

TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE COWS OF BASHAN AND CRITICS OF AMOS IN AMOS 4: 1-3

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Abstracts:

The book of Amos, chapter 4:1-3, illustrates Amos's strategic choice in rebuking the government officials who indulge in luxury. Amos compares these elites to the cows of Bashan. Through rhetorical critique of that passage, this article aims to analyze the motives why Amos deliberately uses the metaphor the cows of Bashan. Amos wants his criticism that he conveys to be right on target to his interlocutors. He recognized that his interlocutors were not ordinary people; they were part of the elite class accustomed to luxurious lifestyles. Taking advantage of their husbands' high positions, they enriched themselves while turning a deaf ear to the grievances of the common people. Therefore, this article believes that through the metaphor of the cows of Bashan and the hook punishment, Amos makes a sarcastic satire because it is seen as effective in touching upon the sensitivities of these government officials. Amos chose the metaphor of the cows of Bashan also because of the socio-geographical context that is very close to their lives. Through this sarcastic satire, Amos successfully conveyed his theological message cleverly: that God does not remain silent in reproaching anyone who disregards the marginalized and oppressed.

Keywords:

Cows of Bashan, Amos, samaritan women, social critique, royal officials' corruption

INTRODUCTION

Corruption cases committed by the public officials in Indonesia are not something new. In recent years, the increasingly diverse and exposed instances of corruption have worsened the social gap. This is because the corrupt public officials have been misappropriating shared funds for personal and their group's interests. This situation contradicts the role that public officials should ideally play as exemplars and servants of the public, rather than causing harm to the public. In several instances, corruption cases that involve public officials in Indonesia have led to a phenomenon of injustice, where these officials flourish in their personal wealth while the general people who are under their care fail to experience the rightful benefits and, in fact, their lives suffer further.

A phenomenon frequently associated with corruption cases is when the party who benefits the most is the family or close associates of the corruptors. Within the family or the group networks of the corrupt officials, every family member or relation who benefits from it enjoys the hard work of their husband, wife, or colleagues from the proceeds of corruption. Interestingly, spouses, children, and relations involved in these corrupt practices may not necessarily be aware of or concerned with the source or method of obtaining this wealth. If family members or benefiting relations are unaware that the wealth is obtained through corruption, according to the law they would still be declared guilty. Conversely, if they are aware that the acquired wealth is a product of corruption and yet continue to enjoy it, it means there is indifference there. Corruption serves as the root of a structured wrongdoing, as it involves the acquisition of wealth through injustice, namely by seizing other people's property rights.

One of the corruption cases committed by the government officials that has gained significant attention recently is the corruption case in Kotawaringin Timur, involving Supian Hadi, the local Regent (Indonesian: Bupati), in the year 2020. As of mid-2023, the case has not been completely handled. That case, although it occurred in the local area, the

repercussions of this case extend beyond the immediate region, causing financial harm to the nation, amounting to approximately Rp 5.8 trillion and 711,000 US dollars.¹ It is said that Supian received bribes in exchange for granting mining permits to three big companies, disregarding the requirements and violating regulations.² Another strong suspicion is that after granting these improper permits, Supian appointed his friends and members of his campaign team to prominent positions within these companies.³ Until now, the legal proceedings against Supian continue.

In the Bible, a situation of officials abusing their authority and acting unfairly is also experienced by the Prophet Amos. The theme of injustice in the book of Amos illustrates how Amos strives to uphold justice regardless of the circumstances. His calling as a prophet made him establish justice within his capacity through the prophecies he delivers. He was called to rebuke the nation of Israel, who have started to forget God due to their excessive devotion to worldly affairs, to the extent of oppressing the weak and the poor.

Thus, the subjects of Amos's criticism are the law enforcers or those who should be responsible for ensuring justice for the poor and oppressed. Therefore, he rebukes the Samaritans who are chaotic and extortionate (Amos 3:9-15), and the Samaritan Women who are likened to the cows (Amos 4:1-3). Other important figures also do not escape his scrutiny (Amos 5:1-3). He even dares to criticize the undesirable worship practices taking place in Gilgal and Bethel (Amos 5:21-27), as these practices are not in accordance with the will of God.

¹ Ahmad Naufal Dzulfaroh, "10 Kasus Korupsi Dengan Kerugian Negara Terbesar di Indonesia," 2022, <https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2022/08/03/201200565/10-kasus-korupsi-dengan-kerugian-negara-terbesar-di-indonesia?page=all>.

² Ardito Ramadhan, "KPK Panggil Bupati Kotawaringin Timur Sebagai Tersangka," 2020, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/07/22/11112311/kpk-panggil-bupati-kotawaringin-timur-sebagai-tersangka>.

³ Fachrur Rozie, "KPK Pastikan Proses Hukum Eks Bupati Kota Waringin Timur Supian Hadi Terus Berjalan," 2023, <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/5336450/kpk-pastikan-proses-hukum-eks-bupati-kota-waringin-timur-supian-hadi-terus-berjalan>.

Among many reprimands and criticisms delivered by Amos, the critique of the Samaritan women in Amos 4:1-3 stands out as the most scathing criticism.⁴ It's striking how boldly Amos equates these respected Samaritan women with the cows of Bashan. This comparison undoubtedly raises significant questions for readers. Consequently, various assumptions arise in an effort to understand: why did Amos use the metaphor of the 'cows of Bashan' to criticize the Samaritan women? What was Amos's intention in rebuking the Samaritan women with this expression? These two fundamental questions will lead the discussion.

However, before answering or discussing those two questions further, there are several considerations to keep in mind when understanding the text of Amos 4:1-3. First, formal scholarly discussions regarding the text of Amos 4:1-3 within the scope of Indonesia have been relatively limited (at least in the past decade). This means that there is still a limited number of sources, especially articles in Indonesian discussing the text.

Second, there is an issue of the meaning behind the metaphor of the cows of Bashan.⁵ Does the reference to the cows of Bashan come from practical cultural and cultic reasons within Israel, often associating cows with the worship of the god Baal, or is it more due to the similarity between the behavioral characteristics of the Samaritan women and the depiction of the behavior of the cows of Bashan? The cows indeed held a cultic significance in the worship of the god Baal. While Miller contends that the cows of Bashan does indeed point to such cultic practices, this paper will explore the opposite perspective – exploring the meaning of the cows of Bashan from historical and geographical contexts.⁶

Third, there is a problem regarding who exactly the Samaritan women are, as they are not explicitly mentioned in the text of Amos 4:1-3.

⁴ Amos was known as a prophet who always conveyed prophetic messages directly to the recipients. Cf. Ruth Alvarado Y., "Facing Corruption Today in Light of the First Testament (Amos 8:1-7)," *Latin American Theology* 12, no. 2 (2017): 29–44.

⁵ Mason D. Lancaster, "Metaphor Research and the Hebrew Bible," *Currents in Biblical Research* 19, no. 3 (2021): 235–285.

⁶ Dr. Robert D. Miller II, O.F.S., "Baals of Bashan," *Revue Biblique* 121, no. 4 (2014): 506.

It is speculated that this interpretation arises due to the influence of the previous passage (Amos 3:9-15). Another explicit statement referring to the figure of 'women' is the use of feminine pronouns for the cows of Bashan in the original Hebrew, indicating a female element.⁷ Additionally, the verbs used to describe the behavior of the cows of Bashan, such as 'press,' 'trample,' are used with feminine pronouns in the original language.⁸ Nonetheless, there are claims that this issue might have arisen due to a translation problem from the LXX making it less of a fundamental concern.⁹

The three considerations mentioned above can further help readers in getting a fresh understanding of the text in Amos 4:1-3, especially in dealing with the acts of injustice such as corruption. What Amos meant in the message to the Samaritan women can be an inspiration to have the courage to voice their aspirations against injustice. However, instead of taking actions like Amos, this review would rather draw inspiration from the intended impact of Amos's message: how to navigate actions wisely when confronted with power and material wealth.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is an effort of qualitative literature research using a rhetorical approach. Regarding Amos's prophecies, a rhetorical approach can help to identify the reasons behind strategic choices and the formula arrangement of sentence expressions in the text.¹⁰ One of the main dimensions of rhetorical approach is deliberative, in the sense that there is a deliberate factor through stylistic choices and prepared intentions. Generally, these intentions factors aim to influence the beliefs and

⁷ R. Mosis, "פְּתִיחַ Pth.," ed. William B. Eerdmans, *Theological Dictionary of The Old Testament XII*, 2003, 162-171.

⁸ Berhane K Melles and Bill Domeris, "Irony as a Literary Stylistic Device in Amos's Choice of Metaphors: Reading from the Perspective of the Tigrigna Proto-Semitic Language," *Conspectus* 28 (2019): 5-17.

⁹ Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos*, vol. 24A (USA: Doubleday, 1989), 420.

¹⁰ For example, Beach and Barker point out that Amos' text deliberately mentions the geo-political climate of Israel and places the composition of the six nations bordering Israel as a collection of peoples punished by God. The rhetorical choice is used as a kind of scathing threat to the Israelites if they do not want to suffer a similar fate. Apparently this kind of strategy succeeded in attracting the attention of those who were criticized by Amos; cf. Lee Beach and Joel Barker, "Springing the Trap: The Rhetoric of Amos as a Strategy for Preaching Justice and Judgment," *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 12, no. 2 (2012): 6.

perceptions of those who receive the message.¹¹ In the text of Amos 4:1-3, the chosen rhetorical strategy involves the use of metaphors with a sarcastic intent towards the target audience. Basically, metaphor is a figurative language that carries an underlying meaning that affects its listeners.¹² To support this, an understanding of the metaphorical meanings of the terms used is needed.¹³ Therefore, this method will analyze the linguistic style used by Amos to rebuke the Samaritan women engrossed in luxury and the intended effects of that rebuke. One of the uses of this rhetorical approach can be traced from the choice of words, specifically "the cows of Bashan," rather than any other animal or type of cow.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of Amos 4:1-3 will be divided into three parts. Firstly, the pericope of Amos 4:1-3 will be presented textually to provide a comprehensive view of the passage. Secondly, an in-depth discussion of the passage's content will be presented through careful analysis and a rhetorical approach. Thirdly, deriving from the previous discussions, the theological implications of the pericope will be explained, which will be an inspiration to deal with the situation of injustice that is rife among the public officials in Indonesia.

The Reading of Amos 4:1-3

When examining the structure of the passage in Amos 4:1-3, it consists of three verses, each verse has different explanatory components. The 1st verse begins with the exclamation, "Hear this word, the cows of Bashan...". Amos explicitly describes the actions of the cows of Bashan: oppressing the weak, trampling the poor, and instructing their masters to

¹¹ M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 11th ed. (Stamford: CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 343.

¹² Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 212 and 343.

¹³ Melles and Domeris, "Irony as a Literary Stylistic Device in Amos's Choice of Metaphors: Reading from the Perspective of the Tigrigna Proto-Semitic Language, 7."

bring the oppressed to them. The 2nd verse shows that Amos begins to deliver his prophecy concerning the coming judgment: being caught up with hooks." The 3rd verse encompasses the punishment or enforcement of justice for unjust actions, complementing the prophecy initiated in 2nd verse. The punishment involves being led out through breaches in the wall and dragged toward Hermon.

The Meaning of "The Cows of Bashan"

In the passage, Amos's prophecy is directed towards the cows of Bashan. Aside from the metaphorical use of the term cows of Bashan, in a literal sense, the cows of Bashan refer to a herd of cows located in the region of Bashan. Bashan was a large area known for its fertility. This is unsurprising as Bashan was located near the Yarmouk River, to the east of the Jordan River, and to the north of Gilead.¹⁴ Moreover, the fertility of the Bashan region was also a result of volcanic mountain activity.¹⁵ Its natural potential even led to the region of Bashan being contested during wars between Israel and Canaan, until Israel successfully conquered it (Deuteronomy 1:4; 3:1-3 and Numbers 21:33-35). In subsequent periods, the region of Bashan remained a contested area among various nations, but it was reclaimed by Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. Consequently, Bashan became renowned as a region associated with the descendants of Israelites, Jacob, Isaac, and the family of Jeroboam.

As a region characterized by hills, mountains, and fertile grasslands, Bashan was also famous for its many crops. The famous crops in the area were figs, grapes, honey, olives, various fruit trees, barley, and emmer wheat. The abundant potential of grapes was so remarkable that it was said that in Bashan, grapes were more abundant than water.¹⁶ Various kinds of

¹⁴ Joel C Slayton, "Bashan," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (USA: Doubleday, 1992), 623-624.

¹⁵ Keith N. Schoville, "Bashan in Historical Perspective," *World Union of Jewish Studies* (1989): 145.

¹⁶ Schoville, "Bashan in Historical Perspective, 147."

livestock that are not counted in number were herded there.¹⁷ During that time, due to the huge number of livestock, many people allowed their livestock find their own food. It is natural that later the term wild livestock were found. This implies that initially these animals were domesticated. However, due to their numerous numbers, it seemed as though they were neglected by their owners.

Speaking of livestock, various kinds of animals were found in the Bashan region, including goats, sheep, and cows. Many of these animals were considered wild livestock as they were left to roam freely in the grasslands. However, the most famous among them were the cows, often referred to as the cows of Bashan. These cows had distinctive characteristics. They are fat and big, producing high-quality milk and meat.¹⁸

The depiction of the livestock world in the Bashan region, as previously explained, was something that Amos was familiar with. In fact, the world of livestock could be considered inseparable from Amos's life. Before being called by God to fulfill his prophetic duties, Amos was a shepherd of sheep from Tekoa (Amos 1:1). Tekoa was located about 16 miles south of Jerusalem.¹⁹ Being not far from Bashan, the region was also fertile. Most people in Tekoa engaged in both farms and agriculture. Coming from an area with a geographic environment not dissimilar from Bashan and his profession as a shepherd, it is unsurprising that Amos is very knowledgeable about the life and characteristics of the cows of Bashan, comprehending their strengths and weaknesses alike.

Meaning of the Metaphor "Cows of Bashan"

When discussing metaphors, they are commonly recognized in literary works, whether written or spoken. Definitely, metaphor means

¹⁷ Slayton, "Bashan," 623-624.

¹⁸ Slayton, "Bashan," 623-624.

¹⁹ Bruce E. Willoughby, "Amos, Book Of," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (USA: Doubleday, 1992), 203.

image, representation, figurative expression, poetic equivalent, sensory symbol, figure of speech, simile, trope, metonymy, analogy, parallel, and also equivalence.²⁰ In Indonesian, metaphor means a depiction of something using another thing that is equivalent or comparable.²¹ Metaphors are often known as the use of words or phrases with meanings that are not meant literally.

The mention of the cows of Bashan in Amos 4:1 by Amos is certainly not without a specific reason. First, Amos introduces the cows of Bashan along with its characteristics. This signifies that he is referring to something very concrete, closely related to the context of his life and the people around him. In other words, the cows of Bashan were well-known by the people in the Samaria region. Second, he mentions the cows of Bashan to symbolize the officials of Israel, particularly the Samaritan women, who oppress and exploit the poor and weak. This naturally invites further questions that more or less lead to the similarity between the cows of Bashan and these women. Hence, there is an understanding that the term cows of Bashan is not primarily meant for the actual cows in the Bashan region, as they are livestock and are not involved in the text. Instead, it serves as an analogy or metaphor to depict the chaotic state of the government officials of Israel.

If the cows of Bashan are comparable to the government officials of Israel, it implies that there is a certain similarity between the cows of Bashan and these officials. Based on the previous discussions, it seems that the similarity between the cows of Bashan and the government officials of Israel highlighted by Amos lies in their characteristics and actions. As known, the cows of Bashan were wild cattle, large and fat, well-known for the quality of their milk and meat.²² The fact that the cows of Bashan live in

²⁰ "Metaphor," *The Random House Thesaurus College Edition* (New York: Random House, 1992), 459.

²¹ Pusat Bahasa Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, "Metafora," *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, 3 (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2005), 739.

²² Paul F. Jacobs, "'Cows of Bashan': A Note on the Interpretation of Amos 4:1," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 1 (March 1985): 109.

the wide and fertile grasslands made them find food freely and live comfortably. Living in such circumstances, the cows of Bashan were thought to become wild and greedy.

The depiction of living in luxury and being greedy, as observed by Amos in the cows of Bashan, becomes his metaphorical representation to illustrate the corrupt government officials of Israel.²³ These officials take advantage of their positions for the welfare of themselves, their families, close relatives, and groups within their class. This situation happened because many officials oppressed the poor and weak, either by extortion or by exploiting their labor. They did numerous acts of injustice against the weak and the poor. This is why Nwaoru said that the situation in Samaria at that time was marked by abundance, while on the other hand, poverty was on the rise.²⁴

The government officials of Israel, symbolized by the Samaritan women and referred to as the cows of Bashan by Amos, did at least three acts of injustice. They exploit the weak, trample upon the poor, and influence their husbands to bring the poor to them (verse 1). While the specific actions of exploiting, trampling, and influencing their husbands are not explicitly described in the text, these three actions can be known by tracing the meaning of the terms.

Oppression is an act of taking maximum advantage of others for personal gain.²⁵ The Hebrew term used is אָשָׁק (*ashaq*), which directly refers to the act of exploiting the weak.²⁶ Similarly, trampling, treading upon (the poor) is the act of standing on or placing one's feet upon something. It is often associated with physical and spiritual burdens, the violence of war or

²³ The use of animal metaphors for humans has the same principle as 'Animal Study' which develops in modern biblical studies. Such studies try to observe animal behavior through the intellectual, emotional, even moral capacity of animal life objectively. An objective description of animal behavior is then possible to become a symbol of human behaviors. Cf. Phillip Sherman, "The Hebrew Bible and the 'Animal Turn,'" *Currents in Biblical Research* 19, no. 1 (October 2020): 37-38.

²⁴ Emmanuel Nwaoru, "A Fresh Look at Amos 4:1-3 and Its Imagery," *Vetus Testamentum* 59, no. 3 (2009): 460-474.

²⁵ "Oppression," *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (USA: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 607-608.

²⁶ William Gesenius, "אָשָׁק," ed. Francis Brown, trans. Edward Robinson, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 796-797.

unjust social and political systems.²⁷ While the Hebrew term for "treading" is רָצַץ (*ratsats*), which implies a sense of crushing or destroying.²⁸ Therefore, treading upon the poor signifies that someone is standing on or putting their foot on the poor. This is not meant literally, but rather indicates that the government officials of Israel were oppressing the poor to the point of crushing them.²⁹ That's why Amos using 'crush' than 'tread.'

The Samaritan women are depicted as individuals who were thought to be unfair without directly engaging in corrupt practices. These women are enjoying the wealth generated by the hard work of their husbands. If this wealth is acquired through corruption, then indirectly, they are also involved in extorting and oppressing the poor and weak. They simply enjoy the luxuries that are available to them without getting their hands dirty, as if it is not their concern.

The Sarcastic Satire in Amos' Prophecy

The explanation of the meaning of the cows of Bashan leads readers to understand that Amos uses the metaphor of the cows of Bashan to condemn the injustice perpetrated by the government against its people. His intention is to humble those who oppress the poor, including the Samaritan women.³⁰ This statement confirms that the cows of Bashan is a metaphor used by Amos to rebuke the government officials of Israel for their actions. In summary, Amos' description of the actions of the Israelite government officials is no different from the behavior of the cows of Bashan. Therefore, the similarities between the cows of Bashan and the Israelite government officials can be observed in the characteristics of their actions.

²⁷ "Oppression," *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 607.

²⁸ William Gesenius, "רָצַץ," ed. Francis Brown, trans. Edward Robinson, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 954.

²⁹ Nwaoru, "A Fresh Look at Amos 4," 461.

³⁰ Berhane K Melles and Bill Domeris, "Irony as a Literary Stylistic Device in Amos's Choice of Metaphors: Reading from the Perspective of the Tigrigna Proto-Semitic Language," 10.

The passage of Amos 4:1-3 is actually part of chapter 3 and does not have a separate title. So, as the passage before, it clearly implies Israel's wrongdoing and punishment. This provides some insight into why, in verses 2 and 3, Amos delivers the upcoming punishment that the government officials of Israel will face.

Examining the style of language used, it seems that Amos has a tough tone when addressing the lives of the government officials of Israel. This is understandable when Amos uses the exclamatory phrase "hear this" accompanied by the metaphor of "the cows of Bashan." With this style of language, Amos is very direct in dealing with the government officials of Israel who are the members of the city officials or nobility of the city. Being in a high social status and being overwhelmed in luxury, and given their tendencies to trample upon and exploit the weak and poor, it is certain that they would not pay attention to the words of an ordinary person spoken in a common manner. This is why Amos uses a language style that is seemingly fitting for their social class.

The sarcastic style used is not just any expression, but it has the right meaning. Amos chooses the metaphor of the cows of Bashan, which shares similar characteristics with the actions of the government officials of Israel. Furthermore, though it might be a bit shocking, the expression cows of Bashan should have been relatable to the government officials of Israel, considering it is close to the reality of their lives. This sarcastic satire is then followed by the announcement of the punishment they will face because of their actions. Thus, the hope is that the corrupt government officials of Israel would recognize the unjust deeds they have committed and be willing to repent.

The Announcement of Punishment

Amos mentions the punishment from God for the government officials of Israel, stating that they will be taken away with hooks (verse 2), pulled out through the breaches of the wall, and dragged towards Mount

Hermon (verse 3). In this case, it seems that Amos is using another metaphor. Why is that? The answer is clear: hooks or fishing instruments have no direct connection to the cow. Therefore, it can be confirmed that this metaphor does not continue the previous one.

Speaking of hooks and fishing equipment, both of these tools are explicitly mentioned in relation to the punishment that the government officials of Israel, symbolized as the "cows of Bashan," will receive. The hooks and fishing instruments mentioned are in accordance with their original depiction, tools commonly used by fishermen to catch fish.³¹ The context of the punishment that these government officials will receive is still the same with the general punishment described for Israel in the previous chapters, which is the destruction of Israel.³² The one who punished the government officials of Israel is God Himself. Thus, what is portrayed as controlling the fishing hook is God Himself.

There is a comment that suggests the punishment begins with the appearance of a hook that will be thrust into a specific part of the back of the body (possibly the buttocks).³³ By using that hook, the government officials of Israel, as the ones to be punished, will be lifted up using the hook and pulled out through a gap in the wall. The gap in the wall referred here could be a crack that occurs on the wall due to the impact of the person's body. Through a forceful pull using the hook, the person to be punished is compelled to exit the initial crack-like gap in the wall, ultimately causing a breach in the wall. After being pulled out from this gap in the wall, the person to be punished is then dragged using the hook towards Hermon. Being dragged towards Hermon signifies that they will be punished by being expelled from the region of Samaria.³⁴

³¹ Nwaoru, "A Fresh Look at Amos 4," 467.

³² Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 1 (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 224-225.

³³ Nwaoru, "A Fresh Look at Amos 4," 467.

³⁴ Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, vol. 24A, 425. Cf. Geographical location of Samaria and Hermon. Hermon is an area that lies far from Bashan, even beyond Damascus in Aran.

The punishment that results in someone being expelled from their own region was a severe penalty in that era, as being driven out of one's own territory meant being exiled and no longer considered as part of the community of that area. By including this punishment, Amos wants to remind that there are consequences for acting against God by treating others unfairly, especially the poor and the weak. Therefore, Amos's message can simultaneously serve as a reminder for people to prevent behaving unjustly towards others.

The Theological Significance of Amos's Sarcasm

Injustice stands in direct opposition to what God desires. Therefore, all acts of injustice are displeasing to God.³⁵ Beyond this, God's love is always directed towards His people, especially those who are weak and poor. God consistently takes the side of the weak and the poor.³⁶ The prophecies delivered by God through Amos were not only meant to rebuke the corrupt officials of Israel, but also to rescue the weak and poor as the oppressed. This was done because God loves His people and always wants them to remain faithful to Him and not turn away.

Amos 4:1-3 also serves as a reminder that human dignity holds great value in the eyes of God. Therefore, people who are weak and poor need to be defended, as their dignity is equally significant in the sight of God. This is why those who oppress others, especially the wealthy oppressing the weak and poor, are not justified by God. Such actions essentially injure human dignity and infringe upon God's authority to govern human lives.

The Relevance of Amos' Message to the Present Situation

The relevance of the message from Amos 4:1-3 for the current situation is evident, particularly in the context of corruption in Indonesia.

³⁵ Brian Irwin, "Amos 4:1 and the Cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria: A Reappraisal," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74 (2012): 243.

³⁶ Nwaoru, "A Fresh Look at Amos 4," 471.

As responsible citizens, we are reminded to stay away from unfair actions, especially corruption. The easiest way to do this is by maintaining personal honesty. Given that Indonesia is a constitutional state, it's important to always remember that corruption has serious legal consequences. By always remembering the punishment in mind, we can refrain from engaging in any form of corruption. Similar to the interpretation of Amos 4:1-3, corruption reflects a mentality of people who always wants more, even at the expense of others. Thus, we are prompted to strive for personal sufficiency through our own honest efforts, without causing harm or seizing the property of others.

One mentality that can also be built is the mentality to live simply. All forms of luxury, hedonism, and materialism will only make people never satisfied with what they have, so they always want to fulfill all their needs regardless of the method taken. The case of Bupati Kotawaringin serves as a reminder that some government officials may misuse their power to fulfill personal and group needs. The bribery case that is detrimental to the nation is proof that injustice still exists in this country. So, as a nation with dignity, we must be able to fight any kinds of injustice by building an honest and simple mentality within ourselves.

CONCLUSION

The criticism that Amos directed towards the government officials of Israel was based on their perceived role as exploiters and oppressors of the weak and the poor. These officials were seen as benefiting from the extortion of the weak and the poor without regard for the suffering they endured. Confronting their greed, Amos' effort to uphold justice by utilizing the metaphor of the "fat cows of Bashan" is a fitting depiction.

The characteristics of the cows of Bashan are similar with the tyranny of the government officials of Israel. These officials resemble the well-fed cows of Bashan that are nurtured and provided for, with all their needs met. However, over time, they become wild and greedy. They show

no concern for the consequences of the profits they get. Therefore, Amos' prophecy becomes the right, elegant, and effective way to not only awaken them to their actions but also to lead them towards repentance and the avoidance of punishment.

The message of Amos remains relevant to this day. While it may explicitly resonate with government officials, its implications extend to anyone who holds authority over others or specific groups. As stewards of governance, it is crucial for government officials not to oppress the people they serve to enrich themselves or their groups, especially how to obtain wealth that is done unfairly. Government should function as a servant to society, rather than engaging in exploitation, oppression, or even destruction.

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