

Amos 3

(1) Hear this word which Yahweh spoke to you, sons of Israel, to the whole family which He brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: (2)“Only you have I known from all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

(3) Do two walk together
unless they have met?

(4) Does a lion roar in the forest
if he has no prey?
Does a young lion give forth his voice from his den
unless he has captured something?

(5) Does a bird dive into a trap on the earth
if there is no lure for it?
Does a trap spring up from the ground
if it has not caught anything?

(6) Is a trumpet blown in a city
and people are not afraid?
Does evil happen in a city
and Yahweh has not done it?

(7) Surely Yahweh does not do a thing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets.

(8) A lion has roared,
who will not fear?
Yahweh has spoken,
who will not prophesy?

(9) Proclaim upon the strongholds in Ashdod,
and upon the strongholds in the land of Egypt,
and say:

“Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria
and see the great tumults within her,
and oppressions in her midst.

(10) They do not know how to do right, proclaims Yahweh,
those storing up violence and robbery in their strongholds.”

(11) Therefore, thus says the Lord, Yahweh:
“An adversary surrounding the land
shall bring down from you your defenses
and your strongholds shall be plundered.”

(12) Thus says Yahweh:
“As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs or a piece of an ear,
so shall sons of Israel be rescued, those who dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed and the demeshek of a couch.”

(13) Hear and testify in the house of Jacob: this is a proclamation of the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts.

(14) “In the day I punish the rebellions of Israel against him,
then I will punish the altars of Bethel
and the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground.
I will smite the winter house with the summer house
and the houses of ivory shall perish
and the great houses shall come to an end.”

Proclamation of Yahweh.

An Exposition of AMOS 3

RHETORICAL GOAL

Was Amos originally merely judgment? If so, what then was the rhetorical goal of his communication? Was it merely a sort of, “Take that!”? Was it a, “So there! You guys are goners.”? If so, then the rhetorical goal would then be the inflicting of pain with his words or a sick sort of desire to be proven right by being able to predict judgment. Maybe it would be some sort of revenge to self-satisfyingly announce judgment before it happens. But this view requires one to fool with the evidence quite a bit. Francis Andersen and David Freedman write:

We are more reluctant to emend the text than scholars of a previous generation. . . . our caution arises from concern for sound empirical method. The textual evidence we have, in manuscripts and versions, always has a better claim on our attention than readings that have been made up in order to solve a problem. In particular, we are unwilling to proceed to comment on an emended text, or to develop further arguments or inferences from a reconstructed text. We prefer to leave some problems unsolved rather than attempt to explain the unknown by the unknown.¹

What shall be said about a position which both fails to deal with all the evidence received and fails to adequately explain the rhetorical goal of the communication? It must be viewed critically. The attempt in this section is to do such by proposing Amos’ rhetorical goal in a way that deals with the textual evidence at hand. In a broad and general way, the illocutionary and perlocutionary force of the whole book will be proposed. This will lead into a more detailed discussion of chapter 3.

What does the whole communication of the book of Amos *count as*? In other words, what is its illocutionary force? In a broad and general way, Amos can be seen as *threat* and *promise*. The perlocutionary force, *what is hoped to be accomplished*, is *repentance* and *faith*. If *repentance* is used

¹Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 3-4.

in a broad way, it also includes *faith*. This repentance is the goal of the book of Amos.

It is not such a surprising thing that repentance would be at least one of the rhetorical goals of a prophet in Amos' time.² Ezekiel 33:11 is a classic expression of Yahweh's attitude that might easily be seen as an overarching theme of some or all of the prophets: "Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord Yahweh, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'"

Amos' rhetorical goal of repentance can especially be seen in chapter 5. 5:14-15 are key verses for this overall rhetorical goal of Amos. 9:10 is also revealing by the way in which it does not say that all Yahweh's people will die, but all the sinners of his people will die (יָמוּתוּ כָּל חַטָּאֵי עַמִּי). Those who turn from their sins will not be destroyed. From 5:15, אִי־לִי ('perhaps') is a key word for the whole book of Amos.

How does chapter 3 fit into this overall rhetorical goal? The illocutionary force is that of *Decree*, *Polemic*, *Verdict* and *Sentencing*. The prophet wants to accomplish the following (perlocutionary force):

1. The people **listen** to this word from Yahweh.
2. They **change** their false idea about their indestructibility (especially by Yahweh).
3. They **admit** their guilt.

Chapter 3 contributes to the overall goal of the book of Amos in these three ways. First of all, they must be convinced that these words of Amos are really from Yahweh. These words have authority (*Decree*). They must change their false idea that they are indestructible, especially their false idea that Yahweh would not allow severe destruction to come upon them since they are His chosen people (*Polemic*). Finally, the judicial *Verdict* and *Sentencing* are used in order to bring the people to recognize their sin,

²See Isaiah 30, 40, 53, 57-59, 63-64; Hosea 3:5; 14:1; 6:1-3; 10:12; Joel 2:12ff.; Jonah 3:9-10; 4:11; Micah 7:9, 18-19.

accept responsibility for rebelling against Yahweh who chose and delivered them, admit their guilt (and thus admit that Yahweh is just in punishing them).³

The goal of the prophet is to bring the people of Israel to the point of seeing that they have no way out on their own. If they are consequently moved to ask, “What must I do to be saved?”, they are then in the place where they can receive the full benefit of the whole message of Amos. Keeping these rhetorical goals in mind will help one understand how chapter 3 coheres in itself and how it coheres within the whole book of Amos.

THOUGHT PROGRESSION

Yehoshua Gitay observes: “A rhetorical analysis of the various units into which form-critical studies divide 3:1-15 suggests that the units are mutually related, each to the other and each to the whole, and therefore are part of a single discourse. . . . Each part continues the thought of what precedes.”⁴ He notes that “If we isolate the separate units of the pericope, it is clear that these units in themselves do not constitute complete statements.”⁵ The goal of this section is to demonstrate this coherence within Amos 3 and with the chapter’s preceding context.

PRECEDING CONTEXT

Julian Morgenstern holds that “the denunciation of the foreign nations is introductory, not

³See Daniel 9.

⁴Yehoshua Gitay, “A Study of Amos’s Art of Speech: A Rhetorical Analysis of Amos 3:1-15,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (July 1980): 295.

⁵*Ibid.*, 294.

merely to the comparatively brief paragraph in 2.6-16, but rather to the entire book, or better, to the one, single, closely unified address contained within the book.”⁶ He writes, “2.6-16, in its present form, contains only the vaguest and most general pronouncement of the doom of Israel, not at all comparable to the specific and absolute pronouncement of the doom of the foreign nations”⁷ Following the pattern in the first two chapters of Amos, Israel falls into group B which differs from group A in long accusations, short punishments and no אָמַר יְהוָה at the end. The accusations and punishments against Israel begin at 2:6 and weave through the book to 9:10 which ends without אָמַר יְהוָה.

Stanley Rosenbaum finds “A more sustained composition based on a sevenfold exposition . . . in 2:7-3:2.”⁸ In 2:6-16, seven accusations, seven gifts from God and seven (vague) punishments are listed: “The gifts of God are complete (seven); the sins of Israel are complete; the punishment will be complete.”⁹ 3:1-2 then somewhat caps off this “sustained composition” with the words, אַתְּ כָל-עֲוֹנוֹתֶיכֶם אֵת כָּל-עֲוֹנוֹתֶיכֶם. But, “What we regard as the first two verses of chapter 3 make a good peroration, especially if it is aimed against the Northern Kingdom.”¹⁰ Most other commentators see 3:1-2 or 3:1-3 as merely the introduction to what follows in chapter 3.

Rosenbaum’s double suggestion is attractive: 3:1-2 is both a conclusion and an introduction. 3:1-2 is a segue from the oracles against the nations into a more sustained oracle/sermon against Israel. Throughout the first two chapters the driver is up-shifting. The first two verses of chapter three

⁶Julian Morgenstern, *Amos Studies*, Vol. 1 (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1941), 10.

⁷Ibid., 9.

⁸Stanley N. Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel: A New Interpretation* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1990), 77.

⁹Ibid., 78.

¹⁰Ibid.

represent settling into the final gear (4th/5th) for the long haul, cruise mode. This is especially evident in the immediate context by the fact that the punishments or effects listed in 2:14-16 are somewhat vague (compared to the previous nations), leaving the reader hanging, expecting fuller completion. And while the words על-פֶּן אֶפְקֹד עֲלֵיכֶם אֵת כָּל-עִוְנֹתֵיכֶם provide a sort of conclusion, they are also incomplete. Will fire devour the strongholds of Israel and people be taken captive (like the other nations)? It seems to be logical that such a disaster would cause the strongest ones to be defeated (2:14-16), but it has not yet been stated in the detail expected, based on the oracles against the other nations. Amos 3:1-2(3) is a transition into that detail.

CHAPTER THREE

Regarding 3:1-2, James Mays conveys the opinion of many commentators with the following words: “This brief oracle has been placed at this point in the collection as a kind of introduction to the following sayings.”¹¹ Verses one and two furnish “a theological framework within which other announcements of coming judgment can be understood.”¹² Their illocutionary force is that of *Decree*, a decree of Yahweh. The perlocutionary force (which plays itself out in verse 8) is to convince the people to *listen*, or really take these words seriously as truly from Yahweh. The key idea is: Yahweh is speaking to you. This is good, the communication link is operational. The time will come (8:11-12) when there is a famine of Yahweh’s words. אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה take us back to Amos’ first words in 1:2. They also point forward to 3:8, יְהוָה דִּבֶּר (inclusio).

Verse 2 begins with reference to Israel’s election: רַק אַתֶּם יִדְעֵתִי. The following phrase (מִכֹּל מְשֻׁפְּחוֹת הָאָרֶץ) further calls to mind Genesis 12. Amos focuses upon this theme of election

¹¹James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969), 54.

throughout the book of Amos by referring to the patriarchs (3:13 Jacob, 5:6 Joseph, 5:15 Joseph, 6:6 Joseph, 7:2 Jacob, 7:5 Jacob, 9:8 Jacob).¹³ On the other hand, the Exodus is referenced less (2:10, 3:1, 9:7) and is minimized (9:7). Election, then, is the basis of the transitional על-כן. It leads into the unexpected zinger: אִתְּכֶם אֶת כָּל־עֹנֹתֵיכֶם. This phrase sets the theme for the following verses as well as being a major theme of the book. אִתְּכֶם forms an inclusio with the final verse of this chapter (v.14 פִּקְדֵי). The end of verse 2 is “one of Amos’s surprise, unanticipated climactic conclusions . . .”¹⁴

With this phrase Amos begins his attack upon the false presupposition of the Israelites: “Die Meinung der Israeliten ist, als Volk Jahwes vor dem Verderben gesichert zu sein; aber sie ziehen aus ihrer Prärogative einen falschen Schluss, denn im Gegenteil: sind sie Jahwe besser bekannt, als andere Völker, so kennt er auch ihre Sünden besser und trifft sie um so schwerere Strafe.”¹⁵ The following

¹²Ibid., 55.

¹³This makes the sudden introduction of David (9:11) stand out.

¹⁴Shalom M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1991), 102.

¹⁵D. Karl Marti, *Kurzer Hand-Commentar Zum Alten Testament: Das Dodekapropheton* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1904), 172. “The opinion of the Israelites is, as Yahweh’s folks they are protected against destruction; but he draws from their perogative a false deduction, because on the contrary: they were Yahweh’s better known, than other people, thus he knows also their iniquity

verses (3-8) then unfold the *Polemic* (illocutionary) against the false opinion, attempting to convince them to *change* (perlocutionary) their false idea.

better and encounters round about severe punishment.”

The fact that commentators are somewhat divided upon whether verse 3 goes with verses 1-2 or 4-8 is testimony to its transitional character. Marti notes that the text has, “durch v. 3 eine Verbindung zwischen v. 2 und v. 4-8 herzustellen.”¹⁶ Verse 3 sets the basic cause/effect relationship of the following instructional polemic against the false opinion. Verses 3-8 “gibt der Prophet den Nachweis, dass wie jede Wirkung auf eine entsprechende Ursache zurückweist, so auch das Auftreten der Propheten auf Jahve, der geredet hat.”¹⁷ The key points are expressed in verses 6 and 8: Yahweh brings destruction and this is indeed Yahweh who has spoken. Both of these are introduced in verses 1 and 2, and argued persuasively in verses 3 through 8.

The literature about 3:3-8 is immense. Andersen and Freedman see all kinds of interesting relationships. Shalom Paul also sees patterns and nine different literary devices. Some commentators go into great depth trying to unpack the imagery, postulating all kinds of references. This discussion will focus upon the linear progression of thought.

Verses 3-8 flow from verses 1-2, making the same point but in a more persuasive and expanded way. He uses analogy, anaphora, parallelism and other devices. Mays notes that “In function this passage is a dispute saying.”¹⁸ (illocutionary force = polemic). Many (including the Masoretes) question the presence of an number of words because they don’t fit in with the meter, but Rosenbaum observes: “Surely, Amos’ ability as a poet indicates that so-called irregularities in the text may be

¹⁶Ibid., 173. “through v. 3 a bond between v. 2 and v. 4-8 standing near.”

¹⁷W. Nowad, *Göttinger Handkommentar Zum Alten Testament: Die Kleinen Propheten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoe & Ruprecht, 1922), 131. “The prophet gives evidence, that every effect gives evidence back to its respective cause, also as well as the appearance of the prophet is from Yahweh, he has been speaking.”

¹⁸Mays, 59.

intentional.”¹⁹ It appears that the second colon in each sentence is consistent poetic anchor since the second colon is always composed of three words. Aside from that, variation is allowed, including the variation of verse 7.

Amos uses a common form of wisdom instruction, proceeding from common and obvious knowledge to the unobvious. Paul recognizes that Amos’ is using a method he has used before (in chapters 1-2 and in 3:1-2): “He gradually yet persuasively leads his opponents step by step into the vortex of a seemingly innocuous reasoning process.”²⁰ Then he springs the unexpected twist at the end (verses 6b and 8b). Verses 3-8 draw two major connections: civil disaster with Yahweh as its cause and prophet as spokesman of Yahweh’s words.

Verses 3-8 cohere within themselves, yet they also need a context. If isolated, they merely say that Yahweh is the cause of civil disaster and that the prophet has authority. The tie to Israel as Yahweh’s chosen, the tie to Samaria and the tie to punishment for their iniquities is derived from the preceding and following verses.²¹

Verse 7 requires special attention since so many object to it. Among other arguments, “It is prosaic, lacks the form of the other lines, and makes a dogmatic assertion, rather than advancing the argument.”²² Gitay comments, “the discourse communicates through the flow of thought, and this enables the text to communicate through the mixed forms. In other words, new forms attract attention, create curiosity, and enable the speaker to convey the message effectively.”²³ Hayes writes, “If the

¹⁹Rosenbaum, 77.

²⁰Paul, 105.

²¹Gitay, 294.

²²Mays, 61.

²³Gitay, 306.

proposition that Yahweh can stand behind the evil that befalls a city is asserted in verse 6b, then verse 7 can be understood as describing how that can be known, namely, through the revelation of the divine purpose to and by the prophets.”²⁴ In addition, “The chain of examples may raise an expected question: how does he, the prophet, know? V. 7 responds to this wonder . . .”²⁵

The groundwork for judicial proceedings has been laid. The authority of Yahweh (decree) and prospect of His punishment (polemic) have been expressed. Now witnesses are summoned in verse 9. Weiser states, “V. 9 ist die Einleitung in der Form des Botenspruches, die zugleich die Basis für das Scheltwort des Propheten in v. 10 abgibt; darauf folgt in v. 11 das abschliessende Drohwort.”²⁶ The witnesses are called upon to examine the evidence (tumults and oppressions). Then the verdict (illocutionary force) is expressed in verse 10: “They do not know how to do right . . .”

Verse 11 follows with the sentencing (illocutionary force). The exact adversary is not yet identified (cf. 6:14). There is a connection with oracles against the nations: “The specific threat enunciated in v 11 is not unlike the standard threat repeated against all of the other nations in chaps. 1 and 2 but not stated in connection with Israel.”²⁷ It should be noted that they are to be punished in exactly the place they have committed iniquity: their strongholds. Gitay points out the rising dramatic effect: “The series of imperatives in v. 9 create a dramatic effect. It is heightened by the shift from the third person (v. 10) to a direct approach (v. 11). It is remarkable that v. 11, which confronts the audience directly, maintains the punishment. The function of the sudden transition from the third

²⁴Hayes, 126.

²⁵Gitay, 304-305.

²⁶Artur Weiser, *Das Buch Der Zwölf Kleinen Propheten*, in *Das Alte Testament Deutsch*, edited by Blkmar Hertrich and Artur Weiser (Göttingen: Bandenhoed & Ruprecht, 1949), 125-126. “V. 9 is the introduction in the form of ambassador’s message, together with the basis for the invective of the prophet in v. 10 delivered; thereupon follows in v. 11 the complete threat.”

person to the second, called *adversio*, is to emphasize and to raise emotion.”²⁸

Verse 12 is a sarcastic/ironic commentary on or expansion of the sentencing in verse 11. Again, the perlocutionary force of these judicial proceedings (verdict & sentencing) is to get the Israelites to see their guilt.²⁹ Keil and Delisch believe that verse 12 is especially directed against “the grandees of Samaria.”³⁰ This fits with Amos’ condemnation of luxury based upon injustice and oppression (3:10, 14; 4:1; 5:11; 6:1, 4-7, 11; 8:4-6).

The mention of the cities of Samaria (v. 12) and Bethel (v. 14) coincides with the cities listed in the oracles of chapters 1 and 2, but not mentioned (until now) regarding Israel. It is evident that chapter three is putting the pieces into place. The oracles against the other nations are introduction to the extended oracle against Israel.

This chapter ends by emphasizing that this is a proclamation from Yahweh (v. 13 and 14), and by further elaborating upon the sentence (v. 14). The great houses will come to an end. But this contributes to the overall call for repentance (chapter 5) as it ties in with the hope: 9:14 - they shall rebuild!! Similar to Jeremiah, there is a rooting out, pulling down, destroying and throwing down (Amos 3:11-14) before the building and planting (Amos 9:14-15). This is Amos’ amazing Law/Gospel

²⁷Andersen, 375.

²⁸Gitay, 306.

²⁹Regarding rhetorical goal, Gitay notes that “one has to distinguish between two goals, conviction and persuasion. The goal of conviction is truth and not necessarily activity; persuasion seeks activity. . . . Amos’s aim in chap. 3 is to seek conviction.” (page 308). My argument has been that the perlocutionary force of chapter three serves the overall perlocutionary force of the book of Amos (which is expressed most clearly in 5:14-15). Chapter 3 serves chapter 5 by its perlocutionary force of seeking *a listening, changing of opinion, and admission of guilt*.

³⁰C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 10, *Minor Prophets*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 264.

sermon with its perlocutionary force: REPENTANCE.

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