THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The teaching of Jesus on the role of the Holy Spirit

John 14:15-26,16:5-15,Acts 1:7-8

In his farewell, Jesus assured his disciples that when he left this world, God would send them the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would play the following roles:

(i) He would act as a counselor and guide the disciples on the spiritual truth.
(ii) He would reveal to the disciples all truth about God.
(iii) He would remind the disciples everything Jesus Christ taught.
(iv) He will pronounce judgment /convict the world.
(v) He would glorify Jesus by opening the minds and hearts of people to his gospel.
(vi) He would be a companion to his disciples in all their mission and ministry.
(vii) He would strengthen the faith of the disciples and give them strength to face persecution.
(viii) He would help the disciples to understand Jesus Christ as the son of God.
(ix) He would forgive sins through the Disciples of Christ.
(x) He would empower the disciples to become Jesus Christ’s witnesses all over the world.
(xi) He would give the disciples wisdom to discern and expose the secret hearts of sinful people.
(xii) He would enable the disciples to predict future events/prophesy.
PETER MESSAGE ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST (FEAST OF WEEKS)

Acts 2:1-40

- It was one of the Jewish annual feasts which was celebrated 50 days after Passover.
- It commemorated the receiving of the Mosaic Law on Mount Sinai.
- The Jews of Palestine and those of dispersion (Diaspora) usually went to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast.
- On the day of Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus were gathered together when they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was in fulfillment of Jesus Christ’s promise to them. (Luke 24:29)

**The spirit manifested himself in the form of:**

(a) A strong wind

(b) Tongues of fire.

© Disciples speaking in tongues.

(d) Peter’s empowered speech in defense of fellow disciples.

The foreigners who were gathered were able to understand what the disciples were saying in their own languages.

While some of them were amazed at what was happening. He claimed the disciples were drunk.

Peter as the disciple’s spokesman, stood up and explained what was happening. He said the following:

(i) He told the people that the disciples were not drunk.

(ii) That they were filled with the holy spirit as a fulfillment of Joel’s prophesy.

(iii) That Jesus Christ was the son of God.

(iv) That God’s power was seen in the miracles/signs/wonders performed by Jesus.

(v) That Jesus has been killed by the Jews because of their wickedness.

(vi) That God raised Jesus back to life.

(vii) Jesus was descendant of David.

(viii) That Jesus Christ ascended to heaven and he is at the right hand of God.

(ix) Jesus is Lord/Christ Messiah.

(x) He called the people to repent their sins so as to be forgiven.

(xi) The disciples were living witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

About 3000 people accepted Jesus Christ and were baptized on this day. This marked the birth of the Christian community.

**Ways in which Peter’s life was transformed on the day of Pentecost**

i. He was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

ii. He spoke in tongues.

iii. He became courageous as his faith was increased.

iv. He preached the word of God.
v. He remembered the scripture of the Old Testament.

vi. He made wise decisions.

vii. He baptized new converts.

viii. He became spokesman of other disciples.

**Peter’s teaching about Jesus in the Pentecost Message.**

1) Jesus was from Nazareth.

2) He had a human nature.

3) He had a divine nature (son of God and savior).

4) He was attested by God in working miracles, signs and wonders.

5) His crucifixion and death was according to God’s plan.

6) God raised him from the dead.

7) He overcame death.

8) His death and resurrection fulfilled the prophecy of David.

9) He is a descendant of David.
QUALITIES OF GOOD LEADERSHIP LEARNT FROM PETER.

i. Boldness and courage.

ii. Eloquence.

iii. Pro-activeness.

iv. Knowledgeable.

v. Defended the disciples /loyalty.

vi. Decisive.

vii. Persuasive A

viii. Faithful. Believed in Jesus Christ the Messiah
PAUL’S TEACHING ON THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1st Corinthians 12:13:14

- Spiritual gifts are special abilities /talents given to Christians by God.
- They are acts of power which come from God.
- They all come from the same source i.e Holy Spirit.
- They are a manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in a believer.
- They are to be used for the services of others and for the building of the church.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit according to 1st Corinthians 12:4-11 are as follows;

(i) Wisdom
(ii) Knowledge.
(iii) Faith
(iv) Healing
(v) Performing miracles.
(vi) Prophesy.
(vii) Distinguishing spirits.
(ix) Interpreting in tongues.

The Christians in Corinth were treating some gifts as more important than the others e.g the gift of speaking in tongues was believed to the greatest and made those who had it more superior than others.

The situation was creating a division among Christians

This prompted Paul to explain the role of each of the gifts. Paul then wrote to explain.

(i) Wisdom
- The gift enables Christians to understand the truth concerning God and plan for human beings.
- It is also important to Christians while making decisions concerning issues affecting the church and the society.

(ii) KNOWLEDGE
- Helps Christians understand issues without necessarily having been taught or experienced.

(iii) Faith
- It’s about the trust Christians have in God. It helps them to face difficult challenges and also perform miracles.

(iv) Healing
- It is the power to heal all forms of sicknesses in the name of Jesus Christ.

(v) Performing Miracles.
- Enables Christians to perform extra-ordinary acts including healing by the power of Jesus Christ name.

(vi) Prophesy
- Ability to receive God’s revelation and convey the message and deliver it to the people.
(vii) **Distinguishing**
- Ability to differentiate between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and those of the evil spirit.

**(viii) Speaking in tongues.**
This is the ability to speak in an unfamiliar language.

**(ix) Interpretation of Tongues.**
This is the ability to understand and interpret an unfamiliar language.

**COMPARISON BETWEEN PROPHESY AND SPEAKING IN TONGUES.**

**1ST Corinthians 14:1-25**

Paul teaches that the gift of prophesy is better than speaking in tongues because:

(i) Those who speak in tongues can’t understand by the audience who can’t interpret the message.

(ii) Those who speak in tongues communicate with God benefiting them.

(iii) Dispense the gift freely.

(iv) Produce the fruit of the holy spirit i.e love, peace & kindness, joy, patience, goodness, faithfulness & gentleness.

(vi) The manifestation of the Holy Spirit should conform to the teaching of the Bible/be in context of Biblical Truth.

(vii) Must be faithful to the authority of Jesus Christ.

(viii) A person who walks by the holy spirit, carousing, fornication, idolatory, licentiousness, strife, impurity, sorcery, enmity, jealousy.

(ix) Lives a victorious life over temptations or works of the flesh.

(x) Do not use the gifts of the Holy Spirit for selfish gains/enrich themselves.
THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Galatians 5:16-26

Paul teaches about other gifts that last i.e. faith, hope and love.

But the greatest is love.

Faith and love are the guiding principles of the new life of Christians.

Those that have faith in Jesus Christ do not need the law of Moses to justify them.

Those that live by the spirit through faith in Jesus Christ will produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit, i.e love, peace, kindness, gentleness, self-control, joy, patience, goodness, faithfulness.
MANIFESTATION OF THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHURCHES TODAY

Galatians 5:16-26

- Praying
- Solving problems decisively.
- Faith healing
- Speaking in tongues.
- Singing and dancing for the Lord.
- Teaching/preaching.
- Giving offertory.
- Prophetic ministry of the church i.e. condemning sins.
- Holding fellowship and bible study.
- Celebration Lord’s supper.
- Bringing new converts to the church.
- Pastoral care and counsel.
- Helping the needy.
- Working together as churches.
- Writing Christian literature.
- Education and giving instructions.
- Confession of sins.

QUESTION 4

i) The Holy Spirit

- The teacher should ensure that sub-topics are well covered and the students read thoroughly the references.
- It is the references that are tested they include:
  a) Jesus’ teaching on the role of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-26, 16:5-15 and Acts 1:7-8)
  b) Peter’s message on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-40)
  c) Paul’s teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12, 13 and 14)
  d) Fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26)
  e) Criteria for discerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:3, Mathew 7:15-20 and Galatians 5:16-26)
- Students should be encouraged to attend church services to see the manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

ii) Unity of Believers

- The teacher should explain the unity of believers symbolized in:
  a) The people of God (1 Ret. 2:9-10)
  b) The Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:1-12)
  c) The vine and the branches (John 15:1-10)
  d) The Bride (Revelation 21:1-17, 2 Corinthians 11:2)
- The student must be urged to read the reference thoroughly
- Students should also be able to explain ways in which unity of believers in the Christian community and the nation is promoted

NB: This is a very easy question to those students who read the references and understanding them but a very difficult one for those who would not read and understand the given references.

Examples

2. Explain what the teaching of Jesus about the vine and branches in John 15:1-10 reveal about the unity of believers (2008)
3. Give reasons why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples after his ascension (2009).
4. State the teachings of saint Paul on the similarities between the church and husband-wife relationship in Ephesians 5:21-32 (2009)
5. Explain ways in which Christians are able to identify those who possess the gifts of the Holy Spirit (2009),
6. State the teachings of Peter concerning the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10)
7. Explain how Peter’s life was transformed on the day of Pentecost (2011)
8. State St. Paul’s teaching on how the gifts of the Holy Spirit should be used in the church (2011).
9. Explain how the unity of believers is expressed in the Body of Christ (2012)
12. Explain how the life of Peter was transformed on the day of Pentecost (2013)
14. Explain ways through which Christians can promote unity among themselves (2010)
15. Explain ways through which kindness as a fruit of the Holy Spirit is abused in Kenya today (2010)
16. Give reasons why some Christians find it difficult to help the sick (2011)

NB: Think of other created situations
PAUL’S TEACHING ON LOVE.

- It is a gift of the Holy Spirit.
- It is the most important gift.
- It is patient and does not let down.
- It is kind.
- It is not envious.
- It is not boastful.
- It is not ill-mannered.
- It is not selfish/generous.
- It is not irritable.
- Does not keep a record of wrongs.
- It is eternal.
HOW THE USE OF THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BROUGHT DISUNITY IN THE CHURCH OF CORINTH.

The people who had gifts of speaking in tongues despised those who didn’t have.

There was competition in speaking in tongues.

There was no interpretation of tongues and hence messages were not understood.

People didn’t show love to one another they used the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

There was disorder/ confusion in worship as people with different gifts tried to outdo one another.

People did not use their gifts for the growth/development of the church.

Gifts i.e prophesy /teaching were looked down upon.
WAYS IN WHICH THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ARE MISUSED/ABUSED IN THE CHURCH TODAY.

- Some Christians pretend to have certain gift of the Holy Spirit i.e healing, speaking in tongues, or false prophecy.
- Some ask for payment/money before healing.
- The gift of prophesy and wisdom have been abused hence leading to false interpretation of the bible.
- Unfaithful Christians impart demonic powers on innocent faithful Christians.
- Some Christians who possess the gift of the Holy spirit develop a sense of pride.
- Some disguise themselves as persons with special powers/gifts with the intention of expel [looting innocent people.
- Some use the gifts to bring a division in the church.
- The gift of speaking in tongue is used without an interpreter and also to attract followers.
- The gift of prophesy is misused when people give false messages.
- The gift of preaching has become a commercial enterprise.
- The gift of knowledge; some use their worldly wisdom to judge others.
UNITY OF BELIEVERS

Introduction: This refers to the oneness of those who have faith in Jesus Christ. The early Christians lived in unity as demonstrated in the following ways:

(i) Prayed together.
(ii) Shared meals.
(iii) Shared property.
(iv) Celebrated the Lord’s super.
(v) They met to receive apostolic messages/instructions.

The New Testament has used several images/analogies to illustrate the unity of believers.

(i) The people of God (1st Peter 2:9-10)

In the New Testament, the people of God are those who follow Jesus Christ and his teachings.

Peter refers to Christians as God’s chosen race, royal priesthood and a holy nation.

Christians have been chosen to proclaim the kingdom of God in the world.

Christians from different background are united with God through Jesus Christ.

Through baptism, Christians are set apart and share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christians have received God’s mercy through repentance.

(ii) The body of Christ (1st Corinthians 12:12-2, Ephesians 4:1-12)

Paul uses the analogy of the human body to demonstrate the unity of believers.

Christians form the many parts of the body of Christ, each with different functions to perform just as the human body does.

The believers are the body of Christ which everyone should work for the total well-being of the church.

Through baptism, believers become members of one body of Christ all empowered by the spirit of God.

The different gifts should be used to enrich the church and glorify God.

Christians share the same rights and privileges as members of one body.

Christians should remain to have the following virtues i.e

- Gentleness
- Patience in order to promote unity.
- Humility.

Christians should be concerned with the welfare of others.

He encourage Christians to live in unity because they are bound by:

(i) One body i.e universal church.
(ii) One spirit, which dwells in the church.
(iii) One Lord, Jesus who is the head of the church.
(iv) One faith in the Lord.

(v) One Baptism.

(vi) One God who is the Father.

(iii) The vine and the branches (John 15:1-10)

- God is the vine dresser/ Jesus is the true vine.
- The followers of Jesus Christ/Christians are the branches.
- The unfaithful Christians are the unfruitful branches which are cut away/destroyed.
- Christians are related to God through Jesus Christ.
- The unfaithful Christians /fruitful branches are pruned so as to produce more fruit.
- For us to continue bearing fruit/doing good stuff if they remain united to Christ.
- Through Jesus Christ, all Christians are joined to one another.
- Christians should rely on God for all providence.
- Love is passed on to the Christians from God though Jesus Christ.
- Christians should keep/observe God’s commandments.

(iv) The Church (Ephesians 5:21-32)

The church refers to the Christian community. The members comprise people drawn from different social and cultural backgrounds who recognize the Lordship.

(i) Paul illustrated the unity of the church using a divine marital relationship

(ii) Just as wives were subject to husbands, Christians should be subject to Jesus their Lord.

(iv) Christ is the head of the church just as husband if the head of the family.

(v) Just as husbands love their wives so did Christ love the church and gave his life for her.

(vi) Just as marriage is supposed to be a permanent union so is the union between Christ and Christians.

(V) The bride (2nd Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 21:1-12)

The metaphor has the following points to note:

(i) Christians are the bride married to Christ.

(ii) Christ is the divine bridegroom who seeks his bride; the Christians to enter into a covenant relationship.

(iii) The marriage would be life-long union where would be neither suffering nor death.

(iv) Christians should prepare themselves to receive Christ who will return for his bride, the church.

(v) During the final establishment of the kingdom, God wil take all believers (bride) to the new home, heaven where they would live in unity and love.

(vi) Christians must obey God and do his will in order to be rewarded eternal life.
WAYS OF PROMOTING UNITY OF BELIEVERS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY TODAY

(i) Preaching love and forgiveness to one another.

(ii) Organizing inter-denominational prayers.

(iii) Reconciling warring parties and encouraging agreements.

(iv) Forming ecumenical movement’s i.e grouping of different churches i.e National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK).

(V) Promotion of Youth movement/groups in schools and other educational e.g. Christian Union (C.U) young Christians Students (Y.C.S)

(vi) Encouraging and promoting dialogue among people in the society.

(vii) Condemning customs and practices which Threaten unity in a society.

(viii) Living exemplary live for other people to copy.

(ix) Promoting the socio-economic welfare of the society through

- Employment Creation
- Provision of social amenities
- providing relief aid
- Providing charitable services

(x) Avoiding actions that may disrupt peace and unity.

(xi) Exposing those intending to cause disunity.

Causes of disunity in the church in Kenya today.

(i) Formation of splinter group.

- In some churches, members of the congregation get divided because some prefer certain leaders to others.

(ii) Misunderstanding of the use of spiritual gifts.

Christians may differ on the cause of spiritual gifts i.e speaking in tongues and performing miracles.

(iii) Discrimination against some members of the church.

- It could be based on economic status and manifestation of spiritual gifts, tribe, race or gender.

(iv) Settling dispute in civil courts.

- Some churches have differences and leadership wrangles to the extent of taking each other to courts of Law. This creates disunity while disputes should be settled within the church.

(V) Misuse the freedom of worship.

Some people have abused this right by breaking away from their mother churches to form splinter groups. Some of them may not be doing so for the purpose of evangelizing but for self interest.

(vi) Administration of Sacrament.

- The attitudes towards sacraments vary from one church to another e.g. Baptism some churches practice it through complete immersion while others through pouring of water on the forehead.
(vii) Differences in the belief of resurrection.

- There are different beliefs of the state of the resurrected/dead and in the manner and nature of the resurrection.
SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS AND THEIR TEACHINGS

Definition of terms:

Prophet: This is a person who speaks and acts on behalf of God. They have been given different titles that illustrate the character and nature of a prophet. They include:

**Man of God.**
- Servant of Yahweh

Watchman’s of God’s word.
- A seer

Man of spirit.
- Nabii

Interpreter of God’s word

Prophets were mediators between God and people.

Prophesy: This is the act/process of delivering the truth as revealed by God.

Is Prophetic utterance which is inspired by the holy spirit.

In the old testament and new testament, prophesy was God’s way of guiding his people to live according to his will and covenant way of life.

Involves predictions of future events.

CATEGORIES OF PROPHETS

(i) **True prophets**
- There are prophets who acted on behalf of God and their messages came to pass/were fulfilled.
- These prophets upheld the covenant way of life.

(ii) **False prophets**
- These were prophets who claimed to speak in Yahweh’s yet their messages were never fulfilled.

(iii) **Major prophets**
- These are prophets whose work or writing is celebrated/detailed given to them by God i.e Isaiah, Daniel, Lamentation, Jeremiah, Ezekiel.

(iv) **Minor Prophets**
- their work is brief/short oracles e.g
  
  | Hosea | Jonah | Hagai |
  | Joel  | Micah | Zephania |
  | Amos  | Nahum | Malachi |
  | Obadiah | Habakuk |

(v) **Canonical Prophets**

These are prophets whose work has been recorded under their names e.g Jeremiah.

(vi) **Non-canonical prophet.**
- These are prophets who were closely related to places of worship

- They assisted priests in their duties.
IMPORTANCE OF PROPHETS

(i) They acted as mediators between God and him.
(ii) They communicated God’s message to the people by revealing his plan.
(iii) Preached practical monotheism/Yahweism
(iv) They used to condemn evils in the society in the effort to restore justice in the society.
(v) They taught people about the nature of God.
(vi) They also anointed Kings (some of them)
(vii) They also acted as conscience of Kings and people in society.
(viii) Some of the prophets acted as the priest e.g Isaiah.
(ix) They foretold and warned people of judgement for their disobedience to God.
(x) They gave hope of restoration to the people if they repented.
(xi) Prophet taught people about the covenant way of life and reminded them of their responsibilities.

Qualities of the Prophets

(i) They heard God’s voice calling them to be his spokes-person through; Dreams, strange object and visions.
(ii) They positively responded to the call with obedience.
(iii) They stood for the covenant way of life.
(iv) They spoke and acted with authority and courage regardless of the consequences.
(v) They condemned all types of evils in the society.
(vi) They had faith in Yahweh.
(vii) They led righteous life.
(viii) They also acted as mediators to the people.
(ix) They challenged the false prophets.
(x) They communicated God’s message to the people sometimes through strange symbolic ways.
(xi) They were prayerful and always sought God’s kindness and revelation.
(xii) They faced rejection and persecution from the people.
(xiii) Their prophecies came to pass.

Characteristics of false prophets.

(i) They challenged the work of the true prophets.
(ii) They gave messages full of untruth to please the kings and ruler of that time.
(iii) They were self-appointed and cheated people and made them believe that they were working for God.
(iv) They challenged the law of the Lord through Moses.
(v) They led people to the worship of other gods and immorality.

(vi) They promised peace while that was not true without demanding for obedience of God’s law.

(vii) They were not guided by Yahweh but by their own wisdom.

(viii) They offered shallow optimism which was devoid of moral conduct.

(ix) They demanded payment for their services.
THE WRITING OF PROPHETIC MESSAGES.

- The messages were written by the prophets themselves.
- The inspired writers put the continuous prose on scrolls into chapters and verses for easy reading and understanding.
- The prophetic messages were written as prophetic saying/poetic passages conveying some teaching, prediction, threat or promise/oracles spoken by either God or by the prophet in the name of God.
- The prophetic message were written as prophetic narratives in the first person where the prophet relates his own experience and mainly his vocation e.g Jerusalem, Isaiah 6.
- The prophetic messages were written as prophetic narratives told in the third person recounting events in the prophet’s life and also touching on the social, political and religious background.
- The prophet’s disciples gathered the writings’ put down oracles, sermons, and prose and poetic materials.
- Some prophets like Jeremiah dictated their messages to their secretaries i.e. Baruch.

CONTENT OF THE MESSAGES

There are generally three different types of messages in the prophetic books.

(i) The prophetic sayings

These are oracles/ prophesy either by God or by the prophet in God’s name.

- Are also regarded as poetic baggage’s conveying some teaching, prediction or a promise, example include: Isaiah 28,29-13-14,Amos 1.

(ii) Narratives in the first person.

- In the narratives, the prophet relates his won experience for example Isaiah who explains his experience of God’s presence in the temple of Jerusalem.

(iii) Narratives in the third person.

These are narratives explaining events in the prophet’s life or the conditions under which he worked.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT.


(ii) Jesus upheld the Law of Moses and argued that he didn’t come to abolish the law but to fulfil it.

(iii) The prophets in the Old Testament condemned insincere worship, similiarly, Jesus condemned outward observances of the law.

(iv) The coming of John the Baptist fulfilled the Old Testament prophesy of a fore runner of the Messiah.

(v) The old testament prophesies about the coming of a Messiah who would bring salvation to Israel is repeated (echoed) by Simeon and Ama, in the temple; during the presentation of Jesus Christ.

(vi) The prophesy of the new covenant found in the Old Testament is inargurated by Jesus.

(vii) The prophesy of the suffering servant of God is fulfilled by Jesus through his passion.

(viii) John the Baptist’s coming brought an end to the Old Testament and the beginning to the New Testament eras, as the greatest of the prophets.

COMPARISON BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN AND OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS.

Similarities.

(i) Both were mediators between God and the People
(ii) Both were called by God to pass messages to the people.

(iii) Both had supernatural powers because they communicated to God through dreams, visions and sometimes trances.

(iv) In both they were people with high integrity, moral standards and obedient to God’s call.

(v) In both cases, some prophets performed the roles of healers and political leaders.

(vi) They both condemned social evils and injustices.

(vii) Both felt some irritable force to carry out God’s message.

(viii) In both cases some prophets were consulted to settle disputes.

(ix) Both were consulted to interpret God’s message.

(x) In both cases, prophesy lead people in religious ceremonies.

(xi) They were both charismatic.

DIFFERENCES

(i) The Old Testament prophets received their messages from God while some traditional African prophets received their messages from spirits and ancestors.

(ii) In some traditional African communities, the prophetic office was hereditary whereas in the Old Testament it wasn’t.

(iii) In traditional African Communities, the prophets concerned with personal, individual and community issues, while in the old testament, the prophets were concerned with issues affecting the nation and even international.

(iv) The old testament prophets were mostly rejected by their own people whereas the Traditional African Prophets were liked and respected.

(v) The prophesies of the Old Testament prophets were written down while that of the Traditional African prophets were preserved orally.
BACKGROUND OF AMOS

POLITICAL BACKGROUNDS:

2 KINGS 14:23-29

- Amos was a herdsman and was called to be God’s prophet during the reign of King Jeroboam II in Israel (78c BC to 746BC) and King Uzziah in Judah (799 BC to 740BC).
- He prophesied at a time when there was political stability and peace. The political rulers were bribed by the rich to let them exploit the poor. The political structure did not serve the poor majority.
- There was widespread corruption. The political rulers were bribed by the rich to let them exploit the poor. The legal structure did not serve the poor majority.
- The law courts as cases were judged to favour the rich. The poor were unfairly charged.
- The religious leaders did not play any political role instead of advising the rulers they protected them.

Socio-economic background.

- Majority of the people were peasant who practiced subsistence farming.
- There was plantation farming in large vineyards owned by rich.
- Local trade existed and international trade between Israel and the neighbouring countries.
- International trade led to the emergence of rich merchants who dominated social structure and the economies.
- The poor were exploited as their farm produce was brought out for low prices during the International trade.
- The traders used false scales that allowed them to exploit the poor.
- Social classes emerged with the gap widening between the rich and the poor.
- The rich lived in Samaria in luxury compared to the poor who lived in the countryside.
- The poor who could not pay their debts, were enslaved and evicted from their land. Their property was also confiscated by force. Some became squatters in their own land.
- There was sexual immorality in the form of temple prostitution, where a man and his son could have sexual relations with the same woman.
- There was idol worship which involved worship of several gods.
- There was hypocrisy in the religious careers where despite preserving elaborate religious practices such as giving tithes and offering sacrifices, people did not care about the poor.
- At this time there were several false prophets and priests who were trained on what to prophesy. They were paid by the Kings to tell them what they wanted to hear. There were very few true prophets and they were mistreated.
- Instead of the religious leaders protecting the poor by condemning evils, they kept quiet.
THE CALL OF AMOS

- Amos was a shepherd from a village of Tekoa in Judah.
- He also tended sycamore trees.
- The call of Amos in 755BC years before the earthquake was in the form of a vision.
- Amos was not trained or professional prophet like others who existed during his time.
- Amos responded to God's call in faith and obedience.
- God sent Amos to go and proclaim his message to the people of Israel (Northern Kingdom). He preached at the shrine in Bethel which was the centre of worship for Kings and the people of Northern Kingdom.
- Amos denounced:

  (i) Public worship in Bethel because it was false.

(ii) Condemned social and economic injustice committed by a few land owners who evicted the poor.

(iii) Idolatry and Syncretism.

- As a result of these evils, Amos pronounced severe punishment from God on both the King and the nation of Israel. He said that King Jeroboam II would die by the sword and the nation of Israel would be sent to exile in Syrian.
- Amos preaching about God’s judgment on Israel and the King led to a sharp confrontation between him and Amaziah, the high priest. Amos 7:12-13
- He felt that Amos was interfering with the established order and was inciting the people against King.
- He sent a message to Amos ordering him to leave Israel and go back to Judah his birth place (Amos 7:12-13)
- The prophet responded to Amasiah’s by stating that he was not professional prophet, neither was he the son of one. He was a shepherd and a tender of sycamore trees and that God had called and commanded him to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom.
- God had decided to use a shepherd because true prophets could not be found in Israel. They had all gone astray and failed to return the people to the covenant way of life.
- The call of Amos who was a person shows that God can use anybody regardless of their status to carry out his will.
THE VISION OF AMOS.

(Amos 7:1-9 8:1-3,9:1-4

What is a vision?

- Refers to power of seeing.
- Also refers to the ability to plan the future with wisdom.
- From religious view, a vision is an ecstatic experience and a medium of revelation.
- A vision is experienced powerfully in the imagination of the mind concerning the future.
- God revealed himself to the prophets of Israel in the form of visions in which he communicated his divine plan for the people of Israel.
- A vision takes place when a person is awake while a dream occurs during sleep.

Prophet Amos received five Visions . All the five visions were linked to his call.

1. The vision of the Locusts. (Amos 7:1-3)

- Amos saw a swarm of locusts sent by God destroying all the crops and greenery in the land of Israel.
- The visions refers to the disaster which God was going to send to the Israel.
- Amos intervened and pleaded with God to forgive Israel and God forgave them (Amos 7:2-3)

2. The vision of fire (Amos 7:4-6)

- God showed Amos a supernatural fire consuming all the creation on earth.
- Amos again pleaded for the people and God spread them (Amos 7:4-6)

3. The vision of the plumb line (Amos 7:7-9)

- A plumbline is a cord with a weight attached to one end by building constructors to test whether a wall is straight or not during construction.
- Amos saw crooked wall being checked with plumb line by God. Just like a crooked wall must be destroyed, God was going to punish Israel by destroying high places of worship and Jeroboam II Kingdom.
- In the vision Amos was silent while God’s judgement on Israel had remained pronounced. This meant that punishment is inevitable because Israel had remained obstinate in her sins. Single had refused to repent and avert God’s punishment.

4. The vision of a basket of summer fruits (Amos 8:1-3)

- Amos was shown a basket full of ripe summer fruits at the end of the fruit harvest.
- Yahweh told Israel that Israel was ripe for destruction.
- Just as one waits for time to harvest fruits, God had waited for the Israelites to repent
- Since they had not, time had come for them to be punished. God’s judgment would not be delayed and longer.
- Amos was silent and did not plead for God’s mercy.
- Punishment was therefore inevitable.

5. The vision of the destruction of the Altar. (Amos 9:1-4)

- Amos saw the Lord standing by the Altar.
- God commanding an angel to strike the altar and destroy it completely.
- All the worshippers were being struck down.
- This meant that God would destroy everyone. No one would escape for God would follow them into their hiding until they were destroyed.

THE TEACHING OF THE PROPHET AMOS.

The following are the major teachings that prophet Amos addressed:
i. Social justice and responsibility.

ii. Judgment against Israel and other nations (punishment and repentance).

iii. Israel’s election.

iv. The day of the Lord.

v. The remnant and restoration.

vi. Hypocritical religion in Israel.


Social Justice - Refers to fair dealings in our interaction with people

- showing concern for the needs of others.

Responsibility: - Means being accountable for our actions towards others.

- Our actions affect the people we interact with.

- God gave the Israelites the law to guide them in their relationship with him and their fellow human beings.

- They were to realize that every person was created in God’s image and is equal in his eyes. No Israelite was to despise or oppress his or her neighbor.

- Amos condemned social injustice that existed in Israel. These social injustices were committed by a cross-section of the powerful people in Israel.

These evils that Amos condemned include:

1. Slavery. Amos 2:6,4:1

The righteous, the needy and the afflicted were subdued by the rich and made slaves.

The poor got into debt which they could not repay the merchants and landowners therefore made them work like slaves and treated them harshly. (Amos 2:6) In doing so they were breaking God’s law which guided them on how to treat their fellow Israelites. The law of Moses did not bring into the sanctuary of Yahweh. This was a sign of unfaithfulness to Yahweh.

2. Sexual immorality and temple prostitution/cultic prostitution. Amos 2:7-8

- A father and a son sharing the same temple prostitution or a servant taken as a concubine Amos 2:7b

- Temple prostitution was forbidden among the Israelites by Yahweh (Deut 23:17). It was a grave sin for the Israelites to copy the pagan practice of their neighboring nations and bring into the sanctuary of Yahweh. This was a sign of unfaithfulness to Yahweh.

3. Breaking God’s Law on garment secure red as pledges.

- God gave the Israelites a law which placed restrictions to items that were to be given out to the creditor as a guarantee for goods borrowed e.g.

- Millstone were not to be taken since they were needed for grinding grain thus essential to sustain life (Deut 24:6)

- The garment of a poor man was not to be taken in pledge overnight. (Deut 24:10-13)

- The widows was not to be taken in pledge at all (Deut 24:17) If taken for debt, they were to be returned to the debtor at sunset.

Yet Amos observed that the creditors failed to return the garments as per the law. Instead they used them openly and shamelessly.
4. Robbery and Violence Amos 5:10

Great oppression and disorder was taking place in the capital city of Samaria e.g

- Panic
- Disintegration of the rule of law.
- Violence
- Oppression of the poor.
- The rich had acquired a lot of wealth through unfair means such as exploiting the poor through threats and actual violence against them.

They no longer bothered to do what was right and just (Amos 3:10) For this reason, God was going to punish Israel by sending a foreign nation to destroy her.

5. Bribery and corruption. Amos 5:7,10:1

- Prophet Amos observed the kind of legal injustices that were taking place in the law courts in Israel.
- Law courts are places where one expects to find justice.
- In Israel the elders were unjust and corrupt.
- They took bribes and grew from heavy fines which they imposed on the innocent.
- It was the duty of these elders to hear the cases of the needy without payments. However they demanded the bribes from them and those who could not offer bribes had no chance of having their cases heard.
- The elders hated any righteous judge who condemned their injustice Amos 5:7,10-15
- They were breaking the covenant law that condemned bribery (Ex 23:8)


- Amos condemned the rich and the selfish women of Samaria for oppressing the poor and drinking too much wine. He compared them to the “cows of Bashan” (a breed of cattle famous for being fat and good for beef because of being well fed in the fertile valley of Bashan).
- Amos accused this rich men of Samaria. They insisted that they husbands continually supplied them with intoxicating drinks. In so doing it was possible for these husbands who could not meet their demands to turn dishonest means in order to meet them.

7. Self-indulgence and false sense of security Amos 6:1-8

Amos attacked on false confidence of the powerful leaders of Israel who sat “at ease” in their homes and felt secure.

They expected the common people to come to them for help or advice.

Amos condemned the leaders who thought that God could not punish them because they were the chosen people of God. They also thought that Samaria, the capital city, could not be attacked from outside because it had strong walls built around it.

Whoever Amos warned that God’s punishment would be upon the city and it would be destroyed (Amos 6:1-8)

8. Cheating in Business.

- Amos condemned cheating in business among the traders in Israel.
- The wealthy merchants hurried through the religious festivals so that they could get back to their business.
- They were impatient because of the interruption caused by the monthly feast of new moon and weekly observance of the Sabbath. (Amos 5:8)
- The business people tampered with the standards weighing scale so that customers get less than what they paid for.
- They over changed the prices of the good they sold.
NB: This practice was a clear violation of the covenant law that advised the business people not to be dishonest in their business (Lev. 1:35-36).

Merchants sold goods of low quality to the poor. They mixed good and bad grains together with chaff and then sold it at exorbitant prices in order to make profits.

NB: By selling goods unfit for human consumption, the merchants did not regard the poor's as human beings.

The poor people who got into debt were sold as slaves even as little as the price of a pair of scandals.

This merchants charged high interest rates on the wheat that they sold. They broke the Law of Moses that forbade the Israelites to charge any interest.

9. Those who spoke the truth were hated.

10. The Israelites indulged in wine drinking and forced even those not supposed to drink, to do so.

**How the church is promoting social justice in Kenya today.**

i. Providing education to the public on social justice/civic education.

ii. By respecting and following the laws of the country as laid down by the government.

iii. By providing shelter to the needy.

iv. It preaches on social justice.

v. The church prayers for the social justice in the country.

vi. The church gives food and clothing to the affected/almos/money.

vii. It advises the government on the need for the practice of justice in the society.

viii. The church is preaching against/condemns/points out social injustice in the society.

**Ways in which the rich oppressed the poor during time of Amos.**

i. Merchants robbed the poor by over charging them.

ii. Selling the poor for the piece of silver or pair of shoes showing that they were worthless.

iii. The rich owed the land from the poor.

iv. The rich cheating the poor in business deals by using false scales.

v. Selling the goods to the poor that were unfit for human consumption.

vi. Making the poor work on land owned by the rich for every little pay.

vii. Selling the poor into slavery for payment of debts to the rich.

viii. Denying the poor justice in law courts because they could not bribe judges.

ix. Cases taken to court by the poor were being thrown out.

x. The poor being prosecuted for challenging injustice and speaking the truth.

xi. Temple prostitutes being drawn from the poor families.

xii. The poor being robbed of their food and belongings

**Amos**

- Cover all the sub-topics outlined in the syllabus exhaustively
Ensure the students read all the references of the sub-topics

Relate the relevance of Amos to Christians today.

Examples

1. State the differences between prophets in the O.T. and T.A.C (2008)
2. State the teaching of prophet Amos on social justice and responsibility (2008)
5. Explain the relevance of prophet Amos teaching on election of Israel to Christians in Kenya today (2009)
6. Outline the characteristics of the prophets in O.T. (2010)
7. State ways in which the rich oppressed the poor during the times of prophet Amos (2010)
8. Describe the call of Amos to become a prophet in Israel (2011)
9. Outline the 5 visions of prophet Amos (2011)
10. Give the reasons why Amos was against the worship of God in Israel (2012)
11. State ways in which God would punish Israel for her evils according to prophet Amos (2012)
12. Outline the characteristics of false prophets in O.T. (2013)
13. State the teaching of prophet Amos on Israel’s election (2013)
15. Give reasons why Christians find it difficult to help the needy in Kenya today (2010)
16. Explain how the church punishes errant members (2012)
17. Outline the factors that hinders Christians from practicing their faith in God. (2013)

NB: Think of many other created situations.
HYPOCRITICAL RELIGION IN ISRAEL

Amos 4:4-5;5:4-5;21-27

Hypocrisy is pretending to have admirable principles, beliefs or moral standards.
A person who pretends so is a hypocrite.

Amos concentrated on what true and false religion was. He condemned the following practices.

1. Empty Sacrifices. Amos 4:4-5

Bethel and Gallgal were the most important places of worship in the Northern Kingdom. Many of the Israelites thought that by going to these high places and making elaborate offerings and sacrifices (to show off) They would please God. For Amos true worship of God would mean living a life in accordance with God’s law and offering him the true worship of praise and obedience.

2. Insincere worship Amos 5:4-15

The Israelites engaged themselves in a lot of religious rites at the temple of Bethel. However; majority of the people who took part in the rites were unjust, corrupt and always oppressed the poor. As result God was s going to punish them by exiling them because they did not live according to the covenant way of life.

3. Syncretism. This is the act of uniting or reconciling diverse practices or ideas especially in religion. During the reign of King Jeroboam II, the Israelites combined the worship of Yahweh and idolatry. Owing to this, prophet Amos warned the Israelites that they would fall and never rise again.

4. Idolatry. This the worship of human made gods and goddesses. Idols can be made in the form of images, symbols, and objects. Due to the Israeliite adoption of idolatry, God was going to punish them. They would be taken into exile (Amos 5:26-27)

The relevance of the teaching of Amos against hypocritical/religion for Christians

Christians should face the danger of giving more importance to outward religious practices than to inward piety and a life of obedience to God’s will.

1. Worshipping in humility. Amos 4:13 .He is the creator of heavens and earth and is able to read peoples hearts. If they realize his fact then they will not think to highly of themselves nor of their prayers and offerings. Instead concentrate on what God offers in their worship –the word of God.

2. The Christians way of worship God should be directly related to their way of life. Religion cannot be divorced from life. Christians should not think of worship as feasts. Holy days and visiting places of worship.

3. All Christians worship God in the name of Jesus Christ. Christians should study the Bible more in order to understand how to live according to the teaching of Jesus which stresses the worship of God in truth and spirit.

4. Christians learn that Worship is achieved when justice and righteousness are upheld they learn to fight insincerity in the churches.

5. Christians learn to deny themselves material possession, power and money in order to help the less fortunate.

6. Church leaders are encouraged to be at the force in fighting h hypocrisy in the church.

7. Any external form of worship a Christian engages in should be a reflection of the inner heart/self.

8. The private life of a Christian should match his/her public life. They should reflect each other.

9. The worship is achieved when justice and righteousness is upheld.

10. Christians should fight insincerity in churches/fight hypocrisy in churches.
Evils that Amos could have condemned in Kenya today

i. Oppression of the poor by the rich.

ii. Cheating in business.

iii. Drunkenness.

iv. Pride in material possessions.

v. Corruption and bribery.

vi. Sexual immorality.

vii. Profaning the name of God.

viii. Idolatry.
JUDGEMENT AGAINST ISRAEL AND OTHER NATIONS

- Judgment to other nations.
- Judgment means making decisions on certain issues after careful consideration.
- In the history of Israel, God found and punished Israel for going against the covenant way of life.
- In Old Testament the word judgment is used to refer to the punishment that God would subject individuals and whole nations with a view to performing them.
- Punishment was always as a result of people committing certain evils, both social and religious.
- Punishment - The act of making a person suffer because of a crime one has committed.
- Repentance - Being remorseful/sorry for the wrongs one has committed.
- Amos prophesied God judgment on Israel and other nations. This shows that God is universal.
- The nations referred to were Israel’s neighbors and were her enemies.

Four…… I will not revoke the punishment…………, to indicate indefinite quality of the sins committed (Amos 1:6)
God’s judgment is pronounced against Damascus which was the capital city of Syria or Aram.

The people of Syria were very wicked and committed the following evils:

1. They were accused of excessive cruelty in times of war.

2. They brutally murdered their prisoners of war by running over them with sledges which had iron teeth. This was a very harsh treatment to be meted out to fellow human beings.

3. Syria had ill-treated the pregnant women of Gilead during their war with Israel. They had committed a war crime because expectant mothers were not supposed to be attacked by enemy during war.

The Syrian soldiers failed to show any compassion to such prisoners and Syria was to face God’s punishment.

**Punishment**

1. God would send divine fire upon them.

2. God would send them to exile to Kir.
TYRE (PHOENICA) (AMOS 1:9-10)

Crime
- The King of Tyre sold Israelites to Edom as slaves, hence breaking the covenant of brotherhood. This pact had been sealed by Tyre and Israel for political purposes. The marriage between Ahab and Jezebel, prince of Tyre.

Punishment
- God would send fire to destroy Tyre.

EDOM
AMOS 1:11-12
Edom had plundered Jerusalem, killed citizens and carried some into slavery (Obadiah 1:10-13). Theedomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob’s brother and were therefore Israelites Kinsfolk. They were not supposed to wage war against the Israelites.

PUNISHMENT.
- God was going to destroy the entire nation of Edom by fire.

MOAB
Crime
The people of Moab had fight the nation of Edom. Therefore raided the royal graves and burnt the bones of the dead kings. This was meat to signify the complete destruction of the royal family. It was believed that when the bones of the dead are burnt their spirits are destroyed as well.

This was rebellion against the sovereign Lord of the universe. It was an assault against God’s image in human beings.

Punishment
1. The Kings and princes would be exiled.
2. God would destroy them divine fire.

AMMON (AMOS 1:13-15)
- The Amorites were cruel to the pregnant women of Gilead during war with Israel.
- attacked and killed their neighbors in Gilead brutally.

Punishment
1. God would send the divine fire to destroy the city wall.
2. The King, his princess and his subjects would be sent to exile.

ISRAEL AND JUDAH
Amos 2:4-16,3:12
- After Yahweh passed judgment over the nations surrounding Israel, he then turned to Judah and Israel.
- Being God’s chosen people the Israelites least expected that they would be judged and punished like the other nations.
- Nevertheless, because of the sins committed during the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel would be judged and punished as well.
God wanted to show the Israelites that all nations are the same to him and he makes moral claims on all of the irrespective of race, religion in nationality.

Amos pronounced judgment on the people of Israel because of the social injustices and religious sins they had committed. The people of God had broken their covenant with God. The sins of Israel included:

- They practiced idolatry which annoyed God.
- They practiced insincere religion based on the external observances at the expense of the inner piety.
- Sexual immorality was rampant especially at the temple.
- The rich sold the poor to slavery.
- The rich lived luxurious life at the expense of the poor.
- There was cheating in business where the poor were exploited.
- There was robbery with violence.
- There was bribery and corruption in the courts of law.
- Political leaders put their trust in alliances with other than with God.
- They had pride caused by self – sense of security.

NB: Because of their special relationship with God, Israel would get a heavier punishment than the other nations.

1. Before Amos pronounced God judgment on Israel, he reminded the people of Israel of the events of their sacred history. Yahweh had brought them out of the land of Egypt.
2. He guided them in the wilderness.
3. He enabled them to conquer and possess the Promised Land and
4. Had raised up prophets and Nazarenes to keep his people faithful to their God. Amos 2:1-11

Punishment for Israel and Judah

God was going to punish Israel and Judah in the following ways:

God was going to use Assyrians to attack and destroy the market places where public assemblies were held.

-Even the rural areas would not be spared (farmers would share the sorrow)

There would be wailing and cries of anguish throughout the cities and the fields so many would be dead such that there would be no professional mourners to wail.

2. Attack by a pestilence (epidemic) Amos 6:9-10

Those who would escape the destroying crimes of Assyria would be struck by a plague in which only a single person would survive when infected. Even this survival would be haunted by silence. Amos 6:9-10

3. Earthquake Amos 4:11,6:11

-God would use an earthquake to destroy the houses of both the rich and the poor.

The relevance of Amos’ message on judgment for Christians

1. God is universal and expects his people to be morally and spiritually upright by obeying his commandments. Leaders in every nation are expected to recognize the supremacy of God. They are not above the law of God.
2. The behavior of God’s people should match their religious piety e.g. Christians should visit the sick, the orphans and the widows.
3. Evil will be judged and eventually be destroyed. Christians are reminded to shun evil and live according to God’s will. When they sin they should repent and seek forgiveness in order to escape God’s judgment.
4. The exiles in Assyria and Babylon were in hopeless situation and no hope for future. Christians today may find themselves in helpless and hopeless situations such as civil wars, famine, displacement and violence. They should face such situations with courage remembering God is in control of their lives.
5. Today we have religious leaders and people who claim to be Christians yet take part in evils. In private they do things which are contrary to God’s law. God will definitely punish such people for they are hypocrites.

www.arena.co.ke
6. Some people today perform religious duties to enrich themselves and not to serve God. They mislead Christians and God will hold them responsible for the actions.
7. God hates sin. He condemns the Israelites and other nations for being sinful.
**REMITTANCE AND HOPE**

**Amos 5:14-15, 9:11-15**

- Although Amos pronounced judgment and punishment to the people of Israel, he gave them a message of encouragement to the people of Israel by inviting them to repent their sins. (Amos 5:14-15).
- God does not want the death of a wicked person but wants a person to change and live. Amos predicted a glorious future for Israel after exile. The people of Israel would return to their homeland after the period of exile. It would be a time of ideal prosperity for God’s people. Amos 5:14-15, 9:11-15.

The following is the message of hope Prophet Amos gave to Israel if they turned to God:

i. Both Israel and Judah will be reunited.
ii. Israel will defeat her enemies.
iii. The towns will be rebuilt.
iv. A descendant of King David will rule God’s people.
v. Those in exile will be brought home.
vi. Their farms shall be productive.
vii. The people of Israel will have a close relationship with God.
viii. The people will settle in the Promised Land permanently.
ix. All would not perish during punishment. There would be restoration of a remnant.

Why Christians repent their sins

i. It is obedience to Christ’s teachings.
ii. So as to lead holy lives.
iii. To be a good example to others.
iv. To be able to prepare for the kingdom of God.
v. For their faith to be strengthened.
vi. In order to receive God’s blessings.

vii. To renew their relationship with God.
ISRAEL’S ELECTION

Amos 2:9-11, 3:1-9:7

- Israel’s election refers to the act where God chose the Israelites out of the entire humankind to fulfill his purpose for the human race.
- God chose the Israelites, Abraham’s descendants and made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai.
- If they obeyed God’s commandments, they would be His people and He would be their God.
- Israel’s election was due to Yahweh’s love for her forefathers and not because she merited it.
- They were a holy nation and had the obligation and responsibility of recognizing only Yahweh as God, by keeping his commandments.
- Failure to meet this responsibility would bring a more severe punishment on Israel.
- The Israelites misunderstood the concept of divine election and became proud and had unfounded assurance in Yahweh’s protection.
- God could have chosen any nation for his self-revelation.
- God is active in the history of the nations even though they are not aware that he leads and judges them. He is the God of all nations.
- Israelites were called to serve Yahweh rather than to manipulate him to serve them.

The relevance of the teachings of Amos on election for Christians

- Christians are the people of God, the new Israel. ”A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God’s own people”(1 peter 2:9)
- They are chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God.
- They should not presume on God’s election as a guarantee of getting into the kingdom of God like the Israelites during Amos’ time did.
- They should understand that they have entered into a special covenant relationship with God through his son Jesus Christ.
- As disciple of Jesus they should implement Jesus commands through teaching, healing and doing other works.
THE DAY OF THE LORD

Amos 5:18-20, 8:7-13

- The concept of the day of the lord originated from Israel’s political suffering. To them it was a day when God would intervene and restore them back to the lost glory.
- The Israelites were confident that the day of the lord would be:
  - A day of Israel’s victory against their enemies.
  - A day of rejoicing for all Israelites
  - Israel would be exalted.
  - Establishment of God’s rule among his chosen race
  - Prosperity for Israel.
  - When justice would prevail and wickedness defeated.
  - A day of light and brightness.

However, Amos reversed the popular belief about the day of the lord.

He declared that it would be a day of:

1. Darkness and not light—Darkness is used to stand for the doom. It would be a day of the suffering for the people of Israel and no one would escape. Amos compared what the Israel would experience with a man who runs away from a lion only to meet a bear. He manages to escape from the bear and runs to his house rests his hand on the wall out of exhaustion and relief, but again meets a poisonous snake that bites him (Amos 5:18-20)

2. It would be a day of terror against the rich landowners and rulers who had developed their economic and political powers.

These people had continued to live in excessive luxury at the expense of the poor and yet held false belief that nothing evil would befall them. (Amos 8:7-13)

3. It would be accompanied by cosmic signs such as eclipses. The sun would go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. (Amos 8:7-13)

4. God would sent an earthquake throughout the land of Israel. There would be mourning, wailing and weeping everywhere over their ruined farms and buildings by the earthquake. Many people would die and the loses of life would be so widespread that every family would grieve and every home would observe rites of mourning e.g. God would cause everyone to:
  - Wear sackcloth as a sign of mourning.
  - Shave their heads as a sign of sorrow.
  - The hymns of joy would turn into songs of mourning.

The Israelites would feel the intensity of the grief, which compared to the grief of losing an only son in the family.

5. It will be a day of famine and drought when they would hunger for the word of God.

6. It would be a day of God’s severe judgment on their Israel’s sins.

The relevance of Amos’ Teaching on the day of the Lord for Christians

1. According to Christians the day of the Lord is the second coming of Christ, Parousia, when Jesus is expected to come back at the end of time. He will come back to Lord and judge Christians belief that his world will come to an end.

2. Christians should prepare for the “Day of the Jesus Christ”. They should await, except and hope for it.

3. No one knows the exact day and time when Jesus will come back. Therefore Christians are expected to be ready at all times.

4. On that day everyone will give an account of his or her actions in the light of our Lord’s teaching.

5. It will be a day of judgment.

6. Each person should prepare for this day by living an upright life and establishing a good relationship with God.
THE REMNANT AND RESTORATION

Amos 9:8-15

- The word remnant refers to a small number that survives destruction.
- In the teaching of the prophets, the term “remnant” is used to refer to the small number of the faithful Israelites who would survive God’s punishment.
- Although Amos pronounced destruction on Israel due to their sins, he, however, felt there was some hope for those who would sincerely repent and turn to God.
- Amos announced that not all the descendants of Jacob would perish but only the sinners (Amos 9:8).
- God would sieve the house of Israel among all the nation the way a person shakes a sieve that holds grain while the chaff is blown away (Amos 9:9).
- The grain represents the faithful Israelites while the chaff represents sinners.
- Through the faithful remnant, the promises of God would be fulfilled and blessings would come to the nations. (Amos 9:14)
- Amos gave a message of hope, not all would perish but the remnant would be restored in the following ways.
  1. There would be reunion of the kingdom of David.
  2. Israel would conquer their enemies.
  3. There would be prosperity in agriculture. Vs. 14.
  4. The exiles would be restored back to their land.
  5. The cities would be rebuilt. Vs. 14
  6. They would settle in the Promised Land permanently vs. 15.
  7. A descendant of King David would rule Israel forever. Vs. 11
  8. All nations would recognize the supremacy of God.
  9. There would be a close relationship between God and his people.

The Relevance of Amos’ Teaching on the remnant for Christians

1. For Christians, the remnant is those who have turned to Christ through the grace of God. (Rom. 11:5).
2. Amos’ teaching on the remnant gives Christians hope that only unrepentant sinners will perish but the righteous will be rewarded by God with eternal life.
3. God does not rejoice in the death of a sinner but he would like him or her to change and return to him.
4. God always preserves a faithful remnant through whom he fulfills his promises to humankind.
5. Christians are the remnant through whom God fulfills his purposes for the world.
6. In time when most people are inclined to do wrong things, Christians should always stand for the truth and do the right things.
BACKGROUND TO PROPHET JEREMIAH

- Jeremiah was called by God when the kingdom of Judah was politically unstable.
- Socially there was moral decay as the people of Judah did not observe the laws of the covenant.
- Religiously the people had taken God’s worship for granted and were not sincere in worship.

(a) Political background

Jeremiah prophesied for a period of 40 years during the reigns of 5 kings of Judah from 626-587 BC. These kings were:

- Josiah 639-609 BCE
- Jehoahaz for 3 months in 609 BCE
- Jehoachim 609-597 BCE.
- Jehoachin for 3 months in 597 BCE.
- Zedekiah 597-587 BCE (Josiah’s youngest son).
- Jeremiah began his ministry in the 13th year of king Josiah in 626 BC. At this time Assyria was a super power in the region. They had conquered the Northern Kingdom in 721 BC and remained a threat to Judah.
- 14 years later after he began his prophecy, the Assyrian empire finally collapsed when Nineveh the capital city was destroyed by the Babylonians.
- In 609 BC Judah fought Egypt; Josiah was killed when an Egyptian army marched through Judah. His son Jehoahaz ruled for three months as a puppet of the Egyptians.
- He had been installed by the Egyptian king for the purpose of collecting taxes on behalf of the Egyptians. However he did not meet the Egyptians expectations and was therefore replaced by his brother Jehoiakim.
- For several years, Judah was controlled by Egypt for Egypt was gaining greater power in the Middle East.
- In 605 BC, Egypt was defeated by Babylon which was under king Nebuchadnezzar. Consequently Judah came under Babylon.
- In 597 BC Babylon invaded Judah and destroyed her in 587 BC.
- Jeremiah prophesied during this time of political instability due to weak rulers.
- He went on with his prophecy even after the destruction of Judah and the temple and during the exile period.
- Jeremiah was the last of the Major Prophets in Judah before the destruction of Judah (Southern Kingdom) by Babylonians.
- In 587 BC the city of Jerusalem was destroyed thus bringing the end to the kingdom of Judah.
- Judah experienced political instability because of not heeding Jeremiah’s warning against political alliances with foreign nations.

Social background

- Jeremiah found that the people of Judah had forgotten the covenant way of life.
- They did not live as brothers and sisters as stipulated in the Mosaic Law.
- The people were morally corrupt and this promoted idolatry.
- Fifty years later, Jeremiah noted that the situation had become worse.
- Jeremiah identified the following social evils:
  - Orphans, widows and the innocent were oppressed and denied their rights.
  - People used dishonest means of acquiring wealth.
  - They committed adultery.
  - They murdered innocent people.
  - They stole and told lies e.g. priests and false prophets cheated people that all was well when it was not the case, this misleading them.
  - Rulers had failed to lead the people to the covenant way of life and therefore led them astray.
  - Sexual immorality was rampant.
  - Bribery and corruption was widely practiced especially in the law courts.

Religious background

During the time of Jeremiah religious situation in Judah had deteriorated e.g.
1. The worship of idols was widespread. Idols were found everywhere including in the temple of Jerusalem. The people of Judah were influenced by their neighboring countries who worshipped idols like: Baal, Asherah, Molech, Chemish and the sun and moon gods.
   - Some kings like Manasseh and Solomon married foreign wives and instituted idol worship as an official religion.
   - Idol worship continued until the time of King Josiah who introduced religious reforms in Judah. These reforms were supported by Jeremiah.
   - Josiah’s reforms did not succeed in changing the hearts of the people.
   - They stopped worshipping Canaanite gods in public but continued to worship them in private. The people of Judah continued to worship Yahweh alongside pagan gods.

2. They practiced religious hypocrisy by stressing on outward observances like sacrifices.
3. The people offered human sacrifices which was an abuse to the sacredness of life.
4. There were false prophets who preached peace when there was no peace.
5. Divination and magic were practiced.
6. Worship was centered in the temple of Jerusalem.
7. King Josiah’s attempt to carry out reforms had failed.
PERSONAL LIFE AND THE CALLOF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah 1

Personal life of Jeremiah

Jeremiah was born in a small village of Anathoth near Jerusalem.

Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, descended from a priestly family but he was not a priest.

- He had deep knowledge of the history, Law of Moses and the teachings of earlier prophets.
- He was very patriotic to his people whom he did not want to suffer God’s punishment.
- He was called by God to be a prophet while he was still a young man.
- He was commanded by God not to marry or participate in social functions.
- His message was mainly on the restoration of the covenant way of life through repentance of sins.
- Jeremiah suffered rejection and opposition from his people.
- After the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile, Jeremiah and a few Jews fled to Egypt for refuge.
- Jeremiah had a scribe called Baruch who recorded his teachings and prophecies on the scroll.
- In his prophetic ministry he faced stiff opposition from his people.
- He was persecuted, imprisoned and even abducted.
- Despite these difficulties he persevered with his prophetic task.
- God encouraged and gave him strength to face the challenges until the 11th year of the reign of King Zedekiah when the people of Jerusalem were taken to exile.
- He preached against evils in society and prophesied about the coming punishment.
- His message also contained hope and the future restoration of people of Judah after exile.
- When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 587 BCE, Jeremiah remained in Palestine but later fled to Egypt, Jeremiah probably died in Egypt.

The call of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1

- Jeremiah received his call as a young man.
- Jeremiah’s call is presented in the form of a dialogue.
- God told Jeremiah that he had appointed him as a prophet to the nations before he was born. (Jer. 1:5).
- Jeremiah was reluctant/hesitant and said he did not know how to speak because he was young.
- He was forewarned about the hostility he would encounter in his prophetic mission.
- However, God told him not to fear for he would be with him to protect him. Vs. 8.
- God touched Jeremiah’s mouth and put words in him. Vs. 9.
- God was the source of the message Jeremiah was to deliver.

This message was:
“To uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Jer. 1:10”

- From these words God would pass judgment on the nation of Judah and other nations.
- The judgment would come to the people of Judah because of their unfaithfulness.
- There was also hope and restoration of the people of Judah who would be exiled.
- During his call, Jeremiah saw two visions:

1. A branch of an almond tree Vs 11-12.
   - The almond tree was bare.
   - The tree would produce leaves when the weather changed.
   - The tree was “watching” for the time it would put forth its buds and leaves.
   - In the same way God would be watching to see the fulfillment of the messages that he would give his prophet.

2. A pot boiling facing away from the North and it was vs. 13 about to tip over towards Judah.
   - This meant that God would use a nation from the North to bring judgment on the people of Judah because of their wickedness.
   - They had abandoned Yahweh and worshipped idols. They offered sacrifices to them vs. 16.
   - Everybody including the kings, the priests’ court officials and ordinary people had sinned against Yahweh vs. 18.
Jeremiah was to face opposition from Judah’s kings, priests and kinsmen. However, God told him not to be afraid because he was going to give him strength to resist those who opposed him and protection vs. 19.

God promised to make him like a “fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall”. (6:19).

- With this divine assurance, Jeremiah took up the task he was given and began his prophetic ministry as God’s spokesman.

**Jeremiah’s response to God’s call**

- He was hesitant as he did not know how to speak.
- He was afraid.
- He was not ready.
- He felt immature because he was young.
- He had a dialogue with God.
- He obeyed and did what God told him to do.
THE EVILS ADDRESSED BY PROPHET JEREMIAH

During this time of Jeremiah the people of Judah committed many social and religious evils i.e.

1. Necromancy (Jer. 14:14, 27:8-9)
   - Necromancy refers to the practice of predicting future events by invoking the dead by using mystical powers.
   - Other words related to necromancy are divination, magic and sorcery.
   - Also refers to the practice of consulting the spirits of the dead.
   - Necromancy/divination was widely practiced in ancient Mesopotamia and reached the people of Yahweh in the Northern and Southern kingdoms.
   - Divinations were strictly forbidden in the Hebrew law. Those who practiced divination magic or witchcraft were to be punished by death e.g. (Lev. 19:31), (Deut. 18:10-11).

2. Dishonesty/Deception. (Jer. 5:30-31,9:4-11, 14:15-16, 23:16-22)
   - Jeremiah observed that the people of Judah were dishonest.
   - People who are dishonest do not tell the truth. Their dishonesty is reflected in their behavior.
   - According to Jeremiah there was no single person who was faithful to Yahweh.
   - Jeremiah observed dishonesty in the following ways:
     1. Prophets and priests spoke nothing but lies (Jer.23:16). These religious leaders should have led people to God but instead they led them astray. They also cheated people by telling them that God was not going to punish them for their sinfulness. They told people all was well when it was not. They spoke in God’s name and deceived people that God had given those messages in their dreams.
     2. The prophets of Jerusalem had become bad as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their evil deeds such as immorality. (Jeremiah. 23:14-15). The people of Judah accepted the lies of priests and prophets without question. They were encouraged to persist in their evil ways. The people of Judah were deceitful in their relationship with one another. No one was safe from the other. The society thrived in this and slander. They were so entrenched in evil doing that they could not come out of it. (Jeremiah 9:4-12)
     3. The priests and the people of Judah were dishonest in the way they worshipped God because their outward rituals did not match with their inner piety. They worshipped him alongside the pagan gods.
     4. The people of Judah offered sacrifices to pagan gods. Yahweh would reject them because of their dishonesty in worship. Jeremiah reminded them that it was better to obey God than to offer meaningless sacrifice. As a result of their dishonesty, Yahweh would punish them through an invasion by a foreign nation and exile.

3. False prophecy. (Hananiah)
   - Jeremiah’s prophecy was challenged by Hananiah who was a false prophet in the Temple at Jerusalem. Hannah spoke to Jeremiah in the temple in the presence of priests and the people of Judah.
   - He told Jeremiah that God was going to:
     i. Bring back all the Temple treasures that King Nebuchadnezzar took to Babylon.
     ii. Bring back Jeconiah who was the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah and all the people who had been exiled.
     iii. Break down the power of Babylon.
   - Jeremiah as a true prophet of Yahweh held the opposite view. He proclaimed that the Babylonians were being used by God as his instrument of punishment and judgment over the people of Judah. He
challenged Hannah and told him that he was a false prophet who could promise peace when there was no peace.
- Hannah then removed the wooden ox yoke that Jeremiah had put across his shoulders and broke it to show how Nebuchadnezzar’s power would be destroyed.
- Jeremiah had walked around in public with the wooden ox yoke to symbolize that Judah would be controlled by Babylon.
- This message was received with hostility by the people of Judah.
- As a true prophet of God, Jeremiah announced Hananiah’s death which came to be fulfilled. (Deut. 18:21-22).
5. Human sacrifice (Jer. 7:30-35)
- Jeremiah condemned human sacrifices as a practice which the Israelites had borrowed from the Baal religions.
- Human sacrifices were carried out in the valley of Ben Hinnom.
- The Law of Moses forbids human sacrifice for life is sacred. Ex. 20:3
- They sacrificed their sons and daughters to the pagan gods as burnt offerings. Jeremiah 7:31.
- God was angry and as a result the people of Judah would face severe punishment of God.
6. Idolatry (Jeremiah 2,3,4,5,7,9,10,23,28)
  - Idolatry refers to the worship of idols.
  - An idol is an image representing a god.
  - Precious materials such as gold, bronze, stone or hard wood were used to make them.
  - These images are kept in places of worship. People worshipped idols and prayed to them for their needs. Those who worshipped believed that they could answer their prayers.
  - The people of Israel had been warned against idolatry in the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:3-5).
  - When the Israelites settled in Canaan, they became farmers and their lifestyles changed from nomadism to agriculture. As farmers they came face to face with the Canaanite religion and were attracted to it. They began worshipping the Canaanite gods alongside the worship of Yahweh.
  - At the time of Jeremiah, idolatry was widespread.
  - Jeremiah condemned idolatry which was demonstrated in the following ways:
    (i) Building of altars for idol gods.
    (ii) Keeping idol images in the Temple of Yahweh.
    (iii) Offering human sacrifice.
    (iv) Prophesying in the name of Baal.
    (v) Practicing Temple prostitution.
  - Jeremiah ridiculed idols that they were powerless to answer people’s prayers and it was useless worshipping them.
  - He described idolatry as:
    (i) Abandonment of Israel’s first love. (Jer. 2:2)
    (ii) Pursuit of vanity. (Jer. 2:5).
    (iii) Defilement of the holy land. (Jer. 2:20).
    (iv) Rebellion against Yahweh. (Jer. 2:20).
    (v) Moral corruption that led to human sacrifices. (Jer.2:31).
    (vi) Harlotry. (Jer. 2:20).
  - Jeremiah condemned the pride which was practiced by the rich, the wise and the rulers who lived in the city of Jerusalem Jer. 9:23-24.

Other things condemned by Jeremiah.

1. He spoke against murder where the innocent were killed.
2. Condemned the worship of false gods.
3. The neglect of the helpless like the orphans, widow and strangers.
4. Preached against adultery and advocated faithfulness in marriage.
5. He expected people to have mutual trust in one another.
THE TEMPLE SERMON
Jeremiah 7:1-8:1-3

- The sermon was delivered by Jeremiah at the gate of the temple court to address the worshippers.
- He appealed to the worshippers to reform their ways and deeds so that God would remain with them in the Temple.
- He warned them against the false sense of security about the temple. They behaved like the temple and the city would not be destroyed. Vs 4.
- He told the worshippers that God would remain with them in the temple if they stopped committing evils such as:
  i. Oppression of the aliens, orphans and widows.
  ii. Murder of innocent people/human sacrifice.
  iii. Worship of false gods/idolatry.
  iv. Stealing.
  v. Adultery.
  vi. Telling lies/dishonesty/giving false witness/cheating.
  vii. Swearing falsely.
  viii. Burning incense to Baal.
  ix. False belief about the temple. Vs.4.
  x. Syncretism.
  xi. Stubbornness and rebellion, refusal to repent despite prophetic warning.
  xii. Hypocrisy.
  xiii. Defilement of the temple.
  xiv. Human sacrifice.
- He warned them that God would destroy the temple the way he had done to the shrine at Shiloh, if they persisted in their evil ways. Vs. 11-14.
- God asked Jeremiah not to intercede for the people because he had already made up his mind to punish the people for the following sins: vs. 16.
  1. Worshipping false gods (Baals).
  2. Practicing religious syncretism.
  3. Stressing external observance like sacrifice without inner piety.
  4. Setting up idols in the temple of God.
  5. Offering human sacrifice.
  6. Stealing, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal.
    - He accused them of refusing to heed to the teachings of God’s prophets.
    - Jeremiah foretold about God’s judgment and punishment when many people would lose their lives and their corpses would be unburied and ravaged by vultures. Vs. 33-34.
    - The survivors who will be taken into exile would experience severe punishment and would wish to have died. Jer. 8:1-3.

The relevance of Jeremiah’s teaching on evils and false prophecy to Christians

Christians should have absolute trust in God for his provision.

- Religious leaders should preach the truth about divine judgment on sinners instead of preaching false hope.
- Christians should be honest in their dealings with others.
- Christians should be sincere in worship and avoid hypocrisy.
- Christians should be aware of false prophets/preachers who may come in the name of Jesus to lead people astray, preach on materialism, attractive idolatries and moral permissiveness.
- Christians should condemn social evils in the society today e.g. stealing, murder, adultery, swearing false, worshipping idols.
- They should lead exemplary lives for others to emulate i.e. holy lives.
- They should call sinners to repentance and forgiveness of sin to avoid divine judgment.
- Christians should avoid idolatrous practices such as witchcraft, sorcery, magic, devil worship and divination.
- Christians need to have a personal relationship with God instead of mere outward show of religion.
- Christians learn that human sacrifice is evil and does not wipe out their sins. Life is precious to God and it is only God who can give and take it away. Human sacrifice does not please God. This is a warning on those who are involved in devil worship.
- Christians are to be faithful to their faith and know that God will listen to their prayers if they are sincere.
- Like Jeremiah Christians should have courage and be firm in their principles when faced with opposition.

www.arena.co.ke
They should stand firm against and evil forces such as divination, magic, devil worship and necromancy, corruption, theft, adultery and other evils.

Jeremiah warns priests and church leaders to be truthful and faithful to their vocations. They should be firm in their faith and be good shepherds of their flock.

What is experienced in Kenya is not different from situation in Judah in the following ways:

1. There is a lot of mistrust—people live in fear they cannot trust one another. One is never sure whether they are walking or travelling with honest people.
2. Prostitution is common, some people engage in sexual immorality in order to earn money.

   NB: God is not happy with immorality and as Christians we need to guard against it.

3. There is neglect and oppression of the poor. In courts, bribery takes place meaning the poor cannot win cases since they have no money for bribery.
4. Existence of devil worship. Many people are involved and people live in fear. Many killings of children linked to ritual killings.

Christians should:

1. Help the suffering among them such as orphans, widows, the sick and the old.
2. Educate the youth against evils in our society.
3. As believers should stand united and live faithful lives of loving other fellow human beings.
4. Christian rulers should not involve in necromancy. They should know that God is more powerful than any diviner, witchdoctor or astrologer.
5. Leaders should learn to worship and trust God and not be like King Manasseh who consulted fortune tellers and mediums.
The theme of judgement and punishment has been discussed in various chapters of the book of Jeremiah.

5:1-9  - The people of Judah could not believe that God would destroy Jerusalem despite their sinfulness.

Jeremiah told the people of Judah that God would bring fire that would consume them as punishment.

(vs.14)  - They would be invaded by a foreign country and taken to exile. The kingdom would be destroyed but God promised restoration in future if they repented.

Jer. 6:1-30  - Punishment would come from the north of Judah. They would be attacked by the Babylonians.

- God would not accept any offering of incense from the people because they had imported the practice from Sheba a foreign land. They also offered it insincerely.
- The invasion by the Babylonians would bring grief and mourning to the people

Jer. 7:30 & 8:1-17

- Punishment was inevitable.
- The people of Judah had defiled the house of God by sacrificing their sons and daughters contrary to God's commandments.
- The living could suffer and also those who had died in sin. Their bones would be exhumed and laid on the ground as waste material.
- The people were accused of not repenting their sins when they backslid, instead they continued to tell lies.
- Jeremiah further says that the punishment would be severe and the signs of the impending judgment would be lack of peace, terror, the sound of an approaching army and earthquakes. (Jer. 8:116)
- The attack of the Babylonians was compared to venomous snakes that would bite the people of Judah.
- Many corpses would be burnt after the destruction and others would be eaten by birds and other beasts.

Jer. 10:17-25

- Punishment of exile for Judah because of her continued idolatry.
- He linked to the fall of Jerusalem to a tent that had collapsed.
- The judgment of the people had been contributed by the failure of the Jewish leaders to lead the people in the covenant way of life.
- They had left the flock to scatter without providing good leadership according to God's commandments.
- Jeremiah pronounced God's judgment on the neighbors of Judah because they had refused to recognize God as Lord.
- They had also destroyed the people of the covenant.

Jer. 14:1-18

- Punishment depicted by drought which would bring a lot of suffering due to lack of water and food.
- Although they would cry to God for deliverance, he would not answer their pleas for rain, God would behave like a traveler who had no concern for the country through which he was just passing.
- God told Jeremiah that even though the people feasted and offered sacrifices, he would not change his mind. (vs. 11).

Jer. 15:1-9

- The people had sinned beyond redemption.
- God could not alter the impending punishment even if righteous servants of God like Moses and Samuel intervened on their behalf.
- Punishment would come through deaths by diseases, sword, starvation and finally captivity.
- Jeremiah traced iniquities to the poor leadership of King Manasseh who polluted Jerusalem with idolatry.
- During Manasseh’s reign Judah embraced Baal worship as an official religion.
Jer. 16:16-18
- Jeremiah continued to insist that deportation of the people of Judah would happen as prophesied.
- He compared the Babylonians to fishermen who would catch the people of Judah like fish in their nets. This would mark the beginning of captivity.
- Send for many hunters to hunt them.

Jer. 17:1-13
- He depicts idolatry being so entrenched in Judah as if it was written in people’s hearts.
- Idol worship was done in the open and even the children participated in them.
- Jeremiah warned the people that they would lose their land following their enslavement in a foreign land.

Jer. 21:1-14
- King Zedekiah sent Pashhur an official in the king’s palace and Zephaniah a priest to Jeremiah.
- He wanted Jeremiah to ask God to intervene and save Judah from Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.
- God’s response through Jeremiah was that Nebuchadnezzar would succeed in conquering Judah.

Causes of judgment and punishments

- Judah’s sinful life and failure to obey God’s commandments.
- Failure by Israelites to repent and turn to God.
- Priest and prophets spoke lies about peace when there was none.
- Worshipping Yahweh using foreign religious rituals e.g. burning incense
- Practicing divination or witchcraft.
- Oppression of the poor by the rich worship of idols and heavenly bodies.
- The rulers and the scribes leading people away from the covenant way of life e.g. Manasseh making idolatry state religion.
- Offering human sacrifice contrary to God’s commandments.
- Defiling the temple by placing images of idols in it contrary to God’s commandments.
- People’s failure to heed the message of the prophets.

How God would punish Judah.

Jer.25:1-38

- God would use foreign country from the worth to invade Judah i.e. Babylon.
- He would destroy Jerusalem with fire contrary to the beliefs and expectations of the people.
- The people would be taken to exile and Judah would remain without inhabitants.
- Judgment would be preceded by lack of peace, terror, starvation and earthquakes.
- Judgment was inevitable.
- Judah would severely attacked by her enemies from all directions.
- Bones of leaders would be exhumed and spread on the ground as a sign of humiliation.
- The attack would have many corpses unburied and others would be eaten by vultures and beast.
- There would be drought which would bring suffering to human beings and animals.
- Not even fasting and offering of sacrifices not intervention by righteous servants of God would alter the impending punishments.
- Apart from destroying Judah, God would use Babylon to also destroy other nations for disobedience by killing their leaders.
- After seventy years of captivity, God would punish the Babylonians who oppressed his people.
THE FALL OF JERUSALEM AND THE EXILE OF THE ISRAELITES

Jeremiah 39

- Jerusalem was attacked and invaded by the Babylonians during the reign of King Zedekiah in 587 BC.
- In the eleventh year of King Zedekiah a breach was made in the city and all the princes of Nebuchadnezzar and the officials sat in the middle gate.
- The Babylonians set up an administrative centre at Mizpah and appointed Gedaliah to be governor of Judah.
- King Zedekiah and his court officials tried to escape to Arabbah.
- The army of the Chaldeans pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho.
- They took him to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah and he passed sentence on him.
- Nebuchadnezzar ordered the killing of the sons of Zedekiah and his government officials.
- The King had Zedekiah’s eyes gouged out.
- Zedekiah was frog-matched and dragged in humiliation to exile.
- The city was looted, houses burnt and the temple and its wall destroyed.
- The remnants, including the royal court officials, priest, army officers and craftsmen were taken to captivity in Babylon.
- Nebuchadnezzar commanded the captain of the guard to treat Jeremiah well and do what he wants.
- Jeremiah was entrusted to Gedaliah to take him home where he lived among his people.
- The land and the city, including vineyards and the fields were given to the poor of the land.
SYMBOLIC ACTS RELATED TO JUDGMENT AND PUNISHMENT

Jeremiah 13; 16; 18; 19; 24; 27

Prophet Jeremiah was commanded by God to present his prophecies of judgment and punishment through symbolic actions. These were:

1. The parable of the waist cloth. (13:1-11)

Jeremiah was instructed by God to buy a waist cloth and wear it.

- He was directed to hide it in crevices of rocks in the Euphrates.
- After some days he was instructed by god to retrieve it. He found the waist cloth rotten and rendered useless hence it was ruined.
- The waist cloth around Jeremiah’s waist symbolized Judah and Israel who had held a position of honour and praise in God’s kingdom.
- The ruined waist cloth reflects the state of idolatry in Israel. This meant that God had already passed judgment in Israel and he would punish them.

2. The parable of the wineskins or jars. (Jere.13:12-14)

- The parable was about wineskins (jars) that were empty then filled with wine.
- When the jars were hit against each other, they broke due to impact.
- The empty jars represented the people of Judah and her leaders.
- The wine would fill the jar symbolized the instrument that God would use to punish them due to their wickedness.

3. Jeremiah’s life (Jere.16:1-4)

- God commanded Jeremiah not to marry or have children. (16:2)
- Jeremiah was denied a normal relationship because of the coming catastrophe that would disrupt all normal relationship.
- Jeremiah was not supposed to enter into any house where a funeral was being held nor mourn or show any sympathy to the bereaved. Jer. 16:5-7

This action had two significances.

1. It meant that God had completely withdrawn his blessing, love and pity for the people of Judah.
2. It referred to those who would die during the fall of Jerusalem.

- There would be no one to bury or to mourn them the remnants would have no one to comfort them.
- The suffering would be great like had never been before. Jer. 5-7
- Jer. 16:8-9. Jeremiah was instructed against entering a house where there was feasting.
- This meant that time for feasting and happiness was over and it would be replaced by suffering and grief. Jer.8-9

3. The parable of the potter (the potter and his clay (Jer. 18:1-10)

- Jeremiah was instructed to go to a potter’s house where he observed a potter molding clay into pots.
- He observed that, whenever the pot had defects, the potter would press the clay into a lump and mold another pot.
- The potter and his clay symbolized the relationship between God and his people.
- As the potter remolds the clay into another pot so does, God have divine authority to tear down or build a nation.
- After the destruction and exile, God would raise a new nation through who he will fulfill his promises.

5. The earthen flask. (Jer. 19:1-15)

- Jeremiah bought earthen flask carrying water.
- He was to empty the flask and break it in the presence of the elders and senior priest.
- The smashing of the flask symbolized the destruction of Judah.
- The city of Jerusalem, the royal palace and ordinary settlement would be destroyed.

6. The vision of the two baskets of figs. (Jer.27)

- Jeremiah saw a vision of two baskets of figs placed before the temple. One basket had good fruits while the other had bad fruits.
  - The good fruits represented the exiles that were to be protected and restored back to their land and be made God’s people.
The bad fruits symbolized the King of Judah and the people who went to the exile. For this group, time was coming when they would be destroyed like the bad fruits.

7. **The wooden ox yoke. (Jer. 27)**
   - Jeremiah put a yoke in his neck and walked around with it like an oxen.
   - This act symbolized the burden that would be felt in the punishment that the people would suffer.
   - It affirmed that the people would be slaves in exile as God’s punishments.
   - It also symbolized the need for the kind to surrender to the powers of Babylon so that they would be stored back and treated with mercy.

**Summary of Jeremiah’s acts related to judgment and punishment**

| 1. The linen cloth which became useless after it was left in the cleft of rocks by the Euprates River. | 1. Yahweh would break the pride of his people by having them serve other nations and by destroying their temple. |
| 2. Jeremiah never married nor had children. | 2. The Israelites people would become very lonely after the siege of Jerusalem. There would be no peace for their families. |
| 3. Jeremiah visited a potter and saw how the potter was remolding vessels he was making when they got spoilt. | 3. God would remould a nation that did not conform to his plans. |
| 4. Jeremiah broke an earthen flask in the valley of Hinnom. | 4. Yahweh would destroy Jerusalem, the temple and all its inhabitants just as Jeremiah had broken the pot. |
| 5. Jeremiah made a yoke and put it on his neck. | 5. Oppression of the Israelites by the Babylonians. |
| 6. Two baskets of figs | 6. Good figs represented the people in exile that God would use to fulfil his promise. The bad figs represented people who had remained in Jerusalem. The lord would destroy them all. |
Jeremiah faced rejection, opposition and suffering from the leaders because of his prophecies about judgment and punishment. Some of the sufferings and lamentations include:

1. **The plot against Jeremiah’s life. (Jer. 11:18-23, 12:1-6)**
   - The people of Jeremiah’s hometown plotted to kill him.
   - Jeremiah appealed to God to avenge for him and God promised to punish his adversaries.
   - When Jeremiah lamented why God allowed the wicked to prosper, God encouraged him to stand firm and be ready for even more sufferings.

2. **Jeremiah’s lament about his isolation. (Jer. 15:10-21)**
   - He suffered isolation and loneliness from his own people because of his faith in God’s work.
   - He was filled with despair and felt that the work he had done was futile.
   - He felt that God had abandoned him even after siding with him against his own people.
   - God challenged him to repent from thinking that he had been abandoned if he was to continue to be God’s prophet. However, he was assured by God that the wicked would be punished.

3. **Jeremiah’s lament on the People’s mockery (Jer. 17:14-18; 18:18-23)**
   - The people mocked him because his prophecies were not being fulfilled.
   - The people continued to mock him and plotted to kill him claiming that God would raise other prophets and priests to replace him.
   - Jeremiah lamented to God because of the mockery and conspiracy against him and appealed to divine punishment against them.

4. **Jeremiah’s torture by Pashur. (Jer. 20:1-6)**
   - Pashur, the priest rejected Jeremiah’s prophecy on punishment and had him arrested, beaten, locked up and then chased away from the gate of the Temple.
   - When Jeremiah was freed, he did not soften his message. He pronounced punishment for Pashur’s family and the people of Judah who will be exiled in Babylon.

5. **Jeremiah’s arrest and trial. (Jer. 26)**
   - When Jeremiah prophesied destruction against the Jerusalem temple he was seized by the false prophets and priests of Jerusalem. He had condemned everything that the prophets and priests were doing such as insincere worship, social injustice and false prophecies.
   - Jeremiah was brought before the princes and the people where he was accused of blasphemy which carried a death sentence.
   - He defended himself by declaring that the:
     1. Message he spoke was from God and not his own. He was therefore a true prophet of Yahweh.
     2. His message was conditional if the people repented and reformed their ways, God would not send disaster to them.
     3. He warned them that if they put him to death they would bring guilt of innocent blood on themselves. They would be guilty of the murder of an innocent person.

   -The princes and the people were convinced that Jeremiah’s message was from God.
   -His accusers had failed to prove that he was guilty of blasphemy and he was set free.

6. **Jeremiah’s imprisonment. (Jer. 37, 38)**
   - Jeremiah tried to leave Jerusalem to go to Anathoth, his home area to claim his share of family land. He was arrested by Irijah the watchman at the Benjamin’s Gate. He was accused of deserting his people to join the Babylonians. This amounted to charge of treason which was punishable by death.
   - The princes beat him and demanded for his execution.
   - He was put in an underground cell for many days.
   - When Zedekiah summoned him from the cell for advice, he remained firm on his prophecy of the Babylonians attack.
   - Jeremiah lamented to the King and wondered why he was as God’s spokesman was being treated as a traitor.
   - Jeremiah pleaded to be released from the dungeon but the King was afraid of his advisors. Instead he placed him in the palace courtyard under house arrest.
   - Jeremiah continued to deliver God’s message to the people from the courtyard.
   - The princes interpreted Jeremiah’s counsel of surrender as a means to weaken the morale of the army and therefore demanded for his death.
Jeremiah was put in a filthy cistern to ensure that he died.
- Jeremiah was rescued by Ébed-melech, an Ethiopian eunuch, who was an official of the King to have him rescued from the well.

Ways in which Christians resolve conflicts among themselves

i. They pray over the issue/problem.
ii. They offer guidance and counseling to the affected.
iii. Paying visit/talking to the offender/fellowship.
iv. By involving church leaders as arbitrators.
v. Forgiving the one who has wronged the other/asking for forgiveness.
vi. Willingness by the offender to accept the mistakes made/accepting liability/pay for the damages.
vii. Withdrawing some privileges for a period of time so that one can reform.
viii. By sharing meals/eating together.
ix. Through sharing of hands.

The relevance of Jeremiah’s suffering and lamentations to Christians

- Christian learn that not all they preach and teach will be accepted.
- Christian need courage and willingness to proclaim the word of God without fear.
- Christians should be ready to be persecuted for the word of God. Hatred, mockery, threats to their life, arrest and imprisonment should not deter them from proclaiming the Gospel.
- Christians should be careful not to mislead by false and self-proclaimed preachers with promises of prosperity.
- Christians should pray for God’s strength and seek his guidance during times of difficulties.
- They should be confident in God’s power and tell the truth about his will.
- Christians should leave their vengeance against their enemies to God.
- Whenever the Christians are in problems, God’s divine intervention will rescue them.
- Christians should forsake family ties for the sake of serving God.
- They should advise the political, leaders on various issues affecting the stake.
- Christians should know that some of their messages will not always be accepted by all people e.g. when they condemn social evils in society and criticize those in authority for their misdeeds.
- Christian leaders must be ready and willing to proclaim the word of God at all costs e.g. Jeremiah knew that talking about the destruction of Jerusalem could cost him his life; he courageously pronounced the conquering of Judah as God’s punishment for her sinfulness. Jeremiah remained obedient to God’s command.
- Christians must be aware of false prophets in their midst whose main goal is to mislead them. The false prophets preached the opposite of Jeremiah’s message with the intentions of pleasing the people.
- Christians should draw their strength from God in the face of temptations. When Jeremiah was castigated and rejected by the people, he prayed to God who reassured him of his protection.
- Christians should always tell the truth about God’s will regardless of the consequences. Jeremiah was not afraid to tell the truth because he was confident of God’s power.
- Christians should remain faithful and firm to the word of God.
THE COVENANT
Jeremiah 23:5-6; 30-33

- The Israelites had failed to keep the covenant law despite the constant reminders by the prophets to return to it. However, God was faithful to his promises and wanted to establish a new and everlasting covenant that was different from the Sinai covenant.
- Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant would give hope to the people of Judah after exile.

Jeremiah’s mission was:

“To pluck up, to break down, to destroy and to overthrow; to build and to plant. Jer. 1:10”

- In this prophecy about the new covenant, Jeremiah planted seeds of hate which began to take root during the long years of exile and found fulfillment at the last supper when Jesus declared:

“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” Luke 22:20.

The new covenant foreseen by Jeremiah had the following characteristics:

1. God’s law would be written in people’s hearts unlike the Old Covenant where the law was written on stone tablets. (Jer. 31:31-32).
2. There would be personal knowledge of God. Each person from the least to the greatest would know God. In the old covenant there were intermediaries such as prophets and priests who taught the people about God. (Jer. 31:34, 32:39-40).
3. There would be spontaneous forgiveness of sins. There is no mention of forgiveness of sins in the old covenant.
4. Each individual would be responsible for his/her sins and the person who sins would be the one who sins would be the one to be punished. This is unlike the old covenant where there was collective responsibilities and punishment.

The “people” refer to the house of Israel and Judah.

6. Yahweh will bring about a change in human nature by giving Israel and a new heart (a new will). There will be harmony in Israel’s will and God’s will. Jer. 23:78.
7. The Israelites would be brought back to their land from exile.
8. It would be broken but would be an everlasting one.
9. God would initiate the covenant and each person would be expected to respond in faith and obedience.
10. The restored community would be ruled by an everlasting and righteous king from the house of David. God will restore the land and they shall rebuild the city and plant vineyards. Jer. 23:5-6; 30:18-22; 31:4-6.
11. There would be justice and righteous in the land of Israel.

NB: The prophecy of the new covenant is fulfilled in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.
SYMBOLIC ACTS RELATED TO HOPE AND RESTORATION.

The period of suffering in exile was meant to be a period of rejection, transformation and readiness to turn to Yahweh.

Jeremiah presented message of hope and restoration to the Israelites after exile in the following symbolic acts:

1. **The two Baskets of Figs (Jer. 24:1-10)**
   - The good figs symbolized the people who submitted to the Babylonians and went into exile.
   - God was watching over them and would preserve them as a remnant and restore them back to their land.
   - They would be given new hearts to acknowledge him as their God and they will be his people.
2. **The wooden Ox Yoke. (Jer. 29)**
   - The wooden Ox Yoke symbolized the perseverance of the Jews in the exile in Babylon.
   - After the period of exile, God would break the Babylonian yoke and restore his people back to their land.
3. **The letter to the Exiles. (Jer. 29)**
   - The exiles in Babylon were in a state of despair as they thought that Yahweh had deserted them or was powerless in the face of the Babylonia gods.
   - Jeremiah therefore wrote a letter of encouragement to the exiles to counteract against false prophecies of speedy return to their land.
   - In his letter he encouraged them in the following ways/message of hope:
     - To build houses and settle down.
     - To plant gardens and eat their produce.
     - To marry and have children and increase in number.
     - To live in peace in the Babylonian cities and pray for the welfare of their masters.
     - Not to listen to false prophets who told them he is about the safety of the city of Jerusalem and their quick return home.
     - God would restore them back to their land only after 70 years of judgment were over.
     - The exiles were to trust in God and not to give up.

NB: Jeremiah informed them that Yahweh was still accessible to them even in Babylon.

   - Jeremiah purchased a piece of land from his cousin, Hanamel in Anathoth.
   - This act signified his faith in God’s promises of restoration of his people.
   - Jeremiah had the title deeds sealed by Baruch and kept them in a clay jar for preservation for the future so that the land could be re-claimed. This symbolized that even if the exiles stayed for a long time, they would return to reclaim their and property and lead a normal life.

The significance of the symbolic act of buying land by prophet Jeremiah

i. It showed that the people of Judah had a future despite the coming crisis/Judah will regain freedom after the conquest.
ii. It was an assurance that the people would be restored back to their homeland/would reclaim their land.
iii. It demonstrated that the people would resume their normal lives/construct homes/cultivate land/own property.
iv. Divined judgment was not an end in itself.
v. Restoration was to take place at God’s own time/God was to determine when the people would be restored back.
vi. The people had to wait patiently for their return from exile.
vii. It showed that God was loving/faithful/was to keep His promise of restoration/bring them back to their ancestral land.
viii. It made them feel secure/they were not to lack anything.

Problems faced by the Israelites during Babylonian exile

1. Lack of adequate food.
2. Family ties were cut.
3. They had homesickness.
4. They had to fit to a new environment.
5. They had to follow the Babylonian laws.
6. Diseases and various ailments.
7. Some were executed.
8. There were false prophets among them.
9. Lowered status due to low education.
10. Living in fear of Babylonian officials.
11. Loss of identity.
12. They lost their unity due to dispersion.
13. Loyalty to God was undermined.
14. Lack of places of worship and for religious festivals.
15. They were forced to work for their Babylonian masters/oppression.
16. They were influenced by idolatry.
17. Their children didn’t have faith in God and blamed their parents.
18. Some of them were executed.

Religious life of the Jews in exile

1. Worshipped in private homes.
2. Had little faith in God due to their circumstances.
3. Some prophets gave them hope of return.
4. They observed the Sabbath.
5. They had no sacrifices.
6. They sang Psalms in worship.
7. They practiced circumcision.
8. They observed dietary laws according to Mosaic Law.
RELATING THE TEACHINGS OF JEREMIAH TO THE NEW TESTAMENT AND CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY

The teachings and prophecies of Jeremiah were fulfilled in the New Testament and many of them are relevant to Christian life today e.g.

1. Jeremiah’s call. (Jer. 1:1-10)
   - Jeremiah was called to be a prophet as a young man. He was given authority by God over nations and kingdoms to “pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow; to build and to plant”.
   - In New Testament, Jesus Christ called the twelve disciples to prepare them to preach the Good News. During their training, Jesus sent them out on a number of missions to preach, heal and to cast out demons. Lk. 9:1-6, 10:1-16. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit and they went about preaching the Good News and healing the sick.
   - St. Paul received a special call from Jesus on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). He changed from a persecutor of Christians to an apostle. St. Paul is known as the greatest preacher ever lived. He spread the Good News to the Gentile world. Christians are also called by God to serve him. They are expected to respond to God’s call in faith and obedience in every responsibility Christians undertake. They are called to serve God e.g. Christian leaders are expected to condemn all forms of evil and teach Christians to be the “light and salt” of the world.

2. Jeremiah’s suffering
   - Jeremiah lived a life full of challenges and difficulties.
   - He suffered in the hands of kings, religious leaders and his own kinsfolk because of exposing their sinfulness and pronouncing God’s judgment on them. He suffered for speaking the truth.
   - Jesus suffered during his ministry even to the point of being crucified for the sins of humankind.
   - Like Jeremiah, Jesus was rejected at Nazareth by his own people.
   - When Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was some said that he was Jeremiah. (Math. 16:13-14)
   - The apostles also suffered persecution at the hands of the Sanhedrin for preaching the Gospel of Christ.
   - St. Paul suffered during his missionary journeys e.g. was imprisoned flogged and even stopped from preaching the gospel.
   - Christian missionaries and evangelists continue to suffer persecution for the sake of the Gospel.

3. Hypocrisy in worship
   - Jeremiah condemned insincere worship of the people of Judah. He told the people that external religious practices were meaningless and useless in God’s sight.
   - Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in their observance of the religious obligations.
   - Some Christians in the society pretend to be pious but are wicked in their actions.

4. Jeremiah’s call for repentance
   - Jeremiah lamented about the sins of the people of Judah and called upon them to repent to avoid God’s judgment and punishment.
   - John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins as a way of preparing people for the Messiah.
   - Jesus taught about the need to repent and ask for God’s forgiveness.
   - On the day of Pentecost, Peter invited those present to be baptized and to repent.
   - Christians should preach the Good News of salvation and call upon people to turn away from their sinfulness.

5. The New covenant
   - Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant is fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.
   - During the last supper, Jesus inaugurated the new covenant which was to be observed by a new community based on faith in Christ.
   - The death of Jesus removed their barrier between God and human beings which had existed in the Old covenant.
   - Christians worship God in spirit and truth and have a personal relationship with him.
   - Those who repent their sins are forgiven and are promised eternal life.

6. Judgment and punishment
   - Because of sin, Jeremiah prophesied judgment and punishment for the people of Judah. He prophesied that they would be exiled to serve their foreign masters.
   - Jerusalem, the religious and political center and the temple would be destroyed.
   - In New Testament, Jesus condemned the Jewish religious leaders for their hypocrisy and sinners for their failure to repent of their sinfulness.
   - Jesus taught about the Day of Judgment when the righteous will be separated from the unrighteous.
Christians should know God will judge. They should shun evil and live according to God’s will.
- When they commit sin, they should repent and forgiveness in order to escape God’s punishment.

7. **Hope and restoration**
- Jeremiah prophesied about future hope and restoration of the kingdom of Judah from exile.
- Jesus gives Christians hope for the future through his resurrection, which affirms that there is life after death. He will take the righteous to live with him in the kingdom permanently.
- Christians are assured of eternal life if they believe in Jesus Christ and continue doing what is right and just in the eyes of God.

8. **The Temple of Jerusalem**
- Jeremiah condemned the false sense of security in the Temple and the city of Jerusalem.
- Jesus condemned the false hope and importance attached to the temple by the Jews of his time. He prophesied its destruction.
- Jesus is the living temple in the New Israel, the Christian community.
- Christians should not trust and put their hope in material things but should trust in Jesus Christ as their savior.

9. **The righteous king**
- Jeremiah prophesied about a new age when Israel would be restored and ruled by a righteous king from the house of David.
- Jesus is the spiritual ruler descended from the lineage of David who ushers in the messianic age.
- Christians acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah (righteous king) who establishes God’s kingdom in their hearts.
BACKGROUND TO NEHEMIAH

A. POLITICAL BACKGROUND
- During the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians, most of the people were taken to exile in Babylon. The city of Jerusalem and the Temple were ruins yet these had been symbols of unity and security.
- In 539 BCE the Persians conquered the Babylonians and liberated the Jews allowing them to go back to Judah.
- Cyrus encouraged the Jews to return to Judah and offered those who returned grants in aid and urged those who remained to contribute to the cost of those returning to Palestine.
- Nehemiah, Ezra and Haggai were among the Jews who returned to Judah.
- Nehemiah was a government official who worked for king Artaxerxes of Persia as a cup bearer.
- Ezra was a priest.
- Haggai was a prophet who encouraged people in the rebuilding of the temple.
- The three worked together with the Jews who returned in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple.
- The Jews who remained in Judah as others were taken captives were called the “people of the land”.
- The people Judah who returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple did not help from the “the people of the land” because:
  i. The people of the land were descendants of the original Northern Kingdom (Israel).
  ii. They considered themselves as pure heirs of the Israelite religious traditions mandated by God to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.
  iii. The people of the land were not pure heirs of the Israelite religious traditions.
  iv. They believed the people of the land must have worshipped other gods while they were in Israel.
  v. They believed the people of the land would defile their sacrificial worship because they were part of the exiled community.
- The return of the Babylonian exiles took place in three separate periods, i.e.
  a. The first group left immediately after the conquest of Babylon led by Sheshbazzar.
  b. The second came eight years later led by Ezra.
  c. The third group came thirteen years after the second led by Nehemiah.
- The people of the land wanted to join in the rebuilding and because they were refused, they opposed the people of Judah. This halted rebuilding work for a while.

B. SOCIAL BACKGROUND
- The exiles lived a stressful life despite encouragement by prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel.
- They lived together in the areas allocated to them but were not mistreated by their masters.
- Their elders did the local administrative work.
- Family units had been disrupted during the conquest.
- They worked for their masters in areas of irrigation, construction, fishing or shepherding. A few held senior administrative jobs in Babylon like Nehemiah.
- After the period of captivity, some were to do Jews opted not to return to Judah but remained in exile.
- The rich Jews who returned to Judah oppressed the poor that they found there.

C. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND
- The religious life of the exiles was disrupted following the destruction of the temple and city.
- In exile they worshiped in private homes and in rural congregations which became synagogues.
- They doubted Yahweh as their God at this time of defeat.
- God sent prophets such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Deutro-Isaiah to comfort and give them hope.
- They retained most of their form of worship and practices such as circumcision, Sabbath observance and use of Psalms for worship. Sacrifices were not offered due to lack of the Temple which was a center for sacrifice.
- After the rebuilding of the Temples the true worship of Yahweh was restored. Ezra led the reformation and ensured that idol worship was not practiced in Yahweh’s house.
OCCASIONS WHEN NEHEMIAH PRAYED

Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:4-8; 4:4-9; 5:19; 6:9; 13:14; 22; 29 and 31.

a) When he learnt of the suffering in Judah and the ruined state of the city. It was a confession prayer for the sins of the people.
b) Before requesting King Artaxerxes to be permitted to return to Judah he prayed to God to grant him favor before the king.
c) When the Samaritans criticized the rebuilding of the wall he prayed for Yahweh’s protection and the revenge against his enemies.
d) When the enemies conspired to attack Judah, he prayed for God to protect them against the enemies.
e) During the exploitation of the poor by the rich he prayed for God to change their hearts.
f) When his enemies plotted to kill him so that he would not oversee the construction work he prayed to God to give him strength.
g) When he was frightened by Shemiah to hide in the Temple following a plot to kill him to punish his enemies.
h) During the cleansing of the Temple following its defilement by Tobiah, he prayed to God not to destroy the Temple which he had built.
i) After warning the Jews who had violated the Sabbath law by carrying out trade, he was given the strength to evict them from Jerusalem’s gate. He prayed for God’s mercy on him.
j) After chasing away Sanbalat’s son-in-law who married a foreigner yet he was the priest by background, he prayed God’s punishment over them.
k) Before assigning duties to the priests from the Levites following their consecration, he prayed that God may remember him with favour.

Importance of Prayer in Christian life

a. Through prayer a Christian is able to express his/her faith in God.
b. Prayer enables one to glorify God for his greatness and goodness.
c. It strengthens one’s relationship with God/strengthens one’s faith.
d. Through prayer the needs of a Christian are met.
e. It enables one to seek God’s will and receive his revelations.
f. It enables one to face temptations with courage.
g. A Christian uses prayer to intercede for the needs of others.
h. Prayer promotes unity for believers as they fellowship together.
i. Their sins are forgiven through prayer.
j. Virtues of patience and persistence are acquired through prayer.
k. Through prayer Christians are able to enter into a personal relationship with God.
l. Through prayer Christians present their needs to God.
m. Prayer helps Christians express their faith and dependence on God.
n. Christians are able to withstand temptations, opposition and persecution through prayer.
o. Prayer gives Christians courage to be able to continue with the work of preaching the gospel.
GOOD LEADERSHIP QUALITITES THAT NEHEMIAH POSSESSED

Nehemiah 1:2; 3;4;5;6 and 7

Nehemiah demonstrated good leadership qualities which were demonstrated in his work of rebuilding Jerusalem and restoring the Jewish community to the covenant way of life e.g.

1. **Patriotism**

When he heard the reports that the gates of Jerusalem were ruined and the people who had turned to Judah were in greatest distress.

- He sympathized with the situation and wept. 1:4.
- He fasted and prayed to God to forgive all the people their inequalities which had led them into exile 1:4-6.
- He prayed to God to fulfill his covenant promises and restore his people back to the Promised Land.

2. **Diplomacy**

He used diplomatic skills to:

- Convince the king to allow him to go back to Judah and help in the reconstruction of the nation.
- Be given letters of introduction in the region he was going to pass through and for acquisition of timber.

3. **Effective planner**

- He planned how to travel back to Judah by putting in place security measures.
- He organized how to obtain construction materials.
- He inspected the walls of Jerusalem before reconstruction begun.

4. **Team builder**

- He mobilized the workers and inspired team to work hard.
- He encouraged them to continue working despite the mockery.
- He worked and stayed with them.

5. **Initiative**

- Nehemiah initiated the idea of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and pursued it to its completion.

6. **Hardworking and Dedication**

- He was able to complete the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in a record time of 52 days.
- His dedication to work enabled him not to give up despite the many threats he received from the enemies.

7. **Mindfulness**

- He was able to listen to the problem of the poor.
- He contributed towards their basic needs e.g. gave land.
- He urged the rich and officials not to oppress the poor.

8. **Reformist**

- He improved the welfare of the poor.
- He reorganized the temple worship.

9. **Wisdom**

- He was able to judge the tricks of his enemies and act appropriately, e.g. when he was tricked by Shemiah with a threat of being killed by enemies.

10. **Courage**

- He had courage and withstood threats of his life and attempts to stop work of reconstruction of Jerusalem by the enemies.

11. **Faithfulness**

- He prayed to God for guidance in all situations.
- He trusted in God’s protection against his enemies.

12. **Dependence of God**

- This is seen in his prayer life.

13. **Tactful leader**

- He called the leaders of the city together in order to win their confidence and sympathy and generate enthusiasm.

14. **Self-control**

- Even in the face of threats ridicule and mockery, Nehemiah never tried to justify himself but remained firm in his mission.

15. **Focused leader**
• Nehemiah aimed at restoring Jerusalem and the worship of God. Opposition did not derail him from what he had set himself to accomplish.

16. A man of action
• Nehemiah did not just listen to the problems of his people, he acted in order to help them and restore the city of Jerusalem.

17. Trustworthy
• This is seen in the position he held of being the king’s cup-bearer.

18. Just leader.
• As demonstrated in the way he solved the problem of the rich exploiting the poor during the rebuilding work.
RELEVANCE OF NEHEMIAH’S LEADERSHIP TO CHRISTIAN TODAY

- As leaders they should be concerned with the welfare of others. They should use their positions to improve the lives of those under them.
- Christians should learn from the planning and organizational skills of Nehemiah in order to accomplish their tasks effectively.
- Christians should learn to lead by example like Nehemiah and work with people and not just give the orders.
- Christians should emulate the hardworking spirit of Nehemiah. He continued reconstructing the wall of Jerusalem even as he faced great opposition from the Samaritans.
- Nehemiah worked selflessly. Many people would want to be paid for any small jobs they do. Christians should emulate the hardworking spirit of Nehemiah. He continued reconstructing the wall of Jerusalem even as he faced great opposition from the Samaritans.
- Christians should be patient and caring. Nehemiah listened to his people’s grievances and gave them solutions.
- Nehemiah brought various reforms in Jerusalem. Likewise Christians should initiate political, economic, social and religious reforms.
- Being a man of God, Nehemiah made sure that the Mosaic Law was adhered to. Christians should emulate him and live upright lives.
- He practiced justices and honest which all Christians leaders should practice.
- In society where people are losing hope because of poverty, political upheaval, diseases and other social problems, leaders should encourage their people even when thing do not seems to as expected e.g. unemployment is a big problem in Kenya especially the young people. Leaders need to encourage young people to be innovative and creative.
- In a country where there are many ethics communities, political parties, various denominations religious and other interest groups arising of conflicts may be common, leaders should therefore try to emulate Nehemiah’s quality of being principled in doing the right thing. They should reconcile the people together. A good leader
- Must not favor any person regardless of their ethnic, political or religious background.
PROBLEM FACED BY NEHEMIAH
Nehemiah 3:5, 4, 5, 6
Nehemiah had to deal with the following problems.

2. Opposition. The rich oppressed the poor who in turn launched complaints before Nehemiah. The poor were enslaved, highly taxed, lacked food and their land grabbed. Nehemiah condemned the action and asked the rich to return what they had taken from the poor. Nehemiah 5:1-19

3. Plot to harm and kill him by Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem by use of tricks. Nehemiah discovered their tricks and refused to accept their invitation to go to them or hide in the Temple.
4. Intermarriage between Jews and foreigners which threatened the Jewish cultural identity.
5. Misuse of the Temple, abandonment of priestly duties, Levites, Musicians and gate keepers were not being paid. Nehemiah 13:10-14.
6. Laxity in observing religious matters e.g.
   a) The temple was not being given honour it deserved e.g. Elishia the priest allowed Tobiah to reside in the Temple. This was wrong because non-Jews could not go inside the Temple. They were to remain in the outer court.
   b) Tithes and offerings which were supposed to take care of the Levites and the singers were not being collected. As a result the Levites and singers had stopped taking care of the Temple and its services as they went to earn a living from their land.
   c) The Jews who returned to Jerusalem from exile started breaking the Sabbath law by trading with foreigners on a day that was supposed to be resting. Nehemiah. 13:15-20
   d) Some Jews had married women from Ammon, Ashdod and Moab (Neh. 13:23-27). Nehemiah asked them to chase away such wives and their children as this had defiled priesthood. (Neh. 13:23-31)
7. Disloyalty. (Neh. 3:5)
   - Some nobles from Tekoa did not accept to serve under Nehemiah as the governor of Jerusalem. They therefore did not undertake the work they were given wholeheartedly
8. Food shortage (Neh. 5:1-5)
   - The people of Jerusalem faced the problem of food shortage. While famine was taking its toll in Jerusalem, some of the officials were overtaxing the people to the extent that the poor were borrowing money to pay the Kings tax.
9. Land grabbing
   - The rich Jews who had come from exile were encroaching the land of the poor people who were becoming slaves and even squatters on their own land. This is one of their causes of Babylonian exile. God was not happy with the oppressions and the exploitation of the poor by fellow Israelites.
10. False accusations by Sanballat and Tobiah
    - Falsely accused that he was planning a rebellion against the King or Persia. Their scheme was to make the king of Persia angry with Nehemiah and stop the reconstruction of the wall. However Nehemiah became courageous and told them that it was they who were scheme evil and not him. If anything, the work he was doing had the approval of King Artaxerxes of Persia.
11. Opposition from the indigenous people of Palestine who despised his reconstruction work.
12. Fear among Jews due to constant threats and harassment from the foreign groups.
    - Nehemiah encouraged them through prayers and organized people to defend the city. He advised the m to trust God.
RELEVANCE OF NEHEMIAH'S EXPERIENCES TO CHRISTIANS TODAY
1. Christians should trust in God in all their undertaking if they have to succeed.
2. They should be ready to face opposition with courage.
3. They should work towards improving the welfare of their people.
4. They should be committed to their work until they accomplish their goals.
5. They should lead by example showing others what to do and by setting the pace.
6. They should condemn all evil in society so as to build a just society.
7. They should guard against external influences which may destroy Christianity e.g. pornography and drug abuse.
8. Christians should be inspired to work for God.
9. They should demonstrate wisdom in solving issues that affect the society.
10. They should be aware of the forces against their effort to serve God and the community.
11. Christians should obey lawful authority.
THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

10. The Renewal of covenant. (Nehemiah 8, 9, 10,11, 12:1-26)

The teaching of Moses Law had been forgotten by the Jews who return from exile. The Jews were anxious to live according to God’s will so as to avoid a repeat of God’s punishment they had suffered. The people like Ezra, the scribe had to read and interpret to them the Mosaic Law so that they could live according to its precepts. Ezra and Levites led the people into renewing the covenant in the following ways.

(a) Reading of the Law. (Nehemiah 8:1-18)
- Ezra read the book of the law to the people as the Levites interpreted.
- The people praised and worship GOD.
- They were remorseful for their sins and wept bitterly.
- Ezra explained to them that ceremony should bring joy to them and not sorrow.
- The people went away to celebrate as instructed.

(b) Celebration of the feast of Booths. (Neh. 8:13-18)
- This Feast had been forgotten for a long time after the Israelites went into exile.
- Ezra led all Jews to renew this feast.
- The people made booths from lives branches and leaves, in which they dwelt in for seven days.
- Each day the Law of Moses was read and there was great rejoicing.

(c) Holding the conference of the people. (Nehemiah 9:32-38, 10:1-39)
- The people of Judah held a national day of confession.
- The fasted and put on sack cloths as a sign of penitence.
- The Jews separated themselves from foreigners.
- They spent the day reading the Torah and confessing their sins.
- Ezra led the people in a prayer of confession in which he recounts God’s love and faithfulness to his promises to the Israelites throughout their history.
- The rebelliousness led to God sending them to exile as a punishment but he graciously spared a remnant.

(d) Sealing of the covenant (Nehemiah 9:32-38, 10:1-39)
- The leaders who included Nehemiah, the princes, priest and Levites sealed the covenant through signing of the agreement.
- The people promised to live in accordance with the Mosaic Law e.g.
  - To preserve the integrity of the community.
  - Not to intermarry with foreigners.
  - To avoid business dealings on the Sabbath and holy days
  - Let’s the land rest every seventh year.
  - To cancel debts every seventh year.
  - To contribute towards the maintenance of the temple.
  - To offer the first fruits of their harvest to God.
  - To dedicate the first born sons and animals to God.
  - To pay tithes in accordance with the Law.

(d) Re-distribution of the inhabitants. (Nehemiah 11, 12:1-26)
- Nehemiah re-distributed the population of the Israelites in Jerusalem because the city was sparsely populated. This was to ensure that the Levites would easily access the Temple and to safeguard he city against attacks by enemies.
- Community leaders were settled in Jerusalem.
- One family out of ten was settled in the city through the ballot.
- The rest of the population remained in the countryside where they had settled.
DEDICATION OF THE WALL OF JERUSALEM
(Nehemiah 12:27-47)

- The wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and completed in 52 days.
- The Levites were brought in from their respective places to Jerusalem.
- Singer also came from the surrounding villages.
- The priest and Levites purified themselves, the people, the gates and the wall.
- Nehemiah brought the leaders of Judah upon the wall and split people into two groups/choirs.
- One group/choir matched clockwise around the wall led by Nehemiah.
- The other group matched anticlockwise led by Ezra.
- They converged in the temple square.
- The two choirs took their positions in the temple under the direction of Jezraiah.
- Some men were appointed to be in-charge of store rooms in the temple –for contributions of tithes and first fruits.
- The priest, singers, gatekeepers and Levites performed theirs duties as required.
- The priest and Levites were allocated their portions of contributions as required by the law.
- Sacrifices were made, with great rejoicing.
FINAL REFORMS

Nehemiah 13

- After Nehemiah dedicated the walls of Jerusalem to God, he introduced various reforms to achieve the purity of the Jews and bind them closely knit community.
- This was carried out in the following ways:

a) The separation of the Jews from the foreigners Nehemiah 13:1-3
- In Nehemiah 7:5-69, Nehemiah enrolled all the citizens in Jerusalem according to genealogy. This was meant to identify Jews. One had to be able to trace one’s ancestry to Jewish parent or grandparent.
- In another public gathering the law was read to the Jewish people. Nehemiah denounced relationships with Ammonites, Moabites and other foreigners.
- The community responded immediately to the demands of the law.
- It set itself apart from foreign elements. They did this according to Deut.23:4-7

b) REFORMS OF THE TEMPLE. Nehemiah 13:4-14
- Nehemiah expelled Tobiah and Sanballat from the Temple.
- He reorganized the stores in the temple and had them cleansed.
- He reformed the tithing system.
- He condemned the temple officials for forsaking the house of God.
- He restored the Levites and the singers to their rightful positions.
- He arranged for equitable distribution of Temple resources under the supervision of priest, musicians, Levites and the governor himself.

c) Reforms on observing the Sabbath. Nehemiah 13:15-22
- Nehemiah discovered that the people were breaking the Sabbath law by carrying out commercial activities.
He took the following measures to correct the situation:

- He warned the people of God’s wrath if they continued with the abuse of the Sabbath.
- He reminded the nobles of Judah that God had punished the nation because of their ancestors’ failure to observe the Sabbath.
- He ordered the doors of the gates of Jerusalem to be shut until after the Sabbath.
- He stationed his personal guards at the gate to prevent traders from entering on the Sabbath.
- He commanded the Levites to protect the purity of the Sabbath by purifying themselves the guarding the Temple gates.
- He threatened the traders who camped outside the wall to have them arrested if they did not withdraw.

d) Nehemiah’s policy on mixed marriages. Nehemiah 13:23-31
- Nehemiah was opposed to the Israelites who had married foreigners because their children could not speak the Hebrew language.
- He cursed those who had intermarried, beat them and pulled their hair as a way of humiliating them in public.
- He made the people to take an oath not to engage their children in foreign marriages.
- He banished Eliashib, the priest, from the office for having married the daughter of sanballat, the Samaritan governor.
- He reminded the people of how King Solomon intermarried with foreign wives hence leading him into idolatry and invoking God’s punishment on Israel.

According to Nehemiah, it was necessary for the Jews to separate themselves from foreigners because of the following reasons:

- The Jews an ethnic minority which needed to preserve their identity and culture.
- Judah was a small and vulnerable nation in the large Persian Empire which needed to remain united.
- There were conflicts between the post exilic Jews and those who had remained behind over the land ownership.
- The returned exiles needed to be isolated and united because the Jews who had remained behind were defiled through inter-marriages.
- Intermarriages posed the threat of loss of land through inheritance.
- Intermarriages would lead the Jews into idolatry due to influence of foreign wives.
- The desire to keep the Jewish community pure after the exile through birth and religious loyalty.
e) Restored the Levites to their duties and the purification of priesthood
f) He made sure the Jews were loyal to the laws of Moses.
g) Chased Eliashib’s grandson who had defiled the priesthood by marrying a foreigner.
h) Re-organized the tithing system.
i) Re-arranged for equal distribution of Temple resources for priest, Levites and musicians.
RELATING THE TEACHING FROM NEHEMIAH’S EXEMPLARY LIFE TO ST.LUKE’S GOSPEL AND CHRISTIAN LIFE TODAY

1. PRAYERFULNESS.
   - Nehemiah led a life of prayer. He always responded to a problem affecting him by consulting God.
   - Jesus constantly prayed and even taught his disciples how to pray. He used the parable of the friend of midnight to illustrate persistence in prayer.
   - Christians should live a prayerful life if they are to succeed in life.

2) Being compassionate
   - Nehemiah felt for the suffering Jews who had returned to Jerusalem. He came to rescue of the poor who were oppressed by the rich.
   - John the Baptist taught about the need to share with the poor.

   Jesus’ mission mainly targeted the poor and the suffering. He healed them, provided food for them. He taught about visiting the prisoners, feeding the hungry and clothing the poor.

   - Christians should demonstrate compassion for the needy through sending relief food to famine stricken areas, building homes for orphans and aged, rehabilitating street children and prisoners.

3) Opposition in the Mission
   - Nehemiah faced opposition from the Sanbalat and Tobiah during his construction work but he never gave up.
   - Jesus met opposition from the Jewish leaders but did not stop preaching the gospel.

   - Christians should be ready to suffer and face opposition for the sake of the Gospel.

4) Reform of the temple.
   - Nehemiah led the people in reforming their religious life. He carried out cleansing of the temple so that the true worship of Yahweh could be restored.

   - During his triumphant entry to Jerusalem, Jesus cleansed the temple by chasing out merchants. His death on the cross illustrates the spiritual renewal for his followers. He also forgave sinners.

   - Christian should not misuse the church as means of acquiring wealth or for political reasons.

5) Honoring the Sabbath
   - Nehemiah restored the observance of the Sabbath. The merchant had abused the holy day by carrying out business.
   - Jesus acknowledged the importance of the Sabbath and used it to promote the life of the suffering by healing the sick.

   - Christians should use the day of the lord for prayers and to carry out works of charity such as visiting the sick and praying with them.

6) Patriotism
   - Nehemiah had deep feelings for Jewish community. He championed for the restoration of his community. He isolated them from foreign influence during his reform.
   - Jesus had great love for his fellow Jews and wept over Jerusalem for her failure to recognize him as the messiah.

   - Christians should be patriotic to their country by participating in national issues such as constitution review process and general elections.

7) Wisdom
   - Nehemiah demonstrated wisdom by mobilizing and encouraging the Jews to work. He could detect the false traps laid against him by his enemies.
   - Jesus was able to read the minds of the religious leaders who wanted to trap him e.g. on the issue of payment of taxes to the Romans Empire and the resurrection.

   - Christians should apply life skills of critical thinking and decision making when handling challenges situations.
8) Repentance

-Nehemiah interceded for the sins of the people of Judah to God and asked for forgiveness. He also repented on their behalf.

-Jesus while on the cross interceded to God for those who had crucified him and asked God to forgive them. He offered his life on the cross for the forgiveness of the sins of humankind.

-Christians hold prayers of intercessions to God for people's sins.