

CLASS: SS2
SUBJECT: CRS
TOPIC: TRUE RELIGION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
WEEK: 7
TERM: THIRD

TRUE RELIGION

Meaning of True Religion

True religion is the combination of our **worshipping God** and the **practice of righteousness** at all times. It is the combination of the ceremonial aspect of our faith with the moral requirements. The ceremonial aspect involves our regular attendance to church services on Sundays or holy days, payment of tithes, offerings and church dues or levies. The moral aspect of our faith is the practicing of righteousness in human relationship through the works of kindness, love, hospitality, honesty, justice, forgiveness, etc.

Amos was the earliest eighth century prophet. Before his call to prophetic work, he was a shepherd and **dresser of sycamore tree**. He was a native of **Tekoa in Judea** but prophesied in the northern kingdom during the reigns of **Jeroboam and the time of Uzziah in Judea**. During this period, there was an economic boom in the northern kingdom (Israel) which resulted in increased disparity between the rich and the poor. Oppression of the poor by the rich became rampant and social evil increased in the society. This social evil co-existed with religious insincerity.

Amos observed that Jewish religion was highly established on the ceremonial side, and totally lacking on the spiritual and moral aspect. The religion was characterized with hypocrisy, idolatry and empty formalism. The people assembled regularly for worship; made costly offerings and had magnificent places of worship, yet social evils still prevailed. This according to prophet Amos showed that the people were not practicing true religion. Some of the religious practices unacceptable to God outlined in Amos that displeased God include the following:

1. Festivals and merry making that lacked true, interpersonal communication and a real communication with God.
2. Holding of sacred services that were shallow and hypocritical.
3. The people followed religious double standards – they worshipped idols at Bethel and Gilgal.

4. Pollution of the land by the people's moral corruption- they were going to Bethel and Gilgal not to worship but to engage in all forms of evil practices such as cultism, prostitution, drunkenness and unnecessary fines which affected only the poor.
5. Little regard for holy periods.

Demands of True Religion (Amos 5:14-15, 24)

True religion demands purity of heart, honest desires and justice, humility and fair play. It is not characterized by regular worship and offerings. This was what Amos meant by declaring that God demanded justice and righteousness from his people and sacrifice (Amos 5:21-24). The kind of worship God demanded from the Israelites according to Amos includes:

1. Seeking God with passion so that they will live. (Amos 5:4)
2. Doing everything good and with honest report while shunning evil. (Amos 5:14)
3. Justice, fair play and being seen to be constantly doing what is right. (Amos 5:15, 24)
4. Righteousness should be allowed to reign in the lives of the people. (Amos 5: 24)
5. Repentance and returning to God for forgiveness.
6. It is necessary to note here, that God does not condemn regular worship, sacrifices – tithes and offerings, etc. Rather Amos meant that religious activities that are not followed by righteousness are meaningless.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social Vices of the Times of Amos (Amos 2:6-8; 4:1-2; 5:7-13)

The society of Amos' time was characterized by and enmeshed in official injustice, corruption, greed and false worship. Their social vices were so excessive and unbearable that God had to send Amos to warn them of the disastrous consequence of their actions if they failed to repent: in condemning the social vices of his time, Amos said that God is not only one-time and universal God, but also a just and righteous one, who demands justice and righteousness from his people.

He then exposed and condemned the social vices of the day which among others include:

1. **Bribery and corruption which was the order of the day:** The judges perverted justice by collecting bribes from the rich. The poor were denied justice as the judges could easily be bought over, 'even with a pair of shoes' (Amos 2:6-8; 5:10).

2. **Dishonesty of the merchants (they used false measures):** In most cases, they sold refuse as wheat to the poor (Amos 8:4-6).
3. **Greed and drunkenness:** The women of Samaria were making excessive demands on their husbands who in turn robbed and crushed the poor to meet their wives' demands. Those women were overfed and Amos described them as 'cows of Bashan', who must consequently be taken captive to Harmon in Assyria.
4. **Selfish luxury of the rich:** The wealthy became abundantly prosperous and lived in affluence, dwelling in expensive buildings (stone houses) and using costly beds made of ivory at the cost of the poor in the society (Amos 6:4-6).
5. **Licentiousness:** Indiscriminate sex pervaded the society. A son and father went in to the same maiden (Amos 2:7).

Opposition against Amos by Amaziah, Priest of the Royal Sanctuary

(Amos 7:10-17)

Amos' prophecy against the sanctuaries, especially the destruction of Bethel, the exile of the whole people of Israel including king Jeroboam II, and members of his family, did not go down well with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. Amaziah saw Amos' prophecy as conspiracy and treason to overthrow the government of king Jeroboam. He therefore reported the prophet to the king. He also ordered Amos to go back to his country, the southern kingdom (Judah) and prophesy there, to earn a living and stop prophesying any longer at Bethel because it was the king's sanctuary and court.

Responding, Amos politely told Amaziah that he was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son but God called him out of his former occupation as a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees to go and prophesy to the people of the northern kingdom (Israel). He was God's mouth-piece hence a prophet of God (Amos 7:10-14).

He further prophesied about the impending exile, during which their wives would be harlots in the city and their sons and daughters would fall by the sword.

Divine Judgement of Evil Doers (Amos 4:2-3; 4:6-10; 5:14-20; 7:16-17; 8:9-10)

God tried to make the people of Israel to return to him by visiting them with drought, famine and pestilence, yet, they remained unrepentant and continued with the prevalent social and religious vices. Amos therefore prophesied and outlined the impending divine judgment.

1. The sanctuaries would be destroyed.
2. The people of Israel would suffer captivity through Assyria. The rampaging enemy forces would be so vicious and heartless.
3. Natural disasters in form of famine, drought, crop failure and plagues such as wind and sand storms, lice, locust invasion, natural calamities etc.
4. The upper class of the society would be the first to go into exile and would lead the columns of refugees (Amos 6: 6-7).
5. Lack of safety as one who ran to the house for safety, leaning his hand on the wall would be bitten by snake (Amos 5:19).
6. Amaziah would be taken to a defiled land where he would cease to perform his priestly duty, and would die in the land of captivity.
7. Amaziah's wife would be left alone as a widow. She would end up being a prostitute for a living.
8. The so called day of the Lord, the Jews were hoping for would be a doom-day and a day of darkness.

ASSIGNMENT

State four risky experiences faced by Christians in our society today.