

Comments on Amos 4

¹ Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink. ² The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. ³ And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith the LORD.

v1-3 This is a broadside against the wealthy political elites of the Northern Kingdom, living at the capital city of Samaria. It specifically addresses the wives, who have become selfish and fat, while their husbands defraud the poor and rob the needy. Their only interest is partying (v. 1). The Lord will punish them by sending them into captivity by foreign invasion (v. 2-3).

Amos is calling the women of Samaria cows. Clearly, it is an unflattering comparison. The intent is to present the culture of the elites as one of idle indulgence at the expense of their own countrymen, whom they exploit. Their overindulgence of food and drink comes because they are starving out their own brothers and sisters. The result is they are like livestock ready to be slaughtered by foreign invaders.

The Hebrew in these verses is obscure. The New American Standard (NAS) renders is:

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan
who are on the mountain of Samaria,
Who exploit the poor, who oppress the needy,
And say to their husbands, "Bring now, that we may drink!"
² The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness,
"For behold, the days are coming upon you
When they will take you away with *meat* hooks,
And the last of you with fish hooks.
³ You will go out *through* holes *in the walls*,
One in front of the other,
And you will be hurled to Harmon," declares the LORD.

The Jewish Publication Society (JPS) renders it:

1 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan
On the hill of Samaria—
Who defraud the poor,
Who rob the needy;
Who say to your [their] husbands,
"Bring, and let's carouse!"
2 My Lord GOD swears by His holiness:
Behold, days are coming upon you

When you will be carried off in baskets,
And, to the last one, in fish baskets,
3 And taken out [of the city]-
Each one through a breach straight ahead-
And flung on the refuse heap
-declares the LORD.

⁴ Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: ⁵ And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God.

v4-5 These are hollow, meaningless performances done only for show. The Lord rejects their hypocrisy, cf. 5:21-24.

⁶ And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. ⁷ And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. ⁸ So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. ⁹ I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. ¹⁰ I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. ¹¹ I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

v6-11 Despite all of the attempts the Lord makes to humble them, they continue to rebel against Him. Compare Isa. 9:8-21 for a similar statement.

This section of text is a compressed series of covenant curses fashioned after Lev. 26 and Deut. 28. The rhetorical style is that of Lev. 26:14-39, where a series of calamities are thrown at them to get them to repent, and when they eventually repent they are accepted (cf. Lev. 26:40-45). However, in this case, there is no offer of acceptance, only punishment.

Note the repeated refrain of "yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord" in v. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11.

v6 "cleanness of teeth", meaning famine, as referenced in the text through v. 9. They have nothing to eat, so their teeth are clean.

¹² Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

¹³ For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, is his name.

v12-13 As the repeated punishments of v. 6-11 have failed to get them to repent, the Lord plans a divine confrontation that will hopefully save them, cf. Exod. 19:11-15, Exod. 34:2, also cp. Num. 23:3. This confrontation is apparently the content of ch. 5-6, which is predicted to fail to have the intended effect, and therefore result in their end in captivity, per 6:14.

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