

The Symbolist and The Symbolised: God's Prophets as Symbols in the Dramatisation of Divine Messages

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Abstract

Biblical prophets have served a pivotal function in the process of communicating God's divine messages to others to whom the messages are intended using various methods. Significantly, these prophets have had to live as dramatists who spontaneously act as symbols according to the script of an ultimate symbolist to present a dramatic enactment of divine messages with their lives before the prying eyes of a spectating audience. This study engages Maurice Maeterlinck's 'Emotional Symbolism' as a theoretical framework. It examines prophets in the bible and the instances where they served as symbols in the hands of God while communicating God's messages. This study examines the symbolisation of Prophets Ezekiel, Agabus, Hosea and Zechariah; significant samples, who functioned as symbols and actors while dramatising divine messages under God's divine direction and supervision. It identifies the supremacy of God in using his prophets as symbols, especially in ways that look dramatic to ensure effective communication of the intended message. It also highlights how the prophets understudy functioned as symbols by tracing the divine instructions they were acting which forms the basis for the script, the entire story and their symbolisation as directed by the ultimate symbolist. Therefore, this study documents the laudable acts of biblical prophets as they offered themselves as actors, who functioned as symbols under the direction of the divine symbolist in the process of conveying divine messages and announcing the need for redemption to capture the attention of the audience to generate an emotional but effective response.

Keywords: *Communication; Dramatisation; Prophets; Symbol; Symbolism*

Introduction

It is no longer news that drama exists in the bible. The truth in this claim is proved by the numerous instances of dramatic acts and occurrences in the bible. For emphasis, it is necessary to deconstruct the meaning of the concept and bring it into context. In the words of Alademomi (2023), drama is

defined as “*the imitation* of a life or an action. This means that drama is putting off one’s original nature and putting on another which is not their real nature” (Emphasis added, 12). That is drama in the simplest sense imitation. This imitation may be of life or action through the use of storytelling, oration, acting, music or dance. Therefore, an allusion to the renowned words of Paul in his message to the Corinthians where he mentioned his tactical use of imitation further establishes this fact:

19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews *I became like* a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law *I became like* one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law *I became like* one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak *I became weak*, to win the weak. *I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.* 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (Emphasis added, I Corinthians 9:19-23, NIV)

From the lines of Paul, as stated above, he engaged the tool of imitation to *become like* others for a moment so that he may have the platform to associate with them and ultimately win them. This was the case for Paul and it dominated the New Testament. However, in another context, Bamiloye (2020) defines drama as “a story enacted according to a written or spoken script” (50). There is a script, which could be either written or oral which contains directions or instructions which is the story, to be executed by an individual or group of individuals.

Following the foregoing, the scripture is replete with various dramatic pieces where God, the symbolist engages His prophets as symbols, who are obligated to execute His divine instructions and communicate them graphically to people to whom the messages were intended. However, beyond the use of mere words of prophecy, these prophets, through the channel of dramatic imitation use their lives as symbols to portray God’s messages, and even when it cost them pain and irreversible losses, they had to stick to the divine script and act as the living symbols under the direction of God, the ultimate symbolist.

Clarification of Key Terms

a. Symbolist

This symbolist refers to the one that engages symbols. The symbolist expresses ideas indirectly through the use of symbols. These symbols may be in different forms and used in diverse ways but the symbolist can be likened to a puppeteer who creates symbols and controls them in a specific way to communicate an idea or a series of messages. The symbolist aims to communicate an intention or even evoke catharsis through the creative use of symbols. In this context, the symbolist is God, who creates and engages symbols in ways pleasing to Him and for the communication of specific messages.

b. Symbolised

To symbolise is to make a symbol out of something, to express indirectly, to represent or stand for. Therefore, ‘symbolised’ which is the past participle of symbolise similarly means to represent or be a symbol. This could be for a phenomenon, visual or non-visual representation. Hence, in this context, the symbolised are the Prophets, who embodied God’s divine messages and

dramatised them using every element of communication available to them for the benefit of a viewing audience.

c. Symbolism

The term symbolism is a concept that connotes the use of symbols for representation. These symbols may be through phenomena or even humans. In the words of Qadri (2017), it is “a practice of representing things by means of symbols or by investing things with a symbolic meaning or character” (154). The use of symbols for communication is towards an end that effective communication be achieved and not merely to make a statement. In the same vein, Qadri (2017) buttresses that ‘Symbols are not metaphors, nor analogies’ but a phenomenon that “stands for something else, usually with something that is concrete. *Symbols organize record and communicate huge amount of information in a quicker way*” (Emphasis added, 154). Hence, symbolism accurately classifies the practice or style that centres on the use of symbols in whichever form for the benefit of communication.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study shall engage Maurice Maeterlinck’s ‘Emotional Symbolism’ as the theoretical framework. Jones (1925) successfully explains the concept thus:

...that which ‘evokes a mood’ and this is known as emotional symbolism. Maurice Maeterlinck is by far the most interesting and sympathetic of the group of French Symbolists Who make use of this kind of Symbolism. Maeterlinck set out to make his audiences feel rather than think, and thus it is that he appeals to them emotionally. In place of perceptions and pictures, he substitutes sensations and ideas...Maeterlinck portrays the characters as puppets swayed hither and thither by the mysterious influences of a Destiny which they cannot understand, but only obey. We become very much interested in and pity the unconscious creatures who are oppressed by their own feebleness and who are compelled to refer the solution of their problem to the supernatural and mysterious. (10-11)

From the foregoing, Maurice Maeterlinck’s emotional symbolism is targeted at using symbols as an alternative medium of communication other than the use of words, in a way that the use of such symbols will generate an emotional response from the spectating audience, hence, resulting in effective communication. Mambrol (2020) adds that “symbols communicate indirectly: concrete images, such as the rose or the cross, *summon up emotional and intellectual associations that cannot be precisely numbered or named*” (Emphasis added, “Mambrol”). Therefore, emotional symbolism is targeted at using symbols (in this case, the prophets) to strategically communicate beyond the use of mere words and evoke sympathy, catharsis and emotional responses.

Drama of the Prophets

Drama in the bible has taken many forms. For the sake of precision, this shall be categorised into two and explained below:

a. Prophetic Revelation Drama

Prophetic revelation drama is a distinct kind of drama that is sent by God, enacted by his prophets, and to His children. Unlike Evangelical drama which is aimed at winning the souls of many, who have not believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the total message of salvation,

prophetic revelation drama is targeted at the children of God, the servants of God and the church. For emphasis, the focus of Prophetic revelation drama is not to ‘evangelise’ to the church or the servants of God since they are already in the fold but rather to deliver God’s message to them, which is oftentimes a warning, instruction or direction. Usually, prophetic revelation drama is God-inspired and God-directed. The story is inspired by God and the details of the communication of the divine message are also given by God. Bamiloye (2020) affirms thus:

The Holy Spirit supervised the writing of the prophetic revelations which the prophets were putting down. They were being moved by the Holy Spirit to speak and write the prophetic revelations which they themselves did not understand. ‘For the prophecy came not in the old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were move by the Holy Ghost’ -II Peter 1:21. Moreover, the messages were given to those holy men by the divine inspiration of God. (82)

Fundamentally, the prophetic revelation drama contains a three-fold objective which is -to revive, to encourage and to prophesy. The scripture is littered with several examples of prophets, who used dramatic actions as a medium of communicating God’s message or instruction to His children to give divine direction or to provoke repentance. It is the acting of prophetic messages given by the Lord to believers, the church or even the nation. However, the peculiarity of prophetic revelation drama is that it is targeted at the people of God; the pulpit and not just the pew; the altar and not just the congregation. That is, it is a kind of drama sent by God through His prophets to mirror the lives of His servants; pastors, deacons, evangelists, bible teachers etc. warn or give them direction(s) through the visual displays of a prophet, who communicates by acting the message beyond the use of mere words. Usually, Prophetic Revelation Drama is first a dramatic occurrence that is acted by a prophet but prophetic as a symbol to the receiver of the message. This means, that prophetic revelation drama is first a message, that is given by God through a prophet who embodies the message by way of imitation and simulation (acting), to communicate God’s message (which are usually prophecies) to an individual or children of God to whom the message is intended. For the prophet in this case, s/he is carrying a prophetic message but to the recipients of the message, the prophet is engaging in a dramatic activity which is usually encoded since the prophet is no longer speaking in plain words and would require that the eyes of the receivers be enlightened to see the underlying messages behind the ‘dramatic’ pieces for immediate action.

b. Applied Prophetic Drama

The applied prophetic drama, like the Prophetic Revelation Drama, is also a form of prophecy meant to be delivered dramatically to an individual or group of people. However, the point of divergence is that the applied prophetic drama is a reality meant to be lived out and experienced by the prophet rather than acted momentarily. Here, the prophecy is applied, first to the prophet before the people to whom the message is intended. Part of the peculiarities of the applied prophetic drama is that it is majorly experienced and is not time-bound as in the case of the prophetic revelation drama where the prophet is conscious of the entire act and is also aware that the ‘dramatic act’ will end after the prophecy has been delivered. Conversely, in the case of the applied prophetic, the message is not acted momentarily with the ability to end at will upon the successful communication of the message but, the prophet is subjected to the instructions of God, the director, who directs the affairs of the prophecy, gives the prophet directions and controls the

total running time of the prophecy. It could take longer or shorter time, and could even be very costly on the part of the prophet.

The Symbolist and The Symbolised: God's Prophets as Symbols

The Bible is littered with instances where drama was used as a tool for communication. However, more particularly, there are instances where prophets were used as symbols in the hands of God - the symbolist, to symbolise something significant to a large community of people by giving prophetic revelational and applied prophetic messages. The examples of such prophets shall be given below based on their use of the 'script', 'story' and 'symbolisation' rule, and their act of imitation through the use of storytelling, oration, acting, music or dance.

Symbol I

Prophet Ezekiel's Symbolisation -Prophecy on the symbol of the Coming Judgment

The Prophet Ezekiel was instructed by God to carry out an instruction. The instruction starts with a caveat that what he is about to engage in is a dramatic activity which will serve as a symbol and warning to the children of Israel, God's people. The prophet Ezekiel was to 'act out' (dramatize) an upcoming siege for the Children of Israel to see and learn and be drawn to the place of repentance.

Script, Story and Symbolisation

The script is a 'pattern of doing' which is either written or passed orally. In this context of biblical dramatization, the scripts refer to the instructions which inform the actions and also guide the execution of the message. In the prophet Ezekiel's case, the script contains the following:

1. Son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a razor to shave your head and beard.
2. Use a scale to weigh the hair into three equal parts.
3. Place a third of it at the center of your map of Jerusalem.
4. After acting out the siege, burn it there.
5. Scatter another third across your map and chop it with a sword.
6. Scatter the last third to the wind, for I will scatter my people with the sword. Keep just a bit of the hair and tie it up in your robe.
7. Then take some of these hairs out and throw them into the fire, burning them up. A fire will then spread from this remnant and destroy all of Israel. (Ezekiel 5:1-4, NLT)

The above-stated was his script. But here is the story. As earlier established, the prophet Ezekiel was to engage the tool of imitation by 'acting out a siege' as a symbol in the sight of the children of Israel to provoke repentance. The story is that of judgement and repentance. God is determined to bring judgment on the people to destroy them as a result of their stubbornness. Hence, He has decided to expose them to the evil coming upon their heads because they chose to wallow in their foolishness. That is the central idea of the story (the message), and Prophet Ezekiel was assigned the responsibility of taking the message to them.

God has given prophet Ezekiel his blockings, the specific movements he is to take, the perimeters of his assignment, and the details of his symbolisation.

1. Son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a razor to shave your head and beard (Props & Blocking)
2. Use a scale to weigh the hair into three equal parts.
3. Place a third of it at the center of your map of Jerusalem (Movement/Blocking)

4. After acting out the siege, burn it there (Movement/Blocking)
5. Scatter another third across your map and chop it with a sword (Blocking & Props)
6. Scatter the last third to the wind, for I will scatter my people with the sword. Keep just a bit of the hair and tie it up in your robe (Blocking)
7. Then take some of these hairs out and throw them into the fire, burning them up.

The above-listed contains the details of the prophet's symbolisation in the process of carrying the God-inspired message to the people. He did all he did as he was led by God to do so. Prophet Ezekiel's drama was a revelation that was not merely said by word of mouth which is a traditional way of giving prophesies but that the attention of the people may be drawn faster, he was instructed to make it more graphic.

Symbol II

Prophet Agabus' Symbolisation -Prophecy on Paul's Journey to Jerusalem

The case of prophetic revelation drama here has to do with a certain prophet named Agabus, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit to enact a dramatic piece in the process of communicating a God-inspired message:

Several days later a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea. 11 *He came over, took Paul's belt, and bound his own feet and hands with it. Then he said, 'The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Gentiles.'* 12 When we heard this, we and the local believers all begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. (Emphasis added, Acts 21:10-12 NLT)

The apostle, Paul was to embark on a journey to Jerusalem and he has prepared himself for the worst that could emanate from that journey. But while he was preparing, Agabus, a prophet moved by the Holy Spirit dramatized the oncoming trials reserved for Paul in Jerusalem. This of course not to scare Paul nor deter him from going, because Paul is already determined to make the journey but to give him a hint on the specific kind of trials awaiting him in the borders of Jerusalem which should not take him by surprise.

Script, Story and Symbolisation

The holy spirit has inspired the prophet to perform an action and then say the prophecy afterwards.

1. Then he said, 'The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Gentiles.' (Acts 21:11 NLT)

The central idea was to hint to Paul about the trials that awaited him in Jerusalem before his arrival, not to inspire fear but to get him informed and prepare his mind.

1. He came over, took Paul's belt, and bound his own feet and hands with it.
2. Then he said, 'The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Gentiles.' (Acts 21:10-11 NLT)

To communicate his message, the Prophet, Agabus had to bind his own feet and hands with Paul's belt to make his message graphic. And although this symbolisation generated responses of empathy for Paul, Paul was not discouraged.

Symbol III

Prophet Ezekiel's Symbolisation -The Death of Ezekiel's Wife

God sent a word to Prophet Ezekiel concerning the pattern at which He would like him to deliver his next prophecy to the children of Israel, and the personal (and) painful details he would have to experience in the process. God wants to make *a statement* but He chose to use Ezekiel as the carrier/embodiment of that statement, not just the speaker. He chose to make his intentions known to Israel, and his people through the lens of Ezekiel, his prophet. That is, for Israel to understand the prophecy beyond the visual presentation, He needed to have a grip on the peoples' *empathy*, not for the situation of Ezekiel's loss but, as a gateway to leading them to a *state of conscientization*. Indeed, it was a highly symbolic drama but, in this drama, Ezekiel had to do as he had been instructed. An experiential knowledge and performance of what is about to happen to others. This is the thin line 'what would happen to the people was applied to Ezekiel first. By experiencing the pain, it becomes an 'expressionistic symbol' to the people. The prophetic message was applied (not just revealed) to him first as a symbol to the people. Hence, this kind of drama is higher than prophetic revelation drama.

Sometimes, some people are not drama ministers but God uses their lives as a medium for expression by using their life experiences and choices (marriage, education, etc) to pass a message. Thus, making them (or it) a reference point to others. In Prophet Ezekiel's case, particularly with the death of his wife followed by the instruction not to weep for her were all strict instructions from God. His obedience to those instructions was the costly price he had to pay for a stiff-necked Israel to be bewildered by the abnormality and drawn to the burning bush of the situation using the bait of empathy.

Script, Story and Symbolisation

1. Son of man, with one blow I will take away your dearest treasure.
2. Yet you must not show any sorrow at her death.
3. Do not weep; let there be no tears.
4. Groan silently, but let there be no wailing at her grave.
5. Do not uncover your head or take off your sandals.
6. Do not perform the usual rituals of mourning or accept any food brought to you by consoling friends.
7. Ezekiel is an example for you; you will do just as he has done. And when that time comes, you will know that I am the Sovereign Lord.
8. I will defile my Temple, the source of your security and pride, the place your heart delights in.
9. Your sons and daughters whom you left behind in Judah will be slaughtered by the sword.
10. Then you will do as Ezekiel has done.
11. You will not mourn in public or console yourselves by eating the food brought by friends.
12. Your heads will remain covered, and your sandals will not be taken off.
13. You will not mourn or weep, but you will waste away because of your sins.
14. You will groan among yourselves for all the evil you have done. (Ezekiel 24: 15-27 NLT)

The above verses show how God used Prophet Ezekiel as a painful symbol to the children of Israel by making him become *an embodiment of the statement* He wants to make, first to himself for the spectators to not only understand the message but also feel his experience as a bit of what God has intended to bring upon them.

Symbol IV

Prophet Hosea's Symbolisation -Marriage to a Harlot

Like Prophet Ezekiel, who lost his wife, Prophet Hosea was sent by God to take a wife; this time, a harlot and marry her to make a statement to the children of Israel. The idea here was for the prophet to marry a harlot, Gomer, and have children with her to make a statement that Israel had forsaken her Lord and God; sunk deep into paganism and made children from that evil. Experientially, prophet Hosea had to marry a harlot and have children with her. All the children whose names have deep meanings relating to the heartfelt perception of Israel in the sight of God were created from that wedlock.

Although God decided to be merciful to Israel afterwards (Hosea 3:1-5), the unobstructed truth remains that he was married to a harlot and has had children by her; that cannot be erased. The purpose of this was to picture the condition of Israel when God called and married her, bringing her into a covenant relationship as His people. God did this to show that the prophecy is a living prophecy. Hence, there was an application of all the prophecies -the wife, the sons and the daughter.

Script, Story and Symbolisation

1. Go and marry a prostitute, so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution.
2. Name the child Jezreel, for I am about to punish King Jehu's dynasty to avenge the murders he committed at Jezreel.
3. Name your daughter Lo-ruhamah—'Not loved'—for I will no longer show love to the people of Israel or forgive them.
4. Name him Lo-ammi—'Not my people'—for Israel is not my people, and I am not their God.
5. This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the Lord and worshipping other gods.
6. Name the child Jezreel, for I am about to punish King Jehu's dynasty to avenge the murders he committed at Jezreel. In fact, I will bring an end to Israel's independence. I will break its military power in the Jezreel Valley.
7. Name your daughter Lo-ruhamah—'Not loved'—for I will no longer show love to the people of Israel or forgive them. But I will show love to the people of Judah. I will free them from their enemies—not with weapons and armies or horses and charioteers, but by my power as the Lord their God.
8. Name him Lo-ammi—'Not my people'—for Israel is not my people, and I am not their God. (Hosea 1:2-11 NLT)

Prophet Hosea's experience was to teach Israel that she must return to God, after forsaking His covenant and going after other gods, and that God will marry her again, just as Hosea remarried his adulterous wife. He would marry her and enter into an eternal covenant with her. However, the prophet had to live out (not act out) these God-given instructions to make God's statement to Israel.

Symbol V

Prophet Zechariah's Symbolisation -Prophecy of the Good and Evil Shepherds

Prophet Zechariah's case is more peculiar. His message was to the children of Israel but God necessitated him to play the role of a shepherd, engage some animal cast, and use them to communicate the intention of God.

Script, Story and Symbolisation

1. Go and care for the flock that is intended for slaughter.
2. Throw it to the potter[a]—this magnificent sum at which they valued me!
3. Go again and play the part of a worthless shepherd. (Zechariah 11:4,13,15 NLT)

Following the explanation of his assignment, the above are the three major scripts (instructions) that God gave to Zechariah as it concerns the assignment. He was to assume the role of a shepherd and care for the flock that had already been meant for slaughter. He was to throw his wages to the potter of the temple, and finally to go back again to play the role of a worthless shepherd. These were the scripts and God gave him the full explanation of the cause and effects of taking those steps. This is found in the details of the story.

1. The buyers slaughter their sheep without remorse. The sellers say, 'Praise the Lord! Now I'm rich!' Even the shepherds have no compassion for them. Likewise, I will no longer have pity on the people of the land," says the Lord.
2. I will let them fall into each other's hands and into the hands of their king. They will turn the land into a wilderness, and I will not rescue them."
3. Then the Lord said to me, "Go again and play the part of a worthless shepherd. This illustrates how I will give this nation a shepherd who will not care for those who are dying, nor look after the young, nor heal the injured, nor feed the healthy. Instead, this shepherd will eat the meat of the fattest sheep and tear off their hooves.
4. What sorrow awaits this worthless shepherd who abandons the flock! The sword will cut his arm and pierce his right eye. His arm will become useless, and his right eye completely blind. (Zechariah 11:5,6,15,17 NLT)

The message intended in this entire scenario was to reveal the mind of God as it concerns the disposition of the people at the time., especially their selfish heart posture which has grown to become a major stumbling block. Hence, a proclamation of justice on them.

1. So I cared for the flock intended for slaughter—the flock that was oppressed. Then I took two shepherd's staffs and named one Favor and the other Union.
2. I got rid of their three evil shepherds in a single month. But I became impatient with these sheep, and they hated me, too.
3. So I told them, "I won't be your shepherd any longer. If you die, you die. If you are killed, you are killed. And let those who remain devour each other!"
4. Then I took my staff called Favor and cut it in two, showing that I had revoked the covenant I had made with all the nations. That was the end of my covenant with them.

- The suffering flock was watching me, and they knew that the Lord was speaking through my actions.
5. And I said to them, “If you like, give me my wages, whatever I am worth; but only if you want to.” So they counted out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.
 6. And the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter[a]”—this magnificent sum at which they valued me! So I took the thirty coins and threw them to the potter in the Temple of the Lord.
 7. Then I took my other staff, Union, and cut it in two, showing that the bond of unity between Judah and Israel was broken.
 8. Then the Lord said to me, “Go again and play the part of a worthless shepherd. This illustrates how I will give this nation a shepherd who will not care for those who are dying, nor look after the young, nor heal the injured, nor feed the healthy. Instead, this shepherd will eat the meat of the fattest sheep and tear off their hooves. (Zechariah 11:7-10, 12-16)

Having received the divine message from God, Zechariah began to dramatize the message. He used the sheep he was to shepherd as an allegory for Israel -God’s sheep. He drove them recklessly, angered them, and even got them to hate him. He did all of these intentionally to the point that even the flock knew that not only did he hate them, but that God was speaking through his actions. It wasn’t because they were the ones caught in the web of evil but because they were just unfortunate to be the pawns in the dramatic expression. Zechariah moved on to break his staff as a symbol that God had discontinued his leadership of the people and had taken away his hands of favour and union.

Symbol VI

Ezekiel’s Symbolisation -Prophecy on the symbol of the Coming Exile

This is another case of prophet Ezekiel’s prophecy. Here, God had instructed him to pretend as someone being sent into exile and carry out certain actions to be a symbol to the children of Israel, who might probably be watching him engage in such dramatic actions.

Script, Story and Symbolisation

1. ‘So now, son of man, pretend you are being sent into exile. Pack the few items an exile could carry, and leave your home to go somewhere else. Do this right in front of the people so they can see you. Perhaps they will pay attention to this, even though they are such rebels.
2. Bring your baggage outside during the day so they can watch you.
3. Then in the evening, as they are watching, leave your house as captives do when they begin a long march to distant lands. Dig a hole through the wall while they are watching and go out through it.
4. As they watch, lift your pack to your shoulders and walk away into the night. Cover your face so you cannot see the land you are leaving. For I have made you a symbol for the people of Israel.’
5. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: These actions contain a message for King Zedekiah in Jerusalem[a] and for all the people of Israel.’

6. Explain that your actions are a symbol to show what will soon happen to them, for they will be driven into exile as captives. ‘Even Zedekiah will leave Jerusalem at night through a hole in the wall, taking only what he can carry with him. He will cover his face, and his eyes will not see the land he is leaving. Then I will throw my net over him and capture him in my snare. I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Babylonians,[b] though he will never see it, and he will die there. I will scatter his servants and warriors to the four winds and send the sword after them. And when I scatter them among the nations, they will know that I am the Lord. But I will spare a few of them from death by war, famine, or disease, so they can confess all their detestable sins to their captors. Then they will know that I am the Lord.’ (Ezekiel 12:3-6,10-16 NLT)

The above scripts are the specific instructions given to the prophet Ezekiel concerning the message he has received to be delivered to the king of Jerusalem and the entire land of Israel. God had hinted to Ezekiel that the children of Israel had sinned but not only that, they have refused to repent and even rebelled against him. Hence, He is set to send them into exile and make them pay for their ignorance through slavery, wars, diseases, and famine until they remember their God and confess all of their sins.

1. So I did as I was told. In broad daylight I brought my pack outside, filled with the things I might carry into exile.
2. Then in the evening while the people looked on, I dug through the wall with my hands and went out into the night with my pack on my shoulder. (Ezekiel 12:7 NLT)

As he was instructed by God, prophet Ezekiel enacted all God told him and executed them while the people to whom the message was intended performed the job of spectators and watched in amazement and curiosity.

Discussion

This study examines the dramatic acts of biblical prophets while acting as symbols under the supervision of God, the ultimate symbolist as a means of achieving effective communication of divine messages to spectating audiences to whom the messages are intended instead of using word of mouth. Oftentimes, this kind of drama is not staged or filmed, it is experiential and living. This means, there is no form of role-playing as it is with the prophetic revelation drama where the prophet spontaneously engages in acting as a tool to communicate a message but in this case, the prophecy is embodied and lived out instead of acted. Hence, the pains, afflictions or losses about the prophecy are experienced.

These dramatic acts are towards the end that a lasting impression will be created in the hearts of people compared to when the warnings are merely being heard. Importantly, these prophets, who are acting as symbols, are kept under strict supervision to ensure that the divine directions they have received from the ultimate symbolist are followed to the letter, and there should be total obedience to the storyline.

By acting as symbols in the symbolistic drama, the prophets are necessitated to be expressionistic by expressing the mind of God to the people to bring them into the experience of God’s perception of them or a particular circumstance. Jones (1925) affirms that “the Symbolistic drama is one that

uses signs, animate and inanimate representations to express apart from what the personages say and do, certain ideas relating to the play” (9).

Truly, acting as symbols to others can be costly in the case of the applied prophetic drama as it may also result in some irreversible losses in the process of symbolising the divine message. However, it also proved effective in communicating the divine message as the people to whom the message or instructions are intended, become attracted by the unfortunate circumstance of the prophets which were merely graphic illustrations to grasp their attention, ensure their understanding of the message and lead them into a catharsis of their emotions and sympathy at the sight of the symbolistic drama.

Conclusion

Beyond doubts, drama is a potent tool for communication, and there are several instances of dramatic action in the scriptures. However, prophetic revelation drama is a peculiar kind of biblical dramatization where God inspires his prophet(s) to deliver his messages which are usually prophecies following the use of dramatic actions. In this context, the examples of prophets Ezekiel, Agabus, Zechariah, and Hosea have been cited with relative instances to buttress the point of how these prophets used dramatic action to deliver their God-given prophecies. This study shows that in some instances, biblical prophets are usually required to embody the messages they are to communicate by acting as symbols which sometimes comes with irreversible losses or pain for effective communication to the individual(s) or people to whom the message is intended through the window of curiosity, emotions and empathy.

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