

# Amos 4:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-4/amos-41-3/>

*Amos addresses the wives of the wealthy oppressors in Samaria and says that they will be pulled from the city either to captivity or to death.*

Amos addresses the wives of the wealthy men who lived *on the mountain of Samaria*. Samaria is another name for the northern kingdom of Israel. The phrase *mountain of Samaria* likely refers to the seat of political power. Amos issued a call for attention and said, *hear this word, you cows of Bashan*. As in the previous chapter, the prophet employed the verb “to hear” to invite his listeners to pay close attention to the *word* or the revelation he was about to deliver to them because that *word* came from *the LORD*, Israel’s Suzerain (or Ruler).

As Amos urged the women to *hear this word*, he called them *cows of Bashan*. The region called *Bashan* was a rich and fertile land located in what is now the Golan Heights, east of the Sea of Galilee. It was noted for its lush grazing pastures and abundant livestock (Deuteronomy 32:14; Ezekiel 39:18). Animals such as *cows* grazed on the lush grass available in *Bashan*. Grazing *cows* pay attention primarily to filling themselves on the lush pastures. The picture is of indulgent and self-absorbed women, feeding their own appetites. Amos made this clear when he described these women as those *Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, “Bring now, that we may drink.”* It would have been bad enough if these women paid no attention to those in need. But they go further, they *oppress the poor* and *crush the needy*. They are not concerned for the welfare of their husbands. They only care for their husbands to provide them with *drink*. Further, they are complicit in the injustice being perpetrated upon the poor of Samaria (Israel) by their husbands who are presumably the ruling class of Israel, who are using their influence to enrich themselves, rather than serving the best interest of their country. Rather than using their influence positively, their wives are full partners in perpetrating injustice.

To *oppress* and to *crush* someone is to exploit him or her in such a manner that they are devastated. The upper-class *women of Samaria* exploited and abused the poor by taking from them what little they had, apparently without caring. They compelled their husbands to *bring* more and more to them to satisfy their desires without thought or care for the plight of the less privileged. This was completely opposed to the covenant God made with Israel. The covenant the people agreed to comply with is based on caring for others, and treating them as you desire to be treated. Care for others is commanded even to the point of forbidding envy (Exodus 20:17). Leaders had a solemn obligation to serve rather than to exploit. Their job was to create opportunities for self-governance and equality of opportunity for everyone.

As a matter of instruction on how to implement the basic principles of self-governance directed by the Ten Commandments, God offered a number of provisions that allow the poor to have dignity, opportunity, and justice. Some examples follow:

Dignity:

- Leviticus 23:22 requires the Israelites to leave scraps and corners of their harvest for the poor to gather for their own sustenance.

#### Opportunity:

- Deuteronomy 14:8 commands Israelites to provide loans to the poor to allow them opportunity to get back on their feet.
- If someone falls on hard times and needs to sell their services to pay their debts, it was required that they be set free from their indenture after six years of service. Deuteronomy 15:12-15 commands Israelites to not only set servants free, but to also provide them with seed capital to get back on their feet, and break the debt cycle. Consistent with the overall principle of self-governance to treat others as you want to be treated, this passage admonishes Israelites to remember that they were once slaves themselves, in Egypt.

#### Justice:

- Exodus 23:6 forbids Israel to fail to give justice to someone simply because they are poor. In Israel justice is to be blind to station in life or social status.

In each case, each Israelite was provided the opportunity to succeed, while retaining the dignity of taking responsibility for themselves. The leaders of Samaria were doing the opposite. To *crush* and *oppress* is to strip off dignity, and squash opportunity.

The prophet predicted certain judgment on these materialistic women and said, *The Lord God has sworn by His holiness*. To *swear* means to take an oath, declaring one's intention to do something. Since there is nothing higher to swear by, God swore by Himself, by His *holiness*, His own moral character and essence. He swore that He would surely bring curses on these women, saying, *Behold, the days are coming upon you when they will take you away with meat hooks, and the last of you with fish hooks*.

The word *behold* indicates the imminent nature of the curse on the wicked women. The meaning of the term *hooks* (*meat hooks* and *fish hooks*) is uncertain. A suggestion has been made that this verse describes the baskets or pots in which fish are transported. This might create a picture of the women being carried into exile, like a merchant might transport a slab of meat on a hook or a basket of fish to market.

Furthermore, *the LORD* declared that the greedy women of Samaria would go *out through breaches in the walls, and each one straight before her*. Since the purpose of having walls around a city was to protect it against outsiders, having *breaches in the walls* would cause the city to become unprotected and vulnerable. The picture here is of invaders who have torn gaps in the walls of the cities of Israel (Samaria), and opened them to invasion. The women will go *out* of these breaches into the hands of the invaders. They likely have a sense of false security, with their wealth and walled city. But that will come to naught.

Amos told his audience that the *breaches in the walls* around Samaria would be so numerous that the enemy would be able to pull the women out of the city, *each one straight before her*.

This probably means there will be a breach in every direction in the city, such that no matter your location, there is a breach *straight before* you.

The invaders will *cast* the women *to Harmon*. The term *Harmon* occurs only once, here, in the Bible. The meaning is uncertain since there is no known place with such a name. Some think it refers to Hermon, a mountain which lies beyond Bashan, far to the north of Israel. Some translate the word as “citadel” or “palace.” This could indicate that the women were destined to become a servant (or worse) in the palace of their captors. Whatever the precise meaning of the term, the intention of the prophet was to describe the ill fate that awaited the wicked women of Samaria, those who exploited and abused the poor. It seems the picture is of them being carried far away to exile. The northern kingdom was indeed invaded by Assyria and carried into exile. These wealthy women would be captured. Likely they would then become poor themselves, and experience the same sort of harsh treatment they had foisted upon others.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>1</sup>Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria,  
Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,  
Who say to your husbands, “Bring now, that we may drink!”**

**<sup>2</sup>The Lord God has sworn by His holiness,  
“Behold, the days are coming upon you  
When they will take you away with meat hooks,  
And the last of you with fish hooks.**

**<sup>3</sup>“You will go out *through* breaches *in the walls*,**