have nothing to live for.<sup>500</sup> אֶבֶל has two usages – mourning for the dead and usage in connection with announcement of judgment; judgment with reference to people and judgment with reference to nature and vegetation. When it is used with reference to nature, the proper meaning of אֶבֶל is 'to dry up', 'wither.' The passages pertaining to nature belong to announcements of judgment usually have to do with a calamity which has come upon the land.<sup>501</sup> The thoroughness of the drought, wiping out all who dwell in the land and the entire animal kingdom give clues that the devastation is not just natural; the crimes of the land of Israel will result in judgment for the whole 'earth'.<sup>502</sup> This verse has a cosmic ring about it, with overtones of the creation story.

#### 4.4.5. Findings of the Study

In this pericope Hosea is emphasizing the human rights violations which are destroying the relationships within the community. He is denouncing the crimes such as swearing, lying, stealing, murder, and adultery. These crimes are opposite of God's intention for human life and are breaches of general morality and do most harm to the fellow human beings. They are all crimes against humanity and acts of rebellion against God. Justice is not possible unless people tell the truth in business transactions and in the courts.

The shedding of innocent blood is a crime and violation of human rights because every human being has a right to live and this crime symbolizes the ultimate rebellion against God in the destruction of human beings who are made in his image and represent him on earth.

Faithfulness, kindness, and knowledge of God are covenant virtues and together express the importance of relationship between God and God's covenant partners. These three virtues overlap and are expressed in personal relationships. If a person is not loyal

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<sup>500</sup>J.B. Hindley. "Hosea" in *NBC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edt. Ed.by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, p.708.

<sup>501</sup>Arnulf Baumann. אֶבֶל in *TDOT*, Vol.I, ed. by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Wills (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983) pp.45-47.

<sup>502</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.98.

and has wrong relationship with God, he will commit sins against his neighbor. People were untrustworthy, failed to show compassion toward others, and lacked a true knowledge of the being and nature of God.

The sins of omission and the sins of commission pictured so relentlessly throughout the chapter make up a remarkably complete picture of the depths of Israel's apostasy. Hosea does not contain extensive accusations about social justice and pleas for justice on behalf of the poor and powerless. He starts with the foundation, the basis for ethical behavior, by concentrating on the issue of idolatry. When the people of God break the covenant God brings judgment upon the people and the nature.

#### **4. 5. Text– Hosea 7: 1 – 7**

##### **4.5.1. Translation**

- 1 <sup>503</sup>When I would restore the fortunes of my people, when I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered, and the wickedness of Samaria. For they have worked falsehood. And a thief comes; a troop of robbers plunders outside.
- 2 And they do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their transgressions. Now their own doings have hemmed them in. They are before my face.
- 3 They made the king glad with their wickedness, and the rulers with their lies.
- 4 They all are adulterers, like an oven heated by the baker; he ceases from stirring from kneading the dough, while it is leavened.
- 5 In the day of their king the rulers have sickened themselves with the heat of wine. He stretches out his hand with scorners.
- 6 For they brought near their heart like an oven, while they lie in wait. Their baker sleeps all night, in the morning, it burns like a flaming fire.
- 7 They all are hot as an oven and devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen. Not one among them calls to me.

##### **4.5.2. Introduction to the Pericope**

These verses are a divine saying in which Yahweh describes the political life of Israel as a creation of evil and an engine of wrath which rushes towards its own end with no appeal to him. It is a lament over the impasse between Yahweh's willingness to restore his people and their total identification with evil. The oracle remains at the level of accusation throughout and never moves to the announcement of judgment. Instead, the final line of v.7 rings like a lament which implies a doom inherent in the nation's failure which works its own punishment. The saying is built around one of Hosea's characteristic

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<sup>503</sup>The chapter division, MT and most English versions shows line 1 as part of chapter 6. But I chose to place it with the present section as it sounds more sensible. The first two lines speak of attempts by God to help and heal Israel.

metaphors. The image of the baker's oven is used to bring to light the passionate wrath that drives Israel's political life.<sup>504</sup> This oracle describes God's acts of mercy and covenant loyalty as another means to bring the people to repentance.

### **4.5.3. Literary Features**

#### **4.5.3.1. Form**

The passage consists of divine speech in the form of accusatory personal laments. Israel is consistently in the third person, as if Yahweh were addressing someone concerning them, as witness in a covenant lawsuit.<sup>505</sup>

#### **4.5.3.2. Structure**

The chapter can be divided into four parts (vv 1 – 2; vv 3 – 7; vv 8 – 12; and vv 13 – 16) while the select pericope is divided into two parts. Verses 1 – 2 is lament over the general wickedness of the nation; and Verses 3 – 7 is lament over Samaritan domestic politics. The pattern of the laments is somewhat chiasmic, i.e. general sins: domestic sins::international sins: general destruction. Several catch words provide links between the subsections of the full passage – e.g. “Evil/wickedness” in vv 2,3,12; “robbers” in v.1; “official” in vv 3,5,16; “punish/instruct” in vv 12, 15 etc., The predominating prosodic pattern is synonymous parallelism; a bit of antithetical parallelism also is present.<sup>506</sup>

#### **4.5.3.3. Setting**

The setting of the passage is best related to the political instability in Samaria after 733 B.C. Vv 3 – 7 in particular via the metaphor of the superheated baker's oven depict the kind of passion involved in the assassination of Pekah. These verses also recall political changes of the north's last days. Since the fall of the Jehu dynasty in 752 B.C. with the assassination of Zechariah, three more kings (Shallum, Pekahiah, and Pekah) had been murdered (2 Kgs 15:8-26). Most of the accusations are made against decisions and practices that originate in the city of Samaria. The chapter catalogs the evils of the Northern capital, and thus follows naturally from the mention of Samaria at the end of the previous pericope.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>504</sup>James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.104.

<sup>505</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.117.

<sup>506</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.117.

<sup>507</sup>Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC, p.117.

#### 4.5.4. Theological Comments

##### 4.5.4.1. Context

Within the recent history, Israel has suffered from foreign domination, but God saved them (2 Kings 14:26-27). Yet even God's goodness did not turn them back to him.<sup>508</sup> The particular occasion of the oracle is probably the assassination of Pekah in favor of Hoshea to rid the nation of his anti-Assyrian policy. The historical basis of the saying is the tragic instability of the monarchy in Israel.<sup>509</sup>

##### 4.5.4.2. Exegetical Study

**V.1** The opening line states the general situation of Israel's wickedness, and the following two lines illustrate the deceit, Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant while thinking to honour Yahweh through outward religious practices. Hosea characterizes the Israel of his time with terms such as "corruption", "wicked deeds", "false dealing", "thieves and bandits", and "wickedness". These sins range from the hidden to the most blatant acts of outrage, acts which everyone recognizes as immoral. When his people turn to him with wailing about their suffering, the covenant God Yahweh is faithful to his covenant. He can heal their wounds and restore to the goodness of life. 'To change the fortune' is a figure of speech which means a return to an original starting point.<sup>510</sup> "To heal" includes the meaning of "forgive". For Hubbard, 'heal' is one of Hosea's favourite terms for the reversal of Israel's immorality and consequent suffering in judgment (5:13; 6:1).<sup>511</sup> The very religion of people is a deceitful act, a revelation of their evil. The priests who enter the temple and minister outside in its precincts are robbers and thieves.<sup>512</sup> The twin crimes of breaking and entering and banditry are cited in evidence, emphasizing the blatant nature of the violations. The two crimes are inclusive for civil and social injustices in general. Plundering captures the idea of stripping clothes and valuables off the bodies of war victims. God is lamenting on society's toleration of open evils of all sorts, while hypocritically maintaining its religious rituals.<sup>513</sup> The iniquity of Ephraim<sup>514</sup> and the evil

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<sup>508</sup> Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, BCBC, p.134.

<sup>509</sup> James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.104.

<sup>510</sup> James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.102.

<sup>511</sup> David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.131.

<sup>512</sup> James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, pp.102-103.

<sup>513</sup> Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.118.

deeds of Samaria<sup>515</sup> are the violent activities of the priests. The criminal actions of priests who ought to have been exemplars and teachers of covenant righteousness are keeping God from restoring the nation.<sup>516</sup>

**V.2.** The stress continues upon the openness of the nation's sins. Ephraim's guilt is not hidden; God has watched it all. In the couplet "they do not think", no emphasis is placed on introspection. זָכַרְתִּי can mean "I remember" commonly used in connection with remembering the covenant. But in this context it means remembering the sins of the people.<sup>517</sup> People will not remember the history of Yahweh's revelation, but he remembers the history of their sin. When they turn to Yahweh in worship and stand in his presence, he is ready to heal and restore. But when he looks upon them, he only sees the evil, the iniquity, and sin.<sup>518</sup> Israel's behaviour reflects the influence of Canaanite religion on Israelite thought patterns. It intended to ignore the divine rule over history, and thus allowed for a personally indulgent ethical system. Their 'transgressions' connote general covenant unfaithfulness rather than political intrigue per se. מַעַל consistently has the sense of failure to live up to expected responsibilities. As Yahweh looks at Israel he sees not people but sins. "When I look at them all I can see is their sins" is the sense of the second couplet "they are before my face."<sup>519</sup> Appearing before him are not those who in their distress seek communion with him, but those who are caught in and circumscribed by their own deeds. The magnitude of priestly error is underscored by the use of "all their wickedness"; nothing they have done will escape divine attention.<sup>520</sup>

**V.3.** Attention centres now on political leadership: royalty, appointed officials, and presumably also influential nobility. The "wickedness" that "makes the king glad" probably refers to the violent overthrow of the king which the prophet has condemned. The conjunction of "king" and "rulers" here suggests that the whole of the court, not just the monarch was the target of a plot. The king and his officials were delighted with the wicked scheming of the priests. In view of v 5a, which speaks of wine, we suggest that

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<sup>514</sup>Ephraim continues to be mentioned as representative of the northern kingdom.

<sup>515</sup>Samaria is the capital city of northern kingdom and cited as the center of crime.

<sup>516</sup>David Allan Hubbard, *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.131.

<sup>517</sup>Brown, Driver and Briggs, eds., *The BDB Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p.270.

<sup>518</sup>James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.103.

<sup>519</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, p.118.

<sup>520</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.131.

what is going on in v.3 is a drinking party at court.<sup>521</sup> The arena of politics exposes another sphere of covenantal unfaithfulness. God's design is that the nation's leaders act as moral guides for the nation. Instead they themselves wander astray.<sup>522</sup> Hosea is exposing the corruption of the palace, the nation, and the diplomats. The "evil" and "lies" the verse addresses are those of political conspirators, whose plotting have brought kings, their chosen officials to power and gave them joy.<sup>523</sup> The prophet speaks as though the celebrations held at the coronation of a new king were before his eyes. Yahweh has nothing to do with such installation; indeed it is an act of rebellion against him. A king should rejoice in justice and righteousness, but here is one whose joy is the fruit of violent evil.<sup>524</sup>

**V.4.** The word "they all" (כָּלֵהֶם) includes those circles reproved in v.3 for deposing the old king and also the newly invested court. The sin of adultery is singled out for special mention. Since adultery took place in the cult, the term refers to the priests who fostered and practiced it. 'Adulterers' (זִנָּיִם) is a metaphor for those practicing covenant infidelity. Their passions burned towards goals that violated the covenant that was to uphold. The 'oven' (תַּנּוּר) and 'baker' similes make this clear.<sup>525</sup> The catchword "adulterers" used before to express covenant infidelity is here also a pun on "to bake," and "anger". Here the term is used of those whose acts are evil and treacherous, betraying Yahweh in political life as he is betrayed in cultic worship. 'They all' gathers up king, court officials, and conspirators as a band of adulterers who transgress the order of their relation to Yahweh with their evil and lies.<sup>526</sup> In Hosea, accusations of adultery are usually directed toward the broken God/human relationships or the Baal/human idolatry. The two cannot be separated. Violence in the country's political life reveals the basic problem of an adulterous relationship with God, a turning away from the obedience that God expects.<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>521</sup>Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea – A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, pp.454-455.

<sup>522</sup> Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, BCBC, p.135.

<sup>523</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, pp.118-119.

<sup>524</sup>James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.105.

<sup>525</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.134.

<sup>526</sup> James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.105. See also H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, p.124.

<sup>527</sup>Daniel J. Simundson. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, pp.62-63.

The leaders of Samaria in their zeal for the sin of adultery were compared to a heated oven – a striking illustration of lust. Their evil plot is already a burning fire in their hearts. But the time is not ripe. They first elaborate their plans and wait for the opportune moment. They had come to power by the heat of treachery and violent usurpation but not by Yahweh's will.<sup>528</sup> The image of the bake-oven is employed as a device to narrate the course of the conspiracy. The people are like baker's oven with the fire damped down while the baker is waiting for the fermentation to take place. The implication is that as soon as the fermentation is complete the baker will stir up the fire and they will find themselves in the flames.<sup>529</sup> Heat figures prominently in this extended metaphor. Heat is the heat of a fire, the heat of sexual desire, the heat of anger, and the heat of intoxication.<sup>530</sup>

**V.5.** This verse seems to describe the ploy by which the palace revolt is accomplished. When all is ready the conspirators arrange for the officials of the present king to be drunk. Hubbard opines that the conspirators are priests who are also called mockers or scorners a term descriptive of their scornful attitude towards royalty.<sup>531</sup> The mockers (לַעֲצִים) are probably those who garrulously deride the prophet. While they are intoxicated and the king is defenceless, they strike (1 Kings 16:8-14). “The day of their king” (יּוֹם מַלְכֵּנּוּ) means the coronation anniversary of the king in whose behalf the conspirators acted.<sup>532</sup> Nothing could be more deceitful than to sit at someone's table while plotting evil against them. The kings and officials are now depicted as hot from drunkenness thus eagerly friendly even to those who scoff at religious faith. The drunken officials either welcome infidels, drink with infidels, or cooperate with infidels. The term ‘extending the hand’ (מִשָּׁךְ יָדוֹ) may have something to do with acts of violence.<sup>533</sup>

**V.6.** The oven imagery is resumed and brought to a climax in a flaming blaze of fire. The fire damped down overnight, but blazing up as soon as the baker stirs it in the morning. This means there are times when their wickedness seems to abate, there is no real reformation, and soon they are worse than before.<sup>534</sup> The few short hours that the baker

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<sup>528</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.119.

<sup>529</sup>Norman H. Snaith. *Amos, Hosea and Micah*, p.68.

<sup>530</sup>Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, BCBC, p.136.

<sup>531</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.134.

<sup>532</sup>James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.106.

<sup>533</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, pp.119-120.

<sup>534</sup>Norman H. Snaith. *Amos, Hosea and Micah*, p.68.

allows the heated oven to rest and ceases from raking its fire correspond to the sleeping hours of the conspirators when their rage is dormant. However the smouldering inactivity of both is brief—for when their fatigue has "leavened", they once again blaze up to renew their nefarious intrigues.<sup>535</sup> The governmental leaders are utterly consumed by their desire for power. Asleep or awake, they are never free from the flame of passion for conspiracy. The horrible, destructive force of this passion drives them even to the assassination of royalty who represent Yahweh. The second couplet continues the oven analogy. Samaria's leaders are compared to that fire; they are devoted to mischief against Yahweh's will.<sup>536</sup> The hot passion of the conspirators is like the oven fire which is stirred and fed at morning until the flames leap out of the oven door.<sup>537</sup> Scholars like Hubbard are of the opinion that priests remain the subjects of the plot. "They drew near" hints at their execution of their assassination plot. Their hearts fired with their evil choices are at full furnace temperature.<sup>538</sup> 'Drawing near' describes the approach of those who lay in wait all night, whose heart was like an oven. When the morning comes, the baker stirs the fire and brings it to baking heat. On that indication the rebels inflamed by wine and anger, devour their ruler with the sword which is a violent crime.<sup>539</sup>

**V.7.** The oracle reaches its climax here. Here the prophet moves on from an actual event to a more general and fundamental description. The leaders of the government have come to power by 'devouring' of kings. One of the consequences of breaking the covenant is severe famine, as a result of which a person is driven to eat the flesh of others.<sup>540</sup> 'Devouring' (אָכַל) continues the image of fire. "Rulers" is a poetic synonym for kings. Hubbard opines that 'Judges' (שֹׁפְטִים) is an appropriate term to describe the *kings* because kings are responsible to enforce justice. But it is more likely that in this passage *judges* is synonymous with *princes* whose task was to carry out the king's righteous command to enforce the covenant.<sup>541</sup> Plural is mentioned because Hosea was not describing an isolated incident but one repeated several times in Israel's history. During Hosea's time alone, four

<sup>535</sup>Shalom M. Paul. "Image of the Oven and the Cake in Hos.7:4-10" in *VT*, Vol.18, No.1, Jan (1968) p.116.

<sup>536</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.120.

<sup>537</sup>James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, p.106.

<sup>538</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.135.

<sup>539</sup>Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*, BCBC, p.137.

<sup>540</sup>Magnus Ottosson. "אָכַל" in *TDOT*, Vol.I, ed. by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Wills (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) p.238.

<sup>541</sup>David Allan Hubbard. *Hosea – An Introduction and Commentary*, pp.135-136.

kings were assassinated (2 Kings 15:10, 14, 25, 30).<sup>542</sup> These assassinations depict the failure of royalty to provide peace, security, and stability. The nation's self-centeredness is painfully evident in the final statement: "Not one of them calls on me" (לֹא יִקְרָא בָהֶם אֵלַי) (1:18). If they had sought Yahweh, he would have gladly helped them.<sup>543</sup> Mays remarks that like every revolutionary state that has no faith in anything beyond itself, Israel was burning up in its own anger. The accusation against Israel's political life is summarized in an inclusive statement which repeats the metaphor of the oven.<sup>544</sup> Once more Hosea portrays his God as one whose love has been disappointed. Judgment must then become even more intense to accomplish Israel's return to Yahweh.<sup>545</sup> The basic problem underlying these cruel attempts to grasp power and the general instability of the political life is that "none of them calls upon me". They did not turn to God, the sovereign who is Lord and judge of all nations. Rather they took matters into their own hands by murdering their leaders and making alliances with other nations without regard to God's direction.<sup>546</sup>

#### 4.5.5. Findings of the Study

In this section Hosea is stressing on human rights violations in political and cultic life of Israel. He typifies the Israel with terms such as "corruption", "wicked deeds", "false dealing", "thieves and bandits", and "wickedness". These sins range from the hidden to the most blatant acts of outrage, acts which everyone recognizes as immoral. Responsible people from different segments of society involved in human rights violations.

Priests involved in human rights violations and their criminal activities are portrayed vividly. They have committed the sins of robbing and theft. The twin crimes of breaking and entering and banditry are cited in evidence, emphasizing the blatant nature of the violations. The two crimes are inclusive for civil and social injustices in general. Plundering captures the idea of stripping clothes and valuables off the bodies of war victims. The iniquity of Ephraim and the evil deeds of Samaria are the violent activities of the priests. The sin of adultery is singled out for special mention. Since adultery took place in the cult, the term refers to the priests who fostered and practiced it.

<sup>542</sup>Leon J. Wood, "Hosea" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.197.

<sup>543</sup>Douglas Stuart. *Hosea – Jonah*, WBC, Vol.31, p.120.

<sup>544</sup>James L. Mays. *Hosea – A Commentary*, pp.106-107.

<sup>545</sup>H. W. Wolff. *A Commentary on the Book of Hosea*, p.125.

<sup>546</sup>Daniel J. Simundson. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.63.

The leaders of the government also involved in human rights violations. They are consumed by their desire for power and had passion for conspiracy which drives them even to the assassination of royalty who represent Yahweh. They took matters into their own hands and murdered their kings and come to power. During Hosea's time alone, four kings were assassinated (2 Kings 15:10, 14, 25, 30). These assassinations depict the failure of royalty to provide peace, security, and stability. Morally and socially, we see the filth of a lawless society, with not only thieves and bandits spreading terror, but the very priests turning religion into a heartless, even murderous racket. The nation refuses to recognize God's concern with moral, economic, and social issues of life.

By its transgression, Israel has become known as an open, flagrant covenant violator. Their crimes block a proper relationship with Yahweh their God. Every attempt of God to bring Israel back to him results in a further disclosure of her wickedness.

#### **4. 6. Text– Isaiah 1: 10 – 17**

##### **4.6.1. Translation**

10 Hear the word of the Lord, O rulers of Sodom, listen to the law of our God, O people of Gomorrah.

11 What to me many of your sacrifices, says the Lord? I am full of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of the fattened cattle, and I do not I delight in the blood of bulls; and lambs and he-goats.

12 When you come to see my face who has required this from your hand to trample my courts?

13 Do not add to bringing vain sacrifice, incense is an abomination to me; the new moon and Sabbath, the calling of meeting; I cannot endure evil, and the assembly.

14 Your new moons and appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a burden upon me; I am tired of bearing them.

15 So when you spread out your hands I will hide my eyes from you, also when you multiply prayer, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.<sup>547</sup>

16 Wash yourselves, purify yourselves; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease doing evil.

17 Learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the oppressor; judge the orphan, plead for the widow.

##### **4.6.2. Introduction to the Pericope**

Here the prophet is describing his people's condition and also moving to possible remedies for that condition. People are rebelling against God and are satisfied with hypocritical worship. They are practicing sacrifices and violence simultaneously.<sup>548</sup>His

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<sup>547</sup>DSS<sup>Isa</sup> adds "your fingers with iniquity." The addition is parallel to the previous stich and would be a metrical improvement on MT. Cf. 59:3.

<sup>548</sup> Ivan D. Friesen. *Isaiah*, BCBC (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2009) p.32.

method is to demolish any false hopes in order to identify the true hope, namely, repentance and reproduction of God's ways. In this section the prophet lays out two alternative means of relating to God. One way is through religious ceremonies – cult – performed in manipulative ways (vv 10 – 15), the other is through a life of ethical purity (vv 16, 17). He closes with a challenge to choose between these two ways (vv 18 – 20).<sup>549</sup>

### **4.6.3. Literary Features**

#### **4.6.3.1. Form**

The select pericope is part of the larger section (1:2 – 23) which is in the form of the beginning of a covenant lawsuit. But in the present passage Yahweh is speaking in the style of a teacher giving instruction. Such instruction may be given by a priest concerning proper forms of worship. But here a critique of worship is more than usual for a teacher. A call for attention (v 10) and rhetorical questions (v 11a, 12) fit the style of the wisdom teachers. The essence of the lesson is presented in a series of statements of God's attitude interspersed with imperative instructions.<sup>550</sup> According to Westermann, vv. 10-17 constitute a variant of the prophetic judgment speech that he calls "the prophetic torah."<sup>551</sup>

#### **4.6.3.2. Structure**

The summons to *hear* in verse 10 marks the beginning of a new unit, linked to the previous one by the repetition of Sodom and Gomorrah. According to Westermann, vv 10 – 17 contain summons to hear (v 10), a reproof (vv 11 – 15), and the instruction (vv 16 – 17).<sup>552</sup> Watts divides the passage into – A call for attention (v 10), and rhetorical questions (vv 11a, 12), and the terms on which God will deal with his people (vv 16 – 17).<sup>553</sup>

#### **4.6.3.3. Setting**

The setting of the passage is Jerusalem. Because the sacrifices are offered in the temple in Jerusalem as Jerusalem is center for cultic activity. The words are addressed to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah must have spoken this message at an open assembly at which the leading officials of the city and the general population were present.

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<sup>549</sup>John N. Oswalt. *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1 – 39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986) pp.94-95.

<sup>550</sup>John D.W. Watts. *Isaiah 1 -33*, WBC, Vol.24 (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1985) p.16.

<sup>551</sup>C. Westermann. *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, Tr.By H.C. White (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) pp.203-205.

<sup>552</sup>C. Westermann. *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, pp.203-205.

<sup>553</sup>John D.W. Watts. *Isaiah 1 -33*, WBC, Vol.24, p.16.

Since mention is made of the great quantity of offerings, of the trampling of the courts of Yahweh's temple, of the festival assemblies, and of the prayers, it must have been an official cultic celebration. Based on Isaiah's condemnation of the many offerings and prayers, it would quite likely that this must have been a day of repentance.<sup>554</sup>

#### **4.6.4. Theological Comments**

##### **4.6.4.1. Context**

The context of the selected passage is primarily the corrupt worship practices of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The people are addressed as if they are the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. The rulers and people of Jerusalem were involved together in something every bit as offensive to the Lord as what had gone on in those two notorious cities of old.<sup>555</sup> People are performing cultic activities in manipulative ways and also involved in the activities of violence and injustice simultaneously. In this context God is reproving them and instructing them to follow a life of ethical purity.

##### **4.6.4.2. Exegetical Study**

The oracle begins with a summons to hear the word of the Lord (v.10). The next verses (vv.12 – 17) are presented as Yahweh's words uttered through the prophet. Vv.11 – 14 says why Yahweh will not accept their sacrifice, while v.15 makes it clear why their prayers will not be heard and answered. The last two verses (vv.16 – 17) are a prophetic instruction on ethical behaviour.<sup>556</sup>

**V.10.** Summons like this are usual in many of the prophetic utterances. Here Israel is described as no different from Sodom and Gomorrah. Two groups of people are summoned to hear the prophetic word: rulers of Sodom (סֹדֶם קִצִּינִי) and people of Gomorrah (עַם עֲמֹרָה). This is a figurative way of addressing the wicked society of Isaiah's time. In the past the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for their wicked way of living (Gen 19:24 – 28). The prophet thinks that the rulers and people of his time deserve punishment similar to that. Isaiah invites his fellow Jerusalemites to listen to two things:

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<sup>554</sup>Hans Wildberger. *Isaiah 1- 12 A Continental Commentary*. Translated by Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) pp.38-39.

<sup>555</sup>Barry Webb. *The Message of Isaiah*, BST (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996) pp.42-43.

<sup>556</sup>Sebastian Kizhakkevil. *Isaiah* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2006) pp28-.29.

“word of LORD” (דְּבַר־יְהוָה) and “*torah*<sup>557</sup> of our God” (תּוֹרַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ).<sup>558</sup> These two words have overtones of covenant relationship. Isaiah is giving *torah* like the priests, but his *torah* is a series of rulings that is critical of the cultic practices he presently observed being performed.<sup>559</sup> This *torah* is called prophetic *torah* but recently it has been argued that this understanding stems originally from the wisdom traditions with their emphasis upon practical character.<sup>560</sup> Wildberger comments that offerings were presented and festivals were celebrated with great zeal, but people did not have time available when it came to taking care of their social responsibilities.<sup>561</sup>

**VV.11-15.** These verses contain a series of rulings about the people’s cultic worship and sacrificial services. A broad spectrum of cultic events and occasions, as well as a variety of sacrifices, is referred to in this section and all are denounced.<sup>562</sup> Prophets insisted that sacrifice be considered secondary to obedience and faith. The term “I have had enough” (שָׂבַעְתִּי) which brings displeasure to God is not the sacrifice per se; ‘the trampling of the courts’ is revolting to him. Yahweh is rejecting the offering of sacrifices because people trample upon His courts. The prophet reminds them that in fulfilling their obligation of pilgrimages and offering of sacrifices, they should not discard other laws of Yahweh. The wickedness of life has infuriated God and he refuses to be placated by their hypocrisy.<sup>563</sup> ‘Trampling’ (רָמַס) also suggests desecration. The failure to accompany sacrificial and festal worship with a lifestyle of justice and righteousness is the problem. The rejection of sacrificial worship is due to the abrogation of covenant.<sup>564</sup>

Sacrifices which are not accompanied by devotion are not pleasing to God rather they are terrible burden to him. Isaiah is not passing judgment on the legitimacy of sacrifice as such, but on its uselessness and even harmfulness as a result of the breach of

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<sup>557</sup> *Torah* may have had a more inclusive reference than *law*. The *torah* was especially associated with the priests and their rulings concerning sacrifices, purity, and uncleanness given in the name of God.

<sup>558</sup> Sebastian Kizhakkevil. *Isaiah*, p.29.

<sup>559</sup> John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine. *Isaiah the Eighth Century Prophet His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987) p.74.

<sup>560</sup> John N. Oswalt. *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1 – 39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986) pp.95-96.

<sup>561</sup> Hans Wildberger. *Isaiah 1- 12 A Continental Commentary*, p.39.

<sup>562</sup> John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine. *Isaiah the Eighth Century Prophet His Times and His Preaching*, p.74.

<sup>563</sup> Sebastian Kizhakkevil. *Isaiah*, p.30.

<sup>564</sup> John D.W. Watts. *Isaiah 1 -33*, WBC, Vol.24, pp.20-21.

the covenant relationship.<sup>565</sup> Isaiah is not advocating a total repudiation of cultic worship. In fact the condemned sacrifices all fall into the category of voluntary sacrifices, that is, those offered on the initiative of the worshippers.<sup>566</sup> Isaiah rejects the mind-set and impulses of the people who had gathered together for the festival.<sup>567</sup>

The rationale for Isaiah's attack becomes clear in v.13. He opposes the offerings because they are vain, not because they are cultic activity. God cannot accept any sacrifice which is offered to him as a mere substitute on which he is obliged to compromise. "Abomination" (תועבה) is a very strong term. The same point is made in the final phrase, 'I cannot bear iniquity and solemnity' (לֹא-אֶכֶל אֲנִי וְעֶצְרָה). God cannot bear 'religious sin.' What displeases God is not the prayer in itself, but the attitude of the one praying. It was not sacrifice as such that God had rejected, but rather its misuse. It was the sinful and wrong motivations behind all these practices. To appear before the Lord must be understood in terms of fearing him and of full obedience to his commands.<sup>568</sup> Commentators have debated the meaning of 'blood' in v.15 in this context. The plural *damim* (דָּמִים) generally refers to violence and bloody acts, like murder (Ps 51:14). Violence must be intended, especially in the light of the stress upon justice in vv 16 and 17.

**VV.16-17.** These two verses summarize the whole prophetic message of the Bible. Most of the prophets invited their hearers to repentance by changing their wicked ways of life. Here the prophet gives instruction on ethical behaviour by means of nine imperatives.<sup>569</sup> The call to repentance commences with nine plural imperative verbs. The first five imperatives refer to cleansing that flows out of right worship. This cleansing is not merely ceremonial holiness but also ethical holiness. The last four imperatives refer to equity that flows out of right living.<sup>570</sup> 'Wash to be clean' (רָחֲצוּ הַזִּכּוֹן) is a reference to repentance and change of attitude. Biblical texts frequently describe sin as a pollutant or contaminant, as something dirty that stains and soils. If sin is pollution, then movement away from sin

<sup>565</sup> Otto Kaiser. *Isaiah 1 – 12 A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1972) p.15.

<sup>566</sup> John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine. *Isaiah the Eighth Century Prophet His Times and His Preaching*, p.75.

<sup>567</sup> Hans Wildberger. *Isaiah 1- 12 A Continental Commentary*, p.40.

<sup>568</sup> S.H. Widyapranawa. *A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 1 – 39 – The Lord is Savior: Faith in National Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990) p.6.

<sup>569</sup> Sebastian Kizhakkevil. *Isaiah*, p.31.

<sup>570</sup> Ivan D. Friesen. *Isaiah*, BCBC (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2009) p.33.

can be expressed in terms of washing and cleansing.<sup>571</sup> The root **רָחַץ** describes the ritual foot washing and an eye washing with milk. But the serious use of the root is reserved for the notion of its representing the cleansing from sin.<sup>572</sup> The sinner needs a course of instruction in the ways of God. This teaching process begins in the call for social justice and defense of the fatherless.<sup>573</sup> The exodus itself had flowed out of God's concern for the oppressed, and from the very beginning he had demanded that his people should have a special concern for the poor and defenceless among them (Ex 2:23-25; 22:21-24).<sup>574</sup>

Injustice and oppression are wrong because they are in defiance of the nature of creation. Similarly, "to do good" (**הַיָּטֵב**) is to learn to value persons as the Creator does. Isaiah is at one with the other eighth century prophets in insisting that ceremonial worship and even prayer are worthless if they are not accompanied by active concern for justice.<sup>575</sup> As an example of the doing of good that is required of them, Isaiah mentions the judicial honesty of the people, which is manifested in the protection of its weakest members, the widows and orphans.<sup>576</sup> The widow, like the orphan, is a conventional figure for marginality, and for social responsibility for the most vulnerable. She is outside the social network of power.<sup>577</sup> The demand for repentance is implicit in the three imperatives, "eliminate," "stop," and "learn".<sup>578</sup> The Hebrew forms for "do good" (**הַיָּטֵב**) or "do evil" (**הָרָע**) means "behave in a good way" or "behave in an evil way"; this means that his comments do not primarily deal with individual actions and fulfilling of laws, but rather deal with a fundamentally new direction for human existence.<sup>579</sup> Through God's judgment the people will learn righteousness. He is the teacher of the Torah and of all the regulations

<sup>571</sup> J. H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine. *Isaiah the Eighth Century Prophet His Times and His Preaching*, p.76.

<sup>572</sup> William White. "**רָחַץ**" in *TWOT* Vol.2, ed. by R. Laird Harris *et al.* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) p.843.

<sup>573</sup> Geoffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah", in *Expository Bible Commentary*, Ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein, Vol.6 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986) p.31.

<sup>574</sup> Barry Webb. *The Message of Isaiah*, p.43.

<sup>575</sup> Barry Webb. *The Message of Isaiah*, p.43.

<sup>576</sup> Otto Kaiser. *Isaiah 1 – 12 A Commentary*, p.17.

<sup>577</sup> Francy Landy. "Torah and anti-Torah: Is.2:2-4 and 1:10-26" in *BibInt*, Vol.11, No.3-4 (2003) p.328.

<sup>578</sup> Hans Wildberger. *Isaiah 1- 12 A Continental Commentary*, p.49.

<sup>579</sup> Hans Wildberger. *Isaiah 1- 12 A Continental Commentary*, p.49.

applying to ethical and cultic life. He was the teacher of all wisdom and source of all instructions.<sup>580</sup>

In the light of Isaiah's attacks upon the leadership of Judah and also Israel, it may be that this passage has special reference to the kings. In the long and prosperous reign of king Uzziah concern for justice had dried up. The rich grew richer while the rights and needs of the poor were disregarded, so that when Isaiah called to his prophetic ministry at the end of Uzziah's reign the nation was already ripe for judgment.<sup>581</sup> The final four admonitions – “seek justice (דִּרְשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט), relieve oppression (חַמּוּץ אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדְכֶם), defend the fatherless (שִׁפְטוּ יְתוֹם), plead for the widow (רִיבוּ אֶלְמָנָה)” appear as the ideals of ethical behaviour throughout the ancient Near East.

To seek justice was probably a way of saying “try to establish in society the orders of life that should properly exist”. To relieve oppression meant to act to correct cases of misjustice. The last couplet was a way of calling society to defend its powerless members. The fatherless (perhaps children of illegitimate and irregular parentage) had no claim to a heritage or status. The widow had no right of inheritance (Num. 27:8-11) or frequently any male to defend her and to intervene on her behalf in a patriarchal and male-dominated culture.<sup>582</sup>

In the Ancient Near East (ANE), the concerns for justice, oppression, and the helpless were the special province of the king. Among the Hebrews this activity is expected because it is an expression of the character of God as he has revealed himself to them. He cared for them when they were strangers, outcast, and helpless. If they are to be his people, they must be like this too.<sup>583</sup> The type of justice which the Old Testament expects from the judge is not a dispassionate justice but a justice which helps those who are suffering. The demands of the law correspond exactly to predicates which describe God as protector of the insignificant and poor, the widows and orphans (Deut 10:18).<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>580</sup>A.S. Kapelrud. “לִמּוּד” in *TDOT*, Vol.VIII, ed. by Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry, translated by John T. Wills (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997) p.9.

<sup>581</sup>Barry Webb. *The Message of Isaiah*, p.43.

<sup>582</sup>John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine. *Isaiah the Eighth Century Prophet His Times and His Preaching*, p.77.

<sup>583</sup>John N. Oswalt. *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1 – 39*, p.99.

<sup>584</sup>Hans Wildberger. *Isaiah 1- 12 A Continental Commentary*, p.50.

#### **4.6.5. Findings of the Study**

In this passage the prophet is highlighting the human rights violations in terms of treating the fellow human beings especially the most vulnerable sections of the society. Innocent people were killed unjustly denying them the right to live. The meaning of blood refers to violence and bloody acts, like murder (Ps 51:14). Isaiah is demanding for the protection of the weakest members, the widows and orphans.

Here Isaiah lashes out at the hollow rituals of the people who have no regard for justice or ethical values. In the ceremonial activities there was no genuine commitment or ethical change. Isaiah and other prophets objected to this kind of religion and attacked such external rituals without corresponding adherence to social justice. Worship had been divorced from justice, and the fatherless and the widow had become the chief victims (v.17). God desires that his people offer justice and show a compassionate concern for the poor and the weak.

This passage has special reference to the kings. In the long and prosperous reign of king Uzziah concern for justice had dried up. The rich grew richer while the rights and needs of the poor were disregarded and human rights are violated. The prophet thinks that the rulers and people of his time deserve punishment similar to that of rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah. Isaiah is at one with the other eighth century prophets in insisting that ceremonial worship and even prayer are worthless if they are not accompanied by active concern for justice.

Yahweh will not listen to their prayers and respond to them because they are guilty of innocent blood. Isaiah calls for a just order in society, and a helping and defending hand for the powerless at the bottom levels of humanity. He centers his critique on the powerful, and their treatment of the most vulnerable elements of society – the poor, the orphan, and the widow.

## **4. 7. Text– Isaiah 10: 1 – 4**

### **4.7.1. Translation**

- 1 Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and writers who keep writing oppression,
- 2 To keep back the poor from judgment and take away justice from the poor of my people, that widows may be their spoil, and they plunder orphans.
- 3 And what will you do in the day of visitation, and of ruin which comes from far away? To whom shall you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory?
- 4 Surely he will grovel under the prisoners, and under the slain they will fall; in all this his anger is not turned away; but still his hand is stretched out.

### **4.7.2. Introduction to the Pericope**

This section responds to the dark picture of Israel's condition, lamenting the bad leadership which had precipitated its current state. It is a woe oracle against oppressive rulers and can be considered as judgment on injustice. The legalized wrongs of the government (v 1) make the climax to the series. Oppressive laws against the weak and helpless have weakened the fabric of society. The exploiters will suffer like all others. Thus they experience God's anger which was aroused by their deeds.<sup>585</sup>

### **4.7.3. Literary Features**

#### **4.7.3.1. Form**

The form of the pericope is 'woe- oracle.' In this last strophe the funeral tone of the lament takes charge. Israel is presumed dead.

#### **4.7.3.2. Structure**

Chapter 10 has two sections (vv 1 – 19 and 20 – 34). The first section has a chiasmic structure. The first and the fourth parts describe scenes of judgment; the second part portrays Assyria as the Lord's rod and staff, with the third part denying that rod and staff can control their user.<sup>586</sup> The present passage is part of the larger section (vv 1 – 19) and recites God's actions and then allow commentary on the reactions of God and Israel.

#### **4.7.3.3. Setting**

The setting of the passage is Samaria. Some scholars see the passage as referring primarily to Judah but nothing in the passage demands this view. The demand for justice was common to both parts of the nation and was prophetically supported in the north as

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<sup>585</sup> John D.W. Watts. *Isaiah 1 -33*, WBC, Vol.24, p.144.

<sup>586</sup> Ivan D. Friesen. *Isaiah*, p.91.

well as in the south (cf Am 5:12). Isaiah's point is that the fate of the people is determined by their relation to the standards of God.<sup>587</sup>

#### 4.7.4. Theological Comments

##### 4.7.4.1. Context

The context is the prevailing injustice in the Israelite society. Poor, orphans and widows are marginalized and are oppressed and denied justice by the unjust lawmakers. In this scenario, God is warning them of punishment.

##### 4.7.4.2. Exegetical Study

**VV. 1-4.** Here we find the basic theme of oppression and injustice charging the rottenness of the scribes and the drunkenness of men of influence. It introduces announcements of divine chastisement for various specified sins, drunkenness, lack of faith, social injustice, etc. Far from being a curse-like formula here, **וָאֵי** (woe) appears to be the prophet's automatic reaction to the destruction that will come upon various classes of Israel's society.<sup>588</sup> It is not clear to whom the opening woe is addressed. The woe opening in verse 1 identifies those being denounced as those decreeing iniquitous decrees and promulgating oppressive promulgations. The immediately preceding text infers that the addressee is Jacob-Israel (9:8-21). These verses were concerned with domestic judicial administration. Either new, unjust social laws were promulgated to the benefit of the wealthy ruling classes or existing laws were interpreted so as to deprive the powerless of their goods and property.<sup>589</sup> The first stanza denounces unjust lawmakers and then lists the effects of unjust laws on the poor. For the government the targets are the poor and the oppressed and their object is prey and robbing, self-enrichment. This is contradicting to the Lord's ways and concerns; he identified with the poor and the oppressed in his exodus deliverance; he cares for the fatherless and the widow (Deut 10:18; 26:5-7 cf. Ex 22:22). But when his people reject his word and his values, his wrath consigns them to the opposite, to the values prompted by fallen human nature.<sup>590</sup> The opening woe indicates that the Lord demands just laws so that the poor have protection from corrupt operators. It was well

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<sup>587</sup>John N. Oswalt. *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1 – 39*, p.259.

<sup>588</sup>Richard J. Clifford. "The use of *Hoy* in the Prophets" in *CBQ*, Vol.28, No.4, Oct (1966) p.460. Also see Erhard S. Gerstenberger. "The Woe – Oracles of the Prophets" in *JBL*, Vol.81, No.3 (1962) p.257.

<sup>589</sup>John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine. *Isaiah the Eighth Century Prophet His Times and His Preaching*, p.191.

<sup>590</sup>Alec Motyer. *Isaiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (England: Intervarsity Press, 1999) p.94.

known that the law court in Judah and Israel was very corrupt. The judges used to add “iniquitous decrees” (הַחֲקִימִים הַקִּי־אֵין) to oppress the poor. They accepted bribes, used threats and intimidations, employed false witnesses and external illegal pressure. So the poor were deprived of all justice and right. It is clear that their legal decisions contradicted the Mosaic law, for the latter defends the poor and the weak.<sup>591</sup> The ‘day of visitation’ (לְיוֹם פְּקֻדָּה) alludes to the day of punishment from which escape is futile (10:3).<sup>592</sup> Three penetrating questions highlight this futility. The last stanza describes captivity and death as unhappy alternatives (10:4). The Lord’s outstretched hand (נְטִייתוֹ) is remarkable in that a similar expression is used in the exodus story to describe the Lord’s liberation of the Hebrews from slavery (Ex 6:6). Here however, the Lord’s outstretched hand describes the Lord’s anger and determination to punish and discipline his own people.<sup>593</sup>

Isaiah, being a southerner focusing on northern kingdom. Probably he understands that Israel in a theological sense is one people ruled by the Lord, so what happens in the north is just as significant for him as what happens in the south. Judah and Jerusalem also are equally corrupt. A progression is discernible in the passage as a whole from moral decay (9:9, 17) through social disintegration (9:20 – 10:2) to national collapse (10:3 – 4). There is also a progression from harassment by neighbouring states (9:12) to outright conquest by Assyria (10:3 – 4).<sup>594</sup> The ‘misleaders’ (v 15) show of decrees and executive orders only increases injustice, but brings no order to those chaotic times. The state is dead, the mourners chant, and the leaders have no option but to share its fate. The final comment notes that God’s anger has not changed. Israel’s fate as a nation is sealed.<sup>595</sup> The consequences of the decrees are spoken of as falling upon those whom Isaiah describes as “needy,” “poor,” “widows,” and “fatherless.”

Those responsible for maintaining the laws of the country are doing so in such a way as to enrich themselves at the expense of the helpless. God who is in himself just is against partiality and he is concerned for those who lack the normal influence to ensure that justice is done to them. For the oppressors, the day of “visitation” (לְיוֹם פְּקֻדָּה) will

<sup>591</sup>S.H. Widyapranawa. *A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 1 – 39*, p.58.

<sup>592</sup> Brown, Driver and Briggs, eds., *The BDB Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p.824.

<sup>593</sup>Ivan D. Friesen, *Isaiah*, p.91.

<sup>594</sup>Barry Webb. *The Message of Isaiah*, pp.69-70.

<sup>595</sup>John D.W. Watts. *Isaiah 1 -33*, WBC, Vol.24, p.144.

be a day of disaster with neither help nor hiding place. For “visitation” the Hebrew has “judgment”. Visitation refers to a time of reckoning. All the ill-gotten wealth will be lost as devastation sweeps in from “far away” (מִמְּוֹתָיִם). The storm that is coming from afar points to the mighty armies of Assyria, the instrument of God’s fury (10:5).<sup>596</sup> The position and power which enabled them to walk on the backs of the poor will be meaningless before God’s judgment. The men and women who have enriched themselves at the expense of the helpless will suffer the same fate as everyone else. So for all these offenses against God – pride, false leadership, devouring one’s brothers, oppression of the poor – the divine hand is outstretched. The judgment not yet finished, waiting to strike again. A greater judgment was on its way.<sup>597</sup>

#### **4.7.5. Findings of the Study**

These verses expose the human rights violations in the judiciary. The law court in Judah and Israel was very corrupt. The judges have violated the human rights by oppressing the poor and by issuing iniquitous decrees. They even accepted bribes, used threats and intimidations, employed false witnesses and external illegal pressure. So the poor were deprived of justice and human rights. Their legal decisions contradicted the Mosaic Law as it defends the poor and the weak.

The more evils denounced further are arrogance, bad leadership, civil strife, and oppression. The final manifestation of human pride is in oppression. It is when persons begin consciously to deprive the helpless of their rights in order to oppress them. The oppression of the helpless cannot be masked by anything. It’s essential ugliness cannot be hidden. It was especially unjustified in a society where equal treatment before the law was understood to grow out of the very character of God. Human beings are not self-existent and are under the hand of a Creator to whom they must give account.

The responsible persons were enriching themselves at the expense of the poor and helpless. The oppressors forget that they will have to ultimately deal with God, for God remembers the fate and the misery of his oppressed people. The position and power prompts the oppressors to take advantage of the misery of the poor which will be meaningless before God’s judgment. The failure of the people to submit to God destroys them.

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<sup>596</sup>S.H. Widyapranawa. *A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 1 – 39*, p.58.

<sup>597</sup>John N. Oswalt. *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1 – 39*, p.260.

## 4.8. Text– Micah 2: 1 – 5

### 4.8.1. Translation

- 1 Woe to those plotting wickedness and preparing evil on their beds! In the light of the morning they do it for it is in the power of their hand.
- 2 And they covet fields and seize them and houses and carry them off. And they oppress a man and his household, even a man and his inheritance.
- 3 Therefore thus says the Lord: Behold against this family I am plotting an evil from which you shall not remove your necks and you shall not walk haughtily, for it is an evil time.
- 4 In that day one shall lift up a taunt song against you and wail a bitter lamentation and says, we are utterly destroyed. He changes the portion of my people. How he has removed it for me. To the apostate he has divided our fields.
- 5 Therefore there shall not be for you one casting a measuring line by lot in the assembly of the Lord.

### 4.8.2. Introduction to the Pericope

In this pericope the prophet makes specific charge against his people. The chief offenders were a relatively small group of greedy, powerful business men who spent their nights devising schemes to get possession of the land of the small farmers.<sup>598</sup> These verses held together by a common theme, getting and losing property, and by the repetition of motifs. This woe saying concerns a particular group, the greedy and powerful men who are expanding their landed estates at the cost of those who are vulnerable to their oppression. Their punishment will be directly correlated with their guilt; they, who plan evil will suffer from it, lose the fields they seized, and be excluded from further acquisition of property. Sayings are addressed to a particular group and announcing a punishment which fits their guilt.<sup>599</sup>

### 4.8.3. Literary Features

#### 4.8.3.1. Form

The form of the present pericope is woe oracle, combined with an announcement of judgment. The woe oracle is a common oral and literary form in the prophets.<sup>600</sup>

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<sup>598</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, WBC, Vol.32 (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1984) p.24.

<sup>599</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976) p.61.

<sup>600</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, WBC, Vol.32, p.24.

#### **4.8.3.2. Structure**

Micah's oracle falls into several parts: first the introductory exclamation and basic accusation (v. 1), which is developed in v. 2; then after the hinge linking cause and effect comes the authoritative "Thus has Yahweh said," the messenger formula often adopted by the prophets as a preface to a divine statement of coming intervention (v. 3); next the result of this intervention, which incorporates a taunt-song (v.4) and finally a supplement marking a logical conclusion (v. 5). The structure is based on the counterbalance of ideas and words rather than on strophe and meter. The whole unit is tied together by a remarkable chain of assonance. The consonantal combination occurs seven times in this poem.<sup>601</sup> Smith opines that this pericope ends with the threat in v.5. The correspondence of the crimes (vv. 1 – 2) to the punishments (vv. 3 – 4) indicates that the whole passage is intended to be a kerygmatic unit.<sup>602</sup>

#### **4.8.3.3. Setting**

The setting of the passage is Jerusalem. Micah delivered the original saying in Jerusalem and spoke to the same audience to which all of his announcements of judgment were addressed. They are the business and political circles of the capital that were enriching the city and building estates by the oppression of the small farmers in the country of Judah.<sup>603</sup>

#### **4.8.4. Theological Comments**

##### **4.8.4.1. Context**

The events of the eighth century had produced two main classes of people: affluent group and a poor class that suffered in the hands of the rich. This period saw great change. There had been an influx of new wealth into the country under King Uzziah. The exploitation of new capital and economic opportunities was resulting in the squeezing out of the small man from the agricultural scene. In this context Micah protests more ardently at their cruel selfishness and greed. He deplores the unscrupulous way in which they

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<sup>601</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976) pp.286-287.

<sup>602</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, WBC, Vol.32, p.24.

<sup>603</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, p.62.

acquire new property.<sup>604</sup> Micah turned to the powerful ruling classes and vividly pictured the intensity with which they sought to defraud the poor and become richer at the expense of the less fortunate. He pictured them lying awake at night devising their plans. They controlled the structure of society and had a free hand to perpetrate their deeds with impunity. They coveted the houses and lands of those who could not adequately defend themselves in this oppressive society.<sup>605</sup>

#### 4.8.4.2. Exegetical Study

**V.1.Woe (הוֹי)** in its origin is a cry of lamentation. One of the features of Woe or Alas oracles is that the divine decree of punishment is always posited, either at the end of the oracle or at the conclusion of a series of statements. This feature of the *hōy*-form is not remarkable, as a cry of woe or lamentation must be the result or anticipation of calamity.<sup>606</sup> The persons addressed by the ‘woe’ (הוֹי) are members of the power structure in Judah’s society. Might has become their right; power corrupts them.<sup>607</sup> The first part of the indictment stresses the deliberate, intentional nature of the crimes committed by the powerful. They lie awake and scheme, and eagerly carry out their plots when morning breaks. They do this because they are conscious of their power.<sup>608</sup> אִי־נֶאֱמָר (iniquity) entails negative power and deception. It is a word from the Old Testament vocabulary for deeds which are destructive of the community’s well-being. It identifies an act as the expression of a power intent on the violation of the order set by God to preserve and augment the life of individuals or their social group. ‘In the power of their hand’ (כִּי יִשְׁלֹאֵל יָדָם) may also be rendered, ‘their hand is as a god to them’ that is they make their own power the highest force they will recognize.<sup>609</sup> Their success is guaranteed, for they possess power which they may exploit to achieve their selfish ends. Here Micah proceeds to speak more plainly and specifies the nature of this misconduct.<sup>610</sup> He accuses the land barons of greed

<sup>604</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.288.

<sup>605</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey, “Micah” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985) p.409.

<sup>606</sup>James G. Williams. “The alas-oracles of the eighth century Prophets” in *HUCA*, Vol.38 (1967) p.83.

<sup>607</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, p.63.

<sup>608</sup>Delbert R. Hillers. *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah*, Ed. by Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). p.33.

<sup>609</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Micah” in *NBC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Ed. by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986) p.753.

<sup>610</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.287.

and recounts the Lord's sentence handing them over to exile and eternal death. During the night the landowners plan to get rich by violence.<sup>611</sup>

**V.2.** This verse moves from a general characterization of conduct to a specific stipulation of deeds. The powerful are expropriating the property of small landowners through oppression. This is an assault on the basic structure of the people of God. It is because of covetousness, breaking the instruction of Yahweh to his people (Ex 20:17). 'Covet' strikes at the heart of a person's spiritual malady and unethical behaviour. Covetousness produced the violent disregard for justice. For 'covet' the Hebrew **רָמָה** is the same verb as in the tenth commandment which they deliberately and cynically violate. They covet the property of others as Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21). This meant depriving Israelite families of their ancestral inheritance conferred upon them by the Lord himself in the days of Joshua.<sup>612</sup> The economic and social ideal of ancient Israel was of a nation of free landholders, not debt-slaves, secure in possession as a grant from Yahweh, of enough land to keep their families. "Each under his own vine and his own fig tree" summarizes the ideal. Other ideals such as justice, mutual love and fidelity, a close-knit family, and so on, depended on achievement of this sort of economic security.<sup>613</sup> By adding field to field these land monopolisers controlled all the instruments of production in that agricultural society.<sup>614</sup> 'Defraud' represents a situation where the stronger takes away either directly or indirectly, the produce and labour of the weaker, giving nothing in exchange. It may be done by using dishonest scales or by extortion or by manipulating the legal system. The parallel in Amos 5:7, 10 – 17 suggests the latter is in view here.<sup>615</sup> This verse as a whole is a charge that this land-grabbing is a violation of the relation between neighbours ordained by Yahweh. 'Oppress' (**עָשָׂה**) is also a theme of Israel's normative tradition; commandments forbid it (Lev 5:21; Deut 24:14) and the teachers warn against it

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<sup>611</sup>Bruce K. Waltke. *Micah – An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988) p.157.

<sup>612</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Micah" in *NBC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edt. Ed.by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, p.753.

<sup>613</sup>Delbert R. Hillers. *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah*, Ed. by Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). p.33.

<sup>614</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, WBC, Vol.32, p.24.

<sup>615</sup>Bruce K. Waltke. *Micah – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.157.

(Prov 14:31; 22:16). It is a grievous sin against which Israel was warned; one is never to oppress his/her neighbour, or hired servant whether Israelite or a foreign sojourner.<sup>616</sup>

The verb עָשָׂה specifically means taking something away from another through an advantage of position or power. Losing property is not simple economic impoverishment. In Israel's social order a man's identity and status in the community rested on his household or family, dwelling place, and land. 'Fields' were a sacred trust. In that agrarian economy a man's life and freedom depended on owning the fields. Deprived of them he might at best become a day-labourer or a slave.<sup>617</sup> His inheritance in his father's family was his 'portion' in the family (Gen 31:14). If he loses it, he lost all the rights which were based on its possession; he had no place in the community. His life passed into the hands of others. The independence which came to him with his inheritance was gone. The rich and ruling classes were assembling estates in the country by skilfully managed loans and corrupt courts. It is a violation of Yahweh's will and would bring divine punishment upon them.<sup>618</sup> At the forefront of Israelite economic theory stood the principle that the land was Yahweh's and that the people received it from him as a sacred trust which was handed down from generation to generation from heir to heir. It was Yahweh who protected the rights of his tenants to their holdings, and ideally it was the duty of those in authority in theocratic Israel to keep vigil on his behalf. Prophets also raise lonely voices on behalf of the victims of loss of land.<sup>619</sup>

V.3. 'Therefore' (לָכֵן) is establishing the preceding catalogue of wrongs as the basis for the disaster that is predicted. Micah pictured the disaster as a burden from which the people would be unable to escape.<sup>620</sup> So 'therefore' matches the sentence with the crime. The messenger formula 'this is what Yahweh has said', introduces the very words of Yahweh in direct address to the guilty. The use of the prophetic messenger formula before the words that speak of impending divine chastisement gives credence and authority to his message and accentuates the text's ethical message that God will not tolerate injustice. Nor will God tolerate the breach of relationship that exists between God and the Israelites and

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<sup>616</sup> Ronald B. Allen. "עָשָׂה" in *TWOT* Vol.2, ed. by R. Laird Harris *et al.* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) p.705.

<sup>617</sup> Bruce K. Waltke. *Micah – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.157.

<sup>618</sup> James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, pp.63-64.

<sup>619</sup> Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, pp.288-289.

<sup>620</sup> Thomas Edward McComiskey. "Micah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p.410.

among the Israelites themselves. This breach of relationship is assumed throughout the book of Micah.<sup>621</sup> He is announcing the outcome of greed and the violent seizure of other's property. God himself is devising a plan that will thwart the plan of the evil-doers. Micah was convinced that the wrongs in this world would eventually be made right because he believed that God was just and sovereign.<sup>622</sup> The catastrophe that is going to fall on the people is not identified. Instead, the metaphor of a yoke on their necks is employed to describe how the powerful end up in the control of others. The powerful will be bowed by the yoke of a captor, and walk in humiliation. The guilty will suffer the same feeling of helplessness that they have brought on others. Waltke opines that disaster came in the form of the crack troops of the invading Assyrian armies.<sup>623</sup> In punishment for this disregard of their obligations of brotherhood under God's covenant with Israel, God will 'devise' or counterplot against these ruthless plotters, and bring down calamity upon them all as a yoke pressing down upon their necks.<sup>624</sup>

Scholars debate on the exact rendering of the term 'against this family' (עַל-הַמִּשְׁפָּחָה הַזֹּאת). Archer maintains that 'family' meant here is the family of the rich oppressor.<sup>625</sup> Scholars like Mays equate it with the whole nation of Israel. He observes that 'this family' as designation of those to be punished is unexpected; in such a context the term must refer to the entire people, all Israel. That would mean the judgment falls on a much broader group than the guilty described in the woe-saying.<sup>626</sup> However Waltke thinks that 'family' denotes Israel as a corporate solidarity bound together by blood, covenant and history. The whole 'family' suffered for the sins of individuals within it, especially of its leaders, because of this solidarity.<sup>627</sup> 'You shall not walk haughtily' (רוֹמָם) (וְלֹא תִלְכּוּ) adds humiliation to the punishment. They would be unable to hold their heads high among the nations. 'For it will be an evil time' (כִּי עֵת רָעָה) appears also as a Redactional comment on one of Amos' oracles (5:13). It should be understood as the comment of a tradent who has lived through the fall of Jerusalem and believes that the

<sup>621</sup>Carol J. Dempsey. "Micah 2 – 3: Literary Artistry, Ethical Message, and some considerations about the Image of Yahweh and Micah" in *JSOT*, Vol.24, No.85, Sept (1999) p.121.

<sup>622</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, WBC, Vol.32, p.24.

<sup>623</sup>Bruce K. Waltke. *Micah – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.157.

<sup>624</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Micah" in *NBC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edt. Ed.by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, p.754.

<sup>625</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Micah" in *NBC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edt. Ed.by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, p.754.

<sup>626</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, p.64.

<sup>627</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *Micah – An Introduction and Commentary*, pp.157-158.

calamity is the disaster of which Micah spoke.<sup>628</sup> The Hebrew word for evil רָע has the dual sense of moral evil and amoral misfortune. God reinforces the certainty and seriousness of the retribution of evil for evil by echoing at the close.<sup>629</sup>

**V.4.** ‘In that day’ (בַּיּוֹם) refers to the ‘evil time’ of the immediately preceding expansion. It is introducing a new starting point to explain the consequences of the divine sentence. ‘It is a link with which the prophet goes on to explain the consequences of divine intervention.’<sup>630</sup> It is the day of God’s intervention to punish or redeem. The Jerusalem notables may have become money-lenders and thereby exerted the pressure on the small farmers of Judah which drove them from their fields.<sup>631</sup> As the strong and mighty in Israel ruined others by taking their fields, so now others will take theirs. As owner of the land, the Lord has distributed it to the tribes and families through the casting of the sacred lot. Israel could enjoy the land freely and fully as long as she served the interest of the covenant, but if she uses the land against the designs of the covenant, it will be taken away.<sup>632</sup> Archer opines that the ‘rebellious’ in this case would refer to the gentile invaders who have never entered into covenant relation with Yahweh or recognized his sovereignty.<sup>633</sup> This lament song is characteristic of the way the people would mourn the desolation of the land. It is uttered by the house of Israel itself, as it is entirely in the first person. The lamentation concerns the fact that the land allotted to the people had changed hands. The land that had been Israel’s exclusive possession had become the property of her enemies.<sup>634</sup>

**V.5.** The owners will not only lose their land, they will also lose the right to participate in the sacred redistribution of territory. There will be no hope of rehabilitation for them, but full and final excommunication. They will have no representative left to stake their claim at the time of redistribution.<sup>635</sup> When “the assembly<sup>636</sup> of Yahweh” (קָהָל יְהוָה) meets to

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<sup>628</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, pp.64-65.

<sup>629</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, pp.289-290.

<sup>630</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.290.

<sup>631</sup>William McKane. “Micah 2:1 – 5 Text and Commentary” in *JSS*, Vol.42, No.1, Spr (1997) p.20.

<sup>632</sup>Bruce K. Waltke. *Micah – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.158.

<sup>633</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Micah” in *NBC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. ed.by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, p.754.

<sup>634</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. “Micah” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p.410.

<sup>635</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.291.

<sup>636</sup>It is not clear whether Micah is speaking of a restoration of standing practice in ancient Israel, whereby common lands were regularly divided in a sacred assembly, or to a visionary future, an eschatological assembly in which economic justice is restored by repetition of the primeval division. The latter seems more likely.

allot lands, the covetous oppressors will have no share. This is the severest of the judgment. It cuts the rich off from future hope. No member of their line stand in the assembly of Yahweh.<sup>637</sup> As a result of the calamity, there would be ‘none to cast the line by lot in the assembly of the Lord’. The ‘line’ (חֶבֶל) here is the surveyor’s measuring cord used in determining the bounds of real estate.<sup>638</sup> חֶבֶל means both measuring instrument and a unit of length. The measuring line played a special role in surveying and the distribution of estates. When Yahweh threatens through his prophet that this survey will not be carried out, it means that the sinful nation has lost its claim to be the heritage of Yahweh.<sup>639</sup> The word ‘assembly’ (קָהָל) may mean a ‘multitude’ in general; it also connotes the assembly of people that is distinctly the Lord’s that is, the covenantal community (Deut 23).

Because of their blatant disregard for the obligation of the covenant, the oppressors had removed themselves from any inheritance in the congregation. The prophet was saying that the corrupt people of his day would have no further participation in the covenant community.<sup>640</sup> Micah looked for Yahweh to bring a yoke on the necks of the exploiters and strip them of their power. Then their ill-gotten fields would be taken away from them and the land redistributed among the general population. The expansion ‘by lot in the assembly of Yahweh’ relocates Micah’s exclusion of the guilty from ownership of land in a future when the land which has been lost by the entire people will once again be redistributed after the pattern set in the Deuteronomistic history. When that happens, those who were guilty of the crime will have no rights in the sacral assembly.<sup>641</sup> Here Micah seems to be looking forward to a new day when the land of Canaan will be redistributed among the families of his people. In that time the guilty land-grabbers will have no one to claim their lot, either because their family will be completely decimated or because they will all be in exile.<sup>642</sup>

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<sup>637</sup>Delbert R. Hillers. *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah*, ed. by Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). p.33.

<sup>638</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Micah” in *NBC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. ed. by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, p.754.

<sup>639</sup>H.J. Fabry. “חֶבֶל” in *TDOT*, Vol.IV, ed. by Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry, translated by John T. Wills (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997) p.175.

<sup>640</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey. “Micah” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, pp.410-411.

<sup>641</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, p.66.

<sup>642</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, WBC, Vol.32, p.25.

#### **4.8.5. Findings of the Study**

In this section Micah is exposing the human rights violations in land dealings. The members of the power structure possess power with which they exploit to achieve their selfish ends. They are expropriating the property of small landowners through oppression. With their greed they covet the ancestral inheritance of the people. Land-grabbing is a violation of the relation between neighbours ordained by God. Losing property is not simple economic impoverishment. In Israel's social order a person's identity and status rested on land. In that agrarian economy a man's life and freedom depended on owning the fields. Deprived of them he might at best become a day-labourer or a slave losing all his rights and also place in the community. The stronger takes away either directly or indirectly, the produce and labour of the weaker, giving nothing in exchange. It may be done by using dishonest scales or by extortion or by manipulating the legal system.

The economic and social ideal of ancient Israel was of a nation of free landholders, not debt-slaves, secure in possession as a grant from Yahweh, of enough land to keep their families. Other ideals such as justice, mutual love and fidelity, a close-knit family, and so on, depended on achievement of this sort of economic security. By adding field to field these land monopolisers controlled all the instruments of production in that agricultural society. The Jerusalem notables may have become money-lenders and thereby exerted the pressure on the small farmers of Judah which drove them from their fields. The covenant demanded that God's people show social concern (Ex 22:26; 23:4-9). Failure to do so would not only weaken the nation by affecting the social fabric but even more important, would seriously affect the nation's relationship to God.

According to the covenant every person in Israel was equal before God and the law, and the land of each tribe and family was not to be transferred to another. The oracle is a powerful display of moral indignation. Micah takes an uncompromising stand as a champion of civil rights and declares the word of God against injustice and oppression in the community.

## 4. 9. Text– Micah 3: 1 – 4

### 4.9.1. Translation

- 1 And I said, hear heads of Jacob and the leaders of the house of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice?
- 2 Those hating good and loving evil; those stripping their skin from upon them, and their flesh from upon their bones.
- 3 And who eat the flesh of my people and cause their skin to come off from upon them; and they break their bones and shatter as that in the pot and as flesh in the midst of a kettle.
- 4 Then they shall cry out to Jehovah but He will not answer them. And He will hide his face from them in that time, just as they have done evil in their doings.

### 4.9.2. Introduction to the Pericope

In this section, Micah is denouncing the judicial leaders of the community for their lack of responsibility. They are condemned here because they oppress the poor people. They are guilty because they have disregarded their responsibility to administer justice and instead have consumed the ones they were responsible to protect. They were acting like cannibals left in charge of missionaries or lions assigned to care for lambs. Because of their guilt these leaders will be abandoned by Yahweh in their hour of need.<sup>643</sup>

### 4.9.3. Literary Features

#### 4.9.3.1. Form

The form of the select pericope is ‘judgment oracle.’ It establishes the guilt of the heads and leaders of Israel.<sup>644</sup> The oracle is an announcement of judgment in the style of a prophetic saying.<sup>645</sup>

#### 4.9.3.2. Structure

According to Mays, the section begins with a summons to attention, identifying the addressees (1a). The accusation (1b, 2, 3) opens with an argumentative question (1b) in direct address which states the responsibility which the guilty have betrayed. Then shifting to participles and third-person verbs, the character (2a) and conduct (3) of the accused is cited. Verses 2b, 4 predict the punishment which will fall upon the guilty. In structure and theme the saying is similar to 3:9-12; like this counterpart it was spoken in Jerusalem to the officials who acted as judges in the provincial courts.<sup>646</sup> Leslie C. Allen’s structure consists of the introduction (1a) and a call for attention and a specification of the national leaders as

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<sup>643</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, WBC, Vol.32, pp.30-31.

<sup>644</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, WBC, Vol.32, p.30.

<sup>645</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, p.77.

<sup>646</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, p.77.

those to whom the oracle is addressed. Then the prophet launches into a basic accusation consisting of an indignant question in the Hebrew and a general charge (1b – 2a), which is then developed at length in a gruesome extended metaphor in vv.2b – 3. In v.4 occurs first an oblique announcement of the punishment that is to befall the targets of his attack. Finally the oracle is rounded off by listening back to the reason for this punishment.<sup>647</sup>

#### 4.9.3.3. Setting

The setting of the passage is the ‘courts’ in Jerusalem. The leaders of Israel preside over an administration of injustice in the courts for which they are responsible. They flay and devour the plaintiffs instead of hearing their plea. In punishment Yahweh will bring a plea to the leaders’ lips and be deaf.<sup>648</sup>

#### 4.9.4. Theological Comments

##### 4.9.4.1. Context

The context of the passage is the injustice and exploitation conditions in Judah. The ruling classes of government and society are devouring its people instead of defending them under the rule of king Ahaz. They who have been entrusted with the faithful administration of justice and the carrying out of God’s law have used their power only for injustice and the heartless exploitation of the governed.<sup>649</sup>

##### 4.9.4.2. Exegetical Study

**V.1** This oracle is pronouncement of judgment on the ruling classes. The phrases “leaders of Jacob and the chiefs of the house Israel” have to do with the people upon whom the administration of justice revolved, and are thus called upon to exhibit their knowledge of justice.<sup>650</sup> “Hear” (שִׁמַע) is an imperative stands at the beginning of the three major divisions of the book (1:2; 3:1; 6:1). The ‘heads of Jacob’ (רֹאשֵׁי יַעֲקֹב) and ‘leaders of the house of Israel’ (וְקִצְנֵי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל) are public officials in Jerusalem.<sup>651</sup> These ‘heads’ and ‘leaders’ were not kings or priests but officials who functioned as judges in the

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<sup>647</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.305.

<sup>648</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, p.77.

<sup>649</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Micah” in *NBC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed ed.by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, p.755.

<sup>650</sup>Sunday Ajayi Obateru. “An Exegesis of Micah 3:1 – 12 and its Implications for Social Justice in Nigeria” in *OJT*, Vol.19, No.1 (2014) p.96.

<sup>651</sup> Micah employs the frequently paired names, Jacob and Israel as a way of addressing his audience in Judah in their identity as the people whose history is the work of Yahweh and whose obligation is to his lordship.

city gates. They were most likely professional judges or rulers who served to decide legal matters on a local level.<sup>652</sup> They have the role as the guardians of justice. The titles ‘head’ (רֹאשׁ) and ‘leader’ (קַצִּיף) are synonyms and are associated with the administration of justice in the community. They were probably family and clan heads. In the villages and towns, presiding over the court in the gate was traditionally the responsibility of the elders. In the early stages of Israel’s history the judges were merely heads of extended families. With the rise of the monarchy this responsibility was passed on to the king. But unfortunately the king often did not devote enough time to judicial matters. ‘Heads’<sup>653</sup> are officers in the national courts. Representatives of this group evidently formed an ancient court (cf. Ex 18). This people’s court was apparently still in existence in Micah’s time. Micah uses the general term ‘leaders’ to describe these judges and to stress the position of responsibility they hold. Micah calls these two key figures in the society as guilty of corruption. The administration of justice is entrusted to them and the prophet reminds them of their obligations. They ought to maintain the standards of right and wrong contained in the legal traditions. In Israel these were given the force not merely of civil law backed by the authority of the state, but also of religious sanction. Law and order should be enforced by the terms of covenant. Micah as prophet of God represents the source of justice.<sup>654</sup>

‘Leader’ is a title that appears in only two settings. In the premonarchical life of Israel it was used for military leaders (Josh 10:24). The title surfaces again in eighth-century Jerusalem and is used by Isaiah and Micah for officials in Jerusalem. Waltke regards that the leaders in ancient Israel were also judges. Ultimately the responsibility for justice resided in the king (2 Sam 15:3; 2 Chr 19:4-11). He further comments that ‘justice’ (שִׁפְט) refers to the decisions collected in the sacred law and to other verdicts of the court as well as to deciding cases fairly.<sup>655</sup> It belongs to the office of the heads of Jacob ‘to know justice’ (לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּט) when they function as judges in the courts. Here ‘justice’ is used in the sense of fairness and equity in governmental administration.<sup>656</sup>

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<sup>652</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, WBC, Vol.32, p.31.

<sup>653</sup>It is a sociological term referring traditionally to the heads of ‘fathers’ houses’ or extended families, who had the authority and responsibility for keeping their houses in order.

<sup>654</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.306.

<sup>655</sup>Bruce K. Waltke. *Micah – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.162.

<sup>656</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey, “Micah” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p.417.

The verb יָדָע 'know' means to be skilled in acquaintance with the normative legal traditions of justice. 'Know' includes the administration of justice as well as an intellectual understanding that justice is good. But these judges were always hating<sup>657</sup> the good and continuously loving evil.<sup>658</sup> Waltke argues that 'know' designates not merely intellectual appreciation of the law, but also personal knowledge of it so that out of sympathy for the afflicted one punishes the wrongdoer and re-establishes the outcast of fortune in his right.<sup>659</sup> Those who know justice will reach the right decision, the finding which upholds justice. The failure of justice in Jerusalem's courts is a recurrent motif in Isaiah and Micah (Isa 1:17, 21 – 23). Micah views these leaders to be righteous judges, free from partiality and unreceptive to bribery. The right decision was the concern of God himself, so the righteousness of a judge was an obligation to Yahweh.<sup>660</sup>

**VV.2-3.** The heads and leaders had ceased to do good and deliberately cherished evil. Micah pleads for "justice" on behalf of his own exploited people. (3:3, 5, 10-11). The leading officials "abhor justice" build up Zion by means of bloodshed and Jerusalem by means of injustice.<sup>661</sup> Micah's charge is reminiscent of Amos's appeal to the courts of the Northern Kingdom (5:15).<sup>662</sup> The charge that they are "haters of right, and lovers of wrong" is unique precisely in this formulation, but however there are close parallels in the eighth century prophets (Am 5:15 for example), so that the idea was current in Micah's time.<sup>663</sup> Micah sets the reality of their conduct: they hate what is good (טוֹב) and love what is evil (רָע). For the eighth century prophets the alternative patterns of conduct described by this vocabulary are a special issue in the courts of justice (Am 5:15; Isa 1:17).

The deeds of the leaders are characterized by a long metaphor; they are portrayed as cannibals who skin their victims, strip their meat, chop their bones, and lump them in boiling kettles. The language of the prophet became vividly emotive as he described the harsh treatment directed against the poor. This metaphor grows naturally from the grim

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<sup>657</sup>Participle form is used which means continuous action of hating.

<sup>658</sup>Ralph L. Smith. *Micah – Malachi*, WBC, Vol.32, p.31.

<sup>659</sup>Bruce K. Waltke. *Micah – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.162.

<sup>660</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, pp.78-79.

<sup>661</sup>Hans Walter Wolff. "Prophets and Institutions in the Old Testament" in *CurTM*, Vol.13, No.1, Feb (1986) p.10.

<sup>662</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.307.

<sup>663</sup>Delbert R. Hillers. *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah*, Ed. by Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). p.43.

reality of the situation and uncovers the vicious nature of the economic and legal processes by which the powerless are devoured. The victims are called ‘my people’ the term Micah uses with whom he identifies.<sup>664</sup> Those who suffer at their hands are members of the covenant community. Instead of using their privileged offices to defend the defenceless, the magistrates abused the law so as to evade it enabling them to live luxuriously. The prophet in a sustained metaphor depicts the magistrates responsible for creating these conditions as acting like cannibals.<sup>665</sup> “Eating their flesh” (אָכְלֵי בָּשָׂר) was a common expression for oppression. Micah deplores the heartless cruelty he has seen at the courts of injustice; he witnessed the brutal lawlessness.<sup>666</sup> The greed of the judges made them to rob the skin and flesh from their victims.

**V.4.** The precise details of the punishment are not reported. Instead, Micah portrays a time in the future when circumstances will press a cry of anguish from the guilty leaders. The fate of suffering they brought on their victims will come upon them. God will not relent even though they cry out for deliverance. As the judges turn a deaf ear to the poor, so too, God will not listen to their pleas when they are helpless.<sup>667</sup> The term ‘cry out’ (זַעַק) is a technical one for appeal to a judge for help against victimization.<sup>668</sup> ‘In that time’ (בְּעֵת) refers to a distant future. Yahweh ‘hides his face’ (וַיִּסְתֵּר פָּנָיו) means the absence of his favour; and he will not answer the laments of those who choose evil instead of good.<sup>669</sup> Yahweh will hide his face because of their evil deeds. For God to ‘hide his face’ was a dire threat in the Old Testament. It has the connotation of unavailability and refusal to help. God will abandon them to their fate. They have no claims on God, for they have repudiated those by their irresponsibility to covenant obligations.<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>664</sup>James Luther Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, p.79.

<sup>665</sup>Bruce K. Waltke. *Micah – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.162.

<sup>666</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.308.

<sup>667</sup>Bruce K. Waltke. *Micah – An Introduction and Commentary*, p.162.

<sup>668</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.308.

<sup>669</sup>James L. Mays. *Micah – A Commentary*, p.80.

<sup>670</sup>Leslie C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.309.

#### **4.9.5. Findings of the Study**

In this oracle Micah exposes the human rights violations in administering justice in the legal courts. The administration of justice is entrusted to the heads and leaders but they are guilty of corruption. They failed to maintain the standards of right and wrong contained in the legal traditions which led for the oppression of the poor and weak and eventually for the violations of human rights. The poor were denied justice and were deprived of their rights and became victims of the power structure. The prophet Micah uses harsh language for oppressors and portrays them as cannibals. The victims are members of the covenant community. Instead of defending the defenceless the magistrates abused the law and lived luxurious life at the expense of the poor. The leading officials abhor justice build up Jerusalem by means of bloodshed and injustice.

Micah's oracle is a cry from the heart. He was concerned primarily with the needs of the people. The characteristics of his ministry are strict morality, unbending devotion to justice, and sympathy with the poor. Through his quivering emotions is expressed God's own disgust at corruption in the law courts. The prophet attacks ethical and social defects in the handling of legal cases. He focuses his attention not so much on the civil rights of the oppressed but on the moral rottenness of the judges, their cold inhumanity, and the collapse of communal solidarity. Those who held the reins of political and judicial power in Micah's day were openly using their power to consume the poor and powerless. But Micah knew of a greater power than that of the heads of leaders of Israel. God was sovereign over all earthly powers. Those who violated the stipulation of God's covenant could not expect him to maintain the blessings of the covenant. It was the disobedience that took the people from the ground of the covenant and marred their relationship to God. God will bring the same fate of their victims upon the guilty leaders. God will not listen to their cry and he also hides his face from them.

#### **4.10. Conclusion**

It has been investigated how the moral, religious and social structure of both kingdoms went into a spiral of decline during eighth century B.C. This has been attested by the books of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. These prophets of eighth century were concerned with the manner in which the people of God had failed to continue in a covenantal relationship with God. The poor were treated as ‘nobodies’ and had no rights under the laws of Israel. Those responsible for enacting legislation in Judah and in Israel had put into effect laws which oppressed three groups in society – the widows, the orphans and the poor.

Amos was burdened for the lost and the nobodies of his society and saw the terms of the covenant as moral. This is expressed in the manner in which he exposes crimes against the weak. Because of the sin, especially the social sin of injustice, the Day of the Lord is about to be inaugurated. Amos continually stresses the justice God has expressed in his dealings with Israel, and how God demands justice from his people, yet this threat of judgment looms like a dark cloud over Israel. Amos shows us a society where economically self-sufficient upper class lived at the expense of the poor (Am 5:11; 8:6). Slaves, foreigners, orphans and widows had no one to uphold their just claims. Bribery was the order of the day and there was dishonesty in business. For Amos, “the crucial manifestation of evil in Israel is the oppression of the weak who are lower socio-economic group”. This is evident in the entire book of Amos.

Hosea does not throw the spotlight on social injustice the same way as Amos or Isaiah do, and does not use the terms justice and righteousness with the same vigour like other eighth century prophets. Yet one cannot say that he is not for the nobodies of society because all the conditions against which he prophesies are the very conditions which produce the social climate where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Hosea focuses more on terms like steadfast love, faithfulness and knowledge of God. It is through the use of these terms that he shows the breakdown in society. He talks about bringing an indictment (Hos 4:1) because there is no faithfulness or loyalty or knowledge of God. Swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery have broken out (4:2). The people have ploughed wickedness and reaped injustice (10:13) and thus had broken the covenant. This breaking of the covenant has brought the nation to its present predicament.

Isaiah unlike the other prophets of this era was not a peripheral voice, rather he was directly involved with the government. From the narratives of Isaiah it can be seen that he was an important figure in Jerusalem, nevertheless this did not stop him from delivering oracles to regulate social change. Isaiah was telling the people that if they wanted to do what was acceptable to Yahweh, then they needed to cleanse themselves and put away injustice and unrighteousness. The strength of his conviction for the need for social change can be seen from his use of these two words 'Justice' and 'Righteousness.' It can be noted that Isaiah too, like Amos had a sense of an ethical dilemma for the people.

For Micah God was the God of the covenant, a God whose justice and righteousness was unparalleled in history. People as covenant community failed to reflect justice and righteousness that caused Micah to stand out as a courageous, passionate champion for justice (Mic 3:8). Micah saw that it was necessary for the people to be reminded of the implications of covenant disloyalty. It was to be through his reminding them that he pursued justice for the victims of the power structure of society. It is evident from the book of Micah that wealthy class was becoming richer and poor class was becoming poorer. It is the theme of Justice and Righteousness that is continually played out throughout the book of Micah.

The eighth century prophets shared a common core of preaching themes, but their preaching was always related to concrete life situations and to the particularities of human history. They vehemently condemned the people who deliberately violated human rights by oppressing and exploiting the poor. The prophets announced the 'end' to the people of Israel. Amos was the first one to do that (5:2); Hosea negates the old covenant relationship: "You are not my people and I am not your God" (1:9); For Isaiah, sacrifices which are not accompanied by devotion are not pleasing to God rather they are terrible burden to him 1:13-15). Micah announced complete ruin to the elect Jerusalem (3:12).

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

Although the phrase ‘human rights’ does not appear in the Bible, there are biblical insights that compel us to take seriously the concern for human rights. As the Bible is primarily a historical record of the struggles of a people, a liberation struggle, the issue of human rights is reflected in the Bible in a permeating manner.<sup>671</sup> The foundation of human rights is in the creation story; human beings are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). The notion of human rights is certainly implicit in the creation accounts of the Bible and Gen Ch.1 is the focal point on human rights. The rights as human beings are derived from the image of God granted by God. The image of God denotes a covenantal relationship. To fulfil the will of God the execution of justice on behalf of the poor is required.

The poor as a particular group in society receive God’s special attention because they are the victims of a situation of chronic injustice. Therefore God takes up their cause against those who are doing the injustice. The biblical notion of human rights is not exclusively individualistic, but is in accordance with the corporate and societal view of human nature. The central thrust of the Bible is life in its fullness. In the Old Testament human rights are the ways and means for building people up into a community that is built on a covenant relationship.<sup>672</sup> In this chapter human rights concerns in Prophetic literature, Ancient West Asia and ancient Israel will be examined briefly.

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<sup>671</sup>George Mathew Nalunnakkal. “Human Rights: A Biblical and Theological Perspectives,” in *Struggle for Human Rights: Towards a New Humanity, Theological and Ethical Perspectives*, vol.2. Ed. by I.J.M. Razu, (Nagpur: National Council of Churches in India-Urban Rural Mission, 2001), pp.2-3.

<sup>672</sup>George Mathew Nalunnakkal. “Human Rights: A Biblical and Theological Perspectives” pp.2-5.

## 5.2. Human Rights in Prophetic Literature

Throughout the Old Testament, the cause of the widow, the orphan, and the poor is particularly enjoined upon Israel being a redeemed people who are entrusted with the character and standards of their Redeemer.<sup>673</sup> The Old Testament could be very specific about the community's social responsibility for the poor. The narratives of injustice and acts of taking unfair advantage of the poor drew the quick rebuke of prophets (Am 5:12; Isa 10:1-2).<sup>674</sup> The teachings of the prophets are filled with ethical content. The prophets were teachers of personal righteousness, advocates of the rights of human beings, and apostles of hope who commented on social and national affairs.<sup>675</sup> They upheld the personal virtues of sincerity, mercy, and justice. Prophets delivered their messages with the purpose of conveying redemptive and ethical concerns of a God who is gracious. They voiced their concern over the violations of human rights and the exploitation of the poor by the rich and the powerful. They condemned poverty, exploitation and all forms of slavery as institutional forms of violence (Jer 22:17; Mic 6:12; Am 2:6).<sup>676</sup> The prophets uncompromisingly adopt an advocacy stance in favour of the poor, the weak, the oppressed, the dispossessed and the victimized, claiming to speak for the God of justice.<sup>677</sup> God's covenantal relationship with his people Israel is central to the message of the prophets. Therefore prophets reminded Israelites to keep their covenantal obligations. Any unfaithfulness to their covenant commitment would result into punishment from God.<sup>678</sup> The prophetic teachings and predictions have always been consistent with ethics. The prophets exhorted the Israelites to live an exemplary life, so that their actions would correspond with their religious and moral commitments. Most the prophets have ethical message but among them Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are outstanding. Since the ethical teachings of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah are discussed in detail in the previous exegetical chapter, here the ethical teachings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel are focused.

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<sup>673</sup>Richard D. Patterson. "The Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature," *BSac*" (July, 1973) p.232.

<sup>674</sup>Walter C. Kaiser. Jr. *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2983) p.160.

<sup>675</sup>R.E.O. White. *Biblical Ethics* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979) p.22.

<sup>676</sup>George Mathew Nalunnakkal, "Human Rights: A Biblical and Theological Perspectives," in *Struggle for Human Rights: Towards a New Humanity, Theological and Ethical Perspectives*, vol.2. Ed. by I.J.M. Razu, p9.

<sup>677</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.268.

<sup>678</sup>E.E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.93.

### 5.2.1. Ethical Teachings of Jeremiah

Jeremiah ministered during seventh and sixth centuries B.C. In his forty years of ministry he expressed his deep feelings more clearly and openly than any other prophet. Jeremiah condemned the people of Judah for violating Decalogue and demanded for the restoration of covenant relationship with God. He challenges the deceit and offences against God and people.<sup>679</sup> Jeremiah like other prophets upheld the rights of the poor, the needy, the widow, the orphan and the stranger (Jer 5:27-28; 22:3). He denounced the greedy, the rich, the unjust gains of prophet, priest and ruler alike (Jer 6:13; 8:10).<sup>680</sup> Israel had failed to meet the requirements of the covenant. During the time of Jeremiah the people were ungrateful, unfaithful and went after other gods. They were guilty of murder, adultery, injustice, oppression of widows and orphans (Jer 7:3-7). Jeremiah called them to repent for their sins and walk in fellowship with God. Jeremiah's contribution to Jewish ethics is his profound experience and description of personal religion.<sup>681</sup> Jeremiah 32:7-8 speaks of rights of inheritance and of redemption belonging to family members.<sup>682</sup> Jeremiah 9:23-24 is a beautifully crafted poem where Jeremiah says, knowing the Lord is practicing kindness, justice, and righteousness. Knowing God is not a matter of mere inner spirituality, but a matter of transformation of values and resulting practical commitment.<sup>683</sup> Jeremiah scathingly denounced Jehoiakim for his unjust exploitation of unpaid labour, and describes him as a man whose eyes and heart were set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion (Jer 22:13-14, 17).<sup>684</sup> True righteousness, a living relationship with the Lord, would be evidenced in a type of conduct that reflected God's high ethical standards:

Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong, or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. (Jer 22:3; cf. 7:4-7).

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<sup>679</sup>M. Stephen. *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005) p.50.

<sup>680</sup>E. E. James, *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.117.

<sup>681</sup>E.E. James, *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.119.

<sup>682</sup>Christopher D. Marshall. *Crowned with Glory and Honor – Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition* (Telford, Pennsylvania: Pandora Press, 2001) p.71.

<sup>683</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.267.

<sup>684</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.273.

### 5.2.2. Ethical Teachings of Ezekiel

Ezekiel was from Jerusalem comes from a priestly family. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel also reveals the sins of the false prophets, priests and princes (Ezek 22:25-28). Ezekiel tried to prepare individual members to take part in rebuilding the community, a community of equals, centred in the family, pledged to mutual support and protection, and loyal to the demands of their covenant with Yahweh.<sup>685</sup> Every individual is responsible for his own righteousness and for his relationship with God and his neighbours.<sup>686</sup> In this way all the prophets of Israel pointed out that all people are subject to basic moral law of God to which all people are responsible. Ezekiel generalized his attack on all ‘the shepherds of Israel’ (means their past line of kings) and denounced them for robbery, plundering, greed and lack of care for the needs of the people (Ezek 34:1-8).<sup>687</sup> Ezekiel portrayed God as the one who judges and also as the one who brings redemption. Yahweh punishes the sinful people, at the same time he shows mercy when they shun their evil ways.<sup>688</sup> Ezekiel in his study of righteousness and wickedness portrays ‘righteous individual (Ezek 18:5-9). He gives a comprehensive list of model behaviours, positive and negative related to what is right and just. The list includes different spheres of life – sexual and social, religious and secular.<sup>689</sup> The land of Israel was full of political, social, economic and ethical abuses. The prophets highlighted, sharpened and deepened the ethical awareness of Israelites. The cause of the widow, the orphan, and the poor is not neglected by the prophets of Israel. They point out that Israel had betrayed their wickedness and lack of God-oriented perspective in their treatment of these under privileged (Isa 1:23; 10:1-2; Jer 7:4-16).<sup>690</sup> Typical of this use of the motif are the words of Ezekiel:

Behold, the princes of Israel in you, everyone according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood. Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you (Ezek 22:6-7; cf. 25, 29).

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<sup>685</sup>Anthony R. Ceresko. *The Old Testament – A Liberation Perspective*, p.308..

<sup>686</sup>The Exile had come in part as a result of the cumulative guilt of generations of Israelites who lived in rebellion against God and his law. While guilt always has this corporate dimension, Ezekiel more than any prophet before him emphasized the individual consequences of both obedience and transgression (18:1-32; 33:10-20).

<sup>687</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.273.

<sup>688</sup>M. Stephen. *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005) p.51.

<sup>689</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.267.

<sup>690</sup>Richard D. Patterson. “The Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature,” in *BSac* (July, 1973) p.230.

### 5.3. Provisions of Human Rights in Ancient West Asia

Though the research is aimed to study the human rights concerns in Israelite society and the message of eighth century prophets, it is appropriate to investigate not only the immediate background of these prophets, but also the wider background, that is the world in which they lived in. And this can include the study of related literature and documents that give provision for human rights in Ancient West Asia (AWA).

The existence of a rich tradition of legal documents in AWA has been brought into light through the archaeological findings during twentieth century.<sup>691</sup> Although the term ‘human rights’ does not find explicit mention, many of the aspects of the modern Human Rights concepts such as freedom, welfare, rights of individuals, property rights, administration of justice etc., find important place in the legal codes and other literature available. The evidences show that the rulers of AWA had a great concern for the welfare of the people especially of the poor, needy and defenceless, and they enacted special laws in order to safeguard the interests of these weaker sections of the society.<sup>692</sup>

#### 5.3.1. Sumerian

The Sumerian literary texts are a unique contribution of this culture and a rich source of information regarding the life and thought of the Sumerians.<sup>693</sup> The literature of wisdom texts is worldwide in scope, of great appeal and quite revealing of daily life and thinking. A fragmentary text contains moral and ethical warnings.<sup>694</sup>

The Sumerian culture and religion believed that there was an idea of a universal and cosmic order or divine principle called *me* operating in the world. This divine principle is to be realized in the activities of the people. Therefore, the laws of the state need to correspond to and express this divine ordering of the world.<sup>695</sup> According to the Sumerian theologians, the gods sent down the rules to mankind. There was a *me*, “regulation, norm”

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<sup>691</sup>There are large collections of legal material available from AWA such as Hittite treaties, law codes of Ur-Nammu, Hammurabi, Eshnunna, Lipit-Ishtar, Ebla tablets, Egyptian coffin Texts etc.,

<sup>692</sup>K. Luke. *The Cultural Background of the Old Testament* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2002) p.48.

<sup>693</sup>F.R. Steele. “Sumer” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol.4, ed.by Geoffrey W. Bromiely (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988) p.658.

<sup>694</sup>F.R. Steele, “Sumer” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol.4, ed.by Geoffrey W. Bromiely, p.659.

<sup>695</sup>Helmer Ringgren. *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, Translated by John Sturdy (London: SPCK, 1973) p.43.

for every conceivable social function. When human beings break the rules, a system to maintain justice was necessary. In heaven Utu, the sun-god, was the supreme judge. He also provided the rules and authority to his earthly counterpart, the reigning king, who would appoint judges and establish a system of jurisprudence.<sup>696</sup>

There are many gods who are pictured as upholders of justice in the Sumerian religion among whom the sun-god Utu is predominant one. A royal hymn from Isin reads that god Utu put righteousness in the king's mouth in order to maintain justice in the society.<sup>697</sup> And the goddess Nanshe is praised for watching over the rights of the widows, orphans and poor. She is praised as who knows the orphan, who knows and cares for the widow and who seeks justice for the poor.<sup>698</sup>

The god protects preserves and saves human being. The moral precepts rest on the will of the gods. They may be summed up in the demands of justice and righteousness. Especially instructive is the enumeration in the incantation compendium of the *Shurpu* listing possible sins that may have caused suffering and misfortune.<sup>699</sup>

Here we find legal offences and moral trespasses:<sup>700</sup>

Legal offences:

Did he use false scales?  
Did he receive false money rejecting genuine?  
Did he take his neighbour's wife?  
Or shed his neighbour's blood?

And Moral trespasses:

Did he part a father from his son?  
A friend from his friend?  
Did he omit to set free a captive or  
Unchain someone in fetters?

We can find in the Sumerian texts treatment on king's responsibility for law and justice. Importance is given to the virtues of honesty in dealing, care for the rights of the weak, truth and justice. The kings were regarded as the agents of gods to administer

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<sup>696</sup>F.R. Steele. "Sumer" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p.656.

<sup>697</sup>Ringgren. *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, p.44.

<sup>698</sup>Kramer. 'Sumerian Literature, a General Survey', *BANE*, p.255, cited by Ringgren. *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, p.44.

<sup>699</sup>Helmer Ringgren and Ake V. Strom. *Religions of Mankind – Today and Yesterday* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) p.64.

<sup>700</sup>Helmer Ringgren and Ake V. Strom. *Religions of Mankind – Today and Yesterday*, p.65.

justice on earth.<sup>701</sup> The Sumerian ruler Urukagina made some strenuous socio-economic reforms which were born out of concern for human rights.<sup>702</sup> The reforms were necessitated due to the exploitation of the poor farmers and landholders, and ordinary citizens by the governors. They suffered from heavy taxes, debts and exorbitant interests. He also established a treaty with Nigirsu in order to protect the rights of the powerless. There was a system of ration prevalent among the Sumerians during the Fara period, upholding a human being's right to food. In this system, grain, pulses, bread, fish, oil, wool etc., were given to old persons, immature children and babes.<sup>703</sup>

In ancient Sumer, the protection of the widow, the orphan, and the poor is detailed in two well-known law codes, that of Urukagina of Lagash in the twenty-fifth century B.C. and that of Ur Nammu, the founder of the so-called third dynasty of Ur in the twenty-first century B.C.<sup>704</sup>

### **5.3.2. Mesopotamia**

In any state, the rights of widow, orphan, and the poor are protected. The same idea is present in the Ancient Near East as well. Such protection was seen as a virtue of gods, kings, and judges. It was a policy of virtue, a policy which proved the piety and virtue of a ruler. Great Mesopotamian kings like Urukagina, Ur-Nammu and Hammurapi boast in their legal inscriptions that they have accomplished this principle. Success was not possible if this principle was not carried through. It is also obvious that this policy was closely connected to social reform or a new legal promulgation. In bad times, in times of decay, the protection of widow, orphan, and the poor was neglected. They were sold as slaves. To obliterate this abuse, laws and also religious pressure were used as compulsory methods to protect the rights of this group. The policy of protection of the weak also occurs in the wisdom literature of the ancient Near East. The wisdom literature was used as didactic material to instruct people how to behave. Legal material, on the other hand, comes with a casuistic stipulation on a transgression of normative conduct prescribed by wisdom literature. The punishment on the transgression is prescribed in the second part of the stipulation. Wisdom literature gives a policy of conduct which bears a close relation to

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<sup>701</sup>Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, p.44.

<sup>702</sup>Urukagina ruled the city state Lagash shortly before 2350 BC. See K..Luke, *The Cultural Background of the Old Testament*, p.50.

<sup>703</sup>Luke,. *The Cultural Background of the Old Testament*, pp.56-57.

<sup>704</sup>Richard D. Patterson. "The Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature," in *BSac* (July, 1973) p.226.

certain parts of the prologue and epilogue of legal codes.<sup>705</sup> The oldest witness to the policy is present in the reformatory measures taken by Urukagina, king of Lagash in the Ur I period, approximately 2400 B.C.E. We read that mighty people were not allowed to do injustice to the orphan and widow.

In the legal code of Ur-Nammu (ca. 2050 B.C.E.) the idea of protection of orphan, widow, and the poor is mentioned in the prologue. In the famous code of Hammurapi (1728 – 1686 B.C.E.), in the prologue there is reference to justice executed by the king and the statement is made that the strong are not allowed to oppress the weak. The same statement is made in the epilogue. In this inscription, Shamash is called in to maintain justice in the land. One important observation here is that Shamash is called the judge of heaven and earth. This means that religious and social ethics are closely connected here. The protection of the weak is regarded vertically and horizontally. The vertical protection comes from the god Shamash which therefore falls in the religious sphere while the horizontal protection comes from the king, which falls in the social sphere. The widows are protected and the slaves are released every three years.<sup>706</sup>

The idea that the poor man is protected by Shamash and that this is expected as a way of life amongst his people, occurs frequently in Babylonian wisdom literature. In the great majority of these texts, reference is made to the poor in general and not specifically to the widow and orphan. Conduct over against the feeble and downtrodden is prescribed in the Babylonian precepts and admonitions, also called the Proverbs of Utnapishtim. Kindness must be shown to the feeble, and sneering at the downtrodden is forbidden. A transgressor of this way of life must expect punishment from Shamash. A very important text is the hymn to the sun-god, Shamash, where assistance to the weak is mentioned as pleasing to Shamash.<sup>707</sup> In another passage the cry of the weak for help and justice is mentioned. It is obvious that the assistance of the poor was regarded as a virtue. Very important is the fact that kings were called on to carry through this policy.<sup>708</sup> The king will have several responsibilities relating to the state. Apart from several responsibilities the

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<sup>705</sup>F.C. Fensham. "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *JNES* 21 (Jan-Oct, 1962) p.129.

<sup>706</sup>F.C. Fensham. "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *JNES* 21 (Jan-Oct, 1962) p.130.

<sup>707</sup>F.C. Fensham. "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," p.131.

<sup>708</sup>F.C. Fensham, "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," p.132.

king is responsible for the “shepherding” of the people. Another important responsibility of the king is to administer justice to all, rich and poor, young and old and thus he was both a judge and a legislator.<sup>709</sup> Throughout the Babylonian legal stipulations and wisdom literature the care of the widow, the orphan, and the poor is enjoined, since the ideal king, as the living representative of the god of justice, the sun god Shamash, is expected to care for the oppressed and needy elements of society.<sup>710</sup> According to the Mesopotamian religion, the sun-god Shamash is regarded as the guardian of justice and the protector of the poor and needy.<sup>711</sup> The gods gave power to the king, who was their representative, in order to make sure that ‘justice and righteousness’ reign in the land.

The kings of Mesopotamia enacted law codes in order to protect the rights of the widows, orphans and the poor. Ur-Nammu who established the Third Dynasty of Ur, (ca. 2050-1950 B.C.E.) promulgated code of laws to protect the weaker sections from exploiters and violation of basic rights. His laws were indented to see that the orphan, the widow, and poor did not fall prey to the powerful and wealthy.<sup>712</sup> The law code of king Lipit-Ishtar, who was the fifth ruler of the Dynasty of Isin (ca.1875-1865 B.C.E.), contains provisions for healthy economic transactions. In its prologue, the king claims that he has sought the welfare of the people and established justice in the land. Further, it states that he procured freedom for those who were slaves in Sumer and Akkad.<sup>713</sup> The laws of Eshnunna, another collection, includes the controlled prices of such basic items as barley, oil, lard, wool, salt, spices and copper.

Another important document known as the Hittite code contains rates of pay for various services. The Code of Hammurabi of Babylon (1728-1686 B.C.E.), the most important legal of ancient Mesopotamia, includes clauses concerning the administration of justice to the poor, women, debtor etc., In the prologue Hammurabi claims that he carried and protected the people so that, ‘the strong might not oppress the weak, that justice might

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<sup>709</sup>A. Kirk Grayson. “Mesopotamia, History of (Babylonia)” in *ABD*, Vol.4, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) p.767.

<sup>710</sup>F.C. Fensham. “Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature,” pp.130-132.

<sup>711</sup>F.C. Fensham. “Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature,” p.130.

<sup>712</sup>Luke. *The Cultural Background of the Old Testament*, p.51 cited from S.N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), p.53.

<sup>713</sup>J.B. Pritchard. ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950) p.159.

be dealt for the orphan and the widow'.<sup>714</sup> Though Babylonians were very religious people, they had a strong sense of morality, and there was strong disapproval when anyone broke the moral code.

The document of Urukagina is a royal inscription of Urukagina, last king of the first dynasty of Lagash. Within the royal inscriptions there was incorporated a record of numerous social and economic reforms which the king had decreed. Those reforms included reduction of taxes and what we could call “fair trade” enactments. It is known that in late Sumerian times and the early Old Babylonian period, kings when they first came to the throne, frequently issued numerous decrees to correct abuses which had been developing during previous reigns. For example, if too many people had been falling into debt slavery because of high interest rates, a new king might decree a reduction in the rate. Not only did this practice alleviate hardship, it also made the new ruler popular with the people. These decrees were written down in collection by the scribes and copied them into royal texts as proof that the king had ruled his people with justice. The Eshnunna “code” is actually such collection of decrees.<sup>715</sup>

The socio-economic structure of Assyria was very conservative and slow to change. But enough protection was given to slaves. There were two types of slaves in Assyria; the debt slaves and prisoner of war. The debt slave was a native Assyria and enjoyed a number of privileges:

- He could marry a free person.
- He can appear as a witness in a court case.
- He can conduct business transactions with other slaves or their masters.
- He can own property.

So it was always possible for a debt slave to pay off his debts and regain his freedom.<sup>716</sup>

It was common practice in Mesopotamia to proclaim social reforms when a new king ascended to the throne or in a decisive time in the history of the nation. The main elements of this reform included cancellation of the debts, liberation of slaves, restoration

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<sup>714</sup>Pritchard. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p.178.

<sup>715</sup>A. Kirk Grayson. “Mesopotamia, History of (Babylonia)” in *ABD*, Vol.4, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) p.770.

<sup>716</sup>A. Kirk Grayson. “Mesopotamia, History of (Assyria)” in *ABD*, Vol.4, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) p.751.

of land to its owners, and rectification of other economic injustices.<sup>717</sup> There is also the proclamation of the liberation known as *anduraru* existed in Mesopotamia during the Neo-Assyrian period. This proclamation included the freeing people from royal taxes and levies, the return of exiles to their homes, the restoration of towns and temples, and the release of prisoners.<sup>718</sup> The edict of King Cyrus is one such act of 'liberation' (Jer 45:1; 44:26-28; Ezra 1:1-4). This granting of freedom and the restoration of individual rights is interpreted as the return of the individual to God in Mesopotamia because human being was considered to be the servant of God.

There are other literatures that refer to the concern for the rights of the defenceless. Among the various ethical demands of the 'mirror of sins' which is found in the second tablet of the incarnation series *Shurpu*, a religious ritual text, is that the kings should uphold the rights of the captives and prisoners. The king should act accordingly; otherwise, he will earn the wrath of gods.<sup>719</sup> The king's duty is to set free innocent prisoners. The text also contains instructions to uphold the rights of the poor. It mentions that helping a poor person 'in his nakedness' is well-pleasing to gods.<sup>720</sup> The instruction is noteworthy because it is not a case of a transgression of a prohibition, but of failure to help. There are matters of property rights in the same text. It seems that there was great respect for property boundaries in the Ancient Near East. According to Ancient West Asian understanding, the boundary stone *kuduru*, was under the protection of the gods. Similarly, the life and property of one's fellow man, including his wife were protected by religious sanctions.<sup>721</sup> There were many legal provisions which upheld some basic rights of slaves. The serfs<sup>722</sup> called '*gurus*' were a major work force in Mesopotamia. They worked either full-time or part-time for the state, temple and state officials. They were semi-free labourers consists of peasants, artisans, and craftsmen who were poor.<sup>723</sup> The lawgivers in Mesopotamia had in view the safeguarding of the rights and dignity of these when they enacted laws.

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<sup>717</sup>M. Weinfeld. *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1995) p.9.

<sup>718</sup>Weinfeld. *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, p.12.

<sup>719</sup>Ringgren. *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, p.113.

<sup>720</sup>Ringgren. *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, p.114.

<sup>721</sup>Ringgren. *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, p.114.

<sup>722</sup>A person who is bound to the land and owned by the feudal lord: it is a term from Middle Ages.

<sup>723</sup>Luke. *The Cultural Background of the Old Testament*, p.56.

In the Old Babylonian period the status of women was relatively high. She was equal with a man in many respects. She could own, buy, and sell property as she liked. She could borrow and lend, she could adopt children, and she could serve as a witness to a contract. She could sue someone, and she could own her own seal. Women received good education and even became scribes.<sup>724</sup>

Babylonian religion permeates Babylonian society, being present in every event, every action, every institution, every thought. Morality was involved in Babylonian religion, and a very high ethical tone is evident in some writings. Shamash was the sun-god and always had great prominence because he was in charge of justice.<sup>725</sup>

### 5.3.3. Egypt

In Egypt the existing material and the wisdom literature throw light to the concern for the rights of the individuals. The Egyptian law followed the codes based on the concept of *Maat*. In Egypt, 'justice' or 'order' or 'right' was expressed by the term '*maat*'. This word referred to a high quality concept throughout Egyptian history. The word is also translated as 'conformity' or 'truth' or 'righteousness'. The term also meant 'just administration'. In Egyptian ethics the basic concept is *Maat* representing truth, justice, balance, and order in the universe. The goal is to find one's place in the established order of society, to live in harmony with *Maat*. In the doctrines of wisdom this is developed in practical precepts of behaviour.<sup>726</sup> This concept *Maat* allowed that everyone, with the exception of slaves should be viewed as equals under the law, regardless of wealth or social position. *Maat* encompassed the notions of truth, harmony, and world order as it should be. A principle of cosmic dimensions, regulating the functioning of nature, society, and an individual's life, *Maat* was the daughter of the Sun God. The King's offering of the icon of *Maat* to the creator was a symbolic expression of the king's role in preserving the harmony of nature and society. *Maat* was a gift of god, instilled in people's hearts to enable them to lead a good life.<sup>727</sup>

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<sup>724</sup>A. Kirk Grayson. "Mesopotamia, History of (Babylonia)" in *ABD*, Vol.4, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) p.771.

<sup>725</sup>A. Kirk Grayson. "Mesopotamia, History of (Babylonia)" in *ABD*, Vol.4, p.774.

<sup>726</sup>Helmer Ringgren and Ake V. Strom. *Religions of Mankind – Today and Yesterday*, p.52.

<sup>727</sup>Edward F. Winte. "Egyptian Religion" in *ABD*, Vol.2, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) p.410.

During the period of Old Kingdom *ma'at* was defined as 'social justice' or 'the right of every human being to the good things of life'.<sup>728</sup> Accordingly, the rich and poor alike had god-given rights to the use of the flood waters. The gods were protectors of the right of the weak. The sun-god Re, or his supplanter Amon was regarded as the guardian of the weak.<sup>729</sup>

The king had a huge obligation to be sleeplessly vigilant on behalf of all his subjects during the Old Kingdom. The protection of the weak was the ideal of kings and other rulers in Egypt. Ameny, a *monarch* of a province during the twelfth dynasty, boasted that he ruled his province with justice.<sup>730</sup> The kings took careful attention to maintain the well-being of all his subjects. During this period and at the beginning of Middle Kingdom, all Egyptians were regarded equal in the sight of the creator God and all had equal rights.<sup>731</sup> The poorest human being had an innate right to impartial justice from the administrator. The instructions of Amenemope (ca.1000 B.C.E.) express concern for the oppressed and disabled.

In ancient Egypt the protection of the widow, the orphan, and the poor was the continual boast of the beneficent king. Thus, Merikare of the First Intermediate Period is instructed by his father, Khety III, that the good king does not oppress the widow or confiscate the property of the orphan. King Amenemhat of the Middle Kingdom's twelfth dynasty lays emphasis on concern for the poor. Ramesses III of the twentieth dynasty boasts that he has given special attention to justice for the widow and the orphan.<sup>732</sup>

In Egyptian literature also the protection of the weak was the ideal of kings and nomarchs.<sup>733</sup> At the beginning of Dynasty XII there lived a nomarch named Ameny who boasted that he ruled his province with justice, respecting the poor man's daughter and the widow. If we take a glance at the occurrence of this ideal and policy in the wisdom literature, it is obvious that the ideal of respecting the rights of the weak, widow, and the orphan flourished in times of decay or at the beginning of a new period. It is considered as

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<sup>728</sup>J.A. Wilson. "Egypt," in *IDB*, Vol.3, ed. By George Arthur Buttrick, et al (New York: Abingdon Press) p.60.

<sup>729</sup>Fensham. "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," p.130.

<sup>730</sup>Fensham. "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature" p.132.

<sup>731</sup>Wilson. "Egypt," p.60.

<sup>732</sup>Richard D. Patterson. "The Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature," in *BSac* (July, 1973) pp.226-227.

<sup>733</sup>Nomarchs are the rulers of districts.

the duty of the king or nomarch to protect the rights of the widows and orphans. One of the maxims indicates that if the king desires long life on earth, he must not oppress the widow and orphan.<sup>734</sup> In the famous Instructions of Amenemope originated ca.1000 B.C.E. there is concern for the oppressed and disabled. A maxim declares that the oppressed must not be robbed and that no harshness may be inflicted on the disabled. We have ample evidence that kings and rulers were encouraged to protect the weak. The obligation felt by the king toward the god, to act righteously toward the poor, the widow, and the orphan, is expressed in Papyrus Harris I, where Rameses III boasts to the god Ptah that he has given special protection to widows and orphans. This protection is also reflected in the few legal documents of inheritance at our disposal. It is obvious from certain testaments that the wife of the deceased had also the right of inheritance. Obviously enough each of the children of the deceased obtained his part of his father's property.<sup>735</sup>

Fensham remarks that the parallel trend between Mesopotamian policy of the protection of the weak and that of Egypt is clear. It is regarded as a virtue of kings and rulers and as an important part of the duty of the sun-god. As in Mesopotamia the religious ethics are closely intertwined in Egypt with social ethics.<sup>736</sup>

#### **5.3.4. Canaan**

A good deal of legal tradition existed in the cities of Canaan. The Ras Shamra texts, found in 1929 from Ugarit, are the Canaanite documents available for reference. But it is difficult to get a fairly good picture of the human rights concepts from these texts because of their highly specialized and limited content. In the epic of *Aqhat* there is an account which shows that the king Daniel's concern for the cause of the poor and widows.<sup>737</sup> According to Canaanite thought, life is the gift of gods, and it is in the powers of gods alone to prolong it or shorten it. The documents show a demand for righteousness from the king which expresses general ethical values.<sup>738</sup>

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<sup>734</sup>F.C. Fensham. "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," p.132.

<sup>735</sup>Fensham. "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature" p.133.

<sup>736</sup>Fensham. "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature" pp.133-134.

<sup>737</sup>Pritchard, ed. *ANES*, p.151.

<sup>738</sup>Ringgren. *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, p.175.

From above discussion, it may be professed that the concern for the rights of the poor, orphans, widows, slaves and foreigners is a common principle in the Ancient West Asian societies. The literature surveyed has particular focus for the protection of the widows, orphans and poor who represent the powerless class and usually deprived of their rights. The rulers were committed to maintain the welfare of these people. They understood that they were the representatives of gods for the administration of justice to the people.

#### **5.4. Legal Provisions of Human Rights in Ancient Israel**

Although the phrase ‘human rights’ being a modern one, and is not employed in the Bible, the idea is very much in existence. Daniel F. Polish rightly observes that the phrase ‘human rights’ itself being of juridical coinage, is not employed by classical sources of the Jewish religious tradition. But the system of values and ideas which constitutes the concept "human rights" is hardly absent from the Jewish worldview.<sup>739</sup> Those values and ideas are among the beliefs which constitute the very core of Jewish sacred scripture and the tradition of ideas and practices which flow from it. The major holy days commemorate and celebrate various aspects of this idea. The narratives of the sacred scriptures of the Jewish people are of a character strikingly different from the myth systems of the peoples of the ancient Near East in whose midst the Jewish people lived and against whose background its sacred texts emerged.<sup>740</sup>

In fact the Old Testament scripture and the traditions are firmly rooted on those values and ideas of human rights concepts. This idea is expressed through certain institutions and provisions like covenant, legal codes, jubilee laws, festivals etc., in the Old Testament.

##### **5.4.1. Covenant**

Covenant is a major theme of the Bible. It is a solemn and binding agreement between God and his people. The covenant between Yahweh and His chosen people Israel is the most basic and distinctive element in the Old Testament. It has influenced the religious and moral outlook of Israel and contained the nature of Yahweh their God, his

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<sup>739</sup>Daniel F. Polish. "Judaism and Human Rights," in *JES*, Vol.19, No.3 (Summer, 1982) p.40.

<sup>740</sup>D.F. Polish. "Judaism and Human Rights" in *JES*, p.40.

relationship with them and their moral obligation to him.<sup>741</sup> According to Marshall, covenant establishes a committed and enduring relationship; and when two parties enter a covenant a new moral community is formed, based on a common recognition of the worth and dignity of the other and generating a range of mutual rights and obligations which both must honour.<sup>742</sup> The covenant at Sinai was the basis for a new moral system. Covenant relationship became the foundation of Old Testament ethics.<sup>743</sup> Covenant includes stipulations regarding duties and obligations of both parties. The covenant is made by cutting the bird or animal. The action involving covenant making employs the idiom ‘to cut the covenant’ (Gen 15:18), that is making bloody sacrifice as part of the covenant ritual.<sup>744</sup> According to Anthony Ceresko, the basis of covenant is the faithfulness between the two parties. Covenant brings common identity. It is an opening toward equality and sharing of communal resources and there is commonness and unity. Israel’s God was a liberating God, one who revealed himself in the midst of a struggle for liberation and in the efforts of the people to build a more just and peaceful human community.<sup>745</sup>

The covenant is to care for the weak, marginalized people, sojourners, orphans and widows (Ex 22:22f; 23:5). It was also concerned of the rights of the slaves (Ex 21:2f). The covenant law declares, codifies, embodies, and nurtures key human rights values.<sup>746</sup> According to Von Rad, Old Testament covenant law of Israel is noted for its passionate interest for the poor, slaves, and strangers.<sup>747</sup> The prophets stress clearly that the God of Israel watches particularly over the rights of those who have no property and to whom justice is denied.<sup>748</sup> Walther Eichrodt in his famous work ‘Theology of the Old Testament’ discusses in detail the concept of covenant and its various aspects. For him covenant concept is central to Old Testament theology. He observes that in the covenant formula ‘You shall be my people and I will be your God’ there is an atmosphere of trust and security.<sup>749</sup>

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<sup>741</sup>E. E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.38.

<sup>742</sup>Christopher D. Marshall. *Crowned with Glory and Honor – Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition*, p.68.

<sup>743</sup>E. E. James. *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, p.76.

<sup>744</sup>Elmer B. Smick. *Berith* (Covenant) in *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, Vol.I ed. by R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) p.128.

<sup>745</sup>Anthony R. Ceresko. *The Old Testament – A Liberative Perspective*, pp.112-113.

<sup>746</sup>Christopher D. Marshall. *Crowned with Glory and Honor – Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition*, p.85.

<sup>747</sup>Gerhard Von Rad. *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1981).

<sup>748</sup>M. Stephen. *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p.41.

<sup>749</sup>Walther Eichrodt. *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol.I, tr .by J.A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961) p.38.

The Bible shows different covenants which God made with his people – Covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the New Covenant of Jeremiah. The scope of Noahic Covenant is universal. It talks about God's grace that is available to all human beings, living creatures and nature also. The scope of Abrahamic Covenant also is universal. It discloses God's redemptive work within human history. All ethnic groups will be blessed through Abraham. The scope of Mosaic Covenant (or Sinai Covenant) is national. God's relationship with people is renewed. There was a promise of well-being and protection. The duty of the people is to love God and love their neighbour (Deut 6:5). The scope of the Davidic covenant is primarily to the house of David, the promise of the permanence of David's line. A society which is very much rooted in righteousness and justice is foreseen. One of the focuses is the defence of the afflicted and the oppressed. Repentance is the key idea in the new covenant of Jeremiah. Restoration, reconciliation, rightness, renewal and transformation are the focus of the new covenant.<sup>750</sup>

The covenant thus became the center-piece of Israelite theology. It speaks of God's intentions to bless his people and honour them as channels of his revelation. We learn that God act in accordance with his covenant promises and by sharing in the benefits of his revelation to and through Israel.<sup>751</sup> The importance and nature of the covenant, in the Old Testament depends entirely upon the nature of God who initiated it. God is the God of the covenant, through his covenant reaching his people of Israel. So human rights are inseparable from the covenant of God described in the Bible. Human rights successfully take shape when human beings work together in co-operation with one another.<sup>752</sup> Marshall comments that rights do not exist to enable people to pursue their private interests but to build community. He further observes that:

“In the biblical tradition, human rights are not simply the claims of isolated individuals against the state or against each another; they are the rights of people in community, bound together not simply by a social contract but by a sacred bond sustained by a shared memory of God's deliverance from slavery and a shared hope for the redemption of the world.”<sup>753</sup>

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<sup>750</sup>M. Stephen. *Introducing Christian Ethics*, pp.41-42.

<sup>751</sup>Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Gr. Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991) p.99.

<sup>752</sup>Purna Chandra Jena. *Towards A Fuller Humanity – A Theological Reflection on Christian Understanding on Human Rights* (Delhi: RCDRC/ISPCK, 1999) p.56.

<sup>753</sup>Christopher D. Marshall. *Crowned with Glory and Honor – Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition*, p.85.

## 5.4.2. Legal Codes

### 5.4.2.1. Significance of the Law

In the Bible we find an intermingling of cultic and civil (social) legislation. It contains laws regulating human being's relationship with God in worship (the ceremonial laws) as well as laws regulating human being's relationship with his fellow human beings: specially the poor, widows, orphans, and foreigners.<sup>754</sup> A special sense of social responsibility for the poor and underprivileged is found mainly in two parts of the Old Testament tradition: in the law, especially in the Book of the Covenant (Ex 20:22-23:33) ; the Deuteronomic law (Deut 12-26) ; and in the Code of Holiness (Lev 17-26) and in the prophets, primarily in the pre-exilic writing prophets.<sup>755</sup>

Biblical law is a vast and complex system of provisions and prohibitions but recognition of human dignity and human rights permeates the system.<sup>756</sup> At Mount Sinai God made his powerful presence known to Israelites as he revealed his will to them through the law. Law is the written expression of God's will for their corporate and individual life. There is lot of ethical value in the law especially in view of the fact that God gave it to his chosen people. Though law can be taken as an isolated entity, it is crucial to recognize that the law was given within the framework of the covenant.<sup>757</sup> While discussing the relationship between Covenant and Law, W. S. Lasor observes that all the elements that make up a covenant are present at Sinai. In Ex19:3-8 Israel summoned to a special relationship with God, described by three phrases: a special possession among all peoples, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Israel is to be God's own people, set apart from other nations for his own service.<sup>758</sup> M. Kline has rightly observed that Exodus Chs.19-24 is in the form of a covenant treaty document. Law is the basis and guide to maintain the divine-human relationship. Giving of the law is historically and canonically surrounded by God's gracious acts as it looks back to Exodus and it looks forward to the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land.<sup>759</sup>

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<sup>754</sup>Sidney Greidanus. "Human Rights in Biblical Perspective" in *CTJ*, Vol.19, No.1, Apr (1984) p.13.

<sup>755</sup>Hans Eberhard von Waldow. "Social Responsibility and Social Structure in early Israel" in *CBQ*, Vol.32, No.2 Apr (1970) p.182.

<sup>756</sup>Christopher D. Marshall. *Crowned with Glory and Honor – Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition* , p.71.

<sup>757</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.67. Also see E. James. *Ethics: A Biblical Perspective*, p.44.

<sup>758</sup>William Sanford Lasor et al. *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.144.

<sup>759</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.67.

The law in Israel is the expression of the righteous will of God and the injunctions regulating Israel's moral, religious and civil life. The law presents the moral standards expected from the Israelites. The legal collections in the Old Testament describes the kind of response expected from a people who have already experienced God's delivering and sustaining love.<sup>760</sup> All the collections of the laws contain regulations for the protection of the powerless. Many laws were enacted in the life of the Hebrews which defend the rights of the widows, orphans and of aliens. Bastiaan Wielenga observes that Torah is not simply dry collection of laws, but it is the law of freedom as the instrument of liberation.<sup>761</sup> There are at least three major collections of laws in the Pentateuch.

#### **5.4.2.2. The Decalogue (Ex 20:2-17; Deut. 5:6-21)**

'Decalogue' comes from the Greek rendering of the literal Hebrew expression *the ten words* found in Ex 34:28 and Deut 4:13; 10:4. In the narrative of the events that took place at Sinai (Ex 20; Deut 5) the Decalogue is presented as having been given by God. Marshall observes that "the reason for the linking of the Decalogue with human rights lies in the function it serves. Ten Commandments are the foundational charter of a people recently liberated from servitude in Egypt (with all its human rights abuses) and now constituted as an independent nation able to enjoy her rights of freedom."<sup>762</sup> George Mathew Nalunnakkal calls it rightly as "a cluster of human rights declarations".<sup>763</sup> Each of them is a practical expression of the concern for human rights. The commandments here except for the fourth commandment, are ethical ones. Thus it is usually called Ethical Decalogue, in contrast to the Ritual or Cultic Decalogue in Ex 34:1-28. The Decalogue chiefly concerned with the behaviour of the people toward God and to one another.<sup>764</sup> The first four commandments refer to the relationship between God and creation; the other six commandments converge on the covenantal relationship among creation. For instance, the commandment 'Do not kill' (Ex 20:13) is an endorsement of the fundamental right to life. Many of them remind us of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The Decalogue was a formula for responsible freedom. The Ten Commandments can be seen

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<sup>760</sup>J. Limburg. "Human Rights in the Old Testament," *Concilium*, Vol.124, No.4 (1979), p.21.

<sup>761</sup>Bastiaan Wielenga. *It's a Long Road To Freedom – Perspectives of Biblical Theology* (Madurai: Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, 1988) p.125.

<sup>762</sup>Christopher D. Marshall. *Crowned with Glory and Honor – Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition*, p.72.

<sup>763</sup>George Mathew Nalunnakkal. "Human Rights: A Biblical and Theological Perspectives," in *Struggle for Human Rights: Towards a New Humanity, Theological and Ethical Perspectives*, p.5.

<sup>764</sup>David F. Hinson. *History of Israel - Old Testament Introduction I*, p.62.

as given in order to preserve the rights and freedoms gained by the exodus, by translating them into responsibilities. The rest of the law in the Pentateuch presents itself as witness to the Lord's justice.<sup>765</sup> K.C. Abraham also observes that Ten Commandments remind us of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He maintains that Ten Commandments are universal principles and instructions for the well-being of the community. Among the Ten Commandments seven commandments are meant for individual and social life.<sup>766</sup>

The Decalogue upholds the sanctity of life and it views life as gift of God and therefore it cannot be destroyed. R.E.O. White observes that these ancient Commandments are the ten pillars of moral wisdom, the ten foundation stones of social welfare, and the unquestioned axioms of any religious morality. He further explains that Decalogue defines godliness in plain and practical terms, describes a piety that begins already to manifest a social conscience, and sets the tone and direction of biblical ethics.<sup>767</sup> Christopher Wright opines that this simple but comprehensive summary of essential stipulations of the covenant relationship provided a 'boundary fence' around the kind of behaviour that could be seen as consistent with covenant membership. He also calls it as a 'policy statement' a list of strategic values that determined the ethos and directions of the rest of the detailed legislation.<sup>768</sup>

The first four commandments circumscribe the relationship of the people of Israel to Yahweh, while the last six commandments order human relationships within the Israelite community. The Ten Commandments brought a sense of righteousness to Israel's religion and social life.<sup>769</sup> According to Mendenhall, the purpose of Covenant is to create new relationships, whereas the purpose of Ten Commandments is to regulate existing relationships by ordering means.<sup>770</sup> The Decalogue also functioned as a general statement of criminal law for Israelite society, delineating serious crime in relation to covenant with

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<sup>765</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, pp.262-263..

<sup>766</sup> K.C. Abraham. "Human Rights: Some Theological Reflections," in *Struggle for Human Rights: Towards a New Humanity, Theological and Ethical Perspectives*, vol.2. Ed. by I.J.M. Razu, (Nagpur: National Council of Churches in India-Urban Rural Mission, 2001), p.19.

<sup>767</sup> R.E.O. White. *Biblical Ethics* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979) pp.18-20.

<sup>768</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.284.

<sup>769</sup> Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p.116.

<sup>770</sup> G.E. Mendenhall. *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) p.200.

Yahweh. This was essential to the well-being of the nation, because an offense against Yahweh's covenant jeopardized the entire covenant community.<sup>771</sup>

The Ten Commandments have the moral eminence and significance and they give a summary of God's ethical requirements and Israel's duties as a people of God. Emmanuel James indicates that there are three expressions of God's will in the Ten Commandments, forming three levels of morality. First, the Commandments begin with God identifying himself with the people of Israel (Ex 20:2); secondly, God sets apart a day when the human ought to worship him, Sabbath (Ex 20:8-11). The third level of morality is the relationship of each person to his community (Ex 20:12-17). Moral obligations include family, sanctity of life, marriage, property, truth and subjective desires. A response is expected to the Ten Commandments for moral welfare.<sup>772</sup> There are instances where those rights which are not taken care by the Decalogue also get uphold. Zelophehad's daughters fought against an unjust system that denied a father's inheritance to the daughters (Num 27:1-10). These women eventually won their case before God.

#### **5.4.2.3. The Book of the Covenant**

The law may be divided into two parts: the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant. The account that is recorded in Ex 20:22 – 23:33 is often called as The Book of the Covenant (the name is derived from Ex 24:7). This is the name given to the section of laws immediately following the Decalogue. The laws in this collection are mostly civil, dealing with offences and disputes that might disrupt communal harmony. They describe typical situations involving disputes over property, damage, assault, negligence and so on. There is also an important section on social responsibilities for the weaker members of society (Ex 22:21 – 27), regulations concerning judicial procedure and a section of cultic law to do with offerings and festivals.<sup>773</sup> It is widely agreed that the Book of the Covenant is the oldest of the legal collections in the Old Testament. The laws of ancient Israel, infused with a deep feeling for righteousness, which are to be found in the Decalogue and the Book of Covenant constitute the basis of the actual Mosaic covenant contract and see the establishment of a moral and social order by divine will.<sup>774</sup>

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<sup>771</sup>Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p.117.

<sup>772</sup>E. E. James, *Ethics – A Biblical Perspective*, pp.86-87.

<sup>773</sup>Christopher J.H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.285.

<sup>774</sup>Walther Eichrodt. *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol.I, p.39.

There is a group of humanitarian rules which forbids oppression of the foreigner, stranger, the widow, the orphan, the poor and the slaves and the retention beyond sundown of the pledged garment of the poor.<sup>775</sup>

Human relationships dominate the Book of the Covenant especially the case laws in Ex21:1-23:9. The basic requirements for treatment of others are fairness, holiness, justice and mercy. In every situation the victim and the weak are afforded protection. Yahweh did not redeem Israel from slavery so that they could oppress others or covet and steal what others possessed. Yahweh sets forth judgments against stealing and poor handling of others' property. Every law code must be judged by how it raises accepted standards. This law raises women above the status of sexual object (Ex 22:16-17). It raises the emotions and loyalties of Israel above sorcery, idolatry, and mistreatment of the poor, the orphan, the alien, the widow or anyone else who has no advocate (Ex 22:21-27).<sup>776</sup> It pushes them to treat others as they have always wanted to be treated. The laws also deals with issues of false witness (Ex 23:1-3), administration of justice (Ex 23:6-8), kidnapping (Ex 21:16) etc., The main principles of the Book of the Covenant are philanthropy and equity, reinforced by piety, a summary of the whole trend of Old Testament ethics. It is impressive to note the degree of humanity and justice attained in that age; even an enemy's need is to be met.<sup>777</sup>

#### **5.4.2.4. The Holiness Code**

The section from Leviticus Chs.17-26 has been regarded by scholars as a separate law collection, which has been given the title 'the Holiness Code' because of its repeated references and emphasis on holiness. Although these chapters basically deal with ritual instructions, also contains the rights of the poor, aliens, deaf, blind, virgin, slave women (Lev 18:1-5; 19:9-10, 15, 33-34; 20:26; 22:31-33; 25:35-38). All these laws refer to the protective provision for the powerless. Holiness for Israel is not merely ritual or pious. These chapters are full of practical laws for the regulation of family life and social life, as well as additional rules for the priestly work and the various festivals. Chapter 25 contains important laws concerning the sabbatical and jubilee years, redemption procedures and

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<sup>775</sup>David F. Hinson. *History of Israel - Old Testament Introduction I*, p.76.

<sup>776</sup>Paul R. House. *Old Testament Theology* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998) pp.115-116.

<sup>777</sup>R.E.O. White. *Biblical Ethics*, p.22.

general economic compassion, while chapter 26 concludes the collection with characteristic promises of blessing for obedience and threats of judgment for the disobedience. Chapter 27 contains the regulations on the redemption of vows.<sup>778</sup>

Apart from several laws about divine human relationships, there are some specific commands about how people must treat others. One summary command stands out above all others: “Do not seek revenge or hold a grudge against any of your people, but instead love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD” (Ex 19:18). This admonition enables the people to avoid stealing, bearing false witness, oppressing the poor or perverting justice (Lev 19:9-16). William Sanford Lasor and others call “Love your neighbour as yourself” as the “Law of Neighbour Love”.<sup>779</sup> All human beings must be respected and loved for the holy nation to give a clear witness of their holy God. The sabbatical and jubilee laws acknowledge that the God who created and redeemed his people owns them. These standards indicate that the poor and helpless must be helped in a holy nation (Ex 25:35-38). If all the persons are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and if all Israelites are participants in the Sinai covenant, then surely each person is inherently equal before God’s law and must be so in human events.<sup>780</sup>

The social principles have been held as the best representation of the ethics of ancient Israel and the great ethical chapter (Ch.19) has been ranked above Decalogue. Humanity, Philanthropy, loyalty to fellow members of the theocracy, and love for God all informed with a clear perception of divine holiness, suggest high motivation. The custom of leaving the corners of the field unharvested enshrines the right of the poor and the landless stranger to a share in the community’s good fortune. Ill-treatment of the afflicted, the blind, the deaf, will be avenged by God; ritual prostitution is strictly forbidden. Commercial honesty is especially stressed; swearing falsely in business is blasphemy, while all measures of length or quantity shall be accurate and just and wages must be promptly paid. This demand for honest dealing extends protection also to the resident alien; it was required not to harm the stranger.<sup>781</sup>

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<sup>778</sup>Christopher J.H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.286.

<sup>779</sup>William Sanford Lasor, et.al *Old Testament Survey – The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, p.158.

<sup>780</sup>Paul R. House. *Old Testament Theology*, pp.145-148.

<sup>781</sup>R.E.O. White. *Biblical Ethics*, pp.29-30.

Holiness also demanded that the cry of the widow and orphan be heeded. They cannot be taken advantage of or oppressed in any way (Ex 22:22-23).<sup>782</sup> Holiness is thus a very comprehensive concept, not so much a religious aspiration or even just a moral code. It is rather a way of being with God in covenant relationship, a way of being like God in clean and wholesome living, a way of being God's people in the midst of an unholy and unclean world. Holiness demands avoidance of all uncleanness. The holiness of God cannot coexist with what is unholy, what is impure or unclean.<sup>783</sup> Holiness among God's people – ritually, morally, physically, socially is the prime thrust of the laws of the Holiness Code. Expansion of the moral laws and additional regulations for holy living were designed to guide the Israelites in their conduct as God's holy people. The moral laws were permanent, but many of the civil and ceremonial laws were temporary in nature.<sup>784</sup>

#### **5.4.2.5. Deuteronomic Code**

The section from Deuteronomy Chs.12-26 has been regarded as Deuteronomic Code. It is a restatement of the earlier laws especially the laws in 'the Book of Covenant'. It reiterates and amplifies the earlier laws with slight changes, expansions, explanations or added motivation. The collection represents a seventh and sixth century revision of earlier laws for the new social, economic, and political condition of the country. The collection contains concern for the rights of the poor, foreigner, widows and orphans (Deut 14:28-29; 26:12-15; 15:7-11; 24:14-17). The law required that the corners and the gleanings of the fields, fruit trees and vines be left for the poor and the strangers (Deut 24:19-22). And as a social security, once every three years a tithe of the harvest was shared with the widows, orphans, Levites, and immigrants (Deut 14:28-29; 26:12-13).<sup>785</sup> Christopher Wright does an elaborate study about different kinds of laws in which he talks about the 'Compassionate Law.' The Compassionate Law includes protection for the weak, especially those who lacked the natural protection of family and land namely widows, orphans, immigrants and resident aliens; justice for the poor, impartiality in the courts; generosity at harvest time and in general economic life; respect for persons and property, even of an enemy;

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<sup>782</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr. *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books from Zondervan Publishing House, 1983) p.161.

<sup>783</sup> Thomas W. Mann. *The Book of the Torah – The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988) p.118.

<sup>784</sup> Samuel J. Schultz. *The Old Testament Speaks*, pp.59-60.

<sup>785</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr. *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, p.162.

sensitivity to the dignity even of a debtor; special care for the strangers and immigrants; considerate treatment of the disabled; prompt payment of wages earned by hired labour; sensitivity over articles taken in pledge etc.,<sup>786</sup> From the demand “Love the Lord your God” (Deut 6:5) arises the humane treatment of the poor, the widows, the fatherless, the defenceless, the sojourners without civil rights.<sup>787</sup> Mercy, fairness, fidelity and justice all clearly established divine character traits; undergird the commands found in Deut 19 – 26. The establishment of cities of refuge certainly displays these principles. To safeguard justice, Moses regulates testimony in civil cases (Deut 19:15-21). Personal rights and societal protection from injustice keep oppression and abuse in check.

Another feature of Israel’s law in the Old Testament worth noting is the way it prioritizes human need over strict legal rights and claims. This is another aspect of the general principle that people matter more than things. It says that some people’s needs and circumstances matter more than other people’s legitimate claims. The following examples will illustrate the point – the need of a refugee slave as against the claims of his owner (Deut 23:15-16); the need of a female prisoner as against the rights of a soldier (Deut 21:10-14); the need of a debtor as against the legal claims of a creditor (Deut 24:10-13); the need of the landless as against the legal property of the landowner (Deut 24:19-22).<sup>788</sup> God’s purposes knows no distinctions of class or position, is founded an unconditional solidarity of all the members of the nation, which bestows on each individual a right to the divine blessing. This takes under its special care those who are underprivileged, the slave, the foreigner, the poor, the prisoner of war, the woman.<sup>789</sup> Since God is righteous in executing justice for the fatherless and widow, and caring for the resident alien, a similar justice and care are required of Israel – especially remembering Israel’s own experience as slaves in Egypt. Justice, fairness and mercy be extended to even the poorest Israelite because God created all persons in his image.<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>786</sup>Christopher J.H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.300.

<sup>787</sup>R.E.O. White. *Biblical Ethics*, p.25.

<sup>788</sup>Christopher J.H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.312-313.

<sup>789</sup>Walther Eichrodt. *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.91.

<sup>790</sup>Paul R. House. *Old Testament Theology*, p.190.

#### 5.4.2.6. Jubilee, Sabbath and Sabbatical Year

The institutions of Jubilee and Sabbath were one of the Hebrew ways of defending the rights of the oppressed and the marginalized.<sup>791</sup>The 'Jubilee' or 'year of release' law redeemed the property and persons who went into the hands of the creditors (Lev 25:10-13; Lev 25:25-28; 47-55). The Jubilee law regarding slaves is to be observed after every seven years, whereas the release of the property was to be observed at every fiftieth year. The year of Jubilee is the year of hope. It is the year of total restructuring of society. It is the year of freedom and liberation for slaves and of rejoicing, renewal and reformation of the oppressed. The slaves are freed and the land is given back to the original owner.<sup>792</sup>Slaves were released during this year regardless of their length of service. The Jubilee law concerning persons is meant to uphold the rights of the slaves and labourers. The aim of Jubilee is the restoration of the position as it was of old: free persons living on free land.<sup>793</sup> The institution of Jubilee was aimed to protect the slaves from excessive subjugation and to protect people from the permanent loss of land, thus upholding the dignity of those who became powerless. The law recognizes the existence of slavery, but it does not support practice of slavery. Rather it shows discomfort with slavery and insists upon the basic rights of the slaves (Deut 15:1; Ex21:5-6). Jubilee emphasizes justice and fair relationship and economic equality is stressed. Hence the Jubilee Year was yet another institution which guaranteed human rights in the Jewish society.<sup>794</sup>

Similarly the institution of Sabbath declares the fundamental right of every one to rest (Ex 20:8-11). There is a strong link between the Exodus experience of liberation from the bondage and the observance of the Sabbath principle. Observance of Sabbath was a reminder that God had redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage and sanctified her as his holy people.<sup>795</sup>Even their servants were included in Sabbath observance. In fact, the Deuteronomic version of the Sabbath (Deut 5:15) does give the Exodus tradition as the reason for keeping the Sabbath. This is also reflected in Ex 20:11. The significance of this

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<sup>791</sup>George Mathew Nalunnakkal, "Human Rights: A Biblical and Theological Perspectives," in *Struggle for Human Rights: Towards a New Humanity, Theological and Ethical Perspectives*, p.6.

<sup>792</sup>M. Stephen. *Introducing Christian Ethics*, p.49.

<sup>793</sup>A. Van Selms. "Jubilee, year of," *Interpreters Dictionary of Bible* Supplementary Volume Ed. by George Arthur Buttrick et. al (New York: Abingdon Press) p.497 cited by Thomas W. Mann. *The Book of the Torah – The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988) p.123.

<sup>794</sup>George Mathew Nalunnakkal. "Human Rights: A Biblical and Theological Perspectives," in *Struggle for Human Rights: Towards a New Humanity, Theological and Ethical Perspectives*, p.7.

<sup>795</sup>Samuel J. Schultz. *The Old Testament Speaks*, p.69.

institution is clearly brought out in the use of the word ‘observe’ (instead of a mere ‘remember’) in the Deuteronomy passage. Ex 31:10-13 introduces the Sabbath as an eternal covenant and relates it with the priestly idea of Yahweh’s resting after six days of creation. Implicit in this institution is the fundamental right of every one to rest.<sup>796</sup> The Israelites who had to do bonded labour under Pharaoh could appreciate how much this meant for them. This serves as a powerful foundation for the rights of the working class. Rest is given not only for the people but for the entire creation. This life-centric ethics is effectively brought out in Exodus 23:10-13. God’s concern here is shown for the poor as well as nature, animals, and earth.

The Sabbath, Sabbatical, and Jubilee laws contain clear social and economic dimensions and a strong ethical rationale. The Jubilee year was a very effective antidote to greed for land and wealth. By living within the land limits of the Jubilee, the nation of Israel was liberated to live as a just and equitable society.<sup>797</sup> The benefit of the weekly day of Sabbath rest was for the working population. In Israel, the work was not divided horizontally (only slaves work and others enjoy leisure), but it was divided vertically. All should work, and all should enjoy rest including slaves.<sup>798</sup> Similarly, the major economic institution of the sabbatical year which includes regulations for leaving the land fallow (Ex 23:10-11) and later, under Deuteronomic law, an accompanying release of pledges held for debts (Deut 15:1-2). It was based on the concept of divine ownership of the land (Lev 25:23). Observing sabbatical year as a year of rest for the land, they left the field unseeded and the vineyard unpruned every seventh year. Whatever they raised that year was to be shared alike by the owner, servants, and strangers as well as the beasts. Creditors were instructed to cancel the debts incurred by the poor during every six years. This was the year of their emancipation. The intended practical effect of this obligation was humanitarian help for the impoverished and the debtor.<sup>799</sup> This is spelt out explicitly in each of the three occurrences of the law (Ex 23:11; Lev 25:6; Deut 15:2, 7-11). This way the Sabbatical year became significant to old and young, to master as well as to servant. And by keeping a law that benefits the poorer neighbours God is honoured.

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<sup>796</sup><sup>796</sup>George Mathew Nalunnakkal. “Human Rights: A Biblical and Theological Perspectives,” in *Struggle for Human Rights: Towards a New Humanity, Theological and Ethical Perspectives*, p.6.

<sup>797</sup>Leaderwell Pohsngap and Stan Nussbaum. “Jubilee and Grace – Good News of Liberation for All India” *UBS Journal*, Vol.1, No.2, Sept., 2003, p.3.

<sup>798</sup>Christopher J.H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.296.

<sup>799</sup>J.H. Wright. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p.296.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

The discussion on the biblical and theological foundation for human rights reminds and emphasizes that all human beings are created in the image of God and bestowed with certain rights to lead a reasonably dignified life in the society. The image of God is the most fundamental theological principle behind the idea of human rights. The fact that God created humanity in his own image and likeness implies that everyone is equal before God. Those rights should not be denied and in fact they should be protected. From a theological perspective, denial of human rights amounts to distortion of the image of God in humanity. As mentioned earlier, the image of God denotes a covenantal relationship characterized by equality, justice and love. Bible is a human rights charter and contains so many instructions in terms of protecting human rights. All the major sections of the Bible uphold and promote human rights in favour of poor and oppressed. The message of Yahweh to Pharaoh through Moses that people should be set free in order that they could worship Yahweh suggests that socio-economic rights are related to religious freedom.

The question of human rights is inseparable from the covenant of God described in the Bible. Human rights are endangered when the relationship between God and human beings is distorted. They successfully take shape when human beings work together in co-operation with one another. Human rights are reflected everywhere in the Bible as Bible records the struggles of the people of God for liberation and God's acts of redemption and deliverance.

Not only in the Bible, human rights provisions are found in the legal texts of Ancient West Asia as well. Many of the aspects of the modern human rights concepts find place in the legal codes and other literature of AWA. The rulers of AWA had enacted special laws in order to safeguard the interests of the weaker sections of the society.

## CHAPTER 6

### HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN INDIA

#### 6.1. Introduction

The concept of human rights has assumed importance globally during the past few decades. Ever since the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the term human right has gained currency. Human Rights have been the crucial element of philosophical, social and political debates in the second portion of the twentieth century. The issue of human rights may be more crucial than any other issues in this twenty-first century. While there is increasingly widespread concern for universal respect and observance of human rights, gross violation of internationally recognised norms continue unabated in almost all parts of the world. Countless people around the world suffer hunger, disease and lack of opportunity, being denied the enjoyment of the most basic economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights. This is of paramount importance for full realization of human dignity and for the attainment of legitimate aspiration of every individual.<sup>800</sup> The issue of human rights covers all the aspects of human life and is crucial for the peaceful human existence, relations and development. ‘Human Rights’ is not an easy subject to reflect upon for it demands sensitivity and commitment to the whole question of human freedom. ‘Human Rights’ is the gift from God, and every human being receives this right at the time of birth.<sup>801</sup>

Today we find injustice and abuse of rights everywhere. The paramount issues on human rights and responsibilities should always be at the heart of any struggle for liberation. Humankind forms a global community, a community of persons with inherently shared needs and interests. In order to achieve a stable society, any community must develop consensus on a unified vision both of the common good and of the good in common. If the global community of humankind is ever going to achieve a vision of the common good, one must learn to exercise rights responsibly.<sup>802</sup>

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<sup>800</sup>Aftab Alam. “Emerging Dimensions of Human Rights” in *Human Rights in India: Issues and Challenges* Ed. by Aftab Alam (Delhi: Raj Publications) p.11.

<sup>801</sup>Purna Chandra Jena. *Towards A Fuller Humanity – A Theological Reflection on Christian Understanding on Human Rights* (Delhi: RCDRC/ISPCK, 1999) p.v.

<sup>802</sup>Royal L. Pakhuongte. “Human Rights and Human Responsibilities: ‘All Things are Lawful,’ but not all things are Beneficial (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23)” *MJT*, Vol.III, No.2, July-December, 2012, p.92.

## 6.2. Definition of Human Rights

Although much has been written and pronounced about human rights through the centuries, it is not easy to define the term. However, as one author has aptly observed “Human rights may be difficult to define but impossible to ignore.” Human rights is a dynamic concept and endeavours to adopt itself to the needs of the day. For this reason, the definition and understanding of the term depend much on the condition and opinions prevailing in the given society at a given time and it attains new dimension with the march of history.<sup>803</sup> For S. Subramanian, human rights recognize the inherent dignity and fundamental freedoms of all members of human family and are the foundations for all basic freedoms, justice and peace in the world.<sup>804</sup> Human rights are a moral good that one can accept on an ethical basis and that everyone ought to have in the modern state-centric world. They are rights which are inherent in the human nature and without these rights humans cannot attain their authentic growth as human beings.<sup>805</sup>

In spite of the complications involved in defining human rights, attempts are made to comprehend it. John Chathanatt describes that human rights are rights that all human persons have simply because they are human. Human rights are rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings.<sup>806</sup> According to Martin Shupack, Human rights are fundamental claims or entitlements that are acknowledged to be morally justified and that take precedence over other societal interests. Each person possesses the full panoply of human rights simply because he or she is a human being. Grounded in a belief in human dignity, human rights express the minimal requirements for human well-being.<sup>807</sup> To put it simply, human rights constitute those very rights which one has precisely because of being a human. So basically human rights are inherent rights that a human possesses regardless of who they are but just because they are born human. Differences of sex, race, language and colour do not change these rights nor do the

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<sup>803</sup>Aftab Alam. “Emerging Dimensions of Human Rights” in *Human Rights in India: Issues and Challenges*, p.12.

<sup>804</sup>S. Subramanian. *Human Rights: International Challenges*, vol.2 (New Delhi: Manas Publication, 1997), p.747.

<sup>805</sup>T. Victor. “Human Rights: Quest for Adequate Ground,” in *VTQ*, vol.16, No.2 (June, 2011) as cited by Royal L. Pakhuongte. “Human Rights and Human Responsibilities: ‘All Things are Lawful,’ but not all things are Beneficial (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23)” *MJT*, Vol.III, No.2, July-December, 2012, p.94.

<sup>806</sup>John Chathanatt. “Human Rights – A Historical Overview” *VJTR*, Vol.65 No.2 (2001) p.112.

<sup>807</sup>M. Shupack. “The Demands of Dignity and Community: An Ecumenical and Mennonite Account of Human Rights,” *CGR*, (Fall, 1996) p.243.

differences of property, social origins, political ideals or religious beliefs.<sup>808</sup> Human Rights being dynamic, inalienable and indivisible, are fundamental to the dignified existence of individuals. Human Rights ensure prosperity in society by having a satisfied and productive people. Social and economic rights take care of the weaker and less privileged sections of the society by providing them equality of opportunity in the matter of education, employment and mobility. Economic opportunities and equality enable the citizens to strive hard and become more productive, which in turn adds to the overall prosperity of the society. Economic equality establishes good relations in society.<sup>809</sup> Certain basic and inalienable rights are commonly known as human rights. Human rights being the birth rights are therefore, inherent in all the individuals, irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, sex and nationality. These rights are essential for all the individuals as they are consonant with their freedom and dignity and are conducive to physical, moral, social and spiritual welfare. They are also necessary as they provide suitable conditions for the material and moral uplift of the people. Because of their immense significance to human beings, human rights are also sometimes referred to as fundamental rights, basic rights, inherent rights, natural rights and birth rights. All these rights which are essential for the maintenance of human dignity may be called human rights.<sup>810</sup>

### **6.3. The Significance of Human Rights**

Since the enlightenment, the term ‘dignity’ has been used to express the fundamental worth of being human. Dignity is best thought of not as a right but as the source and justification for all human rights. Human rights in turn express entitlement to human dignity.<sup>811</sup> Human rights is truly the gift from God. That is why each person is indebted to the other forever. Therefore, it is necessary that all the human beings live a life of equality.<sup>812</sup> The human rights doctrine provides a vehicle for understanding and unpacking the related ideas of liberty and justice. To have a right to something means, that one should have the liberty to exercise that right. Rights and liberties intertwine. Human

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<sup>808</sup>Aftab Alam. “Emerging Dimensions of Human Rights” in *Human Rights in India: Issues and Challenges*, p.13.

<sup>809</sup>S. Subramanian. *Human Rights: International Challenges*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Manas Publication, 1997), p.73.

<sup>810</sup>A. Subramanyam and M. Sarojanamma. “Human Rights: Indian Perspectives” in *Human Rights for the Third Millennium*, ed by M. Ponnaian, Panch Ramalingam, and Rani Ponnaian (Delhi: PR Books ) p.55.

<sup>811</sup>Christopher D. Marshall. *Crowned with Glory and Honor – Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition*, p.54.

<sup>812</sup>Purna Chandra Jena. *Towards a Fuller Humanity – A Theological Reflection on Christian Understanding on Human Rights*, p.6 9.

Rights relate to those liberties which are essential to a human quality of existence, just as special rights protect those which are essential to a special relationship. Justice, defined as “treating equals equally” means respecting and preserving equally the rights of all. The concept of human rights of all persons is deeply rooted in the biblical picture of society and government. Again and again the Scriptures affirm the value God places on the human individual. The Old Testament prophets hold rulers accountable for justice that respects the rights of the poor and the fatherless.<sup>813</sup>

In the second place, human rights are basic to more particular rights. A woman’s rights as a human person, equal to those of a man, because she is a person with full human rights. Similarly governments are instituted to secure our natural rights. Natural rights are not just legal rights given us by the state or by a constitution. They are neither self-imposed nor socially imposed. It means that government is not the master but a servant of the people in the exercise of their natural rights. Third, the value of the concept of human rights is that it avoids ethical egoism even while it emphasizes the value of the individual. Because rights imply obligations, we are morally bound together in a mutually supportive society.<sup>814</sup> Human rights movement advocates that human beings having been created in the image and likeness of God must have their basic rights as human beings, i.e. the right to receive food, right to work, to live in a healthy condition and most importantly right to live. God has given these rights to human beings; no person or organization has the right to snatch away this God-given right from any person.<sup>815</sup>

#### **6.4. Human Rights in Christian Perspective**

One of the most effective ways to inspire people to pursue high moral ideals is to relate them to religious conceptions about the good life.<sup>816</sup> From a biblical view point, human rights are founded not in the fundamental freedom of humanity, but in the revealed truths.<sup>817</sup> According to Christian perspective, respect for human rights, flow for the dignity of human being as a creature of the Lord Almighty. Christian faith aims to write God’s

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<sup>813</sup>Arthur F. Holmes. *Ethics – Approaching Moral Decisions* (Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press, 1984) pp.83.

<sup>814</sup>Arthur F. Holmes. *Ethics – Approaching Moral Decisions*, pp.81-82.

<sup>815</sup>Purna Chandra Jena. *Towards a Fuller Humanity – A Theological Reflection on Christian Understanding on Human Rights*, p.29.

<sup>816</sup>Christopher D. Marshall. *Crowned with Glory and Honor – Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition*, p.46.

<sup>817</sup>J.D. Dengerink. “Rights, Human” in *NDT*, ed. by Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991) p.594.

law on the human heart and to nurture the values and qualities of character necessary for human rights to flourish.<sup>818</sup>Respecting others' rights implies respecting our own rights. The duty of every individual is to protect the rights of the weakest by making oneself a neighbour to others and actively serving them. The human rights belong to human nature and are inherent in the person by virtue of the creative act. Human being is created in the image of God in so much as he reflects, he can live with his fellow human beings, uniting with others in a personal and communitarian solidarity and finally that he or she can make own decisions and freely execute them.<sup>819</sup>

P.C. Jena opines that human rights are the gift from God. He contends that every human being receives this right at the time of birth. And since it is a gift from God, each person is indebted to the other forever. Therefore it is necessary that all the human beings live a life of equality. As human persons living in society, we are supposed to accept some rules and regulations for a better functioning of the society and for the good of human beings.<sup>820</sup>A.F. Holmes also thinks that Rights are not socially accorded but God-given. They may be essential to human community of moral agents, but it is God who in the first place made us responsible agents to live together in a community. Created by God in God's own image, we are expected to reflect the nature of God. God values us as his own creatures and as persons. To treat a person as a person, to respect his/her rights as a person, therefore respects both God's handiwork and God himself. To abuse people, to violate their rights, is to disrespect God and depreciate his image in them. It is in effect an act of blasphemy, for the sanctity of persons reflects the sanctity of God. Human rights are in effect the right to fulfil our God-given calling freely, without obstruction by others. The right to be treated as a person is then the right to the responsible life God has purposed for us.<sup>821</sup>When God created human beings, his aim was that the human beings on this earth must practice justice among each other and live together in love and peace (Lev 26:4-5; Isa 11:6-9).<sup>822</sup>Also in the Decalogue and other Laws that are given to the people of Israel, God upholds the rights of every individual in the community. The followers of Jesus were the

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<sup>818</sup>Christopher D. Marshall. *Crowned with Glory and Honor – Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition*, p.45.

<sup>819</sup>A.S. Anthonysamy. "Human Rights in the Christian Perspective" in *Human Rights for the Third Millennium*, ed by M. Ponnaian, Panch Ramalingam, and Rani Ponnaian (Delhi: PR Books ) pp.155-157.

<sup>820</sup>Purna Chandra Jena. *Towards A Fuller Humanity – A Theological Reflection on Christian Understanding on Human Rights*, p.69.

<sup>821</sup>Arthur F. Holmes. *Ethics – Approaching Moral Decisions*, p.85.

<sup>822</sup>Purna Chandra Jena. *Towards A Fuller Humanity – A Theological Reflection on Christian Understanding on Human Rights*, p.84.

poor and the Dalits. Jesus showed his love towards the suffering people in the society. They are the Dalits, the poor, hungry, sick and those who are weeping because of their suffering.<sup>823</sup> By God's grace we have the right and privilege of serving others. Rights are not ends in themselves to be selfishly and tenaciously grasped, but are means to manifesting God's image more freely. They have to be viewed in theocentric rather than egocentric fashion.<sup>824</sup>

## **6.5.The Historical Background of Human Rights**

### **6.5.1. Human Rights International**

The origin of the concept of human rights in the world history found its first expression in Magna Carta of 1215, and after this the Petition of Rights of 1628, the Bill of Rights 1688, then the American Bill of Rights of 1791 and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789 became the milestone along the road in which the individual acquired protection against the capricious acts of kings.<sup>825</sup> The Bible and other religious scriptures advocate universal brotherhood but it was only after the Second World War that the subject of human rights received worldwide attention. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations Charter laid the philosophical foundation for subsequent formal and positive development in the shape of treaties and conventions.<sup>826</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains a milestone in the struggle for ensuing justice to all humanity. The struggle to preserve, protect and promote human rights continues all over the world even today. Most people believe that 'Human Rights' is a western concept which is not true, because its actual origin is to be found in all human cultures. In every civilization there was a genuine concern for the rights of human.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948 is significant because it was accepted without a dissenting vote. And it is the first multinational declaration mentioning human rights by

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<sup>823</sup>Purna Chandra Jena. *Towards A Fuller Humanity – A Theological Reflection on Christian Understanding on Human Rights*, p.4.

<sup>824</sup>Arthur F. Holmes. *Ethics – Approaching Moral Decisions*, p. 86

<sup>825</sup>A.B.M. Mafizul Islam Patwaris. *Fundamental Rights and Personal Liberty in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (1991), p.34 cited by P.L. Mehta and Neena Verma. *Human Rights Under the Indian Constitution – The Philosophy and Judicial Gerrymandering* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd, 1999) p.1.

<sup>826</sup>A. Subramanyam and M. Sarojanamma. "Human Rights: Indian Perspectives" in *Human Rights for the Third Millennium*, p.56.

name.<sup>827</sup>In the preamble it reads – recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.<sup>828</sup>

The General Assembly proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.”<sup>829</sup>

### 6.5.2. Origin of Human Rights in India

The cause of human rights is not alien to India. In fact it was for the fundamental rights of India that the struggle for independence was waged.<sup>830</sup>Introducing the concept of Human Rights it can be said that “Human Rights” is a twentieth century name for what has been traditionally known as natural rights or the rights of man. These ‘rights’ had a place in almost all the ancient civilizations of the world. In India the *Dharma* of the Vedic period protected rights. The Indian history is warranted by the fact that human rights Jurisprudence has always occupied a place of prime importance in India’s rich legacy of different traditions and cultures. The Indian National Congress, which was in the forefront of freedom struggle, took the lead in this matter. National struggle for freedom was truly an attempt of the Indians to secure basic human rights for all the people.<sup>831</sup>

The modern concept of human rights was concretely developed in India in the context of resistance to British rule. The philosophy of human rights in modern sense has taken shape in India during the course of British rule. From its beginning, the national struggle for freedom was indeed largely directed against racial discrimination and towards

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<sup>827</sup>Royal L. Pakhuongte. “Human Rights and Human Responsibilities: ‘All Things are Lawful,’ but not all things are Beneficial (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23)” p.93.

<sup>828</sup>Richard Howell (Ed). “Universal Declaration on Human Rights” in *Free to Choose – Issues in Conversion, Freedom of Religion and Social Engagement* (New Delhi: Evangelical Fellowship of India, 2002) p.195.

<sup>829</sup>Richard Howell (Ed). “Universal Declaration on Human Rights” in *Free to Choose – Issues in Conversion, Freedom of Religion and Social Engagement*, p.196.

<sup>830</sup>A. Subramanyam and M. Sarojanamma. “Human Rights: Indian Perspectives” in *Human Rights for the Third Millennium*, p.56.

<sup>831</sup> P.L. Mehta and Neena Verma. *Human Rights Under the Indian Constitution – The Philosophy and Judicial Gerrymandering* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd, 1999) pp.8-9.

the securing of basic human rights for all the people and equality before law, protection of liberty, life and property, freedom of speech and press, and right of association. The 1931 Congress Resolution affirmed several social and economic rights. The issues of parliamentary democracy, socio-economic justice, human rights and freedoms were extensively debated in Congress, socialist and communist circles both before and after Independence.<sup>832</sup>

National Human Rights Commission was set up in October, 1993 under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993. It is an institution which provides sharp focus on allegation of violation of human rights and seeks to provide quicker redressal. There is an enabling provision under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 for State Human Rights Commission to be constituted by the respective State Government.<sup>833</sup>

## **6.6. Human Rights in Indian Constitution**

### **6.6.1 Preamble of Indian Constitution<sup>834</sup>**

The Constitution of India begins with a Preamble which describes the nature of the Indian State and the objectives it is committed to secure. The Preamble reads: We, the People of India having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic and to secure to all its citizens: JUSTICE, social, economic, political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all FRATERNITY, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.

**6.6.2 Preamble Features:** The Preamble describes five cardinal features of the Indian state:

#### **6.6.2.1 India is a Sovereign State**

The word sovereign means supreme or independent. The Preamble categorically accepts the principle of Popular Sovereignty. It begins with the words: ‘We the people of India.’ These words testify the fact that the people of India are the ultimate source of all

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<sup>832</sup>John Desrochers. “Human Rights” in *Development, Human Rights and Action Groups* (Centre for Social Action, Bangalore, 1985) pp.87-88.

<sup>833</sup>A. Subramanyam and M. Sarojanamma. “Human Rights: Indian Perspectives” in *Human Rights for the Third Millennium*, p.58.

<sup>834</sup>K.K. Ghai. “Preamble of Constitution of India (5 Features)”. In [www.yourarticlelibrary.com](http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com)

authority. The Government derives its power from them. The Preamble proclaims that India is a sovereign state. Such proclamation denotes the end of rule over India. It testifies to the fact that India is no longer a dependency or colony or possession of British Crown. As a sovereign independent state, India is free both internally and externally to take her own decisions and implement for her people and territories. India is internally and externally sovereign - externally free from the control of any foreign power and internally, it has a free government which is directly elected by the people and makes laws that govern the people. The Popular sovereignty is also one of the basic structures of the Constitution of India.

#### **6.6.2.2. India is a Socialist State**

In 1976, the Preamble was amended to include the word “Socialism”. It is now regarded as a prime feature of the State. It implies social and economic equality. Social equality in this context means the absence of discrimination on the grounds of caste, colour, creed, sex, religion, or language. Socialism reflects the fact that India is committed to secure social, economic and political justice for its entire people. India stands for ending all forms of exploitation as well as for securing equitable distribution of income, resources and wealth. This has to be secured by peaceful, constitutional, and democratic means. The term ‘India is a Socialist state’ really means, ‘India is a democratic socialist state.’

#### **6.6.2.3. India is a Secular State**

By the 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, the term ‘Secular’ was incorporated in the Preamble. Its inclusion simply made the secular nature of the Indian Constitution more explicit. It implies equality of all religions and religious tolerance. India therefore does not have an official state religion. Every person has the right to preach, practice and propagate any religion they choose. The government must not favour or discriminate against any religion. It must treat all religions with equal respect. All citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs are equal in the eyes of law. As a state India gives special status to no religion. There is no such thing as a state religion of India. India guarantees equal freedom to all religions. All religions enjoy equality of status and respect.

#### **6.6.2.4. India is a Democratic State**

The Preamble declares India to be a Democratic State. The Constitution of India provides for a democratic system. The authority of the government rests upon the sovereignty of the people. The people enjoy equal political rights. The people freely participate in the democratic process of self-rule. They elect their government. Every citizen enjoys the voting right without any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, colour, sex, religion or education. For all its acts, the government is responsible before the people. The people can change their government through elections. The government enjoys limited powers. It always acts under the Constitution which represents the supreme will of the people.

#### **6.6.2.5 India is a Republic State**

The Preamble declares India to be a Republic. Negatively, this means that India is not ruled by a monarch or a nominated head of state. Positively, it means that India has an elected head of state. A democratic republic is an entity in which the head of state is elected for a fixed tenure. The President of India is elected by an electoral college for a term of five years. The post of the President of India is not hereditary. Every citizen of India is eligible to become the President of the country. President of India is the elected sovereign head of the state. Any Indian citizen can get elected as the President of India.

**6.6.3.Four Objectives of the Indian State:** The Preamble lists four cardinal objectives which are to be “secured by the state for all its citizens.” These are:

**6.6.3.1 Justice:** India seeks to secure social, economic and political justice for its people.

**6.6.3.1.1 Social Justice:** Social Justice means the absence of socially privileged classes in the society and no discrimination against any citizen on grounds of caste, creed, colour, religion, sex or place of birth. India stands for eliminating all forms of exploitations from the society.

**6.6.3.1.2. Economic Justice:** Economic Justice means no discrimination between person and person on the basis of income, wealth and economic status. It stands for equitable distribution of wealth, economic equality, end of monopolistic control over means of

production and distribution, decentralisation of economic resources, and securing of adequate opportunities of all for earning their livelihoods.

**6.6.3.1.3. Political Justice:** Political Justice means equal, free and fair opportunities to the people for participation in the political process. It stands for the grant of equal political rights to all the people without any discrimination. The Constitution of India provides for a liberal democracy in which all the people have the right and freedom to participate.

**6.6.3.2. Liberty:** The Preamble declares liberty to be the second cardinal objective to be secured. It includes liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship. The grant of Fundamental Rights (Part III) including the right to freedom is designed to secure this objective. Liberty of faith and worship is designed to strengthen the spirit of secularism.

**6.6.3.3. Equality:** The Preamble declares equality as the third objective of the Constitution. Equality means two basic things – firstly, equality of status i.e. natural equality of all persons as equal and free citizens of India enjoying equality before law and secondly equality of opportunity i.e. adequate opportunities to all to develop. For securing the equality of status and opportunity, the Constitution of India grants and guarantees the fundamental right to equality.

**6.6.3.4. Fraternity:** The fourth objective is to promote fraternity among all the people. Fraternity means the inculcation of a strong feeling of spiritual and psychological unity among the people. It is designed to secure dignity of the individual and unity and integrity of the nation.

#### **6.6.4. Fundamental Rights in Indian Constitution<sup>835</sup>**

Rights are claims that are essential for the existence and development of individuals. Some of the most important rights are recognized by the State and enshrined in the Constitution. Such rights are called fundamental rights. These rights are fundamental because of two reasons. First, these are mentioned in the Constitution which guarantees them and the second, these are justiciable, i.e. enforceable through courts. Justiciable means that in case of their violation, the individual can approach courts for their protection. The Constitution guarantees six fundamental rights to Indian citizens as follows: (i) right

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<sup>835</sup>“Fundamental Rights and Duties” in <http://www.nios.ac.in>, pp.25-26.

to equality, (ii) right to freedom, (iii) right against exploitation, (iv) right to freedom of religion, (v) cultural and educational rights, and (vi) right to constitutional remedies.

The fundamental rights as enshrined in the Constitution guarantees in Article 14 equality of all before the law while Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. It enables the State to make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens including the Scheduled Tribes. Similarly Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. Article 19 protects certain rights regarding freedom of speech. Article 23 prohibits forced labour in human beings. Article 25 provides protection of interests of minorities and Article 30 recognizes the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.<sup>836</sup>

The Indian constitution contains a list of fundamental rights which can be enforced by the courts of law and also a list of directive principles which are not enforceable in the courts but can serve as a guide to the states. The Constitution guarantees the right of free speech and assembly, the right of free worship, the right of association and movement, the right of equality under the law, the right to hold property, and the right to carry on business. It provides that no citizen of India shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property except in accordance with the law. The minorities are especially protected and the Constitution seeks to protect their language, script and culture. The fundamental rights defend individuals and minorities against arbitrary action by the state and other citizens. Besides fundamental rights the Constitution contains the directive principles of State policy. These principles though not enforced by any court, are fundamental in the governance of the country and the legislative and executive are asked to apply them in making and administering laws. But the Union and State governments' measures to implement these principles remained on paper and failed to bring out socio-economic justice. This is clearly borne out by widespread poverty, unemployment and illiteracy, widening inequalities, increasing communal tensions continued and manifold exploitation of workers, women, children, minorities, scheduled castes and tribes etc.,<sup>837</sup>

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<sup>836</sup>A. Subramanyam and M. Sarojanamma. "Human Rights: Indian Perspectives" in *Human Rights for the Third Millennium*, pp.56-57.

<sup>837</sup>John Desrochers. "Human Rights" in *Development, Human Rights and Action Groups*, pp.88-91.

The Indian Constitution is an embodiment of a complete catalogue of human rights enacted around the time when the international scene was witnessing the framing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These fundamental rights represent the basic values cherished by the people of this country and they are calculated to protect the dignity of individual and create condition in which every human being can develop his personality to the fullest extent. Its purpose is to help the individual to find his own viability to give expression to his creativity and to prevent government and other forces from ‘alienating’ the individual from his creative impulses. To be true, no society is free, no state is democratic, unless human rights are actualised by every citizen. It is with this purpose in mind that the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 has been enacted for the better protection of human rights. The Act provides for the constitution of a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and Commission for each state. The very idea to bring the Human Rights Commissions into existence is to give practical shape to the entire gamut of human rights philosophy by executing the intention of the legislatures manifested in different social legislations.<sup>838</sup>

#### **6.6.5. Fundamental Rights as Human Rights<sup>839</sup>**

Fundamental Rights are very essential for the well-being of every citizen. It is also fact that people have always struggled against injustice, exploitation and inequality for the creation of better surroundings, better living conditions and preservation of the human dignity. Efforts to avail such rights to all human beings have been made at the international level also by recognising various rights which are popularly known as Human Rights. The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted Human Rights in 1948 and enshrined them in Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Some of the Human Rights include - Equality before Law, Freedom from Discrimination, Right to Life, Liberty and Personal Security, Right to Free Movement, Right to Education, Right to Marriage and Family, Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion, Right to Peaceful Assembly and Association and Right to Participate in the Cultural Life of the Community. A careful examination of these rights discloses how important the Human Rights are. That is the

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<sup>838</sup> P.L. Mehta and Neena Verma. *Human Rights Under the Indian Constitution – The Philosophy and Judicial Gerrymanndering*, pp.3-4.

<sup>839</sup>“Fundamental Rights and Duties” in <http://www.nios.ac.inp.38>.

reason many of the Human Rights have found place in the Chapter on Fundamental Rights in the Indian Constitution. The Human Rights which could not find place under the Fundamental Rights have been included in the Chapter on Directive Principles of State Policy. Moreover, keeping in view the importance of Human Rights, the National Human Rights Commission was founded in 1993 by the Government of India to guarantee that the Indian citizens also enjoy those rights.

On January 2, 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru expressed the hope that the Constitution would bring about the dawn of real freedom that we have clamoured for and that real freedom in turn will bring food to our starving people, clothing and housing for them and all manner of opportunities of progress. The Indian constitution covers almost the entire field of the UN declaration and seeks to ensure both the traditional civil and political rights and the new economic and social rights.

#### **6.6.6. Relationship between Rights and Duties<sup>840</sup>**

Rights are defined as claims of an individual that are essential for the development of his or her own self and that are recognized by society or State. These are legal, social, or ethical principles of freedom or entitlement and are the fundamental normative rules about what is allowed to people or owed to people, according to some legal system, social convention, or ethical theory. Rights are often considered fundamental to civilization, being regarded as established pillars of society and culture. But the rights have real meaning only if individuals perform duties. Besides Fundamental Rights, the Indian Constitution also enlists certain core duties that every citizen is expected to perform. These are known as Fundamental Duties. A duty is something that someone is expected or required to do. Life can become smoother if rights and duties go hand in hand and become complementary to each other. Rights are what we want others to do for us whereas the duties are those acts which we should perform for others. Thus, a right comes with an obligation to show respect for the rights of others. The obligations that accompany rights are in the form of duties. If we have the right to freedom, it becomes our duty not to misuse this and harm others.

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<sup>840</sup>“Fundamental Rights and Duties” in <http://www.nios.ac.in> p.26.

## **6.7. Human Rights Violations Across India – An Overview**

### **6.7.1. Vigilante Violence<sup>841</sup>**

These days there has been a rise in the number of incidents of cow vigilantism. Cow vigilante violence involving mob attacks in the name of "cow protection," but targeting mostly a particular community. Recently emerged cow vigilante groups, claiming to be protecting cattle, have accused some Muslims and Dalits of cattle theft or slaughter, and targeted violence against them, leading to a number of deaths. This arrogant act of cow vigilante groups which is leading to number of deaths of innocent Muslims and Dalits is a clear indication of human rights violations. Because it is denying the people the right to live and it creates panic in the society which is depriving the common people to live a peaceable life in the society.

Vigilante violence aimed at religious minorities, marginalized communities, and critics of the government became an increasing threat in India. The government failed to promptly or credibly investigate the attacks, while many senior political leaders publicly promoted Hindu supremacy and ultra-nationalism, which encouraged further violence. However, in a major setback for cow vigilantism, the Supreme Court of India in September 2017 ruled that each state should appoint a police officer in each district as a nodal officer to take strict action against cow vigilantism. Human Rights Watch has reported that there has been a surge in cow vigilante violence since 2015. Though cattle slaughter is banned in some states of India, and there may be Cow Protection Act in force but still the vigilante groups cannot take law into their own hands and punish the accused.

### **6.7.2. Attacks on Dalits and Minorities<sup>842</sup>**

Mob attacks by extremist Hindu groups against minority communities, especially Muslims, continued throughout the year amid rumours that they sold, bought, or killed cows for beef. Instead of taking prompt legal action against the attackers, police frequently filed complaints against the victims under laws banning cow slaughter. As of November, 2017 there had been 38 such attacks, and 10 people killed during the year.

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<sup>841</sup>“Cow Vigilante Violence in India since 2014”. *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

<sup>842</sup>“Treatment of Dalits, Tribals, and Religious Minorities”. <http://www.hrw.org>

Two people died in caste clashes between Dalits and members of an upper caste community in Uttar Pradesh in April and May, 2017. The caste system declares dalits to be intrinsically impure and untouchable. Dalits have been subjected to atrocities throughout the country along with socio-economic oppression, deprivation, sexual abuses and acts of inhuman treatment. In the name of untouchability, Dalits are facing various forms of work and descend-based discrimination and deprivation at the hands of dominant castes.<sup>843</sup> Between April and July, 2017, 39 people reportedly died from being trapped in toxic sewage lines, revealing how the inhuman practice of “manual scavenging”—disposal of human waste by communities considered low-caste—continues because of the failure to implement laws banning the practice. In March 2014, the Supreme Court held that India’s constitution requires state intervention to end the practice of manual scavenging. Tribal communities remained vulnerable to displacement because of mining, dams, and other large infrastructure projects.

Incidents of violence against religious minorities spiked in 2013 in the run-up to national elections; according to government sources 133 people were killed and 2,269 injured in 823 incidents. More than a year after communal violence killed over 60 people, mostly Muslims, and displaced tens of thousands in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts of Uttar Pradesh state, both the central and the state governments had not provided proper relief or justice. The state government forcibly closed down relief camps and failed to act on allegations that lack of adequate relief services caused the death of over 30 children in the camps. Dalits and tribal groups continued to face discrimination and violence

### **6.7.3. Freedom of Expression is Curtailed<sup>844</sup>**

Several parts of India witnessed violent protests in 2017. Five farmers were fatally shot in June in Madhya Pradesh by police, during protests demanding debt relief and better prices. Authorities continued to use sedition and criminal defamation laws against government critics. In June, the Karnataka state assembly punished two editors for articles that allegedly defamed two of its members. In March, authorities in Maharashtra state charged a journalist for spying and criminal trespass for reporting that officers improperly

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<sup>843</sup>Bankim Chandra Mandal. “Violation of Dalit Human Rights – The Indian Experience” in *Voice of Dalit*, Vol.5, No.1 (Jan-June, 2012) p.3.

<sup>844</sup><http://www.hrw.org>

used subordinates for personal work, filming on army premises without permission, and using a hidden camera. Journalists faced increasing pressure due to threat of legal action, smear campaigns and threats on social media, and even threats of physical attacks. In September, unidentified gunmen shot dead publisher and editor Gauri Lankesh, a vocal critic of militant Hindu nationalism, outside her home in Bengaluru city.

#### **6.7.4. Impunity for Security Forces<sup>845</sup>**

Members of India's security forces continue to enjoy impunity for serious human rights violations. In a rare case in November 2014, the army reported that a military court had sentenced five soldiers, including two officers, to life imprisonment for a 2010 extrajudicial execution of three innocent villagers in the Machil sector in Jammu and Kashmir. The army ordered a military trial after using the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) to block prosecution by civilian courts. The Armed Forces Tribunal has suspended the life sentences for those five army personnel which is a setback for accountability for security force abuses. The government failed to review and repeal the abusive Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), in force in Jammu and Kashmir and in parts of India's north-eastern region, which gives soldiers who commit violations effective immunity from prosecution. The government has to comply with a Supreme Court ruling that civilian authorities should investigate all allegations of violations by troops. Proposed police reforms have also languished even as police continue to commit human rights violations with impunity. These include arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings.

#### **6.7.5. Women's Rights**

Though in theory men and women are equal in the UN's concept of human rights, a number of factors have prevented women the equal enjoyment of human rights. Human right is a right that everyone has equal by virtue of their very humanity. The political, legal, social and economic institutions are populated largely by men, while women are traditionally enclosed within the private spheres of the home and family.<sup>846</sup> According to media reports, In November 2014, more than a dozen women died and many others were

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<sup>845</sup>"Violent Protests, Impunity for Security Forces". <http://www.hrw.org>

<sup>846</sup>Purna Chandra Jena. *Towards A Fuller Humanity – A Theological Reflection on Christian Understanding on Human Rights*, p.25.

critically ill after undergoing sterilization procedures in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh. This led to an outcry against target-driven approaches to family planning programs. Reports of rape—including of Dalit women, individuals with disabilities, and children—continued to make national news on regular basis which exposes the failures of the criminal justice system.

The government introduced guidelines for the medical treatment and examination of women and children who report rape, but failed to allocate resources necessary for their implementation. Maternal mortality rates have declined in India but remain a concern because of weak referral systems and poor access to medical assistance in many parts of the country. India's record on children's rights and women's rights were reviewed in 2014 by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Both committees raised concerns about India's failure to implement relevant laws and policies and ensure non-discrimination.

#### **6.7.6. Children's Rights**

As reported in the media, in a public hospital in Uttar Pradesh over 60 children died in August when a private supplier cut off the oxygen supply after government officials failed to pay long-pending dues. Children's education was frequently disrupted in areas facing conflict and violent protests especially in places like Jammu and Kashmir leading to frequent closing of schools and colleges.<sup>847</sup> The issue of child labour and child prostitution is part of the human rights movement. Child labour is increasing in India. The 2011 national census found the total number of child labourers, aged 5–14, to be at 4.35 million. And it is on regular increase. Our children should have a real experience of their childhood so that we will have a better future for our country.

Millions of children, particularly from vulnerable communities, facing discrimination in schools and pressures to earn money, soon drop out and start working. Children working in many private sectors are found in bondage to a large extent. The employer pays a petty sum as advance to the poor parents and employs their children to work. The money never gets repaid and the children continue to be in the bondage till their death. The children are forced to work for 12 to 14 hours a day under the most appalling

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<sup>847</sup> "Children's Rights". <http://www.hrw.org>

conditions. Diseases or injuries during the work are blatantly ignored. Labour inspectors and the police are fully corrupt that even the death of a child worker does not come to light.<sup>848</sup>In June 2014, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child identified several areas in which the Indian government had failed to ensure protection of children from discrimination, harmful practices, sexual abuse, and child labour.

## **6.8. Human Rights Violations Across India – Specific Examples**

### **6.8.1. Man beaten to death in Madhya Pradesh State<sup>849</sup>**

A 45 year-old man was beaten to death by a mob while another was critically injured in Agmar village of Satna district of Madhya Pradesh by unidentified cow vigilantes for allegedly carrying beef and killing cows. The deceased man and the injured belong to minority community. Surprisingly, the police have registered a case under various sections of the Madhya Pradesh Cow Protection Act against the victims. A murder case and an attempt to murder case have been registered against four unidentified persons as well. This incident is a clear violation of right to freedom and right to life. If anyone is doing anything against the Law, it can be reported and the law will take its own course. But no one can take the law into their own hands.

### **6.8.2. Nerella Incident in Telangana State<sup>850</sup>**

A sand-laden truck rammed into a two-wheeler killing a person on the spot on the outskirts of Nerella village in Telangana State on July 2, 2017. Hundreds of enraged people gathered at the accident site, stopped three trucks and set them on fire. The villagers have alleged that three persons were crushed to death in similar incidents by the speeding trucks belonging to sand mafia in a span of 15 days. In this connection eight people belonging to the weaker sections, including three Dalits, were arrested and tortured by the police on the charges of burning sand-laden trucks. The victims alleged that inhuman treatment was meted against them by the police in the custody. Later they were produced in a court and were released on conditional bail. The condition of the accused was so horrible that they were not in a position even to walk or sit.

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<sup>848</sup>Purna Chandra Jena. *Towards A Fuller Humanity – A Theological Reflection on Christian Understanding on Human Rights*, p.27.

<sup>849</sup>India Today magazine website. Date 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

<sup>850</sup>Deccan Chronicle (Hyderabad) dated 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2017.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) took cognisance of the Nerella incident and served notice to Director-General of Police and the Government of Telangana to conduct a fair and independent inquiry into the allegations and submit the report in a month. The NHRC said that it was alleged that the local police did not act on the many complaints of the villagers that trucks belonging to sand contractors were speeding dangerously and had caused several deaths.

#### **6.8.3. Brutal Killing in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh State<sup>851</sup>**

On 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 a 50-year-old man was beaten to death and his 22-year-old son severely injured by a mob of around 100 people in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh. After rumors spread in the area about a family storing and consuming beef, residents of Bisara village attacked the family. The victim's daughter said the family had mutton in the fridge and not beef. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) described the incident as "serious" violation of human rights. A case of rioting and murder has been registered against ten people and six of them have been arrested.

#### **6.8.4. Rape and killing of Asifa Bano in Kashmir<sup>852</sup>**

An eight year old Muslim nomad girl named Asifa Bano was gruesomely raped and brutally killed by a Hindu person in Rasana village of Kathua district in Indian-administered Kashmir in January, 2018 but trial began on 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2018. The incident took place inside a Hindu temple. The investigation revealed that the rape and murder were systematic, pre-planned and rooted in religious hatred harboured by a Hindu, against the Muslim nomadic community. By targeting the girl they wanted to drive the Muslim community out. The case has exposed the tense divide in India between the majority Hindu and minority Muslim population. Protests were held all over India demanding justice to Asifa.

#### **6.8.5. Police Firing on Protestors in Tamilnadu State<sup>853</sup>**

At least ten protestors were killed and several critically injured in police firing in Thoothukudi town of Tamilnadu State on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2018 as reported by Times of India

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<sup>851</sup>Times of India (New Delhi) dated 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2015.

<sup>852</sup> "Kathua Rape Case." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

<sup>853</sup> J. Praveen Paul Joseph "Police Firing Claims Ten Lives in TN" in *The Hindu* (Chennai) 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2018, p.1.

and other dailies. The protestors were demanding the permanent closure of the copper manufacturing company Sterlite belonging to Vedanta group over environmental concerns. The protests first began peacefully in the month of March where thousands of people gathered demanding immediate closure of Sterlite's copper operations. Instead of closing the company, the management was planning to extend it further. When people continued their protest on 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, police opened fire indiscriminately without following the normal procedure of first *lathi* charge, then tear gas shells, finally resorting for firing. Firing should be aimed at below the knee level. But in this incident the reports say that the police fired targeting the heads. People are of the opinion that the Tamilnadu Pollution Control Board and Ministry of Environment and Forests betrayed them and failed in their responsibilities as regulators. The National Human Rights Commission issued notice to Tamil Nadu chief secretary, and to state DGP. Succumbing to pressures, eventually the government of Tamilnadu has decided to close down the Sterlite Company permanently.

#### **6.8.6. A Dalit Pastor Attacked in Hyderabad<sup>854</sup>**

On January 21, 2017, early in the morning Pastor Swamy was distributing copies of the New Testament in Hyderabad. After a while people belonging to Viswa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal reached the spot and started abusing him using foul language. Then he was taken to a secret place and was brutally beaten on head and on kidneys using trained techniques. Later they have taken him to a nearby police station and filed false charges against him on the allegation that Pastor had resorted to religious abuse. After posing serious life threatening warnings to Pastor Swamy, he was released from the Police Station in the afternoon on the same day. After few minutes, during his travel in his friend's car to his home, he fell unconscious and was rushed to hospital. Pastor Swamy was found to have a blood clot in his brain and was operated on, after which he went into a partial coma and then to complete coma and still fighting for life. Article 25 of Indian Constitution clearly says all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice and propagate any religion.

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<sup>854</sup>P. Victor Vijay Kumar. "Dalit Pastor Attacked Brutally by Hindutva Goons" in Round Table India For an Informed Ambedkar Age. <http://www.roundtableindia.co.in> (15-02-2017).

#### **6.8.7. Bonded Labour<sup>855</sup>**

Scores of bonded labourers have fled their homes after decades of oppression allegedly at the hands of upper caste people. They staged a protest outside the Uttarakhand assembly and State Human Rights Commission seeking a complete ban on the age-old social stigma. The Dalits were made to work in the houses and fields of upper caste people. This is against The Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act which was passed in 1976. Reacting to the development, Justice (Ret) Rajesh Tandon of the Commission said, “It is a gross infringement of the fundamental human rights. The commission will not allow any further violation of the rights of anyone, irrespective of colour, caste or creed.” They strongly believe that it is because of the revenue police their basic human rights are crushed. Dalits are alleging that revenue police harass them and don't register their complaints.

#### **6.8.8. The Plight of Tribals in Bastar, Chattisgarh State<sup>856</sup>**

Chief Minister of Chattisgarh State Mr. Raman Singh called for a national debate on all dimensions of Human Rights violations especially in Bastar District. His chief contention was that there was no talk about the plight of more than forty lakh tribals of Bastar District of Chattisgarh. He grieves that human rights of the tribals are being violated over many years due to Maoist violence and unrest in the region. He observes that the tribals are deprived of development and even basic amenities in many parts of Bastar District. Many tribal people are being killed by Maoists in *Jan Adalats* (People's Courts). Hindustan Times reports on 11<sup>th</sup> of May, 2016 that an independent 'facts finding team' has found rampant human rights violations in Bastar zone and said the deteriorating law and order situation in the strife-torn area is a cause for concern. The team also observed that the incidents of atrocities inflicted by the police force in Bastar region appear to be extensive.

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<sup>855</sup>Times of India (Dehradun) dated 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2016.

<sup>856</sup>Times of India (Raipur) dated 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2015.

## **6.9. Conclusion**

In the foregoing pages it is portrayed how human rights are violated across India. The ones who are supposed to protect the rights of the people are violating the human rights – the government, the police department and the army personnel. Both at the Central as well as at State levels there is absence of ‘political will’ either to implement or to protect the various safeguards provided in the Indian Constitution for the protection of the rights of the people especially the Dalits, the marginalized and the minorities. Dalits are the most suppressed and oppressed people and untouchables. Though untouchability is abolished, there is no spectacular change in the condition of Dalits. Instead, atrocities against them have increased including their women. Widespread atrocities and discrimination against Dalits pose the problem of denial of human rights to a substantial section of our population. Analysis of the causal factors for atrocities on Dalits reveals that atrocities are related to land, water, wages and other livelihood capital. Most crimes are committed when Dalits attempt to assert their right to resources and when they attempt to avail themselves of legal recourse to gain access to these resources. Even today, for the majority of Dalits, regardless of education or economic status, to journey through life as a Dalit entails daily subjugation, humiliation and exclusion, commencing from birth, through to childhood and as an adult worker until death. During the last seven decades since the adoption of the Indian Constitution, very rare individuals or group culprits involved in action leading to the violation of human rights have been punished. This is one of the main reasons both in the increase of cases of violation of the minority rights and the continuing of these violations.

We have to protect our rights and those of others. If someone has deprived of his/her rights, then the person has lost some of the basic and vital human qualities in life. Human Rights are total, holistic and indivisible. If this is violated, it wounds the humanness of a person. When the basic human rights are violated the human values of a person are endangered.

The victims of human rights violations in India come from every community and every region. Among the victims include political and social activists and activists working with specific communities in relation to land, labour and wage struggles. Though India boasts of a democratic set-up with a comprehensive charter of rights written into its

constitution protected by an independent judiciary, large scale violation of individuals' rights has almost become a permanent feature. Every day we witness one or other types of human rights violations of women and children of lower caste and disadvantaged communities. Supreme Court rulings in 2017 strengthened fundamental rights, equal rights for women, and accountability for security forces violations. But when such rulings are honoured and implemented strictly human rights of the majority people are protected.

# **CHAPTER 7**

## **RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY TO THE PRESENT INDIAN CONTEXT**

### **7.1. Introduction**

The study up to this point revealed that the eighth century B.C.E. prophets raised their voice against human rights violations and denounced the oppressive structures of their times. It was observed that the eighth century saw great prosperity which created economic and social distinctions. During this period privileged few in Israel were enjoying unprecedented prosperity while most Israelites were facing dire poverty. The rich had crushed the poor and needy by trampling upon them, coveting their fields, evicting the widows and their children, and selling them into slavery. The oppressed having mortgaged their homes found them removed to the street. This was the economic and social life of Israel and Judah during the eighth century, riddled with abuses which the prophets condemned. The prophets were concerned primarily with the people who were victims of the power structures of society, the ‘nobodies’.

The four prophets of eighth century B.C.E. vehemently condemned the oppression and exploitation of the poor and weak by the rich and powerful of the Israelite society. Passion for social justice was shared by all these prophets. The prophets recognized that God was at work in their contemporary world because they did not think of him only in traditional and conventional terms. For them God is the living God and is at work in the struggles of our social life. Where the ruthless forces of this modern world crush the spirits of men and women, there God is present in power as their vindicator. God is not outside the world-wide human struggle but within it. The prophets’ accusations against violations of human rights have universal appeal. Yahweh is judging the nations on the basis of acceptable norms of behaviour applicable to all people. All the prophets deal with the principles of human rights values and conduct that will have relevance to the present Indian context. Prophets use the terms ‘Justice’ and ‘Righteousness’ very poignantly as the attributes of God and says that as his children we have to adopt the same attributes.

## **7.2. The Prophetic Message and Human Rights**

The message of the eighth century prophets is relevant today in a truer sense; because the truth they declare is permanently valid. Prophets were concerned with public issues and addressed the core issues of human rights. They believed that God is at work in the lives of individuals and also present as the final arbiter in our struggles of social life.<sup>857</sup> The prophets make it plain that religion and ethical behaviour must form a vital unity and they demanded justice for the poor. Today also the economic system often divides people into groups with conflicting interests, and the nations into “haves” and “have-nots.” Particular forms of society and government will prosper or perish according as they embody justice and right, sustain personal dignity and foster personal freedom and true community among people.<sup>858</sup> It is important to see how each of the prophets reacted to the situation as they found it.

### **7.2.1. Amos and Human Rights**

Amos as a prophet of social justice lashed out at the callousness of the rich toward the poor. Social injustice is the point at which Amos speaks devastatingly to the present age. Poor were oppressed and exploited in many ways by the rich ruling classes.<sup>859</sup> Amos is also a prophet for the twenty-first century, a time when the gap between rich and poor has never been greater. The sources of oppression and injustice may look different today, but people’s concern for material prosperity reflects the days in which Amos lived. Amos condemned the injustice of the rulers and judges in the market place, cultic institutions and legal systems. Amos stresses that God as the God of justice demands the same from his people.

The essence of colonial functions was visible through slave trade and economic exploitation and other economic policies. Amos’ message has to be viewed as the voices of the margins and subjugated group of people against the centre of power. Amos reads the socio-religious circumstances of his time with a liberative perspective, which gives preferential option to the poor and highlights their plight. He talks on behalf of the poor and the oppressed who were exploited by the rich.

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<sup>857</sup>R.B.Y. Scott. *The Relevance of the Prophets – An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets and their message*, pp.14-17.

<sup>858</sup>R.B.Y. Scott. *The Relevance of the Prophets – An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets and their message*, pp.237-238.

<sup>859</sup>Arvind S. Kapelrud. *Central Ideas in Amos* (Oslo: Oslo University Press,1961) p.64.

The message of Amos is relevant to the present context. Because most of the sins practiced in the days of Amos are also practiced now. Consumerism, individualism, injustices, and indifference to the poor are behaviours observed even today. In a globalized world, wealth is in the hands of a few while the majority starve to death. A study reveals that in India 73 percent of the wealth is in the control of one percent of people and the remaining 27 percent of wealth is in the control of 99 percent of people. Amos reminds us that social justice and the equitable distribution of resources are what we are called to do.

We are witnessing injustices and corruption even today in our society especially in the legal systems. Sometime back one senior advocate of the Supreme Court of India observed that nearly eighty percent are denied justice and mostly common people are deprived. In another unprecedented development four senior advocates of the Supreme Court of India revealed that all is not well with the legal proceedings in the Supreme Court. In another incident, one CBI court judge in Hyderabad accepted bribe to grant bail in a particular case. As in the days of Amos, we see the corruption in the market places today. We find false and dishonest weighing in buying and selling of various commodities. Some influential merchants monopolize the market. They stockpile grain and in time of poor crops, they control the economy completely. They create artificial scarcity of the grains and in right time they increase the price and release the grains into the market.

### **7.2.2. Hosea and Human Rights**

Hosea also is for the poor and oppressed. He does not use the terms justice and righteousness vigorously instead he focuses on terms like steadfast love, faithfulness and knowledge of God to show the breakdown in society. Swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery have broken out (Hos 4:2). As in the days of Hosea, today also we notice lack of faithfulness, kindness, and knowledge of God and the crimes of stealing, lying, murdering, committing adultery are rampant.

Hosea's lawsuit against Israel (Ch 4) reminds the modern church of the close interconnections among our relationships with God and with neighbour. Our inattention to matters of justice and right relationship in society will create barriers that impede our relationship with God.<sup>860</sup> Today our lack of knowledge of God is connected to violence and cynical manipulation of others that mark our present society. Hosea sees clearly that our

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<sup>860</sup>Bruce C. Birch. *Hosea, Joel and Amos*, p.49.

relationships to God, to society are part of one covenantal reality. Violence and treachery in Israel are related to their lack of faithfulness to God. Hosea was bold in his rebuke of Israel's political and religious leadership.<sup>861</sup>

### **7.2.3. Isaiah and Human Rights**

Isaiah called for just order in the society and warned the people to cleanse themselves by putting away injustice and unrighteousness. Cleansing is a symbol of the moral cleansing that God requires. The people have to cleanse themselves by ethical deeds as well. The people of Judah were like a vineyard which did not yield fruit. When God expected fruit he found injustice and when he expected righteousness he heard a cry from the oppressed. To the loving care of God the nation has responded with violence and oppression (Isa 5:1-7). The strength of his conviction for the need for social change can be seen from his use of two words – Justice and Righteousness.

Isaiah's warning against shallow religious practices of the people of Israel is relevant even today within the Christian Church. Faithful Christian practices should be paired with humility, forbearance, and understanding towards persons of non-Christian religions.<sup>862</sup> God desires that his people offer justice and show a compassionate concern for the poor and the weak. Isaiah exhorts the people to plead for the widow (Isa 1:17). The Hebrew verb used for 'plead' has legal connotations. It can be accurately translated as 'plead the case of the widow'. This appeal for justice, compassion, and love towards the poor and the weak becomes one of the most important emphases the Church can make for the world in its needs for today.<sup>863</sup>

### **7.2.4. Micah and Human Rights**

Micah had great devotion to justice and sympathy with the poor. He takes up a scathing attack on the rich and powerful and depicts them as butchers. The theme of justice and righteousness is found throughout the book of Micah. Mic 2:5-9 talks about how the greedy for land will lose title to that land, and how the persecutors of women will see their own children deprived of their right to belong to the people of the Lord. For

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<sup>861</sup>Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, p.360.

<sup>862</sup>S.H. Widyapranawa. *A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 1 – 39 – The Lord is Savior: Faith in National Crisis*, p.7.

<sup>863</sup>S.H. Widyapranawa. *A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 1 – 39 – The Lord is Savior: Faith in National Crisis*, p.7.

Micah God was the God of the covenant, a God whose justice and righteousness was unparalleled in history. But when the people failed to reflect justice and righteousness, Micah stood against his environment as a courageous, passionate champion for justice (Mic 3:8).

These four prophets spoke messages to their own people in their own time but they were so inspired that they had to say carried meaning for people of future generations. So in this day of war, tumult, social upheaval, oppression, injustice, we find in their words many passages that seem almost intended for us.

### **7.3. Justice and Righteousness in the Message of Prophets**

The eighth century prophets were mainly considered as ethical prophets. They denounced the evils of the social order of their times. Justice (*mishpat*) applies both to a legal decision and to the inherent rights of the vulnerable. They used ‘*sedaqah*’ (Righteousness) in an ethical sense. The people of the eighth century were failing to act on behalf of the oppressed, the orphans and the widows. According to liberative perspective, rituals are of no meaning if they are practiced without concern for the poor and desire to practice righteousness and justice. Justice in the gate was not assured by political leaders. According to Amos, righteousness is essential to the well-being of the community. It has to do with the relationship between a person and God, and between members of the community. Righteousness is a quality of life which is displayed by people who live up to the demands of the covenant. The righteous person does what is right to other persons involved in the relationship. The terms ‘justice and righteousness’ set the standard for what the Lord expects – judicial dealings in which decisions support the one who is right and reject the one who is wrong.<sup>864</sup>

### **7.4. Postcolonial Perspective**

#### **7.4.1. Definition of Colonialism**

Western Colonialism stood on two pillars – Knowledge and Power. In the Era of European imperialism a great number of people around the world were colonized. The colonial power network influences almost all spheres of human life. It penetrates human mind and subverts ideas and thus manifests its ideologies in the language, religion, culture,

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<sup>864</sup>Daniel J. Simundson., *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p.196.

theology and the politics of the people.<sup>865</sup> According to R.S. Sugirtharajah “Colonial reading can be summed up as informed by theories concerning the innate superiority of Western culture, the Western male as subject, and the natives, heathens, women, blacks, indigenous people, as the Other, needing to be controlled and subjugated.”<sup>866</sup> Postcoloniality involves the once-colonized ‘Others’ insisting on taking their place as subjects. By this, the subjugated and sidelined “Other” makes a confident entry into the discursive space and claims one’s rightful place as a dialogue partner. Such a bold move has the promising possibility of releasing the “Other” from one’s marginal status.<sup>867</sup> When the “Others” take their rightful place and construct a hybrid identity by means of discursive resistance, the end result cannot but be the arrival of those at the margins to the forefront. As such, postcolonial criticism brings marginal elements to the front, and in the process, subverts the traditional meaning.<sup>868</sup>

#### **7.4.2 What is Postcolonialism**

Postcolonialism deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. It refers to mode of reading, political analysis, and cultural resistance that deals with the history of colonialism. Postcolonialism is a critique. It invokes ideas such as social justice, emancipation and democracy in order to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination and exploitation. Postcolonialism is a method of reading and discussion. For the liberation of the people, the postcolonial methodology can serve as a powerful optic which can reflect the aspirations of the people which has contemporary relevance. Postcolonialism refers to any strategy that resists not colonialism as such but colonizing (or oppressive, exploitative) practices. What is resisted is not so much any European power of group but a system of domination by any power. Postcolonialism seeks to understand how oppression, resistance and adaptation occurred during colonial rule.<sup>869</sup>

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<sup>865</sup>Praveen Paul. *Power and Love in the Book of Hosea: A Postcolonial Reading*. (Living Insight Translators and Publishers, 2015) p.31.

<sup>866</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Postcolonialism I*. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) p.15.

<sup>867</sup>Dominic S.Irundayaraj SJ. “Daughter Zion’s Contemporary Sibling Dalit Assertions vis-à-vis a Postcolonial Reading of the Book of Lamentations” in *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology*. Vol. 01, No. 01, February (2019) p.88.

<sup>868</sup>Dominic S. Irundayaraj SJ. “Daughter Zion’s Contemporary Sibling Dalit Assertions vis-à-vis a Postcolonial Reading of the Book of Lamentations” in *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology*. Vol. 01, No. 01, February (2019) p.90.

<sup>869</sup>Pramod K. Nayar. *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (Dorling Kindersley India Pvt. Ltd., 2008) p.17.

### 7.4.3. The Postcolonial Context

Postcolonialism is an ideology that questions the forces of colonialism. It also makes protest against domination, hegemony and power. It stands for nationalism, nativity and indigeneity. Postcolonialism promotes freedom and liberation and gives importance to the native tradition, wisdom and perspectives. It challenges the claims of the occident, which affirms the superiority of west in all spheres of life, and affirms the contribution of the orient. It goes against the oppression and systemic violence which are found in socio-political and religio-cultural realms. Colonialism exploits and oppresses the colonized people politically and economically. It involves uprooting the people, destroying their traditions, values and plundering their resources.<sup>870</sup>

As a result of struggles for independence many Asian and Latin American countries have attained freedom from the colonial powers. The native people have suffered a lot from the colonial powers. The western powers have attempted to annihilate many aboriginals. Uprooting the indigenous people from their culture and religion was one of the main attempts of colonial powers.<sup>871</sup>

### 7.4.4. Postcolonial Theology

Postcolonialism points the effects of colonialism and challenges the colonial-imperialistic patterns of thought and actions and made a liberative attempt to redeem them from the distorted perspective of the west. The colonizers (western countries) have been challenged politically, culturally and ideologically by de-colonized countries.<sup>872</sup> The western power, knowledge and methodology are questioned by the colonized as they organized themselves to struggle against the dominance of the west. The people movements which are also liberative movements which affirm the dignity, identity and rights are the vehicles of postcolonial ideology. The subaltern theologies and the efforts of contextualization are the influence of the postcolonial ethos. Postcolonial thought looks to what is 'native' and also looks forward as it challenges dominant, imperialistic world-view. It is re-reading or re-interpretation of history, methodology, theology and sources. As against the western, colonial, elitistic perspectives, the postcolonial theological and

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<sup>870</sup>M. Stephen. *Introducing Post Modernism and Post Colonialism* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., 2013) p.25.

<sup>871</sup>M. Stephen. *Introducing Post Modernism and Post Colonialism*, p.26.

<sup>872</sup>M. Stephen. *Introducing Post Modernism and Post Colonialism*, p.109.

non-theological discourses argue for liberation from Patriarchy, slavery and challenges gender-injustice, human right violations, and different kinds of oppressions.<sup>873</sup>

Postcolonialism explores the potentials of the orient. The positive elements in the third world religions, cultures and social life are explored by postcolonial ideology and theology. The postcolonialist challenges the dominant discourse by resurrecting the victimized voice. The marginality, third world experience and native expressions in theology are holding the postcolonial character. The theology of the subaltern or the victimized groups is post-colonial in nature as they struggle against the imperial, colonial or oppressive powers.<sup>874</sup>

According to R.S. Sugirtharajah, the western modes of scientific thinking can only enslave us, so we have to be freed from them. The indigenous or native expressions and thought patterns are to be upheld. The central task of postcolonial biblical interpretation is described as recovery, reoccupation and transcription of one's culture which has been degraded and affected from the colonial narratives and from mainstream biblical scholarship.<sup>875</sup>

Postcolonial theory is an interpretative act of the descendants of those once subjected. In effect, it means a resurrection of the marginal, the indigene and subaltern. The task of the postcolonial criticism is to engage in reconstructive reading of biblical texts. Postcolonial reading will reread biblical texts from the perspective of postcolonial concerns such as liberation struggles of the past and present; it will be sensitive to subaltern and feminine elements embedded in texts.<sup>876</sup>

Postcolonial theology is narrative, liberative, nativistic and people-oriented. It upholds the struggle of the oppressed and goes against the elites or dominant class and the colonizers. There is a re-understanding of theology as postcolonial theology challenges the western thinking and methodology which is more individualistic, capital intensive and imperialistic. Postcolonial theology is concerned of the marginalized or subaltern such as poor, women, blacks, dalits and tribals. It re-reads the scripture in the light of the

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<sup>873</sup>M. Stephen. *Introducing Post Modernism and Post Colonialism*, p.110.

<sup>874</sup>M. Stephen. *Introducing Post Modernism and Post Colonialism*, p.111.

<sup>875</sup>R.S.Sugirtharajah. *The Bible and the Third World – Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp.176-177.

<sup>876</sup>R.S.Sugirtharajah. *The Bible and the Third World – Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*, p.252.

aspirations of the victimized and also gives importance to the indigenous resources. It does value what is native.<sup>877</sup>

Postcolonial theology challenges the authoritarian structures and it sides the oppressed or marginalized. The subaltern experience and their consciousness is also very crucial in postcolonial Theology. Postcolonial theology is also liberative. The empowerment of dalits, tribals, victimized women, blacks and other suffering humanity is an essential concern of postcolonial theology.<sup>878</sup>

#### **7.4.5. Postcolonial Ethics**

Postcolonialism is not compromising with the powerful or the dominant forces. It is concerned of the issues of the colonized and it rejects the values of the dominant powers and the imposition of their ideologies. It questions the oppressive and exploitative elements. Postcolonialism affirms the contextuality. The experiences of the decolonized or the indigenous people are very significant for postcolonialism. The particular context, the pluralism, the persons and people are considered in contextual ethics. The struggles of the people of the third world and their socio-economic realities and the reality of poverty are responded in postcolonial ethics. Postcolonial ethics is praxis-oriented. Post-colonial ethics looks for deconstruction; it challenges existing structures of domination and looks forward for a radical re-structuring of the society. The identity and crisis of the subaltern are to be taken into account when we deal with postcolonial ethics. The victimized groups need empowerment and liberation. They include dalits, tribals, transgenders, blacks, other indigenous groups and victimized women. Postcolonial ethics is an ethics of the poor, powerless and victimized.<sup>879</sup>

Postcolonialism challenges the oppressing and exploitative structures. The issue of land, nationalism, poverty, women, dalits, tribals, blacks and other marginalized groups and the struggle for equal distribution of resources and empowerment are major concerns in postcolonial theology and ethics. Postcolonial ethics is radical as it is indigenous, people-oriented and anti-hegemonic.<sup>880</sup>

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<sup>877</sup> M. Stephen. *Introducing Post Modernism and Post Colonialism*, p.115.

<sup>878</sup> M. Stephen. *Introducing Post Modernism and Post Colonialism*, p.116.

<sup>879</sup> M. Stephen. *Introducing Post Modernism and Post Colonialism*, pp.124-125.

<sup>880</sup> M. Stephen. *Introducing Post Modernism and Post Colonialism*, p.126.

## 7.5. Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Studies

The postcolonial optic in biblical criticism involves an analysis of the readings and interpretations of the texts of ancient Judaism and early Christianity that takes seriously into consideration their broader socio-cultural contexts in the global sphere.<sup>881</sup> F.F. Segovia remarks that the goal of postcolonial studies is not merely one of analysis and description but rather one of transformation: the struggle for “liberation” and “decolonization.”<sup>882</sup> Postcolonialism identifies the dominant power, exposes it, and engages critically with it. Colonization is the control of another people by power and force that existed in all historical periods. Modern colonization started with the European conquest of overseas countries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and culminated in the 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>883</sup>

Postcolonial biblical criticism has several textual functions. Firstly it pays attention to the presence of the empires of the biblical world. The ancient Israelites were under the control of the Egyptian empire. The Judean scribes, priests, and prophets who shaped the Pentateuch and prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures, were confronted with Persian and Assyrian empires. The books of the New Testament emerged during the Roman Empire. Over the years, the nature of colonialism also changed. External colonialism has been replaced by an internal type. Now colonialism has turned inwards and the post-independence nationalist governments wage war against their own civilians, grabbing the lands, minerals and other indigenous resources in the name of developing them. This is similar during eighth century B.C. period.<sup>884</sup>

In studying the Bible, a postcolonial critic interrogates the texts with several questions and addresses issues which have arisen in the aftermath of colonialism – migration, multiculturalism, nationhood, and diaspora.<sup>885</sup>

Postcolonial theory means a resurrection of the marginal, the indigene and the subaltern. It is an act of reclamation, redemption and reaffirmation against the postcolonial

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<sup>881</sup>Fernando F. Segovia. Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Ed. by R.S. Sugirtharajah (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) p.40.

<sup>882</sup>Fernando F. Segovia. Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, p.42.

<sup>883</sup>R.S. Sugirtharajah. “Postcolonial Biblical Criticism” in *Voices from the Margin – Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*. Ed by R.S. Sugirtharajah (New York: Orbis Books, 2016) p.129.

<sup>884</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah. “Postcolonial Biblical Criticism” in *Voices from the Margin – Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, p.130.

<sup>885</sup>R.S. Sugirtharajah. “Postcolonial Biblical Criticism” in *Voices from the Margin – Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, p.131.

and neo-colonizing tendencies.<sup>886</sup> Postcolonial criticism scrutinizes biblical documents for their colonial entanglements. Bible as a collection of documents came out of various colonial contexts – Egyptian, Persian, Assyrian, Hellenistic and Roman and needs to be investigated again. In doing this postcolonial reading practice will reconsider the biblical narratives, not as a series of divinely guided incidents or reports about divine-human encounters, but as emanating from colonial contacts. It will revalue the colonial ideology, stigmatization and negative portrayals embedded in the content, plot and characterization. It will scour the biblical pages for how colonial intentions and assumptions influenced the production of the texts. It will attempt to resurrect the lost voices and causes which are distorted or silenced in the canonized text.<sup>887</sup>

The second task of postcolonial criticism is to engage in reconstructive reading of biblical texts. Postcolonial reading will reread the biblical texts from the perspective of postcolonial concerns such as liberation struggles of the past and present; it will be sensitive to subaltern and feminine elements embedded in the texts.<sup>888</sup> Postcolonial biblical criticism focuses on the issue of expansion, domination, and imperialism as central forces in defining both the biblical narratives and biblical interpretation.

## **7.6. Liberation Hermeneutics and Postcolonial Criticism**

Liberation hermeneutics and Postcolonial criticism are companions fighting the good fight. Liberation as a grand narrative provides hope for countless millions of people who face institutional and personal violence and oppression. Both the liberation hermeneutics and postcolonial criticism take the ‘Other’ namely the poor seriously; both want to dismantle hegemonic interpretations and do not hesitate to offer prescriptions and make moral judgments, while acknowledging the perils of such decisions.<sup>889</sup>

For postcolonialism, liberation is not imposing a pre-existent notion, but working out its contours in responding to voices within and outside the biblical tradition.

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<sup>886</sup> R.S.Sugirtharajah. *The Bible and the Third World – Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*, p.250.

<sup>887</sup> R.S.Sugirtharajah. *The Bible and the Third World – Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*, p.251.

<sup>888</sup> R.S.Sugirtharajah. *The Bible and the Third World – Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*, p.252.

<sup>889</sup> R.S.Sugirtharajah. *The Bible and the Third World – Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*, p.259.

Postcolonial space refuses to press for a particular religious stance as final and ultimate. It inquires into and entertains a variety of religious truth claims. It sees revelation as an ongoing process which embraces not only Bible, tradition, and the Church but also other sacred texts and contemporary secular events. Both liberation hermeneutics and postcolonialism endorse the Other - the poor, marginalized as the prime site for doing theology. Postcolonialism recognizes the plurality of oppressions.<sup>890</sup>

The work of liberation theology is a noble achievement, as it stages campaigns against poverty and socio-political injustices. Postcolonial theory builds on these very campaigns to enlarge the scope of justice and freedom, whereby the marginal persons recover their dignity. A postcolonial reading of the Bible is a war against sin: colonialism, neo-colonialism, dictatorship, corruption and social injustices in every aspect of society, regardless of their agent. In this case, postcolonialism is not a discourse of historical accusations, but a committed search and struggle for decolonization and liberation of the oppressed. However, what is challenging is that the Bible, as a text, was produced and circulated under imperial rule, to the extent that it was at the service of colonial expansion.<sup>891</sup>

### **7.7. Postcolonial Literature and Prophetic Literature**

Considering the biblical text as literary art suggests similarity between Biblical Prophetic Literature and Post-Colonial Literature. There is considerable existing research on the relation of the prophets to Post-Colonial Literature. The Hebrew prophets came from a people who had been invaded, conquered, colonized, and oppressed.<sup>892</sup>

As a subaltern, Hosea defended those who were the victims of oppressive political systems, including both those who were royalists in Israel and the Assyrian conquerors. Hosea's goal was to resist and subvert systems of oppression.<sup>893</sup>

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<sup>890</sup>R.S.Sugirtharajah. *The Bible and the Third World – Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*, p.262.

<sup>891</sup>Lazare S. Rukundwa. "Postcolonial theory as a hermeneutical tool for Biblical reading." in *HTS*, Vol.64 No.1 (2008) p.343.

<sup>892</sup>Bryan S. Rennie. "Religion and Art Behavior – a Theory and an Example: The Biblical Prophets as Postcolonial Street Theater." in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 9 no.3 (2015) p. 327.

<sup>893</sup>Leo Perdue. "Hosea and the Empire" in *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible: The Next Step*. Ed. by Roland Boer. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2013) p.174.

The relationship between Biblical Studies and Postcolonial Studies rests on the presumption that the Bible exists as a product of empire. This presumption readily leads to the application of postcolonial theory to the reading of biblical texts. Postcolonial readings of prophetic literature present not only opportunities but challenges and possibilities. The question of what can postcolonial theory provides in reading prophetic literature should really focus attention on the suitability of postcolonial enquiry for prophetic literature.<sup>894</sup>

The prophet stands as an intermediary in intersecting modes of power, bearing ambiguities of power, while dealing with issues like imperial power. The study of prophecy as a social institution in the ancient world may serve as a space for postcolonial theory to intersect with prophetic studies. Doing this requires a reading of prophetic historiography from a postcolonial perspective.<sup>895</sup>

### **7.8. Colonization During Eighth Century B.C.**

The people of Israel during eighth century B.C. were in colonized situation. They were oppressed, exploited and suffered and were in need of liberation. During eighth century B.C. Israel reeled under the impact of outside political powers especially Assyria and struggled to survive. The presence of Empire not only seen in its influence upon the king and the government, foreign policy and religion, but especially on the economic system.<sup>896</sup> Premnath comments that during eighth century B.C. the state of Israel shifted from an agrarian subsistence economy to a market economy. This period of colonization was characterized by the presence of land accumulation, growth of urban centres, militarization, extraction of taxes, trade and commerce, market growth, indebtedness of the peasants, flourishing of creditors and corruption of the priesthood and judiciary.<sup>897</sup> During the time of Hosea, Israel was under political, economic, religious and cultural subjugation. Hosea understands this period of colonization of Israel as the result of abandonment by Yahweh and urges the people of Israel to come back to Yahweh (Hos.11:1-14:9).

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<sup>894</sup> Steed Vernyl Davidson. "Prophets Postcolonially – Initial Insights for a Postcolonial Reading of Prophetic Literature" in *The Bible and Critical Theory*, Vol.6, No.2 (2010) p.1.

<sup>895</sup> Steed Vernyl Davidson. "Prophets Postcolonially – Initial Insights for a Postcolonial Reading of Prophetic Literature" in *The Bible and Critical Theory*, p.2.

<sup>896</sup> Praveen Paul. *Power and Love in the Book of Hosea: A Postcolonial Reading*, pp.20-21.

<sup>897</sup> D.N. Premnath. *Eighth Century Prophets – A Social Analysis*, pp.20-24; 25-42.

The postcolonial critique aims to uncover this subtle strategy of the domination through which the colonial powers controlled the Orient and subjugated it for their advantage. Edward Said pioneered the discussion on what is now known as postcolonial theory. He drew our attention toward the Orient which was created by the European imperialists, and proscribed the nature and outline of the knowledge of the colonized.<sup>898</sup>

When applied to Hebrew Bible postcolonialism seeks to interrogate biblical narratives, texts and interpretations which legitimize and re-inscribe colonial tendencies. The curiosity of the interpreter lies not in historical truths but on the colonial ideologies in the text. Biblical exegesis consciously necessitates a critical study of the historical context of the text, its transmission, textual criticism of the text under scrutiny and the socio-religious and cultural structures accompanying the text.<sup>899</sup>

Postcolonialism as a perspective can be productive only when used in collaboration with other critical approaches of biblical exegesis. It is certainly a very important means that facilitates unmasking the colonial ideologies behind the biblical texts. It is vital in unmasking the biblical texts from their Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Roman colonial ideologies. It encourages the readers of the Bible to critically engage with its texts in order to explore new identities especially of those who live in a postcolonial world. However, a postcolonial viewpoint also suggests that colonial tendencies exist and are perpetuated among the European countries.

Postcolonialism as a literary theory engages and deals with the literature written or produced in those countries which were colonies of other countries. It invades these texts and try to deconstruct them from their colonial tendencies, language, signs and symbols. The exchange of language occurs between the colonized subjects and the colonial discourse. In this cultural influx the colonized appropriate the language of the colonizers as a means of appropriation of the impact of the colonial power. However this influx or appropriation of colonial language is not merely an impact of the colonial power but there is a link between idea and power.<sup>900</sup>

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<sup>898</sup>Edward Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1979) pp.3-4.

<sup>899</sup>Praveen Paul. *Power and Love in the Book of Hosea: A Postcolonial Reading*, p.32.

<sup>900</sup>Praveen Paul. *Power and Love in the Book of Hosea: A Postcolonial Reading*, p.33.

## 7.9. Church and Human Rights

Since 1948, and particularly as violations of basic rights have become more and more glaring, the churches are entering the struggle. They realize that it is a Christian struggle, rooted in the very heart of the faith. They also see that they can easily be manipulated, either in their participation or in their passivity, in their partiality or in their attempt to be impartial. Hence the great concern to find the proper roots of a Christian defence of human rights.<sup>901</sup>

By virtue of the gospel committed to her the Church proclaims the rights of the people. She acknowledges and greatly esteems the dynamic movements of today by which these rights are everywhere fostered. To work for human rights also means to work at the most basic level towards a society without unjust structures. Human rights are as basic to the gospel as the command to love our neighbour as ourselves. The struggle of Christians for human rights is a fundamental response to Jesus Christ. In the struggle for peace and justice, the Church must bear witness. It must speak out where no one else dares to speak.<sup>902</sup> The church has done much to foster belief in the equality of every individual before God and to encourage powerful works of charity and justice-making. In many parts of the world today, the Christian church is one of the most influential forces in the human rights struggle.<sup>903</sup>

The leaders of the Church in India are raising their voice for the justice and rights of the people. Bishop Thomas K. Oommen of Church of South India (CSI) expressed his views openly in a letter. Representing the Church of South India (CSI) the second largest Church in India with over 4.5 million members, Bishop Oommen has come out against Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre. Excerpts of the letter:

The NDA government had become a nightmare to the poor and the minorities in India. The NDA government that follows the Hindutva supremacist ideology seems to have discounted what is stated in the Preamble of our Constitution that declares liberty, equality, and fraternity as its ideals. The Church stands in solidarity with the Dalits fighting for justice and equality and agitating against the alleged dilution of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 and condemns all atrocities against the Dalits by the Hindutva extremist forces. The NDA

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<sup>901</sup>J.M. Bonino. "Whose Human Rights – A historic-theological meditation" in *IntRM*, 66/263 (1977) p.222.

<sup>902</sup>John Desrochers. "Human Rights" in *Development, Human Rights and Action Groups*, pp.124-125.

<sup>903</sup>Christopher D. Marshall. *Crowned with Glory and Honor – Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition*, p.45.

government has become a danger to the very fabric of the greatest sovereign, socialist, secular, and democratic republic. The government is changing school text books by inserting pseudo-scientific religious content, banning books, films, and festivals of minorities which it claims offend Hindu nationalist sentiments. The communalist and fascist ideology of Hindutva promoted by the BJP casts a shadow over the constitutional secularism, leaving the religious minorities under threat. The Hindutva's obsession for the cow has not only deprived the Dalits of a cheap source of protein, but also has severely affected the economy of lakhs of Dalits who are marginal farmers.<sup>904</sup>

In another incident, the Archbishop of Delhi Rev. Anil Couto has called for a nationwide prayer campaign ahead of the 2019 elections.<sup>905</sup> In a letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2018 forwarded to the churches, Rev. Couto has said that a “turbulent political atmosphere” in the country posed a threat to Constitutional principles and secular fabric. Rev. Couto has appealed to the members of his churches for a prayer campaign. This call is welcomed by his counterpart the Archbishop of Hyderabad Rev. Thumma Bala, and also other leaders of the Catholic Church. The Vicar General of Hyderabad Archdiocese Father Swarna Bernard also expressed that the catholic community will support those who respect the Constitution of India and do not deny their constitutional rights. He also felt that the government should protect democracy and follow its principles. This is also backed by the leaders of several protestant and independent churches. Two weeks later Archbishop of Goa Filipe Neri Ferrao also in his annual pastoral letter expressed similar concerns over the happenings in India. He observed that Constitution is in danger, human rights being trampled in the name of development.<sup>906</sup> Ferrao further said that minorities feared for their safety while development was being used as a ruse to uproot people from their land. He urged the catholic community to work hard towards protecting the Constitution. Catholics account for 26 percent in Goa's population and wield significance influence.

Though the Church has not yet fully adopted an overall “societal transformation” approach, it clearly stands for socio-economic, cultural, civil and political rights and courageously speaks for them.<sup>907</sup>

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<sup>904</sup>The Hindu (Pathanamthitta, Kerala) 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2018.

<sup>905</sup>Rev. Anil Couto. “Let's Pray for India Before 2019 Polls”. <http://www.thequint.com>

<sup>906</sup>Filipe Neri Ferrao. “Constitution in Danger, People living in Insecurity”. <https://economic.times.indiatimes.com> (5<sup>th</sup> June, 2018). Also see Indian Express (Goa) 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2018.

<sup>907</sup>John Desrochers. (1985) “Human Rights” in *Development, Human Rights and Action Groups*, p.125.

## 7.10. Mission of the Church

The Church has a mission towards the poor and the oppressed communities of the society. The vulnerable segments of our society are denied justice and deprived of their rights. Since opportunities for work on human rights are ample in the given situation today, the Church should undertake the task sincerely with a view to make such people aware of their human rights and attaining the same for their survival as human beings, enjoying their entitled rights.

In some places Church is entering into human rights struggle realizing that it is a Christian struggle, rooted in the very heart of the faith. The Church should feel a great concern to find the proper roots of a Christian defence of human rights. The search for theological foundation has rested basically on the doctrine of creation. The human being as God's creation and image, constitute a strong basis for asserting the rights of all. The struggle for the humanity of each and every individual is not an option for the Church. It becomes more and more a visible mark of the true Church.<sup>908</sup>

As Christians, we are committed to uphold and defend human rights, not for any reason but as an imperative of faith. Our giving value to human rights is deeply spiritual. It is rooted in our basic faith affirmation that human beings are God's creatures. Joel Green opines that "Christians are also to share God's concern for justice and reconciliation throughout society and are also to work with God against all forms of oppression, every manifestation of evil separating human from human and human from God."<sup>909</sup>

Since people are reconciled to God entirely through grace, all secondary distinctions based on race or ethnic identity, on class or political power, on gender or family membership, are uncalled for. By affirming the equality of all in redemption as well as creation, the community of faith was equipped to become a genuinely universal society of human fellowship transcending culturally and socially determined boundaries. The church represented a movement that bonded people together into communities of solidarity whose sole purpose was to promote the reconciliation of people to God and to each other throughout the world. The early church thus functioned as an effective agent for the realization of human rights. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about the

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<sup>908</sup>J.M. Bonino. "Whose Human Rights? – A Historico-Theological Meditation" in *IntRM*, 66/263 (1977) p.222.

<sup>909</sup>Joel B. Green. *How to Read Prophecy* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1984) p.134.

transformation of the suffering people. The values of Jesus are contradictory to the values of this world. Jesus' effort was to dismantle the system of injustice in the society. Jesus proclaims his mission and the will of God through the Sermon on the Mount. The followers of Jesus were from different castes, communities and backgrounds. While coming to Jesus they had different hopes and aspirations. They had the experience of slavery, famine, drought, hunger and sickness.

Violation of Dalit human rights and violence against Dalits is a great concern to day. Due to extreme poverty, lack of education and employment opportunities, the Dalits are forced to work for minimal wages. They are also subjected to longer working hours and delayed wages. They are denied the right to bargain and question with regard to wages. If they demand minimum wages, humiliation, torture, and killings are organized by the upper caste people.<sup>910</sup> These people were expecting liberation from all these problems that they might lead a happy life. These hungry, weeping and sorrowful people were suffering because human values were snatched away from them. Jesus and his disciples continued to work with these people who were considered as nobodies and were willing to transform their lives. In his Nazareth Manifesto Jesus unfolds his mission saying that he was to preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Lk 4:16-21).<sup>911</sup>

There may be a section of conservative Christians in the Church who look with great suspicion on any talk of rights. They insist that human beings are sinners; they have no rights before God. They say that God's Law makes only demands and does not issue rights. Some also think that active participation in the concrete concerns of justice and public policy is outside the proper scope of the church's task and, by its very compromising nature, is an ever-present threat to the integrity of the church's message and mission. Some of those who are in positions have frequently been all too happy to have the church confine itself to the ghetto of personal spirituality. They are disinterested to participate in the human rights movement and are unconcerned towards the people who are deprived of their rights. Many of them are not aware of the issues related to human rights and have little information regarding the human rights movements. Such people should be adequately

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<sup>910</sup>Bankim Chandra Mandal. "Violation of Dalit Human Rights – The Indian Experience" in *Voice of Dalit*, Vol.5, No.1 (Jan-June, 2012) p.15.

<sup>911</sup>Purna Chandra Jena. *Towards A Fuller Humanity – A Theological Reflection on Christian Understanding on Human Rights*, pp.8-9.

equipped with the proper biblical knowledge and analysis and be motivated to participate in the movement on human rights. Pulpits should be used to expose the current social issues of the society to motivate the members of the church.

However, many other church people have seen it as integral to the church's witness to the world to speak with a clear voice for the cause of justice and human rights and to work toward their implementation on the highest level possible. Human rights belong at the very heart of the church's mission agenda. Christians, individually and collectively, may be described in their mission as agents of the kingdom of God.

Since opportunities for work on human rights are ample today, we as Christians with zeal and courage should undertake the task sincerely. In today's difficult setting, we must be prepared to face the continually changing scene, pressing on to respond positively towards the protection of human rights. The purpose is to making the vulnerable segments of our society aware of their human rights and attaining the same for their survival as human beings, enjoying their entitled rights.

The Church cannot be slow to speak out on matters of social injustice, and should be a leader rather than follower in demanding social reform. The Old Testament prophets were revolutionists in the truest sense of the word relentlessly exposing corruption wherever they found it. The church should involve in the fight for social issues that confront the world. Prophets as children of God involved themselves in the burning social and moral problems of their day. They came out of their comfort zone and felt compelled to deliver the message of judgment against the oppressors. They denounced the sins of Israel publicly in spite of ridicule and the seeming futility of the mission. The modern church cannot ignore the social issues of the day— corruption, injustice, issues of women and children, and moral disintegration. It is possible for a Christian to insulate himself so completely that he/she never becomes involved or feels any sense of responsibility to correct the injustices that exist. In the task to fight against human rights violations there may not be popular reception from the society as it was in the case of prophets.

## CONCLUSION

In this study the prevalence of social injustices and violation of human rights in Israelite society during eighth century B.C.E. period are explored. People of God could not maintain the covenantal relationship with God. The prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah denounced the people of Israel and Judah for violating human rights and breaking the covenant with God. The human rights issues and violations in India also are discussed. In the light of these deliberations on human rights violations, few findings are drawn.

### Findings:

1. Passion for social justice was shared by all the eighth century prophets and sought for the reversal of ethical decline.
2. Human rights violations in Israelite society are explored.
  - a. Economic Impoverishment: Poor peasants suffered by the wealthy; rich coveting fields of the poor; homes of the poor are mortgaged (Mic. 2:1-5).
  - b. Slave Trade: Poor, orphans, women, and children were sold into slavery (Am. 8:6).
  - c. Corruption in Various Places: Corruption in market places (Am 8:5), religious places (Am 2:8; 4:4-5) and legal places (Am 5:10:15).
  - d. Social Degradation: Stealing, lying, murdering and adultery was order of the day (Hos.4:1-4; 7:1-7).
3. Human rights violations in India also are surveyed. Several incidents that have taken place across India in the recent past have been studied. Issues like vigilante violence, attacks on Dalits and minorities, and the rights of women, children and tribals have been discussed.
4. God is against to all kinds of social injustices as he is the God of Justice and Righteousness. He is against the oppression of the poor; against amassing wealth through illegal means; against social crimes like stealing, murder, land grabbing; and against child and women abuse.

5. Ceremonial worship is worthless if it is not accompanied by active concern for justice (Isa.1:10-17).
6. People of Israel were in colonized situation during eighth century B.C.E. They were oppressed, exploited and were in need of liberation.
7. Governments have to support human rights groups in their fight for justice.
8. Indian Church may continue to work for the cause of human rights.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The researcher has taken only few selected texts to study human rights violations in Israelite society. As the books of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah have many more texts which talk about oppression, injustice and human rights violations; further research can be done by examining those texts.
2. There may be more issues relating to human rights violations that eighth century prophets could not address may be considered in further research.
3. The mission of the Church has been discussed very briefly. There is a scope that this subject can be discussed elaborately especially considering the challenge of multi-religious context of India.
4. Violation of Dalit human rights and violence against Dalits can be studied further as it is mentioned briefly in this work.
5. The violence against Women and Tribals also can be examined in detail.
6. The problems within the Church also can be studied. Study can be done as how the Church can overcome the problems and the challenges within and focus on addressing human rights violations in the society.

The study began by looking into the background and the message of eighth century prophets. The selected passages from the four books of eighth century prophets were investigated and the biblical and theological foundation for human rights is drawn. Human Rights issues in India were also discussed and attempt was made to bring out the relevance of the study to the present context.

The nation of Israel and Judah enjoyed peace and prosperity during eighth century B.C.E. The eighth century was a period during which few privileged people in Israel were

enjoying exceptional prosperity and power. Unfortunately the economic prosperity benefited only a small group of people the rich and upper class. The poor peasants suffered economic crisis and also were oppressed by the wealthy and elite class. The nation was going through the moral and ethical decay. Rich was becoming richer and the poor were becoming poorer. The people of God failed to maintain the covenantal relationship with Yahweh, their God.

The notion of human rights runs through various law codes that were established. These laws clearly contained provisions for the protection of poor, weak and powerless. However, the nation of Israel failed to administer justice to the poor and to live to the expectations of the God of Israel. The rich and powerful people violated all the laws of justice and acceptable norms of society. The poor and the oppressed have a right to freedom from oppression and exploitation. They also have a right to become the children of God (Jn 1:12) and experience the inner liberation. True liberation involves turning against external structures of enslavement and turning toward God in faith.

God raised prophets to speak to the people by addressing the social issues in the society. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah the prophets of eighth century B.C.E. have strongly denounced the evil practices of the people of their time. They were sent by the Lord to address his will in the concrete situations of life to his chosen people. They condemned the corruption, injustice, oppression and exploitation of the rich against the poor and marginalized classes of people in the society. They raised their voice strongly against the unjust structures of the society. Amos eloquently denounces the atrocities of people against their neighbours. The burden of his message was that the people had no relationship with God because they did not have the right kind of relationship with their fellow human beings.

During Amos' time, the corruption and injustice was evident in market places, religious institutions and even in legal proceedings. The entire system was oppressive and exploitative. Amos' preaching provided a powerful prophetic witness for all ages because of his condemnation of the spiritual blindness of the upper class and their unjust exploitation of the poor. Amos's ministry provides an eternal witness of God's opposition to economic, political, and social injustices. Isaiah insists that ceremonial worship is

worthless if it is not accompanied by active concern for justice. The rich grew richer while the rights and needs of the poor were disregarded.

The prophets of the eighth century were concerned primarily for the people and especially for the victims of the power structures of society. They each in their own way fought against the unethical lifestyle of the people of Yahweh and sought to bring about a reversal of the ethical decline. The words of these prophets have their meaning and significance only because of the divine will which inspired them and their message.

The good and right way of life is the justice (*mishpat*), of which Amos says: "Hate evil, but love good and establish justice in the gate" (Am 5:15). A just decision helps to define the social good and confirms the standards of God. Prophet Isaiah says "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" (Isa 5:20). God's justice and his righteousness must flow among them like an unceasing stream. The nation had not ordered its ways so as to produce the fruit in life, character and action. With the clear insight and courage of their own faith the prophets proceeded to make plain what had gone wrong. They denounced the evils of the social order of their times. The struggle for justice and human rights is a struggle to achieve freedom for the potentialities of being human.

The eighth century period has several similarities to the present day as far as social justice issues are concerned. Violations of human rights prevail in the contemporary society. The prophets had a strong sense of social justice for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the marginalized. They had inspired later day human rights activists like Martin Luther King Jr., Bishop Desmond Tutu and countless others to fight for the poor and the oppressed in the society. In the contemporary society we may be confronting new issues and new human rights violations which the eighth century prophets did not mention directly. But the principles that these prophets applied to denounce the human rights violations are applicable to all generations.

For instance, during eighth century period, there was no caste system and no discrimination basing on the caste. But today in Indian society caste is one of the main factors that is causing oppression and human rights violations. Dalits are considered as outcasts and are oppressed and exploited. Though there was no caste system existing

during eighth century B.C.E., the principle that God is against oppression of the poor can be applied today for Dalits who are the victims of caste system.

Secondly, today rich people are amassing wealth by illegal means and saving in foreign countries. This may not be specific in Amos' time but the principle that God is against amassing wealth through illegal means is applicable all the time. Crimes such as land grabbing, abusing women and children, corruption in market places are seen during biblical times and today. Even corruption in legal proceedings is becoming common these days in the Indian society. Prophets emphasized that people are obliged to maintain the right relationship with God. They have to obey God's words, instructions and commandments. If people are disobedient God deals with them in specific situations. In any situation, it is important to maintain right relationship with God which apparently leads to right relationship with fellow human beings as well. Maintaining relationship with God and being faithful to God's word is vital in all times, in all generations.

Today we are not maintaining good relationship with God. Our social, economic, cultural and political activities are based on injustice and exploitation. Many of the fundamental demands of God expressed by Amos and other prophets are violated. There are many people who have never experienced the dignity of life, the respect, and the freedom which should belong to every individual. There are still courts where the social position or money determine the brand of justice administered. Millions live in unbelievable poverty, filth, disease, and hunger because people are still not willing to accept their responsibility toward the less fortunate. They have not yet learned that every life is sacred to God, regardless of race, colour, or outward attractiveness.

Human rights activists and groups are putting their efforts to educate and organise people against oppression and exploitation, although sometimes their lives are at risk. The leaders of different people's movements, trade unions and some of the social activists are always the victims. Governments have to provide adequate protection to the human rights activists and groups and organize programs to bring awareness among the people on human rights issues. It may be ensured that the cases of human rights violations be fairly investigated and the existing laws should be implemented strictly and new laws may be enacted if needed.

The Church may have to continue to play an active role in exposing and confronting the atrocities that are taking place in the society. She is expected to respond seriously and work towards ordering the society by playing the prophetic role and raising her voice and strive towards the just society. The Church is called to engage in debate on human rights concerns and to bring awareness in the community to uphold the rights of the individuals especially the poor and under privileged. What eighth century prophets spoke is of enormous value for present context. So the challenge before the Church is to see how human beings will restore their human dignity and the image of God supposedly inherent in them. It is hoped that this study may stimulate further the individual Christians and Church as community to campaign for the promotion of human rights in Church and Society.

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