

Amos 5:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time.

Analysis

Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time (לְכָן מִשְׁפֵּיל בָּעֵת הַזֹּאת)—"prudent" (maskil, משָׁפֵיל, from שָׁכַל sakal) means wise, discerning, one who understands the times. "Keep silence" (yidom, יִדּוּם, from דָּמָם damam) means be silent, be still. This could be interpreted two ways:

1. the wise remain silent because speaking truth brings persecution (v. 10), making silence prudent self-preservation; or
2. the wise fall silent in grief, recognizing that Israel is beyond repentance and judgment is inevitable.

For it is an evil time (ki et ra'ah hi, קַיְ אֵת רָעָה הִיא)—"evil" (ra'ah, רָעָה) describes both moral corruption and calamitous judgment.

The "time" (et, עֵת) is the present era of injustice heading toward divine judgment. Most commentators see this as Amos describing the futility of protest—corruption is so thorough that truth-tellers are crushed (v. 10), making silence the only safe option. Yet this "prudent" silence differs from prophetic courage—Amos himself didn't stay silent but spoke boldly despite opposition (7:10-17). The verse may describe others' capitulation while validating why some give up fighting systemic evil when it seems overwhelming.

Historical Context

This verse captures a dark reality in corrupt societies: eventually, good people stop speaking up because doing so accomplishes nothing except personal harm. In Amos's Israel, honest witnesses and judges faced hatred (v. 10), courts were thoroughly bribed (v. 12), and the elite oppressed truth-tellers. Within such a system, the "prudent" might conclude that silence was the only way to survive. Yet prophets like Amos continued speaking despite the danger, demonstrating that God's call sometimes demands courage over prudence.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 – Definition of faith

Romans 2:1 – Judging others

Revelation 20:12 – Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. When is silence prudent self-preservation versus cowardly capitulation to evil?
2. How should Christians respond when speaking biblical truth brings persecution or seems futile?

Interlinear Text

לְכָה יְאַעַת הַמָּשָׁךְ יְלִכֵּד | H3651 Therefore the prudent in that time shall keep silence H1931 H3588

בָּעֵת הַזֶּה יְהִי
in that time for it is an evil H1931

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 3:7 (Parallel theme): A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

Hosea 4:4 (Parallel theme): Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest.

Micah 2:3 (Evil): Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks; neither shall ye go haughtily: for this time is evil.

2 Timothy 3:1 (Parallel theme): This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

Isaiah 37:3 (Parallel theme): And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.

Isaiah 36:21 (Parallel theme): But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not.

Ephesians 6:13 (Evil): Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Ecclesiastes 9:12 (Evil): For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

Amos 6:10 (Parallel theme): And a man's uncle shall take him up, and he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is by the sides of the house, Is there yet any with thee? and he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue: for we may not make mention of the name of the LORD.

Habakkuk 3:16 (Parallel theme): When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.

