

A Literary Reading of Amos

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**Abstract**

The book of Amos has a unique form compared to other prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible. Its distinctive placement of the oracles against the nations (1:3-2:16). and vision sequences (7-9) make it difficult to read the text as a unified book. Yet, Amos employs the consistent rhetorical technique of “unmet expectations” that extends from the introduction (1:2), through the questions (3:2-8), to the visions (7-9). Furthermore, images of water, drought, and agriculture appear constantly within the text. Amos often utilizes these images when he employs his technique of unmet expectations, thereby creating a cohesive book. These images are rooted in the concrete social and political context of the eighth century’s sacred economy in which non-producing elites were often in conflict with subsistence-based agrarian communities.

**Introduction:**

Scholars often approach Amos using various theories concerning the book's composition. While useful for determining the historicity of the text, such theories necessarily overlook the book as a unified literary work. Yet, reading Amos through a literary lens allows one to identify the rhetorical techniques, structures, and themes that unify the book.

I will divide the book into three main sections, 1:2-3:8; 3:9-6:14; and 7-9, paying close attention to the structure and function of each of them. While redaction history will not dominate my perspective, I will, when necessary, make emendations to the text that bolster my literary reading. Furthermore, I will frequently consult Israel's 8<sup>th</sup> century context to better inform my interpretation of various events within the text.

Ultimately, I strive to read Amos in a way that highlights its unity as well as does justice to its rhetorical complexity, beautiful imagery, and sociopolitical function.

## Chapter 1: The Lion's Roar

The book of Amos begins in a very atypical way compared to other prophets. Where others generally begin with call narratives or vision oracles, Amos begins with an introductory pronouncement (1:2) that abruptly launches into a series of aggressive oracles against the nations (1:3-2:16). These oracles have a progressive “x + 1”<sup>1</sup> formula that distinguishes them from the surrounding units (1:2, 3:1-8). The introduction often risks fading into the background when one reads the powerful indictments in the oracles. However, the questions in Amos 3:2-8 directly return readers to the introductory oracle in Amos 1:2 by returning to the image of a roaring lion:

The Lord roars from Zion,  
and utters his voice from Jerusalem;  
the pastures of the shepherds mourn,  
and the top of Carmel dries up. (Amos 1:2)<sup>2</sup>

Does a lion roar in the forest,  
when it has no prey?  
Does a young lion cry out from its den,  
if it has caught nothing? (Amos 3:4)

The lion has roared;  
who will not fear?  
The Lord God has spoken;  
who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:8)

Roaring and leonine imagery are not foreign to the prophetic literature in the Hebrew Bible. Immediately preceding Amos in the Minor Prophets, the book of Joel ends with a roar from YHWH that brings an earthquake to the land. In Joel, however, the people find refuge in YHWH who remains “a stronghold for the people of Israel” (Joel 3:16). Jeremiah 25:30 and

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<sup>1</sup> Jörg Jeremias, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 22. Ex: “For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment” (2:1)

<sup>2</sup> In line 3 I replaced “wither” (from the NRSV) with “mourn” (from the RSV) to highlight both the image created by the line and the contrast of wet and dry between lines 3 and 4.

Hosea 11:10 also characterizes YHWH's wrath as a roar, and Hosea even ties this roar specifically to the image of a lion when he describes YHWH as one "who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west" (Hos. 11:10). In Amos, drought follows YHWH's roar, and, unlike Joel, the people of Israel find no refuge in YHWH. Instead, the land fills with mourning.

Amos 1:2 also alludes to the questions in 3:2-8 by establishing the rhetorical technique of unmet expectations that is emphasized throughout them. In Amos's initial oracle, the saturated image of pastures in mourning is surprisingly followed by a dried up mountaintop.

A second contrast in Amos 1:2 occurs when the second line connotes thunder, and implicitly, rain, but then yields to the dried mountaintop in the fourth line. As J. Alberto Soggin points out, the Ugaritic phrase "utters his own voice" refers to thunder. Job uses this thunder imagery extensively in ch. 37, where he proclaims:

Listen, listen to the thunder of his voice  
and the rumbling that comes from his mouth.  
Under the whole heaven he lets it loose,  
and his lightning to the corners of the earth.  
After it his voice roars;  
he thunders with his majestic voice  
and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard. (Job 37:2-4)

When YHWH utters his voice in Job, thunder and lightning spring forth. Wet imagery of rain also proceeds from this storm, where God, "loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter his lightning" (Job 37:11). So, too, the thunder of Amos 1:2a naturally conjures an image of rain that contrasts the drought imagery in 1:2b.<sup>3</sup> Soggin explores an attempt to rationalize the juxtaposition, describing the drought as

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<sup>3</sup> J. Alberto Soggin, *The Prophet Amos: A Translation and Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 28-9.

the hamsīn mentioned in Isaiah 40:7.<sup>4</sup> However, this explanation does not give due credit to the rhetorical technique of unmet expectations. When YHWH roars in Amos, one expects the same opportunity for refuge presented only verses earlier<sup>5</sup> in Joel. Instead, Amos proclaims mourning. When thunder booms in Jerusalem, one expects a storm, but Amos proclaims a drought. It is this technique of unmet expectations that take center stage within the questions of 3:2-8.

One should also examine how the introductory poem imagines YHWH's cosmic relationship with Israel. In Jeremiah 15, Jeremiah wrestles with the theological images of wet and dry when he compares YHWH to a deceitful spring. Kathleen O'Connor comments on this contrast, writing, "A dried up river bed of a God is dangerous to life and not a 'fountain of living waters' (4:13). An evaporated life force of a God is a deceit, a treachery, a death blow."<sup>6</sup>

Applying O'Connor's comments to Amos 1:2, the physical land of Israel transforms into a spiritual landscape. Rather than a physical drought, YHWH's waters retract from the land, and Carmel, a location known for its evergreen vegetation,<sup>7</sup> becomes a spiritual wasteland. But amidst this violent spiritual divorce, there is a hope of restoration through mourning. While mourning will not cure a literal drought, mourning as a theological image provides a compelling answer to the drought. Mourning is a wet activity, filled with tears and anguish. When the land mourns, it conjures a collective sobbing of the people of Israel. The tears of the land replenish the waters of life, which are lost when YHWH retracts himself,

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> I say "verses earlier" to draw attention to the canonical order of the texts in the Hebrew Bible. If one reads the canon linearly, the roar at the end of Joel places expectation on the roar in the beginning Amos.

<sup>6</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 87.

<sup>7</sup> Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, 30.

offering the hope that the spiritual relationship between YHWH and his people can be restored.

The rhetorical technique developed in the introductory poem is initially not present in the oracles against the nations (Amos 1:3-2:16). Rather, these oracles follow a progressive, structured repetition that satisfies the expectation of the reader. That is, YHWH threatens the transgressive nations with a fitting punishment involving fiery destruction of strongholds. Surprisingly, Amos concludes the series of oracles by exposing the transgressions of Israel. In fact, Israel has "...[sold] the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals" (2:6). Thus, the people of Israel have lost sight of YHWH, who liberated them from a similar slavery in Egypt (2:10). Additionally, Israel has corrupted traditions, manipulating them for personal gain. The propagators brought this corruption into the very house of God, where they drink wine paid for by fines placed on the poor and conduct worship wearing garments unlawfully taken as collateral (2:8)<sup>8</sup>. YHWH responded by raising up both prophets and Nazarites as his voice and presence among the people. Yet, Israel soon rejected these instruments. They turned away the prophet and made the Nazirite drink wine. In effect, they rejected the very god that formed their nation. Therefore, YHWH threatens Israel with punishment of death.

Such a threat would be difficult for Israel to understand, especially given its historical dependence on YHWH as its force of liberation from Egypt. Surprisingly, YHWH justifies his punishment using this precise historical relationship. In the lines that follow the oracle against Israel, Amos proclaims:

Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt:

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<sup>8</sup> Hans Walter Wolff. *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 167.

You only have I known  
of all the families of the earth;  
therefore I will punish you  
for all your iniquities. (3:1-2)

These verses again continue the rhetoric of unmet expectations established in 1:2. The first verse evokes an image of liberation from oppression, specifically that from Egypt. Amos places this image of liberation in contrast with the image of punishment evoked with the phrase "...word the LORD has spoken against you..." Compare this to the previous oracle against Tyre (1:9), where YHWH avenges the oppressed, trafficked communities, and "speaks against" the oppressor. Here, unlike the avenged communities, YHWH speaks against those whom he liberated, and not their oppressor. Verse two expands upon this rhetoric of divine favor, reminding the people of Israel not only of their liberation, but their exclusive privilege with YHWH. Privilege with YHWH brings with it refuge and continual spiritual connection. Here, though, the expectation of refuge is ripped away by the punishment pronouncement that immediately follows. Not only will YHWH punish Israel, he will do so specifically because he favors it exclusively over other nations. This poetic reversal primes one to quickly identify the rhetorical thread that began in 1:2, and, therefore, allows him or her to understand the full rhetorical impact of the questions in 3:3-8.

The technique of unmet expectations continues in Amos 3:5:

Does a bird fall into a snare on the earth,  
when there is no trap for it?  
Does a snare spring up from the ground,  
when it has taken nothing?

The image of this unit evokes significantly more than the inevitable "No!" response from the audience. The prophet takes the reader on a visual journey, where he or she imagines the bird plunge to the ground if it were caught, then, when he or she looks down, there is no trap to be

found. Amos presents the converse image in the latter half of the verse. The hunter sees a trap spring up. He or she walks over to the trap to catch his or her prey, but no prey is found. The words here work to build up an expectation that is never met, one that is always taken for granted. When the audience envisions the scenario, placing themselves in the shoes of the hunter who set the traps, an element of disbelief is sure to enter their thoughts, where they think: “At first the trap was functioning perfectly. But now, seemingly right before my eyes, I am left with no game.” This rhetorical act of swapping positive expectation with negative result creates the sense of irony within the poem.<sup>9</sup> The lion questions in the previous verse (v. 4) are not exempt from this irony. Presented is a lion that roars, presumably because it has just captured a meal. As soon as the prophet builds the expectation of prey, he destroys it saying that the lion has caught nothing.

Continuing the trend of unmet expectations, v. 6 speaks to the current situation of Israel’s people:

Is a trumpet blown in a city,  
and the people are not afraid?  
Does disaster befall a city,  
unless the Lord has done it? (Amos 3:6)

Hans Walter Wolff describes this event as the “watchman’s blowing of the alarm to give warning of danger”.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the trumpet’s sound creates an expectation of an imminent threat, which instills fear within the people. Israel, though, is not afraid. In fact, the elites lounge on couches, eating tender meat (6:4). Thus, Israel’s self-image is still that of the privileged wife of YHWH, safe from all disaster. But, as YHWH announces in v. 2, it is specifically because of Israel’s privileged status that he will punish it. It is because the people

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<sup>9</sup> Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 150-52.

<sup>10</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 186.

hold the expectation of safety that they will face unexpected tragedy. The images of the lion (3:4) and of the trumpet (3:6) build up a sense of irony, especially when considering the very real threat proclaimed by Amos in 1:2.

Amos 3:7 breaks from the question formula that the prophet utilizes in the previous verses. It presents a rather direct statement that interprets v. 6:

Surely the Lord God does nothing,  
without revealing his secret  
to his servants the prophets. (Amos 3:7)

Joseph Blenkinsopp argues that v. 7 shifts the blame of disaster away from YHWH and onto his people. He notes that such an apologetic shift in blame is a characteristic of deuteronomic texts.<sup>11</sup> Wolff agrees, citing a change in the author's primary concerns:

The original text of Amos is concerned with the relationship of the prophetic word to the preceding oracle of Yahweh. The Deuteronomist, on the other hand, is preoccupied with the relationship of the proclaimed word to the subsequent deed of Yahweh. (Wolff 180)

For this reason, the poem's rhetoric is best understood by reading from v. 6 directly to v. 8 where the rhetorical technique reaches its climax in the lion image.

Reading v. 6 with v. 8 renders the text:

Is a trumpet blown in a city,  
and the people are not afraid?  
Does disaster befall a city,  
unless the LORD has done it? (v. 6)  
The lion has roared;  
who will not fear?  
The Lord GOD has spoken;  
who can but prophesy? (v. 8)

The tense shifts dramatically from v. 6 to v. 8. If the lion's roar has indeed occurred, as v. 8 suggests, then Israel is truly in danger. This declaration transforms the previous questions

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 75.

from unmet expectations into real events. Thus, the roaring lion of v. 4, which originally had no prey, now holds prey in its clutches (3:4). YHWH, too, prepares to send real disaster upon Samaria because of its wrongdoing (3:6). These threats instill a sense of fear and panic in the otherwise lounging elites, waking them up to the consequences of their transgressions against the poor.

The lion's roar of 3:8 also calls to mind YHWH's roar in the introduction (1:2). With the introductory roar, YHWH retracts his waters of life from the land. Facing this spiritual deathblow, readers also recall that the shepherds' pastures mourn in 1:2. This connection thus establishes the possibility that Israel might respond to the announcement of destruction in 3:8 with mourning. By joining the shepherds of 1:2, Israel can hope to maintain a thread of connection with its deity. Amidst the panic created by the lion's roar, replenishing tears of mourning may usher in the hope of restoration.

## Chapter 2: Destruction and Lamentation

On the heels of the lion's roar in 3:8, Amos proclaims a series of indictments against Israel in 3:9-6:14 that expose Samaria's transgressions. Therefore, it is important to understand the structure of these poems. Proper identification of rhetorical structure enables one to comprehend the purpose and effect of the text in 8<sup>th</sup> century Israel. One could read the text sequentially, as with 1:1-3:8, but various difficulties arise with such a reading. The sequential text appears to jump from one section to another: beginning first with images of destruction (3:9-15), then a series of indictments (4:1-12), lament and reconciliation (5:1-13), and returns once more to indictments and images of ruin (6:1-14). Of course, this structure is difficult to follow because it does not progress in a logical pattern. One expects resolution to occur at the end of a sequential text, not at its center. Therefore, scholars have proposed other structural frames that better accommodate the order of the text.

Many scholars have suggested that chapters 3-6 contain chiastic or concentric structures. These structures consist of mirrored top and bottom sections that work to "draw unusual attention to the central terms, which are repeated in close proximity to one another."<sup>12</sup> This technique, therefore, "elevate[s] the central concept [of the poem]."<sup>13</sup> John Barton notes the development of chiastic theories of Amos, writing, "Back in 1977 J. de Ward argued that 5:1-17, a very early part of the book, is chiastic in structure. N. J. Tromp proposed that the whole 4:1-6:7 forms an extended chiasmus, while R. Bryan Widbin that chapters 3-6 are chiastic".<sup>14</sup> These structural proposals are not mutually exclusive, but are

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<sup>12</sup> John W. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*. (Utah: Research Press, 1999), 10

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> John Barton, *Theology of the Book of Amos* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 151

often compatible.<sup>15</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, Paul Noble's concentric proposal including Amos 3:9-6:14 shall guide one's interpretation:

- A: Introductory oracles (3:9-14)
  - x: Israel vis-a-vis the foreign nations (3:9-11)
  - y: An image of ruin (3:12)
  - z: The devastation of Israel (3:13-15)
- B: Heartless indolence in Samaria (4:1-3)
- C: Rejection of Israel's cult (4:4-5)
- D: The final judgment (4:6-12)
- E: Lamentations for Israel (5:1-3)
- F: Seek Yahweh! (5:4-6)
- G: The corruption of justice (5:7, 10)
- H: Hymn to Yahweh (5:8-9)
- G': The corruption of justice (5:11-13)
- F': Seek Yahweh! (5:14-15)
- E': Lamentations for Israel (5:16-17)
- D': The final judgment (5:18-20)
- C': Rejection of Israel's cult (5:21-27)
- B': Heartless indolence in Samaria (6:1, 3-7)
- A': Concluding oracles (6:2, 8-14)
  - x': Israel vis-a-vis the foreign nations (6:2, 8)
  - y': An image of ruin (6:9-10)
  - z': The devastation of Israel (6:11-14)<sup>16</sup>

This concentric structure of Amos 3:9-6:14 funnels the reader into a grand funeral procession.<sup>17</sup> The lion's destruction intensifies in the chiastic periphery, forcing Amos to call all of Samaria into lament. As with the chapters before it, the threads of destruction and mourning are inherently wed to one another. The parallel images of punishment that run alongside the lament prepare Samaria to recognize its socio-economic mistreatment of the poor. It is this relationship that the elites must mend in order to maintain connection with their God.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Paul R. Noble, "The Literary Structure of Amos: A Thematic Analysis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 2 (1995): 211.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 46. Brueggemann claims that prophets use a "...*language of grief*...that engages the community in mourning for a funeral they do not want to admit. It is indeed their own funeral."

It is important to highlight the three emendations that the Noble's structure applies to the text. Hans Walter Wolff and others have been suspicious of 6:2 because it, "interrupts the otherwise regular sequence of participial and third-person plural verbal forms appropriate to the original didactic style of the woe-oracle"<sup>18</sup> Noble resolves this issue by transposing 6:2 after 6:7, where it fits well with the surrounding verses.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Noble deletes verse 4:13.<sup>20</sup> This decision follows the arguments of Shalom Paul and Wolff, who dismiss the verse for its late Hebrew syntax and elevated theology.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, Noble understands that 5:8-9 interrupts the flow between verses 7 and 10. Therefore, he moves the pair past verse 10. More controversial is his insistence on the originality of both verses 8 and 9. Noble justifies this stance, writing, "A dominant theme in the surrounding units is that Yahweh is bringing judgment upon his erring people, and that it is appropriately underpinned by the hymnic celebration in vv. 8-9 of Yahweh's mastery over nature and of his destructive power in history."<sup>22</sup> Noble does not stand alone in this reading. In fact, Barton also reads these verses as a unit, and uses them to reflect on the "paradoxical character of God's way of acting in the world".<sup>23</sup> He goes as far to suggest that a, "canonical reading of the text might well try to do justice to this ambiguity".<sup>24</sup>

With these alterations in mind, consider the core hymn of the ring composition:

The one who made the Pleiades and Orion,  
and turns deep darkness into the morning,  
and darkens the day into night,  
who calls for the waters of the sea,

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<sup>18</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 274.

<sup>19</sup> Noble, "Literary Structure," 217.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>21</sup> Shalom M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 152.

<sup>22</sup> Noble, "Literary Structure," 215.

<sup>23</sup> Barton, *Theology*, 158.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

and pours them out on the surface of the earth,  
 the Lord is his name,  
 who makes destruction flash out against the strong,  
 so that destruction comes upon the fortress. (Amos 5:8-9)

As Barton mentions, the juxtapositions of themes are apparent. Not only does YHWH display his cosmic power in the turning of the seasons,<sup>25</sup> but also announces his control over human political strongholds. Jörg Jeremias is quick to point out the impact of YHWH's action in v. 8, writing, "Whereas Israel 'turns' justice into its opposite, Yahweh 'turns' the darkness (the term used here often refers to the dangerous proximity of the realm of the dead) to light and light to darkness".<sup>26</sup> Israel's fate hangs in the balance between the darkness and light. Yet, if they confess the hymn, hope remains that YHWH will turn their transgressive nature into one of reconciliation. It is the only act that can save the people from destruction.

This hymnic expression of YHWH's cosmic and political control serves as the key to understand Samaria's transgressions. Samaria's impending demise is not the result of improper worship. In fact, Amos mocks their practice, proclaiming:

Come to Bethel—and transgress;  
 to Gilgal—and multiply transgression;  
 bring your sacrifices every morning,  
 your tithes every three days;  
 bring a thank offering of leavened bread,  
 and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them;  
 for so you love to do, O people of Israel!  
 says the Lord God. (Amos 4:4-5)

Notice the rhetorical effect of the proclamation. In this sarcastic call to worship, Amos transforms the sanctuary entrances at Bethel and Gilgal into sites of transgression. Thus, pilgrimage to these sites, "becomes a rebellion against Yahweh."<sup>27</sup> So, it is no surprise that

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<sup>25</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 241.

<sup>26</sup> Jörg Jeremias, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 90-91.

<sup>27</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 219.

YHWH despises these festivals (5:21) and rejects Samaria's offerings (v. 22). Nevertheless, it is not the sacrificial practice itself that is corrupted. Rather it is Samaria's socioeconomic mistreatment of the poor that fuels YHWH's rage.

Indictment surrounds the hymn to YHWH on both sides. YHWH exposes the nation's corruption and extortion, highlighting the emerging trend of latifundialization that turns its poor farmers into tenants who pay taxes on their yield (v. 11). D. N. Premnath articulates the plight of the poor, writing:

The vulnerable members of society, with no power or influence, could not protect themselves in the social order. They needed the help of the court (Mays 1969a:92). But the irony of the situation was that the very courts meant to promote and maintain justice, have, in fact, become the instruments of distorting and subverting justice. (Premnath 170)

As Premnath suggests, the powerful Samarian upper-class began to leverage the legal system, accepting bribes (v. 12) and rejecting legal truth (v. 10) for personal financial gain.<sup>28</sup> With the fruits of their extortion they built grand vineyards and houses made of hewn stone (v. 11). Yet, they will never see these spoils. Instead, YHWH will curse the vineyards precisely because they were built by way of agricultural injustice.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the elites remain oblivious to their transgressions. While they lounge about on beds of ivory (6:4) they simultaneously crush the poor (4:1). It is as if they are clueless to the oppression that feeds their overindulgence. In fact, they presume protection from the Day of YHWH, and even push it out of their minds (6:3). They cannot imagine a scenario where their economic institutions fail them.<sup>30</sup> Instead, they continue to sing songs and anoint themselves with fine oils (v. 6), unprepared for the day they are dragged out from

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<sup>28</sup> Devadasan Nithya Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003), 170.

<sup>29</sup> Paul, *Amos*, 173.

<sup>30</sup> Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 42.

their houses through breeches in the walls (4:3). Shalom Paul elaborates on the elite's state of mind, writing, "Feeling secure and reveling in their present life style of pleasure and luxury (immediately described in detail) they simply do not face, or wish to face reality".<sup>31</sup>

The chiasm in 3:9-6:14 primarily functions to showcase the transformation of the Samarian upper-class from numb purveyors of this royal consciousness to renewed proclaimers of YHWH's cosmic order.<sup>32</sup> Consider this passage from the periphery of the chiasm, translated by Wolff:

Thus Yahweh has said:

Just as the shepherd rescues from  
 the mouth of the lion  
 two splint-bones  
 a tip of an ear,  
 so will the sons of Israel be rescued,  
 who sit in Samaria  
 at the footboard of the couch  
 and at the <headboard> of the bed. (3:12)<sup>33</sup>

Wolff's construction calls to mind the lounging elites of chapter 6.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the image of their destruction intensifies with the presence of the lion. One can imagine Amos reaching into the mouth of the lion, hoping to retrieve some artifact of the ruling class. One may quickly identify this artifact as a remnant, one that will eventually restore Israel. Wolff discourages such an interpretation. Rather, he suggests that the shepherd gathers evidence in order to nullify any obligation of restitution. The imagery that Amos presents draws upon

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<sup>31</sup> Paul, *Amos*, 240.

<sup>32</sup> Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 42. Brueggemann uses the term "royal consciousness" to represent the state of mind that a ruler projects upon his or her people. The royal consciousness propagates the ideas that "all is well" and that the current rulers will reign forever, thereby making citizens "numb" to the traumatic reality before them.

<sup>33</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 196. I chose Wolff's construction due to its clear link with the images of overconsumption in 6:4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

Exodus 22:13, where Samaria is an animal “mangled by beasts”. According to Wolff, “Those bits of ‘rescued’ evidence are, therefore, nothing other than proof that total loss was unavoidable”.<sup>35</sup>

Here, on the chiastic edge, rests total destruction. There is almost no hope of redemption. In his wrath, YHWH threatens to annihilate even the remnants of entire families:

If ten people remain in one house, they shall die. And if a relative, one who burns the dead, shall take up the body to bring it out of the house, and shall say to someone in the innermost parts of the house, “Is anyone else with you?” the answer will come, “No.” Then the relative shall say, “Hush! We must not mention the name of the Lord.” (Amos 6:9-11)

Amos presents an image of Samaria that has severed all connection with its deity. God’s people are not even allowed to utter his name without threat of death (v. 10). But, it is within this survivor’s silence that the last thread of hope remains. There is still one left within the innermost part of the house, and if he or she does not speak, then YHWH may overlook him or her. Jeremias explains the power of the silence, writing, “Thus does the last survivor of a city in ruin, through this very silence, testify to the judging God—and this after the reveling city itself previously had made continual and thoughtless use of this name (5:21ff.; 6:1ff).”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, silence amidst destruction functions like the hymnic profession of 5:8 in that it serves as a testimony to the power of YHWH.

For Amos, these images of destruction would be especially painful. As a farmer himself, he knows the devastation created by total loss. Yet, the roar of 3:8 compels him to prophesy. His words of ruin awaken the reader to the inevitable result of Samaria’s perpetual socioeconomic injustice, which is death. Each chiastic unit works to shed Samaritans of their ignorance. Amos’ lament naturally pulls one to the center, where he or she is forced to seek

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Jeremias, *The Book of Amos*, 117.

YHWH, acknowledge corruption, and profess authority. It is in this lament where the nation of Israel must face the reality of its own death. The elites must grieve Israel, accepting that it has “Fallen, no more to rise” (5:2). Only then can a new societal order emerge out of its ashes, one that recognizes the role of the farmer.

Amos demonstrates this new framework in the scene of corporate lamentation:

In all the squares there shall be wailing;  
 and in all the streets they shall say, “Alas! alas!”  
 They shall call the farmers to mourning,  
 and those skilled in lamentation, to wailing;  
 in all the vineyards there shall be wailing,  
 for I will pass through the midst of you,  
 says the Lord. (Amos 5:16-17)

Under the threat of death, none are excluded from lamentation. It extends from the streets to the vineyards. The streets of the city-center bellow with screams, calling to mind the tumults seen by the assembly on Mount Samaria (3:9). With these screams, the elites call on the support of the farmers to mourn their destruction. Without the farmers’ support, all of society would crumble under the weight of YHWH’s threats. Therefore, calling on the farmers is an act of recognition of their status in society. One imagines that it is the poor workers who wail in the elites’ vineyards. It is in this place, the very symbol of the elites’ extortion, where the poor farmers demonstrate their agency to maintain a connection with YHWH.

The tears of collective lament dissolve the blinding cloud of ignorance that characterizes the lavish life of the upper-class. With renewed sight, they can once again seek YHWH. Furthermore, Amos implores them to reject the sites of their past transgression (5:4). They can no longer enter into these spaces because corruption has consumed them like a fire. Instead, they should mend the spaces that the poor most depend on for security. Amos

instructs them to “establish justice in the gate” (5:15), an act that protects the poor and enables them to exist in the center of society. Only when the elites enact these measures will God create a new society from a remnant of Joseph (5:15). Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that Samaria heed Amos’s words. If they fail to establish new justice, thereby widening the rift between elite and farmer, then no thread of connection will remain between God and his people after their destruction.

### Chapter 3: The Visions

Making a thematic break with the sections before it, chapters 7-9 contain five vision sequences. These visions continue the theme of unmet expectations established in the first three chapters. While different in style than the introductory poem (1:2) and the questions (3:2-8), the visions serve a similar purpose. The visions dissolve the cloud of ignorance that surrounds the elites and prepare them to accept the reality of YHWH's impending destruction of Israel.

Vision oracles often occur in two parts: YHWH's presentation of an image to the prophet, and the prophet's interpretation of that image. The oracles generally occur early within a prophetic book, often in the prophet's call narrative (e.g., Jer 1:11-19; Ezek. 1:4), which function to legitimate his or her burden of prophecy.<sup>37</sup> Other visions express indictments with aggressive imagery and/or wordplay that shock the hearer, inviting him or her to consider the implications of the prophet's message.

Uniquely, Amos does not include a prophetic call. Furthermore, his visions of destruction are clustered at the end of the book (cf. 7-9) after multiple chapters of condemnation. Although these chapters form a clearly distinct unit, they are also intrinsically connected to the earlier materials in Amos. Jeremias claims that the oracles of 1-2 presuppose the images of destruction contained within Amos's visions. He reflects on the difficulty of their positioning, writing, "If the book of Amos were following an even incipiently biographical outline, the visionary accounts would have to stand at the beginning of the book".<sup>38</sup> However, violating expectations is characteristic of the book of Amos. Such a surprising location fits Amos's style, and only helps further captivate his audience and

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 138.

<sup>38</sup> Jörg Jeremias, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 126

convey their punishment.

Amos's visions highlight YHWH's lust for violence, as well as his willingness to adjust the setting and scope of Israel's destruction. Before focusing his wrath exclusively on the elites in the latter three visions, God first considers annihilating the entire population through famine:

This is what the Lord God showed me: he was forming locusts at the time the latter growth began to sprout (it was the latter growth after the king's mowings). When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, "O Lord God, forgive, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" The Lord relented concerning this; "It shall not be," said the Lord. (Amos 7:1-3)

Amos envisions a scene of food scarcity in the first vision. The king has already laid claim to the first growth, forcing farmers to depend on the late spring rains of April and May. If this latter crop were to become compromised, then the farmers would surely starve in the seasonal drought that follows.<sup>39</sup> Locusts, then, are a particularly dangerous threat to the farmer. Hans Walter Wolff comments on the wide-ranging devastation that locusts inflict, writing, "...locusts spare not even vines, fig trees or other fruit trees. Were locusts to consume all the vegetation by the late spring rains, the resulting shortage of grain and vegetables for human consumption and of fodder for cattle would indeed be severe".<sup>40</sup> In effect, nothing would survive.

A symbolic interpretation also underpins the reality of the vision. In the Book of Nahum, the prophet likens the princes and scribes to grasshoppers and clouds of locusts who feast on the nation in its cold, dark days (Nahum 3:17). Often, elites from Egypt and

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<sup>39</sup> Hans Walter Wolff. *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 297.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

Palestine would engrave symbols upon stone scarabs. These symbols could represent a person's household and family name. Archeologists uncovered one such Hebrew scarab that dates to the eighth century. It features a carving of a locust, above which an inscription reads, "Belonging to Azaryaw [son of] *hgbh*".<sup>41</sup> According to N. Avigad, "The locust obviously serves here as the emblem of the Haggobeh or Haggabah family".<sup>42</sup> This evidence develops the vision beyond its immediate meaning. Read symbolically, the devouring swarm of locusts represents the never-ending extortion of the upper-class. First the king takes his mowings, then the elites take what is left.

While YHWH's proposal of crop destruction would certainly stop future occurrences of extortion, it would do so at the expense of the poor. The farmers must starve and society's agricultural system must crumble for the upper-class to feel the pain of their own transgressions. Amos, understanding the pain of the farmer, begs YHWH to consider his effect on "Jacob". Terminology in this vision is a key to understand the nature of Amos's plea, as Jeremias explains:

For Amos and his followers in the book of Amos (cf. esp. 9:8b), "Jacob" never refers to the state, but rather always to that entity which is totally focused and dependent on God; Jacob is, after all, "small," that is, diminutive, powerless, and thus incapable of life without the help and care of its God, who has taken up with the weak. When God hears the name "Jacob," he can only relent... (Jeremias 128)

Thus, Jacob represents the farmers. This small group was among the first to follow Amos in lament (cf. 5:16), and only survive now by their dependence on God. Considering the farmers' plight, YHWH declares that the vision of locusts "shall not be" (7:3).

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<sup>41</sup> N. Avigad, "A Hebrew Seal with a Family Emblem," *Israel Exploration Journal* 16, no. 1 (1966): 50-53. See also Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah: An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 136.

<sup>42</sup> N. Avigad, *Hebrew Seal*, 52.

Nevertheless, God sends the second vision:

This is what the Lord God showed me: the Lord God was calling for a shower of fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. Then I said, “O Lord God, cease, I beg you!

How can Jacob stand?

He is so small!”

The Lord relented concerning this;

“This also shall not be,” said the Lord God. (Amos 7:4-6)

This vision features the sharp, yet familiar contrast of wet and dry imagery. Life-giving rain is essential for crop growth. It enables the farmer to survive through the extremely hot summer that follows the latter growth. However, this rain does not bring life-giving water. Rather, it is a rain of fire that dries the land. It calls to mind not only YHWH’s fiery wrath in the oracles against the nations (1:3-2:16), but also the sequence of events in the book’s introduction (1:2). Recall that YHWH’s utterance evokes images of stormy rain, but causes Carmel to wither in 1:2b. In his second vision, Amos expands this contrast of 1:2. The rain that once nurtured the crop now devours it. Even more, it dries up the “great deep”. Drawing upon Ugaritic tradition, “great deep” represents the cosmic, primeval waters that flow directly from the divine. Thus, this vision transcends the physical landscape into a cosmic one. As this cosmic riverbed evaporates, YHWH retracts his waters of life, thereby severing his connection to Israel.

Once again, the deathblow targets the poor farmers, those already suffering at the hands of the elite. Amos’s response is more emphatic than that of the first vision. He no longer asks YHWH for forgiveness, but only shouts “O Lord God, cease, I beg you!” (7:4). He pleads again that God consider Jacob, knowing that it cannot withstand this punishment. In response, God relents once more. Nevertheless, Amos’s desperate plea highlights the urgent necessity of his intervention and the temporal proximity of YHWH’s threat. It is as if

YHWH is one second away from sacrificing the farmers to enact justice on the rich.

Fortunately, YHWH adjusts his scope for the latter two visions, refocusing his wrath on upper-class Samaria<sup>43</sup>:

This is what ‘the Lord Yahweh’ showed me: Behold, he -- the Lord -- was standing on a wall of tin, with tin in his hand. And Yahweh said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “Tin.” Then the Lord said, “See, I am setting “Tin” in the midst of my people Israel; I can no longer pass them by (and spare them). (Amos 7:7-8)

Scholars struggle to translate and interpret the third vision. The Hebrew word *’ānāk*, translated “tin” here, forms the central image of the vision. Furthermore, *’ānāk* occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. This issue forces translators to examine surrounding languages in order to define the term. According to Benjamin Noonan, “Non-Semitic forms include Sumerian AN.NA, Egyptian *imq*, Sanskrit *nāga*, and Armenian *anag*, which similarly can mean both ‘tin’ and “lead.””<sup>44</sup> This flexibility leads scholars to commonly translate the word as “plum-line”, a lead-based measuring tool. The result is an interpretation that imagines God as testing Samaria for its purity. Using the plummet, he determines that the wall protecting the city is not straight, but is corrupt. Therefore, he swings the plumb-line like a pickaxe,<sup>45</sup> crushing the heart of the city.

Jeremias cautions against such a reading because it does not properly consider Amos’s dialogue with YHWH in the first two visions. In neither vision does Amos dispute Samaria’s guilt. Rather, he begs the Lord to forgive the elites of their transgressions (7:2, 7:5). It is therefore unnecessary for YHWH to symbolically measure, and thereby assess, the

<sup>43</sup> Jeremias, *Book of Amos*, 124. Translated is by Jeremias.

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin J. Noonan, "There and Back Again: ‘Tin’ or ‘Lead’ in Amos 7:7-9?\*" *Vetus Testamentum* 63, no. 2 (2013): 304.

<sup>45</sup> J. Alberto Soggin, *The prophet Amos: a Translation and Commentary* (London: SCM, 1987) 116.

transgressions of the city. Instead, one would expect the third vision to imagine a punishment that remains consistent with the earlier visions.

Rendering ' *ānāk* as “tin” allows for a consistent image to materialize. The image of the Lord “standing on a wall of tin, with tin in his hand” is one of strength and security. This is not contingent on the physical properties of tin. In fact, tin is a relatively soft metal. However, proper interpretation of its significance relies on knowledge of international trade. Along with copper, tin served as the essential component in bronze weaponry. According to Jeremias, “[Tin] was a far more precious element than copper, even though the latter was used for alloying in at least a sixfold quantity. This was the case especially in Palestine, since copper could be mined here, whereas all tin had to be imported, presumably by way of Cyprus.”<sup>46</sup>

In the context of the vision, the presence of tin forces one to consider the economic transactions required to produce both bronze weaponry and fortifications, thereby preparing the Samaritans to reflect upon their current economic system. YHWH’s initial stance on the wall characterizes him as a defender. One imagines that he guards his people from external threats. Surprisingly, he does not wield a sword of protection, but one of destruction. In an escalation of threat, YHWH no longer uses natural disaster to inflict pain. He effectively places himself in the midst of his own people. The absence of a plea for mercy indicates YHWH’s increased anticipation of the event. YHWH gives Amos no time to intervene before proclaiming “I can no longer pass them by” (7:8).

Additionally, one should consider the setting of this vision compared to its predecessors. In the first two visions, YHWH inflicts damage directly to the land and its

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<sup>46</sup> Jeremias, *Book of Amos*, 131.

vegetation, striking the farmers with a deathblow. Here, YHWH does not attack the farmers who live outside the wall, but the strongholds of the city-center, where he threatens to “rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword” (7:9) In this way, he preemptively considers the plight of Jacob and directs his punishment only on its oppressor, which is the state.

The narrative of 7:10-17 supports this reading of the vision. Amaziah’s message to King Jeroboam highlights the locational nature of YHWH’s threat. It reads: “Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words” (7:10). Amaziah visualizes the land as a container<sup>47</sup> that is filled to the brim with Amos’s indictments. The proceeding threat of Jeroboam’s death by sword (7:11) acts “[as] the decisive drop [that causes] the barrel to overflow”.<sup>48</sup> The image of overflowing indictments calls to mind the concluding poem of ch. 5 where, “justice roll[s] down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (5:24). Amos’s words pour out over the “house of Israel”, which represents the state.<sup>49</sup> YHWH’s wrath closes in on the center of elite society, and the king himself will suffer for the transgressions of his elites.

Using a simple, yet direct vision Amos seals Israel’s fate:

This is what the Lord God showed me—a basket of summer fruit. He said,  
 “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then  
 the Lord said to me,  
 “The end has come upon my people Israel;  
 I will never again pass them by...” (8:1-2)

This fourth vision uses Hebrew cognates “summer fruit” (qāyīṣ) and “end” (qēṣ) to transform an image of harvest into an image of judgement. These words share more than a written

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<sup>47</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of Prophets Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 306. “*Hip’il*”, translated as “to bear” in the NRSV, is translated “to contain” by Wolff.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>49</sup> Jeremias, *Book of Amos*, 138.

similarity. Bruce D. Rathjen analyzed a limestone tablet of the Gezer Calendar recovered by R. A. S. Macalister in 1901. This calendar, which was in use between approximately 950-925 BCE, lists eight distinct agricultural periods that each last one to two months.<sup>50</sup> The eighth period typically translates to “the month of summer fruit”. Interestingly, Macalister’s tablet uses *qēš* (“end”) rather than *qāyiš* (“summer fruit”) to describe the period, rendering the translation “final month”. This leads Rathjen to wonder if ancient communities frequently interchanged *qēš* (“end”) and *qāyiš* (“summer fruit”).<sup>51</sup> If the words are indeed interchangeable, it suggests that they may share a pronunciation.

Furthermore, *qēš* (“end”) derives from the root word *qšš* (“cut off”<sup>52</sup>, “hew off”<sup>53</sup>). Wolff incorporates this root meaning in his interpretation of the vision. The basket of summer fruit calls to mind Israel’s reaping of the harvest. Wolff suggests, then, that “‘end’... means the ‘reaping of death’”.<sup>54</sup> While the fourth vision roots itself in agricultural imagery, YHWH does not target the farmer as he does in the first two visions. Rather, he focuses again on the palace, the symbol of elite society:

...Then Yahweh said to me, “The end has come upon my people Israel;  
I can no longer pass them by (and spare them).

The singers in the palace shall be wailing in that day,”  
Says the Lord Yahweh;  
“the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Be silent!” (8:2b-3)<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Bruce D. Rahtjen, "Critical note on Amos 8:1-2," *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 83, no. 4 (1964): 416.

<sup>51</sup> Rahtjen, "Critical note," 117.

<sup>52</sup> Jeremias, *Book of Amos*, 134.

<sup>53</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 319.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Jeremias, *Book of Amos*, 143. I utilize Jeremias translation of the text. Jeremias defends his rendering of “singers” and “palace” in 8:3, writing, “Instead of *šîrôl*, “songs” (the plural is otherwise always masculine in the Old Testament; cf. here v. 10), one generally reads *šârôt*, “(female) singers” (or *šârôt*, “princesses”). In that case, however, *hêkâl* is referring to the royal palace; by contrast, female singers are never attested in connection with the temple.” (cf. 137 footnote 1.)

Jeremias calls the palace “the paradigmatic locus of the celebration of festivals”.<sup>56</sup> One can picture the liveliness of the summer harvest festival, where people crowded in the palace to eat food and hear songs. Facing the new reality of YHWH’s wrath, the singers now wail to a congregation of dead bodies. Furthermore, this scene of destruction calls to mind 6:10, where the family member drags bodies from his or her home.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, the bodies here will be “cast out” (8:3). YHWH’s wrath effectively silences the elites (8:3) by destroying the headquarters of their extortion operation.

YHWH continues, describing the specific character traits of his targets. They forsake the sabbath in anticipation of wheat sales (8:5). The transgressors also take constant advantage of the poor, selling “sweepings of wheat” (8:6) measured out on “false scales” (8:5). Even more egregious, these elite merchants enslave debtors over small items like pairs of sandals (8:6). Because of this manipulation and extortion, YHWH threatens to rise against the elites on behalf of the oppressed community (8:7).<sup>58</sup> There is irony in the financial language of this threat. Just as the merchants enslave the poor because of their unpaid accounts, so, too, will YHWH punish the elites on account of their deeds (8:8).

God threatens to send an earthquake that will make the land rise and sink like the Nile (8:8). The quake, then, functions like a flood that will sweep away the corrupt. And YHWH

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 148. “Pride of Jacob” (8:7) depends on the on the translation of *gā’ōn* (translated “pride” in the NRSV). It can also mean “arrogance” and “majesty”. Jeremias suggests that 8:7 uses the word’s dual meaning as a form of wordplay that contributes to the irony of YHWH’s aggression against the elites. However, this interpretation overlooks the use of “Jacob” in the first two visions. There, “Jacob” represents the small, yet faithful group that depends on YHWH’s protection. A positive interpretation of “pride of Jacob” in 8:7 does justice to these earlier uses of “Jacob” within the visions. An exception to this positive interpretation occurs in Amos 6:8, where YHWH “abhor[s] the pride of Jacob”. Amos 6:8 continues to describe YHWH’s hatred of the strongholds in the city. While YHWH associates his hatred with Jacob, he does so by using images that only represent the wealthy elites.

will drain Israel's corruption through the cracks created by the earthquake. Juxtaposed to this flood imagery is the spiritual drought that YHWH sends upon Israel (8:11-12). During this bitter day, the beautiful young women and men of the upper-class "shall faint of thirst" (8:13). Even when they "wander for from sea to sea", they will not find replenishment. They will seek other Gods (8:14), but none will quench their spiritual thirst.

Israel's response to the drought highlights both its dependence on YHWH as a provider and its inability to escape YHWH's wrath. Amos expands on this second point in his fifth and final vision sequence:

I saw the Lord standing beside<sup>59</sup> the altar, and he said:  
 Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake,  
     and shatter them on the heads of all the people;  
 and those who are left I will kill with the sword;  
     not one of them shall flee away,  
     not one of them shall escape.  
 Though they dig into Sheol,  
     from there shall my hand take them;  
 though they climb up to heaven,  
     from there I will bring them down.  
 Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel,  
     from there I will search out and take them;  
 and though they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea,  
     there I will command the sea-serpent, and it shall bite them.  
 And though they go into captivity in front of their enemies,  
     there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them;  
 and I will fix my eyes on them  
     for harm and not for good. (Amos 9:1-4)

YHWH's command from the altar is reminiscent of the third vision where he stands on the wall and strikes Israel with a sword (7:7-9). Shalom Paul explains the significance of YHWH's new location on the altar, writing:

The altar was that place of "slaughtering"...on which the great burnt offerings were offered; it is situated in the situated in the outer court of the temple. The

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 155. "beside" can also mean "on".

figure of Yahweh, towering over all human dimensions (cf. Is 6:1), occupies this place in order to smite the capital with outstretched arm and strong hand (Paul 399).

YHWH's sacrifice of the capital functions as atonement for the elites' transgressions, and none are exempt from God's wrath. In fact, YHWH resolves to find the transgressors wherever they might be. He will search the forest of Carmel and look in the depths of the sea just to find any survivors. Even if an enemy takes a transgressor captive, YHWH will still ensure the wrongdoer's death by sword. Hiding in silence cannot save them now (cf. Amos 6:10, 8:3)

YHWH's persistence and intensity in this fifth vision make it the culmination of those before it. One can trace YHWH's fleeting patience within the visions. In the first two, YHWH demonstrates his eagerness to demolish the Israel's farmland (7:1-6). Nevertheless, his concern for Jacob leads him to relent (cf. 7:3, 7:6). As YHWH refocuses his anger exclusively on the city-center in visions three and four, his anticipation grows to the point where he "... can no longer pass [the transgressors] by" (cf. 7:8, 8:2). Finally, in the fifth vision, YHWH imagines what it would be like to spare no elite. He becomes fanatical and meticulous in his elimination of these corrupt people.

Following the climax, YHWH surprisingly transforms from a destroyer into a rebuilder. While his destruction plans are vast, he pledges not to destroy utterly Jacob (9:8). Instead, God imagines a new socio-economic framework rising from the ashes, one led exclusively by these previously oppressed farmers:

The time is surely coming, says the Lord,  
 when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps,  
 and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed;  
 the mountains shall drip sweet wine,

and all the hills shall flow with it. (Amos 9:13)

In an epic role reversal, the farmers seize the means of production. In this new economy, farmers will express total control over their land and resources. Recall how YHWH previously threatened to limit the elites' access to their own vineyards, proclaiming, "you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine" (5:11). In direct contrast, God proclaims that the newly elevated farmer shall, "...plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit" (9:14).

In fact, wine imagery saturates Israel's entire restoration. In 9:5, YHWH used the term "melt" to describe his violent touch that sends the earth into mourning. Here, YHWH declares that "the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt."<sup>60</sup> In the presence of this new society, even God's language transforms from something destructive into something productive. This becomes clear with the melting of the mountains in 9:15, which "serves to open up even the last bare patches of land to overflowing fruitfulness, making possible a completely new harvest of grapes".<sup>61</sup>

Continuing this pattern of transformation, the book's final verse beautifully links back to the introduction of 1:2:

I will plant them upon their land,  
and they shall never again be plucked up  
out of the land that I have given them,  
says the Lord your God. (Amos 9:15)

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 161. Jeremias translates "mûwg" in 9:13 as "melts", linking the verse back to 9:5 where YHWH "touches the earth and it melts".

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 168

YHWH resolves to grow a permanent community out of the remnant that he plants. This community is a new forest of spiritually evergreen people. The trees YHWH once withered at Carmel with his utterance, he now rebuilds with his declaration in 9:15. Here, the farmers become permanently rooted in the land. They are no longer at the mercy of the corrupt elites, but are unmovable in their commitment to YHWH.

## Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have presented a reading of Amos in its final form. With minimal textual emendations, I demonstrated that one can successfully divide the book in three major sections, 1:2-3:8; 3:9-6:14; and 7-9. While each of these sections contain units with distinct structural features, they all utilize the rhetorical technique of unmet expectations to expose Samaria's guilt and corruption.

In 1:2-3:8, the introductory poem immediately utilizes into the technique of unmet expectations with its juxtaposed storm and drought imagery. It also serves as the link to 3:8, and invites one to interpret the lion image in 3:8 as a call to mourning.

3:9-6:14 is a chiasmic structure that forces Samaria to confront the reality of its socioeconomic mistreatment of the poor. At the center of this structure stands a hymn to YHWH that is flanked by lament. This lament forces the transgressor to shed his or her ignorance, whereby he or she acknowledges the corruption in Samaria's economy. Only then can one properly reorient himself or herself toward YHWH's cosmic and political order.

Finally, ch. 7-9 showcase YHWH's transformation from a destroyer into a builder. His anticipation and desire for destruction grow as he progresses from one vision to the next. Yet, in the end, he imagines rebuilding the society from a remnant of Jacob. With equal anticipation and fervor, YHWH promises to nurture and protect this new community. Thus, there is a thematic symmetry between the first and last chapters to the text. Though the book begins with indictments and threats against Israel, it finishes with resolution and a new promise to protect Israel.

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