S.6 DIVINITY NOTES
THE PSALMS

The word Psalms is derived from a Greek word " Psalmoi" which means, songs sung with accompaniment of stringed instruments. The Hebrew word for Psalms – "Thallium" means praise/ songs.

Psalms are therefore songs which are poetic in nature but religious in context. They were a hymn book for the Jews. Were used frequently in worship by the Israelites during their daily worship.

The writer of any given Psalm is called Psalmist and the book of Psalms in general is referred to as a Psalter.

Psalms gives a very fine picture of Israel's communication with God. They presented their messages, prayers, attitudes, thanksgiving to God in form of songs accompanied with musical instruments- like lyres, symbols, rattles, flutes, drums, dancing, clapping of hands.

They contain Israel's history with God right from the Davidic period- believed to have originated during the reign of David and Solomon.

They are about concrete situations in Israel's history. Behind each Psalm, it is easy to see a real life situation which might have given rise to it e.g. some Psalms are about wars, suffering, famine, worship, exile, coronation of kings, happiness etc.

Types of Psalms:

- Hymns of praise
- National laments
- Royal Psalms including messianic Psalms
- Individual laments
- Thanksgiving

THEMES IN THE PSALMS

Almost all themes studied in the Old Testament are realised and made clear in the Psalms by the Psalmists e.g.

- God's presence in the world is recognised
- The role of Yahweh in the lives of the Israelites is realised and praised
- God's power is realised and the mastery over history
- The need for fellowship and communion with God is highlighted
- God's rescue of Israelites from enemies is recognised
- Realisation of the responsibility of Israelites to give thanks to their God.
- God's love and mercy on the oppressed and suffering people
- God's forgiveness of sinners
- God's anger against evil men who refused to repent
- God's holiness and purity
- The call by worshippers to punish the wicked people is evident.

PSALMS 2 – A ROYAL PSALM USED AT THE CORONATION OF KINGS

Kingship was a very important situation in Israel. The life situation which gave birth to the composition of Psalm 2 was the enthronement of a new king descended from David's dynasty.

This theme contains the following issues:-

In chapter 2: 1-3, the Psalmist mentions that enemies/nations are planning to attack the king of Israel. They think that they will succeed since Judah is a small state – militarily weak.

The composer of this Psalm marvels at their stupidity. The king they are trying to attack was appointed by Yahweh and is protected by His power. Their plans are therefore stupid and unachievable.

In trying to attack the king, the enemy nations are trying to attack Yahweh the God of Israel who appointed the king. The king was God's representative and the enemy plans were bound to fail. Their plans are evil because they are trying to reject God's lordship over them.

Yahweh wasn't going to allow the attack and defeat of his anointed king, the prince of peace.

In Psalms 2:4-6, the Psalmist gives God's reaction to the secret and evil plans of the enemy nations. He mocks them for their lack of foresight.

Yahweh is powerful on His throne but hesitates to use violence on ignorant nations. He first warns them in fury and anger. Their plans are futile and a wastage of time. They will face destruction if they attack.

God is the creator of all human beings. He knows and controls the destinies of individuals and nations alike. He knows all plans before they can be carried out. No human plans are hidden from him and no human plans can over throw the king He has installed.

Yahweh says that the king of Israel is installed on Mt. Zion, with God's approval and he is held in God's power. He is God's representative on earth who can only be removed on God's decision. As long as God wishes, the king of Israel will continue reigning over Israel.

In Psalms 2: 79, the anointed king is depicted as joining in this singing. He declares the oracle which Yahweh has given to him. He declares His sovereignty and rights.

He proudly says that at the coronation, He became an adopted son of Yahweh. By calling himself a son of God, the king was accepting to represent Yahweh on earth.

As long as the king remains an obedient son, he will not be disappointed. Yahweh will give him blessings, victory etc. This meant that the king had to obey all God's laws, defend monotheism serve the people with care, guide them, listen to God's messengers-priests, prophets i.e. work for unity to observe laws of holiness and ungodliness, avoid intermarriages.

Yahweh promises the king that He will give him everything he asks for if he is obedient Ps 2:8. He will empower him to the extent of giving him world power.

The king was thus not to seek for fame and victory through alliances with other nations. Yahweh would protect the king and the chosen nations.

The king will be given total victory over his enemies if he remains obedient to God. The king will break traitors with an iron rod Ps : 2:9 and will break to pieces.

In Psalm 2:10-12 all the rulers and kings of the world are called upon to serve the Lord with fear and rejoicing. They should tremble and bow down to Him in worship. As for the rebellious kings, they had to bow down and ask for forgiveness.

Yahweh is the king of Israel and the king of kings. The rulers of this world must not forget it. Those who acknowledge Yahweh's lordship over them will be protected and blessed.

Comments:

This Psalm is Messianic, looking forward to the rulers of God in the world and the appointment of His messiah to act on God's behalf.

God the true king appoints a messiah to lead His people into the blessings of the Promised Land, (Heaven)

Much as the kings of Israel were assured of Yahweh's blessings if they remained obedient only a few of them managed to remain faithful to Yahweh. Hence, there was an ever increasing hope that a really good and just descendant of David would come and rule his people according to God's will.

Such a king was finally related to the messiah who brought perfect peace and justice in the world and who managed to remain a beloved son of God to the extent of laying down his life for saving the sinners.

In the New Testament, Psalm 2:1-2 was quoted by the apostles in Acts 4:25-26, psalm 2:7 was quoted in Act 13: 33, Psalms 2:8-9 is related to Revelations in 12:5, 11:16.

So with the resurrection of Jesus, all forces of evil were scattered and the New Testament theology believes that Jesus established God's rule on earth.

RELEVANCE FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY

God as the overall ruler of this universe , knows our destinies as individuals groups or even nations . No plan can be hidden from Him.

God has no room for evil plans so we should be careful and stop provoking Yahweh's wrath on us by planning evil things.

They ought to believe in God's omnipotence. He is patient with mankind. He gives us the chance to change and turn back to God.

Christians who are earthly rulers should act as His representatives because all the earthly rulers are under God's control.

They should accept to listen to their earthly leaders, as all leadership comes from God. In case of mistakes we need to advise them.

They ought to take up the responsibility of serving God first then the people willingly and justly.

Christians today are called upon to believe in God's help to leaders who fully trust Him, prayer can perform more wonders than weapons.

Christians today are to accept to forgive their leaders and advise them in case they make mistakes because they are human, than rebelling against them.

They ought to believe in God's universality. He loves all people regardless of their race, sex or nation.

Scientists are called upon to stop challenging God, lest they face His wrath. They need to change and bow down to him.

PSALM 20, A ROYAL PSALM ASKING FOR VICTORY IN WAR

The background of this Psalm is that of war, depicts Israel preparing for war. They used to sing this Psalm asking God for quick success in war.

The Israelites believed that it was Yahweh who led them to war and was the commander of their armies. Ps 20: 1-5 show people praying earnestly to their God to give victory to the king.

In Ps 20:1, the God of Jacob is called upon. He is the God of history who gave great protection and victory to their ancestors. They are calling upon Him to be on their side as he did to the patriarchs.

The Psalmist related God's power and help to the temple. Hence Ps 20:2 read s , "send us help from the sanctuary…." This help is also associated with Zion. By then they believed that the temple was God's earthly base and His power was concentrated there.

The worshippers call upon God to accept the sacrifices they have offered especially those of his servant the king.

They cry for Yahweh's help, command of the armies, to be in their midst because war used to create fear, panic, destruction and death. They can't fight a war where God is absent.

The worshippers have a hope in God's help and look forward to shouting with joy when victory is attained Ps 20:5

In 20:6 the tone of the Psalmist changes. Yahweh has answered the prayers and has accepted the sacrifices of the worshippers. God has proclaimed an assurance of victory. People shout with joy because the king's success is theirs as well.

Victory comes from trusting in God. It is God's power which leads to the defeat of enemies.

The Psalmist proudly says that other nations trust in their own power, in their war chariots and horses but they are defeated in the wars.

Israel trusts in God and they gain victory, it does not trust in weapons nor alliances.

Other nations are therefore pitied. They will be crashed by Yahweh's power while Israel will grow stronger and stronger. This Psalm gave great confidence and trust to the king and the people in general.

RELEVANCE OF ROYAL PSALMS TO MODERN POLITICAL LEADERS

Political leaders today should put all their plans in Yahweh's hands, to be able to command their armies.

They need to pray with good intentions as God answers prayers of faithful people who pray with good intentions.

They ought to respect and obey God who is powerful, great above everything on earth.

Political leaders should lean on God for help in the various wars they fight like physical or spiritual wars.

They should offer to God what is worthy well knowing that God is the one who gives and that offerings please God.

They are called upon to trust in God to solve their leadership puzzles of all kinds.

They need God's guidance to rule peacefully and win wars.

They should be humble in order to be protected by God from all kinds of attack from the foreign nations or enemies.

They should try to win the confidence and trust from their subjects by upholding God's will.

They need to have hope in God's help in all problems they face, as He will always provide solutions whenever need arises.

They ought to cry for God's help in their midst to remove fear, panic etc that can be created due to various problems in their life.

They ought to listen to God's messengers like priests, prophets etc. in times of trouble.

They need to work for unity, observe the law of holiness in order to become victorious over their enemies.

PSALM 22, A PERSONAL LAMENT FOR SUFFERING

Individuals who were facing terrible danger and were asking for Yahweh's help used this Psalm.

These who had gone through very difficult moments and were seeking to give thanks to God, also used this Psalm i.e. It was a lamentation.

In psalm 22:1-5, the psalmist introduces a lonely soul, seeking and crying out for help and God's nearness.

Before this lonely state, the sufferer had known Yahweh as a God of love, protection and amazing. He was near him and enjoyed an intimate relationship with him. He used to pray and his prayers were answered.

All of a sudden, Yahweh's love was denied of him. He began suffering terribly despite the fact that he had faith in God. Thus, the opening cry, " my God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" Psalm 22:1 that was a cry of anguish, uttered out by the worshipper in a terrible state of despair.

The Psalmist felt estranged from God. Yahweh's love for him had disappeared. He was in a state of terrible separation from God. He cried out for God's help day and night but received no reply. Yet his physical pain and psychological torture was increasing.

Despite the fact that Yahweh had not yet responded, the Psalmist remained confident in Yahweh. He addresses him as the holy one of Israel, worth of praises- Ps 22: 3

The sufferer knew that his God was a God of ancestors who trusted Him and they were not to let Him down. They were rewarded for good deeds whenever they were in spiritual vacuum, they prayed to God and were assisted.

The sufferer had faith that the God who assisted his ancestors in the past could still assist him.

He is exposed to public ridicule and mockery. Everyone despises him as if he is a criminal!

He says that everyone laughs at him and makes fun of him. They stick out their tongues and jeer at him. They abuse him as a foolish man who puts trust in an empty God. "He trusted in the Lord… let him deliver him…" Ps 22:8

The sufferer longs for Yahweh's presence. It is Yahweh who has the ability to protect him but Yahweh is far. He cries out for His nearness –Ps 22:11

The sufferer recalls and acknowledges Yahweh as his creator and protector, right from birth- Ps 22:10. Thus, he still had faith in God.

In Ps 22:12-21, the sufferer describes his suffering in very strong language. He says the bulls of Bashan surrounded him which are fierce. Lions roaring and opening up their mouths are referred to. His enemies attack him like wild beasts, fierce dogs are referred to.

He further describes his enemies as a gang of evil men because of this; he feels great agony and helplessness.

In his great suffering he has an inner dilemma. His unspoken question is why do I suffer , yet I have done nothing wrong? Why do the wicked prosper?

The Psalmist expresses a state of loss of energy. He says that his bones are out of joint, his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth and his heart melted like wax. His clothes are being gambled by the wicked etc.

He calls upon Yahweh to save him from the lion's mouth, from the power of dogs and from the swords. He needs Yahweh's nearness but not distance.

In Psalm 22: 22-23, there's a change in tone. The worshipper starts praising Yahweh for His goodness. He says that Yahweh helps the needy , feeds the hungry and rescues the oppressed. That God deserves praising in public. He is a God of all nature He is the God of Jacob, He never abandons the needy.

The Psalmist rejoices because God is faithful. He remembers people who have trust in him. He is no longer an outcast. He feels safe and secure. Yahweh's love and protective hand is near him.

Who was the sufferer?

Different interpretations have been made as to who the sufferer was. Some scholars say that it was Israel as a nation, that kept on suffering and calling for Yahweh's help.

Others say that the sufferer was Jeremiah who complained with God in a state of great despair, others say it was Elijah, Job etc.

However, popular opinion is that the sufferer was Jesus Christ. The Psalm was thus prophetic and messianic. Jesus suffered terribly but never gave up his father's mission.

The following are the similarities between Jesus' suffering and the sufferer in Psalm 22.

Psalm 22:1 is similar to Mk 15:34 and Mtt : 27:35, " My God my God why have you abandoned me?"

Psalm 22:7 is similar to Mt: 27:39, "people jeer at me".

Psalm 22:8 is similar to Mt: 27:35 Jesus' life style was full of lonely moments e.g. in Mt 26: 69 when he was deserted.

In Mt 26: 26-46, great sorrow befell Jesus.

In Mk 14: 43-65, Jesus was surrounded and tortured.

So Psalm 22 was a prophecy about Jesus' suffering . It points towards God's power over death and resurrection. Mk 16:1ff compared with Psalm 22:22-31

Summary of Ps 22 examine the view that Psalm 22 was a cry of anguish and suffering:

- The sufferer was asking for Yahweh help when facing danger
- The sufferer knew that Yahweh was a God of love and protection
- The sense of abandonment is seen
- Feels Yahweh's disappearance from him as there was no reply
- The sufferer remained confident in Yahweh
- Knew that his God was a God of his ancestors
- Had faith that the God who assisted his ancestors would still assist him

- Exposed to public ridicule and mockery
- Longs for Yahweh's presence
- Acknowledges Yahweh as the creator and protector
- Uses strong images of bulls, lions, strong dogs
- Describes his enemies as a gang of evil men
- Expresses loss of energy, his bones disjointed, melted heart like wax
- Praises God for his goodness- feeds the hungry
- Recalls that God always remembers the people who trust in him
- Makes them prosper
- Laments the sharing of his clothes.

Justify the view that Jesus was a fulfilment of the character in Psalm 22

- Jesus suffered like a criminal
- Despite his suffering did not abandon his father's mission
- He cried on the cross like – Eloi-Eloi, Lema Sabatchani, "My Lord my Lord why have you abandoned me?"
- He was mocked , ridiculed- save yourself
- Peter denied Jesus
- Jesus was surrounded by the Roman army
- Opposed by the Pharisees
- In the garden of Gethsemane wanted the cup of suffering removed
- He was handed over to the Roman authorities
- Jesus' clothes were divided
- He was killed with merciless evil men
- Jesus was condemned to death
- Jesus was helped by a sinner to carry the cross
- When his strength dried up, Jesus confirmed God's power over death with his resurrection
- His feet were nailed.

RELEVANCE OF PSALM : 22 TO CHRISTIANS TODAY

Christians today should draw their attention to God more in times of suffering and fall back to Him, ask for help in case of economic, political, social hardships.

Christians today should accept suffering as part of life because it is meant to test one's faith. The need to endure patiently and in prayer in face of suffering. We should always praise God amidst suffering.

They ought to trust in God as it pays. The prayers of a trusting man are always answered by God. Thus, keep trusting God in times of suffering.

They are called upon to believe in God's mercy kindness, love and power. He keeps by the side of the sufferer.

Christians today should have hope in the resurrection. Suffering or even death is not the end of life. Abundant life awaits Christians during the Perousia.

They should accept the idea of God's protection to His people – right from childhood to date, even in the face of problems. Thus, it is wrong to accuse him of abandoning people in times of trouble.

Christians today should feel proud of Jesus Christ, despite having been jeered at or laughed at and be ready to testify about Christ.

They ought to believe in God as a God of history to those who trusted him and so can up hold them in happiness.

We should always strive for God's love and protection by upholding His will on earth- love of God and neighbour

They need to long for God's nearness to them through practicing good deeds to others-like charity works to the needy in society.

They need to call upon God to save them from the beasts of this world and satan's evil ways through his presence in them.

They ought to praise Yahweh for His goodness and provisions to them in all situations like food, justice in society etc.

They should rejoice in God's faithfulness to his promises to mankind- by remembering those who trust in Him.

PSALM : 47

This Psalm was usually sung by the Israelites' New year day festival to emphasise the absolute sovereignty of God. This was a famous, festival after the exile . It could also be used on other occasions as well in the Jerusalem temple.

In Psalm 47; the Psalmist calls upon his fellow worshippers to give praise to Yahweh by clapping hands, singing loudly and joyfully.

Yahweh is presented as the highest God and the king of the whole universe. Yahweh is universal and worth of praise.

The Psalmist proudly sings about God's choice of Israel. They are a covenant people, descendants of Jacob and should praise their God for choosing them and giving them great favours.

Yahweh gave them the land of Canaan for which they are very proud and should praise Him for it. Formerly , it belonged to the Canaanites, giving it to the Israelites was a sign of love. For this they had to praise God.

Their God should be praised more because of the victory He has constantly given them over their enemies/other nations.

The Psalmist and other worshippers rejoice in their intimate relationship and attachment to such a powerful God. He is high above and greater than other Gods. He therefore deserves praise.

While singing this song, the worshippers were nationalistic, they couldn't hide the pride they had in being Israelites.

In Psalm 47: 5-9, the Psalmist portrays God as a ruler of all nations. He is more powerful than all earthly kings and rules over them all. Nobody is like Him. He therefore deserves respect and honour. He is greater than human armies.

God's love to His people is so much that he deserves to be praised- gave them food, protected them from enemies , gave them a land to stay in etc.

Comment:

Christians look at this Psalm as a messianic one. It was a prophecy about the establishment of God's kingdom on earth; a kingdom in which Gentiles and Jews would mix and this has already happened.

The Psalm shows God as the enthroned king of Israel (a theocratic leader)

RELEVANCE TO UGANDANS TODAY

Ugandans today should praise God because He is good and great. He is the creator and all creatures should worship him.

Ugandans today should feel free to sing, clap, jump, dance while praising God. Thus, Yahweh should be worshipped whole heartedly.

They ought to respect God because He is the overall king of the world. They should base their plans on God and reserve time to worship Him- praise

They are called upon to be grateful for God's providence to them e.g when they attain success, they should take it highly as God's help rather than one's effort/talent.

They should act as true descendants of Abraham by being faithful to God as Abraham was faithful to Yahweh.

They should openly accept God's love for them and be thankful to Him , through praises . He provides for them in times of need.

Ugandans today should respect and honour Jesus Christ who gives such victory to them. He is the king of our hearts, he reigns in men's hearts and gives them victory over their enemies.

They need to believe that Christians are the new Israel, the newly chosen people of God.

They should call for God's help over their enemies in case they are faced with difficulties.

Ugandans who are Christians of different denominations and sects should unite around their k ing Jesus Christ.

They ought to preach the good news of God to all including non-Christians /pagans so as to make them aware of God's nature.

They should allow God to be their overall king and Jesus to reign over their lives for success in any area of life.

PSALMS: 137: A NATIONAL LAMENT FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

The final destruction of Jerusalem came in 587BC at the hands of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon

The Jews were consequently exiled in Babylon while others lost their lives during the fight. The Jerusalem temple and city were destroyed as prophesied earlier.

God took Israelites to exile so that they could change spiritually. The exile was an educative punishment to the Israelites for their sins.

In this Psalm, the Psalmist shows the plight of the captives. He laments about the destruction of the temple, the city and the killing of Israelites. He also calls, upon Yahweh to revenge against the Babylonians and Edomites.

In Ps 137: 1-4, the Psalmist presents the exiles as living in a helpless situation. They are grieved and distressed. They are weeping over fallen Jerusalem and loved it too much.

While in exile, their captors approached the temple musicians and asked them to sing Yahweh's songs for the captors . This request was a great mockery on them. They were already demoralised and had already hung their harps and other musical instruments up on the trees.

They refused to play the harps. How could they sing Yahweh's songs in a foreign land? Their duty was to sing for Yahweh in His temple. The exile had silenced their joy and cheerfulness.

The songs they played in the temple were purposeful-meant to praise Yahweh. Such songs were not to be sang for the convenience of their captors who just wanted to enjoy them without understanding the message in them. If they accepted they would be guilty of exposing Yahweh's honour to public ridicule.

In Psalm 137: 5-6, the Psalmist vowed never to forget Yahweh, Zion the holy city and the Temple of Jerusalem.

The worshippers called upon Yahweh to curse them if they ever forget Jerusalem. They would rather die than forget Jerusalem and their God Yahweh. They were concerned about Jerusalem because their God lived there – " a holy centre".

The Psalmist in 137:7-9, called upon God, to exercise revenge on the destroyers of Jerusalem. He believed in the Mosaic law of tit for tat.

He prayed to God to punish the Babylonians and Edomites. This was because those two nations had dealt mercilessly with the Israelites. They had killed Israelites-children and old people without mercy.

They plundered and looted the city, they destroyed farms and pulled the temple down! Such nations felt happy when Israelites were suffering. The Psalmist therefore calls upon Yahweh to punish them in a harsh way too.

They longed to return to Jerusalem, their centre of worship by their refusal to sing for the captors. This showed their total repentance.

The Israelites had showed their renewed commitment to monotheism, they did not want to mix the worship of Yahweh with that of pagan gods.

Israelites were against the signs of any political, religious or cultural alliance with the pagans as stated in the Mosaic Law.

They accepted their mistakes and were ready to seek God, wanted to reconcile with their God and the prophets.

Israelites were not aware that the Babylonians were sent by God to punish the disobedient and unrepentant people of Judah.

They sat by the rivers of Babylon- Tigris and Euphrates and wept over their fallen city of Jerusalem.

They also wept over their Jerusalem temple which was destroyed.

They wept over God's holy mountain Zion, their comrades who were killed in the attack and the loss of their status. The once despised gentiles were now ruling them.

Comments:

Note that the Psalmist believed that Yahweh was a God of justice.

Unfortunately during those days, there was a tendency of reducing God to a vengeful one.

The Psalmist did not know that Yahweh was a God of love who easily forgives enemies.

At the same time, the Psalmist failed to understand that the Babylonians were Yahweh's agents in punishing a rebellious nation of the Israelites.

The Psalmist did not also put into account the fact that people were suffering because of their sins.

In effect therefore Yahweh did not promise to punish the Babylonians in this Psalm.

RELEVANCE OF PSALM 137 TO CHRISTIANS TODAY

Christians today should accept their mistakes and repent as the Israelites accepted their mistakes in Babylon and repented.

They ought to be monotheistic and stop other religious practices like syncretism, idolatry etc.

Christians today should pray to God and move when faced by problems like war, famine

They should stick to God in times of hardships as the Israelites leant on God while in exile.

They ought to boldly defend God's holy name at all times, regardless of where they are . Israelites defended this name while in Babylonian exile.

They should struggle to please God than human leaders as Israelites refused to entertain the Babylonians with the praise songs they used to sing for Yahweh in the Jerusalem temple.

They need to be aware of God's omnipresence. He was with the Israelites even in Babylonian exile.

They ought to proclaim God's universality. He showed His power over the Babylonians. Edomites showing that He was also their God. So even when Christians find themselves in exile or prison, God is near them and they should call upon Him for assistance.

Man should walk in God's ways so as to escape God's punishment. Man in most cases suffers out of his own making not out of God's will . Israel suffered because of their sins.

They should worship and praise God for His goodness to His people; as Israelites praised Him in the exile.

They need to pray for their enemies and love them unlike Israelites who wanted God to revenge on their enemies.

They should reconcile and cooperate rather than revenge because the Christians God is a God of love.

They should leave (stop) falling into tempting situations that might lead to evil deeds because God hates evil men.

IMPORTANCE OF PSALMS AMONG THE ISRAELITES

The book of Psalms reveals how the Israelites expressed their love for God through music , dance and drama.

Psalms helped the Israelites to understand the greatness of Yahweh their God and king of Israel who needed praises.

They became more enlightened about God's activity.

Psalms were used to call upon God to remember them and punish their enemies.

Psalms helped them understand the fact that suffering was part of life and that in such periods, there was no need to lose faith in Yahweh.

They came to know that Yahweh deserves proper worship. They were sacred hymns used in praise of Yahweh.

Psalms enlightened the special bond between God and the Israelites. It was a special and loving relationship that required holiness.

Were used to respond to God with total faith and obedience whether during happiness or suffering.

Psalms were used for offering counselling and guidance and consolation of people in various problems like the sick, heartbroken etc.

The idea of election and being favoured by God became enlightened in the message of psalms.

They were meant to learn of Yahweh's universal nature and is equally concerned about other nations.

Psalms were used to call upon God to remember them and punish their enemies.

They were composed to show the future of Israel as related to their past experiences eg. The messianic psalms had a predictive element but were closely connected to Israel's past experiences like the messianic hope which lingered on for long in their lives.

To show God's nature of love, providence and protection.

They were used to show the wealth of Israel's wisdom. Experienced and talented people used psalms as occasions of developing their talents.

Kings were helped to understand that they were God's representatives and had to serve God and the people loyally.

The Psalms helped to supplement the message of the priests and prophets. Thus, it helped to promote and preserve the covenant. Faith.

Royal Psalms served as national anthems on all major national occasions. Through Psalms, people were reminded that there was only one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to whom they owed worship.

Psalms clarified that God hates sins and sinners but he gives sinners a chance to repent. various sinners used Psalms for confessions.

They were used to thank God for good harvest, military victories etc.

PSALMS AMONG CHRISTIANS TODAY

Though written several years ago and originally meant for use in the Jewish temple, Psalms are still used in Christian worship today which signifies their importance as follows:

- Christians today in our Sunday worship use the Psalms, they read and recite them. Among the most famous Psalm is Ps : 23, which is very popular among the protestants- they are an integral part of Christian liturgy.
- Pop singers have adopted the use of Psalms to suit the taste of modern age e.g. Ps 137…" By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down…."
- Psalms apply to life situations of modern times as well as they were for the Israelites e.g. wars, suffering which need us to draw near to God. It encourages those in fear, failure and persecution to stay calm, trust in God.
- They help us to develop a good attitude towards suffering. It is part of life and a test of our faith but not a punishment from God.
- They teach us that God is universal. He is for everyone who is willing and ready to believe in Christ.
- They come to learn more about God's character- a powerful God, answers prayers, concerned about the suffering people, a forgiving God etc.
- Psalms teach Christians about God's control over our history, our plans and he knows our destinies.
- Psalms can be very valuable during our leisure time. They can help us to reflect on the purpose of our being alive, our role as co-creator etc.

- Psalms help us to understand that we depend on God entirely and we can't go on without God. Thus they strengthen our belief in Jesus Christ.
- Christians today can use the Psalms for teaching their children how to pray and learn more about God.
- They help to enhance one's wisdom, vision, foresight.
- Amongst counsellors, Psalms are important sources of information. No wonder, most pocket bibles of the New Testament have one additional book of the Old Testament- the psalms.
- Psalms are used for giving thanks to God for His various provisions to them.
- They help Christians today to prepare for heavenly glory through reciting Psalms
- Psalms are used for repentance among Christians today – Ps : 51
- Christians demonstrate their love through the messages in Psalms
- Psalms are used for calling upon God's intervention in problems they face
- To be assured of God's power, protection over them from their enemies.
- For expressing their joy to God for various favours to them such as blessings with success in all areas of life – political, social, economic.

THE BOOK OF JOB

This book was written towards the end of the Babylonian exile or shortly after. It is among the books categorised as the wisdom literature.

The writer focuses on the problem of suffering of a non-Jew who learnt the law, put it into practice and became a very faithful follower of Yahweh.

Job was spiritually and morally upright and expected blessings from God, unfortunately, he got disasters.

The book shows the effort of a faithful man to understand the puzzles of life and God's ways but ends up with a conclusion that true wisdom comes from God.

THE PURPOSE OF JOB

The book was written purposed to transform the Deuteronomic teaching about retribution or deserved punishment. Traditionally, the Jews believed that any religious and morally upright person was entitled to rewards and blessings from God while a wicked person was to receive his punishment. According to this book, this is not automatic and that in some cases righteous people suffer.

It was meant to teach the meaning and value of suffering in life. It shows that suffering is part of life, whether one is morally upright or wicked, he may suffer as a way of testing or strengthening his faith.

To console the suffering Israelites. The writer's intention was to show that God is present in the lives and circumstances of suffering people. The purpose was therefore to ease the tension and stress of all sufferers.

To demonstrate the inadequacy of human knowledge. Jobs experiences clearly show that human wisdom is limited. None of Job's friends – Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar was able to understand the cause of his suffering , innocent people and the prosperity of the wicked.

Was written to show the danger of spiritual pride. In this book, Job felt spiritually proud and almost became arrogant before God.

He tried to question God's justice and wanted to go to court with God to prove that he was suffering innocently. When God spoke to Job, the latter realised his foolishness.

Thus, the book teaches that no amount of suffering or human intelligence should make us question God's ways.

To show the nature of God, the writer depicts God as a caring and creating being who restores Job to good health, restores his children, domestic animals wealth etc. Hence, He is provider, creator, omnipotent and omniscient. He is an inspiring God who empowers the demoralised Job to stand up and talk to Him.

The writer wanted to show the value of justification by faith but not be the works of the law. Job was righteous but this did not save him from the suffering of his life. It was only faith in God amidst suffering that pleased God. If his faith had relaxed in the midst of his suffering, he would not have been justified before God.

To show how suffering and evil are a greater problem and mystery which human experience and understanding alone cannot explain.

To show Satan's work in the world. Job's experiences showed Satan's presence and activities even in the lives of the faithful, trying to tempt them and sway them away from God.

To show that sin means rebellion against God. This judged from the argument of his friends when advising him. They insisted that in one way or another, Job must have sinned against God. Though Job had not necessarily sinned, the message remains clear that sin is rebellion against God, and accompanied with punishments.

The Background to the theme in the book of Job

Traditionally, there was an orthodox (original) belief that a person who behaved well, was morally upright was entitled to blessings and rewards from Go. Deut 28: 1-14, 7: 12-26. Hence, a faithful/ righteous man expected the following:-

- God would show him constant love
- He would receive a number of healthy children
- He would be protected from sickness
- Have a number of fertile sheep and cattle
- Protection from one's enemies/ victory over his enemies
- Riches, peace in villages and towns
- Abundant food stuffs, plenty of rainfall
- He would receive leadership posts etc

These and many others would be enjoyed by the whole nation of Israel, if they remained faithful, obedient and trust worthy.

On the other hand, an evil man or nation would experience the following curses and punishments :-

- Curses on one's crops and fields, leading to drought, famine , starvation
- Would have few and poor breeds of cattle and sheep
- Trouble, confusion and lack of a peaceful mind.
- Killing of their kings, priests, prophets thus, there would be lack of guidance to the people
- Infectious diseases on both human beings and their animals
- Sand storms and dust storms instead of rainfall
- Earthquakes and hailstones
- Defeat by one's enemies
- Rampant deaths, no descent burials, their bodies would be eaten by wild animals/birds

- Would have attacks of incurable diseases, boils, itching sores
- Blindness and madness
- Oppression and exploitation from neighbours
- Assault from robbers
- Enslavement of one's children by enemy nations
- Living a life of suffering and loneliness in exile
- One's vines would be eaten up by worms, thus, there would be little or no wine
- Locusts would destroy their crops
- A foreign nation would occupy their land
- Hunger, thirst and nakedness would characterise the society
- They would be taken back to Egypt in ships.

JOB'S LIFE EXPEREINCES

Against the above background, Job's life experiences are presented and the writer exposes a contradiction to the Deuteronomic teachings.

Job's life shows that good conduct and a person's wellbeing are not necessarily related. Good conduct does not necessarily lead to rewards and blessings or wickedness to curses and punishments.

Job is introduced as a worshipper of God, he was wise, God loving, God fearing, morally upright, repentant and forgiving. He helped the poor, weak voiceless like the strangers, widows, orphans, disabled etc. In Ezekiel 14:4, 20, Job's goodness is compared to that of Noah and Daniel.

His spiritual and moral maturity was reflected in the purification sacrifices he offered on behalf of his children.

Due to his righteousness, Job pleased God who blessed him with 7 sons, 3 daughters, 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 1000 heads of cattle, 500 donkeys and many servants. Such blessings were in line with the Deuteronomic teachings.

Job's faith is debated in heaven. All of a sudden, there occurred a heavenly meeting during which God and Satan debated the subject of God's faith.

Satan argued that Job is faithful and morally good because of the blessings he had from God. If his wealth was removed, he would abandon God very fast. According to Satan, a poor man could not have faith in God.

God insisted that Job was trustworthy and faithful irrespective of the blessings. He allowed Satan to remove all Job's material possessions- Job 1:6-12

Note: The impression given is that Satan was an angelic being in charge of testing men's faith on God's behalf.

A TURNING POINT IN JOB'S LIFE: JOB 1:13-19

Satan tested Job and inflicted the disasters below on him.

Marauding Serbians stole all Job's cattle and donkeys. They killed the servants who were in charge of the donkeys except one.

Lighting struck his sheep and shepherds and they were all killed except one servant .

Chaldean bandits stole all Job's camels and killed the servants. A strong storm swept from the desert and blew down the house of Job's eldest son. All his children were feasting in the house and they perished.

In Job 2: 1-6, back in heaven, another meeting occurred between God and all the angelic beings. God interviewed Satan and maintained that Job's faith was unshakable but Satan was not satisfied.

He claimed that if he was given chance to afflict Job's physical body, then he would abandon God. The Lord allowed Satan to afflict Job's skin but not to take away his life because it belongs to God alone.

Back on earth, Satan inflicted Job's body with a terrible skin disease- Sores erupted all over his body. In obedience to the laws in Leviticus – Lev : 13, Job went out of his home and sat by a rubbish heap. He took a broken piece of pot and began to scratch his sores: Job:2: 7-8

THE MOVEMENT OF THE BOOK

Job is obedient, faithful and moral; he receives blessings from God and gets many friends.

God allows Satan to test Job's faith. Job's health falls under danger and he moves to a rubbish pit. His wife advises him to curse God and die but he rejects her advice.

His friends visit him near the rubbish heap, but cannot believe what they see. Silence strikes them until Job breaks it.

Job complains and maintains that he is suffering innocently. His friends –Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar reject Job's argument. According to them, Job had sinned and is reaping curses as per the teaching of Deut. 28.

Job insists that he is innocent and accuses God of being unknowable or understandable.

Elihu intervenes in the dilemma of a suffering but a just man. He explains the role of suffering in life.

Yahweh himself speaks, he does not answer any of Job's questions but accuses Job of his impatience in suffering. Job's questions are not answered.

Job repents and is blessed by God. He is restored to his original life of happiness full of health and wealth.

REACTIONS TO JOB'S SUFFERING

1. **By his wife Job 2:9**

   Before the disasters befell Job, she was very supportive to her husband. When the first disaster befell Job, his wife was still supportive, she tried to comfort him.

   However, with time, she was overcome by the suffering of her husband. This was especially when a skin disease deformed Job.

   She advised Job to curse God and die, this was probably due to Satanic influence. Her suggestion was in line with the Deuteronomic teaching- whoever cursed God had to die- such ill advice shows that her faith was in ruins – Job could no longer bank on the support of his wife.

2. **The general reaction of his friends- Job 3: 1**

   Job's three friends- Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar heard all about his suffering and the disasters that had befallen him.

   Before these disasters the three shared joy with Job. Now they were ready to share grief with him. Hence, they arranged to go and comfort their friend.

When they neared the rubbish heap where Job was sitting, they were overcome with silence for seven days and nights.

So their first reaction was to keep quiet. This was a sign of mourning amongst the people of the ancient East.

It was Job who broke the silence by cursing the day he was born – Job 3: 2-3

3. Eliphaz's reaction- Job 4: 7, 5:2, 5:7-8, 22:5

He was the eldest and most experienced of all Job's friends and the first to react to Job's outbursts and he did so with composure and confidence.

He acknowledged the faith and trust that Job had in Yahweh.

He called upon Job to endure suffering, to Eliphaz, Job was suffering for some sin, which he had committed either intentionally or unintentionally.

He comforted him that his suffering and pain was short lived. Job had to keep calm because his goodness would finally triumph.

He blamed Job for complaining bitterly against God – Job :4. He informed Job that no man is infallible before God. So Job's complaint against God was useless and could not find support even amongst angels- so Job cannot claim innocence.

He informed Job, that man's suffering is caused by his evil heart and thoughts.

He challenged Job to look back into Israel's history. "Think back now…" Job 4:7 He informed him that according to history, all, good men received rewards while the wicked met disasters, so Job must have sinned.

He advised Job to repent and turn to God by offering a sacrifice- Job 5: 7-8. Eliphaz even praised God for his power, justice and wisdom and called upon Job to do the same.

He disapproves Job's lack of patience during suffering

Note:

Eliphaz understood Job's suffering to be in line with the Deuteronomic teaching i.e due to some sin/disobedience to God.

4. Bildad's reaction: 2nd friend

He was annoyed by Job's reply to Eliphaz i.e that he was suffering innocently and wanted to see God face to face to argue out his case before him.

To Bildad, it was wrong for Job to criticise God and refers to Job's words as mere wind. Job's reaction would provoke Yahweh's anger.

He maintained that God is full of justice and never fails to see what is right – Job : 8:3

He said that God can't curse or punish a just person. By this Bildad imp ied that Job had sinned.

Bildad told Job that even his children had sinned and that is why they perished in a storm. Job 8: 1 -4, " God punished them as they deserved…"

He believed in a moral law which exists in this world. By this law everything good is rewarded while evil acts are punished.

He maintained that Job had sinned and one of the sins was loss of patience during suffering.

Note:

Job responded by emphasising his innocence. If God were human, I could answer him; we could go to court and decide our quarrel- Job 9: 32, 9:20

5. **Zophar's reaction** - youngest of Job's friends

Blamed Job for his empty words

Called upon Job to trust in God who strengthens man to endure pain. He advised Job to reach out to God in prayer so as to remain faithful.

He maintained that Job must have sinned and that God was punishing him lest he deserved it.

He informed him that God's wisdom and greatness are greater than his knowledge.

He referred to historical times whereby God had seriously punished the wicked – Job 20: 4-5, 26: 13-15

In response to Zophar, Job maintained his innocence and wondered why God allowed the wicked to prosper- " why does God allow evil men to live, let them grow old and prosper?..." Job 21: 7 – 19

Summary of the advice from Job's friends

God is full of justice, love, care for all His creatures. God always blesses a person who is righteous, faithful and morally good.

God punishes evil doers by sending them curses/ disasters. Accordingly, they concluded that Job must have sinned either outwardly or inwardly.

They advised Job to repent of his self-exaltation, impatience, hypocrisy. They based their arguments and advice on historical, perspective. According to Israel's historical experience and religious traditions, God had always punished evil people.

In the same way God had always blessed good and righteous people. They argued that Job could not be an exception. They therefore, defended God's ways and justice. In this way they were very right.

They condemned Job's spiritual pride and lack of patience during suffering.

Unfortunately, his three friends failed to understand the cause and nature of Job's suffering. They insisted that he had sinned yet he had not.

They were not aware of the heavenly conversation between God and Satan. Thus, this showed the inadequacy of human wisdom especially in matters to do with evils and suffering, good morals, blessings; so their advice then hurt Job than consoled him.

6. Elihu's reaction:

Elihu was a by stander who listened to all the advice given to Job by his friends. According to him, both Job and his friends held some mistaken ideas.

In his speech to Job, he defended God's way before man- Job chs32 – 37. He told Job that his major problem was spiritual pride which in itself was a sin- Job 33, 17, 35: 12

He stressed the educative nature of suffering by saying that God at times afflicts a person so as to teach him some truth- Job 36: 21-23, 33: 29-30

He disagreed with Job's complaint that God had dealt with him unjustly. To Elihu , God is full of justice and wisdom. All people feel the weight of his justice and righteousness in the same way.

He blamed Job for showing no respect to God- Job 34:7

He disagreed with Job's view that righteousness brought no advantage to a righteous person- Job 34:9

He said that God is a great teacher who uses various methods to educate men. He blamed Job's friends for failure to make him understand the situation.

However, even Elihu had some shadowy view that Job might have sinned. He was angered by Job's insistence that he was innocent.

7. God's reaction

Finally God spoke to Job. He called upon him to realise the differences between God and man, the latter entirely depends on his creator.

Job had no right to criticise God's ways and to call God to court- Job 13:3, 22:3-5

God challenged Job to first explain the mysteries of all created things. Thereafter, he would answer his questions.

In the above quotations, God informed Job that man is a creature who entirely depends on his creator.

Man does not have a right to question God's ways. Man cannot explain the mystery of the world.

Job was overwhelmed by the presence and words of God and shut up his mouth in silence. He realised he was a nobody and said, " I talked about things I did not understand about, marvel too great for me to know… so now I am ashamed of all I have said and repent in dust and ash- Job 42: 2-6

Conclusion to the book of Job 42: 7-17

Job's friends are criticised for not speaking the truth about God and Job

God calls upon Job to pray for them and calls upon them to offer sacrifices and seek for forgiveness. They accept; offer sacrifices and are forgiven.

Job is restored to his former health, comfort and wealth – actually, he is blessed two fold. He receives a number of friends.

His sheep are multiplied by God to 14,000.

He is given 6000 camels, 2000 herds of cattle, 1000 donkeys.

He is given seven sons and three daughters who were the most beautiful in the whole world!

JOB'S REACTION TO HIS SUFFERING

On receiving information about the death of his children, the robbing his donkeys, cattle and camels, Job reacted as follows:

- He tore his clothes in grief, shaved his head and threw himself downwards Job 1:20
- He prayed to God to strengthen him. In his words- I was born with nothing and I will die with nothing. The Lord gave me and the Lord has taken away. May His name be praised, Job:1:21, bowing down in prayer showed his acceptance of God's justice.
- Job, maintained his faith and trust in God amidst the suffering and psychological pain he faced.s
- He never blamed God for not protecting his property. This showed that he was not materialistic but spiritual. It also showed that he accepted Yahweh as a provider.
- When he was hit by a skin disease, Job responded by fulfilling the laws of purity as laid down in Leviticus: 13.
- He rejected his wife's advice of cursing God- Job 2:9 and argued that man should accept both good and bad things from God.
- He did not complain against God for making him sick – Job 2: 10

- In Job 3, Job cursed the day he was born and the night he was conceived. He asked God to turn it into a day of darkness, a barren day etc. this showed his despair. He wished he had died in his mother's womb – Job 3: 1-13
- He lamented that he was nothing and had no freedom, no peace and no rest. Even prisoners and slaves were better than he was- Job 3: 18-26
- He listened to the advice of his friends but did not accept that he had sinned as they claimed
- He asserted that he was innocent and upright, blameless. Thus, said he was suffering innocently
- He called for justice and fairness from God. He questioned why wicked people were prosperous yet the righteous like him were suffering
- He maintained that he was upright and charged, that if God was physical, he would take him to court 9: 19, 13: 1-8, 23:3
- He begged for God's mercy upon him – Job 9:15
- Job longed for death as the only means of finding rest. Life had become meaningless to him – Job :7 :16
- He stated that he was a good man full of integrity and charity. He said that he had given assistance to the poor, orphans, widows etc – Job 29: 12-16
- He disagreed with Zophar's arguments and referred to them as lies- Job 12& 13:14
- He listened carefully and humbly to Yahweh's speech to him Job 38: 41. At the end of the speech, he acknowledged God's omnipotence justice, wisdom and he repented for having questioned God's ways – Job 42: 3-6
- He listened to Elihu's speech and advice carefully and attentively- Job 32-37

THE RELEVANCE OF JOB'S BOOK TO CHRISTIANS TODAY

Christians today, should maintain their faith and trust in God amidst suffering as Job remained faithful in his suffering. There are various problems/ suffering experienced by man today like poverty , famine, brutality during war but their faith should go on amidst such.

They should expect to suffer at one time in their life because suffering is part and parcel of life. They are called upon to welcome all those who are suffering in many ways like the disadvantaged group as Job gave charity to orphans, strangers etc.

They ought to accept the idea of even the righteous facing suffering, so that their faith is tested. Suffering fails to give evidence that one if a sinner.

Christians today should remain prayerful as if is the only way they can be strengthened. Job remained prayerful despite his intense suffering and he was strengthened.

They should remain humble and calm rather than questioning God, regardless of any amount of suffering unlike Job who had spiritual pride and questioned God's justice.

They need to be selective of the advice given to them by their friends in times of suffering as Job who rejected the ill advice by his wife to curse God and die.

They ought to trust in God's providence as Job who accepted his situation and allowed God control his life during his intense suffering thus, it teaches us to be spiritual rather than materialistic in thoughts.

They should believe in God's ways as being different from man's ways, his wisdom surprises that of man, unlike Job's suffering.

They should be spiritually humble and leave the spiritual pride that he even thought of taking God to courts of law.

They ought to help those in need or with problems through material help or proper advice as Job's friends advised him in his time of need.

They are challenged to keep alert because Satan is always around us trying to tempt us from the right path of salvation. Satan can even use our friends to tempt us.

They should accept God's will for them than cursing the days we were born. This is because God has a purpose for each of us and loves as dearly unlike Job who cursed his birthday, in a state of despair

They should believe in God's blessings to the obedient ones, just as the blessed Job and restore him to happiness, good health due to his belief and obedience to God.

Christians today should be patient in times of suffering as Job remained patient in his suffering.

They ought to control their tongues at all times unlike Job's friends who judged him according to the Deuteronomic teaching yet he was indeed innocent!

They need to instil hope in those who are suffering, extend love to those in agony, visit them constantly as a way of encouraging them to remain in hope for the best.

They should have friendship that is based on sincerity and true help of one another; rather, than practicing hypocrisy, unlike Job's friends who failed to empathise with him during his suffering.

END