

Final Exam

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Essay Prompt #1- The Word of God is a scalpel in the hands of the Holy Spirit. What cancerous tumors has the book of Amos cut out of your life? Name and explain them.

There are many cancerous tumors that the Holy Spirit has cut out of my life through the scalpel of the Word of God in Amos. The first is studying the biblical context matters. To apply God's words to my life, I must study the context of the original audience first. Over the past several years, I have done my best to make it a habit to read the Bible cover to cover at least once per year. This has proved a great habit where I was starting to learn about the whole story of the Scriptures. But when it came to books of the Bible like the Prophets, Psalms, and Minor Prophets, I would (now upon reflection) blindly apply the word of God. This semester, learning about the chiasmic structures of Amos, made a huger impact in me. This motivated and convicted me that I must become the best Bible scholar for God's glory. My walk and the walks of the congregations I serve are on the line.

Next, after the contextual study of Amos, I learned that the purpose behind my religious actions is valued more in the eyes of God. This was evident through God's mocking and rejection of Israel's religious actions. Even though I may not be offering bulls and physical sacrifices, learning this made me reflect, "Am I truly living a Christian life in all areas of my life?". This was the problem with the Israelites, and I was found just as or even more guilty of heartless religion. God truly sees my heart above everything. This made me recheck my heart

and reflect on why my heart has become so cold and indifferent “as long as I do the right things on the outside.” This is further from God’s will for myself.

Another area that was cut off my heart was that I must treat people right. The Israelites were judged because they were doing the right things on the outside, but they were treating their neighbors unjustly. It does not matter how much time, energy, and sacrifice I give to God if I am going to treat people in any way I want. So many times, I would treat people and strangers however I want because I am not at church. And no one knows that I am a pastor and a Christian in this store, street, or place. But true religion loves God and people. “Obviously, oppressive politics and affluent economics depend on each other.”¹ In Amos’ time, the economics flourished only through injustice and unfair treatment of the people. This displeased God. This really showed me that God values not only our relationship with Him but also with another. My relationship with God is not a private matter, but a central matter in all areas of my living.

Next, my understanding of God’s prophecies has definitely grown, and the incorrect views of biblical prophecies have been cut off. “In their defeat, they will come to know again whose strength it is that leads all nations and determines their destiny (9.7).”² If the Israelites were not to heed God’s words through Amos, even after God’s judgment was executed, He will still show hope and mercy. God’s judgment always leads to His hope and character despite our failings. Growing up I was always so scared to read the prophetic and Old Testament parts of the Bible. Jesus’ words in red in the New Testament were enough to scare me. Encountering and furthering my understanding of God’s grace through the Scriptures helped me embrace the New Testament. Through the study of Amos, I saw God has never changed even before New

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. *Prophetic Imagination: Revised Edition*. Lanham: Fortress Press, 2001, 30.

² Mays, James Luther. *Old Testament Library: Amos*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1969, 123.

Testament periods. God's heart has always been to show His love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and blessings only if I would place my faith in Him completely.

Last, through Amos, I was convicted that the most important part of my faith while not neglecting everything I just shared is to execute my walk with God through obedience to Him. It does not matter if I know everything and understand biblical truths. What God desires is that I obey His voice through correct understanding and application of His Words in my life. I realized I have overcomplicated my relationship, faith with God so many times. More than getting good grades and living a righteous and moral life (which are all important in its time and place), I must make it my aim to ultimately obey God's will. Understanding without obedience is not acceptable. I must seek to obey God fully through my understanding of Him.

Essay Prompt #2- What would you say to a skeptic if he/she asked you what Amos is all about? Demonstrate intentionality to adapt the message to the skeptic.

The very first thing I would ask the skeptic if he or she asked what Amos was all about is, "What do you think Amos is all about, and why?". My purpose behind asking this question would be to observe the worldview the skeptic has. God is an incarnational God. He seeks to relate and communicate to us in relatable ways. God never speaks without a way for us to understand Him. And the best way to communicate Christian truths to a non-Christian is to first meet him or her where they are at. "Rather, his work came precisely at the engagement of the *religion of God's freedom* with the *politics of human justice*."³ Brueggemann clearly explains that Moses came not just to share God's new message, but God's message directly engaged with

³ Brueggemann, 7.

the injustices of the society Moses was confronting. By asking the skeptic their perspective first, this will set me up to engage properly and effectively with him or her.

Next, I would actually share the gospel before going into the details of the book of Amos. I would do this because Amos and all books of the Bible tell the greater narrative of the gospel. The gospel starts with who God is, how he has revealed himself to humanity, and what our responses have been and should be. And if we respond the way God desires, God will share eternal life with us which is personally knowing Him through Jesus Christ starting right now and forever. Even though this next step may not seem directly connected to explaining Amos, the gospel is what saves people and not good theology. Whenever there is an opportunity to plant the seed of the gospel, we must.

After these base lines are established, then I would use the literary and original contexts of the book of Amos to intrigue and draw the skeptic in. Most people appreciate masterpieces, and Amos is a literary masterpiece. “Then the pattern of the series is broken and expanded as Israel hears its own name added to the list of those whom Yahweh will devastate.”⁴ I would open with sharing about the chiasmic structures of Amos and share Israel’s original story on how they thought they were exempt from this judgment. People usually do not respond positively to commands and principles, but they respond well to stories. It is because stories help us relate to the characters. In doing so, we are able to put ourselves in the characters’ shoes as if we were the characters themselves and analyze and reflect on our lives. This reflection would be key in not only explaining the book of Amos but most importantly sharing the gospel message in the book of Amos that can break the skepticism and disbelief of the person. And turn their hearts into belief and salvation.

⁴ Mays, 22.

Second, I would highlight a problem the Israelites had in Amos which was the hypocrisy of their religious services. Hypocrisy is something everyone can relate to whether they believe in God or not. Character is something everyone shares, and sharing about how the Israelites were failing morally would definitely relate with him or her. I would share about the reason God's judgments were coming through the plagues and events to come. I would also highlight how God commanded the Israelites to bring sacrifices, but it was never to break their relationship with Him through the sins they were committing and also the relationships they had with another. It was to show their relationship with Him, and if this is broken, the outward sacrifices mean absolutely nothing. People crave community and relationships. This would be a great bridge in introducing a relationship with God with the skeptic.

Lastly, then I would share the absolute verdict of the book of Amos: that hope and salvation is found only by turning to God evident through righteousness, justice, and love. Our actions must reflect this heart of knowing that salvation is only found in God. Ultimately, God offers hope, forgiveness, and a new life if Israel wholeheartedly turns back to God, but it is because of who God is. The gospel starts, is carried through, and ends with God and who He is, and we must trust His character and His Spirit working in us to experience the fullness of His presence in our lives.

After sharing these points of Amos, I would extend an invitation to the skeptic if he or she is interested in personally coming to know this God. This is a journey that he or she does not need to do alone, and I would invite the skeptic to a meal, church, and take it step by step with him or her. I would also invite the church community I am a part of to be praying, and as God leads, to help me show love and that God would bring salvation into the skeptic's life.

Bibliography

Brueggemann, Walter. *Prophetic Imagination: Revised Edition*. Lanham: Fortress Press, 2001.

Mays, James Luther. *Old Testament Library: Amos*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1969.