

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES (CRS)

S.S. 2 WEEK 2

GREED AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Meaning of Greed: Greed is the selfish and excessive desire to acquire power, wealth or any other possessions.

AHAB SEIZES NABOTH'S VINEYARD. 1KINGS 21:1-16.

Ahab was the King of Israel (Northern Kingdom), his wife was Jezebel. Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard near the palace of Ahab. King Ahab demanded Naboth to give him his vineyard in exchange for his town or if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.

Naboth refused saying, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my father, this inheritance here means his birth right. Ahab went back to his house and was very sad, he laid down on his worry bed and refused to eat when Jezebel learnt that the King refused to eat food, she said to him, "why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?" King Ahab told her that Naboth the Jezreelite refused to give him his vineyard for money. Jezebel consoled her husband and promised him of owning the vineyard.

She wrote a letter in Ahab's name to the elders and nobles of Jezreal and asked them to proclaim a fast and set tow base fellows who would bring a charge against Naboth that he cursed God and the King and then stone him to death.

When Naboth died, Jezebel said to King Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth which he refused to give you for money. Ahab went to the vineyard of Naboth and took possession of it".

THE CONSEQUENCES OF AHAB'S GREED 1KINGS 21:17-29

God send Elijah the Tishbite to confront King Ahab who has gone to take possession of Naboth's vineyard. Prophet Elijah said to him, have you killed and also taken possession? Ahab replied to him, "Have you found me O! my enemy?. Elijah replied, I have found you because you have done what is evil in the sight of the Lord. Elijah pronounced the following punishment on the house of Ahab.

1. In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick Ahab's blood.
2. God will totally sweep the family of Ahab's away and cut from Ahab every male bond or free as he did to the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and Baasha son of Ahijah
3. The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the bounds of Zereal.
4. Any one belonging to Ahab who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat any one who dies in the open country, the birds of the air shall eat.

When Ahab heard those words, he rent his cloths, fasted and put on sack cloth. When God saw how he crumbled himself, he spoke through Elijah that those evils would no more take place during his time but in his son's days.

THE HEALING OF NAMMAN. 2KINGS 5:11-19

Namman was the great army commander of Syrian. He was a mighty man of valour with leprosy. In one of the Syrian battle with Israel, they captured a little girl from Israel then she became a maid to Namaan's wife. One day, she suggested to her mistress that Naaman can be cured of his leprosy by a prophet in Samaria. Naaman reported this to the King of Syria and the King of Syria and the King sent Naaman with a letter to the King of Israel requesting him to heal his army commander of his leprosy. The King of Israel became angry when he read the letter and wondered if he were God who heals.

When Elisha the Prophet hared the King of Israel had rent his cloths, he asked that Naaman be brought to him. Naaman went with ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten festal garments. When he arrived a messenger sent by prophet Elijah told him to go and wash in the River Jordan Seven times (7) so as to be healed of his leprosy, Naaman became angry and thought that Elisha would call on the name of the Lord and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. He was disappointed and said, "Are not Abana and Pharpar the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? So, he refused to wash in the Jordan River but his servant pleaded with him and he headed and washed seven times in River Jordan and was healed completely.

Naaman was, happy and offered gifts to Prophet Elisha but he refused to accept the gifts from him he acknowledged that there is no God in all earth except in Israel. He requested to return back to Syria with two mules burden of earth for he will no longer offer burnt offerings or scarifies to other gods but to the Lord.

HOW THE NAME OF GOD WAS GLORIFIED THROUGH NAAMAN'S HEALING.

1. The God of Israel is the only true God.
2. Obedience to the word of God spoken by his true Prophets.
3. Prophet of God had powers to perform healing and miracles.
4. God-given talents are free and should not be commercialized.
5. Naaman's servant convinced him to be humbled and obedient to the prophet of God.
6. It brings about worship of Yaweh in a pagan nation.

LESSONS FROM THE HEALING OF NAAMAN

- a. People should be humbled in their dealings with follow men.
- b. We should not visit the house of God with empty hands.
- c. God can use ordinary people to achieve his purpose eg. Maids
- d. Obedience to God's word brings good result.
- e. We should use our gifts/talents for God.
- f. You don't always need to do extra ordinary things to get result
- g. With God all things are possible
- h. God is the God of both rich and poor
- i. It pays to be honest.

NAAMAN LEARNT THE FOLLOWING LESSONS FROM HIS HEALINGS.

- i. He was convinced that the God of Israel was the only God
- ii. He learnt that prophets of Israel had powers to perform healing/miracles.
- iii. Naaman equally learnt that God is a forgiving God.
- iv. He learnt that it was important to obey the word of God spoken by his true prophets.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT BROUGHT ABOUT THE DISMISSAL OF GEHAZI 2KINGS 5:20-27.

After the healing of Naaman at River Jordan, he presented his gifts to prophet Elisha which he refused to accept. As Naaman was on his way

home, Gehazi, Elisha's servant regretted his master's refusal of Naaman's gift and swore to collect a reward. He ran after Naaman who halted on sighting him. Gehazi lied to him that his master had visitors, two sons of the prophet from Ephriam and he wanted me to collect a talent of silver and two festal garments. Naaman begged to give two talents which his two servants carried for Gehazi. At the house, Gehazi took the items and send them away secretly. Elisha asked him where he went, he lied going anywhere Elisha asked if his did not follow him and whether it was time for acquisition of wealth. He cursed him that the leprosy of Naaman be transferred to him and his descendants forever.

LESSONS LEARN FROM GEHAZI'S CONDUCT

- i. It is not good to be materialistic or greedy
- ii. One can get diseases such as AIDs' through sinful acts.
- iii. It is wrong to lie to cover an offence.
- iv. Elisha was a prophet, we should know the king of people we deal with.
- v. God knows the secret sin of man
- vi. The consequences of sin can be generational

AREAS IN WHICH GREED IS PREVALENT IN THE SOCIETY

- a. In the political circle
- b. In the office
- c. In the church
- d. Business
- e. family

3RD WEEK NOT OF LESSON

Topic: The Supremacy of God

The Religious situation in Israel at the time of Elijah 1Kings 16:29-34

Ahab succeeded his father, Omri as King of Israel. He reigned twenty two years in Samaria when Asa king of Judah had reigned for thirty-eight years. Just like his father Omri, Ahab did what is evil in the sight of God more than all the king that were before him. He walked in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Ahab married Jezebe daughter of Sidon as a wife. She introduced the worship of ball melkart in Israel

which approved and worshiped and also build an alter for it. He also made an Asherah Baalism (ball meltark) was made the official inational religion and people were forced to comply.

Dissident were persecuted. It was also during his reign that Tiel of Bethel build Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of his first son Abiram and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub in accordance with the word of God to Joshua the son of Nun. God reacted and sent Prophet Elijah.

LESSONS

1. Weakness of the ruler may ruin the nation
2. At all times God defends the rightful course hence the call of Elijah to defend Yawism.
3. Moral courage to challenge people in authority over their apostasy.
4. Inter-religious marriage has its consequences.

THE PRONOUNCEMENT OF DROUGHT IN ISRAEL BY PROPHET ELIJAH 1KINGS 17:1-7

King Ahab and Jezebel maintained four hundred and fifty prophets of baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah but slew the prophet of God and destroyed his alter. It was during this period of atrocities. In Israel that God sent Prophet Elijah the Tishbite of Tishbe in Gilead to pronounce three (3) years of drought in Israel as God's punishment for the apostasy. When the drought began, God told Elijah to hide himself by the brook chrith that is east of Jordan where he was fed by the ravens morning and evening with bread and meat.

Even the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to a widow at Zarephat which belong to Sidon. The widow had only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a cruise. Elijah instructed the widow to first make a little cake of it for him assuring him that according to the word of God, it will not finish. The widow obeyed and the jar of meal was not spent neither did the cruise of oil fail.

Later, the son of the woman died and she accused Elijah of slaying his son. Elijah prayed to God, he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to God to restore back his soul and the soul of the child came back to him again.

MORAL LESSONS

1. God is supreme and above all kings, rulers and tribes subjects
2. God's servants should be prepared for trials and persecution; but victory shall be there's at the end.
3. God's command must be obeyed as failure to do so means punishment
4. God is a jealous God and takes vengeance on anybody who raises his hand against his peoples
5. God controls the nature eg. Rain, draught etc.

ELIJAH PRONOUNCES THE END OF DROUGHT 1KINGS 18:1-19.

God sent Elijah to Ahab in the third year of drought in Israel. The famine was severe in Samaria Jezebel sought to destroy all the prophets of God. At this time, Obadiah the servant of Ahab was in-charge of Ahab's household he took a hundred prophets of God and hid them in fifties in a cave because he feared God greatly.

Because the famine was severed in Samaria, Ahab sent Obadiah to go and search for water and grasses in order to save the King's animal from dying. Ahab and Obadiah went in different direction in search of food and water for the king's animals while Obadiah was on his way, he met Elijah and recognised him and said, "Is it you my Lord Elijah" He told Obadiah to go and inform Ahab that he was around, Obadiah became afraid because he feared that the Spirit of God would take Elijah away before the arrival of his master and he would then kill him.

When Ahab met Elijah, he said to him, "Is it you; you trouble of Israel? Elijah replied, I have not troubled Israel but you and your household because you have forsaken the Lord and worship baals.

Elijah told him to gather the four hundred and fifty prophets of baals and the four hundred prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table.

MORAL LESSONS

- a. Unfaithfulness to God attracts punishment
- b. God protects his people from harm
- c. Believers should take care of God's people
- d. Punishment for sin brings untold hardship to both innocent and the culprits.
- e. It is good to discharge any assignment given by a true man of God
- f. God has a way of solving human problems
- g. People should be told to confront those who cause human sufferings.

ELIJAH/CONTEST AT MOUNT CARMEL IKINGS 20:1-46

King Ahab gathered all the people of Israel and the prophets of Baal together at Mount Carmel. Elijah ask them “How long will you go limping with different opinions?” If the Lord is God follow him but Baal then follow him. He suggested that two bulls be given to them. The prophet of Baal which were four hundred and fifty will choose one Bull of themselves first. They will cut the bull in pieces and lay it on the wood in the alter and put no fire to it. Elijah the prophet of God will do likewise and put no fire to it also. They accepted it and did as Elijah directed and called on the name of baal from morning to noon to answer. Elijah mocked them telling them to cry loud, for he is god, he may be on a journey or musing or he is asleep must be awakened. They cut themselves with swords and lances according to their custom until mid day up to the time of the offering of the oblation but there was no answer from their god. Prophet Elijah called the people nearer to himself and repaired the alter of the Lord that had been thrown down He took twelve stones according to twelve tribes of Israel, put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces he instructed the burnt offering. They did, it three times and water round about alter at the times of the offering of oblation, Elijah prayed to God to come and prove His supremacy. God answered by fire and consumed the offering when the people saw what happened, they fell on their faces and said, “The Lord, He is God, The Lord He is God” Elijah then ordered that all the prophets of baal be seized; He took them to the brook Kishon and killed them there.

After this, Elijah instructed Ahab to eat and drink for there will be rainfall. Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel, bowed down and put his face between his knees. He told his servant to look towards the sea and his servant said there is nothing. He did it seven times but on the seventh time, he said there was a little cloud like a man’s hand rising out of the sea, Ahab mounted on his horse and rode towards Jezereel while Elijah girdled his mantle and out ran Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

LESSON/SIGNIFICANCE

1. It proves the supremacy of God over all gods
2. God does not disappoint but other gods do
3. The contest helps to purify the religion of Israel
4. It helps to win people’s hearts back to God.
5. We should put our faith in God.

ELIJAH FLEES TO MOUNT HOREB 1KINGS 19:1-18

When Ahab told Jezebel how Elijah had killed all the prophets of baal, Jezebel threatened the life of Elijah but saying that she must kill him, Elijah became afraid and ran for his life. He left his servant at Beersheba in Judah, He travelled a day journey into the wilderness and sat under a broom tree he asked God to take his life for he was not better than his ancestors. While he was sleeping, an angel of God woke him up twice to eat and drink for he has a long distance to travel. He began his journey to Mount Horeb for forty days and forty nights. He lodged in a cave where he encountered with God. God asking Elijah what he was doing there, he narrated to God how he was jealous of him and how the prophets of Israel have forsaken his covenant, destroy the alters of God and killed the prophets of God and Jezebel threatened his life. God told to stand on Mount Horeb, the Lord passed by a great and strong wind, rent the mountains, rocks broke in pieces but God was not there.

After the wind, and earthquake and after the earthquake, came a fire but God was not in the fire. After the fire there came a still small voice and Elijah heard it, wrapped his face in his mantle and stood outside the cave. The voice asked him, "What are you doing here Elijah?" He was told to return to Damascus where he shall anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, Jehu son of Nimshil to be king over Israel and Elisha the son of Shaphat to be prophet in place of Elijah. If anyone escapes the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay and he who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha Slay.

Ways God Plan to Punish The House of Ahab and Israel

1. In the wilderness of Damascus, Elijah would anoint Hazael king over Israel
2. He would anoint Jehu to be king of Israel
3. He would anoint Elisha to succeed Elijah as prophet
4. God would save seven thousand (7,000) people who had not bowed to baal and kissed him.

4th WEEK NOT OF LESSON

Topic: Religious Reform

Prevalent Religious Evils at the time of Josiah II Kings 22:26

Josiah was the son of Amon. At the time of Josiah, the pagan practices introduced by King Manasseh Josiah's grandfather still prevailed in Judah.

These religious practices are;

1. Idolatrous practices that is they worshipped foreign gods with their officiating priests and priestesses in the temple at Jerusalem. Prostitution was practised in the temple of God.
2. The use of medium and wizards which was introduced by King Manasseh was used to kill innocent people through pagan practices.
3. Shrines and Idolatrous priest were set up in all the cities of Judah for people to worship.
4. King Mansseh set up the image of Asherah he had made in the house of God.
5. Child sacrifice – Mnasseh burned his son an-offering at a place called Tophet to god called Molech.
6. Manasseh and his son called Amon the father of Josiah worshipped host of heaven and astral gods of Assyria and erected altars for them.

THE REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE AND THE DISCOVERY OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW.

Josiah was Eight Years Old when he began to reign and he reigned for Thirty One Years in Judah (Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah. Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

At the Eighteenth (18th) year of Josiah reign, he sent Shapan the temple sectary to Hilkiyah the high priest to make available the money collected for the work of repairing of the temple to the workers. Hilkiyah told Shaphan that he had found the book of the law in the temple. He gave the law book to Shapan and he read and later took it to King Josiah.

When Shaphan read the content of the law book to the king, he rent his clothes. He sent Hilkiah the Priest, Ahikiah Achbor, Shaphan the secretary and Asiah to a prophetess called Huldah to enquire of the Lord for Judah and for Judah and for him. The prophetess informed them that God was about to bring evil upon Judah and the people of Israel because they had forsaken the Lord burned incense to other gods. He also added that because Josiah had a penitent heart, wept and humbled himself before the Lord when he heard God's destruction on Judah, he shall die in peace and will not see the evils which he will bring upon Judah.

PREPARATION FOR JOSIAH'S REFORM

The first step in the preparation for the reform was that he summoned all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem, priest and prophets and read the book of the law to their hearing. He stood by the pillar and made a covenant with god to walk in his ways.

King Josiah ordered Hilkiah the high priest to bring out of the temple all the vessels made for baal, Saherah and for all the host of heaven and burned them in the field of Kidron and took their ashes to Bethel.

JOSIAH'S REFORM IN JUDAH (SOUTHERN KINGDOM)

1. Josiah brought out of the temple all the vessels made for baal, Asherah and for the host of heaven and burned them in the field of kidron
2. He deposed all the Idolatrous priest who burn incense in the high places baals, sun and moon, buried them at Kidron.
3. He removed the horses that kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun god.
4. He also pull down the alters when King Manasseh made to the false gods
5. He broke down the male cult prostitute in the house of God.
6. Josiah destroyed Tophet that was in the valley of sons of Tlenom to stop people from burning their sons and daughters to Molech
7. He brought out the Asherah from the house of the Lord and burned it.

JOSIAH'S REFORM IN SAMARIA (NORTHERN KINGDOM)

1. Josiah demolished the altar at Bethel and crushed its stones to dust which Jeroboam erected.
2. He burned the bones which he took out of the tombs upon the altar as declared by the Lord.
3. He removed all the shrines of the high places that were in cities of Samaria
4. Josiah slew all the priest of the high places upon the alters
5. He abolished witch craft, medium, sorcery sooth saying, divination and ttier idols.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOSIAH

1. King Josiah stopped the practice of Baalism in Judah
2. He brought about spiritual revival. The temple of Jerusalem was repaired and established as the centre of worship
3. He institutes again the feast of Passover which was celebrated last during the times of Judges.
4. The reform made the people re-dedicate themselves to the service of God.

Josiah's reform was external not internal because the people still continued in their evil ways. This was seen in Jeremaih's prophecy which he prophesied towards the end of Josiah's reign.

5th WEEK NOT OF LESSON

Topic: Concern for one's Nation

THE FIRST DEPORTATION/CAPTIVITY OF JERUSALEM 2KINGS 23:28-31, 24, 25: 1-17

King Josiah was slain by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt at Meggido. After the death of Josiah, his son Jehoahaz succeeded him on throne. He reigned three months in Jerusalem. He rebelled against Pharaoh Neco, he was taken to Egypt where he eventually died. Pharaoh Neco of Egypt land upon Judah attribute of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. He made Eliakim son of Josiah to rule and he renamed him Jehoiakim. He collected the taxes levied upon Judah for Pharah Neco.

Egypt was later defeated by Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar. In sequel to this defeat, King Jehoiakim became the servant of Nebuchadnezzar for three years. Based on this rebellion, King Nebuchadnezzar sent bands of the Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites to destroy Judah according to the word of the Lord through the prophets. This was as a result of the sins of Manasseh and for the innocent blood he had shed and God would not pardon. Jehoiakim died before the arrival of the invaders.

After the death of Jehoiakim, his son Jehoiachin reigned in Jerusalem for three months like his father, he did what was evil in the sight of God. At this time, the servants of king Nebuchadnezzar came up to Jerusalem and besieged the city. When he besieged the city, he took Jehoiachin captive and carried all the treasures of the King's house and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the Lord which Solomon had made. He carried away all the Princes, mighty men of valour, Ten Thousand captives, all the craftsmen and the smiths. Both king Jehoiachin and prophet Ezekiel were exiled to Babylon. Only the poorest people of the land were left. This is the first deportation exile.

THE SECOND DEPORTATION

After the first deportation, Nebuchadnezzar made Mattaniah, Jehoiakim's uncle, king of Jerusalem and changed his name to Zedekiah. Later, Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon and this revolt made Nebuchadnezzar attack Judah the second time.

Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah and Jerusalem, he built siege works against it so that the city was besieged till the eleventh year of Zedekiah. When the famine was so severe, Zedekiah and his servant wanted to escape but they were captured and taken to King Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah. The city Riblah was near Babylon, the city of refugees. The following occurred to Zedekiah before his death. He was bound with fetters and exiled to Babylon; his sons were killed before his eyes and his eyes were gouged out. He died in Babylon.

Later the Babylonian army under the command of Nebuzaradan invaded Jerusalem, burned the King's house and all the good buildings, burned the house of the Lord (temple), took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the dishes for incense and all the able men captive to Babylon and left the poorest of the land to be vine dressers and ploughmen. Seraiah and Zephaniah the high priest together with the King's officers were slain at Riblah.

The destruction of Jerusalem was in 586 B.C. This was sequel to the rebellion of Zedekiah against the Babylonian Lordship. Among those kings Nebuchadnezzar left was Gedaliah. He appointed him governor but was later killed at Mizpah.

THE REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF THE NATION AND NEHEMIAH'S CONCERN FOR THE NATION NEH. 1:1-11, 2:9-20

Nehemiah was the son of Hachabiah. He was a Jew serving in Susa capital of the Persian Empire. He was the cup bearer of the king of Persia by name King Artaxerxes. When Hanani with some men out of Judah who survived exile came to Babylon, Nehemiah asking him about the condition of the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. The report was that the Jews were in great trouble and shame, the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and its gate had been destroyed by fire.

When Nehemiah heard this report, he sat down and wept. He mourned for days in fasting and prayer before God confessing the sins of their ancestors and their sins. He acknowledged that it was their sins that took them to Babylon.

Nehemiah was not only sad, but showed concern for his nation Jerusalem. He started to plan toward going to Jerusalem to help the suffering Jews. When the king asked him why he was sad, he replied that his nation was in ruin, the walls and its gates were destroyed. He took permission from the king to go to Jerusalem and lead the Jews in rebuilding the walls of the city. On request, King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah letter of authority to the governors of the province beyond the river to enable him while going without hindrance. He also gave him a letter of authority to Asaph the gate keeper of King's forest to collect all the timbers needed for the rebuilding work. Nehemiah was provided adequate security for his journey by the king.

After three days of Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem, he went out at night with some men and inspected the destroyed walls of Jerusalem. The purpose of the inspection was to help him ascertain the magnitude of work with facing them and plan accordingly. Going out with some men at night was to keep his plan for the work secret to avoid hindrance. When he revealed the need to rebuild the city walls to them, they said, "Let us rise up and build".

After Nehemiah's inspection, he gathered the leading Jews, priest, nobles and officials and appealed to them to join him in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. When the enemies of Judah namely, Anballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshan the Arab heard that the Jews were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, they were not happy and wanted to frustrate them. Anballat ridiculed the Jews in the presence of the army of Samaria by describing them as feeble minded people who engage themselves in an impossible task. Tobiah the Ammonites added that the wall they were rebuilding was so fragile that if a fox would go on it, it would crumble. But Nehemiah took the enemies ridicule to God for Him to avenge. When these enemies hear that the work was still going on, they plotted to attack Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. But Nehemiah prayed to God and mounted guards against their enemies day and night and encouraged the workers not to be afraid. One of the workers complained that the straight of the burden-bearers is failing and the works is still enormous. Also, the plan by the enemies to attack the workers from different sides contributed to the weakening of the strength of the workers.

When Nehemiah realized that their enemies wanted to frustrate their work, he made the workers held their weapons (spear, shield, bows) with one hand and laboured with the other hand. Each of them had his sword girdled at his side while he built. They held their spears out. He told them that a trumpet was to be used to alert them and bring them to a particular point in the event of any sudden attack of the enemies form any side.

VIRTUES/LESSONS FROM NEHEMIAH'S REACTIONS.

- a. Nehemiah was patriotic and it pays to be patriotic.
- b. He was a man of prayer
- c. He was conscious of the nation's wrong doing, so he confessed to God.
- d. We should always intercede for our nation
- e. It is important to have faith in God
- f. There is need for national repentance.

CAUSES OF SOCIAL UNREST IN AFRICA

- i. Political instability
- ii. Disparity between the rich and the poor
- iii. Religious fanaticism

- iv. Social injustice
- v. Economical stagnation
- vi. Corruption/Dishonesty
- vii. Suppression of truth
- viii. Disparity

THE RETURNEES

Though Israelites were deported to Babylon, they were not enslaved rather they settled in a particular area. They were allowed to acquire and own property, most of them attained position of importance in the government of the law.

Later, Babylon was by Persia. King of Persia was Cyrus. It was during the first year of King Cyrus of Persia that God fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah. God stirred his spirit and he issued a decree for all Jews to return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the temple. He authorized that they should be assisted with silver, gold and other essential materials including free will offering to God.

In quick response, the heads of the families, the priests, the Levites and others who were touched by this gestures rose up. They were aided with physical in cash and kind including beast of burden. King Cyrus brought out all the vessels about five thousand, four hundred and sixty nine vessels which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple and handed them over to Sheshbazzar one of the leaders of the returnees.

The returnees were faced with many problems like.

1. No place of worship, for the temple of God had been destroyed by the Babylonian.
2. An adulteration of Yaweh worship
3. Insecurity because the wall of Jerusalem and its gates were destroyed.

REASONS FOR THE POSITIVE RESPONSE

- a. The spirit of nationalism or the feeling that home is home
- b. In the foreign land, they were not free to practice their culture/religion
- c. Slavery is a curse to any person
- d. Fulfilment of God's promise

THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITON EZRA 4, 5: 1-12, 6:13-22

Prophet Haggai, Zechariah son of Iddo Prophesied that the work should resume. When the Jews returned, Jeshua son of Jozadak the priest and Zerubabel, son of Shealtiel built the altar of God to offer burnt offering upon it, morning and evening. After carrying the foundation, they started praising God. But many of the priest, Levites, Head of the father's houses and old men who had seen the first temple. When they saw the foundation of the temple laid again. These men helped in the rebuilding of the temple Ezra, Zerubabel, Chesbazzar, Jeshua the priest, prophet Haggi and Zechariah.

When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin learnt that the returned exile were building a temple to the Lord, they approached Zerubabel and Jeshua and declared their intention to take part in the reconstruction work. But they said to them you have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God, we alone will build to the Lord as Cyrus the King of Persia had commanded us. When they were not allowed to join in the rebuilding of the temple, they lured counsellors and wrote against the Jews to King Cyrus in Aramaic Language but he did not stop the work.

During the reign of Artaxerxes, the adversaries namely Rehum the commander and Shimshai the Seribe wrote a letter to the King against Jerusalem. In their petition, they describe the Jews as rebellious and wicked people. They explained that if the king should allow the Jews to rebuild the temple, they stop paying tribute, toll etc and the royal revenue would be impaired. They asked the King Artaxerxes to search the archives to confirm the rebellious nature and made a decree against the rebuilding of the temple and the work cease until the second year of King Dairus.

In the second year of King Dairus the Jews wrote counter letter that the rebuilding work was in line with the decree of Cyrus and it was documented. When King Dairus found that it was true, he then allowed them to continue the rebuilding work. The Jews continued the rebuilding prophecy of prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo. The rebuilding of the temple was completed during the sixth year of King Dairus and in the third day of the month of Adar.

When they finished building the temple the returnees celebrated the dedication of the temple with joy. They offered one hundred lambs and twelve he goats according to the twelve tribes of Israel were sacrificed as sin offering. They also celebrated the feast of Passover.

EZRA REFORM EZRA 7 : 1 - 10

Ezra was the son of Seraiah. He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses. He set his heart to study the law of God and to do it and to teach his status and ordinances to the returnees.

After the dedication of the temple Ezra went up from Babylon with some Priests, Levites, Singers and Temple Servants to Jerusalem in the seventh year of the returned exiles. The reform teaching of the knowledge of the law was important because many of them were influenced by pagan worship during the exile. Again, some of them were born in exiles and lacked knowledge of the law.

THE EFFECT OF THE CAPTIVITY ON THE EXILES IN BABYLON

1. The exiles faced some restlessness in living under the Babylonian rule.
2. They also had difficulty in worshipping God because there was no temple where they worship God.

6th WEEK NOT OF LESSON

Topic: Faith in God

The command to Worship King Nebuchadnezzar's Image and Refusal of the Three Hebrews Youths. Daniel 3.

Among those taken in the first group of deportation to Babylon where Daniel who was called Belshazzar, Shadrack renamed Hananiah, Meshack was called Misheal and Abednego was Azaria. These men were Jews from the tribe of Judah.

A situation came when King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden image whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth was six cubits. He set it up at the plain of Dura and invited all the people regardless of language or

nationality for the dedication of the image. He ordered all his administrative officials namely the Satraps, the Prefects, the Governors, Counsellors, Treasurers, Justice and Magistrates to be present at the dedication of the image. He instructed them that when they hear the sound of horn pipe, lyre, trigon and all kinds of instruments, they should bow down and worship the golden image. If anyone refuses to obey the instruction, must be cast into a burning fiery furnace. All headed to the instruction except the three Jewish youth. They refused to bow down and worship the golden image. The Chaldeans reported them to the king who became angry and called the three Jews and asked them, "Is it true you do not serve my God which I have set up?" He warned them to worship the golden image as they heard the sound of various instrument or else they would be thrown into the fiery furnace and no god would deliver them out of his hand. The three faithful men replied to King Nebuchadnezzar, "We have no need to answer you in this matter, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace but if not O! King, we will not serve your god or worship the golden image which you have set up. This answer made the king to be furious and he ordered that the furnace be heated seven times more than it was heated.

The king was astonished when he saw four men walking in the midst of the burning fiery furnace. He described the appearance of the fourth person as the son of God and the three Jewish youths were unhurt. The king commanded that they should come out of the fire. When they came out, the officers of the province inspected them and saw that fire had no effect on them.

King Nebuchadnezzar made a decree that any nation, people or language that speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshack and Adedego should be torn limb and their houses destroyed. The three faithful servant were promoted in the land of Babylon.

CULTURAL PRACTICES WHICH ARE CONTRARY TO THE CRISTIAN FAITH.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| i. Polygamy | ii. Female Circumcision |
| iii. Traditional Festival | iv. Secret Cults |
| v. Worship of Idols | |

VIRTUES/LESSONS FROM THE FAITH OF THE THREE HEBREW YOUTHS.

1. They showed a great amount of courage
2. The three men had implicit trust, faith and confidence in God
3. They were not shaking because they knew that God will deliver them from the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar

DANIEL EXPRESSED HIS FAITH IN GOD (FAITH AND POWER) Daniel 6:1-28

Daniel was one of the Jewish captive taken to Babylon. He was renamed Beltshazzar by the King. Daniel was among those to be educated in the king's palace and also to be given a daily portion of the rich food which the king ate. But Daniel resolved himself with the king's rich food or with the wine which he drinks. While in Babylon, he attained greater height in the government of the land because he had an excellent spirit and God was with him. This excellent spirit made him to interpret the hand writing on the wall written against Belshazzar son of Nebuchadnezzar. This is the writing. That was inscribed MENE, MENE, TEKEL, AND PARSIN. MENE means God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end.

TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting and PERES means your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

Dairus was the king of Medes and Persians. He divided his empire into One Hundred and Twenty province and each was ruled by a governor (Satrap) He appointed three presidents to whom the satraps were accountable. Daniel was one of the presidents and distinguished himself. He was gifted in wisdom and matters of administration than his counterparts because he was filled with an excellent spirit. This made him famous so that king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Other president and satraps became jealous of him and sought ways of bringing him into disrepute before the king. They could not find ground except his religion.

The conspirators came by agreement to the king requesting him to establish a law that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty (30) days except for the king shall be cast into the den of lions. They

further requested that the law cannot be changed or revoked like the law of the Medes and Persia.

Although Daniel knew about this decree, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber opened toward Jerusalem and continued to make his prayers to God three times a day and glorified the name of his God. When the conspirators caught Daniel praying to his God, they reported him to King Darius who ordered that Daniel be cast into the den of lions. The King said to him, may your God whom you serve continually deliver you". A large stone was rolled in to block the entrance to the den and the king put his signet on it as a seal so that nothing could be changed concerning Daniel. The King went home, fasted and was without sleep because of what had befallen Daniel.

God sent His Angel to shut the mouth of the lions because Daniel was blameless before Him and before the King. Daniel was brought out unhurt because he had faith in God. The king ordered that the accusers of Daniel be thrown into the den of lions. The king also decreed that the God of Daniel should be worshipped in all his kingdom.

MORAL LESSONS

1. Envy is an evil which leads to self destruction
2. Strong faith in God gives protection from evil forces
3. We should not plan evil against others to avoid repercussion on us.
4. One with God is majority
5. Christians must be firm on their faith
6. God saves those who have faith in Him.

8th WEEK NOT OF LESSON

Topic: Social Justice and True Religion

THE CALL OF AMOS Amos 1 : 1 - 15

Amos means burden bearer. He was from the hill country of Tekoa in Judah Southern Kingdom. He was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore tree. He had an emergency call by God to be a prophet. He was not a prophet by birth or a prophet's son; He prophesied in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of King Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II son of Josaiah king of Israel.

Amos prophesied during the period of economic boom in the Northern Kingdom (Golden Age) that is the highest point of their national property. This economic boom resulted in increasing disparity between the rich and the poor, Amos was a contemporary of the prophets namely Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, because he condemned the social injustice in the Northern Kingdom, he was called prophet of doom or social justice.

SOCIAL EXILS PREVALENT IN THE NORTHERN KINGDOM DURING THE TIME OF AMOS. Amos 2.

Social justice is the basis for good relationship with God. It was the oppression of the poor by the rich in the Northern Kingdom that prompted God to send Amos to condemn the behaviour or relationship of the Israelites towards one another.

The social evils/inequalities which the Northern Kingdom were condemned are;

1. **OPPRESSION OF THE POOR BY THE RICH:** The rich sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes. They trampled the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turned aside the way of the afflicted. In other words, the lives of the ordinary citizen (poor or righteous person) were reckoned to be of less value than a pair of shoes inspite of the fact that it was their labour and sweat that sustained the machinery of state.
2. **DISHONESTY OR INSINCERITY OF THE MEARCHANTS (Cheating in business):** The rich exploited the poor by selling to them with false weights and measures (the ephah and shekel) thereby becoming richer at the expense of the poor whom they exploited. They sold rotten wheat to the poor because they had no choice. The society was made up of 'haves' and 'have nots'.
3. **INJUSTICE AND BRIEFLY IN THE LAW COURT:** The Judges took bribe and perverted justice. The poor loses his case in any court of the law, since his accuser could easily bribe the judge. The poor were denied justice because the rich hate him who speaks the truth.
4. **SEXUAL IMMORALITY:** This was on the increase in some cases, such sexual acts were carried out in the house of God.

Drunkenness gave rise to sexual immorality. Under the influence of alcohol, a man and his own son could go in to the same woman or maiden thus profaning the name of God.

5. **SELFISH LUXURY OF THE RICH OR EXCESSIVE LUXURIOUS LIVING:** The rich controlled government. They dwelled in costly buildings (stone houses/palaces) and he upon beds of wory and ate lambs from the flock and drink wine in bowls, all at the expense of the poor in the society. The poor were even robbed of their properties. They pleaded such property to borrow money but when they were unable to redeem it; such properties would not be returned to them.
6. **DRUNKENNESS AND GREED:** Amos condemned the woman of Samaria because they were making excessive demands. On their husband who in turn robbed the poor to meet their wives' demands. They also encouraged their husband to bring home there ill-gotten wines for them to drink.

A WARNING TO THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA. Amos 4:1 - 3, 5:1- 24.

Amos spoke against the woman of Samaria because they took part in the expression of the poor. These woman made excessive demands on their husband who in turn robbed the poor to meet their wives' demands. They overfed themselves and Amos described them as 'cows of Bashan who must be taken captive to tharmon in Assyria. They shall be carried will hooks.

The following punishment would come upon Israel if they failed to repent like drought, locust, pestilence, sword and earthquake. Despite all the warning the people refused to repent and the prophet said to them 'prepare to meet your God, O Israel, the prophet advised them to seek the Lord and live and seek good and not evil.

SOCIAL EVILS IN OUR SOCIETY TODAY

1. Bribery and Corruption
2. Oppression of the poor
3. Indiscipline
4. Sexual Immorality
5. Cultism.