Amos
Chapter 4

"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, that we may drink!' 2 The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. 3 And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead; and you shall be cast out into Harmon," declares the LORD. 4 "Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days; 5 offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel!" declares the Lord GOD.

4:1 *cows of Bashan.* Upper-class women, directly addressed, are compared with the best breed of cattle in ancient Canaan, which were raised (and pampered) in the pastures of northern Transjordan (cf. Ps 22:12; Eze 39:18). Whether the metaphor was intended as an insult or as ironic flattery is uncertain. (CSB)

Because their appetites are insatiable, prominent women of Samaria are likened to fat cows. Bashan was a fertile plain known for its rich pasture and large, healthy livestock (cf Dt 32:14). (TLSB)

This name being taken from the strong, well-fed cattle of the pasture country east of Jordan. (Kretzmann)

say to your husbands – Rich women goaded their husbands to acquire more, even at the expense and suffering of the poor. (TLSB))

4:2 *The LORD God has sworn.* Stresses the solemnity of the situation and the certainty of the events. (CSB)

God has issued His verdict in the form of a legal oath, swearing by the highest referent possible, His own holiness (cf Heb 6:13). (TLSB)

by his holiness. Contrasts with Israel's sin, reminding them of what they could have been (Ex 19:6) if they had faithfully kept their side of the covenant—as God had his. (CSB)

hooks. According to Assyrian reliefs (pictures engraved on stone), prisoners of war were led away with a rope fastened to a hook that pierced the nose or lower lip (cf. 2Ki 19:28; 2Ch 33:11; Eze 19:4, 9; Hab 1:15). The Hebrew word here may, in fact, refer to ropes. (CSB)

Slaves and prisoners were hooked in order to control them. (TLSB)

4:3 *breaks in the wall.* See 2Ki 17:5. (CSB)

Fortress walls will be breached, and lines of prisoners will march out. (TLSB)

through the breaches – Literally, "every one before her," anxious to get away, looking neither to the right nor to the left. (Kretzmann)

Harmon. Appears to be a place-name, though it is not otherwise known. (CSB)

Possibly Mount Hermon in Bashan. (TLSB)

4:4–5 Sarcasm; sacrifices rightfully belonged to the Lord at His altar in Jerusalem. Amos heightens this sarcasm by urging the people to sacrifice more frequently, “every morning” and “every three days.” (TLSB)

4:4 *Bethel … Gilgal.* These towns had historical importance as places where God’s help was commemorated (cf. Ge 35:1–15; Jos 4:20–24), and both were popular places of worship in Amos’s day (5:5; cf. Hos 4:15; 9:15; 12:11). (CSB)

North of Jericho. One of the main sanctuaries for northern Israel; location of idolatry and syncretism. (TLSB)

tithes. Apparently the special tithe that was to be brought every three years (cf. Dt 14:28; 26:12). (CSB)

days. The Hebrew word for “days” sometimes stands for years. (CSB)

Rather, "after three days," for Amos purposely speaks hyperbolically: Even if you should offer burnt offerings every morning and tithes every three days, it would only increase your guilt before Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

4:5 *leavened.* The burning of leavened bread in the sacrifices was strictly forbidden (see Lev 6:17; 7:12). Either Amos rebukes the Israelites for willful transgression of the law, or he speaks of burning in a general way for offering inappropriate gifts to the Lord. Leavened bread could accompany a fellowship offering (see Lev 7:13). (CSB)

you love to do. They loved the forms and rituals of religion but did not love what God loves—goodness, mercy, kindness, justice (see 5:15; Isa 5:7; 61:8; Hos 6:6; Mic 6:8). (CSB)

The more zeal the hypocrites show in imitating the outward worship of the true believers, the more guilt they heap upon themselves in the sight of God, whose all-seeing eye penetrates their flimsy pretexts and causes Him to emphasize His threats of punishment. (Kretzmann)

3:1–4:5 Because Israel has completely abandoned the covenant—through worshiping idols, perpetrating injustice, and showing indifference to the poor—the Lord threatens to allow an invading enemy to wreak havoc on the land. Wealth, compromise of confession, and indifference to suffering tempt the “new Israel,” the Church, still today. Recognizing such failures in ourselves should move us to repentance and increased gratitude for Christ, who was rich, yet became poor for our sakes, so that through His poverty we might become eternally rich (2Co 8:9). • Walk with us, O Lord. Abide with us, and restore us according to Your favor. Amen. (TLSB)

Israel Has Not Returned to the LORD

6 “I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to me,” declares the LORD. 7 “I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest; I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city; one field would have rain, and the field on which it did not rain would wither; 8 so two or three cities would wander to another city to drink water, and would not be satisfied; yet you did not return to me,” declares the LORD. 9 “I struck you with blight and mildew; your many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees the locust devoured; yet you did not return to

me," declares the LORD. 10 "I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt; I killed your young men with the sword, and carried away your horses, and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD. 11 "I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD. 12 "Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" 13 For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name!

4:6–11 In the past, God had used natural disasters to discipline and warn his people, but those lessons were soon forgotten (cf. Dt 28:22, 39–40, 42, 48, 56–57). (CSB)

4:6 *I.* These were not simply natural disasters; they were direct acts of God (3:6). (CSB)

cleanness of teeth. Namely, because they had nothing to eat. (Kretzmann)

Hunger and famine make an empty mouth. (TLSB)

yet … me. In repentance. This phrase is repeated five times in vv 6–11. Afflictions sent by the Lord were intended to make Israel despair, so that out of their misery they would return to their covenant God, who abounds in compassion, forgiveness, and salvation (Ex 34:6–7). (TLSB)

4:7–8 Lack of rain three months before harvest would prevent full development of the grain. (CSB)

Withholding the latter rains (those coming in Mar/Ap) inevitably resulted in a massive crop failure by the harvest season (May). (TLSB)

4:9 *blight and mildew*. These diseases destroyed both garden and vineyard. Crop devastations were evidence that Israel had broken the covenant and forfeited the Lord's care and blessing. Cf Solomon's prayer, 1Ki 8:37–40. Since Israel has forsaken the Jerusalem temple, Solomon's petition had fallen on deaf ears. (TLSB)

Locusts. Cf. 7:1; Joel 1:4. (CSB)

4:10 *plagues … as … Egypt.* See Ex 7:14–12:30. (CSB)

carried away your horses – Signs of military strength are removed. (TLSB)

stench of your camp – Unbearable smell of unburied corpses. (TLSB)

Unburied corpses were a high insult.

4:11 *some of you*. Afflictions, plagues, warfare, and death described here are doled out selectively. Yet even those preserved from sickness and death will fail to recognize God's judgment in the afflictions and will not return to Him. (TLSB)

Sodom and Gomorrah. Exemplified total destruction, God's judgment on those cities (see Ge 19:24–25) having already become proverbial (cf. Dt 29:23; Isa 1:9; 13:19; Jer 49:18; 50:40; Zep 2:9). (CSB)

Two cities near the Salt Sea, destroyed for their evil at the time of Abraham and Lot (Gn 19:23–28); prototypical examples of God's wrath and judgment. (TLSB)

aa a brand plucked out of burning. Saved only by God's grace (cf. Zec 3:2). (CSB)

Snatched from total destruction. They should not feel vindicated but should seriously consider what consequences might follow if they continue despising the Lord. (TLSB)

4:12 *prepare to meet your God.* Devastated Israel, brought to her knees by the Assyrians, would meet the God she had covenanted with at Sinai and had now so grievously offended. (CSB)

A day of judgment looms. God met with Israel at Sinai amid such terrifying sights and sounds that the people begged to be spared hearing the thunder of God's voice and beholding the brilliance of His nearby presence (Ex 20:18–21). And that was when God was giving the covenant, not calling people to account for breaking it! (TLSB)

4:13 The God of such power and majesty is easily able to execute the judgment announced in v. 12. (CSB)

Doxology of judgment. (TLSB)

The Ruler of all the heavenly armies. The entire creation proclaims the one true God, and it is a matter of wisdom for man to stand before Him in a relation which will cause Him to show mercy rather than stern justice. (Kretzmann)

morning darkness. Deepest darkness is said to come just before dawn breaks. As Creator and Sustainer of all things, the Lord is responsible for both the brilliance of the noontime sun and for the deepest darkness of the night. Gregory of Nazianzus: "The Word [of creation] was given once, but the Action is continuous even now" (*NPNF* 2 7:313). (TLSB)

4:6–13 Amos intersperses vivid descriptions of divine judgment with the divine lament "yet you did not return to Me." God's reasons for allowing calamities to enter our lives are ultimately good, but people nonetheless refuse to respond in humility and faith. True repentance is always His work, wrought through the Law. Forgiveness is His greatest work. Praise God that all sins, including our slowness to repent, are fully forgiven by Christ's sacrificial death. • Lord Jesus, we thank You for being our advocate with the Father. Because we are often intractably sinful, we are all the more grateful that You plead unceasingly for us in heaven. Lead us to believe in and ever hold fast to the forgiveness You won for us. Amen. (TLSB)