

YEAR ELEVEN

TOPIC: THE SUPREMACY OF GOD

SUB-TOPIC: The Religious Situation of Israel at the Time of Elijah and Obadiah

Ahab, son of Omri mounted the throne of Israel in the thirty-eight year of Asa, king of Judah. He did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all his predecessors. He married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of Sidon, this brought into Israel the worship of Baal. Ahab also made the worship of Baal a national religion and the people were forced to comply.

God reacted and sent Elijah to Ahab to proclaim three and half year's drought in Israel as a punishment for abandoning their God, and he told him about God's judgment.

After the pronouncement, God told Elijah to hide himself by the brook of Cherith. There, the ravens brought him bread and meat in the evening and morning until the brook dried up because there was no rain. From there, he went to Zarephath.

After hiding for three years, God asked him to go and show himself again to Ahab. Meanwhile, Elijah's movement coincided with the time Ahab and Obadiah parted ways to look for grass for horses and mules to eat.

Obadiah, recognizing Elijah, fell on his face to greet him. Elijah told him to go and tell the king '*Behold Elijah is here*'. At first Obadiah was afraid because he thought that before he got to the king, Elijah would have disappeared to another place and

the king might think he was joking and would kill him. He told Elijah about his good deed, how he hid hundred prophets of God in caves and fed them so that they would not be killed by Jezebel. Elijah promised Obadiah that he would not disappear.

THE CONTEST ON MOUNT CARMEL

When Ahab saw Elijah he said *"Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"* but Elijah refuted the charge by saying that Ahab is the troubler of Israel.

Elijah suggested a contest between himself, and the prophets of Baal. He asked Ahab to bring to Mount Carmel four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah.

On Mount Carmel, Elijah addressed the people of Israel. He asked how long they would continue to limp between Baal and God. He asked for two bulls, one for God, and the other for Baal. Each side was to cut the bull into pieces, lay it on the wood and put no fire on it. They would call on their gods to put fire on their own. The god who answered by fire would be declared the true God.

The prophets of Baal chose their bull. They prepared it and started calling on Baal from morning till noon. They struggled and chanted furiously to get fire until it was midday but still there was no fire.

Elijah prepared his bull built an altar with twelve stones and dug a very big trench round it and asked the people to pour four

jars of water on the offering three times and then called on God and immediately fire fell and consumed the offering, the woods, stones and dried up the water. When the people saw this they fell to the ground saying "*The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God*".

Elijah ordered that the prophets of Baal be seized. He took them to the brook of Kishon and killed them there.

GOD'S SUPREMACY OVER DAGON OF PHILISTINES

The Philistines captured the ark of God and took it to the house of Dagon. They placed it before Dagon's image. The next day, they found out that Dagon had fallen before the ark of the Lord and they put it back in its place. The following morning, Dagon had not only fallen, both his head and hands had been cut off from the body. In addition, the people of Ashdod were afflicted with tumours. With this, they concluded that it was the hand of God and that the ark of the covenant must be returned immediately. The ark was brought to Gath. The same thing happened there again and tumour broke out upon them. They sent it to another place again called Ekron where the people rejected the ark. When there was no place to put it again in Philistine, the lords of the land decided to return it back to Israel because the affliction was much. Many had died and those who were alive were afflicted with tumours. This shows greatly God's supremacy over idols.

CLASS WORK

1. During the reign of Ahab, the supremacy of God was championed by
 - A. Elisha
 - B. Hazael
 - C. Obadiah
 - D. Elijah
2. During the religious tension in Israel was the man that hid about a hundred prophets of God
 - A. Jezebel
 - B. Ahab
 - C. Elijah
 - D. Obadiah
3. was the number of the prophets of baal that contested with Elijah.
 - A. 100
 - B. 250
 - C. 450
 - D. 340

TOPIC: RELIGIOUS REFORMS

SUB-TOPIC: PREVALENT RELIGIOUS EVILS AT THE TIME OF JOSIAH (II kings 22)

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, he reigned 31 years in Jerusalem, his mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath.

During his 18th year as king, he sent Shaphan, the scribe to Hilkiah, the high priest, that he may count the money and pay the workers.

Hilkiah gave Shaphan the book of the law which he found in the temple. When Shaphan read the book before king Josiah, he tore his cloths. The king sent Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, Achbor, the son of Michaiah, Shaphan, the scribe, and Asaiah a servant to go and inquire from Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, what they should do because their fathers have not kept the law of God.

On getting to Huldah, she explained to them that God will destroy the people because they have apostasy but for Josiah, the king, God will spare him because he walks in the right path. All these they told Josiah when they returned.

JOSIAH'S REFORMS

1. He ordered the priest to bring out all the vessels made for Baal and Asherah and burn them.
2. He disposed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah ordained.
3. He destroyed the houses of the male cult prostitutes.

4. He defiled Topheth to prevent people from burning their children as sacrifice to Molech.
5. He removed the horses the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun.
6. He removed the shrines of the high places that were in the city of Samaria which the kings of Israel had made.
7. He restored the feast of Passover.
8. He abolished witchcraft, sorcery, and soothsaying.

SUB-TOPIC: RELIGIOUS REFORMS IN THE NORTH

Josiah's reforms did not end in the south, which is Judah but he also made some reforms in the north which is Israel.

He destroyed the alter made by Jeroboam in Bethel and burnt the wooden image.

He took the bones from the graves in the mountain and burnt it on the altar defiling it. The bones of the man of God who prophesied his reforms were not touched.

He did the same in Samaria in all the shrines that kings of Israel had made. He executed all the priests of the high places who were there on the altars and burnt men's bones on them and he returned to Jerusalem.

SOME AREAS OF RELIGIOUS REFORMS IN NIGERIA

1. Removal of adulterous priests
2. Abolition of homosexual
3. Removal of gay pastors
4. Abolition of prostitution
5. Abolition of abortion
6. Abolition of killing of people suspected to be witches and wizards.

TOPIC: CONCERN FOR ONE'S NATION

SUB-TOPIC: CAPTIVITY AND DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

King Josiah was killed in a battle with the Egyptians at Megido. Judah's travails began when Jehohaz, Josiah's son succeeded his father as king at the age of 23. Unlike his father, Jehohaz was so carefree that he accelerated the return to paganism. This resulted in Judah becoming weak.

Pharaoh Neco desposed Jehohaz and in his place, he made Jehoiakim a vassal king over Judah. It was during his reign that Babylon defeated Egypt and Jehoiakim became his servant. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. After the death Jehoiakim, his 18 year old son, Jehoiachin, succeeded him. He also did what was evil in the sight of God and in 598 BC, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and took him and his household

captives and carried away all the treasures in the palace and the temple, all the princes, craftsmen, blacksmiths, and men of valor, leaving behind the poor people. Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle was made king by Nebuchadnezzar and his name changed to Zedekiah. He, also rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The troops of Babylon besieged the city and while Zedekiah and his household tried to escape, they were caught at the plains of Jericho and taken to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah where his two sons were killed and his two eyes plucked out and then he was taken to Babylon and he died there.

Shortly after, Nebuzaradan, the captain of Nebuchadnezzar's troops under the order of the king went and burnt down Jerusalem including its temple and the walls. This final destruction of the temple of Jerusalem and deportation into exile in Babylon in 586 BC was predicted by Jeremiah.

SUB-TOPIC: RESPONSE TO THE STATE OF THE NATION

Following the conquest of Israel by Babylon, Israel did not exist again as a nation. Most of the people were taken as captives to Babylon, though, they were not enslaved and they settled in a particular area. They were allowed to acquire and owned property while in Babylon. Most of them eventually attained positions of importance in the government of the land. Later,

Persia defeated Babylon and became world power. Babylon and all its empire were now under Persia.

It was during the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia that God stirred his spirit and he issued a decree that all Jews should return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of God. Following this order, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin led some of the returning exiles to rebuild the temple. King Cyrus also contributed by making available to the returning exiles, all the treasures in the temple seized by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

Following this decree, various Jewish patriots rose up to the occasion and played various roles which finally saw the establishment of Israel as a nation. Remarkable among them were Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

Zerubbabel led about fifty thousand Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of God. Some Samaritan-Jews offered to help in the work but their offer was turned down. Most of them therefore mounted stiff opposition and made several attempts to frustrate the people's effort in the building of the temple. Notable among these people were Bishlam, Mithreadath and Tabel. Contrary to their expectation, the more they opposed the builders, the more the builders succeeded because God was with them. They completed the building in twenty years after their arrival from exile. The walls of the city were however not rebuilt.

Ezra, a Jewish scribe vast in the law of Moses, the ordinances and status came back with about six thousand Jews and his aim was to carry out religious reforms.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM BY NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah, a captive in Babylon, was the cup-bearer of king Artaxerxes. He was visited by Hanani. Nehemiah wanted to know the state of Jerusalem and her inhabitants. Hanani told him that the remnants of the land were in great trouble and shame. He was told that the gates and the walls were broken down and destroyed. This made Nehemiah sad. He then fasted and prayed for many days. He requested for his freedom from the king and was granted. The king also gave him a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest to provide him with timber.

On arrival in Jerusalem, he went at night to inspect the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down. Nehemiah said: *"let us build the walls of Jerusalem so that we may no longer suffer disgrace."* The people responded and work started, but, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem opposed the reconstruction work. They ridiculed Nehemiah and the workers. The Ammonites who were with Sanballat said: *"what they are building, if a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall"* Nehemiah 4:3

Instead of engaging their enemies in a battle of words, Nehemiah simply prayed to God to judge them for despising and taunting his people. Sanballat with his associates resorted to violence on the builders in order to create confusion and disorganize them. Nehemiah responded by setting armed guards to protect the workers day and night. God frustrated the evil plans of the enemies at every stage of conspiracy.

REASONS FOR THE POSITIVE RESPONSE OF THE JEWS TO RETURN HOME

1. The people had the feeling that home is home coupled with the spirit of nationalism.
2. In a foreign land, they could not freely practice their culture and religion.
3. Slavery is a curse to any people
4. It showed the fulfillment of God's promise.

TOPIC: FAITH AND POWER

Daniel was one of the Jewish captives taken to Babylon. While in Babylon, he attained new heights in the government of the land because he had excellent spirit and God was with him.

King Darius set over his kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps (Governors). These satraps were accountable to about to about three presidents and he distinguished himself. The king loved him and planned to set him over the kingdom. This made the rest of the presidents and satraps conspired to destroy Daniel.

Knowing fully well that Daniel loved God and served Him continually, they planned their strategy along that line. They went to the king and requested him to decree that nobody should make petition either to God or man for 30 days except to the king. Anyone who breaks this rule would be cast into the den of lions. They requested that the king should establish the

interdict and sign the document so that it could not be changed like the law of the Medes and Persians which could not be revoked. King Darius did as they requested not knowing that it was a plan to rope in somebody he loved. Although Daniel knew about this decree but he went ahead and continued to make his prayers to God. The conspirators reported Daniel to the king. The king was distressed and wanted to deliver Daniel from the punishment but the conspirators reminded the king that the decree cannot be changed.

They cast Daniel into the lion's den but the king kept praying that God should deliver Daniel. Early next morning the king rose up and went near the den and called with a loud voice, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has you od whom you see continually been able to deliver you from the lions?" Daniel answered from the lion's den. The king was happy, he ordered that Daniel should be removed while those who accused Daniel should be cast into the den along with their wives and children. King Darius decreed that everyone should worship the God of Daniel.

QUALITIES OF DANIEL

1. He was without blemish.
2. Skillful in all wisdom
3. Had an excellent spirit
4. He was faithful.

TOPIC: TRUE RELIGION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

SOCIAL JUSTICE

There was a high level of social and moral decadence in Israel as at the time Amos prophesied.

The theme of Amos' prophesy is summed up in the book of Amos 2:6-8 "for three transgressions of, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair o shoe. They that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turned aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go into the same maiden so that my holy name is profaned; they lay themselves down beside every altar upon garments taken in pledges and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been condemned"

By this statement, Amos was addressing the following issues

1. The judges took bribes and perverted justice. The poor were denied justice because the judges collected bribes from the rich and passed judgment in their favor.
2. The poor were robbed of their properties. They pledge such property to borrow money but when they were unable to redeem it, such properties would not be returned to them.

3. The rich exploited the poor by selling to them with false weights and measures, thereby becoming richer at the expense of the poor who they exploited. The society was made up of the 'haves' and the 'have not'
4. There were also cases of forced slavery. Some poor people who borrowed money from the money lenders were forced to become servants to the lenders when they could not pay back.
5. There was sexual immorality. In some cases, such reckless sexual acts were carried out in the house of God. This was a great abomination in the sight of God.
6. Both the wine from those fined and the garments taken from those that pledged were supposed to be kept untouched but the rich slept on those garments and drank the wine even in the house of God.
7. Amos called the Samaritan women cows of Bashan because some of them indirectly took part in this humiliation, intimidation and oppression by encouraging their husbands to bring home their ill-gotten wine for them to drink.

OPPOSITION AGAINST AMOS

Amos condemned the social and religious immorality among the people. The priest of the royal sanctuary of Bethel, Amaziah reported Amos to the king accusing him of conspiracy and

sedition. He ordered Amos to return to Judah and prophesy there. Amos pronounced the following curses on Amaziah.

- a. Amaziah's wife would become harlot in the city
- b. His sons and daughters would be slain by the sword
- c. His land would be divided by line
- d. Israel would surely go into exile

PUNISHMENT

As Amos pointed out the evils in the society, he warned the people on the punishment that would come upon them if they failed to repent.

1. The Samaritan women would be taken to exile in hook and they would be cast into Harmon.
2. Those who exploited the poor to build for themselves hewn stone would not dwell in the houses nor live to drink the wine of the vineyard they planted
3. In all the squares, there shall be wailing.
4. All the people hoping on the business they would carry out over the years and possible exploitation of the poor would have their hope dashed while their feast would be turned into mourning.

TRUE RELIGION

Apart from social justice that had been corrupted, true religion of the Israelites was no longer practiced. Their hearts were not truly with God, they only pretended by fulfilling the physical obligations of worship such as payment of tithes and offering sacrifices while the real fear of God was not in them.

True religion had been polluted with the worship of idols, a case in point was the golden calves made by Jeroboam which he kept one at Bethel and the other at Dan. Also there were other idols brought by the foreign women that various kings of Israel had married. All these combined to pollute the true worship of God in Israel. Israel became a nation that hated truth. They harassed the people that told them the truth. Rather than turning to God with their whole heart, they felt they could appease God by their sacrifices. God rejected their offerings and sacrifices. God rejected their offerings and sacrifices because they were not from people of pure heart.

"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fattened beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream"

THE THEME OF AMOS' MESSAGE TO THE ISREALITES

1. The people should uphold justice in all their dealings.
2. Righteousness should be transparently seen in their lives.
3. God was after their hearts and not after their sons and burnt offerings.
4. The days of the Lord should be kept with ordinances and statues.

TOPIC: DIVINE LOVE

Hosea is generally referred to a 'Prophet of Love' because his message centered on God's love for the people of Israel despite their unfaithfulness. His marital experience acted as a practical input to his message of love. God commanded Hosea to "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord"

Hosea married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim and she conceived and bore him a son. God instructed him to call his name Jezreel which means that: "*God will punish the house of Jehu for the blood the blood Jezreel...u..*" (Hosea 1:4). Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter named "Not Pitied" this is to show that God would no longer pity the house of Israel again.

The third she gave birth to was named "Not my people" this simply means that God has rejected the people of Israel.

THE UNFAITHFULNESS OF ISRAEL TO GOD AND HIS CONTINUOUS LOVE FOR HER

After giving birth to these three children, Gomer left Hosea and ran after her lovers. Out of love, Hosea implored her to come back but she refused. Hosea sent the children to plead with her, but all was to no avail, Gomer was very much interested in the material things she would get from her lover. In spite of Gomer's unfaithfulness and disappointment, Hosea's love for her persisted.

Hosea's marital experience was synonymous with God's relationship with the Israelites. As a husband, God had shown a lot of love to the Israelites right from the time He delivered them from Egypt with a lot of signs and wonders. He had also established a covenant with them but they never kept the commandment of God. just like an harlot running after her lovers, Israel found great pleasure in running after other gods.

As Hosea sent his children to appeal to Gomer to come but she refused. In the same way, God had sent prophets to appeal to the people to change but they refused. God would have no option than to divorce Israel, by raising a nation that would destroy them. Despite all these God still hoped to see if they would repent and return to Him.

MAN'S RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE (HOSEA 6:1-11)

God's love for man is genuine. He is faithful to man. Man on his part only pretend to love God. man's relationship with God is calculative. They go to God when they have a problem. Once their problem has been taken care of, they will return to their sinful life.

This was the case with the Israelites. They only pretended to have repented to avoid any punishment from God. they told themselves that: *'come; let us return to the Lord for he has torn, that he may heal us. He has stricken, and he will bind us up. After two days, he will raise us up that we may live before him'*. (Hosea 6:1-2)

God knew the wickedness of their hearts. This was the reason why He made it clear what He needed from them: *'For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings'*. This was God's mind to the people of Israel when they thought that they could win God to their side by numerous offerings. Sacrifices without righteousness and holiness are nothing before God.