

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Reexamining Amos' Use of Rhetorical Questions in Hebrew Prophetic Rhetoric

Submitted to Dr. Yates

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

THES 690-006

Thesis Defense

by

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April 16, 2019

The views expressed in this thesis do not necessarily represent the views of the  
institution and/or of the thesis readers.

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## Abstract

The book of Amos contains a message of repentance and judgment to eighth-century Israel. However, the book also portrays the Hebrew prophet persuading his audience of their condemnation before a God whom they do not fully understand. The prophet employs rhetorical questions to help assert his argument. Modern scholarship, however, does not address the function(s) of rhetorical questions from a purely Hebrew context, but evaluates them from an approach heavily influenced by Classical rhetoric. This error results in an incomplete view of Amos' rhetoric and message that removes the rhetorical questions from the context of the Hebrew prophet. Thus, a new understanding must be proposed to recover Amos' rhetoric and message that honors his context.

After exegesis of each rhetorical question posed by Amos or YHWH against his audience (2:11-12; 3:3-8; 5:18-20; 5:25-27; 6:2; 6:12; 8:5-8; 9:7), the passages reveal that the prophet drew from common thought in nature, society, and Torah to form agreeable statements in the form of a rhetorical question for the purpose of imposing a superior argument or judgment. This conclusion is supported by an analysis of the book's structure. The functions listed above are embedded in rhetorical structures familiar to Amos and his audience: disputation speech and entrapment language.

Amos' questions are an integral aspect of his message rather than a literary device merely used to form common ground between a speaker and his audience. Amos' questions contain strong assertions that draw in the audience with common thought, condemn the audience through their response, and impose the prophet's divine message. In opposition to Classical rhetoric, this approach results in a view compatible with the prophet, his message, and his rhetoric.

## Introduction

Amos is among the first of the writing prophets in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup> Thus, his use of rhetoric is significant for understanding Hebrew rhetoric as a whole. Unique to Amos is his frequent use of rhetorical questions directed at his audience and how those questions relate to disputation speech and entrapment language. Amos uses rhetorical questions in various ways within his message, but the usage does not consistently resemble a modern or Classical understanding of rhetorical questions. Thus, a problem emerges: evaluating Amos' rhetorical questions through the lens of Classical rhetoric may result in misinterpreting Amos' rhetorical questions and overall rhetorical strategy. Although many of Amos' rhetorical devices can be understood through the use of anachronistic terminology from Classical rhetoric, studying each of Amos' questions in its Hebrew context further illuminates his strategy and message.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Introducing the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 69; Richard Alan Fuhr, Jr. and Gary E. Yates, *The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 3; Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 423-424. It is not within the scope or interest of this paper to dedicate a separate section on issues pertaining to authorship. Instead, the book will be evaluated in its present canonical shape with the assumption that Amos (mid-eighth century) is at least the originator of the book's content whether that be through direct authorship or scribal recording. If the book itself did not originate from the mid-eighth century when the prophet ministered, then the present study holds to the idea that the message recorded are accurate depictions of the prophet's words in his original context. Möller adds that the book, at least in its canonical form, is less concerned with the prophet himself or a random anthology of Amos' preaching and should be viewed as a "structured communication." See Karl Möller, *A Prophet in Debate: The Rhetoric of Persuasion in the Book of Amos*, vol. 372, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 2. It is important to note that Möller does not argue to Amosian authorship, but upholds and eighth-century authorship. See *Ibid.*, 118. Niditch adds: Indeed, once a prophet is believed by a group to be a "true prophet," it becomes especially important to write down and preserve his/her variously interpretable messages so that they can be available for future validation, confirming and perhaps helping to bring about the events they predict. See Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*, *Library of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 119.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the implementation of classical rhetoric is not opposed for further insight. However, as Amos was not a student of classical rhetoric, his rhetoric will contain differences to the classical system. Gitay examines the prophet's rhetoric in its own light, yet applies classical tools and frameworks. See Yehoshua Gitay, "A Study of Amos's Art of Speech: A Rhetorical Analysis of Amos 3:1-15," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1980), 294, 294n3. As Gitay discusses the

research presented in this paper is to determine if Amos' rhetorical questions and strategy remain the same if read in light of Hebrew prophetic rhetoric within the broader ancient Near East as compared to Classical rhetoric from the Hellenistic and modern eras. This study will focus on identifying rhetorical structures within the book of Amos, performing a thorough exegesis of Amos' rhetorical questions, and evaluating the rhetorical questions from Classical and Hebrew understandings. One can then provide a clearer understanding of how rhetorical questions function within Amos' rhetorical strategy.

### **Methodology**

A sound methodology is crucial for comparative studies that cover multiple disciplines. The foundational content for this research is drawn from primary sources, translations of primary sources, and transliterations of primary sources. The biblical text from Amos was analyzed in its Masoretic form and translated by the author. Translations of other ancient sources were then used to build a pool of comparable literatures for analysis. These translations included texts from Sumerian, Ugaritic, and Classical-Hellenistic cultures. Sumerian, although not a Semitic language, is significant for this study as Sumerian epigraphy demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of rhetoric at an early time that greatly affected the development of other written languages in Mesopotamia and the Levant<sup>3</sup>. Epigraphy from Ugarit is also significant due to its close

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rhetorical situation of Amos 3:1-15 and argues that the rhetorical questions in 3:3-8 are key verses for the task, he limits their description to "a useful device for influencing people." See Gitay, 296. Witherington adds "Though some very helpful insights have come from such studies, unfortunately the problem of anachronism sometimes mitigates their value, and there are also epistemological problems." See Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 58.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to emphasize that the Sumerian epigraphy is not Semitic. Akkadian, a language that adopted the Sumerian script, was used by Semitic people. Akkadian bears a closer connection to Hebrew language and literature than Sumerian, but Sumerian is significant as it served as the catalyst for

proximity to Hebrew—geographically, linguistically, and culturally. Specific to the book of Amos, cultural and religious similarities from Ugarit further influence the content of Amos' rhetoric as he spoke out against Baal worship and syncretism. Together, Sumerian and Ugaritic literature help contextualize the form and content of Amos' rhetoric. In one scenario, transliterations of an Ugaritic text are used to further solidify possible polemic connections between one of Amos' questions.

Classical literature from the Hellenistic era is also significant even though it originates from a different culture at a later date. Although Classical literature had no influence on ancient Near Eastern rhetoric, it helped form modern understandings of rhetoric that are frequently used to analyze ancient Near Eastern rhetoric. Classical understandings were analyzed and then compared with the rhetoric of the ancient Near East.

Commentaries were used throughout the exegesis of Amos to ensure the presented interpretation of each question corresponds with the general consensus of biblical scholars. The commentaries assisted in constructing a general understanding of each question without needing to evaluate the specific function of Amos' rhetorical questions. Additional secondary sources such as books and journal articles were consulted for further clarification on textual-critical issues, and how certain questions operate within their assigned literary structures.

Specialized books and dictionaries were consulted throughout the research process to establish an understanding of how rhetorical questions functioned within

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writing in the ancient Near East as a whole. See Ellis R. Brotzman and Eric J. Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 7-10.

Classical rhetoric and how they are understood by modern scholars. If a comparison between Hebrew and Classical rhetoric is to be presented, then both approaches must be accurately understood and applied. Dictionaries helped define rhetorical questions within Classical and modern understandings, while specialized books provide information on their use and development within literature.

The process of data collection and analysis required close examination of sources from different disciplines. Although some overlap exists between the disciplines, identical terminology is used at times to communicate different understandings. Thus, data collection needed to be structured according to each discipline, while terms needed to be clearly defined for each context. Clarifying each discipline's terminology allowed for an organized assessment of what each source was attempting to communicate about rhetorical questions.

The methodological process for this research began with extensive exegesis of Amos' rhetorical questions in the original Hebrew language. This step included translating the Masoretic text (MT) and consulting with commentaries, books, and journal articles to properly understand the text. Emphasis was placed on how the questions related to its literary structure and theological agenda. The second step in the process focused on gathering data from ancient Near Eastern texts and secondary resources to compare to Amos' broader historical-cultural and literary contexts and his implementation of questions. This portion of the research also included an analysis of Hebrew prophetic rhetoric, further developing the exegetical work accomplished in the first step. The third step consisted of gathering texts and sources within Classical rhetoric. This process approached two stages in the development of Classical rhetoric: Classical

rhetoric as established in its original context and how it functions in modern understandings of rhetoric.

The collected data was structured according to discipline and perspective. The data was then compared and contrasted between disciplines and perspectives in order to expose any similarities or differences. Any similarities between two disciplines required explanation in order to understand if influence existed between the two. Although this process exposed a large amount of similarities between each discipline's understanding of rhetorical questions, special attention was given to differences and their effect on interpreting Amos' questions and rhetorical strategy. The results were then analyzed to determine if Amos' rhetorical strategy for using questions within Hebrew rhetoric of the ancient Near East differs enough from Classical rhetoric from the Hellenistic and modern eras to require a more appropriate definition.

This methodology presented in this study displays the wide array of understandings of rhetorical questions in modern and Classical scholarship, the lack of explanation for rhetorical questions in biblical scholarship, and the need for a clearer understanding that aligns with the Hebrew text and its context. The exegesis of individual questions established the parameters of what the text was allowed to communicate. The historical, cultural, and literary context of the prophet served as the foundation to which understandings of rhetorical questions were compared. If an approach to understanding rhetorical questions betrayed the context of the prophet or operated outside the parameters of the text, it was filtered out as an unlikely explanation of the questions. This methodological process was beneficial for exploring a wide range of approaches to

understanding Amos' rhetorical questions, yet allowed one to filter out improbable approaches on the basis of not having a connection to the text or context of Amos.

## Chapter 1: Background Information

### Amos the Prophet: His Audience and Background

Amos ministered to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the eighth century BC. Amos records that his prophetic ministry endured through the reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah (Amos 1:1).<sup>4</sup> An additional historical marker given by the prophet is the earthquake that occurred within two years of what he saw regarding Israel (Amos 1:1; cf. Zech. 14:5). The most likely date range for this earthquake is between 760-750 BC.<sup>5</sup> Although the prophet ministered to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, he was from Tokoa of Judah (Amos 1:1). This range for Amos' ministry occurred only a few decades away from their Assyrian defeat in 722 BC.

The nation of Israel experienced peace and prosperity unknown to them since the United Kingdom of David and Solomon. Jens Kofoed notes that this peace and prosperity “led to extravagance, moral decay, and idolatry ‘financed’ by corruption, social injustice, and oppression of the poor.”<sup>6</sup> Such actions led Amos to bravely describe some members

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<sup>4</sup> Joshua Moon highlights the significance of Amos' introduction regarding historical matters: What we find, in other words, is that all the collections of prophets from the eighth-century prophets :Isaiah, Hosea, Amos and Micah) are introduced in the same basic form with minor variations. That changes significantly with superscriptions for the later prophets. See Joshua N. Moon, *Hosea*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary*, vol. 21 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 13. Many scholars hold to the idea that the double synchronistic reference to the kings of both kingdoms is a Deuteronomistic superscription added at a later date. See Ryan N. Roberts, “Eighth-Century Levantine Earthquakes and Natural Disasters,” *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 307. Roberts is referencing Werner H. Schmidt, “Die Deuteronomistische Redaktion des Amosbuchs: Zu den theologischen Unterschieden zwischen dem Prophetenwort und seinem Sammler,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 36, no. 2 (Winter, 1965): 168-193.

<sup>5</sup> Roberts provides the possibility that this is not merely a historical marker, but also a claim that Amos predicted the earthquake (Amos 2:13; 3:14-15; 6:11; 9:11). See Roberts, “Eighth-Century Levantine Earthquakes and Natural Disasters,” 307.

<sup>6</sup> Jens Bruun Kofoed, “The Divided Monarchy,” *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 221.

of his audience as “cows of Bashan” (Amos 4:1).<sup>7</sup> Assyria posed no threat since the withdrawal of Adad-nirari II in 796 BC. It was not until Tiglath-pileser III came to power that Assyria once again became a threat to Israel.<sup>8</sup> Jeroboam II’s exploits were made possible only by Assyria’s inability to prevent it. Jeroboam II also conquered Damascus to the North after the death of Ben-Hadad II (2 Kings 14:28).<sup>9</sup> This means that Israel’s domination, not just wealth, was only surpassed by that of the United Kingdom of David and Solomon. Although this period of prosperity should have resulted in a return to covenant obedience, the people continued in their wickedness without immediate consequence.

The lack of immediate consequence made the prophetic goal of repentance more difficult to achieve. Amos the prophet receives a considerable amount of attention due to his claim that he is not a prophet by trade, nor the son of a prophet, but rather a herdsman (Amos 1:1; 7:14-15). Prior to his prophetic ministry, Amos divided his time between shepherding in the lower regions during the warm season, and dressed the sycamore trees—possibly for the purpose of gaining grazing rights to the land.<sup>10</sup> However, many scholars hold to the idea that Amos was more of a sheep breeder with connections to the

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<sup>7</sup> Brian Irwin argues that this passage, rather than being an insult directed against the wealthy men and women of the Northern Kingdom, was confronting the elite women of the Samaria and their anti-patriarchal social structures against the patriarchal social system that was maintaining social stability and justice. See Brian Irwin, “Amos 4:1 and the Cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria: A Reappraisal,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 231-246.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 382-383.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>10</sup> Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 423.

temple, rather than being a simple shepherd.<sup>11</sup> This implies that Amos was likely part of the “well-to-do class” of Judah, much like those he preached against in Israel.<sup>12</sup>

### **Rhetorical Questions: An Overview**

Traditionally, one approaches the study of rhetorical questions through the lens of Classical rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 BC- 400 AD). As a result, many readers of the Old Testament understand a rhetorical question as “Basically a question not expecting an answer, or one to which the answer is more or less self-evident” that is used in public speaking when “trying to work up the emotional temperature” of the audience.<sup>13</sup> This broad definition can be nuanced to fit a specific context but ultimately captures the consensus regarding rhetorical questions.

It is important to note that due to the breadth of this definition, extensive overlap can exist between this definition of rhetorical questions and one derived from Hebrew prophetic rhetoric. However, similarities do not imply that they have the same function, and the differences between the two are significant for understanding their functions. Leland Ryken provides perhaps the best clarification for modern readers that assists in closing the distance between such a broad understanding of rhetorical questions and that which is seen in Amos. Ryken articulates the function of rhetorical questions by stating that “If we thus move someone to agree with us, we have persuaded that person to reach a

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<sup>11</sup> J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 287-288.

<sup>12</sup> Mark F. Rooker, “The Book of Amos,” *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 431.

<sup>13</sup> J. A. Cuddon, ed., “rhetorical question,” *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., rev. M. A. R. Habib (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 606.

conclusion or confirm a held position... If the author can get us to agree with him in regard to the question he has asked, we are inclined to agree with what the author expresses elsewhere.”<sup>14</sup> This description of rhetorical questions stems from a study in rhetoric within wisdom literature of the Hebrew sages. It provides clarification for how a broad understanding of rhetorical questions can begin to be contextualized within a more specific function within a particular literature or rhetoric. Although Ryken’s description of rhetorical questions moves the reader closer to a more nuanced understanding of rhetorical questions within Hebrew literature, it still remains broad in its function and application in Amos.

Evaluating the legitimacy of this description requires one to first understand the distance between modern or Classical rhetoric and that of Amos. The Hebrew prophets predate the Classical rhetoricians by several centuries.<sup>15</sup> The Hebrew sages and prophets inherited a rich tradition of rhetoric that “developed from an ancient preclassical history [*sic*]” and traces its roots back to Sumer and Ugarit.<sup>16</sup> Although many of the Classical

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<sup>14</sup> Leland Ryken, *Short Sentences Long Remembered: A Guided Study of Proverbs and Other Wisdom Literature*, Reading the Bible as Literature (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 109.

<sup>15</sup> Amos ministered in the eighth century BC. The dates for the Classical rhetors are as follow: Plato (429-347 BC), Aristotle (384-322 BC), Cicero (81-43 BC), Longinus (First Century AD), Quintilian (wrote 88-94 AD). See Penelope Murray “Literary Chronology,” *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 1x-1xiv.

<sup>16</sup> Jack R. Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 166. Lundbom adds other examples of rhetorical questions in the Hebrew Bible: 1 Samuel 15:22, Isaiah 10:15, Jeremiah 2:11, 32; 18:14-15. Other key example include: Micah 2:7; 3:1; 6:6-7; Nahum 1:6; 2:11; 3:8; Malachi forms much of his message around questions in 1:8-9; 2:10, 15; 3:2. An example of an Ugaritic rhetorical question that fit the Hebrew rhetorical paradigm in Amos are ‘Anatu’s response to ‘Ilu, “Will I not seize them in my right hand, squeeze [them] in my broad grasp?” in Dennis Pardee, trans., “The BA‘LU MYTH (1.86) (CTA 3 v 19-25),” *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, vol. 1, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Leiden, Netherlands: BRILL, 2003), 254. This fits well as it is not seeking information, but is intensifying ‘Anatu’s threat in a similar form as the threat of judgment in Amos. Earlier, ‘Anatu uses an identical rhetorical questions to frame here response to Ba ‘lu’s messenger(s) “So, what enemy has arisen against Ba ‘lu, (what) adversary against Cloud-Rider?” Between the two questions are a list of ‘Anatu’s victories, but the rhetorical questions provide greater emphasis as the audience should be able to respond with “none!” Ibid., (CTA 3 iii 32 - iv

terms align closely with what is seen in Hebrew rhetoric, significant differences exist in the details that require attention.<sup>17</sup> Admittedly, even if the Greeks and Romans formed a more sophisticated understanding of rhetoric over the centuries, the concept of rhetoric began much earlier—as attested by the Hebrew prophets and other ancient Near Eastern literatures.<sup>18</sup> The overlap in style and function between Hebrew and Classical rhetoric mistakenly results in the application of Classical understandings onto Hebrew rhetoric.

Although overlap exists, one must evaluate if the correlation between the two traditions allows for the application of identical terminology and understanding. This requires that one approach the Hebrew prophetic text in its own context before attaching Classical terminology. Aaron Chalmers specifies, “When considering the rhetorical world of the prophet, therefore, we are enquiring as to how the prophets effectively used language to persuade and influence *their* audience, and how they shaped their material to

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51), 252. The predating of Ugaritic rhetorical questions with unique functions similar to that of Hebrew rhetoric reveals a rich tradition of rhetorical questions long before the Classical era. Rhetorical questions also abound in Sumerian disputation texts. “The Disputation between Ewe and Wheat” includes several rhetorical questions throughout that help intensify points throughout the conversation, especially “You, just as I, are meant to be eaten. Therefore, looking at what you really are, Why should I come second? The Miller, is he not evil to you?” H. L. J. Vanstiphout, trans., “The Disputation between the Ewe and the Wheat (1.180),” *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, vol. 1, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Leiden, Netherlands: BRILL, 2003), (163-166), 577.

<sup>17</sup> Lundbom notes that the Hebrew prophets display “an array of figures of speech performing the same or similar function as in classical rhetoric, as well as modes of argumentation known and classified by later Greek and Roman authors.” See Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets*, 166.

<sup>18</sup> Kennedy notes that “If we wish to provide a name for ‘rhetoric before rhetoric’ probably the best choice is, ‘persuasion’.” See George A. Kennedy, “Historical Survey of Rhetoric,” *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 BC – AD 400)*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (New York, NY: Brill, 1997), 7. Although persuasion may better capture Amos’ intentions, this article will continue to use rhetoric as it still fits into the broader concept of rhetorical studies. One must also note the dangers of viewing all rhetoric through the lens of Classical rhetoric. Doing so suggest Aristotle’s system “represents those preceding it,” that other cultures followed the same approaches as Aristotle, or that earlier rhetoric is only primitive approach that are not worth studying. See Carol Lipson and Roberta A. Binkley, “Introduction,” *Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks*, ed. Carol Lipson and Roberta A. Binkley (Albany, NY: State of New York Press, 2004), 2-3.

communicate *their* message in a compelling fashion.”<sup>19</sup> On the broader level, one must first examine the rhetorical structures of the prophetic unit, paying close attention to the prophet’s use of forms and language. More specifically, one must then examine how rhetorical features function within the text.<sup>20</sup> This process allows for the rhetorical questions to be evaluated in their original context.

### **Primary Rhetorical Structures in Amos**

Although the book of Amos displays a variety of rhetorical structures, there are two structures that are significant to this study: disputation speech and entrapment language. Disputation speech “involves a hypothetical dialogue cast in literary form. For the prophets, the strategic function of disputation was to use the people’s own words against them in demonstration of their guilt.”<sup>21</sup> Disputation speech frequently resembles wisdom literature as the prophet seeks to overturn the values, common thought, or worldviews of the audience.<sup>22</sup> In the context of Amos, the prophet must engage in dialogue with those who have a perverse understanding of true worship and social justice according the Mosaic Law. Syncretism was rampant in the Northern Kingdom of Israel,

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<sup>19</sup> Aaron Chalmers, *Interpreting the Prophets: Reading, Understanding, and Preaching From the Worlds of the Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 93. Emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> However, Crenshaw does not see a valid connection between Amos’ use of rhetorical questions in Amos 3:3-6 and the wisdom tradition in Israel. For him, rhetorical questions are “too commonly used in the Old Testament to ascribe much weight to them.” Furthermore, only three analogies or questions are taken from nature, while two are from warfare. Crenshaw understands that Amos is still influenced by the wisdom tradition. See J. L. Crenshaw, “The Influence of the Wise upon Amos,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 79, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 46-47, 49-51.

which greatly affected the social actions of the people.<sup>23</sup> Rather than a straightforward announcement of judgment oracles within Amos, one sees the prophet confront the audience's values and understanding, replacing them with true wisdom and righteousness based on an accurate understanding of their covenant with YHWH. As the disputation speech unfolds, rhetorical questions are deployed in a variety of ways that ultimately help the prophet overturn common thought (Amos 5:25).

Entrapment language is a second significant structure that functions alongside disputation speech. As Amos confronts misconceptions and sin, his rhetoric of entrapment is used to draw in the audience. Perhaps the greatest example of entrapment language is seen in the prophet's oracles to the nations (Amos 1:3-2:16). The prophet begins by pronouncing judgment upon seven of Israel's neighbors for their sins. In a shocking reversal, Amos then turns to Israel for her judgment and magnifies the people's sins more than those of the other nations. In the process, "Amos masterfully drew Israel into thinking that God was pronouncing judgment upon their enemies for their own benefit, only to turn the tables on them and pronounce his most damning judgments in an unexpected eighth oracle against his own people, Israel."<sup>24</sup> Entrapment language seeks to draw in the audience for the purpose of abruptly reversing the prophetic message onto the audience. This structure frequently uses rhetorical questions embedded in poetic parallelism that intensifies over several lines before abruptly shifting the focus to the crowd (Amos 3:4-6, 8).

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<sup>23</sup> Matthews defines syncretism as "the practice of borrowing or adopting cultural ideas and traits from neighboring peoples." This idolatrous concept is seen in Israel's tendency to combine Yahweh worship with Baal worship and the fertility cult. Victory H. Matthews, *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 219.

<sup>24</sup> Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 114.

Disputation speech and entrapment language are both strengthened by Amos' use of rhetorical questions. Consequently, the two structures can help determine the purpose for the prophet's questions.<sup>25</sup> Determining purpose through structure is particularly valuable for revealing how the prophet uses questions as part of his disputation speech to disqualify common thought. In the context of disputation speech, the value of a rhetorical question is seen as he uses his audience's own views against them. In the context of entrapment language, the value of a rhetorical question is seen as he draws in his audience and abruptly reverses the situation. These prophetic structures are certainly not exclusive to the book of Amos, but their occurrence with rhetorical questions in Amos is unique. It should be noted that both structures work together and are not mutually exclusive.

The rhetorical questions amplify the prophetic message while strategically preparing the audience for its reception. In this sense, rhetorical questions resemble two broad functions familiar to the Classical approach: (1) as a set of questions that utilizes carefully formed uses of rhetoric, and (2) as questions that are so obvious or absurd that they need no formal response.<sup>26</sup> Others have continued to specify rhetorical questions in

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<sup>25</sup> Moshavi adds an additional Adina Mosak Moshavi, "Two Types of Argumentation Involving Rhetorical Questions in Biblical Hebrew," *Biblica* 90, no. 1 (2009): 36-37. Moshavi is utilizing an article by Douglas Walton, "New Dialectic: A Method of Evaluating an Argument Used for Some Purpose in a Given Case," *ProtoSociology* 13 (1999): 70-91. It should be noted that the structures also work alongside the context and form of each question in order to specify the question's purpose.

<sup>26</sup> It is possible to add that "Rhetorical questions presuppose a listener who will answer, as do indictments and denunciations." See "Rhetorical Patterns," *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 727. This addition is appreciated in more specific scenarios when entrapment language is being used. Amos' questions leading up to the nation's judgment partially resemble the traditional understanding of rhetorical questions in which the addressee will not answer due to the question being self-evident or self-condemnatory (Amos 3:3-8). However, Amos' question of sacrifice in the wilderness (5:25) plays a different role in the prophet's rhetorical strategy than his earlier set of questions leading to the nation's judgment (3:3-8). The question pertaining to the wilderness sacrifices does not have as obvious of an answer and causes the audience to think through the prophet's words, ultimately strengthening his message.

contrast to genuine questions in that they are not a request for information. Instead, a rhetorical question is an “implicit assertion” that is made obvious in the question.<sup>27</sup> In some situations, the speaker and his audience both accept the assertion, while other situations imply that the speaker is attempting to convince the audience of a new assertion.<sup>28</sup> This more specified definition still operates on an understanding of rhetorical questions that remains too broad and does not fully appreciate the prophetic context or rhetoric displayed in Amos.

One should also keep in mind the prophet’s keen sense of sarcasm through the book (Amos 4:1). Although not a unique rhetorical structure such as disputation speech or entrapment language, his sarcasm may be a driving force behind some of his questions—especially those with a seemingly obvious answer (3:3-6) or preposterous propositions (6:12). The connection between rhetorical questions and sarcasm is not unique to Amos, and is often seen alongside mockery. However, its appearance with questions continues to broaden the definition of rhetorical questions as they can be understood as an example of flouting one of the maxims of human interaction, such as sincerity or quality.<sup>29</sup>

The content of each question is also significant for understanding the intention of the questions. Careful exegesis reveals the assertions or implicatures that rest behind each

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<sup>27</sup> Moshavi, “Rhetorical Questions in Biblical Hebrew,” 32-33. See also, Adina Moshavi, “Between Dialectic and Rhetoric: Rhetorical Questions Expressing Premises in Biblical Prose Argumentation,” *Vetus Testamentum* 65, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 110. See also, Robert Koops, “Rhetorical Questions and Implied Meaning in the Book of Job,” *The Bible Translator* 39, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 416.

question.<sup>30</sup> The prophet clearly establishes the poor spiritual condition of the nation and identifies the implications of their spiritual condition in the social context. As a result, questions pertaining to the natural world may have a more obvious answer than those pertaining to spiritual or religious matters. As one exegetes the text in its rhetorical situation, a more specific definition for rhetorical questions becomes necessary.<sup>31</sup>

### The Interrogative Particles of Amos' Questions

The majority of Amos' questions begin with the interrogative particle הַ (he): 2:11; 3:3, 4, 5; 5:20, 25; 6:2, 12; 8:8; 9:7). The interrogative *he* indicates that a question is being asked by attaching itself to the first word of the interrogative clause. The clause it is attached to then functions as a yes or no question.<sup>32</sup> This particular interrogative is left untranslated and has no English equivalent.<sup>33</sup> The interrogative particle *he* is thus more of an indicator or sign of a question than a translatable word or formal concept.<sup>34</sup> However, the reader can expect the answer to be a simple yes or no. For the purpose of translation, Kutz and Josberger suggest first translating the interrogative *he* clause as an

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<sup>30</sup> Implicatures in biblical literature can be “links and connections within a text which are not stated plainly in words.” See Koops, “Rhetorical Questions and Implied Meaning in the Book of Job,” 416. Implicatures are significant for rhetorical questions as the rhetorical questions lead the audience to certain conclusions without explicitly stating them.

<sup>31</sup> “Rhetorical situation” in the context in which Amos created his rhetorical discourse. See Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), xxiii. As a branch of rhetorical criticism, studying Amos' use of rhetorical questions requires one to evaluate how they are used in Amos' rhetorical structures and how they function in his prophetic discourse. *Ibid.*, xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>32</sup> Karl V. Kutz and Rebekah L. Josberger, *Learning Biblical Hebrew: Reading for Comprehension—An Introductory Grammar* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 115. Waltke and O'Conner prefer to identify these as “polar questions” due the fact that it is an equivalent to the English yes or no question, where the “entire proposition is questioned rather than just one feature of it.” See

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> This is opposed to הַמָּה (‘‘What?’’ or ‘‘How?’’) or הַמִּי (‘‘Who?’’).

assertion, then reframing the assertion as a yes or no question.<sup>35</sup> This understanding of the interrogative *he* in a clause further supports the idea that behind rhetorical questions of Amos are strong assertions presented in a way that requires audience involvement. The question in Amos 3:6 breaks from this pattern and is marked by ׀א. However, Shalom Paul correctly asserts that this is “the standard correlative and complement of the interrogative particle ׀” and is not a more intensive form.<sup>36</sup>

Amos 3:8 includes two questions that use the interrogative pronoun ׀ך. This shift is not only a break in form but a break in the style of answer it requires. The polar yes or no questions of 3:3-6 are identified by the idea that “the entire proposition is questioned rather than just one feature of it.”<sup>37</sup> The use of the interrogative pronoun seeks to question a single aspect of the proposition or clause: who? Waltke and O’Connor note that other rhetorical questions containing ׀ך must be recognized by context rather than form.<sup>38</sup> Although 3:8 does not necessarily fit into the yes or no format traditionally identified with rhetorical questions, its context supports this conclusion. Amos 3:3-6 is a string of rhetorical questions, along with the prose of 3:7, that prepares the audience for the questions of Amos 3:8. Read as a unit, these two questions are not seeking a specific answer, but rather imply that all the people should be fearing and that someone will be prophesying. Context provides no reason for suggesting a specific answer to either

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<sup>35</sup> Kutz and Josberger, *Learning Biblical Hebrew*, 118.

<sup>36</sup> Shalom M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 106. Paul continues to note that this pattern is unique in the Hebrew Bible and attributes this to the prophets innovative literary creativity. See *Ibid.*, 106-107.

<sup>37</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 684 (40.3 a, b).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 321 (18.2f).

question, revealing that the questions likely function as intense assertions rather than fact-seeking or genuine questions.

## Chapter 2: Exegesis and Theological Implications of Amos' Rhetorical Questions

### Exegesis of Amos

After establishing Amos' context and rhetorical structures, one can exegete the MT with a clearer understanding of how it functioned within its ancient environment. The results of this process allow for one determine how the book of Amos uses rhetorical questions within its written argument. Translations from the MT are provided in a way that honors the word choice and order of the prophetic author. The exegesis and interpretations presented in this paper primarily implement methods from rhetorical, historical, and textual criticisms, while paying special attention to the prophet's rhetorical strategy.<sup>39</sup> As one exegetes the text, remembering its rhetorical situation helps illuminate its content, assertions, and implicatures.<sup>40</sup>

A surface reading of Amos' rhetorical questions reveals that they have a broad range of function, meaning his questions do not fit uniformly into the terminology typically associated with rhetorical questions. After the exegesis of each question, the question is evaluated to determine its role in Amos' argument, message, and rhetoric. Amos' questions reveal functions that are familiar to modern readers, yet some that remain foreign. If this is the case, a more specific definition may be necessary to

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<sup>39</sup> Walton introduces a significant point in justifying the need for the exegesis and analysis of each rhetorical question in Amos in that an a good interpretive methodology "provides *an* interpretive key to texts, but not *the* interpretive key." This approach of rhetorical criticism should be coupled with information from other approaches to the text to uncover clearer results. Steve Walton, "Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction," *Themelios* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 6. This approach also prevents the interpretive process from being one-dimensional by allowing other aspects, such as historical or cultural factors, to speak with greater volume or play a more prominent role when appropriate.

<sup>40</sup> "Rhetorical situation" in the context in which Amos created his rhetorical discourse. See Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), xxiii. As a branch of rhetorical criticism, studying Amos' use of rhetorical questions requires one to evaluate how they are used in Amos' rhetorical structures and how they function in his prophetic discourse. *Ibid.*, xxiii-xxiv.

understand and identify their role in the book. To define a rhetorical question as a question that is simply part of the prophet's rhetoric or one that requires no response, does not fully articulate what exegesis reveals. This process reveals that the rhetorical questions function as key vehicles in the delivery of his message.

#### Amos 2:11-12

Amos 2:11-12 forms a concentric structure in which the Lord raised up prophets and Nazirites, yet the people defiled the Nazirites and silenced the prophets:

(A-v.11) I raised up some of your sons as prophets (נְבִיאִים) and some of your young men as Nazirites (נְזִירִים).

(B) Is this not so, O sons of Israel? This is the LORD's declaration.

(A-v.12) Yet you made the Nazirites (נְזִירִים) drink wine and ordered the prophets (נְבִיאִים), "Do not prophesy."<sup>41</sup>

The question in Amos 2:11 is followed by Lord's affirmation in verse 12, which transitions to the nation's judgment (2:13-16). The question is self-condemning and the crowd likely did not want to provide a verbal response. However, the question, "Is this not so, O sons of Israel?", still requires the audience to internally validate the accusation of rejecting the Lord's blessings.<sup>42</sup> Although the question contains an obvious logic, it still requires thought and involvement from Amos' audience. The answer to this question

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<sup>41</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are translated by the author. This unit is identified as concentric rather than a simple chiasm. Meynet identifies the simple *a b a* structure as concentric. One reason for reason for this distinction is because chiasms lack a single center element. See Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, vol. 265 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 376.

<sup>42</sup> It can often be true of rhetorical questions that they require no response. These types of questions are designed to make the audience think through and reflect upon a specific point. Denning-Bolle finds an example of this when Utnapishtim converses with Gilgamesh through rhetorical questions that are not meant to be answered, but are used as dramatic illustrations of the "impermanence of things in this life for which no immediate solution can be found" and are based on Utnapishtim's reflections. See Sara J. Denning-Bolle, "Wisdom and Dialogue in the Ancient near East," *Numen* 34, no. 2 (Winter 1987): 228. This further connects Amos' questions with the Wisdom tradition of Israel and its ancient Near Eastern background.

is positive: the Lord blessed Israel with the prophets and Nazirites, yet Israel rejected them (cf. 7:12-13). By rejecting the prophet of God, the people are ultimately rejecting God's divine message to His people.<sup>43</sup>

The Lord blessed Israel with individuals set apart to be holy (Nazirites) and others to be His mouthpiece (prophets). The pairing of the Nazirites with the prophets suggests that both groups are “examples of failure on the part of Israel to deal with those whom God had chosen and sent to serve his people.”<sup>44</sup> In an effort to demonstrate Israel's lack of appreciation toward God's grace toward them, the Lord provides an example of His grace by leading Israel out of Egypt and defeating the Amorites (2:9-10). He follows this statement by showing that He also set apart some Israelites as prophets and Nazirites (2:11-12). Israel consistently rejected the two groups and their ministries. The question strategically connects Israel's sins (2:6-10) with the two groups that the Lord gave to them for their own benefit, especially the intercessory role of the prophet (7:2, 5; cf. Num. 14:13-19).

This question is embedded in the judgment oracles spanning from Amos 1:3-2:16. In this section, the prophet ensnares the audience by pronouncing the sins and judgment of seven other nations—including Judah—before announcing a surprising eighth oracle against Israel. Amos structured the judgment oracles with entrapment language in order

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<sup>43</sup> This is famously demonstrated in 2 Kings 2:23-25 when the boys told Elisha to “Go up!” (הלך) in the same manner as when Elijah “went up” (הלך). The boys' words reflect that the people were unwilling to accept God's word through the prophets. House interprets this connection as “Go away like Elijah,” possibly spoken in a spirit of disbelief. See Paul R. House, *1,2 Kings*, The New American Commentary, vol. 8 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 260.

<sup>44</sup> Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1989), 331.

to draw his audience into thinking they were excluded from judgment.<sup>45</sup> After the prophet entrapped his audience, 2:11 states an agreeable claim from the common thought of Torah and seeks validation from the audience. Although in a section of entrapment language, the question implies that the prophet is trying to persuade the crowd of their disobedience and its consequences. The rhetorical function of this question in light of its place in 1:3-2:16 has two purposes: to single out Amos' audience and to prepare them for judgment. In short, "The audience is forced to grasp the incongruity of the nation's story and concur in the decision of YHWH to judge it."<sup>46</sup>

#### Amos 3:3-8

Amos 3:3-8 contains the longest string of rhetorical questions in the book and the questions progress in intensity:

- (3) Can two walk together unless they have met together?
- (4) Does a lion roar in the forest if it has no prey?  
Does a young lion growl from its den unless it catches something?
- (5) Does a bird fall on the trapping net on the ground if there is no snare for it?  
Does a trapping net come up from the ground unless it has certainly caught something?
- (6) Does a horn blow in a city and the people not fear?  
Does disaster happen to a city but YHWH not do it?
- (7) For YHWH God does nothing unless He has revealed his secret to His servants, the prophets.
- (8) The lion has roared--who will not fear?  
YHWH God has spoken--who will not prophesy?

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<sup>45</sup> Some identify Amos' speech here to be in the genre of "cumulative forensic narration" in which "The gracious actions of YHWH are set in contrast to the apostasy and injustice of the people, with the incongruity spelling judgment. This type of narration serves to connect the accusations logically and dramatically to the sentence." See Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, Bible and Literature Series, 26 (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1990), 76.

<sup>46</sup> Patrick and Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, 76.

This passage is a clear example of disputation speech. Typical to wisdom disputation, the prophet generally navigates from the natural world that all listeners can comprehend, to more spiritual matters (3:4, 5). However, the content of his questions reveals that Amos is implementing basic truths from additional sources other than nature to establish common, agreeable thought. Based on the content, the prophet includes social patterns such as traveling or disaster as common knowledge (3:3, 6), but also expects Torah to serve as common thought (3:6, 7). The outcome of Amos' questions expresses "God is the One responsible for calamity, and indeed, the signs are already in place (3:6b; 4:6-11)."<sup>47</sup> A second implication of the questions is that God announces His intentions through the prophets. This second implication provides further validation of Amos' prophetic ministry, with special emphasis on his message.

Möller identifies four sections within the structure of Amos 3:3-8 (3-5, 6, 7, 8).<sup>48</sup> The first section is "*introductory and preparatory*."<sup>49</sup> Verse 3 opens with the simplest question for Amos' audience, in which he proposes a scenario where two individuals who travel together also planned to meet with one another.<sup>50</sup> The basic question introduces the

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<sup>47</sup> Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 123.

<sup>48</sup> Möller, *A Prophet in Debate*, 228. Möller's outline and analysis will be used in this pericope as he approaches the text through a rhetorical lens.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Italics are original.

<sup>50</sup> The verb "agree" is left out of the author's translation because it is not present in the MT or the verbal form, and can be misleading when translated into English. However, the concept of agreement or partnership is present between the two parties of 3:3. Garrett provides a more specified understanding of the term to avoid the idea that two parties synchronized their "appointment books." He suggests that the term implies "a metaphorical coming together by design," or "they have come to terms with one another and can consider themselves to be in a partnership." He then argues that the question may have further implications in that "to meet" (קָוַה niph'al) is the same root as the meeting (קָוַה) agreement in Exodus 25:22. The underlying message is that "fundamental differences now exist between YHWH and Israel, such that he can no longer journey with them and must turn against them." See Duane A. Garrett, *Amos: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 83.

audience to the format for the following paired questions in the pericope.<sup>51</sup> The questions can be structured as conditional statements or assertions that reflect simple logic: If X occurs, then Y happened prior to X. Significantly, the perfect verb in the second half of the sentence (“then Y happened prior to X”) functions as a past perfect, suggesting that it occurred prior to the first event.<sup>52</sup> The anterior can also be true of each statement: Two persons made (perfect) an appointment, so they walk (imperfect) together.<sup>53</sup> This observation of form supports viewing the role of the opening question as preparatory for the last, in which YHWH is revealed to be the ultimate cause behind disaster. Amos structures the sentence in such a way for the purpose of showing the “interrelationship of cause and effect.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, the opening question begins to move the audience toward realizing the cause of their disaster through a series of simple questions that requires little effort to follow. The questions of 3:4-5 move the dialogue into the realm of the natural world to establish common thought with questions from animal struggle (3:4) and

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<sup>51</sup> Garrett notes that this is a basic rhetorical question is a proverb and is not in poetic form like those found in 3:4-6. *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>52</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 87. It is important to note that although Chisholm’s terminology is being used in this section, these passages are not used as an example in his text. Thus, this thesis’ use of his terminology does not necessarily imply that Chisholm is in agreement.

<sup>53</sup> Andersen and Freedman note that the fifth and sixth questions do not follow the same Y (effect)→X (cause) pattern in which the imperfect verb (effect) is given before the perfect verb (cause). Instead, the two questions only contain imperfect verbs, implying “the causal connection or temporal sequence is less clear... we cannot decide whether the trumpet is blown in the city because the people are alarmed, or vice versa, though it is more likely the latter than the former.” Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 389.

<sup>54</sup> Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, The New American Commentary, vol. 19B (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 72.

conflict between animals and humans (3:5).<sup>55</sup> However, these questions maintain the same verbal and logical structure as 3:3.

Möller identifies Amos 3:6 as a “*thematic development*” signaled by “structural alterations.”<sup>56</sup> Here, the message intensifies and grows in scale. Rather than a simple meeting between two individuals, it is now a trumpet being blown in the city with fearful people. The question introduces the audience to the reality of disaster brought about by military invasion (cf. Deut. 28:25). The use of the imperfect verb helps introduce the audience to the imminent reality of their fear.

The second question in Amos 3:6 allows the audience to identify a divine causation behind the impending disaster: the LORD is the One causing the events observed by Israel. When destruction arrives, the LORD is the one behind it—emphasizing the urgency for Israel to “Seek the LORD and live!” (5:6). This realization, coupled with 5:14-15, should motivate Israel to repent and obey God so that the God of Hosts might fight for them rather than against. Although Möller’s structure of Amos’ argument of “*introductory and preparatory*” (3:3-5), “*thematic development*” (3:6) “*explanation*” (3:7), and “*focal point* (3:8)” is beneficial for understanding the development of the prophet’s thought in the 3:3-8 as a whole, the conclusion of 3:6 is

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<sup>55</sup> Wolff notes that the transition from animals to animals and humans embodies the position of the audience in that they become the endangered species. Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), 186.

<sup>56</sup> Karl Möller, *A Prophet in Debate*, 228. Italics are original. Apart from using two imperfect verbs, he structural change is based on a shift from using the article *he* to *im*. The prophet also reverses the order in the first question by placing the cause before the effect. Paul argues that this reversal in the two questions of 3:6 creates an effective chiasmic word order. Additionally, the prophet introduces different subject in the two cola, unlike the previous questions when the prophet maintained the subjects between cola. See Paul, *Amos*, 107.

obtainable due to its positioning within the wisdom epigram of 3:4-6.<sup>57</sup> The epigram contains three strophes (3:4, 5, 6), in which each strophe is an example of a single lesson.<sup>58</sup> 3:6 serves as the climax of this wisdom poem in which divine causation is introduced as what should be common sense in the same way as the conclusions of Amos 3:4, 5.

The seven questions of Amos 3:3-6 are followed by a prose statement in verse 7 that serves as an “*explanation* of God’s purposes.”<sup>59</sup> Just as the simplest of Amos’ questions contained a knowable cause, so too do YHWH’s acts of judgment against Israel. The Lord chooses to speak through His prophets to inform His people of the coming destruction. This statement continues the common thought of 3:3-6 and adds an additional element in that not only does the effect have an obvious divine cause made known from in Torah (Deut. 28:25), but the divine cause is made more plain in that it is announced to the people by the prophets (cf. Deut. 18:18).

The prose in Amos 3:7 resumes the earlier structure where an imperfect verb (הַעֲשֶׂה) structurally precedes a perfect verb (הִלְלֵךְ). Presumably, the anterior is also true of this statement, in which the revealing (perfect) of God’s council through the prophets signals the Lord’s acting (imperfect). Later, Jeremiah 23:18-22 adds a significant understanding to Israelite prophecy in that true prophets of God stand in the “council of YHWH and see and hear His word” (Jer. 23:18). Similar to Jeremiah, Amos must speak

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<sup>57</sup> Möller, *A Prophet in Debate*, 228. Italics are original.

<sup>58</sup> Garrett, *Amos*, 84.

<sup>59</sup> Möller, *A Prophet in Debate*, 228. Italics are original.

the divine message given by YHWH (Jer. 20:9). Amos' assertion prepares his audience for the final question that emphasizes the necessity of God's message to be spoken.

Amos 3:8 introduces the audience to the "*focal point*" of the rhetorical questions in this pericope.<sup>60</sup> The first of these two questions links back to the lion of verse 4, removing the earlier question from the hypothetical realm and making it a historical reality for Israel (cf. Amos 1:2). Israel is now the prey in the lion's mouth. This supports one of the primary purposes of his rhetorical strategy: revealing the divine agent behind their calamity. The final question of this pericope supports a secondary purpose of his rhetorical questions in this pericope by validating Amos' role as a prophet: the servant through whom God is warning Israel of His divine intentions.

Amos 3:3-8 demonstrates that the prophet is disputing with his audience and is capable of reversing their own words to abruptly reveal their condemnation. The prophet's audience must acknowledge Amos' divine message, as well as his authority to speak it. The foundational understanding between the prophet and his audience is revealed in nature, society, and Torah. His argument implements questions that contains key elements of disputation speech and entrapment language. Ultimately, this passage teaches that if YHWH is going to act, then someone must deliver the message. Amos is proclaiming the message, which means YHWH is preparing to act. Just as his audience understood the prey in the lions mouth, they should understand their current position before God.

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<sup>60</sup> Möller, *A Prophet in Debate*, 228. Italics are original.

## Amos 5:18-20

After the prophet firmly establishes Israel's iniquity in the land, the nation receives another woe oracle directed toward them:

(18) Woe to those who desire the day of YHWH. What will the day of YHWH be to you? It will be darkness and not light! (19) It will be like a man who flees from the face of a lion and meets a bear; or he goes to his house and leans his hand on the wall and a snake bites him. (20) Won't the day of YHWH be darkness and not light, pitch black and not bright?

The first question of 5:18 causes the audience to reconsider their viewpoint of the Day of the LORD. They believed it to be a glorious day of deliverance. However, it will be a day of destruction instead. The oracle begins by pronouncing a woe to those who look forward to the Day of the LORD. The prophet follows up by asking "What will the Day of the LORD be to you?" Although modern readers cannot know the audience's exact response, the prophet interjects with the correct answer: It will be darkness and not light! The expected day of deliverance has been reversed for God's disobedient nation as it now awaits judgment. The Day of the LORD should bring to mind their deliverance from Egypt. However, their covenant disloyalty has earned them judgment and plagues much like those inflicted on Egypt (Amos 4:10; cf. 8:8-9). The question draws in the audience and dramatically reverses their expectations. Since Israel is oppressing the poor and enslaved much like Egypt did to their ancestors, they will be judged like Egypt (cf. Dt. 15:15).

Amos 5:20 continues with the language established in verse 18 of darkness and light: "Won't the day of YHWH be darkness and not light, pitch black and not bright, to him?" The coming darkness is inescapable (Amos 5:19; cf. Joel 2:2). Amos interjects the question to correct Israel's misunderstanding. Luther James Mays highlights that Israel

understood the Day of the LORD, but they failed to grasp a proper view of themselves or YHWH.<sup>61</sup> They failed to understand their roles as the objects of God's wrath and not His deliverance.

Paul identifies a small chiasmic inclusio from Amos 5:18-20 that operates on the use of darkness and light.<sup>62</sup> The prophet shocks the audience with a paradigm shift, draws them into reconsideration with question, and applies the proper understanding to the audience with a second question. Amos' dispute is evident in his reversal of common thought: what the audience understood to be positive, he argues that it will be negative. The common thought between the prophet and his audience stems from Torah, which is best demonstrated in its placement in 5:18-27.

#### Amos 5:25-27

The most difficult question is posed by the prophet in 5:25. The prophet inquires on behalf of YHWH: Sacrifices and offerings, are these what you brought to me during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? This question is a part of a lawsuit case against the Israelites and establishes that "Observing the moral commandment is the wish of God rather than sacrifice."<sup>63</sup> Amos continues the exodus imagery to inquire if

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<sup>61</sup> James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> printing, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1974), 105.

<sup>62</sup> Paul, *Amos*, 186. The structure begins in 5:18 with יום יהוה followed by הושיע. The structure ends with הושיע followed by יום יהוה.

<sup>63</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, "Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature," *Vetus Testamentum* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1977): 190. Weinfeld establishes a connection between Amos 5:25 as a rhetorical question against Israel's actions and cultic practices, with those found in Isaiah 1:11-17, Jeremiah 6:20, 7:22, and Micah 6:6-8. He further connects this trend with wisdom literature as seen in Proverbs 15:8. See *Ibid.*, 189-190. As Weinfeld seeks to establish Hebrew prophetic patterns in its ancient Near Eastern context, he identifies an identical pattern in Egyptian literature, particularly the "Instruction to King Merikare" and an admonition of Ipuwer. See *Ibid.*, 190-191. Weinfeld's comparisons ground the prophetic pattern in earlier Psalms of Israel and Egyptian literature. This implies that the prophets were concerned

God commanded Israel to make sacrifices in the wilderness.<sup>64</sup> Based upon reflection of Torah, one can understand this question to be communicating that “in the absence of a regular sacrificial system, God still maintained a relationship with his people and blessed and cared for them,” implying that sacrifices alone are not enough to gain God’s favor.<sup>65</sup>

The significance of this challenging question is less historical or literal than it is a matter of emphasis. The question is not a genuine question in which the prophet is seeking information. Torah establishes that God gave instructions for sacrifices at Sinai (Num. 14:1-40). However, the emphasis of this instruction was obedience, not sacrifice. The people’s relationship to God through the covenant cannot be sustained by sacrifice and ritual alone, but must include obedience. Two passages are significant for coming to this conclusion. Exodus 19:5 is the first relevant passage for understanding Amos’ point for the question. In Exodus, God instructs Moses to inform Israel that if they are to be God’s prized possession, they must fully obey God and keep the covenant. This passage not only informs Amos 5:25, but also helps anchor 3:2 in common thought from Torah: it is the covenant relationship with God that distinguishes Israel; and covenant faithfulness and obedience are the indicators of this relationship. The second significant passage comes from another prophet. Jeremiah confronts the same issue in 7:21-26 and comes to

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with righteousness versus sacrifices, and the rhetorical questions allow the prophets to uphold the importance of sacrifices as long as there is an absence of evil. *Ibid.*, 192-193.

<sup>64</sup> Some understand this as evidence that sacrifices were not initially included in the in the relationship between God and the people. E.g. Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 31 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 335. Garrett lists two popular understandings of Amos 5:25 and Jeremiah 7:22-23, in which each passage “either follows JE against P (Paul 1991, 194) or reflects Deuteronomistic thinking (Wolff 1977, 264-265) when it asserts that the Israelites received little if any cultic instruction in the wilderness.” Garrett is referencing Paul, *Amos*, 194 and Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), 264-265.

<sup>65</sup> Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 114-115; See also Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 335-336.

a similar conclusion by implementing Exodus 19:5 into 7:23. God did not just provide instruction for sacrifice, but commanded the people to obey Him. If the people obey God, then things will go well for them in the land. However, Amos and Jeremiah's audiences were no different than Moses' stubborn and disobedient audience (cf. Deut. 31:27). This is why God sarcastically tells them to continue in their sacrifices and offerings in Jeremiah 7. Exodus and Jeremiah both support the idea that Amos 5:25 is asking for the purpose or emphasis of God's commands in the wilderness: was it obedience or sacrifice? This is furthered by the pronouncement of exile in 5:27, which connects the relationship between their disobedience and coming exile.

Amos poses this question in a perplexing way by placing the objects ("Sacrifices and gifts") toward the beginning of the sentence. The placement of the objects at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis suggests the prophet is asking his audience if those were the focus of the wilderness wanderings. The answer should be a resounding negative, confirming that the significance of the wilderness wanderings was obedience. This also coincides with earlier portions of Amos in which he calls out Israel's ritualistic syncretism (Amos 4:4-5; 5:22-23). Their ritualistic sacrifices are unable to replace true covenant faithfulness—especially if it is syncretistic in nature. True covenantal faithfulness is centered on obedience and sole worship of YHWH. The rhetorical question causes the audience to reflect on their salvation history as seen in Torah, realizing that their history should emphasize obedience and faithfulness rather than sacrifice and sin. The present situation of ritualistic sacrifice and covenantal disobedience is brought into view through the a backward-looking rhetorical question.

The response to this question brings about the prophet's threat of exile to the nation: a reversal of the exodus events. Rather than deliverance, they will be led back into captivity in a foreign land. Amos 5:26-27 continues the discussion by saying "'So you will pick up Sikkuth, your king, and Kaiwan, your image of your star god, that you made for yourselves. And I will exile you from beyond Damascus.' YHWH, the God of Armies is His name, has spoken." Tucked within the threat of exile is polemic imagery against their idolatrous processions of carved idols to the cultic centers: instead of the Israelites delivering their idols to their respected high places, the procession is one that will lead the people out of Israel and into exile.<sup>66</sup> This abrupt reversal is ultimately possible because of the opening rhetorical question that establishes the order of their history. The Israelites were led out of captivity and through the wilderness where they were to practice genuine worship of YHWH and be led into the promised land (Exod. 3:12, 17). However, a drastic reversal takes place in Amos: the Israelites will be led out of their land, carrying their idols into captivity in a foreign land.<sup>67</sup>

#### Amos 6:2

The prophet continues in his message to Israel and proposes another twofold rhetorical question to help make his point. The prophet directs his audience's attention to Calneh, Hamath, and Gath by asking, "Cross over Calneh and see it. From there, [go] to

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<sup>66</sup> Paul, *Amos*, 196-197.

<sup>67</sup> Andersen and Freedman argue that it is very possible reorder the structure of Amos 5:26-27 to show the future reversal of salvation history. See Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 535. However, the idol worship emphasized in verse 26 serves as an antitype of the ideal worship seen as the opening focus in verse 25. The mention of the wilderness in verse 25 corresponds to the exile in verse 27. It follows the same pattern of worship → journey. Verses 26-27 function as a unit against verse 25 to show that the first journey (exodus) focused on YHWH worship, while the second journey is summarized by idol worship.

Hamath Rabba. Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Is their territory greater than yours?" He asks the twofold question: (1) if you (Israel and Judah) are better than them (Calneh, Hamath, and Gath) and (2) if their territories (Calneh, Hamath, and Gath) are larger than yours (Israel and Judah)? The two questions operate on the prideful assertions of Israel's leaders that they are superior in strength and size to the Calneh, Hamath, and Gath (cf. Amos 3:9-11; 4:10-11; 6:8, 14; 7:16; 9:10).<sup>68</sup> The Philistines knew not to make this claim in light of the Assyrian threat, yet proud Samaria has been "overconfident and lulled to sleep by their leaders."<sup>69</sup>

A great deal of debate surrounds the nature of these place names. Many use the presence of these place names as evidence that this question was added at a later date.<sup>70</sup> Tiglath-pileser III's capture of the region in 738 BC supports the idea of a later origin.<sup>71</sup> If this is the case, Amos could be warning Israel about their own destruction if the other cities mentioned recently received that very fate. However, one must also remember that the entire region, including Israel under the reign of Menahem, was under pressure by the

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<sup>68</sup> The prophet's questions are similar to the questions from Vanstiphout, "The Disputation between the Ewe and the Wheat (1.180)," (168), 577, that are asked to confront the pride of the audience.

<sup>69</sup> Smith, *Amos*, 273.

<sup>70</sup> Many scholars attribute the questions to a later disciple, redactor or editor other than Amos who witnessed the destruction of Calneh, Hamath, and Gath. See Paul, *Amos*, 201; Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 560. Paul asserts that the historical context behind these verses are "obviously relating to a period of time when these kingdoms had suffered defeats or incursions into their territories (738, 720, 711 BC). See Paul, *Amos*, 203. This article adopts the assumption of Smith that the verse is original to the prophet Amos. See Gary V. Smith, *Amos*, A Mentor Commentary (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 271.

<sup>71</sup> Peterson notes that "Calneh's resubjugation during the same year in which Assyrian annals record that Menahem (752-742 BC), king of Israel, gave tribute to Tiglath-pileser III." See Brian Neil Peterson, "Calneh," *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Assyrians during this time.<sup>72</sup> It seems more likely that Amos is alluding to the destruction of the city states in the previous century.<sup>73</sup> However distant the events may be, their memory would still resonate with Amos' audience.

The rhetorical questions highlight the folly of Israel's leaders who claim superiority over these nations. This use of rhetorical questions is thus not an explicit threat of judgment and exile, but rather an accusation of pride toward Israel. However, their pride blinds them to the coming day of evil (6:3). The prophet lures in his audience by asking them to compare themselves to other nations and asking questions that his audience must respond to at some level.<sup>74</sup> The events surrounding each location are common knowledge for his audience and the answers to the prophet's questions are obvious. The questions attack Israel's pride and impose a corrective message in that "Those mighty kingdoms, although more powerful than Israel, still suffered defeats. How much more so, then, Israel!"<sup>75</sup>

This conclusion is consistent with the recurring motif of God equalizing His relationship with Israel and the other nations. In Amos 2:6-16, God reminds Israel that He has destroyed other nations in the past and is able to do the same in the future, even to Israel.<sup>76</sup> This reminder reflects upon Israel's deliverance from oppression in past, while

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<sup>72</sup> Paul, *Amos*, 203.

<sup>73</sup> Views vary between who was responsible for the destruction of these locations. See Paul, *Amos*, 201-204; Aren M. Maeir, "The Historical Background and Dating of Amos VI 2: An Archaeological Perspective from Tell Tell Eş-Şâfi/Gath," *Vetus Testamentum* 54, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 327.

<sup>74</sup> To those in Amos' audience who believed they were superior to these cities, Amos' command to look at the three cities would have a similar effect as the judgment oracles in Amos 1:3-2:5.

<sup>75</sup> Paul, *Amos*, 203.

<sup>76</sup> James D. Nogalski, *The Book of The Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, Smyth & Helwys Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2011), 287.

emphasizing their oppression of the poor in the present (3:6-7). Their current acts of oppression equate them with their previous oppressors. Amos 3:1-2 tells of YHWH leading the Israelites out of Egypt and knowing only them from the other nations. However, because of the nation's sins, they will be punished like the other nations. The prophet revisits this concept in 9:7-8 when the Israelites are shown to be no different than the Cushites to YHWH. Additionally, God normalizes Israel's key salvific event of the exodus by claiming to have done the same for the Philistines and Arameans. The impending destruction of Israel in 6:2 fits into this motif in that their destruction will be no different than that of Kalneh, Hamath, and Gath.

#### Amos 6:12

Amos 6:12 continues his message by asking rhetorical questions with common knowledge from the natural world. Amos asks, "Do horses run on the rocks? Or does anyone plow the sea with oxen? Because you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood." The first question is straightforward and its absurdity has an obvious response. Obviously, the horses should not run on the rocks, as that would lead to injury.<sup>77</sup> The prophet's second question is less straightforward due to its textual issue. The MT contains אִם-יִהְיֶה-רֹשׁ בְּבִקְרִים which can be translated as "Does anyone plow (there) with oxen?" The parallelism between the two lines ends with the contrast between horses and oxen. However, Michaelis' emendation proposed in 1772 "enjoys almost universal acceptance."<sup>78</sup> His solution is to split בְּבִקְרִים in order to read יֵם בְּבִקְרִים, "Can you

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<sup>77</sup> Paul counters that it is possible for certain horses to run on rocky surfaces. See Paul, *Amos*, 218. However, the context seems to favor the idea that horses cannot run on the rocky terrain. Although it is possible for some to do so, Smith suggests that this is "unthinkable." See Smith, *Amos*, 283.

<sup>78</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 577.

plow the sea with an ox?”<sup>79</sup> This reading of the text honors the Hebrew text while matching the absurdity of the first question. The answers are simple enough for the common listener in Amos’ audience to answer with a “No!”

The two questions provide examples of absurdity in the natural world. In the second half of the verse, the prophet abruptly shifts his focus to highlight the absurdity of Israel’s actions: turning justice into poison and righteousness into bitterness. The prophet’s rhetoric allows him to make his point in a more explicit manner than simply announcing Israel’s sins. The correlation between the questions and statement allow for the possibility of translating the prophet’s statement as a rhetorical question: How then can you turn justice into venom and righteousness into bitter gall?<sup>80</sup> The questions guide the audience to a standard of foolishness and then places their actions on the same level of foolishness. Israel’s justice and righteousness are equally absurd as plowing the sea with oxen. However, the audience will not realize the depths of this issue without such a comparison.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. It must be admitted that the sentence structure of this suggested reading is abnormal. However, the imagery honors the prophet’s style throughout the book and continues to increase the absurdity of his questions. Although a strong argument can be made for the traditional reading, it does not follow the prophet’s pattern of changing scenarios with each new question. Garrett makes a case for the traditional reading as “Does one plow stone with oxen,” by arguing that (ַּוּבֹ) does “double-duty” and should be read into the second line here. See Garrett, *Amos*, 199. Allen notes an additional reading of this text as “Do horses run on crags? Or does the wild ox plow in the valley?” This emendation (*bbq’ rym*) of the verse is the result of comparing the original MT with Amos’ consistent pattern and usage of rhetorical questions throughout the book. Spencer L. Allen, “Understanding Amos vi 12 in Light of his other Rhetorical Questions,” *Vetus Testamentum* 58, no. 4 (2008): 442. It is important to note, however, that Allen does not see an issue with *bqrym*. He justifies this claim by an early scribal error before the third or second century BC, as evidenced by the LXX. Ibid., 447-448.

<sup>80</sup> L. J. Regt, “Discourse Implication of Rhetorical Questions in Job, Deuteronomy, and the Minor Prophets,” *Literary Structure and the Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. L. J. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J. P. Fokkelman (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1996), 72.

## Amos 8:5-8

Amos 8:5-8 helps initiate the final section of the book. YHWH, through Amos, mockingly calls out Israel's merchants, who ask "And asking 'When will the New Moon be over, so we may sell grain, and the Sabbath, so we may begin selling grain? We may begin to reduce the measurement and increase the price and falsify our deceitful scales!'" The people are described in 8:4, while the question of 8:5 reveals their intentions.<sup>81</sup> Due to the dishonest behavior of the merchants, they are detestable to God (Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:13-16).<sup>82</sup> The New Moon was the first solar day of the lunar month and was considered a day of rest.<sup>83</sup> This question is self-incriminatory and requires no response. The New Moon operated on a pattern, so those asking the question likely knew the answer. They also knew that it was supposed to be a day of rest, where they were only allowed to partake in religious acts and not economic activities.<sup>84</sup> The question reveals their insincerity of religious acts and their greedy intentions. Embedded in their question is not a request for information, but an indicator of their eagerness for corruption. The rhetoric of the question is thus stronger than if Amos were to simply accuse the merchants of rushing through the rituals in order to resume their dishonest business. Thus, the prophet uses his audience's own words against them.

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<sup>81</sup> Göran Eidevall, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 218.

<sup>82</sup> Judith Hadley notes the presence of heavier and lighter shekels in the archaeological record, potentially supporting the accusation of Amos 8:5. See Judith M. Hadley, "Hebrew Inscriptions," *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 141.

<sup>83</sup> Philip S. Johnston, "Amos," *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 5, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 80-81.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

The context of the rhetorical question in 8:5 develops the close association between Amos' questions and his message. His superior understanding, or divine message, is embedded within the assertions of his questions. This connection is more evident when one observes that this question is attributed to God Himself. The mocking nature of the accusations and questions is seen as God sarcastically swears upon Israel's pride that He will not forget their wicked deeds.<sup>85</sup> Amos 8:5 initiates the rhetorical question with the temporal interrogative pronoun *מָה*. This breaks the form of previous rhetorical questions, yet similarly implies that the wicked merchants knew the answer to their question, as they were already making plans.<sup>86</sup> The prophet uses the question to connect the accusations of 8:4-6 with the result in 8:8 that is also listed in form of a question. The break in form in 8:5 is not significant due to its content and placement within 8:4-6, which reveal that the prophet uses this question to intensify the accusation and direct their attention to the results in 8:7-14. Moreover, the question is ascribed to the merchants and their disposition, and is thus more representative of the audience's mindset rather than exclusively being part of the prophet's speech.

Amos 8:8 introduces a question regarding the response of the people when God acts against their greed.<sup>87</sup> The prophet asks, "Because of this, will the earth not tremble and all who live in it mourn? And all of it rise like the Nile, churning and then subsiding

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<sup>85</sup> Michael B. Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve: The Minor Prophets*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018), 194.

<sup>86</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 805.

<sup>87</sup> Some commentators believe the second half of Amos 8:8 to be a second rhetorical question that continues the thought of the first. See Paul, *Amos*, 256, 260-261; Anderson and Freedman, *Amos*, 800. However, this paper considers the second half of the verse to bear a closer resemblance to an assertive statement.

like the Nile in Egypt.” The language of an earthquake connects back to Amos 1:1 in which the prophet ministered for two years before the earthquake. It also continues the logic of Amos 3:6, in which disaster occurs because the LORD wills it. The coming disaster is supported by the connection between the accusation found in Amos 8:5-6 and 2:6-16. As much as their sins in 2:6-16 brought about the questions of 3:3-6, 8, the sins of 8:5-6 will bring about the question in 8:8. Likewise, it is YHWH who is causing this disaster. The question in 8:8 functions in the same way as the question in 3:6 by connecting the natural and spiritual realms by revealing the divine causation.<sup>88</sup> The rhetorical question is used to heighten the intensity of the situation from a natural scenario to a situation with a divine causation. In their notes on Amos 8:8, the translators of the NET Bible add that “The rhetorical questions entrap the listener in the logic of the judgment of God (cf. 3:3–6; 9:7).”<sup>89</sup> Without question, it is understood that the people would mourn if YHWH caused the earth to quake. The rhetorical question is coupled with a prose statement much like that of Amos 3:7, while the signs of God’s judgment resemble exodus language when God acted against Egypt (8:8-9).

Amos may pose the question as a polemic against Israel’s syncretistic worship. Jeroboam II initiated “a syncretized form of Yahwism that adopted the cultic symbol of the northern territory’s indigenous deity (Baal), a non-Levitical and voluntary priesthood (1 Kings 12:31; 13:33), and a new holy calendar, all while claiming to embrace the orthodoxy of Sinai.”<sup>90</sup> Amos’ attack on the combination of Yahwism and Baal worship is

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<sup>88</sup> Eidevall, *Amos*, 219.

<sup>89</sup> The NET Bible, (Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), n29. This also applies to the questions in Amos 9:7.

<sup>90</sup> Sandra Richter, “Eighth-Century Issues: The World of Jeroboam II, the Fall of Samaria, and the Reign of Hezekiah,” *Ancient Israel’s History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill T. Arnold

already visible in the opening of the book, when YHWH's voice "roars (or thunders) from Zion" (Amos 1:2). Baal is the Canaanite storm god that controls thunder, lighting, rain, storms, and floods.<sup>91</sup> Comparatively, YHWH's voice is the one thundering from His house in Zion. The prophet continues to establish YHWH as the one over the wind (storm) in Amos 4:13, as well as the one "who calls for the water of the sea and pours it out over the face of the earth" (5:8).<sup>92</sup> In Amos 8:8, the prophet may be using a familiar concept in which Baal asks, "Enemies of Haddu, why do you shake with fear? Why do you shake with fear, you who take up arms against Dimārānu?"<sup>93</sup>. Within the same section, another translator notes, "Baal uttered his holy voice, Baal repeated the [issue] of his lips; (he uttered) his [holy] voice [(and)] the earth did quake, [(he repeated) the issue of his lips (and)] the rocks (did quake); peoples afar off were dismayed..."<sup>94</sup> The power that the Israelites mistakenly attributed to Baal is again displayed by the Lord's actions.

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and Richard S. Hess (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 327. Richter continues her thought that Israel's syncretism accepted Sinai while rejecting the "manifest destiny of the Davidic dynasty, while embracing the deity of the indigenous population, Baal." See Richter, "Eighth-Century Issues," 327, n24.

<sup>91</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 338.

<sup>92</sup> Amos 5:8 is also significant in that Baal battled against Yamm, a Canaanite sea god. See Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Pardee, "The BA<sup>c</sup>LU MYTH (1.86) (vii 37-CTA 5 ii)," *The Context of Scripture*, 263. Watson identifies additional rhetorical questions within this section of the Canaanite myth (CTA 4 vii 43-44) that mirrors traditional Hebrew rhetorical questions. See Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1986), 338. The myth continues the string of rhetorical questions after a line of prose, "Since Ba<sup>c</sup>lu has taken up residence in his house is there or is there not a king (who) can establish himself in the land of (Ba<sup>c</sup>lu's) dominion?" In this example as well as Watson's, the divine figure asserts his authority and dominance. The connection is not explicit, but the two texts share similar style, rhetoric, and display of power. Furthermore, Israel displayed great familiarity with Baal worship.

<sup>94</sup> J. C. L. Gibson, "The Palace of Baal (4 vi, vii), *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (T&T Clark International, 2004), 65.

God will again show His authority over creation by causing the land to quake.<sup>95</sup> The people will then mourn in response. Much like the other passages in Amos, the prophet is assigning this action to YHWH alone—not Baal.

#### Amos 9:7

Amos 9:7 introduces the audience to the final set of rhetorical questions in the book. On behalf of YHWH, Amos asks, “‘Are you, Israelites, not like the Cushites to me?’ This is YHWH’s declaration. ‘Did I not bring the Israelites up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and Aram from Kir?’” The verse maintains Amos’ typical disputation style, yet in a more interrogatory form. The speaker of these questions is YHWH Himself, who makes a claim unlike any other in Amos or the rest of the Old Testament.<sup>96</sup> The first of the questions brings into consideration Israel’s “sense of chosenness [*sic*] and relationship with YHWH” in a rather provocative manner.<sup>97</sup> The second question then disputes the foundation of Israel’s history in which the exodus is equated with the migration of any other people group.<sup>98</sup>

Similar to the previous questions in Amos, verse 7 serves as an introduction for a proceeding section. In this case, it introduces the epilogue of the book (9:7-15). Although negative in form, the two introductory questions require a positive answer of agreement

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<sup>95</sup> Gavin Cox compares this lament to Sumerian City Laments, particularly UL 3.3, 3.15a, which states “a devastating deluge... makes the Tigris and Euphrates quaver.” See Gavin Cox, “The ‘Hymn’ of Amos: An Ancient Flood Narrative,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 38, no. 1 (Summer 2013): 86. Even with the Canaanite imagery rejected in place of Sumerian similarities, this supports the overall argument of Amos’ rhetoric being grounded in ancient Near Eastern tradition and literature.

<sup>96</sup> Mays, *Amos*, 156.

<sup>97</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 1, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 271.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

from the crowd. Andersen and Freedman observe that verse 7b introduces the audience to the first part of the epilogue in which the sinful kingdom is destroyed and scattered (9:7b-10). Verse 7a then introduces the audience to the second portion of the epilogue in which the shelter of David is restored and a final battle takes place against Edom (9:7a, 11-12).<sup>99</sup>

The significance of this final set of rhetorical questions is found in its connection to early parts of the book as the prophet challenges Israel's supposed superiority over the other nations (6:2). The verse looks back to Amos 3:2 in which Israel's covenantal relationship with YHWH is brought into focus. The covenant is the foundation of Israel's relationship with YHWH and is also the basis for her judgment. Interestingly, 3:2 also serves as the introduction to the largest set of rhetorical questions in the book. This supports the idea that the intentions of using rhetorical questions is to direct Israel's focus on her unfaithfulness to YHWH. Amos 9:7 also continues the concept of undoing the exodus.<sup>100</sup> The judgment Amos pronounces on Israel is also seen through her destruction as a nation, reversing her formation at Sinai (9:8; cf. 2:10, 3:1, 6:25). However, the second portion of the book's epilogue—introduced in verse 7a—looks forward to a new exodus in which the fallen shelter of David will be restored and the kingdom will again have dominion over the region (9:11-12). After judgment, Israel will be restored and experience prosperity unknown since the reign of David over both kingdoms of Israel.

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<sup>99</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 865-866.

<sup>100</sup> Amos 5:17 harkens back to Exodus 12:12 when the Lord passed through the Egyptians, killing the firstborn, while passing over Israel. Now the Lord will pass through Israel in the same way He passed through the Egyptians prior to the exodus out of Egypt (cf. Amos 4:10).

## Analysis of the Exegesis

The exegesis of Amos reveals that the prophet implemented common thought from nature and society as the foundation of his questions. It is important to note, however, that the prophet also uses history and covenant expectations from Torah to establish common thought with his audience. In the same manner that disputation speech establishes agreement from nature before transitioning to supernatural matters, Amos expected his audience to know their salvation history and covenant responsibilities. The added dimension of Torah assisted in establishing Israel's sin and the known consequences of such violations. If Amos is to persuade Israel of his argument, the nation must understand the severity of their sin in a covenant relationship with a righteous God, as well as the imminence of God's judgment upon them due to His righteous character.

Exegesis also reveals the significance to the intended answer of the prophet's questions. The objective of each question is to motivate the audience into agreement with the implied assertion, preparing them for next part of the message. Their responses to his questions are thus formative for his following arguments. In the context of 6:12, the audience would have agreed with the absurdity of his propositions by providing a negative response. This prepares them to receive their condemnation, which is equally absurd. The significance of their response is not if they respond with a yes or no, but that they are in agreement with the prophet's claim and are prepared for his following arguments.

### **Theological Implications of Amos' Rhetorical Questions**

Amos' use of rhetorical questions reveals an unpleasant theology of his audience's spiritual disposition. Brevard Childs describes Amos' challenge in that "The

burden of his preaching was to make clear that Israel's manner of life reflected a basic misunderstanding of divine election, worship, justice, covenant, and promise," and his words were an attack upon their "persistent and recurring abuses of religion which threaten true faith."<sup>101</sup> The prophet was challenged with the task of communicating an impending judgment to a people who failed to understand themselves, their covenant, or their God. Amos' rhetorical questions provide a means of communicating with such an audience.

God raised up prophets to call the people back to covenant obedience, yet they could not hear their messages. Part of this issue is the result of silencing the prophets (Amos 2:11-12; 7:12-13). Behind the rejection of God's appointed mouthpieces rests a deeper issue in that Israel was incapable of hearing the God's words. Deuteronomy 29:2-4, 31:15-22 and 32:15-18 inform the reader that the nation's poor spiritual condition was a perpetual issue (cf. Isa. 6:9-11). Israel has been deaf, blind, and calloused since their time in the wilderness. Even though the Lord blessed them and gave to them the land of Canaan, Israel remained internally unchanged. This resulted in the people forsaking YHWH and turning to the land's idols and rituals, ultimately living in disobedience and unfaithfulness to their covenant with YHWH. Unfortunately, their disposition would not change until military defeat and deportation (Deut. 28:36-37, 49-57; Amos 5:16-17).

Consequently, the moral and spiritual condition of the people emphasizes the reliability of YHWH's covenant faithfulness for a thousand generations (Exod. 34:6-7). Although Israel persistently broke the covenant with God, God remained faithful to His

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<sup>101</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 409.

character and people. In a gracious effort to prevent His people from experiencing calamity, Amos delivered his message in an attempt to warn the nation (Amos 5:4, 6, 14-15). Mark Boda rightly summarizes Amos' ministry in saying, "It appears that Amos has been sent as Yahweh's eleventh-hour attempt to call the people to repentance through the threat of his personal appearance ('Prepare to meet your God, O Israel'; 4:12)."<sup>102</sup> The call for repentance in the book of Amos offers a possibility that God would relent from sending calamity (cf. Joel 2:13-14).<sup>103</sup> Israel's preservation and prosperity in the midst of such covenant unfaithfulness reveals their inability to acknowledge and understand the final aspect of God's self-proclamation of His nature: punishment of the wicked (Exod. 34:7).<sup>104</sup>

Syncretism worsened the severity of the audience's dull and deaf condition. Inscriptions from the eighth century tell of "Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah," implying that YHWH, like the Canaanite El, has a consort by the name of Asherah—ultimately revealing that the "prophets had to continue the struggle against the syncretistic Ba'alism of their predecessors Elijah and Elisha."<sup>105</sup> Israel could not understand the severity of their covenant violations if their view of God was blurred by such syncretism. This not only explains the use of rhetorical questions in Amos, but also

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<sup>102</sup> Mark J. Boda, *'Return to Me': A Biblical Theology of Repentance*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 35 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 97.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 98. See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King and His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 400.

<sup>104</sup> Nahum 1:2-3 illustrates a direct correction of such misunderstandings. The prophet's opening proclamation emphasizes divine punishment driven by an explicit allusion to Exodus 34:6-7.

<sup>105</sup> Kofoed, "The Divided Monarchy: Israel," 221. Kofoed is referencing the storage jars found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud.

the prophet's interest in reassigning attributes of Ba'al to YHWH alone (1:2; 4:13; 5:8; 8:8).

The theological purpose of Amos' rhetorical questions can then be viewed as an effective way of getting Israel to acknowledge their ways and repent in the hope that they might live. Due to the spiritual condition of Israel, the prophet crafted rhetorical questions through the rhetorical structures of disputation speech and entrapment language to accomplish such a task. Unfortunately, as effective as his questions may have been, the people failed to return to covenant obedience and faithfulness.

### **Chapter 3: Analysis of Rhetorical Questions in Amos**

An exegesis of Amos' rhetorical questions provides a clear understanding of how each question functions in its specific context. However, the patterns of function that emerge in the individual questions require further evaluation in light of their placement in the book's argument as a whole. This is accomplished by evaluating what the prophet was attempting to communicate to his audience and how he structured his argument. After establishing the questions in the book's overall argument and structure, the patterns in his implementation of rhetorical questions can be understood and a more specific definition of rhetorical questions can be proposed.

#### **Amos' Argument in Light of His Rhetorical Questions and Structure**

Amos' rhetorical questions are significant on their own account. However, their full value is not grasped until understood through the entire book's argument and structure. Möller correctly articulates that the book conveys "a prophet struggling, and indeed failing, to persuade his addressees that they stand condemned in the eyes of Yahweh. Because of the people's horrible social wrongdoings together with a misplaced complacency, Amos argues, the deity is no longer willing to tolerate their behaviour [*sic*] but is about to punish them severely."<sup>106</sup> Continuing Möller's identification of an argument, one must establish the specifics of the prophet's argument and how it is structured in the book. After an analysis of the book's structure, the purpose of the argument is evident in Amos 5:14-15, when the audience is given the opportunity to

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<sup>106</sup> Möller, *A Prophet in Debate*, 122.

repent and find life by seeking the Lord.<sup>107</sup> It is from this key principle that the rest of the argument stems.

### Structure of Amos

Embedded in the structure of Amos is the key to uncovering the core aspects of the prophet's argument. The two accusations in 4:1-13 and 5:1-6:14 contain a clear view of YHWH's identity (4:13; 5:8-9), covenant expectations (5:13-14; cf. 3:2), and consistent calls for repentance (4:6-11). However, the highest concentration of rhetorical questions occurs in 3:1-15 and 5:1-6:14, which demonstrate the prophet in debate with his audience. For these reasons, one must examine the book's structure in order to determine how rhetorical questions relate to the argument and message of the book. With minor adjustments, Duane Garrett's approach to the structure of the book clarifies how one should view each section:

A 1:3-2:16: Seven judgment proclamations to the nations, with a surprising eighth against Israel

B 3:1-15: First defense of Amos' prophetic message<sup>108</sup>

C 4:1-13: Amos' first major accusation against his audience and their sins

C<sup>1</sup> 5:1-6:14: Amos' second major accusation against his audience and their sins

B<sup>1</sup> 7:1-8:3: Second defense of Amos' prophetic message

A<sup>1</sup> 8:4-9:15: Final judgment and verdict against Israel, with a surprising inclusion of other nations into Israel's Glory

Understanding the structure of the whole book helps contextualize the individual sections and how they relate to one another.

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<sup>107</sup> Rooker, "The Book of Amos," 434.

<sup>108</sup> Garrett entitles this section "The first defense of Amos' prophetic office." The argument of this paper prefers to remove focus from Amos' office and place it instead on Amos' divine word from YHWH. Amos' ministry is secondary to his message. See Garrett, *Amos*, 7.

A 1:3-2:16 includes the famous judgment proclamations to the seven neighboring nations, with a surprising eighth against Israel.<sup>109</sup> This opening section is the clearest example of entrapment language. The prophet cleverly drew in his audience with the judgment oracles against seven of their neighbors for their crimes. As the crowd was drawn in and excited by the judgment of surrounding nations, the prophet abruptly proclaimed his eighth and longest judgment oracle against Israel. This introduction of Israel and their sins lays the foundation for the content of the prophet's first message in 4:1-13. This first section contains a rhetorical question in the judgment against Israel (2:11). B 3:1-15 contains the first defense of Amos' prophetic message against those who would have silenced the prophets. This unit contains the longest strand of rhetorical questions in defense of his divine message (3:3-8).

The two centerpieces of the chiasmic structure contain the core of the prophetic message. C 4:1-13 is Amos' first major accusation against his audience and their sins.<sup>110</sup> This is the only section of the outline that does not contain any rhetorical questions. However, the prophet initiates this section by calling the oppressive women of Samaria "cows of Bashan" (4:1), an insult that would have secured his audience's attention. This first message is rhetorically embellished with sarcasm and repetition, but also contains clear connections to the covenant curses of Deuteronomy (Amos 4:6-9; cf. Deut. 28:16-25).<sup>111</sup> In this sense, the message in 4:1-13 is delivered as a straightforward condemnation

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<sup>109</sup> Garrett, *Amos*, 7.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. It is important to note that one can also read 3:1-4:13 as a single unit containing a judgment oracle. However, this larger unit can be divided into smaller divisions: 3:1-2, 3:3-8, 3:9-15, 4:1-5, 4:6-12, 4:13. See Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 122-128. The division of this unit into smaller sections by content helps orient the purpose of his overall message and argument.

<sup>111</sup> Fuhr and Yates point out that the phrase "Yet you did not return to me" is repeated in 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11. See Fuhr and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 127.

and application of covenant curses. C<sup>1</sup> 5:1-6:14 is Amos' second major accusation against his audience and their sins.<sup>112</sup> Two significant differences exist between these two passages. Unlike C, this second accusation contains rhetorical questions in three locations (Amos 5:20; 6:2; 6:12). The rhetoric of C is grounded in a strong insult and applications of covenant language. Moreover, C contains no message of repentance and centers on the theme of covenant curses, while C<sup>1</sup> contains urgent calls for the audience to seek God and live (5:6, 14-15).<sup>113</sup>

B<sup>1</sup> 7:1-8:3 is the second defense of Amos' prophetic message in the form of narrative and visions oracles. Although this section does not contain any rhetorical questions in relation to his audience, the prophet twice intercedes on behalf of the people and asks God how Israel would survive the Lord's judgment (7:2, 5). After the third vision, the prophet transitions to a narrative in which he must defend his prophetic ministry against Amaziah. Although the prophetic office is certainly in view here, the message is prioritized as he affirms that he is not a prophet, yet the Lord sent him to speak to His people (7:14-15). A<sup>1</sup> 8:4-9:15 concludes the book with a final judgment and verdict against Israel, then introduces the inclusion of other nations into Israel's glory.<sup>114</sup> It is at this point the prophet introduces a clear vision of redemption and the reversal of

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<sup>112</sup> Garrett, *Amos*, 7.

<sup>113</sup> The repetition of *לֹא־שָׁבוּתָם עָדַי* does not necessarily communicate that Amos was trying to persuade the audience into repentance at this point in the message. He uses the repetition of this phrase to illustrate their past (and present) inability to recognize the covenant curses. The Lord repeated provides warning signs to call the people into repentance, yet the people never return to the Lord. It then becomes part of their judgment beginning in 4:12 as the Lord *אָעֲשֶׂה־לֵהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל* and the people did not return. The Lord signals this by the use of *לֹא־יָבוּאוּ*.

<sup>114</sup> Garrett, *Amos*, 7.

tragedy. The hopeful statements of Amos 9:11-15, if not a clear reversal of, are at a minimum a contrast to the opening oracles against the nations and Israel.

### The Effects of Rhetorical Questions in Amos' Argument and Structure

The structure of the book of Amos reveals the heart of his message in his two accusations (C 4:1-13; C<sup>1</sup> 5:1-6:14). In support of this idea is the chiasmic structure extending from 3:1-6:14, in which “יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ” is the centerpiece (5:8).<sup>115</sup> The climax of Amos' message is simply, “YHWH is His name!” The identity and character of God are wedded to the moral expectations of Israel in that seeking righteousness is congruous with seeking God. Thus, the significance of justice and righteousness is not only a social justice issue, but a theological one as well.<sup>116</sup> It is necessary to understand that “The prophets were primarily focused on the character and activity of God—past, present and future—as it impinged on the life of the people in a given situation at a given point in time.”<sup>117</sup> If Israel was to act in justice and righteousness, they were in need of a correct view of YHWH. Amos' argument seeks to penetrate his audience's minds, that they might be persuaded into repentance, covenant obedience, and life. However, all of this is anchored in Amos persuading his audience into an accurate view of God, His character, and His covenant.

Amos' rhetorical questions are an essential part of his argument—primarily in the chiasmic structure extending from 3:1-6:14. In B, his audience is alerted to YHWH's roar

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<sup>115</sup> For the full chiasm see R. Bryan Widbin, “Center Structure in the Center Oracles of Amos,” *Go to the Land I Will Show You*, ed. Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 181; Rooker, “The Book of Amos,” 435.

<sup>116</sup> Shepherd, *Book of the Twelve*, 174.

<sup>117</sup> Chalmers, *Interpreting the Prophets*, 150.

through a long string of rhetorical questions. The questions result in the prophet's message being justified as necessary because God has spoken. C begins the prophet's message to his audience as a straightforward accusation of Israel and an explanation of their situations in light of Deuteronomy 28:16-25. C<sup>1</sup> intensifies the message by introducing the audience to a proper view of God and a call to repentance and life. This second message places Israel's perverted view of God, justice, and righteousness on trial so that the prophet can impose a true view of God, justice, and righteous. Unsurprisingly, just as Torah served as the foundation of C, it serves as the foundation of common knowledge in C<sup>1</sup>.

Amos strategically places rhetorical questions throughout the argument and structure of the book. The highest concentrations of rhetorical questions appear in his first defense of the message (3:1-15) and his second accusation (5:1-6:14), two sections that clearly illustrate a prophet disputing with his audience. The concentration of rhetorical questions in these units aligns with the data derived from exegesis in showing that Amos was trying to persuade his audience of his argument, the divine message. This conclusion moves beyond understanding rhetorical questions as mere literary devices for building common ground and establishes their function as a key part of his argument and message.

### **Understanding Amos' Use of Rhetorical Questions**

After evaluating the rhetorical questions through exegesis, and examining the argument and structure of the book, one can determine how to properly understand the function of rhetorical features within Amos. This final process establishes the understanding and implications of rhetorical questions from Classical rhetoric and evaluates the MT from a Classical understanding. After this evaluation, the results are

compared with the exegesis, argument, structure, and context of Amos to determine if this evaluation has any merit, or if a more specified definition is necessary.

Some understand a rhetorical question to be “a query posed by an advocate for which a response is not expected.”<sup>118</sup> However, even within Classical literature, such questions played a more significant role. Longinus notes that in many cases if the rhetorical questions “had been given as a bald statement, it would have been completely ineffective.”<sup>119</sup> Longinus makes an additional point that further connects Hebrew and Classical rhetoric: rhetorical questions are understood to be “a natural outburst of emotion” in which the audience is “stirred into answering the questions spontaneously.”<sup>120</sup> These definitions of rhetorical questions, with the inclusion of Ryken’s, reflect a broader understanding of rhetorical questions that requires additional specification of how each question functions in its context. Although not explicitly defining their own opinion on the matter, Edward Schiappa and Jim Hamm state “It has sometimes been argued that failing to limit the denotative range of the word ‘rhetoric’ threatens to render the term so global and universal as to make ‘rhetoric’ meaningless; *si omnia, nulla.*”<sup>121</sup> This caution strengthens the need to provide a clearer view of the function of rhetorical questions in the book of Amos in an effort to avoid misrepresenting

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<sup>118</sup> James Jasinski, “Rhetorical Question.” *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2001), 494. Jasinski ultimately shares in the belief that rhetorical questions make indirect assertions.

<sup>119</sup> Longinus, “On the Sublime,” *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 139.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>121</sup> Edward Schiappa and Jim Hamm, “Rhetorical Questions,” *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Worthington (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 4. It is important to note that although this guideline helps establish boundaries for “Hebrew rhetoric” and “Classical Rhetoric,” it further exposes the dangers of overlapping the two traditions.

his argument by interpreting his disputation features through an over-generalized perspective.

After exegeting and evaluating each rhetorical question in Amos on its own terms, a strong theme of *auseinandersetzung*, or confrontation, emerges.<sup>122</sup> The very nature of the prophetic office is displayed in the prophet's confrontation through question. The twofold questions of Amos strictly function as part of disputation speech and entrapment language, yet also connect him to sapiential teachings.<sup>123</sup> His questions are ultimately established as foils (entrapment) for his audience.<sup>124</sup> Amos' questions may share common ground with Classical rhetoric, but the two approaches are not interchangeable. While Classical rhetoric may help to align certain aspects of Amos' questions with logic, common ground, or apologetics, this should not supersede their role and classification within Hebrew prophetic rhetoric. Allowing Classical understandings of rhetorical questions to govern one's interpretation of Amos' use of them results in imposing foreign interests on the prophet, misunderstanding the prophet's argument, and neglecting key aspects of the Hebrew prophets. Each of these issues can be demonstrated by evaluating Amos 3:3-8.

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<sup>122</sup> Walter A. Brueggemann, "Jeremiah's Use of Rhetorical Question," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 358. Brueggemann defines this word as confrontation.

<sup>123</sup> This is not to say that Amos is a wisdom teacher, but that he simply reveals Israel's actions to be considered unwise and thus, unrighteous. This is similar to Jeremiah's use of questions. Brueggemann classifies this as a "sapiential perspective." See Brueggemann, 361. A significant aspect that helps ground Amos in the prophetic office rather than as a wisdom teacher is his need to prophesy in Amos 3:6-7. This shows that he functions as a prophetic mouthpiece or prosecutor for the Lord, yet still somehow reflects a use of rhetorical questions familiar to Israel's wisdom tradition.

<sup>124</sup> Jack R. Lundbom, "Rhetorical Discourse in the Prophets," *Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*, Hebrew Bible Monographs, Vol. 45 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 167.

## An Example of Rhetorical Disconnect

A primary example for evaluating the disconnect between Hebrew and Classical understandings of rhetorical questions is evident in Amos 3:3-8. As already demonstrated, Amos 3:8 is important for the sake of persuading the audience into hearing the divine message from Amos. Some argue that the two questions of Amos 3:8 are in line with Aristotle's writings on the orator being viewed as favorable in the eyes of his audience, making Amos part of his audience.<sup>125</sup> In doing so, this becomes part of Amos' attempt to "present his view on reasonable grounds... but reason by itself was not sufficient to overcome the views of his hearers."<sup>126</sup> Although well-reasoned assertions were not enough to convince his audience, and rhetorical questions were implemented for intensity, this does not mean they have the same functions as those in Aristotle's writings. One must still determine if any of the Classical approaches to understanding rhetorical questions fully capture Amos' use of them.

One can identify several issues in implementing Classical understandings of rhetorical questions onto Amos. First, it neglects the book's tendency to prioritize the message of the prophet over the prophet himself. The lion and LORD both remain the subjects of the questions with an emphasis on the divine roar or message, not the prophet's ministry. It is ultimately the divine message that the prophet communicates,

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<sup>125</sup> Gitay, "A Study of Amos," 298. Gitay places this under the subheading of "The Ethical Appeal" in classical rhetoric. Webb notes a divide in rhetorical understanding in Classical authors such as Aristotle and Cicero. Cicero held that there is an underlying concern in Classical rhetoric for a speaker to win over his audience and please them in the process. Aristotle also wrote that inflicting pain on an audience should be avoided. However, he ultimately "conceded that it was rendered necessary by the corruption of the audience." See Ruth Webb, "Poetry and Rhetoric," *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 BC – AD 400)*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (New York, NY: Brill, 1997), 341-341. One can see that this stands in direct opposition to Amos' prophetic ministry.

<sup>126</sup> Gitay, "A Study of Amos, 298.

without need for his audience's approval. Amos' justification as a prophet is a byproduct of his message, not the purpose. Undeniably, the referent of the interrogative pronoun *מָה* is what the questions of 3:8 are intending to answer.<sup>127</sup> The audience should understand from these assertions that they should be fearing, and that Amos should be prophesying. However, this is only in response to the larger topic of YHWH roaring, speaking, and acting. Amos 3:7 establishes the idea in prose by asserting the idea that God does not act without first speaking through His prophets. In this sense, Amos' justification for prophesying in 3:8 is understood as an indicator of divine activity. Amos' prophetic words are the conduit in which God's activity is revealed and understood. This approach maintains emphasis on the message of the prophet rather than the prophet attempting to build common ground with his audience as an apologetic.

This claim also finds difficulty with the expectations concerning prophetic immunity.<sup>128</sup> Although the life of a prophet is frequently threatened, and in extreme cases taken (Amos 7:10-17; cf. 1 Kings 19:3, 14; 2 Chron. 24:15-25; Jer. 18:18-23; 20:1-6; 26:7-19), the expectation remains that the prophet will endure (Jer. 20:11-12). Prophets were to speak freely without the concern of death based on the idea that "Since the prophets were viewed as messengers of God, they were not supposed to be held liable for the message they spoke, and tradition dictates that they not be killed because of that

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<sup>127</sup> Waltke and O'Connor note that *מָה* is often used in rhetorical questions for abasement. However, Amos 3:8 does not match the style or form of these questions. See Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 322 (18.2g); George W. Coats, "Self-Abasement and Insult Formulas," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 14-26. Waltke and O'Connor note that other rhetorical questions containing *מָה* must be recognized by context rather than form. See Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 321 (18.2f).

<sup>128</sup> Matthews defines prophetic immunity as "a traditional form of protection given to prophets when they speak in a god's name and that in principle is designed to prevent the people from killing the messenger because of a negative message." Matthews, *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World*, 219.

message.”<sup>129</sup> Although this does not exclude the possibility of a prophet attempting to show himself as favorable in the eyes of his audience, the priority is to communicate the divine message regardless of how the audience views the prophet (cf. Jer. 20:7-8, 10). Amos 3:7-8 maintains the primacy of his message rather than being favorable among his audience. The rhetorical questions add urgency to the prophetic proclamation rather than the prophet’s life or reception.

An additional lexical observation supports the notion that Amos is emphasizing the divine message. Amos 2:11-12 introduces the readers to the tendency of Israel to silence God’s appointed mouthpieces by proclaiming לֹא תִנְבְּאֶנּוּ (Niphal imperfect 2mp). This proclamation is demonstrated by Amaziah in 7:12 as he tells Amos תִּנְבְּאֶנּוּ (Niphal imperfect 2ms). The priest continues to tell Amos the seer (הַנָּבִיא) to not return to Israel to prophesy. Amos’ response poses difficulty to the view that Amos was adamantly defending his prophetic office, as he seems to confirm the validity of the accusation. The affirmation of Amaziah’s accusation is difficult to determine as it is a verbless clause: לֹא־נָבִיא אָנֹכִי. Although it is possible to translate the phrase as “I was not a prophet,” the use of imperfect verbs in Amaziah’s accusations provide the grounds for understanding Amos’ response in the present: I am not a prophet.<sup>130</sup> Amos strengthens the authority of his message by calling attention to how he makes his income (7:14). In 7:15, his

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<sup>129</sup> Matthews, *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World*, 32.

<sup>130</sup> Eidevall’s justification for the present tense is not based on if Amos is a prophet or not, but on Amaziah’s discussion of how and where Amos is allowed to prophecy. The inclusion of Amos’ occupations is then viewed as a way of showing that Amos does not obtain payment from Israel and is not under Amaziah’s authority. This is supported by Amos’ נָבִיא using rather than הַנָּבִיא. Eidevall, *Amos*, 209-210; Paul concludes that Amos denies the idea that he was a professional prophet who makes his living from his prophetic activity. Amos justification for being a prophet is in the command of YHWH rather than from connections with prophets or prophetic guilds. Paul, *Amos*, 247. Either approach to addressing this situation is compatible with the idea that Amos is minimizing his prophetic office, not denying it.

justification for ministering to Israel is seen in YHWH's command, which mentions the same verb as other locations in the form of a command: הִנְבֵּא (Niphal imperative 2ms). Similar to other prophets, Amos adds authority to his message by drawing attention to his commissioning (Jer. 23:16-22; cf. Isa. 6:1-6; Amos 3:7-8). In 7:16, Amos accuses Amaziah of the identical sin as Israel of silencing the prophets through the use of לֹא תִנְבֵּא (Niphal imperfect 2ms).

In relation to Amos 3:3-8, the prophet begs the question מִי לֹא יִנְבֵּא (Niphal imperfect 3ms). He asserts that YHWH does not act without first informing His people through the prophets (3:7; cf. Isa. 6:1-6). This initiates a problem for the audience because someone must prophesy, yet they have silenced their prophets. Thus, an emphasis is placed on the need for Amos to prophesy in a place that has silenced all their prophets. Amos' claim in 3:8 defends his message in that he has heard YHWH speak.<sup>131</sup> Amos is not a prophet because of occupation, association through a prophetic school, or ancestry, but because he has been commanded by YHWH to prophesy.

Additionally, although this approach seeks to justify his message on reasonable grounds, it removes the message from the context of disputation speech and entrapment language. As disputation speech, the questions in Amos 3:3-8 form a "series of questions" (3:3-6) that are non-threatening to draw in the audience, a "Conclusion" (3:7) that states the mindset being argued for, and a "Lesson" (3:8) in the form of a question that proposes Amos' argument.<sup>132</sup> The questions, as part of disputation speech and

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<sup>131</sup> Paul articulates the compulsion of Amos to speak in 3:8 by saying, "The prophet speaks when commanded but, once commanded, must speak." Paul, *Amos*, 114. Amos shares in a conflict similar to Jeremiah 20:8-9 in which the prophet is unable to conceal the YHWH's word.

<sup>132</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 470.

entrapment language, are used in order to shock the audience after drawing them in with obvious questions and then abruptly exposing their poor spiritual condition and sin. Their purpose is not for the defense of Amos as Classical rhetoric would frame it, but part of Amos' rhetorical strategy to pronounce judgment and expose Israel's "guilt and spiritual blindness" in a way that would otherwise be ineffective.<sup>133</sup> It is important to note that the prioritization of rhetorical questions as disputation speech and entrapment language does not exclude the possibility that some members of his audience would have accepted what is recorded in Amos 3:3-8 as a prophetic defense by building common ground. However, understanding rhetorical questions as disputation speech and entrapment language places a greater emphasis on the prophet struggling to persuade his audience into hearing his message by drawing them in with common thought (3:3-6) and abruptly exposing Israel's condemnation (3:8). As such a literary device, the rhetorical questions of this pericope draw in and condemn the audience with more conviction and intensity than if they were proclaimed in the form of a statement. Amos' use of rhetorical questions may reflect some similarities with Classical rhetoric, but they ultimately function in separate rhetorical structures and strategies familiar to the Hebrew prophets. This conclusion requires that a more specific function be attributed to rhetorical questions in Amos.

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<sup>133</sup> Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 471. A similar function for rhetorical questions can be found in the Baal Cycle from Ugaritic literature. Dennis Pardee's analysis of CTA 5 vi 30'-6 I 10, when 'Anatu asks "Ba'lu is dead, what (is to become of) the people, the Son of Dagan (is dead), what 9is to become of) the hordes (of the earth)?" reveals a similar function as the two-part question of Amos 3:8 in that "The burden of lament, in the form of a rhetorical question, is that the fate of the world is tied in with the fate of Ba'lu, and the implication is that the world cannot survive after Ba'lu's demise. See Dennis Pardee, *The Ugaritic Texts and the Origins of the West-Semitic Literary Composition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 116-117. Just as 'Anatu's question contains a lament with a strong assertion, Amos' question of "The Lord has spoken—who will not fear" embodies the strong assertion that Israel should fear for their fate because the Lord has pronounced judgment through Amos, concerning their wickedness.

## A New Understanding

A definition such as Ryken's has value for interpreting Amos, but ultimately falls short of capturing the fullness of how the book of Amos implements rhetorical questions. Certainly, the prophet utilized questions that persuaded the audience to his position by causing them to agree with him. However, exegesis and analysis reveal that the prophet utilized rhetorical questions in ways not represented in Ryken's approach. The presence of clear prophetic rhetoric results in nuanced functions within his message, particularly the element of abrupt reversals. The breadth in functions of Classical rhetorical questions displays usage that is not present in Amos' use of rhetorical questions. Although some of his questions align with functions of rhetorical questions in Classical rhetoric—such as making an indirect assertion that would otherwise not be as effective as a statement—one must still come to terms with how they operate within the larger rhetorical structures of Hebrew prophetic rhetoric. The insufficiencies of these approaches to understanding rhetorical questions in Amos require that a new one be provided.

A better understanding for Amos' use of rhetorical questions is that rhetorical questions function as strong implicit assertions within Amos' prophetic rhetoric of confrontation (primarily through disputation speech and entrapment language) in order to (1) draw in his audience with agreeable common thought, (2) abruptly condemn Israel's actions and expose her sin, and (3) impose his superior argument (divine message) with greater effectiveness, ultimately overturning common thought or proclaiming judgment.<sup>134</sup> In this sense, many of the rhetorical questions "catch the Israelites' attention

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<sup>134</sup> Smith notes that "Amos's theological methodology is to intertwine the common things of life with the listener's larger theological framework." This is done by drawing a theological connection between what the audience is familiar with and what God is doing in response to their actions. See Gary V.

with something they already know and then compare this to something of which they are presumably unaware.”<sup>135</sup> The rhetorical questions of Amos fit within shared notions of prophets functioning as God’s spokesperson. As God’s spokesperson, or even prosecutor, Amos calls a stubborn people back to covenant obedience and faithfulness to YHWH. It is the covenant relationship between the divine and human parties that requires the prophet to speak to his audience and effectively communicate the divine message (Amos 3:2).

It is important to note that not every rhetorical question in Amos appears to embody the fullness of this understanding on its own. As examples, when evaluated individually, the questions of Amos 2:11-12 and 8:5-8 function as part of Amos’ strong implicit assertions and confrontation style, but they do not appear to draw in the audience with common thought, abruptly condemn, or impose a superior argument on their own. However, examining the questions through the structure of the book and each passage’s context brings into view the other three functions.

Two passages that are important for this understanding are Amos 2:6-16 and 3:1-2. Amos 3:1-2 establishes the basis for Israel’s judgment: they know YHWH, His covenant with them, and its implications. Additionally, the mention of the exodus reveals the significance of Israel’s history in relation to their identity (cf. 9:7). Even if not from the natural world, common and agreeable thought is expected and established from Torah. Amos 2:6-16 identifies Israel’s sins from Torah history that Israel should be aware

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Smith, *Hosea, Amos Micah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 213-214. This is largely accomplished through Amos’ connection to the wisdom tradition of ancient Israel.

<sup>135</sup> Allen, “Understanding Amos vi 12 in Light of his other Rhetorical Questions,” 438.

of. Thus, the questions of 2:11-12 and 8:5-8 are given as the foundation of common thought to justify the prophet's abrupt condemnation and superior argument in form of punishment. In context, Amos 2:11-12 looks back at Israel's history (2:10) as common thought, implements the rhetorical question of 2:11 to engage the audience in the argument, and abruptly condemns the audience (2:12), and imposes judgment (2:13-16).

Amos 8:5-8 builds on this concept by reiterating what has already been established in 2:6-7. The prophet identifies his audience in 8:4 as those who are guilty of the same crimes as those mentioned in 2:6-7. Torah instruction and covenant stipulations serve as the background of these passages as common thought (Lev. 19:9-16; 19:35-37; Deut. 15:1-18; 24:10-15). The use of a rhetorical question suggests that the audience should be aware of their violations (8:5-6). Much like the explanatory prose of Amos 3:7, the prophet raises the intensity of the situation by claiming God's awareness of their actions (8:7). Similar to Amos 3:8, a cause is provided in YHWH not forgetting Israel's actions, with the effect provided in 8:8. Again, the prophet begins with common thought from Torah, a question to engage and condemn the audience, and progresses to the prophet pronouncing judgment as the superior thought.

The proposed understanding provides a consistent approach to viewing rhetorical questions in the book of Amos. This approach aligns with the exegesis of each rhetorical question and the argument, structure, and rhetoric of the book. The implementation of the book's argument and structure allows for each rhetorical question to be understood in its context, rather than in isolation. The prophet's use of disputation speech also allows for nature, Torah, and society to supply common thought between him and his audience. His use of entrapment language is reflected in his tendency to abruptly condemn his audience

based on their agreement with his common thought. Finally, this understanding honors the historical and cultural context of Amos and his audience.<sup>136</sup> Rather than imposing foreign understandings upon the text, this approach operates within means familiar to the Hebrew background.

### **Conclusion**

The research presented in this study set out to determine if Amos's rhetorical questions are better understood through the prioritization Hebrew prophetic rhetoric over Classical rhetoric. Although Amos' rhetorical questions function within the broad definition of being part of the prophet's rhetoric, analysis of each question results in a clearer understanding of his message and strategy. Even though his implementation of rhetorical questions frequently aligns with the standard understanding of rhetorical questions derived from Classical rhetoric and its development into modern rhetoric, the questions should be viewed primarily in light of his context as a Hebrew prophet. The questions contain enough elements and functions that differ from Classical rhetoric to require a more specific understanding of their function in Amos. His use of questions should be viewed through his prophetic ministry and the rhetorical structures present in the Hebrew prophets: disputation speech and entrapment language.

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<sup>136</sup> The rhetorical strategy of the Hebrew prophet must then align itself with the social and religious context of the prophet, specifically, their devotion to YHWH. Matthews adds that "In both kingdoms, however, devotion to Yahweh included identification with sacred space and sacred objects, the formulation of religious practices and rituals, and the development of a corps of religious practitioners, priests and prophets. These individuals were social reflections of the people's need to interact with the divine, and they had the important role in society of serving as intermediaries and spokespersons for God." See V. H. Matthews, "Prophecy and Society," *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 624-625. From these shared views, one can begin to see Amos' rhetorical strategy unfold as he addresses their social and religious condition.

This study began by establishing the background of Amos as an eighth-century prophet. Amos was a sheep herder and sycamore dresser commissioned by YHWH to prophesy to Israel. As a Hebrew prophet, Amos utilized rhetorical devices and structures familiar to himself and his audience. Two important structures that are essential for his rhetorical questions are disputation speech and entrapment language. Disputation speech draws in his audience with common thought for the purpose of imposing a superior argument. Entrapment language draws in his audience for the purpose of abruptly reversing the situation onto the audience as condemnation. Amos' questions work within these two structures to communicate his message to a stubborn audience.

This study also contains an exegesis of each rhetorical question in its context (2:11-12; 3:3-8; 5:18-20; 5:25-27; 6:2; 6:12; 8:5-8; 9:7). The exegetical work reveals patterns in his rhetorical questions that are consistent with disputation speech and entrapment language. The questions serve not only as a part of his message and argument, but also as a way to prepare his audience for the following part of his argument or condemnation. Exegesis also reveals that Amos drew from common knowledge in nature, society, and Torah to form agreeable assertions to his audience. The structure of the book and its placement of rhetorical questions reveals that the questions are concentrated in locations that emphasize the prophet attempting to persuade his audience of his divine message (3:1-15; 5:1-6:14). The structure shows that the prophet was persuading his audience into an accurate understanding of YHWH and the implications of being in a covenant relationship with Him. The rhetorical questions are placed in key locations to add authority or weight to his argument, as well as to communicate condemnation, judgment, or a superior way of thinking.

The final argument presented in this study exposes a disconnect between Classical and Hebrew understandings of rhetorical questions and proposes a new definition that recaptures their purpose in disputation speech and entrapment language. Although “the prophetic message is linguistically couched in a specific form that is a function of the audience’s conditioning and modes of reasoning,”<sup>137</sup> one must remember that this specific audience’s conditioning and reasoning is not founded on Classical rhetoric. The prophetic rhetorical structures of disputation speech and entrapment language are what best describe the prophet’s communication against his audience’s conditioning and reasoning. The proposed understanding does not apply anachronistic terminology and concepts onto the prophetic text, but allows Amos’ message to be evaluated in its own context. This enables further discussion in the field of Hebrew rhetoric and how the Old Testament prophets effectively communicated their messages to their audiences.

Amos strategically places rhetorical questions throughout his book that reflect patterns familiar to disputation speech and entrapment language. The concentration of rhetorical questions in key locations also suggest that the prophet implemented them in his attempt to persuade his audience into his divine message. Although the questions may at first seem bizarre or out of place to modern readers, there are several unifying factors within the feature. As a literary device, the questions function as entrapment language meant to draw in Israel in order to better convey the nation’s sin, and allows the audience to come to the conclusion before the prophet announces judgment. Moreover, the questions function within disputation speech as Amos calls into question Israel’s actions and way of thinking in order to propose the correct way of thinking. The book clearly

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<sup>137</sup> Yehoshua Gitay, “The Art of (Hebrew) Biblical Argumentation,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 15, no. 1 (2002): 86.

portrays a prophet debating with his audience, trying to persuade them of a proper view of God and His covenant with them. This argument enables the audience to receive the message of repentance and judgment in accordance with Torah.

Theologically, the rhetorical questions are based on Israel's knowledge of God through covenant relationship and are meant to shockingly draw Israel's attention to her unfaithfulness (cf. Hos. 1:2-3; 3:3). Israel knew Torah and understood that the prophet's questions were drawn from those expectations. Torah functions as the common knowledge from which the prophet disputes, drawing the connection that because God knows Israel through covenant, Israel should be living in obedience to this covenant (Amos 3:2). The result of the prophet's argument is that due to Israel's unfaithfulness to YHWH, the nation will experience judgment from the God of Armies the same as other nations who do not know YHWH.

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