

Title – Amos 3:3-8: A Case Study of the Function of Rhetorical Questions in Amos

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Abstract: The book of Amos contains the message of a Hebrew prophet who struggled to communicate a divine message to a disobedient and stubborn Israel. Amos implements rhetorical questions throughout his book that allow for his audience to engage in his prophetic message, the premiere example being Amos 3:3-8. However, scholars often analyze the prophet's questions from modern understandings of rhetoric that originate from the Classical rhetoric of the Hellenistic era. This research addresses the question of if the application of modern understandings of rhetorical questions properly represents Amos' use of them. This study presents an analysis of Amos' rhetorical questions in Amos 3:3-8 through the lens of Hebrew prophetic rhetoric, specifically disputation speech and entrapment language. This process will include interaction with other ancient Near Eastern literature to further contextualize Amos' rhetoric. The results of this analysis are then compared to results of biblical commentators who assess the questions from a modern understanding. Although similarities exist between the two approaches, the differences are significant enough to require a more nuanced definition. As a Hebrew prophet, Amos uses rhetorical questions throughout his message to draw in his audience, abruptly condemn and expose their evil actions, and then impose his divine message with greater efficacy. Amos embeds rhetorical questions within the prophetic rhetorical structures of disputation speech and entrapment language in order to more effectively communicate with an

audience that would otherwise be unable to hear the divine the message. The conclusion of this research challenges modern readers to evaluate the words of Amos, and the other Hebrew prophets, in their ancient Hebrew context without imposing modern understandings. This study also opens the door for additional studies in the prophets to evaluate their use of rhetorical questions in rhetorical structures other than disputation speech and entrapment language.

Christian Worldview Integration: My Christian worldview has several effects on my research into this topic. Most prominent is my belief in the efficacy of God’s Word—regardless of the circumstance. Although this study examines the rhetoric of a Hebrew prophet, it ultimately evaluates the efficacy of God’s Word in a given context (cf. Isa. 55:11; Heb. 4:12). The example of God’s Word through the prophet Amos should encourage modern believers to continue trusting in the truth and authority of God’s Word. God uses the prophet to effectively communicate His message to His people. The message of Amos contains a condemnation of sin, a call for repentance, and the hope of avoiding judgment and receiving life. The message of the gospel of Jesus shares many similarities and should be trusted as being the truth and authority for modern believers. Amos’ example should also challenge modern teachers of God’s Word. Amos knows God’s law and its implications for His people. He then implements effective communication and rhetoric in the hopes of reaching his audience. The prophet displays the balance of knowledge of God’s Word and the rhetoric of effective communication skills. Modern preachers and teachers should not neglect either aspect of the task they are called to, but should strive to better understand the depths of God’s Word and how to appropriately communicate it in their contexts. In a broader sense, the Great Commission charges all disciples to teach what Jesus

commanded (Matt. 28:20). This charge requires believers to know God's Word and communicate it to others. Modern culture may be similar to Amos' audience and in that they require believers to be grounded in their knowledge of God's Word and strive to communicate the gospel as effectively as we can (cf. Acts 17:16-34).