

PROPHET EZEKIEL

Ezekiel was both a priest and a prophet. He ministered during the darkest days of Judah's history that is to say the seventy years period of the Babylonian captivity.

Ezekiel is a Hebrew name which means "God strengthens" or "strengthened by God" He was indeed strengthened by God for the prophetic ministry for which he was called (Ezekiel 3:8,9).

Ezekiel was a son of Buzi. He lived with the Hebrew exiles beside River Chebar in Babylonia.

He was an exile prophet and his prophecies were directed to both exiles in Babylonia and the people in Jerusalem.

EZEKIEL'S FIRST VISION AND HIS CALL (EZEKIEL 1,2 and 3).

While in exile, besides River Chebar, Ezekiel had a vision and in the vision he saw a storm coming from the north.

The great wind from the north symbolized the coming for God. This was the very direction through which the gods of the Babylonians passed.

In the vision Ezekiel saw what looked like four living creatures in human form each of them had four faces and four wings.

Each had a face of a human being, which meant that man was above the rest of the creatures because his face was in front.

He also saw a lion's face at the right which symbolized that the lion was the leader of the wild animals.

Then he also saw a bull's face at the left implying that the bull was the head of the male race among the domestic animals.

He also saw an eagle face which implied that an eagle was the king of the birds.

In the vision, he saw something which looked like a throne and sitting on the throne was a figure that looked like a human being. This meant that God was a king.

The figure which he saw seemed to be shining like bronze and there was bright light which had in it all the colours of the rainbow. This was the dazzling light which signified God's presence.

When Ezekiel saw the dazzling light, he fell face down wards on the ground.

While he was on the ground, he heard a voice saying that, "mortal man stand up, I want to talk to you".

While the voice was speaking, God's spirit entered Ezekiel and raised him to his feet. .

Then Ezekiel had a voice continuing to say, "Mortal man, I am sending you to the people of Israel, they have rebelled and turned against me".

God told Ezekiel that He was sending him to stubborn people and he was supposed to deliver his message to the people of Judah.

God warned Ezekiel that he wasn't supposed to be afraid of the rebellious people or what they said.

God told Ezekiel to listen to what He was going to tell him. He told him not to be rebellious like the Israelites he was being sent to.

God told Ezekiel to open his mouth and eat what he was going to be given.

Ezekiel saw a hand stretched outwards him and it was holding a scroll.

On the scroll, there were writings on both sides. They were cries of grief, wails and groans.

God told Ezekiel, "Eat this scroll, then go and speak to the people of Israel".

Ezekiel opened his mouth and God gave him the scroll to eat. When Ezekiel ate the scroll, it tasted as sweet as honey.

Then God instructed Ezekiel to go and prophesy to the people of Israel. It was told that they were going to be stubborn, not willing to listen.

God promised to make Ezekiel very stubborn and tough as the Israelites. God told him not to be afraid of the rebels.

God's spirit lifted him up and he heard the loud roar of a voice that said, "Praise the glory of the Lord in heaven above".

The power of the Lord came on him with great force, and God's spirit carried him off. He felt bitter and angry.

Ezekiel spent seven days at Tel Abib besides River Chebar, where the exiles were living. He was preparing himself to begin his prophetic ministry.

After seven days, Ezekiel received a new message from God. He was commanded to be a watchman to his fellow exiles.

LESSONS CHRISTIANS LEARN FROM EZEKIEL'S CALL

Christians learn the following lessons from Ezekiel's call;

Christians should respond positively to God's call just as Ezekiel responded positively without any hesitation.

Christians should worship God, the powerful and all present God just as Ezekiel worshiped him.

Christians should be ready to carry out God's work however much challenging it may be just as Ezekiel did God's work which was challenging.

Christians should be brave and bold in all the missions assigned to them just as Ezekiel was told not to be afraid of the stubborn people.

Christians should be alert and prepared for God's divine message. Ezekiel was prepared for God's call that's why he didn't hesitate.

Christians should have confidence in God the almighty because He is a loving father even to those who appear to be abandoned for example the Israelites in exile seemed to be abandoned but God showed them love.

Christians should respect God and recognize his greatness and honour Him accordingly just as Ezekiel recognized his greatness and honoured him.

Christians should acknowledge God's omnipotence just as Ezekiel acknowledged his omnipotence in the vision.

Christians should seek for God's guidance just as Ezekiel was guided by God and He was always with him because he was sent by him to stubborn people.

Christians should have interest in God's work even when it has challenges just as Ezekiel seemed to have interest in the challenging mission of God.

Christians should be exemplary just as Ezekiel showed a good example when he accepted to carry out God's mission.

Christians should have faith in God likewise Ezekiel had faith in God that's why he acted as His prophet.

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE CALL OF EZEKIEL AND MOSES

The calls of Ezekiel and Moses had similarities and differences. The following were the **similarities**;

Both calls were vassal in nature. They were between a superior party and inferior parties. In this case, God was superior while Moses and Ezekiel were inferior.

Both Ezekiel and Moses were called by the same God. That is to say God the Almighty who is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Both Ezekiel and Moses were prophets of doom to the wicked Babylonians and Egyptians respectively.

Both Ezekiel and Moses were given hard tasks for example Moses had to liberate the Israelites from Egypt while Ezekiel had to restore hope to the exiles in Babylon.

In both cases, the calls were initiated by God who kept on guiding both Ezekiel and Moses.

Both Ezekiel and Moses were to deal with people in exile though from different places. Ezekiel was to deal with people in the Babylonian exile while Moses was to deal with people who were in the Egyptian exile.

Both were called when the situation was out of hand that it to say the Israelites were greatly in need of God's assistance.

Both received their calls from foreign places for example Moses was in Median while Ezekiel was in Babylon.

Both Ezekiel and Moses took up God's mission. They responded positively to God's call and they carried out God's mission effectively.

Differences

While Moses asked for a spokesman and was given his brother Aaron, Ezekiel was to speak by himself.

While Moses took off his sandals because he was instructed by God, Ezekiel remained as he was.

Moses was hesitant to take up God's mission while Ezekiel responded positively without hesitating.

During Moses' call, he asked for God's name and God said that "I AM WHO I AM" while Ezekiel never asked for God's name because he knew about the God who had appeared to him.

Moses was sent to people who didn't know anything about God while Ezekiel was sent to people who already knew about God but were just rebellious.

Moses was a law breaker for example while in Egypt, Moses committed murder while Ezekiel was pure. In other words, he lived a sinless life.

Ezekiel was given a scroll to eat, which scroll had God's message and helped him to get strength to prophecy God's message while Moses was given a stick to help him to perform miracles.

While Moses was addressed by his name, Ezekiel on the other hand was addressed as "Mortal man"

Moses was given powers to perform miracles yet Ezekiel on the other hand never requested for any powers to perform miracles, therefore, he didn't receive any powers.

Ezekiel never doubted God therefore; he wasn't given any powers to perform miracles while Moses doubted God that is why he was even hesitant.

EZEKIEL PROPHECIZES THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

After the prophet's call and before he set out to speak to his people, God told him to draw a map of Jerusalem. In it he marked signs of the great siege. This signified that Jerusalem was going to be sieged and destroyed because of the sins of the people.

The iron plate or a pan he saw symbolized the strength of an army which was going to attack Jerusalem.

He was told to sleep on the left side. This was to bear guilt of Israel. He was then ordered to sleep on the right hand. This symbolized his suffering for the guilt of Judah. He slept on his right side for forty days one day representing one year of their punishment hence they were to bear punishment for forty years.

The Lord commanded Ezekiel to measure out very small quantities of grains of wheat, barley, beans, peas and millet for his meal while he lay down waiting for the siege of Israel and Judah. He was also to drink some little water. These symbolized the shortage of food and water during the siege of Jerusalem which would eventually lead to starvation.

The Lord also ordered Ezekiel to eat food which the law forbids. (Ezekiel 4:12-17). The prophet refused at first but eventually the Lord asked him to bake his bread on fire from cow-dung which was considered undefiled. All this showed that the Israelites would be unclean during and after the final overthrow of Israel.

Ezekiel was then told to shave off his hair and beard, weigh it and burn a 1/3 of it when the siege is over. Some of the hair was to be chopped and then scatter and the remainder was to be blown (Ezekiel 5:1-4).

Shaving off his hair was a sign of mourning for the destroyed Jerusalem and the people. The sword which he used to shave his hair symbolized the war which would destroy the city.

The way in which the hair was to be destroyed symbolized the way in which the city would be destroyed, burnt and the people would be scattered.

The lord also gave another message to Ezekiel that he was going to destroy Israel because of her sins. That the lord had made her the centre of the world but she rebelled against him; and became more wicked than other nations.

Israel rejected God and his commands and instead followed other gods. Because of this, God would surely punish them. The prophecy reflected Yahweh as the God of all nations.

CORPORATE SIN AND GUILT

The Israelites believed that a sin of an individual would be carried on for four generations. They cited many examples where the whole society was affected by one man's sin like; Eli and his family, king Saul, king David, king Solomon, priest Amaziah and others. These incidents concerning corporate sin made the Israelites to believe that incase one person sinned against God, then all of them were justified to be punished. They considered God to be unfair therefore, they developed a common proverb saying that; "Fathers ate the sour grapes and the children felt the sour taste at the edge of their teeth". (Ezekiel 18:2)

EZEKIEL'S TEACHING ABOUT INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE'S SIN (EZEKIEL'S RESPONSE TO CORPORATE SIN AND GUILT) EZEKIEL 18:1ff)

Ezekiel started by reacting to the popular proverb by saying that it would not be repeated in Israel anymore because everyone would be responsible for his sins (18:3-4).

Ezekiel said that corporate sin and guilt would not happen in Israel. Everyone as an individual will be responsible for his / her sins. It would be the sinner to be punished.

He said that in this case the righteous would live and the wicked would die.

Ezekiel said to the Israelites that the souls of the father and his son belonged to God. Therefore, it is only that wicked soul which would be punished.

He said that a wicked man who would repent would be forgiven and none of his sins would be remembered and he would therefore live.

He said that a righteous man who decided to become wicked would be punished and none of his righteous deeds would be remembered. He would die (Ezekiel 18:24).

Ezekiel went ahead to express God's love for his people by saying that God is not happy to see a sinner die. He would rather see him repent and turn to God so that he lives.

He further analyzed individual responsibility for sins by giving the example of a father and a son he said that a son would not be punished for the sins his father committed and vice-versa.

He said that supposing a father is wicked and the son is righteous then the father would die and the son would live.

Ezekiel said that everyone would be judged as an individual according to what he has done. This means that God knows each and every individual in any society.

Ezekiel challenged the Israelites then in exile that they were not blameless. In their midst they had injustices and were victims of apostasy. Therefore, the blame should not be put on King Manasseh.

He said that the restoration of Judah would depend on their national repentance but not divine descendancy from Abraham.

He told the people that God had appointed him as a watchman. As a watchman, he had to warn the people about the forth coming danger as a result of their sins. If he warns them and they don't listen then they are responsible for their sins and the forth coming punishments. But if he doesn't warn them and they die, then the watchman would be responsible.

THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ABOUT JUDGEMENT

The New Testament has the following teaching about judgement;

It emphasizes that there will be individual judgment, that is to say, everyone will be judged individually.

It is said that judgement is gradual. Therefore, people are given time to prepare for it.

It is said that judgement will be at the end of the world with the appearance of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament shows that one is judged according to his or her deeds. This implies that the wicked are supposed to be destroyed and the righteous to live.

It is believed that the good deeds lead to heaven while wickedness leads to hell.

It is said that people shall be judged according to their relationship with their neighbours. Therefore, neglecting of a neighbour leads to hell while concern leads to life.

It is believed that judgement will take place on the second coming of Jesus (Parousia).

It is believed that on judgement Jesus will appear with the angels and he will come as the Lord and carryout his judgement.

It is believed that on judgement, the trumpet will be sounded announcing the second coming of Jesus and the dead shall have to rise.

It is believed that on judgement day there will be a final struggle against the powers of satan, that is to say, satan shall be defeated on this day.

It is believed that on judgement day the righteous shall be separated from the unrighteous.

According to the New Testament, judgment will begin from the house of the Lord.

It is said that the names of the good people are written in the book of life.

It is also said that judgement will be done by Jesus himself.

It is believed that on this day, there will be no more time for forgiveness.

SYMBOLIC SIGNS PERFORMED BY PROPHET EZEKIEL

God told Ezekiel to perform some symbolic signs to signify the punishments which would befall on Israel if they were not ready to repent and turn to God. They were as follows;

Inability to talk (Ezekiel 3:22-27); God withdrew Ezekiel from the public, shut him in the house, tied him with ropes and made him unable to talk for some time. This signified that God had nothing to say to the people who were unable to listen to him. Therefore, he was going to withdraw himself from them.

A cooking pot (Ezekiel 24:1ff); Ezekiel boiled meat in a pot until everything was destroyed including the bones. This signified that Jerusalem and her inhabitants would be destroyed completely due to their wickedness.

Refusal to carry out a funeral service (Ezekiel 24:15ff); God told Ezekiel to get prepared for the death of his wife whom he loved so much. When the wife died Ezekiel never carried out a funeral service for her. This signified that during destruction, dead bodies would be so many in Jerusalem to the extent that burial services would be ignored.

God told Ezekiel to get a brick and scratch lines on it to indicate a city plotted to be attacked. He was to put trenches, earth works, camps and battering rams on the brick. These were meant to indicate that Jerusalem was going to be attacked by foreigners and the attack would be planned by God. Scratches would show routes the foreign armies were to use and camps which were to shelter the foreign armies. (Ezekiel 4:1ff).

The punishment (Ezekiel 4:4-6) (The punishment to Israel and Judah) Ezekiel lay on his left side for 390 days and for 40 days on the right hand side. These indicated the number of years Israel and Judah were to be in exile respectively if they failed to turn away from sins.

Eating food in a hurry (12:17-20); God told Ezekiel to eat food while hurrying and trembling. This was signifying how the people would hurriedly eat food during the time of the attack.

The sword dance; God told Ezekiel to dance with swords striking them downwards again and again. This signified how the Israelites would be slaughtered and that all would be a workmanship of God.

Running away from the city; Ezekiel symbolized the way people would run away from the city during the day of the attack, by packing up his belongings and passing through a hole he had made on the wall of his mid-house.

Divination; God told Ezekiel to perform what the pagan kings of Babylon would do when they attack Jerusalem. The king would carry out divinations to find out the best route to use when attacking Jerusalem.

Eating limited quantities of food; (4:9ff) God told Ezekiel to always eat 230 grammes of wheat and two cups of water. This was to signify that there would be very little food to eat during the days of the attack.

Defilement; (4:12ff) God told Ezekiel to prepare food using human faeces but Ezekiel refused instead he used cow-dung. This was to indicate that the Israelites would be unclean during and after the final overthrow of Israel.

Massacre 5:1ff; God told Ezekiel to shave off all his hair from the head. Among the Jews, they were adulterous or sorrowful women who used to shave off their hair. This act signified that as hair cannot remain standing before a razor of a barber, after shaving, so would be Israel. No people would remain in Israel after a final overthrow of Israel.

Joining of two sticks (37:15ff) this was an illustration intended to show that beyond the days of destruction, there would be restoration of Israel. The people of Israel and Judah would come back from exile, form one kingdom and become like one person.

EZEKIEL'S TEACHING AGAINST THE SHEPHERDS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH (EZEKIEL 34).

Ezekiel first saw the restoration of Israel in an image of a shepherd and his flock. The leaders of Israel were the shepherds and the people of Israel were the flock. The leaders were responsible for the fall of Israel and Judah.

They were guilty of the following;

They were not caring about the flock. They minded about themselves and left the flock unattended to.

They were obtaining milk and wool from the sheep they did not want to feed well.

They were killing and eating the finest sheep instead of caring for them.

They had no concern for the sick and injured animals.

They never looked for the animals which scattered and wandered in the feeding ground.

They mistreated the animals as they took care of them.

The shepherds left the sheep to the wild animals to feed on them.

They never provided the sheep with good water to drink.

They left the fat and strong sheep to step on the pasture and water which the weak animals would have eaten and drunk respectively.

The shepherds did not bandage the injured animals. Due to the bad leadership of the shepherds, **God was going to do the following to the flock;**

God was going to rescue the sheep from the bad shepherds. He was going to take care of the flock himself.

The bad shepherds were going to get nothing from the sheep. They were not going to be rewarded for the work done.

That the Lord would gather the scattered sheep and feed them in one place which is suitable for them.

That he would feed the sheep on good pasture which is on the mountains and hills of Israel and he would lie on the grazing ground as he feeds his sheep.

He would provide good security for his animals and this would help him to keep them safe from the wild animals.

That God would find a pleasant resting place for his animals.

He would expand on his flock unlike the shepherds who were just destroying it.

He Lord would bandage the hurt / wounded animals.

He was going to judge between the fat and weak animals so that the fat strong animals don't trample on the grass and water of the weak animals.

That God was going to give the sheep to another good shepherd who would assist him in his work.

WHY JESUS IS CONSIDERED AS A GOOD SHEPHERD (JOHN 10)

Jesus is a good shepherd because he provides entrance for all his animals. They can go in and come out freely. Jesus Christ provides away to God's Kingdom. All believers enter heaven through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is a good shepherd who is ready to expand on the size of his flock ie Apart from the Jews being considered as God's people, Jesus also converted many gentiles to enter into God's kingdom.

A good shepherd builds confidence in his sheep. They cannot follow any one else apart from their good shepherd because they know his voice. In the same way Jesus Christ built confidence and trust in his people. When he calls them, they respond but when Satan calls them they don't respond.

He knows his animals by their names and they also know him. In other words, through him we become children of God and we are individually known to him.

A good shepherd makes sure that his sheep don't scatter and wonder off. In the same way Christ makes sure that Christians follow the church where he is the head.

A good shepherd protects his sheep from being eaten by wild animals just as Jesus Christ protects believers from Satan.

A good shepherd knows the problems facing his animals in the same way, Jesus Christ knows our problems and he is ready to solve them.

He is ready to lie down with his flock. When a hired shepherd sees a dangerous animal, he simply runs away leaving the sheep to the animals. However, Jesus was ready to be crucified on the cross for mankind.

He is the owner of the flock and as a good shepherd therefore he is ready to do anything in order to promote his flock in the same way Jesus Christ tries all his best to promote the salvation of the Christians.

THE VISION OF THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES (EZEKIEL 37:1-14)

Ezekiel felt God's presence. Then God's spirit entered him and took him to the valley of dry bones.

God made Ezekiel to move around the valley. Then God asked Ezekiel that; "mortal man, what do you see?"

Ezekiel responded that; "a valley of dry bones".

Then God asked Ezekiel whether the dry bones can come back to life.

Ezekiel replied that it was the sovereign Lord who would answer that question.

God instructed Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones so that they could come back to life. He told him to tell the bones to listen to the word of the Lord.

Ezekiel prophesied as he had been instructed. When he did so the bones started joining together, developing muscles, sinews, and covered with the skin but they weren't breathing.

God instructed Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind so that it would enter into the dry bones.

Ezekiel did as he was instructed, and the wind came from all directions and entered the dry bones.

When the dry bodies had received the wind, they started breathing because they had received life. They were very many enough to make an army.

God told Ezekiel that the Israelites were like the dry bones which never had hope of coming back to life.

He told Ezekiel that like the dry bones, the Israelites didn't have hope of going back to their land of Judah after exile.

However, God promised that since the dry bones had come back to life, there was hope that the Israelites were going back to their land.

THE MEANING OF THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES.

The vision of the valley of dry bones meant the following:-

The dry bones were equivalent to the Israelites who were in exile, because they had lost hope of going back to their land.

The dry bones were for the dead bodies therefore, the vision showed that the Jews in exile were dead like the dry bones.

The Israelites had no hope because they had lost it after looking at the forms of suffering they had experienced in the Babylonian exile.

The vision meant that God was going to restore the Israelites both physically and spiritually.

The vision signified the idea of life after death because the bones received life after listening to the prophecy.

It meant that Israel was to be saved from exile the way the dry bones received life and were saved from death.

The vision confirmed that God keeps and fulfills promises; because He had promised that Israel would last as a Kingdom.

It showed that those who listen to God's word receive life and God's mercy because the dry bones received life when they listened to Ezekiel's prophecies.

The bones gained flesh and life which meant that the Israelites in exile would soon go back to their land and be free.

God put his spirit into the bones and this showed that God was the source of life.

The vision meant that man is made up of both body and the spirit which are God given.

The new spirit from God to the bones would make the Israelites new people of God (changed people).

The vision meant that the Israelites would share a new relationship with God from exile.

The vision meant that God is the creator i.e. the one who moulded man and breathed into him in Gen 2.

Israel was to be saved from exile the way the dry bones received life and were saved from death.

The vision confirmed that God keeps and fulfills promises because He had promised that Israel would last as a kingdom.

The vision showed God's might. There is nothing impossible before God for example He was in position to give life to the dry bones.

The vision meant that God doesn't abandon sinners. Therefore, He had not abandoned the Israelites who had lost hope.

It showed God as loving and forgiving. Therefore, He can't abandon the sinners. He finds ways of having them repent so that they can be forgiven.

The vision showed God's omnipotence because the spirit of God lifted Ezekiel and carried him to the valley of dry bones and that showed God's powers, and also the dry bones received life because of God's powers.

EZEKIEL'S TEACHING ABOUT THE FALSE PROPHETS

He accused them of providing their own inspiration and inventing their own visions instead of seeking for God's visions.

They failed to correct the mistakes of their followers, they therefore greatly misled them.

They were fond of slandering in order to get what to eat and for that reason, they would be destroyed.

They were not appointed, acknowledged by Yahweh. They were therefore self-proclaimed. Even their prophecies were from their own mind.

They used to make false statements which often misled the people.

They stole oracles from God's prophets in order to make themselves appear good.

They disregarded the covenant faith which was the foundation of Israel's religion.

These prophets challenged God's providence and power. This implies that they often performed strange miracles using magic or stannic influence.

They generally lived an immoral kind of life.

They killed people who were innocent and kept the wicked ones.

They brought God's judgement to the innocent people who were misled by these prophets.

EZEKIEL'S MESSAGE OF HOPE

God gave the message of hope to the Israelites who were in exile and those still in Judah. This message is contained in chapters 36 and 37 and it is as follows:

Ezekiel said that those nations which were humiliating Judah and Israel were to be humiliated and insulted too.

He said that God was going to send a foreign nation to defeat and humiliate Babylonia and Assyria the same way they had humiliated the Israelites.

Ezekiel assured the people of Israel that the Land, mountains and hills of Judah would be filled with healthy vegetation bearing multitudes of fruits and green leaves everywhere.

Israel and Judah would return home from exile, join together as one kingdom with one king as good as his servant David.

God vowed to be on the side of his people Israel as He had done for their ancestors when He brought them from Egypt.

The people of Israel were to have good fertile soils like those of Canaan at the time of their first settlement giving them lots of food to make famine a legend.

Ezekiel said that their population would increase because people would produce many children and grand children without diseases, calamities or famine affecting anyone.

Jerusalem city and the magnificent temple would be rebuilt, palaces renovated for the kingdom to regain its previous glory.

The people would attain a lot of wealth; their cattle would increase in number for the Babylonians and Edomites to envy their prosperity but with nothing to do about it.

No Nation would make fun or even insult Israel again because God's people would be better than all the pagan nations.

God was to save his people from all kinds of shame and trouble for the sake of his own name and glory as His name had been disgraced in every country.

God was to rescue and bring his people back to their homeland showing the Babylonians and Edomites that He was the only God of Israel.

God would bless His people with clean water and cleanse them from the defilement of the pagans from their beliefs and idols.

God would give them new hearts and mind to make them change their behaviours and become obedient to Him.

God was to make a new covenant with His people to be an everlasting one written in their minds.

God himself would be their king choosing one of His servants from them to take charge over His people, giving security, saving them from danger just like His servant David.

God continued to promise either to be the good shepherd Himself to His people or give them a leader as good as David.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

The word psalm is derived from the Greek word "PSALMOI" Meaning songs accompanied by musical instruments. That very word psalmoi is a Hebrew translation of the word "TEHILLIM" meaning "praise". Therefore, from that perspective, psalms were sacred songs with musical accompaniment. They were used in praising God.

Among the Jews it was a common phenomenon to express their love for God through music, dance, and drama. They used to play harps, lyres, drums, rattles and cymbals perhaps similar instruments like those which were used by Africans in their different activities.

The most remarkable expression of this happiness by the Israelites to their God was seen in 2 Samuel 6:5. Here King David was extremely happy during the transfer of the covenant ark from Baalah to Jerusalem that he joined his people in dancing and singing in the honor of God.

In total, there are 150 psalms in the bible which are said to have been written by different people. These included among others Solomon, David, and prophets. The book of psalms explores full range of human experience in a very personal and practical way of life.

Psalms run from the creation through the patriarchal, theocratic period, monarchical, exilic and post exilic periods. Psalms handle diverse topics such as jubilation, war, peace, worship, judgement, messianic prophecy, praises and lamentations. It is believed that it took around 600- 700 years writing the various psalms as they are in the Bible.

THE ROLE PLAYED BY PSALMS IN THE LIFE OF THE ISRAELITES.

Psalms played a great role in the life of the Israelites which included the following;|

They were hymns used to praise their God during their daily situations. They were used to express God's holiness, greatness and glory.

They were used during annual festivals such as Passover day, day of unleavened bread, atonement. etc.

They were sung during the Jewish daily sacrifices. This was realized when the chief priest came up in most cases to spearhead the function of the sacrifices and the whole event was accompanied by these sacred songs.

They were used for personal confession/repentance. Forexample psalm 51 was given as an expression of forgiveness by King David.

Psalms were used to call upon God's judgment onto Israel's enemies or any wickedness in their midst.

During days of suffering, psalms were used to give consolation to the affected people. They used to instill comfort and courage as God would soon come in to deliver them from such suffering.

After a great national or individual loss, often psalms were used during that moment of lamentation. They expressed the magnitude of suffering. (Psalm 22)

Some psalms were used for the expression of their joy to their God who would have enabled them attain either victory or their success in their undertakings. (Psalm 21)

They were used to express either national or individual gratitude to their God over various achievements in life.

Psalms used to draw people into communion and fellowship with their God.

Psalms were used as prayers asking God to guide, protect and defend their country against their enemies. (Psalm 28, 54, and 108)

They were used to reflect God's central contribution in the history of the Israelites right from Egypt up to Canaan.

Others were used to depict the wickedness of man showing how they would meet their death. (Psalm 53)

They expressed their faith and commitment to God.

Royal psalms served as National anthems such as psalm 47. This was a song sung on the Jewish New Year.

Others were just used for liturgical purposes. They added life and flavor to the Jewish worship of God.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PSALMS TO CHRISTIANS TODAY

Through psalms, Christians are encouraged to endure hardships whenever they are faced with challenges in life. They are urged to use psalms because they provide solutions to our day today problems.

Through psalms Christians learn to acknowledge the greatness of God's kingdom. They should therefore spare time to glorify his name just as the Israelites used to do.

With the help of psalms Christians are encouraged to stick to God the almighty. They need to stick to him because he is the source of help for mankind.

Christians should use the psalms to develop trust in their God because he is willing to deliver his people out of suffering.

Psalms are inspirational. They encourage Christians to become vigilant in the spreading of the good news. They should continue spreading the good news.

Christians should use the psalms to promote unity in church. They should thus use the psalms to fellowship and praise their God.

Psalms encourage Christians to have love for one another. They need to use these hymns to express their love for their fellow Christians.

Through psalms Christians learn to show concern to people in problems like the sick, poor and the orphans. Psalms can make such people have a sense of belonging.

Christians are encouraged to use the psalms to identify themselves with God as members of his community.

Christians should exalt God through psalms. They should sing and play their instruments as they are worshiping God.

They are also called upon to use the psalms as they are celebrating religious festivals like Christmas and Easter.

Psalms are rehabilitative and so Christians should use them during the counselling of those people with problems.

Psalms encourage Christians live a God- fearing life because he is the source of success and protection.

They should use the psalms to make the worship more humorous and edifying.

PSALMS: 2 CORONATION PSALM OR MESSIANIC PSALM

This psalm is a pre-exilic one which is believed to have been used during the coronation of a king descending from David.

Kings in Israel were taken to be God's sons and on coronation they were given all the written instructions relating to their duties. Therefore, the use of the son-father relationship by the psalmist is used to imply the close relationship that existed between God and the kings of Judah.

However as time went on, this psalm came to be understood as a messianic psalm looking forward to the rule of God in the world and the appointment of his messiah to act on his behalf. God is seen as the only king who appoints his messiah to lead his people into the blessings promised to them.

Many New Testament writers point at psalm 2 as a messianic prophecy i.e. Act 4:25-26 refer to psalm 2:1-2 as prayer of the first Christians in Jerusalem referring to Jesus as God's servants and a messiah.

If deeply analyzed psalm 2 is divided into four main parts which include the following;

The opposition and rebellious plots by the pagan nations.

God's response to the rebellious attitude of the pagans

The new king announces the divine decrees given to him by God.

Warning and appeal to the pagan kings

Therefore psalm 2 can be analyzed in the following ways;

In this psalm the psalmist was surprised with the stupidity and evil nature of the nations which rejected God and threatened to attack God's appointed ruler of Judah.

The psalmist says that such people had forgotten their problems and decided to oppose God's anointed one

Their action is against God the ruler of the world because he is the one who had enthroned the Israelite king.

In psalm 2:4-6, the psalmist shows that God looked at the pagan nations with contempt because of their stupidity

With excessive anger God warned them against the consequences of their plots against his anointed one.

Pagan nations would be punished by God. Therefore, this means that God alone controls the destiny of his people and their kings

Psalm 2:7-9, shows that the anointed king of God receiving laws given to him by God. The king became an adopted son of God on the day of his coronation.

All nations of the world have been given to him and so any rebellion against him will be shattered like a clay pot.

In psalm 2:10-12, the psalmist concludes by giving the pagan kings some words of wisdom. He requested them to serve the lord with fear, tremble and bow to him or else they will be punished by his wrath.

Revision question; Examine the significance of Psalm2 to the modern Christians.

PSALM 20: A ROYAL PSALM ASKING FOR VICTORY IN WAR

This psalm is attributed to King David the chief musician. It was a popular belief among the Israelites that God often led his people into battles against enemies.

In this psalm, the psalmist gives the background information concerning the war where by a king had to pray for God's help to protect him and give him victory over his enemies.

He also gave sacrifices while praying to God so that they may be accepted by God and lead him to success.

The Israelites always believed that God was always on their side whenever they were fighting, hence a slogan "if God is with us who can go against us?"

In this psalm the worshipers and priests called upon the God of Jacob to protect them. They called the God of Jacob because he is a faithful God. Since he protected Jacob there was no way he could abandon his grand children because he promised them blessings and protection in all situations.

The worshippers promised that if they succeeded over their enemies, they would shout with joy and give praise to God in recognition of what God had done for them.

The psalmist expressed his total commitment and confidence in God. He thus says, "While some trust in their war chariots and others in horses, but we trust in the power of the lord our God" (psalm 20:7)

He showed utmost faith in God and said that people who trust in chariots and horses will crumble and fall.

The psalmist requested God to give victory to the king and answer their prayer.

He believed that God would never let them down.

LESSONS CHRISTIANS LEARN FROM THE PSALM

Christians should commit themselves to God while faced with problems because he gives divine care and protection since the psalmist encouraged the king to pray for God's protection.

Christians should depend on only one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who is faithful and keeps his promises to all people just as the psalmist encouraged the king to depend on him alone for all his desires.

Christians should genuinely pray to God and sacrifice to him because God will surely answer their prayers since the psalmist prayed to God to answer all the people's requests.

The Christians should pray for victory from God since he is confirmed as a God who gives victory to his chosen king.

The Christians should have absolute trust in God's power since the psalmist encouraged the people to trust in God's powers other than the war chariots and horses.

Christians should rise and stand firm with God's assistance unlike their enemies who will stumble and fall as said by the psalmist.

The Christians should praise God as they celebrate victory just as the psalmist promised to shout for joy over the victory of the chosen king.

The Christians should have utmost faith in God the Almighty just as the psalmist had faith and believed that those who had faith in other things would crumble and fall.

PSALM 22: A PSALM WHICH EXPRESSES PERSONAL SUFFERING

In this psalm, the psalmist shows an individual who disastrously suffers yet he is a virtuous man. Because of his suffering he feels that God had deserted him, "My God my God why have you abandoned me?" (Psalm 22:1)

The sufferer shows his desperate cry for help but the lord seems not to care for him, otherwise he would have answered. There was no response from God for his wailing.

He calls upon God day and night but God could not answer. He however recognizes God's holiness that he is one worshiped by Israel.

The sufferer says that their ancestors trusted in God and saved them from the danger. They were not disappointed at all.

The sufferer in the psalm expresses himself as an insignificant person equivalent to a worm. He is despised and scorned at by any one.

He shows that people laugh at him that he relied on God but the God he believed in so much has not helped him.

People commented that if God loved him, why doesn't he rescue him from suffering?

However, the sufferer expresses his total reliance on God from childhood and so he was not ready to abandon God because of the troubles he saved him.

He showed that his enemies surrounded him like a herd of bulls and a pack of dogs. They all looked at him and shared his garments.

He Calls upon people not to stand aside but to come and rescue him from the paws of dogs and mouth of lions.

The sufferer shows his gratitude to his God in advance if the lord rescues him. He says that he will praise him and would ask other people to join him in prayer of thanks giving because God would be the cause of his praise in the assembly.

He calls upon the people of Israel to honor him, worship him and all nations to remember him.

He says the lord would feed the hungry to their full and he will take care of the suffering. Those who search for the lord will praise him and the earth will remember and come back to God who rules all nations.

That all the prosperous nations and kings would bow down before him and all generations would proclaim his great name.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE SUFFERER AND JESUS CHRIST.

The sufferer is compared to Jesus Christ who on the cross cried "Eloi Eloi lema sabachthani". Meaning that my God my God why have you deserted me? (Mark 15: 34)

Much as the psalmist was scorned and abused by the congregation, Jesus too was laughed at and scorned (mark 15:29, PS 22:7) people tossed their heads and sheered at him.

The sufferer calls himself son of God just as Jesus referred to himself as son of God. But the people were gearing at him saying that let us see if God will save him for he trusted him (mark 27:43, psalm 22:8).

While the sufferer's feet and hands were torn by the ropes (psalm 22: 16) this also was true with Jesus when he was nailed through the feet and hands.

Jesus like the sufferer was surrounded by evil men attacking him like a herd of bulls and a pack of dogs. In the same way Jesus was surrounded by evil men who were shouting crucify him, crucify him. He was even crucified together with bandits (mark 15: 13, psalm 22:13) among them. The same is true with Jesus Christ.

Jesus like the sufferer was innocent and he was rejected by his kinsmen.

The sufferer also shows that the evil men divided his garments and men advocated for his crucifixion just as Jesus' garments were divided.

He seemed to have lost hope, but he still had God as his strong hold just as Jesus had God as his strong hold.

Much as the sufferer was restored and rescued from his enemies and regained victory over them. Jesus too showed victory over his enemies when he resurrected on the third day. His pursuers were put to shame.

NB. It is important to note that the suffering servant in Isaiah and psalm 22 was a future manifestation of the fulfillment of the prophecy of the suffering Jesus.

LESSONS CHRISTIANS TODAY LEARN FROM THIS PSALM.

The Christians should endure suffering just as the sufferer endured when he suffered disastrously.

The Christians should pray and cry to God to rescue them from their trials of life just as the sufferer cried out for help from God

The Christians should emulate the psalmist and continue recognizing and worshipping God inspite of the trials just as the sufferer still recognized God's glory and power inspite of his suffering.

Christians should be committed to God's will just as the sufferer did, even when he was scorned by people him, still he cling to God.

Christians should accept to suffer for God's sake just as the sufferer accepted his feet and hands to be torn by ropes.

Christians should have God as their strong hold just as the sufferer still had God as his strong hold much as he seemed to have lost hope.

The Christians should be willing to undergo persecution just as the sufferer was scorned and abused by the congregation.

They Christians should live a spiritually upright kind of life in order to be identified as children of God just as the sufferer was innocent.

They should have confidence in God just as the sufferer had confidence in him and he restored and rescued him from his enemies and regained victory over them.

PSALM 47: A PSALM THAT EXPRESSES GOD AS A SUPREME RULER OF THE WORLD.

In this psalm, the psalmist begins by calling upon worshippers to clap their hands and praise God with shouts of joy.

He proclaims God as the highest being and king of the world. He shows God as the universal ruler.

He shows that God is not a God of one nation but God of all nations and He brings people under his control.

The psalmist shows that God chose them (Jews) to inherit the land onto which they live.

High above in his throne God is seen and there are shouts of joy and the blast of trumpets as the lord goes up.

The psalmist calls upon other people to sing and praise God their king.

He acknowledges God as their king of the whole world and therefore he calls upon people to praise him with songs.

The psalmist shows that He rules the entire world from his heavenly throne.

All the kings of the world assemble before the God of Abraham who owns all the shields, hence his reign is supreme.

In this psalm, God is seen in the following perspective;

He is seen as a supreme God. He is the overall leader of all nations. His superiority is felt in each and every part of the world.

He is the king of kings and lord of lords. All the earth belongs to him.

He requires to be recognized with pleasure, clapping to him, praising him with shouts of joy. Christians therefore need to show their happiness while communicating to God through singing, dancing and shout of joy.

He is a loving and caring father who enjoys our company in prayer.

God is perceived as a fighter and winner of many wars. He fights on the side of his people and he never abandons them.

He deserves honor and respect from the worshippers. This is because he is the creator and sustainer of mankind and therefore, he wants to be recognized in that aspect.

He is a loving and caring God who enjoys our company in prayer.

He is a faithful God who fulfills his promises. He blessed the Israelites, gave them the land of Canaan and fought their enemies.

God is seen as an omnipresent being. He is the ultimate controller of all armies in the universe, this reaffirms that he is the supreme because his presence is felt everywhere.

He is seen as the almighty God. He is beyond all earthly powers and he is infallible being.

His kingdom reaches everywhere in the world. He has conquered men's hearts through his son Jesus Christ.

PSALM 137: AN EXAMPLE OF THE JEWISH LAMENTATION IN EXILE

This psalm shows the nation of Israel lamenting in exile because of the destruction of their temple and city and the killing of very many Israelites.

The psalmist shows people singing as they were seated by the lord of Babylonia, weeping and remembering Zion (Jerusalem) their wonderful city.

They hung up their harps and refused to play them.

Their enemies kept on mocking them to sing for them the song of Zion in the foreign land.

The Israelites were desperate with no hopes of going back to their land.

They pleaded to God reminding Him of what the Edomites did to them as they shouted to tear Zion to the ground.

The psalmist deep in his heart believed that God would pay back what the Babylonians did. He thus says Babylon "you will be destroyed, happy is a man who pays you back for what you have done to us" PS 137: 8-9

That the Babylonians deserved to be destroyed for taking away their babies and smashing them against a rock.

LESSONS CHRISTIANS LEARN FROM THE ABOVE PSALM.

Christians should use the most peaceful means against their enemies to bring about peace unlike the Israelites who planned for revenge against the Babylonians.

The Christians should forgive their enemies and all those who have offended them unlike the Israelites who vowed never to forgive the Edomites.

The Christians should always turn to God whenever faced with problems just as the Israelites turned to God while in Babylon.

The Christians should pray to God anytime whenever they are unlike the Israelites who refused to sing praises to God in Babylon.

The Christians should always ask for God's deliverance even when they are dominated by other powers just as the Israelites asked God to deliver them from the Babylonians.

The Christians should have confidence in their God inspite of all trials of all walks of life just as the Israelites in exile never resolted to other gods.

The Christians should remain firm in faith just as the Israelites in exile remained firm in their faith.

The Christians should put God in their midst just as the Israelites remembered him and vowed never to forget him.

The Christians should present their enemies before God who can best deal with them unlike the Israelites who wanted to revenge on the Babylonians.

The Christians should pray for their enemies unlike the Israelites who hated the Babylonian cruelty and wanted their enemies to go through the same suffering.

The Christians should have love for their countries or be patriotic and love for the worshiping places just as the Israelites had love for their city and God's temple.