

Prophet Jeremiah's Vision of the North as Instrument of God's Judgment: Attendant Consequences for the Atrocities Being Committed in Nigerian

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Abstract

The northern region in Nigeria has witnessed the emergence of different crises more than others (East and South). Some of them were so deadly because they do not respect the sacredness of life. In line with Jeremiah 4:6b, which declares "I will bring evil from the north and a great destruction". The Lord Himself raised people that show no mercy as documented in chapter 6 verses 22 – 23. Prophet Jeremiah expounds on at least fifteen of such calamities or atrocities that warrant the north being used as instrument of judgment or punishment on the land. In verse 15 of chapter 1, God called the families of the kingdoms of the north to execute judgment for the sake of Judah's wickedness. The same wickedness is being committed in Nigeria in a greater magnitude, which implies that same north is being used as judgment from impartial God who puts people in the positions to serve others. Hence, leaders are expected to serve in various capacities in every nation. However, there appears to be leadership problems in Nigeria that has seriously affected the whole system. Some of the atrocities committed are no execution of justice between man and his neighbour; disobedient to the covenant / Oath office; shedding of innocent blood; human sacrifice; murder; adultery and fornication; swearing falsely; turning the places of worship to den of robbers; covetousness; and idolatry. Thus, the paper proposes genuine repentance; obedience; Prayer; intercession; trust; honesty and sincerity; and true preaching as the way forward

Key words: vision, judgement, north, atrocities, consequences,

Introduction

In every nation of the world, the north seems to be a problem. Several obstacles in the ruler-ship and leadership are linked to the region. In other words, the north determines to a large extent who becomes what in the national arena especially in Nigeria. It is argued that the north has taken the leadership of Nigeria as a birth right, or mini colonization and so forth. Despite her less academic and economic prowess, she capitalizes on her political strength. The north may not have everything it takes to develop a nation but capitalizes on political control and any objection entails trouble of complicated magnitude in the country. Many Easterners and Southerners do not understand why they have to rely on the north to achieve their national political goals. The vision of a seething pot whose face was toward the north provides the answer. It is categorically stated

in Jeremiah 1: 14b that “out of the north, evil shall break forth upon all inhabitants of the land”. To buttress this statement, any student of Nigerian history will recollect many troubles or challenges that have emanated from the northern Nigeria.

The north consolidates on political leadership of the country at all times. The permutations of who becomes who in the national arena is planned and hatched in the north. This is made possible as a result of the atrocities committed in the country and God’s willingness to use the north as instrument of judgment. Prophet Jeremiah expounds on at least fifteen of such calamities or atrocities that warrant the north being used as instrument of judgment or punishment on the land. In verse 15 of chapter 1, God called the families of the kingdoms of the north to execute judgment for the sake of Judah’s wickedness. The same wickedness is being committed in Nigeria in greater dimension, which implies that the north is being used as judgment from impartial God.

The North

The northern region in Nigeria has witnessed the emergence of different religious sects more than others (East and South). Some of them were so deadly because they do not respect the sacredness of life. Except and unless God eliminate the groups for His mercy sake, all the efforts of past and present leaders would be fruitless. It has been the intercessory prayers offered on behalf of the country that the nation is still united. Jeremiah 4:6b reads “I will bring evil from the north and a great destruction”. Is this the scheme of the north? No! The Lord Himself raised few people that show no mercy as documented in chapter 6 verses 22 – 23. No one can explain the spiritual undertone even those involved on why they had to be cruel to fellow citizens. Like the saying that we are nothing but pencils in the hand of the creator, despite the logical reasons Nigerians advance for the killings.

The current religious sect is *Boko Haram* (meaning, Western education is forbidden) and other terrorist groups. Their activities are directly related to Jeremiah 8:17, “The Lord called them serpents, cockatrices which will not be charmed. They shall bite you”. Concerned Nigerians have blamed the government for not been able to halt the activities of these groups that have constituted themselves as threat to national security. The phrase “which will not be charmed” is often not considered before criticizing the leaders. It means that any day the government is able to annihilate one terrorist group, other deadly ones will emerge because human injustice toward God and humanity is continuum. The only possible way out is genuine repentance and asking for mercy so that peace can be restored in the country.

Jeremiah 50:3 further expatiates the activities of the northern (Babylonian) instrument of judgment. They shall make the land desolate. Remember that many parts of the north is becoming so, which is gradually being extended to other regions. Many people are relocating to other parts of the country or the world beside those in the Internally Displaced Peoples’ camps. They cannot stay for fear of death being scattered as the Jews. Parents are forced to be separated from children and other relations; their means of livelihood taken away; some are being kidnapped all because of sins against God and humanity.

ATROCITIES BEING COMMITTED AND ATTENDANT CONSEQUENCES

God puts people in positions to serve others. Hence, leaders are expected to serve in various capacities in every nation. However, there appears to be leadership problems in Nigeria that has seriously affected the whole system. Some of the atrocities committed are briefly explain below with attendant consequences

No execution of justice between man and his neighbour

The first one is purely on injustice. Pomerleau (2023) says justice is one of the most

important moral and political concepts. The word comes from the Latin *jus*, meaning right or law. He analysis Plato's definition of justice as a virtue establishing rational order, with each part performing its appropriate role and not interfering with the proper functioning of other parts. Aristotle says justice consists in what is lawful and fair, with fairness involving equitable distribution and the correction of what is inequitable. For Augustine, the cardinal virtue of justice requires that we try to give all people their due; for Aquinas, justice is that rational mean between opposite sorts of injustice, involving proportional distributions and reciprocal transactions.

Furthermore, Pomerleau (2023) goes on to say Hobbes believed justice is an artificial virtue, necessary for civil society, a function of the voluntary agreements of the social contract; for Hume, justice essentially serves public utility by protecting property (broadly understood). For Kant, it is a virtue whereby we respect others' freedom, autonomy, and dignity by not interfering with their voluntary actions, so long as those do not violate others' rights; Mill said justice is a collective name for the most important social utilities, which are conducive for fostering and protecting human liberty. Rawls analyzed justice in terms of maximum equal liberty regarding basic rights and duties for all members of society, with socio-economic inequalities requiring moral justification in terms of equal opportunity and beneficial results for all; and various post-Rawlsian philosophers develop alternative conceptions.

From the above, the reverse of justice can be seen in the system. Leaders wittingly promote injustice base on personal greed, tribal and religious sentiments. Leaders perfect the role of oppression and exploitation. Nigerians are deliberately denied their rights and access to national resources as a result of ethnicity and religion. The same God who created difference in ethnicity, tribe and religion will hold leaders responsible for their display and perpetuation of injustice no matter the huge sum of prayers for their forgiveness. God will not at all acquit the guilty ones because He is not a Nigerian judge (that can be perverted) or a politician that accept wrong and reject the right.

Disobedient to the covenant / Oath office

The constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria spells out the responsibility of every Nigerian. It is likened to be a covenant between God and Israel. More so, Nigerians are very religious but do obey the oath of office. Adewumi (2016) advises that Nigerians need to start taking God's commands more seriously. In the Bible, when people disobeyed God's instructions, they were punished. Nigerians will not go scot free as Wellman (2018) rightly observes that there are consequences for every action, both good and bad, just as there are consequences to obeying or not obeying God's law. Obedience brings blessings and disobedience brings curses, so it is close to Sir Isaac Newton's law, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." Breaking God's law, just as breaking mankind's law, brings consequences that are not good. Nigerians are all free to choose to do what is right, even when one is in the minority. The fact is, what is popular is not always right, and what is right is not always popular. Choose to do what is right, whether it is popular or not.

To understand the consequences of disobedience, Boa (2021) posits that the pathetic conditions of Israel's disobedience were death, degradation, and destruction. The same fate awaits Nigerians who pay lib service to the oath of office and God's command. Common sense according to Aribisala (2019), teaches us to care for the poor or less privileged, orphans and widows. Why? Harsh consequences await us if we fail in these responsibilities as stipulated in Exodus 22:22-23; James 1:27. It is imperative to note that the care ought to come from legitimate earning not stealing what belongs to the people and giving to those in need at homes or in the

street.

Shedding of innocent blood

Human lives and blood are being wasted on daily basis. The rate and dimensions of shedding innocent blood in Nigeria are worrisome. As religious people, Olowjoba (2020) reminds us that God forbids shedding of innocent blood (Proverbs 6:17-19). The fourth commandment says, “Thou shalt not kill.” Exodus 20:13. Nigerians shed blood through ethno-religious conflicts, Boko haram insurgency, armed banditry and robbery, kidnapping among others. One notable form of shedding the blood is abortion of an innocent child and sacrifice of children. Irresponsible ones especially the youth engage in illicit sex, which result in unwanted pregnancies. To prevent the shame of such ungodly action, they sometime with parental consent opt for abortion. They become accomplice and guilty of murder. The blood of innocent victims they have shed and are shedding are crying each day to God for vengeance, which must be avenged.

Simeon (2019) rightly observes that the frequency and amount of innocent blood shed on Nigerian soil by state and non-state actors have become unacceptable. The land is over-saturated with innocent blood. One drop of innocent blood is enough to convulse the sensibilities of refined and pious minds. But those whose consciences are seared have no qualms about the spilling of millions of litres of innocent blood. From God’s viewpoint, the consequences of spilling innocent blood are dire, whether on the individual, family, community, ethnic group or nation because God hates “hands that shed innocent blood” (Proverbs 6:16 – 17). The “hands” include those that are directly involved and those who sponsored or approved the bloodshed. All of them are directly or vicariously culpable before God, as it is written, “You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed...” (Ezekiel 22:4).

The repercussions of shedding innocent blood are great for both individual and society. It makes a person or a nation odious and loathsome before God and hinders their prayers. Justifying His fury against the people, God told Prophet Ezekiel, “the iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of blood...” (Ezekiel 9: 8 and 9). Despising the sacrifices and prayers of the people, God warned through Prophet Isaiah: “Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; yea when you make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1: 14 - 15). Little wonder why the multitude of prayers said in Churches and mosques concerning Nigeria have little or no impact on the condition of the country as long as the shedding of innocent blood continues. In addition, individuals lose divine presence (Genesis 4:16); lack focus (Job 12:24 (NIV)); joblessness (“...you will never be able to farm the land again.”); fruitless labour. “...it won’t produce anything for you.” (Verses 11 and 12); and homelessness (verse 12). Other notable consequences are emotional, psychological and physical health challenges; and after having an abortion, the woman is subject to having miscarriages or not being able to get pregnant again. According to Josephus, in less than 40 years later, the Romans invaded Jerusalem and killed about a million people. Tens of thousands were crucified as they did to Jesus. Their blood flowed like water. The Jews were persecuted and scattered all over the world for about 1,800 years for shedding the blood of the innocent Jesus Christ and many other Prophets before Him (Matthew 23: 31 – 36).

Human sacrifice

Like Israel, Nigeria borrowed and copied the culture of human sacrifice. This is done in the secret for acquisition of spiritual powers that are not from God. It is seen by Bentinck (2023)

as the offering of the life of a human being to a deity because it is considered most valuable material for sacrifice in an attempt at gaining powers or expiation. There are two primary types of human sacrifice: the offering of a human being to a god and the entombment or slaughter of servants or slaves intended to accompany the deceased into the afterlife. The latter practice was more common. In various places in Africa where human sacrifice was connected with ancestor worship, some of the slaves of the deceased were buried alive with him, or they were killed and laid beneath him in his grave. Kaplan (2016) buttresses further that the ancients could kill in a million different ways and give a million different reasons why it needed to be done. In much of the pre-modern world, ritual sacrifice was framed as necessary for the good of the society at large — the only way to guarantee, say, a plentiful harvest or success in war. However, God has warned Israel and Nigeria inclusive to desist from sacrifices to idols.

To Spinney (2018), human sacrifice is ritualized and religiously motivated killing of a human being. It is no longer sanctioned by any state, but it was once practiced by societies across the globe. Chiefs and priests routinely strangled, bludgeoned, drowned, and burned their victims to death in order to please various ancestors or deities. Invariably, those ordaining the sacrifices were of higher status than their victims, prompting researchers to ask whether the violence served a social purpose—namely, keeping the lower orders in line. Explaining further, Atekyereza, Ayebare and Bukuluki (2014) posit that to understand child sacrifice requires the broader understanding of the history, context of and rationale for the concept of sacrifice in all its forms. Historically, sacrifices were made to atone for sins or wrong-doing and to ask for blessings. The blessings included, but were not limited to, material wealth (particularly land, domestic animals and other tangible possessions), children, health, and prosperity. The higher the value of the blessings to be sought or wrongs to be atoned, the higher the value of the sacrificial item. God has done the needful for mankind by sacrificing Jesus. What is expected is reciprocating the gesture to God and not to idols to avoid been destroyed.

Murder

Murder is an intentional killing that is committed with “malice aforethought”. This does not mean that a killer has to have acted out of spite or hate. It exists if a defendant intends to kill someone without legal justification or excuse. It also includes intentionally inflicts serious bodily harm that causes the victim's death, or behaves in a way that shows extreme, reckless disregard for life and results in the victim's death (Berman (2023). This is quite different from homicide, which is a legal term for any killing of a human being by another human being that could not necessarily be a crime. For instance, a justifiable killing of a suspect by the police or a killing in self-defence.

According to England (2023), certain homicides are lawful (such as in wartime), while others are unlawful (such as murder and manslaughter). It encompasses lawful killing (such as a killing in self-defense), intentional killing (murder), state-sanctioned killing during war, and negligent or reckless killing (manslaughter). On the other hand, Murder is one type of homicide that involves very specific elements under the law. There is no religion in Nigeria that permits murder so the act is punishable by the law of man and God. Human beings are butchered by fellow Nigerians and non-Nigerians in Nigeria for inability to pay ransom or in attempt to escape from the kidnappers; some are butchered for belonging to a particular religion or tribe. The God of whole the earth will avenge those that were and are being butchered.

Adultery and fornication

Adultery is sex between two married persons while fornication is sex between two unmarried people. Both (fornication and adultery) are very dangerous for Nigerians as it is for

God's children because they open an array of doors for satanic oppression and possession. It goes beyond just premarital and extramarital affairs, it also includes pornography, masturbation, homosexuality, and all sorts of sexual perversion or immorality.

The consequences of fornication and adultery on the victims irrespective of country are enormous. A fragment of the victim's soul is co-joined with sexual partner. Those who engage in sex with a marine agent, a witch, a demon possessed person, a person moving with multiple curses and poverty will have parts of these forces working against them and their destiny. Other consequences are sin against one's own body; defilement of God's temple; brings about spiritual and physical deaths; barrenness; and lack of fruitfulness/ promotion.

Swearing falsely

Oath is a sacred or solemn voluntary promise usually involving the penalty of divine retribution for intentional falsity and often used in legal procedures. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, oaths have been used widely. In Judaism two kinds of oaths are forbidden: (1) a vain oath, in which one attempts to do something that is impossible to accomplish (like the Nigerian politicians that promise to build bridges where there are no rivers), denies self-evident facts, or attempts to negate the fulfillment of a religious precept, and (2) a false oath, in which one uses the name of God to swear falsely (like Nigerians leaders that promise to serve), thus committing a sacrilege. At the time of Jesus in the 1st century CE, oaths were often misused as in our present-day Nigeria and, for that reason, people were often rebuked in early Christianity. In Islam a person may make a *qasam* ("oath"), in which the person swears, for example, upon one of the names or attributes of Allah. Because the *qasam* is primarily a pledge to God, a false oath is considered a danger to one's soul.

Turning the places of worship to den of robbers

The house of God has become political gathering and campaign venues. Pastors have become campaigners with false prophecies. One wonders the motif of the contradictory messages and prophecies of the Nigerian pastors. The bottom-line line could be generating income for the church at the detriment of desecrating the house of God. Everything is allowed to go that Jesus would not be pleased with. For example, Amaechina (2022) recalls that a few days before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus went into the Temple and saw the blasphemy perpetrated by the attendees. Worshipers were buying and selling inside the Temple of God. He overturned the table of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves. He said to them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!". This citation was from the books of Jeremiah and Isaiah. God was angry with the Israelites who were abusing their privileges as religious leaders and violently taking what did not belong to them.

In the modern day Nigerian churches, practical exchange of monies is reformed into donations, fund raising, sowing of seed, take a "sit God reserves" for us, etc. These techniques do not take into consideration of who gives (he or she could be a cultist, a murderer, an armed robber, a thief, a scammer, a kidnapper, a ritualist among others) and for what purpose (to be recognised or gain attention or support or elected etc.). The scripture categorically says that the giving of a sinner or wicked is an abomination before the Lord. Hence, Longhenry (2013) cautions Nigerians not to trust in lying words or techniques of generating income for the church that cannot profit her spiritually. Will Nigerians steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto gods, and walk after other gods that they have not known, and come and stand before God in the Church and say it is well. Read Jeremiah 7:8-11

Covetousness

Both the leaders and the led in the country have inordinate desires (covetous). Cadapen (2020) says covetousness is a strong desire that which God has forbidden. It was at the heart of original sin and it can cause great damage to the spiritual life of a Christian. How can we avoid this sin and embrace the opposite positive virtue? This is why Haynes (2023) gives us four reasons why the sin of covetousness is so dangerous. These are, first, despising God's blessings in one's life because of interest in the next set of blessings and not thankful for the ones already received; second is to end up never satisfied with how much one has; third is to end up in financial ruin for always running after what other people have; and four is never enjoy life because they will not be thankful for what God has blessed one with.

Idolatry

Idolatry is anything that one loves and cherishes more than God. Everything that takes the first place before God is an idol. It could be work, money, children, etc. This according to Johnson (2020) is caused by crave for evil things that God forbids and crave good and legitimate things that God chooses not to give us. Idolatry brings physical ruins such as brokenness, pain, suffering, death, and judgment. Idolatry could also be the worship. For instance, Israel (2014) defines it as the worship, praise, honour, bow, respect of any other god, image, power, help, persons, image in the heart, graven image at home or in the church etc., other than the true God (Jehovah). We are not to bow to any image in the likeness of Jesus, Mary, Peter, or any of the apostles or dead saints. God instructs us not to make any idol in the likeness of the moon, star, sun, or any creature. The act provokes God to jealousy, ignites God's anger, defiles and pollutes people and the land. Idol in the family affects everyone from that family as it is a legal ground for satanic control.

Patronizing native doctors or occult temple or priests for charms, making enquiries, for favour or for success is idol worship. It reduces men to the dust. In view of the passages from Jeremiah 2: 20, and Hosea 2: 15 we understand that in the eyes of the Lord as his prophets say: idolatry is seen as an act of adultery or prostitution. In other words, it means that in the eyes of the Lord, idolatry is a sign of infidelity to God. The love that God has for us makes him jealous to see us go to other gods, so that we may be happy. Happiness and salvation are only in God. "A life without God is like an ocean without water. (Thomson Dablemond)

Way forward

To conclude, God loves Nigeria so much that the country is still one. However, the loving God will not overlook witting disobedience of Nigerians. Consequently, the paper recommends as a way forward in the following paragraphs

One way forward is through genuine repentance and pleading the blood of Jesus. Riccardi (2020) defines repentance as *a change of mind*. That is the literal, etymological definition of the Greek word for repentance: *meta*—change; *noeo* — to think. *the mind* that is changed in repentance refers to the inner consciousness of the whole person. In the Bible, the mind and the heart are often used interchangeably. Psalm 51:14 explains that the sin of blood-guiltiness must be repented of urgently and genuinely so that it can be washed with the blood of Jesus. As exemplified in Psalm 51:7, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin which also implies lifting and reversing every associated curses. In a nut shell, repentance begins with an intellectual recognition and confession of sin with a contrite heart that results in a changed life which produces fruit as in 2 Corinthians 7:11.

Second is total deliverance. To terminate the affliction or consequences, the killer or someone who commits abortion needs to be delivered from vagabond spirits so that he or she can live a fruitful, meaningful, blessed and settled life and breaking of soul ties. It is not enough to be born again. One should undergo thorough deliverance and do away with anything that is connected with idols.

Third is to call on the name of Jesus in prayer. Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." God placed upon him the iniquity of us all. The hypocritical prayer and fasting cannot atone for the sin of shedding of innocent blood.

Obedience 35

Intercession 11:14

Trust 9:4

Sincerity 9:8

True preaching 11:21, 12:10, 14:14 & 23:14,21

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