

## **Amos 8:1-14; Galatians 4:4-7 (1984 NIV)** ***God's Time is Ripe***

### **Introduction**

In Amos 7:1-9:4, we read of five visions that God showed Amos. The first two visions were of destructions that were avoided because Israel repented (see Amos 7:1-6). The next three visions revealed ways Israel had not repented (see Amos 7:7-9; 8:1-3; 9:1-4).

This morning we are going to take a look at the 4<sup>th</sup> vision in 8:1-14 that God showed Amos—a vision of a basket of ripe fruit. Through this vision of a basket of ripe fruit in Amos 8:1-14, God is conveying a very serious message to the people of Israel—not to bring hurt to them, but to bring healing to them. This basket of ripe fruit symbolizes a critical season of time for the people of Israel.

What then does it mean to say that God's time is ripe for people?

### **I. God's time is ripe can mean His judgment (Amos 8:1-6, 11-13).**

Amos 8:2 - "What do you see, Amos?" he asked. "A basket of ripe fruit," I answered. Then the LORD said to me, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer."

The Hebrew phrase which is translated "basket of ripe fruit" (kelub qayits) literally means "basket of summer fruit".

The basket of ripe fruit signified the end of harvest season. God wanted Amos to know that it was also the end of God's patience with His people. His time of judgment was now at hand. At the end of verse 2, God said, "I will spare them no longer."

Throughout the years God had been very patient with His people. He had called them out of slavery, set them up in a land of their own, given them guidance as to how they were to live their lives, and promised His abiding presence with them ... IF they would obey Him and honour Him with their lives. IF they refused to listen to God and turned away from Him, then God would judge them and they would suffer the consequences of their decisions.

God had sent His prophets to His people over and over again, but they had rejected God's prophets, rejected His counsel, and now the time for judgment had come.

God is always faithful to His promises. Before we shout "hallelujah" too soon, let me lovingly remind us all that God is always faithful to His promises of

blessing if we persevere in obedience, AS WELL AS faithful to His promises of judgment if we persist in disobedience.

The people of the Northern Kingdom convinced themselves that their blessings were from God, they convinced themselves that what they were doing was pleasing in God's sight, but they misled themselves by refusing to listen to God's prophets. They tuned God out and God let Amos know that they were "ripe" for judgment.

They were getting ready to experience a catastrophe brought on by their own rebellion. We read in Amos 8:3 - "In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies—flung everywhere! Silence!"

The songs of the temple were joyous songs; songs of celebration; songs that reminded the people of the goodness and glory of God. The songs that they were accustomed to singing were soon to be replaced with songs of wailing.

In Amos 8:4-6, God calls the guilty nation to listen to the evidence He has gathered to support His charges against them:

- They trampled the needy.
- Their actions were eliminating the poor from the land.
- They observed the religious holy days with their minds preoccupied with getting back to business.
- Their business practices were corrupt.
- They were treating the poor like some cheap commodity.

You'll see over and over again, not just in our study of Amos, but in our study of all the Minor Prophets, that God will not tolerate taking advantage of the poor, weak, and disadvantaged. God will not tolerate unethical business practices. God will not tolerate His people behaving like the people of the world.

Today in Amos 8, it is clear that God is highlighting the corrupt business practices of the nation. The corrupt business practices led to the exploitation of the poor of the land and God would tolerate it no longer.

God revealed the secret thoughts of the people by saying in Amos 8:5-6 - "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?"— skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.

The festival of New Moon was, in pre-exilic times, celebrated by resting from work. It is known as Rosh Chodesh in Hebrew and literally means "Head of

the Month”—i.e. the first day of every month in the Hebrew calendar, marked by the birth of a new moon.<sup>1</sup>

The Israelites were observing their weekly Sabbath worship and they were coming together for the monthly New Moon festival. They closed their shops so they could observe those important days. But the truth of the matter is that while they were in worship, worship was the last thing on their mind. They were watching their clocks and counting the minutes so they could get back to taking advantage of people at their places of business.

They did shut down their shops so they could worship. But the truth is that they never left their work. I'm sure the people who heard God's indictment against them were probably thinking to themselves, "Hey, at least I go to church! My neighbour hasn't been to church in years. You've got to give me some credit. Yes, my mind may tend to wander from time to time. But I've got a lot on my mind. I've got a lot of things I have to take care of in my business."

I've got something I want us to consider together. Does our worship on Sunday have anything to do with our work throughout the week? I believe that if my worship on Sunday is nothing more than fulfilling a religious duty then I am more prone to cut corners, make compromises, and act unethically in my work. I'm convinced that Christ-centred worship leads to Christ-like work.

In Leviticus 19:35-37, God gave His people guidance concerning how to conduct their business. He said, "Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt. Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the LORD."

God says, "Use honest standards. Don't cheat!" If you have a business, or you work for a business, you want to make sure that what you are doing is ethical, that it is right in God's eyes. You do right, you follow God's guidelines for how you treat your employees and your customers, and you can rest assured that God will take care of you.

I want to jump now to Amos 8:11-13. God said that He would never forget what the people of the Northern Kingdom had done. He was going to judge them and the end of the nation was soon coming. God's judgment would be carried out by an enemy nation and it was going to be a dark and horrible day for those in the Northern Kingdom. I want to show you one aspect of God's judgment included in these verses.

Amos 8:11-13 - "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11493-new-moon>

will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it. In that day the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst.”

God had sent His prophets time and again, but the people had rejected them. God had sent trials to His people like famine and drought to try and turn them back to Him, but they had refused.

None of these attempts to turn them away from their rebellious ways had worked. Because they refused to hear the Word of the Lord—God would be silent. There would be a famine of the Word of God in the land. The people who refused the counsel and guidance of Almighty God would be left to themselves.

What happens to people when they are left to do what they think is best? Well, we don't have to look too far to find examples of this. During the period of the Judges, God raised up leaders and judges to lead His people, but like the people of the Northern Kingdom, they refused the counsel of God.

In Judges 17:6, we read, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” Everyone did what each thought was best. They did the very best they could, but seven times in the book of Judges we read, “They did evil in the eyes of the LORD.” (Judges 2:11; 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). What can we conclude from this? Left to ourselves we will find ways to justify our actions, even if we know we did wrong.

What is the remedy? Is there any hope? I believe hope lies in a return to God right now.

- Stop waiting until the time is right.
- Stop treating the Lord like He is a past-time.
- Stop doing wrong and start doing right.

Amos 8:2b – “The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.” This can be translated as “When the time has fully come for Israel, I (God) will spare them no longer.” This is a picture of doom.

But let me now paint for you a picture of hope.

## **II. God's time is ripe can mean His redemption (Gal 4:4-7).**

Gal 4:4-7 - “But when the time had fully come (when the time is ripe), God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”

Jesus, the Son of God, came to “redeem those under law” by being born “under the law”. The law had many demands.

- Don't drink this, don't eat that.
- Don't covet your neighbour's wife.
- Don't covet your neighbour's house.
- Don't hate.
- Don't lust.

That's what the law had done to the Israelites—it had beaten them down and actually enslaved them in their own sins. It's like I tell you, “I want you to stop listening to me right now. You hear me? I want you to stop listening to me right now.” Now, I wonder what you have been doing the last few seconds. That's what the law had done to the Israelites—it had beaten them down and actually enslaved them in their own sins. They kept doing the very things that God commanded them not to do.

When the time is ripe, when God's time has fully come, Paul said that Jesus was “born under the law to redeem those under the law”. It means that Jesus bought us back from our slavery to the law. Jesus volunteered and said, “I'll take their punishment for them!” But the only way Jesus could do this is to become a perfect human and to live that perfect life in our place. So Jesus was born of a woman and under the law.

And what's the result? We then receive the full rights of sons (i.e. children of God). Our status has been changed from slaves to sons! John Calvin once put it this way—“the Son of God became a Son of man so that sons of men would become sons of God.” That time has fully come—Jesus has come and we can now become God's children in Him.

God has changed our status from slaves to sons! A new relationship is formed. This is important. We aren't just working in God's household to pay off a debt. We are there because God has made us a part of His household in Jesus Christ. There's a whole new relationship here. God is no longer our slave master. Instead of calling Him “Sir” or “Master”, we can call Him “Father”. The picture God wants to draw for us is a loving Father who will take care of us.

God wants to listen to our cries. He wants to respond and help. He encourages us to come to Him because He is an approachable God. How can a holy God be approachable? Only in and through Jesus Christ can this be possible. As children of God, we have the reassurance and comfort in knowing that our God is not only a holy and righteous God, but also a loving and forgiving Father.

Amos 8:2b says, “The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.” This is a call to judge; a time when God will take away everything from His people.

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But Gal 4:4-7 says, “When the time is fully come (when the time is ripe), God sent His Son ... that we might receive the full rights of sons ... also an heir.”

When the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son. When Jesus came the first time, born a baby in human flesh, later died and then risen, amazing things happened. We were set free from the penalty of sin. We were given eternal life. Now the clock has been set again—and it’s counting down for Jesus’ return in heavenly glory. But it’s not full time yet. God is still waiting for more people (both Gentiles and Israelites) to be brought to faith (Romans 11:25-26). When this time fully comes, we can look forward to greater things—the Lord Jesus will come again to receive His people unto Himself. This is a time to be blessed as God’s people; as His children; as co-heir with Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

How then do we prepare ourselves such that when God’s time has fully come, it will be a time of redemption and blessing for us?

Time is a gift from God to us and meant to be treasured. Yet there are many things competing for our time; many temptations to misuse it with indulgence and negligence rather than diligence.

The Oxford Dictionary defines “diligence” as “careful and persistent work or effort”. From a biblical perspective, this definition is quite inadequate. Biblically speaking, diligence is not merely getting lots done or getting more done than the other person. Diligence is using your gifts, talents, time, energy, and enthusiasm for the glory of God and the good of others by focusing on those few things that the Lord has laid upon your heart.

You remember that familiar story of Jesus in the home of Martha and Mary in Luke 10. In Luke 10:42 Jesus said, “... but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Mary was commended for choosing that one needed (necessary) and better thing. And I believe this one thing has to do with the priority of doing first things first. In this instance, the priority of sitting at the Lord’s feet over standing on our feet. The Lord in this encounter with Martha and Mary wanted them to know that this priority is both needed (necessary) and better because of a few reasons:

- This priority helps us experience a balanced Christian life. We often serve the Lord by rushing time on our feet. But to be still before the presence of the Lord, we need to sit before the Lord by redeeming time at His feet—like Mary. The two elements of a balanced Christian life are sitting and serving; receiving and giving. But the first must always

precede the second—i.e. sitting before the Lord and receiving from Him must precede serving in Him and giving in Him. The Lord was not rebuking Martha for her active service. Rather, He wanted to remind her that sitting at His feet in faith was necessary as the first requirement of service in faithfulness. Before we are a worker of the Lord, we need to be a worshipper of the Lord first.

- This priority helps us be clear of the Lord's will. The Lord longs to guide us in our daily lives, but we often fail to hear His “gentle whisper” because we are not living in close touch with Him. The result is that we repeatedly make wrong decisions because we lack clarity of His will for us. But when we take time and make time to sit at His feet and receive His Word, we will align ourselves to the Lord's will more intimately in spirit, mind, and action.
- This priority helps us overcome self. Martha was irritated and distracted, and she complained to the Lord in v. 40, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” Martha had worked hard, but she also had a restless spirit because the self in her was big. Mary hardly worked, but she had a rested spirit because the Lord before her was magnified. When our self is big, our Lord becomes small. But remember—we must always decrease, and the Lord must always increase in our lives (John 3:30).

Notice that in v. 42 we are told that Mary **CHOSE** to sit at Jesus' feet. It was a matter of deliberate choice. I believe Mary has led the way for us here—i.e. to choose each day not to rush time, but to redeem time by making and taking time to be with the Lord and in His Word; to learn to first sit at His feet before we serve Him on our feet.

So, the caution and reminder for us is this—“Diligence in many things can lead to indulgence in those things, and negligence in that one/few needed thing(s).”

The time is ripe for us. The time is ripe for us to commit ourselves to diligently steward our time, beginning today. A few suggestions to help us:

1. Revitalize the spiritual disciplines. It is very telling that when we are busy or lazy, the spiritual disciplines tend to be among the first things we neglect. Let us then be sure we plan the time, place, and context each day in which we will read God's Word, pray and wait in His presence, and grow in our relationship with Him by both knowing and doing His bidding.
2. Restore broken relationships. Jesus redeems us by forgiving us of our sins. Put in another way, there are many broken relationships that remain broken because those concerned refuse to forgive or to seek forgiveness. Many reasons for such refusal—when we are deeply hurt by someone we love or trust, it can be hard to move forward. We carry the pain with us, and it causes fractures in our hearts. But the beautiful

truth is this—Jesus did not come merely to give us life after death. He came to restore all that had been lost and broken.

Luke 19:10 says, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” This is not just about Jesus saving the souls of lost sinners, but also about saving the broken relationships of lost love in people. God’s redemption has the power to restore everything lost in the transgression of the Fall, which separated us not only from the presence of God but also from one another. If redemption was powerful enough to restore our relationship with God, it is certainly compelling enough to reconcile us to each other. So, before the Lord comes again in His time, let’s seek Him to help us restore our broken relationships in our time.

3. Resolve to constrain the enemies of our diligence. In our day, there is no shortage of distractions eager to bring us out of meaningful labour and into mindless busyness.
  - What needs to be cut out or significantly restricted from our lives in order for us to redeem the time?
  - Do we need to limit TV or computer time so that we can spend more time connecting with God and our significant others?
  - Do we need to delete social media apps that lure us away from diligence throughout the day?

The fact of life is that there seems so much to do with so little time in hand. And so we don’t fancy any interruption or disruption to what we have already scheduled for the day. However when we so rush from one thing to another, we can waste many unscheduled opportunities to touch others with God’s love. And sometimes, God has to scream at us to get our attention, “Stop!!! Do something for this someone in my name!” Indeed, the Bible exhorts us not to rush time, but to redeem time by fighting the evil of our days and doing something aligned to God’s purpose and direction for us (Eph 5:16).

Today, we learn that God’s time is ripe can mean at least two things:

- God’s time is ripe can mean judgment. It is judgment calculated to discipline so that we can return to Him and become better worshippers of God.
- God’s time is ripe can also mean redemption. At Jesus’ 1<sup>st</sup> coming, it is redemption from the penalty of sin secured for us by His perfect sacrifice so that God’s holiness and righteousness is not compromised. At Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, He will come to receive those who belong to Him to be with Him in their new, resurrected bodies.

I want to conclude with some final words to those of you in this sanctuary who are not yet believers. You may say, “Well, God’s time can mean a time of



judgment as well as a time of redemption. But this only applies to Christians and has nothing to do with me.”

If you think this way, I am sorry to tell you that you are mistaken. God’s time of judgment and redemption is not only for Christians, but for all of humanity. And that means it applies not only to me as a Christian, but also to you as a human being in this world.

The Bible in John 3:16-18 says this concerning those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God—“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

So, if you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, I say to you—“You are not here today by accident but by divine appointment. The Lord Jesus is calling you today to believe in Him and receive Him into your life while time is still with you here on earth. And if you would do that, when He comes again in His time, it will be a time of redemption and not condemnation for you.”

We encourage you to talk with us after the service to find out more about what it means to believe in and receive Jesus Christ into your life, and how you can go about doing that.

The Lord is coming again. When the time is ripe for Him to come, will He find you and me living for Him with the time in our hands?

*Let’s devote our days to grow deep in the Lord and reach out to others so that should His time be ripe today, He will be pleased to find us waiting in faith for His return and working with faithfulness for His glory.*

The Lord helps us. Amen!