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 **MAKING DECISION**

 Decision making has the ability to make or mar our destiny or career in life. The decision of a king determines the level of growth and development of a nation.

**Solomon’s wisdom (I Kings 3:3-15).**

 King Solomon took over the throne from his father David. David told Solomon to observe God’s statutes and work according to His laws in order to be successful. King Solomon walked in the ways of the Lord, he loved the Lord He married the daughter of Pharaoh. He also succeeded in building the Jerusalem wall and the house of the Lord.

Solomon went to Gibeon to offer sacrifice to the Lord. He sacrificed a thousand sacrifices and this pleased the Lord. The Lord appeared to him at night and asked him to request for whatever he wanted. Solomon thanked God for His love for his father David and for making him the successor to the throne. He then requested for wisdom and understanding to enable him to rule so great people effectively. His request pleased the Lord and the Lord gave him wisdom. God also added riches, honour and long life to him. Solomon returned back to Jerusalem and prepared a feast for his servants.

**The application of Solomon’s wisdom** **(I Kg 3:16-28, 4:29-34, 8:1-53 I Kg 5:1-12).**

**1. The judgement of the case of two harlots**

Two harlots were living in the same house and they both gave birth to sons almost at the same time. At night, one of them laid on her son and he died. She quietly carried him and laid him beside the woman whose child was alive and took her living child to herself. When the woman woke up in the morning, she saw that her baby had been removed and, in his place, a dead child. While they argued over the living child, the king commanded the living child to be divided into two and each woman be given half.

 While the mother of the living child disagrees with the decision, the mother of the dead child approves of the decision Solomon said the child should be given to the woman that disapproves of the decision because she is the mother of the child. This judgement brought fame to king Solomon.

**2. Building of the temple.**

Another important event through which Solomon manifested his wisdom was the building of the temple David started. Hiram king of Tyre gave Solomon timber and stones he used to build the temple and in return, King Solomon gave him twenty thousand measures of wheat for food for his household and twenty measures of oil. Solomon was in league with Hiram until he completed the building projects.

**3.** **Solomon’s wisdom in Art-songs and proverb**

God gave Solomon wisdom more than all men at his time. He was wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Chalcol, Dada, the sons of Mahol and his fame spread around all the nations. He spake 3,000 proverbs and composed 1005 songs people came from far and near to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

4. **Dedication of the temple**

After the completion of the building of the temple in Jerusalem, Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and representatives of the people for the dedication of the temple. He transferred the Ark of God to its new resting place in the inner sanctuary of the temple and hoped to make the ark once again the symbol of national unity. He organized a feast at the dedication.

**This is the highlight of Solomon’s prayer at the dedication;**

**1.** Solomon acknowledged the greatness of God and expressed his gratitude to God for the choice of the Davidic dynasty. He prayed for the confirmation of the promise made to his father David.

**2.** He pointed out that the temple was not an attempt to limit God, since heaven and earth could contain Him.

**3.** He prayed for the effectiveness of the Oath taken in the temple, so that the righteous could be vindicated and the guilty punished.

**4.** Solomon prayed for the forgiveness of the nation whenever such request was made in the temple.

**5.** In the case of scarcity of rain, famine, locust, pestilence or blight due to the people’s sins, Solomon prayed for divine forgiveness.

**6.** Solomon requested that God should grant the prayer of foreigners made in the temple.

**Unwise decision of Solomon and Rehoboam**

Solomon made some decisions during his reign that mar his regime. These unwise decisions led to his downfall.

**1. Forced labour – I Kgs 9:20-23**

King Solomon subjected the people to hard labour in order to accomplish his building projects.

The people groaned under this condition, and this prepared the ground for rebellion. It turned the people’s mind against Solomon.

 **2.** **Over taxation (I Kgs 9:15-19)**

Solomon needed a lot of money, not only to maintain his large family, he also needed to complete his building projects, he therefore over taxed the people. This displeased the people and led to the total disapproval of the reign of Solomon

**3.** **Marriage to foreign wives: (I Kgs 11:1-4)**

 God told Solomon at the beginning of his reign not to enter into marriage with Israel’s enemies. These countries include Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon and Hittite. He married 700 wives and 300 concubines. All these women turned away his heart from following the Lord.

**4. Worship of foreign Gods (Apostacy (I Kgs 11:4-13)**

 Solomon’s wives turned his heart away from the Lord and he worshipped their gods. He went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Milcom of the Ammonites and built a high place for Chemosh of the Moabites and for Molech, of the children of Ammon. He burnt incense and sacrificed to their gods. God became angry and decided to tear the kingdom from his hand into two but promised He will not remove it completely from his lineage because of his servant David.

**Unwise decision of Rehoboam (I Kgs12:1-20)**

 Rehoboam was the son of Solomon, who wanted to be king in Solomon’s stead. Another successor to the throne was Jeroboam the son of Nebat Rehoboam went Shechem with all Israel to make him King along with Jeroboam. The people told him to remove the heary burden put upon them by his father and they shall serve him He asked the people to give him three days to give them answer.

 Rehoboam went to consult the elders who told him to heed the people’s request to lighten their burden. He also went to the young men who advised him to tell the Israelites, “My finger shall be thicker than my father’s loins. Though my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpion. My father imposed heavy yoke upon you, I will add to your yoke”. Rehoboam rejected the advise of the elders and took that of the young men.

 When he gathered the Israelites on the third day, he told them the advise of the young men. The people said “what portion have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse to your tents, O Israel now see to your house David” All the Israelites departed into their tents. The kingdom was divided into two, while Rehoboam was King over Judan and Benjamin alone, the Israelites made Jeroboam the son of Nebat King over the other ten tribes. Rehoboam ruled the Southern Kingdom while Jeroboam ruled the Northern Kingdom.

**The Significance and Lessons.**

 1. We learnt that success is rooted in obedience to God.

 2. We learnt that true wisdom is rooted in the fear of God

 3. We learnt that we should obey the advice of our elders.

 4. We also learnt that we should always seek the things that

 work of peace

 5. And that every sin warrants punishment

 **Greed and its consequences**

Greed refers to selfish and excessive desire for the good things in life or the urge to acquire things beyond one’s normal due, or the desire to convert what belongs to another to one’s personal use. It is a sin against God and it warrants punishment by God.

**(a)** **Ahab’s greed and its consequences** **(I Kgs 21:1-29)**

Naboth the Jezrealite had a vineyard close to the palace of King Ahab. Ahab went to him to request for the vineyard to be used for a vegetable garden. Naboth refused and said, “the Lord forbid that he gives his father’s inheritance to him”. Ahab went home sad and refused to eat Jezebel his wife asked him what had happened, he told her how Naboth had treated hm. Jezebel asked him to cheer up that she was going to help him get the vineyard.

 Jezebel wrote letter in Ahab’s name and sent it to the nobles and elders in Jezreel to proclaim a fast and set Naboth on high among the people, get two base fellows and accuse him of cursing God and the king that he deserved to die. This they did and Naboth was stoned to death. Jezebel, on hearing that Naboth was dead asked her husband to arise and take over the vineyard of Naboth.

**Consequences of Ahab’s greed (Ikgs 21:17-29)**

God sent Elijah the prophet to him in Naboth vineyard to tell him that he had not only killed but he has also taken possession: Elijah pronounced the following curses upon him,

1. He said the dogs would lick the blood of Ahab in the place where they licked the blood of Naboth

**2.** God would cut off every male that piss against the wall from the house of Ahab

**3.** Dogs would eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel.

**4.** And that the dogs would eat any member of Ahab’s family who died in the city while the birds of the air would eat any one of Ahab’s family who died in the open country.

When Ahab heard these curses, he tore his clothes and put on sack cloth, as a show of repentance. God then changed his mind and said the punishment on Ahab’s house would take place in the days of Ahab’s sons instead of his time.

**Gehazi’s greed and its consequences (II Kgs 5:1-27)**

Naaman was a commander of the army of Syria, though he was a great warrior, he was a leper. After he had tried all to have this leprosy cured, all was to no avail. A slave girl who was taken from Israel advised her mistress to tell Naaman to go to Israel to be healed of his leprosy. Naaman went to the king of Syria who gave him a letter to the king of Israel telling him to heal Naaman of his leprosy.

 When the King of Israel received the letter he was troubled saying that the Syria king wanted to make quarrel with him again when he knew that he was not God. When Elisha heard of it, he ordered to the king to send Naaman to him so that he might know that there is a prophet in Israel. As Naaman arrived at the doorstep of Elisha, Elisha sent a messenger to inform him to go to River Jordan and wash seven times and he shall be made whole.

 Naaman became angry because he thought the prophet would come and laid hands on him, call the name of his God and cure him. He also complained that there are better rivers in Syria. As he was going back, one of his servants advised him to comply to the words of the prophet. He then went to river Jordan and dipped himself seven times and he was made whole instantly.

 Naaman decided to show his gratitude to the prophet by presenting to him ten talents of silver, six hundred shekels of gold and ten festal garments, but Elisha refused. Naaman requested that two mule-loads of sand be given him because he would thereafter worship no other god than the God of Israel. Elisha granted the request and sent him away in peace.

 Meanwhile, Gehazi Elisha’s servant was not happy and decided to run after Naaman in order to collect the gifts. He lied to Naaman that as soon as he departed from Elisha, the sons of the prophets visited the prophet and the prophet had sent him to collect a talent of silver and two festal garments. Gehazi collected two talents of silver and two festal garment from them and hide them before going to Elisha.

 When Elisha asked him where he had been he said he went nowhere. Elisha told him that he went with him in spirit when he went to collect gifts from Naaman. Elisha cursed him that Naaman’s leprosy should come upon him and his descendants, he went away, leprous.

**The Significant points and Lessons.**

1.We learnt that greed is a social offence and it warrants negative consequences.

2. We learnt that God sees everything we do

3. We learnt that God confirm the word of His prophets.

4. And that innocent people also suffer for our sins.

 **The supremacy of God**

**Supremacy:** refers to a position of highest status and authority over other powers. It refers to absolute authorities over all other authority. All true religions recognize the existence of a supreme God. Israel call this God, Yahweh, they were to worship this God, as the only true God

**Religious tension in Israel:** **Ahab sins (I Kgs 16:29-31)**

In the 35th year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab, the son of Omri began to reign over Israel in Samaria He reigned for 22 years and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord by following the footsteps of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. He brought Baal worship into Israel and erected an alter in it for worship. He also married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Siddons who brought Asherah, the goddess of Baal Melkart into Israel.

He also allowed Hiel of Bethel to rebuild Jericho against the curse placed there by Joshua Hiel lost his first son Abiam, at the laying of the foundation and lost his youngest son Segub at the setting of the gates according to God’s word.

**The propagation of Baal (Worship by Ahab and Jezebel causes religious tension (I Kgs 17:1-7, 18:3-6, 19:1-18)**

1.The prophet of Yahweh were persecuted by Jezebel and Obadiah hid 100 prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water, morning and evening.

2. The forceful imposition of Baalism on the people by Ahab created unsafe atmosphere for the worship of Yahweh. This reduced the number of Yahweh loyalists.

3. Elijah pronounced drought on the Israelites and this lasted for a space of three years. God asked him to go to the brook cherith where He commanded the ravens to feed him with bread and meat in the morning and in the evening. He also drank from the book which later dried up.

4. Baal prophets were killed by Elijah and Jezebel scared Elijah away. Elijah killed 450 prophet of Baal at a contest on mount carmel. When Jezebel threatened to take his life he ran to mount Horeb and lodged in the wilderness under a broom tree. God sent angels with cake baked from hot stones and a jar of water. He went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights. He asked God to take his life. While he was waiting to hear from God, the Lord passed through the mountain with a strong wind and broke the rocks in pieces, but the Lord was not in the wind. Likewise, earthquake and fire, but the Lord was not in them. God then spoke to him in a small still voice.

5. God told him to go back home through Damascus. He shall anoint Hazael King over Syria, Jehu the Son of Nimshi, King over Israel and Elisha the son of Shaphat to be prophet in his place. God promised to use them to wipe out Baalism totally from Israel and leave 7000 Israelites who have not bowed to Baal.

**Elijah announces the end of drought (I Kgs 18:1-19).**

After three year of drought, God sent Elijah to Ahab to announce his readiness to bring rain to Israel. On his way to meet the King he met Obadiah who went in search of green pastures for the Kings animals. He told Obadiah to go and tell the King to come and meet him in the wilderness, but Obadiah refused fearing that he might be killed if the king should fail to see Elijah. He also feared that the king might have heard how he hid 100 prophets of Yahweh.

 Obadiah went and called Ahab and when Ahab saw Elijah he said “is it you, you troubler of Israel? By forsaking God’s commandments thereby causing drought. Elijah told him to gather on mount carmel all the Israelites, the prophets of Baal and the prophets of Asherah to prove the supremacy of God over Baal. He assured him that after that, God would send the rain.

**Elijah organized a contest on Mount Carmel (Ikgs 18:17-46)**

When Ahab had gathered all the Israelites on mount Carmel, Elijah rebuked the people for their infidelity and syncretic practice. He said to them “how long will you go limping with two different opinions? If Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him”. Elijah called for two bulls and prepared an alter of sacrifice with wood but without fire. Both Elijah and the 450 prophets of baal should cut each bull in pieces and placed each on the wood and called on the name of their god to consume the sacrifice by fire. The god that answers by fire shall be the true God.

Baal prophets were to perform first, they called on the name of their god from morning till noon, their God did not answer. Elijah mocked them by telling them to cry aloud maybe their god had gone on a journey. They started cutting themselves with knives until blood started gushing out, but baal refused to answer them.

When it was Elijah’s turn, he prepared on alter with twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel. He laid the bull on the alter and dug a trance around it and asked the people to pour four jars of water on the burnt offering. This was done thrice, and Elijah called on the God of Israel to consume the burnt offering to prove Himself as God of Israel and to show that Elijah is His true servant. Immediately, the fire of the Lord fell on the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the dust licking the water.

On seeing what had happened, the people fell on their faces and said, “The Lord He is God, the Lord, He is God”. Elijah then ordered all the prophets of baal to be killed at the brook of kishon. After the contest, Elijah went to the mountain top to pray and this was followed by a heavy rain to mark the end of the drought.

**Another Instance of the demonstration of God Supremacy (Isam. 5:1-12)**

(a). The philistines defeated the Israelites and carried away the ark of the covenant from Ebenezer to Ashdod and set it beside Dagon, the god of the Philistines who they believe was more powerful than Yahweh.

(a). God humiliated Dargon and afflicted the people of Ashdod with tumour. Dagon fell on it face and the philistines came and restored it to its former position and it fell again and had its hands and head cut off from the trunk. Once again, God afflicted the people in Ashdod and its surroundings with tumours.

(c). When the people of Ashdod cried for the removal of the ark, it was taken to Gath. God also afflicted the people of Gath both young and old with tumours.

(d). When the people in Gath complained also, the ark was taken to Ekron. God afflicted the people in Ekron with a more severe tumour, that so many of them died. The people cried that they had brought around them the ark of the God of Israel to slay them.

(e). The Philistines returned the ark to Israel due to the bitter experiences their people went through as a result of the ark. The ark was returned to Israel with guilt offering to prevent further afflictions.

**The Significance and Moral Lessons.**

**1.** We learnt that the supremacy of God cannot be questioned.

2.We learnt that we should avoid idol worship as it warrants

 punishment from God.

3. As leaders, we should not yield to negative influences.

4. We also learnt that God uses affliction to redirect people or

 sinners.

 **Religions Reforms**

Josiah was the son of Amon and his mother’s name was Jedidah. He became a king of the southem kingdom at the age of 8 years. He notice adulteration of pure worship of God with Pagan worship and decided to reform.

**Motivating factors to Josiah’s reforms**

1. **The prevalent religious evils of his day.**

The evils at the time of Josiah were;

(a). Idolatrous practice in Jerusalem. There were worship of other gods in the temple. There was prostitution in the house of God.

(b). Shrines and idolatrous priests were scattered all over Judah and In the Northern kingdom.

(c). There was the practice of child sacrifice at a place called Tophet in Judah in line with the Assyrian religious practice.

(d). The use of mediums and wizards:- The activities of mediums and wizards led to the death of many innocent people in the Kingdom.

2. **The discovery of the Law Book (2Kgs 22:1-11)**

In the 18th year of his reign, he ordered the renovation of the temple and in the process Hilkiah the High Priest discovered the Law book in the temple. He sent the book to the King through Shaphan, the king’s secretary. When the contents of the book was read to the King by Sharphan, he realized that the people had deviated greatly from the ideals of the worship of God, and decided to go into reforms immediately.

3. **The prophecy of Prophetess Huldah (2kgs 22:12-29)**

After hearing from the book, Josiah sent people to prophetess Huldah in order to hear God’s intention concerning people from the mouth of His messenger. From her prophecy, Josia saw that God’s Judgement on Judah was imminent and he decided to go into reforms urgently.

4. **The favourable political situation of his time**

At the time of King Josiah, Judah was a vassal state to Assyria. Assyria was weak and this encouraged Josiah to carry out his reforms without government intervention. With this, he was able to purge Judah of Assyria pagan practices

5. **Josiah’s God-fearing nature**

Josiah feared God, having realized how the people have sinned against God, he went into reforms immediately in order to avert God’s punishment on his people.

**Preparation for the reforms (2 Kgs 23:1-3)**

In preparation for his reforms, Josiah gathered together all the elders, priests and prophets at the temple in Jerusalem. He renewed their covenant with God after reading from the Law book. They all agreed to obey the Lord and keep His commandments. After this, he set forth for the reforms.

 **Josiah’s reform Measures (2kgs 23:4-30)**

**The reform in Judah**

King Josiah eradicated idolatrous practices in the temple at Jerusalem. All the foreign gods including baal, Asherah the sun god and their images and materials of worship were removed from the temple and burnt at Kidron, outside Jerusalem. He removed idolatrous priests, priestesses and cult prostitutes from the temple and burnt their houses.

(i) He deposed all the idolatrous priest officiating in the High places, he defiled their places and destroyed the foreign gods.

(ii) He abolished child sacrifice by defiling Topheth, a place where child sacrifice was being carried out to the god Molech.

(iii) He abolished the use of mediums and wizards (divination or soothsaying) that were pagan practices.

**The reform in the Northern Kingdoms (Israel)**

(i)He destroyed the high places and the alter built at Bethel by Jeroboam (I) the son of Nebat. He burnt foreign gods at Bethel

(ii) He also destroyed and defiled all the high places in Samaria, the capital of Northern Kingdom.

(iii) He also killed all the idolatrous priests in the high places in Samaria in line with the recommendations from the Law book.

**The outcome of King Josiah’s reforms**

(a) He succeeded in eradicating idolatrous practices in Judah at that period.

(b) He centered worship again at Jerusalem.

(c) He restored back again the celebration of the Passover feast

The reforms of king Josiah were more external than internal. They only succeeded in making the people return to God outwardly but couldn’t prevent the people from sacrificing in high places. Evil still prevailed in Judah. This was because Jeremiah preached against Judah’s evils towards the end of Josiah’s reign. In this case, we can say that Josiah’s reforms were short lived.

**The significance and Moral lessons**

1.We learnt that leaders should have the fear of God and be sensitive to the commandments of God.

2. We learnt that we should not worship other gods as it brings God’s anger on us.

3. We learnt that we should help to rid our society of evil practices and idol worship

4. We also learnt that our body is the temple of God, we should remove whatever will defile it.

**Concern for one’s nation**

**(a) The state of the nation**

(i) **Egypt (under Pharaoh Neco) destabilize Judah’s political state (II Kgs 23:28-31)**

Pharaoh Neco went to meet Assyria king and Josiah went to meet him. When pharaoh Neco saw him, he slew him at Megidd. The people took Jehoahaz, the son of Josial and made him king in Josiah’s stead. Judah then became a vassal state to Egypt. Later, pharaoh Neco deposed Jehoahaz and made Jehoiakim a vassal king over Judah. Pharaoh Neco carried Jehoahaz into Egypt and he died there.

(ii) **Jehoiakim’s revolt, Babylonian in rasion the first exile of the people (II Kg 24:1-17).**

Nebuchadnezzar came over Jehoiakim and after ruling Judah for three years he revolted against Nebuchadnezzar. God then sent against him the bands of the Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites to destroy Judah for the sins of Manasseh and for the innocent blood he had shed. Jehoiakim later died and his son Jehoiachin reigned in his stead.

Jehoiachin was 18years old when he began to reign and he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar’s servants came over Jerusalem and Jehoiachin gave himself up to Nebuchadnezzar, his mother, his servants, his princes and his palace officials. Nebuchadnezzar took him prisoner and took him to Babylon and carried away all the treasures in the Lord’s house, in the King’s house and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the Lord’s house. He also carried away, all princess mighty men of valour, craftsmen and smiths and remained the poorest people in the Land. He made matathia Jehoiachin’s uncle King and changed his name to Zedekiah

(iii) **Zedekiah’s revolt, destruction of the temple and the city wall (Second exile) II Kgs 25:1-17).**

Zedediah also rebelled against Babylon and the Babylonians invaded Judah for the second time, the Chaldeans laid siege over the city of Jerusalem. They pursued the king of Judah and captured him and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah where his two sons were killed before him. They gouged out his two eyes, bound him with fetters and carried him into exile.

In the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the king’s body guards overran Jerusalem. Be burned the house of the Lord and the King’s houses and all the houses in Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem. He also carried away all the important people and remained only the poorest of the people. He took away all the vessels of the house of God and burnt down the city. God used this to punish Judah for her sins in 586 BC.

(iv) **The report of Judah sent to Nehemiah and his response (Neh 1:1-11;2)**

Nehemiah was a jew and he was the son of Hacaliah. He was taken captive into the exile. He was a cupbearer to the King of Persia called Artaxerxes at susa the capital city. In the month of chisler, Hamani with some brethren broght a report from Judah to Susa. They told Nehemiah about the pathetic state of Judah that the survivors were in great trouble and shame. They also told him that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and it’s gate was destroyed by fire.

When Nehemiah heard this report, he became sad he sat down, wept and mourned for days. He fasted and prayed to the God of Heaven not only to remind Him of His covenant with His people, but to forgive them their sins. He asked God for success and mercy in the sight of the King.

God granted him favour in the sight of the King. The King gave him permission to go and rebuild Jerusalem. He promised to support him and he gave him letters to the governors of the province beyond the river to enable him pass through the land without hindrance on his way to go and rebuild Jerusalem.

**(b) Response to the state of the nation**

(i) **The decree of Cyrus, the return of the exiles (Ezra 1:1-11; Neh 1:1-11)**

Babylon came under Persian Empire and the King of Persia, Cyrus, as directed by God issued a decree that all the Jews in exile should return to their country and rebuild Jerusalem. In response to this decree, the Jewish exile returned to Judah. They were led by Zerubbabel and Shewshbazzar

(ii) **The Rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4 and 5).**

The group of exile that came to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple was led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua in support of prophets Haggai and Zechariah. When the Samaritans heard that they had come to rebuild the temple, they requested for the assistance to help them in rebuilding the temple. They rejected their assistance and this made them to fight against the rebuilding work. They hired counselors and wrote to the King against the Jews that they were rebellious people. They said if the King should allow them to rebuild the temple and the wall of Jerusalem, they would stop paying him tribute. With this, the King decided to pass a decree to stop the rebuilding work.

However, the Jews then wrote a counter letter to the King of Persia telling him that the rebuilding work they were in was in line with the decree of king cyrus. The king found out that it was true and commanded the rebuilding work to resume. The work resumed and the temple was eventually rebuilt.

(iii) **The dedication of the temple (Ezra 6:13-22)**

When the temple had been completed, the third day of the month Adar, the sixth year of the reign of Darius, the Persia King, the temple was dedicated with a feast of bull rams, goats and lambs. Twelve he goats were sacrificed as sin offering for the twelve tribes of Israel. On the 14th day of the first month, the returned exiles started the celebration of the Passover feast. They killed the Passover lamb, observed the days of unleavened bread and celebrated the feast with joy.

(iv) **Ezra revives the knowledge of the Law and its obedience among the returned exile (Ezra 7:1-10)**

After the dedication of the temple, Ezra the scribe came from Babylon with some of the Israelites including priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants to reform the religious lives of the people. Ezra thought the people from the law of the Lord, to observe it and have knowledge of it.

 This was necessary because some of the returned exiles were born in exile, and they might have learned some pagan practices. This teaching of Ezra was sometimes referred to as ‘Ezra’s reform’. This was because his teaching on the knowledge and observance of the Law helped to reform the religious lives of the people.

(v) **Nehamiah helped to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem in the face of opposition (Neh 1:1-11; 2:9-20’ 4:1-23)**

After Nehemiah had obtained permission from the Persian King Artaxerxes, the King also gave him all the timber needed for the rebuilding work and adequate security for the journey. Three days after Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he went to inspect the wall at night with a few men. This was to enable him assess the magnitude of the work and know how to plan.

 After inspection, and planning, he gathered the leading Jews that is, the priests, noble and officials, and appealed to them to join him in the rebuilding work. He told them how God had granted him favour in the sight of Pensian King for the rebuilding work. They agreed to work with him and said, “let us rise and build” having received public support, Nehemiah embarked on the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem.

 However, the enemies of Judah sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arab tried to frustrate the Jews by frightening them. They told the Jews that the king of Persia could interpret it as a sign of rebellion. Sanballat openly described the Jews as feeble-minded people Tobiah also mocked them by saying that the wall they were rebuilding was so fragile that if a fox should go on it, it would crumble.

 Nehemiah prayed to God to avenge their enemies and make them suffer invasion and captivity by ridiculing not the Israelites but their God. Samballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites planned to attack the work secretly, but Ehmiah prayed and mounted guards night and day to watch over the wall. At a time, Judah one of the workers complained that the people were becoming weak due to lack of strength and the threat from enemies. Nehemiah in response first asked all the workers to bring their families into Jerusalem for safety and got all the workers armed. He told them they should be alerted by the trumpet whenever the enemies strike. With this, the walls of Jerusalem was completed.

**The significant points and lessons**

**1.** We learnt that we should be patriot.

2. God can use any means to punish disobedience.

3. God can use even our enemies to be a source of blessing to us.

4. We learnt not to give up in the face of opposition, but to be firm and ask for divine guidance and protection.

 **Faith in God**

Faith is an absolute trust in God and in His powers. It is the foundation of the Christian religion. Miracles, prayers cannot be done without faith.

a. **Faith and courage (Daniel 3:1-30)**

 Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon made a golden image and put it in the plain of Dura. It assembled all the principal officers of the province for the dedication. He told them that as soon as they, hear the sounds of all kinds of musical instruments, they should all bow down and worship the image, and anyone who refused to bow down shall be thrown into a burning fiery furnace.

 After the king had passed the decree, the three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down at the sound of instrument, as was reported to the King by the Chaldeans. When they were brought before the King, they told the king that they could not answer him on the matter that the Lord they serve would deliver them from the burning fiery furnace and from the king. The king became angry and commanded the furnace to be heated seven times.

 Subsequently, the three Jews disobeyed it the sound of the instruments. The king ordered them to be dropped into the furnace. The heat from the furnace killed the people that dropped them into the furnace. When the King went to check the furnace in the morning he saw four men in the furnace and the forth man looked like the son of the gods. The king called them out and they told him that the God they serve had sent an angel to deliver them. The king then blessed their God and passed a decree that anyone that spoke against the God of schadrach, Meshack and Abednego shall be turn to pieces and their houses destroyed. He then promoted them.

**Faith and Power of God (Dan 6:1-28)**

Darius King of Babylong appointed 120 satraps and 3 presidents to oversee his kingdom. Daniel was among the 3 presidents. He was preferred by the king who decided to set him over his kingdom because he had an excellent spirit. All other officers became Jealous and looked for a way to bring him down. They persuaded the King to make a decree that no one should pray to another God apart from the god of the King for thirty days. Any one who disobeyed the King’s order shall be thrown into the den of lions.

 When Daniel heard of it, he went into the room three times in a day, and glorified the name of God. When the men saw him, they went to report to the king , he felt sorry that it was Daniel whom he loved, but prayed that the God he served shall be able to deliver him. Daniel was cast into the den of Lions.

 The next day, the king went to the den and called Daniel and asked him whether the God he served had been able to save him Daniel answered and said that, the God he served had sent an angel to shut the mouth of the Lions that they could not touch him. He ordered Daniel to be brought out and ordered all the accusers of Daniel to be thrown into the den Before they could get to the bottom of the den, the Lions broke their bones into pieces. He then passed a decree directing all men in his domain to worship the God of Daniel who only can rescue, work signs and wonders in heaven and on earth and whose kingdom is everlasting.

**The significance of lesson.**

1.Absolute faith in God attracts his intervention in our lives and situations.

2. Envy is an evil which leads to destruction

3. One with God is majority.

 **God's message to Nineveh**

 God, in his love for his people has been sending his messengers to correct his people whenever they go astray. In the Old Testament, God used his prophets, priests and judges. A prophet is the mouthpiece spokesman of God. In the modern day church, we have pastors, Reverend Fathers, Bishops etc. Prophet Jonah was one of such prophets.

**a. Jonah as a messenger (Jonah 1:1-17, 2:1-10)**

 Jonah was son of Amittai, God asked him to go and cry against the city of Nineveh that their wickedness had come up to him. Jonah, in his bid to disobey God decided to go to Joppa and board a ship going to Tarshish, in order to run away from the presence of the Lord. God then sent a great wind into the sea that the ship was almost broken into pieces. The mariners decided to tell everyone in the ship to pray to his god and they threw down some of their wares to lighten the ship so that it will not sink. But Jonah was asleep at the side of the ship. The captain of the ship went to him and asked him to also arise and pray to his god perhaps, god may hear and rescue them from destruction.

 However, they decide to cast lots in order to ascertain why the calamity was befalling them and the lots fell on Jonah. The people then asked Jonah who he actually is and he told the that he was an Hebrew who feared the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. When Jonah told the people that he was running away from the presence of the Lord, they became greatly afraid. After accusing Jonah of causing problem for them, they asked him what should be done to avert the imminent danger. He told them to throw him into the sea so that the sea will be calm.

 Therefore, the people prayed to God not to hold the sin against his servant against them and they took Jonah and threw him into the sea and the sea became calm. The people then offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. God the prepared a big fish to swallow up Jonah and he was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

**The message of God to Nineveh (Jonah 2 & 3)**

Jonah then prayed to God from the belly of the fish and said, "I called to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice''. He recounted his ordeal in the belly of the fish and made a vow to God. God then remembered him and spoke to the fish and the fish vomited Jonah on the land.

 Then God called Jonah the second time and said, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you". In obedience to God, Jonah went to the city and when he had gone a day's journey, he cried and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown". The king then proclaimed a fast and made a decree that no nor animal should eat anything, but to pray to God for the forgiveness of sin. When God saw how they repented and turned from their evil way, He repented of the evil He was to do to the people and decided not to destroy the city again.

**Jonah's Anger at the Lord's Compassion (Jonah 4)**

 However, it displeased Jonah that God did not destroy the city. He told God that he decided to run away before because he knew that he will have mercy on the people. He asked God to take his life that it is better for him to die than to live. God told him that he had done well to be angry. He then went out of the city, made a booth and sat under its shade as he was waiting to see what would become of the city. The Lord then prepared a gourd to shade him from the heat of the sun and Jonah was happy.

 The next morning God infested the tree with worm that it died and the sun beat Jonah that he fainted, and said within himself, "It is better for me to die than to live". God told Jonah that he had done well to be angry and to have pity for the gourd which he did not labour to plant, should himself (God) not spare Nineveh a great city of 120 people with much cattle, who cannot differentiate between their right hand and left hand.