

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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It Is An Evil Time Amos 5:13

These words are fitting for almost every age and every generation. There has never been a perfect age, except in that Paradise of God where Adam and Eve lived before their fall into sin and misery. There never have been perfect men and women, except Adam and Eve in their state of innocence prior to their fall. It is the expectation of all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that He shall bring us to glory, and that we shall be perfectly fitted to live there in the presence of God. The work of remodeling us and fashioning us into His image is going on presently, and shall be completed in His presence. In the meantime, we live on earth among evil and sin. God is not to be blamed for the misery and sin that we find in this world of ours. There is sin because man sinned and still does. There is misery because we are ruined by the Fall, and we tend to destroy each other as Cain did Abel. It is an evil time!

Atheists like to blame God for the problems in this world. If not God, then certainly those who believe in God? But this will not do. I think every Christian would acknowledge unequivocally that they have contributed to the ruin of this world, but that in Christ it is their desire to labor at rebuilding what once was beautiful. In a very small way, I think the cultural mandate exists but never to the exclusion of the Gospel needed to bring sinners to life. The present and future success of this world is not in the cultural mandate, but rather is in the need for sinners to repent and come to Jesus Christ. This is our mandate in the midst of an evil time.

A cursory reading of the prophet Amos reveals to us a man driven by God to proclaim God's message to his generation. Although Amos was from the southern kingdom (Judah) he was called to preach in the northern kingdom of Israel. It was a time of prosperity. Jeroboam II had reigned for a long time, and things were going exceptionally well. The economy was good. Jeroboam followed the expansionist policy of his father, Joash, and was successful in adding territory to Israel (2 Kings 14:25).

In the south, Judah enjoyed peace. The world was seemingly peaceful. Assyria was quiet due to the preaching of Jonah and repentance had brought a delay in God's promised judgment upon that wicked nation. Peaceful conditions provide golden opportunities for evil to work. This is always the danger associated with peace. As believers we know what it is to enjoy God's presence and be at peace with God, only to have that peace shattered by our sinfulness. Life is not so pleasant then, as God deals with us.

Israel was guilty of two major sins. There was the absence of God in the nation – no true worship was taking place, and secondly, there was no justice. Peaceful conditions allow evil men and women to chip away at the fabric of society until one day we wake up and wonder how it happened. The greatest vigilance is needed when we are seemingly at peace. Is there not a lesson for us here in times of persecution? Persecution is largely regarded as the single most effective feature to produce a Christian life of power. When the Church has suffered, she has been most productive, fruitful and powerful. When the church is at peace, danger lurks close by - subtle and hidden. This is not to say that we do not desire peace – we do! When the Church in Jerusalem had peace through the conversion of Saul of Tarsus they grew greatly, so God uses both (peace and persecution) to do His work. Spiritual awareness is lessened it seems, with times of peace, so greater vigilance is required.

Israel was going through the motions spiritually speaking. Everything had become mechanical and rote (see 4:4, 5; 5:4 – 6). Their heart condition was divided. When Amos came among them, they rejected him and His message. Amos was a simple sheep breeder and sycamore tree worker (see 1:1; 7:14; also 2 Kings 3:4). He was dressed in rough plain clothing, and spoke as a southerner (from Judah). Israel just did not like this common laborer coming among them and telling them what God thought about them. They despised him.

Amos spoke a message against the nations - Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and against Judah and Israel. These nations were those that immediately surrounded Judah and Israel. The rhetorical device *“for three transgressions and for four”* (see 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6), introduces the punishment that God was going to bring upon each of these nations. These statements stress the depth of sin and the irrevocable promise of judgment. Each statement was preceded by *“Thus says the Lord”* stressing also the absolute certainty of judgment and where it was coming from. Some commentators see the number seven as prominent in the phrase thus emphasizing the completeness of the judgment to come.

Israel’s rebellion (see chp. 4) prompts God to tell them that He will judge them (vv. 12, 13), and that they should prepare to meet their God. Mercy, however, is ever near (see chp. 5). If Israel were to seek God they would surely live (see 5:4 – 15). This is always true of God. Before He extends His hand of judgment, He warns His people of their sins, and their need to return to Him. God says that He knows Israel’s sins and how great they are (see 5:12). For those who are tempted to ignore God’s warning, God magnifies His Person before them by way of comparison. It is God who made the Pleiades and Orion – those magnificent heavenly stars. It is God who turns darkness into the morning and who then turns the day into the night (see 5:8). God can call forth the waters of the sea at any time to do His bidding and saturate the earth. He can bring destruction against the buildings of man (their fortresses). These are things that are impossible for any person to do, so God holds absolute sovereignty over all. He can do as He pleases, and when He pleases.

God urges His people to do justly, establish justice in the land, do good, hate evil, and to turn away from corruption. By doing these things which have made the time evil, God promises restoration. We live in an evil time. We continue to kill the unborn. We continue to promote lifestyles that are abhorrent to God. We revel in glitzy shows and films. We are driven by the engine of Sodom and Gomorrah and we feed at the bowl of seemingly innocent fun. This was Israel in the time of Amos. This was the world in the time of Noah. This was Judah in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. This was Israel in the first century. Inevitably, the irresistible judgment of God poured forth upon these evil ages and people. Even the Gentile nations come under the dominion of God and He has judged them and continues to judge them. Where are Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome? They are but sand carried away by the winds of God’s vengeance. It is an evil time!

We hailed the beginning of the twentieth century as a time of peace unparalleled in human history. How wrong we were. Man did not turn out to be what we thought he was. He is still a beast and a madman intent and bent on his own desires that shall inevitably result in his demise. We continue to do the very things that these ancient nations did. They destroyed the innocent unborn or unwanted child. They engaged in sexual deviations that stirred up the fire-hot wrath of God. Justice has vanished in the land; Governments do not seem to be for the people, but rather for themselves. It is an evil time!

Human civilization is not so civilized, is it? Thank God, man is not in charge ultimately of his destiny, for all would be wretched. In the midst of all the evil times of all the ages, God has been calling out a people for Himself who can stand against the prevailing moods and actions of their time. Let us be like Amos who stood resolute for God in his evil time. His was an evil time, and so is ours, but God is great and God is good.