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AMOS 3: *APOLOGIA* OF A PROPHET[1]

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Amos 3 has been rarely treated as anything other than a heterogeneous collection of oracles proclaiming judgement on Israel.[2] Consequently, it is not surprising that many scholars believe that the chapter division is misleading. A minority claim that some of the initial verses of chapter 3 more properly belong to chapter 2 as the conclusion to the previous great speech against the nations.[3] On the

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[1] Since the writing of this article I have come across David A. Dorsey, "Literary Architecture and Aural Structuring Techniques in Amos", *Biblica*, 73 (1992), 305-330, where Dorsey argues for a chiastic structure to Amos 3 but ignores the formal units in the text (see especially p.310-311). Unfortunately, this article came too late to my attention to interact with it.

[2] Among older commentators C. F. Keil's remarks are representative: "In ch.iii the sins and punishments are described in the most general form" [*Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 237]. Cf. also the comments of D. W. Nowack, *Die Kleinen Propheten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897), 129. Similar observations are found in more modern commentators. For example M. Bic states: "Wir wollen auch nicht versuchen, einen einheitlichen Plan aufzustellen, denn einen solchen hat es offenbar nie gegeben" [*Das Buch Amos* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1969), 65]. H. W. Wolff treats the text as a collection of independent units without an organizing principle in his *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 177-78. May's comments about the structure of Amos 3-6 can be defined as typical of the conclusions of scholars in the first seven decades of this century: "the collectors apparently took oracles which had the same introductory words and used them as headings of small sequences of approximately equal length. Beyond this there is no demonstrable scheme of arrangement, historical, geographical or thematic" [*Amos. A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 14].

[3] Scholars arguing that Amos 3:1-2 are the conclusions of chapters 1-2 are K. Budde, "Zu Text und Auslegung des Buches Amos", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 43 (1924), 80 and V. Maag, *Text, Wortschatz und Begriffswelt des Buches Amos* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1951), 13. A number of others contend that 3:1-8 concludes the great speech against the nations: J. A. Motyer, *The Day of the Lion. The Message of Amos*

other hand, many others argue that although chapter 3 begins a new section of speeches, some of its oracles, if not its entirety, should more naturally be grouped with some of the speeches of chapter 4 which have as a theme the judgement of Samaria.[4] The spate of fine, recent commentaries on Amos has offered essentially no new alternatives to an understanding of the arrangement of the oracles of chapter 3.[5]

(Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1974), 13; A. van der Wal, "The structure of Amos", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 26 (1983), 107-113; C. van Leeuwen, *Amos* (Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, 1985), 97ff.

[4] The view that there are two distinct units or collections, 3:1-8, treating the prophet's defence of his call, and 3:9-4:3, concerning Samaria, is held by the following scholars: W. H. Rainey, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), cxxxii, 74; E. A. Edgehill, *The Book of Amos* (London: Methuen & Co., 1914), 27-35; H. E. W. Fosbroke, *Amos* in *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), VI, 42ff. The theory that 3:1-4:3 is a distinct collection is claimed by the following: J. Taylor, "Amos", *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. J. Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), 85-88; G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908), 41ff; R. Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 221. M. O'Rourke Boyle claims that 3:1-4:3 is a unit of a covenant lawsuit speech which presents the witnesses against Israel, "The Covenant Lawsuit of the Prophet Amos: III:1-IV:13", *Vetus Testamentum*, 21 (1971), 338-62.

[5] J. A. Soggin treats chapters 3-6 as a collection of 15 units, without discussion of the significance of any patterning [*The Prophet Amos*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1987), 53-111]. S. Paul acknowledges a redactor's use of the literary device of *inclusio* to unify the contents of chapter 3: *Amos* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 102, 125. D. Stuart sees 3:1-2 and 3-8 as distinct units as well as 3:9-4:3 [*Hosea-Jonah* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 321ff.]. G. Smith argues that 3:1-8 comprise a unity as does 3:9-4:3 [*Amos. A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 97ff.]. F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman separate 3:1-8 from 3:9-15 within chapter 3. They also consider the possibility that 3:9-15-4:3 is a grouping of related oracles [*Amos. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 371ff.].

One of the most significant studies of Amos 3 in recent years has been the work of Yehoshua Gitay.[6] His study argues that the form-critical work of previous investigators has blinded them to the coherence of what he believes is a *single* unified discourse in 3:1-15. Since form-criticism isolates individual units and assigns them to a specific social context (*Sitz im Leben*), it ignores the larger textual picture, the literary context, of the speech units. Consequently, it may easily overlook more global, structural factors which, if taken into consideration, would argue for a larger original text of which the individual unit is an integral part.

In his study, Gitay uses a thorough knowledge of the principles of communication in classical rhetoric and, on the basis of these, shows that 3:1-15 constitutes a single speech rather than a collection of speeches: "the units are mutually related, each to the other and each to the whole, and therefore are part of a single discourse."[7] The theme of the discourse is the absolute certainty of Israel's punishment.

While Gitay's work is a healthy corrective to the sometimes atomistic analyses of form critics, it seems to have had little substantive influence on subsequent Amos scholarship. Very few scholars cognizant of Gitay's work believe that Amos 3:1-15 is one speech.[8] Obviously, this is due to a number of factors.

First, the different units do not have smooth transitions linking them together. In fact there are no formal connections; the units seem to be simply juxtaposed.[9] By way of contrast, the speech in chapters

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[6] "A Study of Amos's Art of Speech. A Rhetorical Analysis of Amos 3:1-15", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 42 (1980), 293-309.

[7] *Ibid.*, 295.

[8] See note 4 above.

[9] Cf. R. F. Melugin's discussion regarding the structure of chapters 3 and 4: "Chs. 4-5 [*sic*] are composed of genre-units which can be relatively easily isolated. In all probability this indicates that we have to do with a process of collection of material. A composer, in the strictest sense of the term, would probably have blurred the distinctions between units somewhat more" ["The Formation of Amos: An Analysis of Exegetical Method", *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, ed. P. J. Achtemeier (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978), 380]. Melugin's reference to chapters 4-5 is a mistake. He intends chapters 3-4. Cf. also Andersen and Freedman regarding 3:9-15: "On the first reading, and even after many readings, 3:9-15 seem like a loose assemblage of unrelated oracles, or even fragments of oracles. There are some obscure passages, and whether we take each bit separately or even try to make sense of the whole unit, the difficulties are severe" (*Amos*, 403-4).

1-2 and that in 4:6-12 are cohesively related by excessive verbal, generic, and thematic repetition. Second, some of the units seem independent and self-contained. While the literary context eludicates the meaning of some of the oracles (e.g. "the sins" of verse 2), other oracles do not seem to require the literary context for meaning (e.g. the judgment oracles of 9-11 and 13-15). Finally, the oracles from 3:9-4:3 have a common theme and geographical location, judgment on Samaria, and this suggests they originally belonged together.[10]

At the same time, though, some scholars do argue for a unity of 3:1-15 which is secondary, i.e. one which is assigned to a redactor. Koch argues that the chapter was composed by a redactor who created verses 1-2 as a preface to Amos' apology in verses 3-8. Next, the redactor attached to verses 1-8 an already existing series of oracles about Samaria (verses 9-11, 13-15; 4:1-3), separated the last one addressed to the women of Samaria into a new context (initiating a new series, 4:4-13), and inserted 3:12 between 9-11 and 13-15 in order to contribute to a thematic unity of oracles which proclaim the destruction of buildings and furniture.[11]

Melugin agrees with Koch's general approach and advances further arguments for the unity of the chapter. He notes that the verb *pqd* occurs in verses 2 and 14 and attributes this inclusio device to the redactor.[12] Verses 9-11 and 13-15 have similar opening imperatives, and the redactor created 3:12 to insert between these two units. Melugin argues that 3:12 is a redactional addition since it seems to presuppose the entire context of chapter 3:

> Its use of the messenger formula, as well as the language about household furnishings and the verb *yšb* relates to both vv.9-11 and vv.13-15. The mention of the "lion" in v.12 is reminiscent of vv.3-8. It looks as if v.12 was created by a redactor who already had the material before him.[13]

As one studies the work of these two scholars it is clear that they are using redaction criticism to distance themselves from form-

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[10] See K. Koch, *Amos. Untersucht mit den Methoden einer strukturalen Formsgeschichte* (Kevelaer/ Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker/ Neukirchener Verlag, 1976), II, 95.
[11] Koch, *Amos*, I, 126ff.; II, 76ff. See also Melugin's excellent discussion of Koch's work: "Formation of Amos", 381 ff.
[12] "Formation of Amos", 381. See also Paul, *Amos*, 125
[13] *Ibid.*, 382.

criticism's myopic analyses. These scholars can write about "compositions" in Amos rather than mere "collections" of oracles.[14] AT the same time, as far as 3:1-15 is concerned, it is clear that their redactors are extremely skilful, Melugin's a bit more than Koch's. In the light of Gitay's subsequent study, one is left wondering if a redactor is necessary. John Barton's comments are pertinent:

> The more impressive the critic makes the redactor's work appear, the more he succeeds in showing that the redactor has, by subtle and delicate artistry, produced a simple and coherent text out of the diverse materials before him; the more also he reduces the evidence on which the existence of those sources was established in the first place.[15]

In other words, the more skilful a redactor is shown to be, the less necessary the redactional hypothesis.

I would like to contribute to the discussion of Amos 3; by advancing further arguments for its original unity. The fact that the oracles are formally juxtaposed without the cohesion that exists in chapters 1-2 and 4 is an important argument of the form critics for understanding chapter 3 as a collection of independent speeches. However, there are many other resources that an orator has at his disposal for producing textual cohesion.

In proposing a new alternative for understanding the structure of 3:1-15, I will study the contribution this section makes to its literary context within the book of Amos. I would also like to make a suggestion about the possible place of this text within the prophetic career of Amos. Finally, I wish to reflect on the possible import of this text for contemporary biblical scholarship and the church.

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[14] But it is clear that the word "composition" means a group of already existing oracles that are selected, organized and edited by an individual. Very little material is freely composed.

[15] *Reading the Old Testament. Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 57. Cf. Andersen and Freedman on Amos: "We have found it increasingly difficult to distinguish original from redactional components. In terms of the methodology of redaction criticism, this means that the more difficult it becomes to separate the redactors' work from the material that came into their hands, the more difficult it becomes to talk about redactors at all. A thoroughly creative rewriting of available material becomes indistinguishable from original creative writing" (*Amos, 17*).

1. The Literary Context of Amos 3:1-15

It is clear that in the present form of the book of Amos, chapter 3 is a distinct discourse unit.[16] Without going into great detail, chapter 3 is clearly separated from both chapters 1-2 and chapter 4. First, there is a conspicuous, formal break with previous discourse in 3:1. The imperatival expression "Hear this word" initiates an oracle series in 3:1, 4:1, and 5:1 as many scholars note in theory but ignore in practice.[17] The formal separation of chapter 3 from chapters 1-2 and 4 is further supported by the repetitive, climactic style in the latter chapters: the recurrences of "For three sins and for four I will not turn it back"[18] and "You did not return to me"[19] are salient features of chapters 1-2 and 4 respectively. In each of the latter sections the repetition is used effectively to reach a climax. Such a style is absent from chapter 3.[20]

As far as the structure of the book of Amos is concerned, the third chapter has strategic significance. The book, as its historical superscription (1:1) indicates, contains "the words of Amos ... which he received in visions." After the hymnic title (1:2) presenting the Lord as a roaring lion, there is an introduction in which judgment is prophesied to the nations (1:3-2:16). There follows a series of five words (3:1-15, 4:1-13, 5:1-17, 5:18-27, 6:1-14) and five visions (7:1-9:6), to which a concluding section of oracles is appended (9:7-15). Consequently, the structure of the book with its core of words and

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[16] "Discourse unit" is a more neutral term. It does not imply that 3:1-15 is a collection or a composition in a redactional sense, or single, original utterance. It simply means that 3:1-15 is intended in its present form to be read or heard as a distinct unit of communication. The units contained in it have more in common with each other than with other units of Amos.

[17] Note that the formula is slightly different in 4:1 where the accusative particle is omitted and the object is not modified by a relative clause as in 3:1 and 5:1. These are not significant differences. S. R. Driver's remarks are apt: "There are clearly three separate discourses introduced by the emphatic 'Hear Ye this Word' " [*The Books of Joel and Amos* (Cambridge: University Press, 1898) 95].

[18] Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6.

[19] Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11.

[20] It is true that there is a repetitive style leading to a climax in one of the units in chapter 3 (*viz.* 3:3-8; see Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 100). But such style is not a structural feature of the entire chapter.

visions corresponds to the information supplied in the historical inscription.[21]

Chapter 3, therefore, is essentially the first chapter, having the critical importance of being the first of the "words." It follows the searing and shocking introduction in which Amos announces doom to all the surrounding nations, climaxing with a word of judgment to Israel. Repeatedly there is a stress on the fact that the limit of God's patience has been exceeded. Sin — repeated sin — cannot go unpunished any longer. Israel hears the unthinkable. She, the covenant people, which had been brought up from Egypt, is the prime target of God's judgement. The first word, then, follows this "theological bomb" which has been dropped on an unsuspecting audience.

It precedes the next four words which seem to intensify the description of both the sins of Israel and the awesome judgment of God, so much so that the final two discourses are not addressed to the living ("Hear!": 3:1; 4:1; 5:1) but to the dead ("Alas!": 5:18; 6:1).

2. The Structure of the First "Word"

Within chapter 3 itself there are five clearly defined units as form critics have shown: 1-2 (judgment oracle); 3-8 (series of rhetorical questions); 9-11 (judgement oracle); 12 (oracle containing a simile); and 13-15 (judgement oracle).[22]

The first judgment oracle reads as follows:

> Listen, Israelites, to these words that the
> Lord addresses to you, to the whole nation which he
> brought up from Egypt:
> For you alone have I cared
> among all the nations of the world;
> therefore will I punish you
> for all your iniquities (Amos 3:1-2, NEB).

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[21] For a recent study of the structure of the book of Amos using the distribution of the divine names and titles as a clue, see my article "The Lord is his Name: A Study of the Distribution of the Names and Titles of God in the Book of Amos", *Revue Biblique*, 98 (1991), 170-89. At the time of writing I held that Amos 3 was a composite (178, n.28).

[22] See the work of Wolff (*Joel and Amos*, 177-180), Melugin ("Formation of Amos", 378ff.) and the meticulous study of Koch (*Amos*, I, 126-137).

It has been unanimously recognized that this oracle introduces one of the central themes of Amos' prophecy. Instead of ensuring privilege and immunity from judgment, as Amos' audience believed, election to the covenant guarantees responsibility and liability. In this oracle the reason for judgment is stated first — election — then followed by the shocking verdict and sentence — the certainty of Yahweh's punishment. Such an oracle provides a fitting summary of both the content of Amos' message (the importance of covenant traditions and judgment) and its style (shocking, reversing expectations). If any text is vintage Amos, it is this one.[23]

The unit also continues a theme of the previous discourse, i.e., Israel in the context of the nations ("For you alone have I cared among all the nations of the world"), thus contributing to the literary and thematic cohesion of the book.[24] The function of the oracle, though, is clearly apologetic. The speaker shares the same theological presuppositions of his audience, but draws different conclusions and wishes to persuade the audience of the truth of his convictions. This requirement has been precipitated by the shocking speech announcing judgment to Israel in the context of the nations.[25]

The next unit is a series of rhetorical questions in which the prophet continues and intensifies his apologetic mode:[26]

> Do two men travel together
> unless they have agreed?

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[23] Consequently, I find it hard to believe that this text can be attributed to a redactor (cf. Melugin, "Formation of Amos", 380-381). Cf. Andersen and Freedman: "for example 3:1-2, surely one of the most important statements in the book, which could hardly have come from anyone else — unless we recognize that the editor was as much a prophet as Amos, and then it would hardly matter" (*Amos*, 149).

[24] I am indebted to Paul's insights at this point (*Amos*, 100-101).

[25] Andersen and Freedman note that chapter 3 presupposes chapters 1-2 (*Amos*, 377 ff.), but they argue that chapter 3 has a chronological priority (*Amos*, 84 ff.). Smith's solution to the relationship between chapters 1-2 and 3 is much less complicated: "When Amos announced the destruction of Israel at the end of his oracles against the nations, his audience stood in shock and disbelief ... the prophet must overcome the illogical nature of supposing that the God who chose Israel would now destroy her. This ... must be restated in a convincing way to persuade the audience that God will judge Israel" (*Amos*, 97). Hence chapter 3.

[26] Andersen and Freedman regard these verses as Amos' *apologia* (*ibid.*, 384). For Gitay, they correctly define the rhetorical situation ("Study", 296).

Does a lion roar in the forest
if he has no prey?
Does a young lion growl in his den
if he has caught nothing?
Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground
if the striker has not set for it?
Does a trap spring from the ground
and take nothing?
If a trumpet sounds the alarm,
are not the people scared?
If disaster falls on a city,
has not the Lord been at work?
For the Lord God does nothing
without giving to his servants the prophets
knowledge of his plans.
The Lion has roared;
who is not terrified?
The Lord God has spoken
who will not prophesy? (Amos 3:3-8, NEB).

Formally this unit represents a clean break with the previous oracle.[27]
Yet, rhetorically it functions to answer possible arguments offered
against the speaker's credentials, which would, in effect, marginalize
or domesticate his "wild" message. It also envisions attempts at
censorship. Thus, the prophet presents his credentials, his *curriculum
vitae* as it were. Just as there are natural cause-and-effect
relationships in the physical world, the same is true in the more
important spiritual sphere. The rhetorical questions that emphasize
the sequence of cause and effect conclude with a climax, in which a
lion's roar is compared to the divine voice. Just as the former is the
cause of automatic fear, the latter results in automatic prophecy.
Amos' scandalous message is simply a human effect of a divine
cause. He has no credentials, except the fact that he has stood in the
divine council (3:7). The words of Amos are not of his own making.
They are transcendent in origin and he has no choice but to speak
them.

The parallel of the lion's roar with the divine voice continues and
expands the theme contained in the hymnic title of the book:

The Lord roars from Zion

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[27] The impact of this break is felt particularly by J. Morgenstern who
observed that 3:3-8 "stands absolutely isolated in its present position"
[*Amos Studies* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1941), I, 17].

and thunders from Jerusalem;
the shepherds' pastures are scorched
and the top of Carmel is dried up.
(Amos 1:2, NEB).

The next unit, another judgment oracle, reads as follows:

Stand upon the palaces in Ashdod
and upon the palaces of Egypt,
and proclaim aloud:
"Assemble on the hills of Samaria,
look at the tumult seething among her people
and at the oppression in her midst;
What do they care for honesty
who hoard in their palaces the gains of crime and
violence?"
This is the very word of the Lord.
Therefore these are the words of the Lord God:
An enemy shall surround the land;
your stronghold shall be thrown down
and your palaces sacked. (Amos 3:9-11, NEB)

The string of four imperatival sentences with which this unit begins
("Stand ... proclaim ... assemble ... look") not only marks formal
disjunction with the previous discourse, but arrests the audience's
attention to important information.[28] Much of this information is
shocking since it presents the surrounding pagan nations as a foil for
Israelite immorality. Centres notorious for their inability both to
discern and practise morality are, invited to learn a lesson in
immorality in — of all places — the streets of an Israelite city. The
people of God who occupy this city care nothing for honesty; they
have lost all sense of basic moral discernment.[29]

Although there seems to be formal independence of this oracle
from the previous context, it is thematically relevant since it
contributes to the apologetic tone. Just as the previous texts justified

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[28] "The series of imperatives in v.9 create a dramatic effect" (Gitay,
"Study", 306).
[29] G. Pfeifer correctly argues that the word which is translated by the
NEB as "honesty" has nothing to do with covenant law. It rather means
the moral obligations that every member of the human race intuitively
recognizes. This is proven by the fact that foreign races can be the judges
of Israel's conduct ["Die Denkformen des Propheten Amos (III 9-11)",
Vetus Testamentum, 34 (1984), 480].

Amos' prophecy by stressing the implications of the covenant and the logical argument of cause and effect, verses 9-11 appeal to the moral conscience of the Israelites as human beings. A knowledge of the covenant is not necessary to discern the truth of Amos' message. Even moral barbarians can see that.

Just as the previous units expand on themes mentioned in the introduction so too does 9-11. The theme of the nations being used as a foil for Israel's moral corruption is continued as is the use of the key word "palaces" (3:9, 10, 11) which figured so prominently in the first two chapters (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:5).[30]

The fourth unit in the sequence is a prophetic oracle containing a simile about Israel's "salvation":

> These are the words of the Lord:
> As a shepherd rescues out of the jaws
> of a lion two shin bones or the tip of an
> ear, so shall the Israelites who live in Samaria be
> rescued like the corner of a couch or a chip from
> the leg of a bed. (Amos 3:12, NEB)[31]

The text, again, seems to be formally independent of its literary context, but certainly not thematically. J. Vermeylen feels that it originally belonged to verses 3-8 with the latter's stress on the lion.[32] Melugin, as already noted, argues that it was specifically created by the redactor because of its use of imagery found throughout the chapter.[33] Whether or not one agrees with these scholars about the origin of the verse, they clearly see that it is thematically relevant to the chapter.

Again, the text is used for apologetic purposes. The previous judgment stressed the plunder of the Samarian wealth. This unit envisions those who imagine that they can escape the coming judgment announced in verses 9-11 (and 2:13-16), thinking that

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[30] See Melugin, "Formation of Amos", 383.

[31] The text contains a notorious crux, the resolution of which is not important for my thesis. For a relevant discussion see the standard commentaries.

[32] *Du Prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1978), II, 527ff. Cf. B. Renaud's discussion of Vermeylen's thesis: "Genèse et Théologie d'Amos 3, 3-8" in A. Caquot and M. Delcor, eds., *Festschrift Henri Cazelles* (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1981), 32-63.

[33] "Formation of Amos", 382.

perhaps their wealth can save them.[34] Any possible hope of salvation is dashed by the repetition of the imagery of a lion: "As a shepherd rescues from the jaws of a lion two shin bones and the tip of an ear, so shall the Israelites who live in Samaria be rescued."

This unit deliberately echoes the second unit in which Yahweh's voice is compared to that of a lion. The lion has not only relevance for the cause of prophecy but also for its effect. The ominous voice that has roared can also devour, leaving nothing but the evidence of destruction: two shin bones or the lobe of an ear. And again this unit, a part of the first word, reinforces the theme sounded in the hymnic title: Yahweh is a lion.

The final oracle of judgment reads as follows:

> Listen and testify against the family of Jacob.
> This is the very word of the Lord God, the God
> of Hosts. On the day when I deal with Israel
> for all their crimes,
> I will most surely deal with the altars of
> Bethel: the horns of the altar shall be hacked off
> and shall fall to the ground.
> I will break down both winter-house and
> summer-house; houses of ivory shall perish,
> and great houses be demolished.
> This is the very word of the Lord.
> (Amos 3:13-15, NEB).

The function of this unit in its literary context reinforces the thought of the previousoracle: there can be no sanctuary from the coming disaster, here envisioned as an earthquake. Indeed, the first objects to come crashing down are those of the sanctuary, the horns of the altar, where one could obtain protection from life-threatening circumstances.[35]

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[34] Melugin's understanding of the function of 3:12 is that the redactor's "purpose was to show that the destruction proclaimed in vv.9-11 (also 13-15) would be so thorough that nothing of consequence would be left" (*ibid.*). This analysis of the meaning of verses 9-11 in context cannot be improved. As I argue, however, a redactor is not necessary.

[35] Cf. 1 Kings 2:28-35. Paul's comments are superb: "The altar ... served as an asylum ... and was also the site where the blood of sacrifices was spilled ... Thus the destruction of the altar and its horns actually symbolizes the end of sanctuary, immunity, and expiation for the people" (*Amos*, 124).

As the fourth unit echoes the second, the final judgment oracle recalls the first, thus completing a deliberately designed chiastic structure. With the repetition of the imperative *šm'* (cf. 3:1), the double use of the verbal root *pqd*, and the resumption of reference to Yahweh in the first person, the text ends where it began: "Listen ... therefore *I* will punish you for all your iniquities" (3:2).[36] In the conclusion, the nature of the judgment is spelled out, and this prediction of the earthquake, mentioned in the historical superscription (1:1) and perhaps alluded to in the great speech against the nations (2:13-16)[37] is graphically described. It is an essential part of the first "word" of Amos.[38]

In summary, 3:1-15 is a deliberately designed speech using the principle of chiasm. If letter values are given to the different units of the speech, the text can be described as follows: A (1-2), B (3-8), C (9-11), B' (12), A' (13-15). By means of this structure the middle unit is made conspicuous, since it is the only one which is not repeated in the pattern. The middle unit, C, states unequivocally that the burden of the responsibility for the coming judgment rests squarely on the shoulders of the Israelites who have lost the elementary ability to make moral distinctions. Even Philistines and Egyptians know better! As such, this unit stands out as a moral appeal to the conscience of the prophet's audience to recognize the truth of his assertions.

A knowledge of this carefully organized chiastic structure can put to rest some of the arguments that form and redaction criticism might offer against the original unity of chapter 3. Cohesion in this text is not achieved mainly by linguistic devices which signal taxis and hypotaxis, but by means of the macro-structure of chiasm. Contiguous units must be sharply distinguished from each other in order for the global chiastic structure to be discerned. Moreover, the integral function of each unit in the structure argues against a gradual growth of a collection of units or even a secondary redacted unity. As Gitay states: "In short, the supposed independent units in vv. 1-15 are interrelated and create one single discourse."[39] Failing to see the structure, Vermeylen detects disunity and argues that 3:12

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[36] Scholars such as Melugin and Paul argue that this evidence of unity points to redaction. But why not authorship? See Melugin, "Formation of Amos", 381 and Paul, *Amos* 125. Cf. Gitay, "Study", 301.

[37] See e.g. Soggin, *Prophet Amos*, 49ff. But cf. Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 335 and Paul, *Amos*, 94-99.

[38] It is hardly necessary to postulate logical contradiction between the different judgments predicted in 9-11 and 13-15. Why could not the prophet have predicted two types of calamities within the same discourse?

[39] "Study", 295.

was part of 3:3-8 originally; and on the other hand, in order to explain unity, Melugin must postulate a redactor who creates texts. Both solutions are unnecessary.

3. The First "Word" — A Prophetic Apology

When the book of Amos was being compiled, why did Amos or his scribe/editor place 3:1-1-15 as the first of the "words," as opposed to, say, the speeches in chapter 4 and 5? The third chapter simply functions as an apology for the first and unthinkable announcement of disaster. The other discourses are not marked by such an apologetic mode. But, in addition, this literary reality in which 3:1-15 is placed after chapters 1-2, probably reflects historical reality.

There is no question that, historically, the first announcement of God's "No" to Israel would have created controversy and required a strident apologetic thrust by the prophet.[40] The sparse historical information that exists confirms this analysis. In the second part of the core of the book, the visions (7:1-9:6), there is a brief narrative account of the prophet after he received the third, critical vision (7:10-17). This visual revelation marks the turning point in Yahweh's relation to Israel, from the "Yes" of forgiveness to the "No" of judgment. The narrative digression describes official religious opposition to the message of Amos and the resultant vigorous apology of the prophet:

> I was no prophet. Nor was I a prophet's son. I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the Lord took me as I followed the flock and said to me, "Go and prophesy to my people Israel." So now listen to the word of the Lord. (Amos 7:14-16, NEB).[41]

The most natural reading of this text suggests that this *apologia* followed an announcement of doom inspired by the third vision. In other words, the textual sequence reflects historical sequence. When Amos first "went public" with his message of judgment, an apology was required because his words were regarded as no less than treason. The first "word" with its pervasive polemical tenor probably

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[40] See R. Smend, "Das Nein des Amos", *Evangelische Theologie*, 23 (1963), 404-423 and the related discussion in G. Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 105-109.

[41] I use the alternate reading of the NEB in which the past tense of the copula verb is used. For a discussion of the problems involved in the understanding of the tenses here, see Hasel, *Understanding Amos*, 41-47.

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represents an expanded version of the prophet's apology for his first message of doom.[42] Its rich associations with the great speech against the nations suggests that the latter was the "sermon" that got Amos in trouble. With its stress on the *irrevocable* divine decision to judge,[43] the great speech parallels the third vision where a similar statement occurs.[44] This speech probably arose, then, out of the third vision, and just as an apology follows the latter (7:10-17), so also an apology succeeds the speech against the nations.[45] In it Amos effectively demolishes all possible arguments that his message contained in chapters 1-2 is false.

To a stunned audience Amos parried theological objections to the speech with theological reasons deriving from the same theological traditions (3:1-2). Anticipating attempts to call into question his credentials or to silence him, he argues that he has stood in the divine council. One might just as well command someone not to fear at the sound of the lion's roar as order him not to prophecy when Yahweh speaks (3-8). Moreover, he adducea as the heart of his apology the fact that even the morally obtuse pagans could see the evidence of moral depravity in the streets of the affluent capital city. Consequently all the affluence would be plundered by a foreign army (9-11). Lest any imagine that they would be rescued from the invasion, he countered with sarcastic agreement: "There will be salvation, yet, but only for the evidence of destruction" (12).

When individuals might object that the religious sanctuaries and hallowed sites would grant Israel special immunity, Amos declared that they would be the first to go in the coming deluge of judgement (13-15).[46] In short, Amos 3:1-15, is a scathing apology, a prophetic demolition of all possible arguments against the message of judgment, presented in defence of the speech of chapters 1-2.[47]

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[42] There are occasional references which imply an apologetic context in other passages: 5:14; 6:2, 12.

[43] 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6.

[44] 7:8.

[45] Note that in both there is the command: "Hear the word of the Lord."

[46] From a New Testament perspective, cf. Matthew 24:1ff.

[47] For a different explanation which connects chapters 1-2 to the fourth vision, see Andersen and Freedman (*Amos*, 83 ff.). Yet they claim, as I, that chapters 1-2 contain the Bethel speech which led to the confrontation with Amaziah. Despite their arguments it seems more natural to understand the confrontation with Amaziah following the third vision. Subsequent to the confrontation was the word of doom contained in the fourth vision (cf. *Amos*, 733ff.). After all, this is the order of the text.

In summary, the thesis of this paper is that Amos 3:1-15 is a single speech, a prophetic apology, designed on the basis of the principle of chiasm. The first "word" continues themes introduced in the first two chapters and its apologetic tenor suggests that it was spoken at the beginning of Amos' prophetic vocation.[48]

Concluding Reflection

It does not seem appropriate to end a consideration of this chapter without asking how this first "word" of the prophet Amos, spoken almost three millenia ago, might analyze the scholarship which analyzes it. Amos' words can be explained away as those of an ethical idealist, a social reformer, a prophet of liberation, etc., but as far as he himself is concerned these explanations are totally unsatisfactory. What does one do with a man whose *raison d'être* was God?[49] How does one study the words of this One who roars from Zion, knowing that these are the words of the Creator who makes all scholarship possible, and who can destroy as well as create? What does he think of all the learned papers, voluminous commentaries, scholarly reconstructions — this paper — if they do not lead to a more profound reverence, trust and obedience?[50] If scholarship is not first of all pleasing to him, then it is so much food for the lion.

How does this chapter scrutinize the contemporary church which reads the Scriptures every Sunday? The first word of Amos tells the church that election is not insurance from judgment, but a guarantee of judgment if God's will is not being obeyed (1-2). In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "cheap grace" is an illusion. Moreover, the Word of God cannot be domesticated, programmed, and managed, but is in fact wildly free, challenging all comfortable cultural and theological assumptions and vested interests (3-8). It will not be imprisoned by modern or post-modern definitions of reality; it defines reality.

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[48] Or, at the least, after his speech at Bethel.

[49] See further the observations of H. W. Wolff, "The Irrestible Word", *Currents in Theology and Missions*, 10 (1983), 5-13. Particularly noteworthy are Karl Barth's remarks: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), IV, 445 ff.

[50] See in particular Wolff's quotation of Barth's application of Amos 5:21-24 to scholarship (*Amos*, 267-268). See further, K. Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. G. Foley (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 134ff.

Amos 3 reminds the church of its abysmal condition when the world becomes its moral superior (9-11); that there is no security from the consequent judgment of God (12), and that the objects the church thinks are its security will be the first to be swept away when judgment comes (13-15). Yahweh, the Lord of history and nature, brings judgment by either military disaster or natural calamity. His agenda must be the agenda or there will be no agenda.

Of course, it is not fashionable to think of God in such terms in both contemporary post-modern society and the church. Neither was it fashionable in 762 B.C., when Amos delivered the first of his "words ... received in visions ... two years before the earthquake" (1:1).[51] What is fashionable or "politically correct" is not important. What is important is truth. Amos told — and tells — the truth. He did not have a choice. He heard the Lion. Does anyone else?[52]

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[51] Cf. Abraham Heschel's statement discussing the reference to Yahweh roaring like a lion in 1:2: "These words are strange and inexplicable to us. Most of us who care for the world bewail God's dreadful silence, while Amos appears smitten by God's mighty voice. He did not hear a whisper, "a still small voice," but a voice like a lion's roaring that drives shepherd and flock into panic" [*The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), I, 29].

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