

Stuart, Douglas K. Hosea-Jonah. Vol 31. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco: Word, 1987. 320-333.

Constable, Thomas L. Notes on Amos. Soniclight.com. 2023 Edition.

Widbin, Bryan R. Center Structure in the Center Oracles of Amos. 177-192.

Smith, Gary V. Amos, A Mentor Commentary. 135-155.

In a few paragraphs of approximately 350 word total length, detail what you learned about these verses that was new, fascinating, or compelling to you.

The structure of the book of Amos is complex and intentional. This week's reading helped me see the importance of taking time to study and understand the literary structure.

Widbin's article helped me see how the structure adds to or clarifies the meaning of the text. When we examine the structure we can find unity in ideas, metaphors, and themes. For example, Widbin states (p. 184) that we can find unity in the theme that YHWH's prerogative and activity stand behind what happens in the world particularly as it concerns affairs between nations. Additionally, Widbin suggests that an analogy in one part finds a counterpart in another part, further explaining the text. He also suggests that connection in unusual features in the text help our understanding. For example, when the prophet uses the phrase "in the house of Jacob" (3:13) and the phrase "pride of Jacob (6:8) this supports the prophet's invitation for the nations to bear witness concerning the crimes of Jacob. (Widbin, p. 186) Lastly, Widbin suggests that when textual correspondences abound (as in the extended portrait of the men and women and in the announcement of punishment) in every clause we are given a better/greater picture of the situation. (Widbin, p. 188).

In watching Dr. Mack's video, I learned that when we understand the four literary markers in the text (the series of similarly structured oracles, the "thus says YHWH" statement, the exhortation as an introduction to a new message, and a shift in focus from guilt to judgement) and the key words and themes (know, lion, prey, punishment, etc.) we can see that they all suggest the closure of the first major unity and the beginning of a new one. Additionally, when we recognize the symmetry of the text, we see that this structure underscores the close connection between Israel's guilt and coming judgement. Lastly, when we understand the chiasmus in chapter 3 of Amos, we see that at the center is the key idea of the unit: Israel does not know how to do right.

Constable's notes also highlight some of the literary features to help better understand the text. Constable suggests that Amos' use of rhetorical questions in chapter 3 helps the Israelites appreciate the inevitability of their judgment. In each question, the prophet pointed out that a certain cause inevitably produces a certain effect. Additionally, the questions create an ominous rhetorical tone. Constable also notes that Amos' literary structure in 3:11-15 previews what is going to happen. Amos' announcement of Israel's judgment came in three waves, as her coming invader might come. (vv. 11, 12 and 13-15)

The Word Biblical Commentary suggests it is important to understand that like many proverbial and prophetic sayings, Amos's words in 3:3-8 are elliptical. The full logic is assumed, not stated. This helps us understand that Yahweh must punish Israel for their sins, a concept that the people of Amos' time apparently found hard to understand. (Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 31 by Douglas Stuart p. 321-322)

These are just a few examples of how understanding the structure and literary form of the text lends to understanding and more accurately interpreting the text.

In reading Gary Smith's commentary on Amos (Amos, A Mentor Commentary) he explained that Amos' listeners thought God's election of Israel had made them immune to God's judgment. "Unfortunately many Israelites seemed to concentrate more on the eternal blessing than on the conditional nature of God's blessings." (Smith, p. 135) God's promises were assumed to be rights that Israel would always receive. I must confess that I may be more like the people of Amos' day than I would like to confess. My question is this: If it's a promise from God then how can it be conditional?