

CLASS: SS2

SUBJECT: CRS

TOPIC: CONCERN FOR ONE'S NATION

WEEK: 9

TERM: SECOND

CONTENT

1. The Captivity and Destruction of Jerusalem (II Kings 24, 25:1-17)
2. Report on the Conditions of the Nation (Nehemiah 1:3)
3. The Concern of Nehemiah, Ezra and Zerubbabel for their Nation and their Response to the State of the Nation Despite Opposite (Neh. 1:1-11, 2:9-20; Ezra 1:5-11; 7:1-10)
4. Reconstruction of the Nation in the Face of Opposition (Ezra 4; 5:1-2; 6:13-22; Neh. 4:1-23)

THE CAPTIVITY AND DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM (II Kings 24, 25:1-17)

Judah slide back into apostasy after the death of Josiah. The kings who succeeded him could not maintain his religious reforms as a result of their moral and personal weakness. Consequently, the nation began to experience turbulent and unpleasant situations due to their rebellion against God which eventually led to the captivity and destruction of Jerusalem as a fulfilment of God's word against their apostasy.

Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt in a battle at Megiddo. Consequently, Judah became a vassal of Egypt. Jehoahaz who succeeded his father Josiah as king at the age of twenty-three reigned for three months before he was deposed by Pharaoh Neco, and in his place made Jehoiakim (Jehoahaz brother) a vassal king over Judah.

Egypt was later defeated by Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar and Judah was therefore made a vassal of Babylon. Jehoiakim was encouraged by Egypt to revolt against Babylon contrary to the advice of Prophet Jeremiah who saw Babylon as

an instrument of God's corrective punishment for Judah. Jehoiakim died during the struggle and his eighteen-year-old son, Jehoachin succeeded him on the throne.

FIRST DEPORTATION

In 598 BC, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and carried Jehoachin captive with his household, his mighty men of valour, the craftsmen, palace staff and body guards and some prophets, including prophet Ezekiel. All the precious vessels of gold in Jerusalem temple were plundered and carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar to the house of his god. This was the first exile or first deportation. Nebuchadnezzar then appointed Jehoachin's uncle, Mattaniah, King (whose name was changed to Zedekiah). He was twenty-one years old when he was appointed King by Nebuchadnezzar.

SECOND DEPORTATION

However, it was not long before Zedekiah, just like Jehoiakim, revolted against Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah's rebellion made Babylon invade Judah for the second time under Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldeans laid siege to the city of Jerusalem for almost three years, and this lasted from the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign to his eleventh year. It brought severe hardship and famine in Judah.

During the Babylonian siege on Judah, King Zedekiah tried to escape but was caught by the Chaldean's army in the plains of Jericho. His two sons were killed in his presence and his two eyes plucked out. He was bound with fetters and taken to Babylon where he died. Nebuchadnezzar ordered his army to destroy the walls of Jerusalem and burn down the temple and the city. More Jewish captives were deported to Babylon while Gedaliah was made governor over the remnant in Judah, consisting of the aged, the wretched and the poor. These predicaments were allowed by God as punishment for the people of Judah and their leaders for their sins. This was the final destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of exiles to Babylon in 586 BC. It is known as the second deportation or second exile.

REPORT ON THE CONDITIONS OF THE NATION
(Nehemiah 1:3)

In the month of Chisler, after the exile, **Nehemiah**, one of the prominent and patriotic Jews in exile in the palace and a **cup bearer to Artaxerxes** received the news of the pathetic state of Judah from **Hanani** one of the Jews that came from Judah to Shushan. Hanani reported to Nehemiah that the survivors who escaped exile were in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem was broken down; and the gates were destroyed by fire.

On hearing this, Nehemiah became sad. He sat down, wept, mourned and fasted for days. After confessing the sin of the people of Judah which he was part of, he prayed to God to grant him favour before the king. The following day, the king, Artaxerxes observed Nehemiah's countenance to be gloomy and moody and asked him what the matter was. Nehemiah took the opportunity to request for permission to go to Jerusalem and help the Jews rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. The king granted his request and also gave him letters to governors of the provinces beyond the river, instructing them to allow Nehemiah pass through their territories. The king also gave another letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, to provide Nehemiah with timber he needed for the gates, walls and the house in which he would stay. Having obtained the king's permission, authority and support, Nehemiah set off for Jerusalem for the work.

The Concern of Nehemiah, Ezra and Zerubbabel for their Nation and their Response to the State of the Nation Despite Opposite

(Neh. 1:1-11, 2:9-20; Ezra 1:5-11; 7:1-10)

Having obtained king Artaxerxes permission to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple of the Lord, Nehemiah left Shushan for the city and got there after three days. On reaching Jerusalem, he stirred up public support; he inspired and assessed the extent of damage and the work to embark on. He did the inspection at night with the few men he selected to avoid interference and distraction at the early stage. After the inspection, and planning, he gathered the Jewish leaders – the priests, nobles and officials and employed them to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem informing them how God had given him favour before the king of Persia. In response, the people pledged their unalloyed support and cooperation to ensure that the work was done.

As the rebuilding work commenced, the enemies of the Jews **Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arab** opposed Nehemiah and the work. They used different kinds of tricks and tactics to undermine and sabotage the effort of the Jews in the rebuilding project. Nevertheless, Nehemiah was not overwhelmed. He remained courageous, bold, determined and eventually completed the project.

Apart from Nehemiah, other concerned Jews had taken the challenge and responsibility of rebuilding Jerusalem. Zerubbabel and Ezra had made similar attempts. As soon as Babylon came under Persian Empire the **kings of Persia, Cyrus** issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem, by divine providence, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah. In line with this decree, the Jewish exiles (about fifty thousand Jews) led by Zerubbabel and Sheshbazzar returned to Judah.

At this time, the Jews in Judah were confronted with many problems such as:

1. Lack of a place of worship because the temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians.
2. An adulteration of Yahweh worship which was one of the negative effects of the exile on the Jews.
3. Insecurity, as the walls of Jerusalem and its gates had been destroyed.

However, God used patriotic and concerned Jews like Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Prophets Haggai and Zechariah, to address these issues facing the Jews.

ASSIGNMENT

1. What lessons can be learnt about God's nature through the conquest of Jerusalem.
2. List all the character in this lesson and explain their roles.