

Final Exam
Dr. Russell Mack
Amos OT655
August 1, 2021
Stefanie Hill

The following is a combined response to the following prompts:

1. Based on what you know about the person of Amos and his times, what do you think happened *after* delivering these prophecies? How do you think his life might have played out? Use your creative imagination but be sure to draw your informed conjecture from the text.
2. It's Sunday morning and Amos steps up to speak. What would he say to your specific congregation at this particular time? Use first person and contextualize the message.

I, Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa, pick up my quill and write in my own hand the message of the Lord. Home again in Judah, I am forever changed. My heart still burns with the intensity of the message Yahweh spoke through my mouth. As never before, I hold knowledge of the relentless love of God and his unwavering justice this love demands. I recognize in my spirit my task is not finished until I write down the words of the Lord. I am no prophet by profession but perhaps he is making a new sort of prophet of me, a writing prophet. Compelled in my spirit, I am eager to commit all to parchment. This labor is of utmost importance to me yet I do not work alone. With my friends and scribes, Benaiah, Jonathan, and others, I endeavor to preserve a faithful accounting of all that has transpired. Perhaps God can speak to future readers through this scroll and reach the hearts of those inclined to dismiss God's judgement of Israel as of no import for them. Only Yahweh knows if these words, unlike those so utterly disregarded by Israel, will be heard and move hearts to repentance.

In addition to our primary work of carefully preserving God's words, I also wish to record my own memories, those vivid recollections of the people I encountered on my brief assignment to the Northern Kingdom. I shall never forget little Mara. I noticed her as I stopped at a vendor's stall to purchase bread, wine and a little oil for my evening meal. Her attention was fixed on the loaf in my hand and her pinched features spoke of the

slow starvation rampant among the poor. Sharing a meal with her, my gentle questions soon opened a flood of heartache. Her story was not unique. Mara's family were farmers. Her father once stewarded ancestral lands. Mara's family and relatives now existed in a one room home, so small even the flat roof was filled with meager pallets. While her account was stark, my own observations of the region allowed me to complete the picture of her family's fate. I knew the wealthy schemed to acquire and consolidate the small farms into large holdings, proceeding next to specialize in the most profitable crops, many marked for export. Mara's father was unable to compete. He was forced to sell land piecemeal over the years. In desperation, he sold himself in to slavery to protect Mara. He surely knew the fate that awaited innocent girls placed into debt slavery in the homes of the wealthy (2:7). A loving father, he sacrificed himself in her stead. Mara mentioned also the absence of her older brother. This brother had once dedicated himself to be set apart for God, a Nazarite (2:11-12). It was clear from her fond tone, he had been the pride of her family, the one on whom the continuation of their name depended. She was unable to explain where this brother had gone, why he was not stepping into his proper role in the absence of her father. She only knew he had discovered new friends who invited him to drink forbidden wine he could ill afford, friends who forsook worship of the one true God. Sadly, her brother had disappeared and her family mourned bitterly the loss of this only son (8:10).

Another who haunts my memories, albeit most unpleasantly, is Athaliah. A woman of great wealth and substantial power, she was utterly lacking in heart. We clashed when I spoke God's warnings to those entering the temple, a place no longer offering true worship to God. The burnt offerings and grain offerings were a stench in his nostrils and his presence had long since departed (5:21-22). The insincere worship smacked of Babylon and its idolatrous enslavement to wealth and power. To these pampered women and their husbands, worship was a venue for ostentatious displays of wealth. The music, the festival atmosphere, and the wine were more suited to heathen rituals. The women arrived in litters adorned like couches with silk pillows and canopies, each wearing garments costly beyond calculation, all brazenly bearing offerings intended to tout their wealth (6:1-7). The contrast between this extravagant procession and the pervasive poverty, a story engraved on the faces of the poor, was staggering. A single ring from their lotioned hands could sustain a family for years. The Sovereign Lord spoke to me, I could only prophecy (3:8). Athaliah heard my warnings, the words of destruction, exile, and even those regarding her own death (4:2-3). She mocked me for daring to prophecy, for I had no association with that establishment. She asked me if I knew who she was, if I possessed enough intelligence to understand she could crush me as easily as she did any other poor fool who dared to cross her. She passed me by, laughing and calling for her husband to bring more drink (4:1). Woe to her, complacent and amused by the words God spoke through me (6:1).

Abram is unforgettable. Homeless, he sat near the city gate most days (4:6). He was one of a handful of Israelites who spoke of Yahweh with reverence and affection(9:12). Faithful, frail, and elderly, he was much acquainted with hardship. He reminisced about how his village had been struck by drought and yet when the rain finally returned, the flooding was such that the fledgling crops were destroyed by blight and mildew (4:7,9). He remembered the faithfulness of God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt, led them for forty years in the wilderness and gave them this land. Surprisingly, Abram also recognized these recent plagues for what they were and knew from whom they came. He wept as he retold how he had cried out to people in his hometown, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one God. Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever. Repent for the LORD's anger has flared up against us. We will soon perish" Deut. 6). He was commanded to never speak such words again. The elders rebuked him harshly, reminding him Israel is God's chosen people and exempt from judgement or wrath. After all, they scoffed, Israel was nothing like Egypt. I feel a special affinity with Abram. I believe he also knew what it is to be the mouthpiece for Yahwah though he was silenced (2:11-12).

Unfailingly faithful to his covenant with his chosen people, God will not overlook their covenant failure and unfaithfulness as evidenced by religious apostasy, moral and social collapse and political corruption. He is El Roi, seeing all people and concerned for even the weakest of society, those most vulnerable. Through my encounter with the Lord our God, I am changed and will devote my life to serving him only. In obedience, I will continue to speak as he leads. Perhaps my people will one day be given new hearts and a new spirit in the place of their hearts of stone.

Bibliography

Achtemeier, Elizabeth. *Minor Prophets I*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996.

Barton, John. *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of the Book of Amos*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Carroll, M. Daniel R. and Thomas E. McComiskey. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2008.

- Hill, Andrew, and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2017.
- Mackie, Tim. “*Bible Project*”. Podcast audio. *Introduction to Biblical Law*. October 1, 2015. Accessed July 15, 2021.
- New International Version Family Reading Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
- Sailhamer, John H. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.
- Smith, Billy K. and Frank S. Page. *The New American Commentary*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1995.
- Smith, Gary V. *Amos: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989.
- Smith, Gary V, Sheri L. Klouda, Andrew E. Hill, Tremper Longman III, Herman J. Austel, R.D. Patterson and Willem A. VanGemeren. *Commentary on the Minor Prophets*. Edited by Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2012.
- Stuart, Douglass. *World Biblical Commentary: Hosea-Jonah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988.
- Walton, John H, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Commentary: Old Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.