

Confronting the Challenges to Development in Nigeria with Lessons from Old Testament Prophecy

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Abstract

The concern for development is the plight of any patriotic citizen anywhere. However, in Nigeria, in spite of recurrent claims and efforts, very disturbingly, national development has continued to be elusive. Today, the importance of national development calls for renewed efforts to address its main challenges. In response to this need, the ongoing debate on the role of different disciplines in combatting the challenges of national development is timely. While religion generally would offer useful contributions to national development, the content of the prophetic corpus of the Old Testament, which revolves around the religio-civic development of Israel, proposes to offer more useful hints towards the development of Nigeria. This paper is therefore a specific response to the ongoing search for answers to the national development question. Following a traditionally expository method, this paper first seeks to discover the main challenges to development in Nigeria and then, exegetically drawing relevant lessons from the prophetic corpus of the Old Testament, desires to confront such growing challenge. The hope is that, the application of such Biblical wisdom to confront political issues would not only result in a more responsible civic arrangement towards the desired national development, but will also generate further scholarship in this area.

Keywords: Development; Nigeria; Old Testament; Prophecy; Corruption.

1. Introduction

Every country desires to grow from strength to strength in every aspect of life. This growth is judged in political standards as 'Development.' This is the reason some nations are judged to be 'Developed,' some 'Developing' and others 'Underdeveloped'. National development is the joint responsibility of everybody in the polity: leaders and followers. National development is always evident in the daily life style of the citizenry. It always shows and it is felt. However, there are always challenges to this desired situation and these challenges differ from nation to nation. Nigeria, as a nation has been struggling with a lot of challenges to national development. Despite the enormous resources the country is endowed with, the level of development is not matching the political capacity of the nation. This has been a great problem not only to the nation but also to the international community and even in the face of the heated debate on national development, the proffered way-forward has not yielded appreciable results even up till now. In the ongoing search for answers to this disturbing situation in Nigeria, this research begins by identifying, not just the challenges but specifically the major 'root-generator' of these challenges to our national development. Convinced of the thesis that *objective religion builds the nation*, and, believing that a similar political struggle for national development by a theocratic society like the Old Testament Israel, as evident in the prophetic corpus of the Christian Scripture, could meaningfully serve the Nigerian situation and offer lessons and practical solutions, we intend, in the cause of this paper to confront the challenges to national development in Nigeria with possible lessons from Old Testament prophecy drawing conclusions and making recommendations for a better experience of Development in our country Nigeria.

2. Explication of Terms

In order to appreciate better the import of this work, it is important to explain the key terms within the context of their usage. Going by the Title, the three major terms here are CHALLENGES, NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT and OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY. Apart from their unique definitions at this point, the contextual appreciation of these concepts will definitely entail some delimitations.

2.1 Challenges:

By challenges, we mean those factors which tend to stand against the efforts made towards achieving a desired goal. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines challenge as: "a new or difficult task that tests somebody's ability"¹ In our own case, challenge here means a difficult situation that thwarts one's resolve to achievement.

2.2 National Development:

Development ordinarily means growth. It is "the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced

¹ A. S. HORNBY, (2010), "Challenge" in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, UK: Oxford, p. 230.

and stronger.”¹ In the context of usage here, development is the advancement of a political entity in all necessary ramifications to the extent that the citizenry enjoy the desired dividends of governance in a way that it also benefits the political interest of the international community. In this vein, when we talk of national development, we mean such resurgence to a stronger height in the political life of a nation. In this context, that nation is Nigeria and national development would therefore mean the general growth and advancement of the nation, Nigeria.

2.3 Old Testament Prophecy:

The Old Testament is the first part of the Christian Scriptures called the Bible. It records the initial covenant between God and His covenanted people Israel as a typified relationship of God with all people.² It is believed to be “an important collection of inspired writings that disclose God’s revelation to the whole of humanity.”³ The Old Testament is made up of four sections: The Pentateuch, the Historical Books, the Prophetic Books and the Wisdom Books. Each of these, in a unique way, accounts for a peculiar appreciation of God’s relationship with his people. Old Testament prophecy, as used here, is not only a way of identifying the pool of our submissions – the prophetic section of the Old Testament, it is also a way of qualifying the type of prophecy intended here – that which is found in the Old Testament, because there could be other types of prophecies today.⁴

3. Delimitations

With the limitations of time and resources, it is important to narrow down our scope in order to record the desired precision. Following from the definitions above, there are these two phrases that need to be narrowed down. They are: Challenges to National Development in Nigeria and Old Testament Prophecy.

3.1 Challenges to National Development in Nigeria:

It is not possible to claim an exhaustive list of challenges to national development. While we admit that there could be a lot, our research has already revealed that they are centered around and that they can be reduced to one major challenge. Therefore, our reference to ‘challenges’ should be understood as a reference to this one encompassing challenge. This challenge is identified as ‘corruption.’ The challenges to national development in Nigeria are all accommodated in this terribly contagious trend of corruption.⁵

3.2 Old Testament Prophecy:

Again, the prophetic corpus of the Old Testament is another wide section of the Bible. We have not only limited this to the Old Testament, but we have also narrowed it down to a few major prophets of the Old Testament with specific mention of Amos who was the most outspoken on social issues especially on corruption.

4. Literature Review

In order to ascertain and appreciate the level of scholarship in our area of study, there is need to review some important literature on the subject area and by so doing ascertain the possible justification for our research. It is hoped that by so doing we could establish the theoretical framework for our research.

The debate on national development has assumed different dimensions at various stages of national life. The Nigerian experience is a very rich one. Our research, *Confronting the Challenges to National Development with Lessons from Old Testament Prophecy*, has enjoyed the contributive goodwill of many scholars. Bordering on key words like Corruption, National Development, Religion, Old Testament prophecy etc, there has been a good number of books and scholarly articles addressing this situation of national interest. All the same, every one of them appears to be writing from a particularly different point of view such that, even though there may be correspondence, the approach is different.

In our research, we came across a few western books on corruption and national development but we found out that they were not very helpful in addressing the local need. Our exploration of indigenous scholarly work has been more rewarding. Our research confirms that the foremost books in this area are those which address the challenges of national development from a political standpoint. Beginning chronologically from the works of CROWDER, M., *The Story of Nigeria*, in 1966; ACHEBE, C., *The Trouble with Nigeria*, in 1983; PALMA, M., *Dilemmas of Development*, in 1985; JOHNSON, O., *Development of Modern Nigeria*, in 1996; IROANUSI, S., *Corruption: The Nigerian Example*, in 2006; AJAYI, C., *A Country on the Brink of Collapse?* in 2008; GHANI,

¹ A. S. HORNBY, (2010), “Challenge” in *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, p. 400.

² M. BASSEY, (1997), *The Bible Says: (On the Bible and Church Doctrines)*, Vol I, Uyo: Etofia, p. 5.

³ R. R. EKSTROM, (1995), “Old Testament” in *The New Concise Catholic Dictionary*, Mumbai: St. Paul’s, p. 200.

⁴ Apart from the fact that we also have New Testament prophecy, many people and various institutions lay claims to different types of prophecy but our reference to Old Testament Prophecy here is to avoid any ambiguity...

⁵ Apart from personal experience as an adult Nigerian, corruption was identified as a major challenge to our national development through an informal random sampling among Nigerians of different walks of life especially my students in the University of Uyo from different parts of the country. This was also confirmed in many literatures.

A., & LOCKHART, C., *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for rebuilding a Fractured World*, in 2009 to ANAZODO, P., *Nigeria: The Truth Must be Told*, in 2009, the trend has been to address the state of development or otherwise from some unique perspective. Crowder in his 'opener' *The Story of Nigeria* introduces Nigeria as a country with great potentials to national prominence and yet with imminent cracks that need to be checked.¹ Achebe's *The Trouble with Nigeria* does more of exposing the challenges to national greatness than dwell specifically on development.² Palma's book *Dilemmas of Development* exposes the imminent lack of focus in the development agenda of Nigeria.³ It is in Johnson's book *Development of Modern Nigeria* that some blueprints to development are specifically initialed even though the recommendations are political and social.⁴ One of the most frank assessments of the level of corruption in the Nigerian polity is found in the book - *Corruption: The Nigerian Example* by Iroanusi in 2006. In this piece, Iroanusi, using Nigeria as an example of a corrupt nation, exposes the extent of harm that this vice can do on the polity.⁵ Ajayi's work: *A Country on the Brink of Collapse?* and the work of Ghani and Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for rebuilding a Fractured World*, critically analyze the national situation exposing the possibility of collapse and also give room for a repair of this 'fracture' respectively.⁶ Finally, Anazodo's *Nigeria: The Truth Must be Told* serves like a motivational treatise to generate more scholarship addressing the national situation. Even in this, the menace of corruption is not left out.⁷ We must give all these scholars the credit of relevant exposition but most of them, lack the specific address of a perennial way to face the growing challenges to national development, where they do, it is always the same reference to political leadership as a means of fighting corruption. This has proved to be ineffective since a lot of the corruption is perpetuated through political leadership. There are also some scholarly articles in this area⁸ but like the books, most of the articles address national development and corruption from a point of view different from religion. Some of them address the effects on a particular aspect of national life and fail to be all-inclusive in the assessment. This was the situation in the articles of Igbaekemen and Achimuga.⁹ From every indication, apart from confirming that the debate on the challenges to national development is heated, this review has also provided the theoretical framework for our research. While many scholars have addressed the challenges of development from different perspectives, none of these scholars has confronted these challenges with lessons from the Old Testament Prophets. This is the focus of our work and it makes our research unique and relevant to the current debate. It is hoped that this research will not just add to the existing points on the debate but that it will introduce a new dimension to sustainable development in Nigeria.

5. Understanding The Major Challenge To National Development In Nigeria

Nigeria is a very vast and complicated polity. Unfortunately, the advantages of national development have often eluded us. Different people have given different reasons for this. But the problem in Nigeria does not need any scientific analysis before one can know. Experience and research have shown that the problem in Nigeria is basically corruption and insecurity presenting itself in kidnappings and terrorism.¹⁰ The thick population and diverse composition of the citizenry, in a way, constitute a disadvantage. Also disadvantageous is the fact that there are no adequate checks and balance. People are not called to accountability. Nigeria is "drowning in a sea of corruption, violence, crime, greed, impunity and, of course, terrorism."¹¹ It is possible for a longer list of the challenges to national development to be drawn up but at the end of it, one realizes that the 'common factor' of all these is corruption. It is this corruption that accounts even for the terrorism we experience today. This has been at the center of Nigeria's problem as is evident in the daily life of the nation – a constant struggle against the challenges to national development.

5.1 Corruption:

Generally, corruption is seen as "dishonest or illegal behavior especially of people in authority."¹²

¹ M. CROWDER, (1996), *The Story of Nigeria*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 1ff

² C. ACHEBE, (1983), *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension, p. 1ff

³ M. PALMA, (1985), *Dilemmas of Development*, Itahea: Peacock Publishers, p. 1ff

⁴ O. JOHNSON, (1996), *Development of Modern Nigeria, Maryland*: Penguin Books, p. 1ff

⁵ S. IROANUSI, (2006), *Corruption: The Nigerian Example*, Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publications, p. 1ff

⁶ C. AJAYI, (2008), *A Country on the Brink of Collapse?* London: Academy Press, p. 1ff; AGHANI, & C. LOCKHART, (2009), *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for rebuilding a Fractured World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 1ff.

⁷ P. ANAZODO, (2009), *Nigeria: The Truth Must be Told*, Ibadan: Macmillan, p. 1ff

⁸ N. ALEMIKA, (1983), "Corruption in Nigeria" Being Seminar Paper in Civil Service Annual Events,

⁹ G. IGBAEKEMEN, G., et al., (2014), "The Effect of Corruption on Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria" in *Canadian Social Science*, Vol 10, No. 6, pp. 149-157, Accessed on 22nd April 2015 from www.cscanada.net; H. ACHIMUGU, et al (2014), "Public Administration and The Challenge of National Development in Nigeria: Issues and Concerns" in *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, MCSER-CEMAS, Rome: Sapienza University Press.

¹⁰ S. OLADOKUN, (2014), "Corruption and Terrorism in Nigeria: The Way forward," in *The Opinion*, assessed on the 19th March 2015 from www.theopinion.ng.

¹¹ S. OLADOKUN, "Corruption and Terrorism in Nigeria: The Way forward," in *The Opinion*.

¹² A. S. HORNBLY, "Corruption" in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, p. 330

Etymologically, it comes from the Latin, *con* (meaning ‘together’) and *rumpere* (meaning ‘to break’). It connotes the idea of breaking-up. It means to destroy or spoil. Therefore corruption is a deprivation of the ideal. It is a break away from the normal. It manifests itself in indulgence in different types of crimes: insincerity, insecurity, theft, bribery, fraud, kidnapping and immorality. As Uzochukwu Mike puts it, corruption has many faces in Nigeria.¹ It comes in many ways and is evident in many quarters. It is sometimes, and most unfortunately, found even in the Church. One of the things that suffers as a result of the deep seated corruption in the society is national development. It is generally proven that any country with a high level of corruption is most likely to experience developmental bankruptcy and if not checked, it leads to national crises. There are people, agencies and institutions who have judged Nigeria on corruption at different times. Evaluating Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Nigeria is far from claiming any corruption-free status.² The problem is not so much the fact that there are serious elements of corruption in Nigeria but that Nigeria and Nigerians do not seem to be very alarmed by the prevalence of corruption in the country. Sometimes, very serious corrupt practices are lightly explained-away even by the very people who should condemn those practices.³ At other times, the people just excuse their corrupt tendencies with the pretentious declaration: “This is Nigeria...” The sad impression given is that Nigeria is familiar with corruption and should be excused on this. It is this general ‘venom’ which plays out itself in the many terrible vices evident in the Nigerian polity today like the problems in leadership, the unpatriotic ill-disposition of the followers to say no to the “rulers’-led” corruption and move Nigeria forward; and, insecurity and the absence of accountability. Let us now discuss some of these as shades of corruption which impede national development in Nigeria.

5.1.1 Lack of Selfless Leadership

The corruption in Nigeria seems to be concentrated in high quarters. Leadership is supposed to be about service but in Nigeria many past and present office holders see leadership as an opportunity to ‘cart away’ their own share of the national cake. Selfish leadership is not only as a result of corruption but it typifies it. Even before people are sworn-in as leaders, the process of election in Nigeria is often flooded with corruption. The corruption in Nigerian politics leads to the political corruption in Nigeria. This takes many shades today ranging from election rigging to embezzlement, bribery, rituals, etc. The unfortunate thing is that there is no end in sight as many young people today feel that this politics is the easiest way to make cheap money – using corrupt tricks to steal money. There is no transparency in governance. For selfish reasons, the leaders deny the citizens the right to true information about their stewardship. One clear consequence is evident. In a place where the leadership has grown so corrupt and selfish, it remains difficult if not impossible for any impact of national development to be felt. This has been the plight of Nigeria in the hands of her leaders.

5.1.2 Lack of sincere Patriotism

It must, however, be noted that the corruption in Nigeria does not stop with the leaders. The ordinary citizens take advantage of the selfishness of the leaders and approach national issues in a manner that is quite unpatriotic. One is adjudged patriotic for having the interest of the nation at heart. But when people (individuals and groups) behave in a way that blocks such national gain, then the person is seen to be unpatriotic. On the part of the people, the love of corruption is the loss of patriotism. Unfortunately many Nigerians have fallen into this individually and collectively. There is corruption everywhere: in schools, churches, security agencies (Army, Police etc) and public squares. The most prevalent is the individual involvement in corrupt practices. We have seen and heard many of them in Nigeria. There are individuals who engage themselves in laundering, kidnapping, robbery, thugery, vandalism, terrorism and many other forms of fraud. As far as these impede national development, they are seen as unpatriotic.

5.1.3 Insecurity and Absence of Accountability

The problem of insecurity in Nigeria was already bad enough when it came newly and was associated with kidnapping, theft and robbery. Little did we know that worse days were to follow with greater challenges to security and far-reaching adverse effects for national development. The insurgency of Boko Haram⁴ has installed a lot of fear and insecurity in the nation. Many innocent lives have been lost. Some lucky ones have been displaced and even some security personnel are missing in action.

¹ M. UZOUCHUKWU, (2015), “Corruption in Nigeria: Review, Causes, Effects and Solutions” accessed on 18th March 2015 from www.uzochukwumike.hubpages.com

² CPI (Corruption Perception Index) in 2014 said that Nigeria is up eight places to 136 out of 175 corrupt countries in the world. But GTI (Global Terrorism Index) ranks Nigeria 7th among corrupt countries. No matter how one interprets this, the trouble is far from over especially when you experience the daily happenings in the land. Cf. K. OLANIYAN, (2014), “How Corrupt is Nigeria?” in *Vanguard News* assessed on 18th March 2015 from www.vanguardngr.com. See also S. OLADOKUN, “Corruption and Terrorism in Nigeria: The Way forward,” in *The Opinion*.

³ Without being judgmental, it is on record from several means of mass media that the President, Dr. Goodluck E. Jonathan said in one of his official speeches that “stealing is not corruption...” See F. ARIBISALA, (2014), “Nigerian Politicians are Thieves, But they are not Corrupt...” in *The Vanguard*, 22nd, July 2014 assessed from www.vanguardngr.com

⁴ Boko Haram is the fundamental Islam sect that has formed itself into a terrorist group fighting for the establishment of an Islamic state. The real motivation for this is not ascertained but they have constituted the major agents of insecurity especially in Northern Nigeria.

There is no doubt that there are agencies charged with the task of curbing this bad trend. But the disheartening aspect of the Nigerian situation is that even these agencies in their equally corrupt manner are not ready to be held accountable. In fact as far as the perceived war against corruption is concerned people are not ready to take responsibility. There is no accountability in Nigeria. People commit the worst of crimes and get away with it either because of 'interests' or because there is no culture of accountability. This has impacted very adversely on the Nigerian economy.

6. Lessons From Old Testament Prophecy Towards National Development

One of the most meaningful ways to describe Old Testament prophets is to see them as 'watchdogs.' This was the role they played in Israel both as a political and a religious community. This is what McKenzie meant when he said that the prophets "reflect the thought and speech of ordinary life of ancient Israel."¹ They were the people who watched after the sustenance of the covenant relationship between Israel and God. The bases for the comparison of the Israelite context to the Nigerian situation is that both do not only share a common political status (a State), the challenges that Israel faced during the Old Testament times are also very similar to the challenges faced in Nigeria today. Besides, Biblical history, deduced from an appreciation of the prophetic corpus, has proven that there loomed extreme consequences for the nation had they not matched their challenges with positive action then. The argument is that if Old Testament Israel had some of the challenges Nigeria has today and she was able to survive those turbulent times, confronting the Nigerian situation with examples from the experience and response of Israel could be a pragmatic step towards our national development. As far as the prophetic corpus is concerned, there were general lessons and there were specific lessons towards national development.

6.1 General lessons from the Prophetic Corpus

Generally, the prophets, in their oracles, safeguarded the integrity of God in his relationship with the people of Israel. They were seen as Israel's moral compass.² Every prophet was tied to a particular political situation. As we normally say, it is not possible to be a judge in a case you are not familiar with. However, every Old Testament prophet belonged to a particular historical and political extraction. In order to appreciate better understanding of the prophet for pastoral reasons, the historical background of the prophet has to be determined and his message understood in that light.³ At whatever time the prophets came unto the scene, they were generally condemning one social, political and religious vice or the other. A cursory assessment reveals that the prophets were generally anti-corruption crusaders. Their oracles were a real call to patriotism. It was also a real call to security, justice and accountability. Seen on the whole, Old Testament prophets were true vanguards of political growth and national development.

6.1.1 Old Testament Prophets as Anti-Corruption Crusaders

Like Nigeria today, one of the challenging situations that rocked Israel of old was corruption. Like Nigeria, this happened after Israel's surge to economic prominence from the time of prosperity and cultural achievement that greeted the reign of Jeroboam II.⁴ Again, like Nigeria, corruption in Israel took different forms and had different shades of expressions. One of the commonest shades of corruption in Israel was injustice. It was almost costing them their political and religious integrity. The terms of justice and righteousness "are two terms employed by especially Isaiah, Jeremiah ... Amos and Micah to designate the contours of a society founded on a covenant relationship."⁵ These were the foundational principles of relationship with God and neighbor. The fact that almost all the Major Prophets preached about this justice and righteousness implies that in some way, its sustenance was a problem and constituted a challenge.⁶ In any society, corruption brings untold suffering both to the people and to the nation. In Israel, the corruption that showed itself in injustice had a lot of adverse effects on both the nation and the individual. It was a barrier to national development. God was a God of justice and needed to be worshiped in justice by just people. The pervasion of justice was a stumbling block in the growth of this worshipping community as a chosen people of God. But physically too, the lack of justice and consequent prevalence of corruption also stunted the development of Israel as a political entity. But the prophets were more concerned about the suffering, hardship and hopelessness that the situation visited on the poor and the underprivileged. These consequences were going to be very disastrous for the people and "the prophets by the very nature of their mission, could not turn a deaf ear to a cry that resulted from a denial of justice."⁷ It was in

¹ J. L. MCKENZIE, (1979), *The Old Testament Without Illusion*, Chicago, IL: Thomas More, p. 120.

² R. BURNETTE-BLETSCH, (2007), *Studying the Old Testament: A Companion*, Nashville: Abingdon, pp. 167-238.

³ P. ELLIS, (1963), *The Men and the Message of the Old Testament*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press. P. 276.

⁴ B. W. ANDERSON, (1957), *Understanding the Old Testament*, 2nd Edition, NJ: Prentice-Hall, pp. 228-229.

⁵ J. P. KAKKANATTU, (2014), "Old Testament Prophets and the Call for a Corruption-Free Society" assessed on 20th March 2015 from www.dharmaramjournals.in.

⁶ Most of these prophets directly or indirectly have oracles addressing justice and righteousness. See Jer. 7: 5-6; 9: 13; 22: 3; 13. Isaiah 1: 21-27; 5: 1-7; Amos 5: 8-13 etc.

⁷ J. P. KAKKANATTU, "Old Testament Prophets and the Call for a Corruption-Free Society"

the assessment of their general outcry against the injustice of the time that made Old Testament prophets to be seen as anti-corruption crusaders.

6.1.2 Old Testament Prophecy as a call to Patriotism

In order to underscore the fact that Old Testament prophets were worthy of the description ‘watchdogs,’ it can be seen that their oracles also addressed the unpatriotic tendency to corruption prevalent at the time. They addressed the misuse of political power at the time. When one reads between the lines, it is possible to also identify that the different shades of corruption that we have in Nigeria today were also discernible in Old Israel. These were as unpatriotic then as they are today in Nigeria. When the Kings of Israel did not defend the rights of the vulnerable, the prophets spoke against that. This was the situation with Nathan who rose in condemnation of David in 2Sam 12: 1-10 and of Naboth’s vineyard in 1Kings 21. The prophetic oracles were not only for the common people, it also addressed the elders and rulers calling them to responsibility and patriotism. There were times the prophets decreed the impending danger for the nation if the trend of corruption would not be reversed by the leaders:

Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong. Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us." Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height. (Mic 3:9-4:1 RSV)

The above typical Old Testament prophetic passage is pregnant with meaning. First of all it details some of the many shades of corruption that were prevalent at the time. Prophet Micah, alongside Isaiah preached in Judah during the reign of Jotham until Hezekiah came. From the passage above, it is evident that there was misuse of political power, misuse of economic power, misuse of legal power, even misuse of religious power. All these were very unpatriotic and, to worsen it all, it is important to note that there were to be consequences which would not only thwart national growth but would spell real doom for the nation.¹ There was also the unnecessary affluence of the rich who tended to ‘feed’ on the poor. Bribery and corruption was the order of the day and it means the judicial integrity must have been compromised too.

6.1.3 Old Testament Prophecy as a Call to Security and Accountability

Another aspect of corruption that was prevalent in Israel of old and is prevalent in Nigeria today is insecurity perpetrated by the lack of courage to bring culprits to accountability. From this point of view, it is possible to see the prophets in their oracles as making a call to security and accountability. Security needs responsibility and responsibility goes with accountability. Just as Nigeria is struggling with security challenges today, there were times Israel faced serious security challenges. The case of the Syro-Ephraimite war and the intervention of Isaiah is a good example. As Isaiah counseled, security for Israel lay in true and undiluted religion expressed through faith in God and not in political alliance.² Regarding the call for accountability, no other prophet brought this out better than Ezekiel in chapter 18 when he showed that each man would be evaluated according to his actions. The Israelites may have thought that they would go away with their actions or that the punishment would be served by another generation. Ezekiel brought to their understanding that there is the need to be conscious of accountability.³ People need to be held accountable for their actions.

6.2 Prophet Amos on Corruption

Apart from the fact that, as seen above, different prophetic oracles addressed the corruption in the Israelite community, if there is any one prophet who encompasses the fullness of prophetic oracle against the corruption of the time, it is Amos and this has even gained him the name: Prophet of social justice. In his fight for corruption, he directed his message against the kings (Amos 7: 10-11); priests (7: 16-17); and upper classes (4: 1-3; 6: 1). But the entire judgment was to affect everybody and the entire nation as a whole.⁴

The oracles of Amos are a direct indictment of the corruption of his time. He pronounced doom for the nation.⁵ Amos follows a certain formula in most of his oracles. There is always a culpability stated. This is followed by a threat of destruction. Sometimes a specific sin or type of corruption is identified and finally a

¹ The prophets condemned the misuse of political power in Isaiah 1: 1-6. They condemned the misuse of economic power in Is 5:8; Amos 8:4; Micah 2: 2. The misuse of legal power was condemned in Zeph 1:- 13

² When the President of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, claimed in the face of the Boko Haram insurgency that the insecurity in the nation be tackled pastorally and not politically, he meant to draw from the Israelite example. Unfortunately, it is not clear how much of that example has been taught or learnt today by the Nigerian government.

³ Just as it is in Nigeria today, where people get away with virtually every crime and corruption, the Israelites may have taken their irresponsibility for granted but Ezekiel 18 clearly addresses the need to be held accountable.

⁴ M. L. BARRE, (1990), “Amos” in The New Jerome Biblical Commentary ed. By R. E. Brown et al, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, p. 210

⁵ Cf. J. H. HAYES, (1971), *Introduction to the Bible*, Philadelphia: Westminster, p. 167

punishment is pronounced. In most cases it is a punishment of destruction.¹

Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes -- they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same maiden, so that my holy name is profaned; they lay themselves down beside every altar upon garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined. "Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above, and his roots beneath. Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?" says the LORD. "But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy.' "Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down. Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life; he who handles the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life; and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day," says the LORD. (Amo 2:6-3:1 RSV)

The impression here is that the level of corruption was so high and that it would have serious consequences for the nation. The entire book is littered with visions of destruction like this. It is important to understand the background of Amos preaching. As the third of the four great prophets sent to Northern Israel, he preached, during the reign of Jeroboam at the time of great material prosperity that was accompanied by unprecedented moral corruption. Amos condemns the injustice of the day cf. Amos 5: 10-17

They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth. Therefore because you trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins -- you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate (Amo 5:10-12 RSV)

Amos' oracles shows that there was serious dichotomy between the affluence of the rich and the peasantry of the poor cf. Amos 6: 7. There was so much bribery in the land and corruption in financial power cf. Amos 5: 12. Amos really disclosed the political situation of the time and generally confronted the crimes of the time.² Ranging from idolatry to commercial corruption, the Israel of Amos' time was charged with so much corruption perpetrated by a hardened people who, despite the oracles and threats of a prophet like Amos, still persisted in sin until God destroyed Northern Israel about 30 years after Amos preached.³ It is interesting that when destruction was imminent on account of the fact that the people were not ready to repent, Amos began to sound some note of hope of restoration because with God, destruction is not the last word even for His unrepentant people.⁴

7. Evaluation

Having explored both the challenges to national growth posed by the near-institution of corruption in Nigeria, and the challenges, struggles and end-results of a similar situation in the theocratic nation of Israel of old, as a deeply religious people, too, it is now necessary to bring out the relevance of this Old Testament prophecy to national development and above all, identify useful lessons which must be learnt. It is the hope that the final confrontation of such a situation with the current struggle of the Nigerian situation could open a new page towards renewed development in Nigeria.

¹ P. ELLIS, *The Men and the Message of the Old Testament*. P. 207.

² F. I ANDERSON, (1993), "Amos" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Edited by B. M. METZGER and M. D. COOGAN, NY: Oxford, p. 25.

³ P. ELLIS, *The Men and the Message of the Old Testament*. P. 206.

⁴ Amos is a clear example of the fact that divine punishment can never be completely destructive. See Introductory notes on the Book of Amos in *The New American Bible*, p. 951. The last oracle of Amos opens up a perspective of restoration under a Davidic king. This offers some hope of resurgence for corrupt countries like Nigeria.

7.1 Relevance of Old Testament Prophecy to National Development in Nigeria

From every indication and based on the exposition above, the situation of Israel as depicted in the Old Testament prophecy is very relevant to the Nigerian situation in pursuit of national development today. There are many religious, cultural, political and social similarities that would make the old Israelite situation a viable example for today's Nigeria. The following are some of the bases:

- ✓ Israel was a theocratic society. Nigeria is a religious society
- ✓ Israel was a rapidly growing economy when corruption crept into slow down its national development. The Nigerian situation was/is similar
- ✓ The corruption in Israel surfaced in crimes like injustice, bribery, fraud, religious deceit. The Nigerian situation is similar
- ✓ Israel had the prophets to warn them of impending danger. Nigeria has been warned by many religious and well meaning and concerned analysts
- ✓ Israel paid deaf ear to most of the warning and the nation and individuals suffered terrible consequences which culminated in the final doom (The elimination of the polity...). Nigeria has paid deaf ear all this while and it has resulted in untold suffering for the people and the nation. The possible worst is yet to come and it is at this point that the Israelite situation and experience really qualifies as a good example for Nigeria lest we not only see worse days ahead but lest we witness the final break up that Israel experienced.
- ✓ Though, as the prophets prophesied and as Biblical history confirms, Israel was able to come up again, there is no guarantee that Nigeria could be as lucky if we allow her to degenerate to the worst on account of the prevalent culture of corruption in the nation

Having assessed all these bases and having considered the fact that many other options in the past to fight corruption and revive our national development agenda have been a failure, the findings of our research have emboldened us to confront the challenges to national development in Nigeria with lessons from the Israelite experience with the hope that such lessons backed up pragmatically with relevant recommendations could have the desired effects of not only reawakening Nigerians to consciousness but also giving every citizen the political patriotism to sincerely join the fight for corruption and reposition our country on the path to greatness and national development.

7.2 Confronting the Challenges to National Development in Nigeria with Lessons from the Old Testament

7.2.1 Lessons:

At this point, there is need to look more closely at some of the lessons derivable from the experience of Israel that could help address the challenges to national development in Nigeria.

1. National prosperity is not to be taken for granted
2. Individual affluence does not guarantee national development
3. National interest is higher than individual interest
4. Politics really needs religion
5. Corruption breeds more corruption if not checked
6. Corruption is a major barrier to national development
7. The fight against corruption is a communal responsibility
8. National disaster is more devastating than individual disaster
9. The fear of God is still the beginning of wisdom
10. The 'bad' if not checked could grow worse and if not reversed could hit the worst
11. Prevention is better than cure

7.2.2 Recommendations:

The picture of Nigeria today, as far as national development is concerned is very worrisome. There is still hunger in the midst of plenty and worse still, there are people who do not see anything wrong with the present Nigerian situation. These are the ones who are 'feeding' on this national crisis. Based on the results of our research and in response to the lessons drawn above, our major recommendation is that since every Nigerian, in one way or the other is a religious being, we must appeal to our religious conviction and in our fight against corruption, allow objective religion to be at the service of politics. The following specific sub-recommendations could be helpful:

1. There should be renewed call to national patriotism especially from religious circles
2. The religious lesson of the need for the fear of God needs to be taught with passion. Insurgency and insecurity associated with religion should not only be condemned but immediately stopped.
3. The political gains of a subject like CRE detailing the struggles of religious communities for political stability should be invoked in schools to complement the knowledge of secular history towards preparing our younger ones for national responsibility in future
4. If the fight against corruption must succeed, the system must create sustainable room for accountability, checks and balance without giving-in to the usual 'sacred cow' attitude

5. National development must be seen as a communal responsibility to the polity
6. Attitudinal re-orientation on the impending devastating consequences of the current trend for both leaders and the led is very necessary in today's Nigeria if we must reverse the culture of corruption
7. While the above action is pursued, we must remain hopeful and stay positive.

8. Conclusion

Every country desires to grow from strength to strength. The absence of such national development, which could be caused by many factors, has always been a thing of concern in politics. The experience in Nigeria in the recent past, especially since after the country's oil boom, has ironically, not been good enough and the ensuing debate has been on how to overcome the challenges to this national development. In our research, as reported in the above pages, we did not only identify corruption as the major factor blocking this development, we also, in search of the way forward, discovered and found reasons to confront the challenges to our national development with lessons from the experience of Old Testament Israel.

It was clear in the course of the work that corruption, apart from bringing untold suffering to people individually and collectively, thwarts national development and if not checked can lead to national crisis as it also happened in Israel. This outcome for Old Testament Israel is projected as a lesson for Nigeria. It is time to act. The solution is not in the usual uncommitted verbal rhetoric associated with campaign promises to fight and eradicate corruption. We have projected a viable example from a theocratic polity and Nigeria needs to learn to take practical steps this time around lest it would become too late and our worse gets to worst. On the strength of the above, this work confronts the Nigerian situation with lessons drawn from the Old Testament prophets not only because this can and should appeal to our much-treasured religious sentiments, but also because primarily this is a historically true situation that is verifiably akin to the Nigerian situation. After an objective evaluation offering lessons and recommendations, this work concludes with the conviction that having religion serve politics in this way would reduce, if not totally overcome, the challenges to national development in Nigeria.

This conclusion calls for collective action towards enduring sustainable national development. But this action must also be a practical assent to faith. Having identified corruption as our greatest challenge, there is a serious need to learn from Old Testament Israel and with the advantage of hindsight, we must unlike Israel, quickly heed to the passionate call to confront this negative culture with an objective religious attitude of faith. It needs a personal commitment that only faith can guarantee... It is hoped that when lessons from religious history like this are used to check corruption in Nigeria, national development will be possible, appreciable and sustainable.

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