

## **A THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF MATTHEW 24:6-7 IN THE LIGHT OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses a theological assessment of Matt 24:6-7 in the light of insecurity in Nigeria. Theological cum historical methods were adopted. Jesus Christ had predicted that there will be confusion at the close of age. Christ predicted that peace would elude the universe as there would be upheavals in virtually every part of the globe. There appears to be a glaring manifestation of this prediction especially in Nigeria in the contemporary days. Youth restiveness occasioned by joblessness which is necessitated by the greed and avarice of Nigerian leaders, has enormously truncated the peaceful existence of so many places in Nigeria. Since an idle hand is the devil's workshop, jobless youths have decidedly resolved not to allow the sleeping dog to lie. Huge sums of money that should have ordinarily been used to cater for youths and the general populace, perhaps by way of job creation is constantly siphoned by the privileged or opportune few. The resultant effect of this is that nothing is left for the welfare of the youths. Consequently, the youths have taken up arms, not necessarily against those that engendered the problem; but against the poor and innocent individuals in the society, who are probably in the same shoes with them. The by-product of this is palpable fear in the country. Nigerians can no longer sleep with two eyes closed, apparently because of the fear of hoodlums parading the nooks and crannies of the country either as armed robbers, kidnappers, or militia.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Youth, Armed robbers, kidnappers, Insecurity

### **Introduction**

Jesus, through his prophecy made diverse predictions, among which is the uprising and or bedlam that would occur at the close of age. Jesus predicted that when the end of age is drawing near, series of strange, unusual and disturbing happenings would be heard in several places. Going by the predictions, peace which had hitherto been the hallmark of nations would be truncated, when the end is near. Nations would no longer know peace, but would experience catastrophic occurrences that would give them sleepless nights, and traumatize them, exceedingly.

These happenings have started to manifest and virtually every Christian who is not unmindful or oblivious of Jesus' prediction, much earlier, is now waiting very anxiously for the end. This is because what Jesus predicted would happen when the end is near have started happening, almost on daily basis. We have heard of several occurrences that have sent jitters to the spines of people. Most of the unusual contemporary happenings which are terrifying in nature, were unheard of some years back. Apprehension is rife as a result of the activities of terrorists, who are desirous in seeing the blood of their supposed "enemies", and even that of innocent people, flow. The activities of some eccentric individuals in the society, who have taken kidnapping as a means of their livelihood, have increased enormously. Thus, there is tension generally of both political or religious upset and other untoward occurrences. This paper carries out the exegesis of the text, examines some of the strange happenings in Nigeria, and ends with the conclusion.

#### **Exegesis of Matt. 24:6-7**

It is pertinent to carry out the exegesis of the text under study. The text reads in transliteration thus:

##### V.6

*mellesete de akouinpolemous kai akoaspolemon orate me throeisthedei gar genethai all oupoestin to Telos.*

Translation(6) : And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars, see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet.

##### V.7

*egerthesetai ethnos epi thnos kai basileia epi basilela kai esontailimoi kai seismoi kata topous.*

Translation (7). For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places; all these is but the beginning of the birth-pangs.

You shall hear *mellesete de akouin*, you are about, and you are destined, to hear<sup>1</sup>is really in the affirmative of the obvious, meaning that, it is bound to happen. And *polemous kai akoas polemon* (wars and rumours of wars) i.e. wars here at hand, and distant wars of which the rumour only reaches you, but which threaten to approach and menace your peace. The peace, which reigned according to Spence, at Christ's birth, was rudely shattered after his death, though the wars before the destruction of Jerusalem were of no great importance<sup>2</sup>. According to Walvoord and Zuck, commenting on the end-time:

That period will be characterized by false Christs... the first seed is Antichrist, wars and rumours of wars, the second seal is warfare in which nations will rise up against each other on a global scale and unusual disturbances in nature...

Moreover, *orate methroeisthe dei gar* (see that you are not alarmed for this must take place). Jesus addressed the apostles as representatives of the whole body of believers.<sup>4</sup> Thus, according to Allen, the wars and rumours of wars against which he warned were “messianic” wars not the usual wars which take place in the world. This text is sometimes misapplied, as when one is resigned to the fact of international wars as inevitable. Jesus was not teaching that nothing can be done to prevent wars. His concern was to warn his followers against being drawn into “holy wars” which claimed to be messianic<sup>5</sup>. Jesus’ prediction on wars can be regarded as dualistic in nature i.e. messianic and physical wars as we have them all over the globe in the contemporary days, serving as pointers to the end of age.

Besides, *all oupoestin to telos* (i.e. but the end is not yet) denotes that the end is yet to come, albeit the strange happenings can be a prelude to the close of age. According to Buttrick:

Many Jews had believed that the destruction of Jerusalem was the sign of the end. But time did not ‘have a stop’. The suffering probably means ‘the birth pangs of messiah’ – a phrase used by Jewish writers to describe the sorrows which, as they believed would usher in the golden age.

...pain reveals truth as darkness discloses the stars...pain throws a man or a generation back to God, so that he comes in surprise of mercy when men are at their wits’ end<sup>6</sup>.

Again, *egerthesetai ethnos epi ethnos kai basileia epi basileia* (for nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom). Insurgency is noticed globally; various nations are at logger heads with each other. There appears to be no peace again. According to Spence, “the Lord’s words seem to refer to times when Rome’s dominion had ceased, and nation warred against nation as in later and modern days in Europe, Asia, and parts of Africa. So again, the prediction must be extended far beyond events in the Jewish cycle”<sup>7</sup>. That is why, perhaps, we hear of diverse uprising universally. Peace, to a reasonable extent, has become an illusion.

Moreover, *kai esontailimoi kai seismoi kata topous*. (and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning

of the birth-pangs). Famines and earthquakes are some of the major occurrences that would serve as pointers to the end of the age. According to Spence: Besides the famine mentioned in Acts 11:28, there were others in Jerusalem and Judea, together with pestilence as consequent on famine, hence the Greek *paronomasia*. Again, according to Spence:

We read that at Rome in a single autumn, thirty thousand persons perished. Wordsworth refers to Tertullian...who sees in these predictions unfallable proof of the inspiration of scripture. Hence, it is that we come to be certain of many things not yet come to pass from the experience we have of those that are; because those were pre-signified by the same spirit with these which we see fulfilling every day.

... commentators relate the occurrence of such commotions at Rome in Crete, Laodecea, Campania...and at Jerusalem<sup>9</sup>.

Spence then submits that: Nosgen takes the term “earthquakes” in a metaphorical sense as equivalent to upheaval and implying mental perturbations; but it seems incongruous to admit a metaphysical prognostication in the midst of a notice of a series of material phenomena<sup>10</sup>. Nosgen’s line cannot probably be towed because “these things”, Jesus said, will be the beginning of birth pains. As a pregnant woman’s birth pangs indicate that her child will soon be born, so these universal conflicts and catastrophes will mean the end of this interadventage<sup>11</sup>. Just as predicted by Jesus, there had been glaring upheaval in virtually the whole universe. There was the Iran/Iraq imbroglio, Afghanistan/United States/Saudi Arabia/Iran rivalry. In Nigeria there was the 1967-1970 civil war, and farmers’ scuffle. Indeed, the Fulani have succeeded in annihilating farmers in their hundreds. Their farm produce are similarly destroyed, just as their houses are set ablaze. Arson has thus become a common phenomenon in many parts of Nigeria. There is palpable restiveness. Farmers cannot work freely and with the rest of minds on their farms. They hardly can sleep with the two eyes closed. Besides, there are trite and spasmodic fights among adherents of the religions of the children of Abraham, that is, Christianity and Islam. The dreaded *Boko Haram* insurgents are causing excessive havoc in the North Eastern part of Nigeria.

### **Examination of Some Disturbing Situations in Nigeria that Serve as Pointers to the End of the Age**

Before the advent of the colonialists, there was nothing like Nigeria. According to Adiele, with the amalgamation of Northern and

Southern Protectorates in 1914 by Sir (later Lord) Fredrick Lugard, what we have now as Nigeria came into existence<sup>12</sup>. As their colony, the Britons ruled Nigeria from the period of amalgamation to 1960 when she (Nigeria) became independent. With that freedom from colonial rule, Nigeria started the internal democracy by organizing elections. Essentially, the intent of the elections was to ensure that Nigerians governed Nigeria. Unfortunately, these elections were marred by irregularities, which culminated into violence. Many politicians and innocent people were affected in the massacres. It was more pronounced in the Western part of Nigeria (Yorubaland) where we had operation *Wet e*, i.e. wet him or her with petrol and ignite. Thus, many people were roasted alive. Those that were spared had no roof on their heads, as a result of arson. According to Asaju:

The politics of (that) era (was) full of violent killings and internal-communal clashes. Ethnic conflicts usually had political undertones whether local or external. Nigeria's first Republic was terminated by political violence in various parts, particularly in the Wild West. This snowballed to the ethnic attack...<sup>13</sup>

The crises invariably led to the January 15, 1966 coup and the counter coup of July 29 of the same year, which led to the killing of some prominent citizens in Nigeria. The coups were probably meant to "bring sanity to" the political system. Then came the 1967-1970 civil war, which came as fallout from the 1966 coups. The war naturally brought untold hardship to the two sides, as the Nigerians and Biafrans had no rest of mind as they were daily thinking of their safety in their father-land. Again, according to Adiele:

Following series of massacres of the Easterners in Northern Nigeria in 1966, nearly all the Easterners resident in the North returned to their ancestral home. Their unexpected return created some problems.

...The problem of the returnees varies. More especially the plight of the women and children seemed more pathetic than others. There were many women who neither returned with any valuable property nor their husbands and by implication bread winners...<sup>14</sup>

After the war, there was relative peace. Those that ran to their various regions (but survived the war) returned to their bases. Thereafter, they started working without noticeable molestation to earn their daily bread.

There was absolutely no cause for alarm, save skirmishes. However, the *Maitatsine* sectarian uprising and subsequent religious violence left scores either dead or maimed. Life then appeared to be worthless, as innocent people were hacked down in cold blood. Indeed, there was no respect for human lives and properties. There was wanton destruction of whatever was in sight, just as lawlessness and anarchy<sup>15</sup> became the order of the day... people lived in constant fear, day and night<sup>16</sup>. Asaju situates the scenario thus:

In the early 1980's, *Maitatsine* riots left many people dead, majority of whom were Southern Nigerians and Christians too. The most organized peaceful protest and counter reactions from Christians against *shariah* led to carnage in Kaduna in 2000 which was described as one of the worst incidents of blood-letting since the Nigerian Civil war of the 1960s. Similar related crisis occurred in Tafawa Balewa in 2001, Kano in 2001 and 2004, Salka village in Niger State in 2001 and during the Miss World Pageant in 2002. Foreign events such as the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars were responded to in Kano by burning churches and killing Christians.

Summarily, it is quite evident that religious crisis is a regular phenomenon in Nigeria<sup>18</sup> and evidently accordingly to Opoola, these crises erupted because people do not want to acknowledge the rights of individuals to practise his or her religious beliefs and tenets. The problems have caused a breakdown in the religious, political and socio-economic stability of the country<sup>19</sup>. Opoola asserts that: "Times without number, adherents of different religious groups engage in conflicts which resulted into loss of lives and property"<sup>20</sup>.

Today, insecurity is so pronounced in the country that even citizens are not sure of what is going to happen to them, while foreigners are frightened, and are no longer desirous to visit Nigeria. Perhaps, that is why many foreign investors are scared to come to Nigeria for investment. According to Opoola quoting Omotoye: our times are characterized by living daily with the combined forces of destructiveness, untold number of wars of religion, warrior spiritualists, persecutors, inquisitions, violent intolerance, social bigotries, various forces of religious disorientation and burgeoning restlessness<sup>21</sup>. Presently, insecurity appears to be the second name of Nigeria, as terrorism is the order of the day. That is why according to Alechenu:

Sokoto State Commissioner of Police ...said on Monday that about 5,000 police personnel had been mobilized to provide

security during President Goodluck Jonathan's official visit to the State on Tuesday.

...Assistant Commissioner of Police had been assigned to each of the identified routes the President was expected to pass through.

...officers had been briefed on security modalities they were expected to adopt during and after Jonathan's visit<sup>22</sup>.

Furthermore, due to the palpable insecurity in Nigeria, both the United Kingdom and the United States of America warned on the eve of Easter that the dreaded religious sect, Boko Haram was planning to strike during the Easter period of 2012. Although the federal government claimed to discountenance and discarded the warning, security agencies took precautions, as according to Salihu: "Armed soldiers and security operatives are guarding churches and mosques in major Northern Nigerian towns to forestall Boko Haram attacks during the Easter celebrations"<sup>23</sup>. However, in spite of this, "A massive blast at the Junction/Sarduana Crescent area of Kaduna on Sunday left many dead thus marring the Christian celebration of Easter in the Northern State"<sup>24</sup>. In fact, an officer of the Cyclists Association submitted that:

Yesterday (Sunday) was a very dark day. This is because we lost our members and other innocent Nigerians. On the average, over 100 of our members lost their lives<sup>25</sup>.

Reports have it that the target of the suicide bomber was a church. Nevertheless, the suspicion and firmness of the security man at the gate of the church who disallowed the bomber entry into the church premises was what saved the situation. Of course, the casualty would have been much more than what was recorded, as all the worshippers, in their entirety, would have perished in the dastard blast. And in a related development:

Joint Military Task Force on Monday uncovered a large undetonated bomb in an abandoned vehicle close to a JTF check-point in Kano...

This came just as suspected Boko Haram members killed a policeman, a civilian and a local politician in coordinated attacks...

Gunmen also shot dead a seven-year old girl during a failed attempt to kill her policeman father; hours after group members killed three in a separate raid...<sup>26</sup>

Prior to that, the activities of the sect in the North had been quite disturbing. They have succeeded in killing and maiming so many innocent

citizens in the Northern part of the country. Initially, the North East was their operational base. Gradually, they infiltrated into the North West. Presently, it appears that scores of them can be found in Kano, Kaduna and other places. The stock in trade of Boko Haram is to kill people; and their targets are usually crowded places where they know that if a bomb is detonated, scores would be killed. Southerners are now scared to travel to the North. This is because they are not too sure of their safety. Insecurity is somewhat palpable. Nobody knows where the next target would be as the sect appears to be invincible. According to Alanam, “the country has recorded very bizarre experiences in the domain of religious violence, resulting from intolerance among religious groups”, and that “The various violence has led to wanton destruction of thousands of lives and properties.”<sup>27</sup>

Beside political and religious upheavals, there is insecurity emanating from ethnic militia. Among the Yoruba, we have the Odua People’s Congress (OPC), Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) among the Igbo; the Niger Delta Liberation Force (NDLF) in the Niger delta, etc. Within the rank and file of the ethnic militias are jobless and despondent youths, who are struggling vehemently for recognition and necessary attention. Thus, they are trying to do everything humanly possible to arouse curiosity and sympathy. But the resultant effects of the negative acts of commission or omission, is insecurity. For the Niger Deltans, the militants have been calling for resource control, and have been bombing oil installations. Save the amnesty granted them, they would have thrown the whole area into a war zone, and constituted themselves as blockade to the free-flow of oil.

Again, it is not uncommon to hear of kidnapping in the South-East and South-South geo-political zones; while robbery is prevalent nationwide. In all, according to Ehioghae: Nigeria has had more than fair share of...uprising leaving in its wake, destruction of properties, maiming of innocent persons, and outright massacre of defenseless citizens. Such has been the case in the various violent encounters.<sup>28</sup>The scenario in its entirety looks incorrigible. According to Adeboye: You kill a terrorist today, a dozen others are rising up to take his place.<sup>29</sup>This is probably because the end is near.

In days of yore, people were trekking long distances both during the days and nights, passing through towns and villages and even bushes and thick forests. There was absolutely nothing to fear then. As a matter of fact, virtually everybody was not only affable, but humane. Therefore,



travelers who never knew anybody, not only ate the meals served them by their host(s) but could sleep with them, with the two eyes closed. The reverse is the case today. Indeed, in almost all establishments in Nigeria, local security personnel are attached to the principal officers. It is not uncommon to see an orderly with the Permanent Secretaries, directors etc. This is to forestall any attack by “hoodlums”. This was not the case a couple of years ago.

### **Suggestions**

The down–turn of the economy that has over the years led to youth unemployment has led to the restiveness of the youths. Quite a good number of them (many of whom are graduates) are roaming the streets, jobless. Since an idle hand is the devil’s workshop, it behooves on them to naturally take up arms at the slightest opportunity. It is pathetic to note that government at various levels has decided to look the other way, rather than addressing this seemingly intractable and pathetic problem. It is strongly suggested that the three tiers of government should look critically at the issue of unemployment and address it immediately.

In the same vein, there is the inequitable distribution of the commonwealth. Up to the present time of writing, the minimum wages are just eighteen thousand naira per month (which in many instances are not paid for months), while some go home with several millions of naira every month. According to a report, N150 billion is the annual budget of the Federal Legislators consisting of only 109 Senators and 360 members of the House of Representatives, notwithstanding the prevailing abject poverty across the land. Thus, the rich are getting richer, while the poor are getting poorer.

If and when there is upheaval, the poor ones seize the opportunity to vent their grievances against the rich in the society. Efforts should be geared towards ensuring that there is equitable distribution of what belongs to all the citizens. It is, indeed, not proper for some to be enjoying what ordinarily belongs to all, while others are wallowing in abject poverty. Some cannot afford to eat at all. They have thus decided to be scavenging at the refuse dumps in order to make ends meet. This is a situation where a negligible percentage of the total population is stealing in millions in the past but now in billions what should be shared to every Tom, Dick and Harry. Thus, decidedly, the poor, out of despondence, partake actively in upheavals. According to a report:

Bloody clashes in the mile 12, Ketu area of Lagos State on Thursday (march 13, 2016) left no fewer than 10 persons dead

and about 100 others injured. Among the dead were two school children, traders, artisans and residents. A two year old boy Andrew Daniel was abducted by some hoodlums and taken away after his father, Igba, was attacked with machetes and left for the dead. No fewer than 40 vehicles were either burnt or vandalized in the *Agiliti* area of Ketu. Two churches and over 20 houses were equally set ablaze and hundreds of residents rendered homeless in Maidan Community as a result of the violence which was said to have broken out after a disagreement between some Yoruba and Hausa in the area<sup>31</sup>.

Anger and provocation are boldly written on the faces of the poor, as Nigeria has become something else. This is because some individuals are even richer than the country. This has probably necessitated the seemingly intractable problems of armed robbery and other vices like kidnapping for ransom and rituals, violent attack, etc.

A couple of decades ago, there was absolutely nothing like undue youth restiveness. This was when they were fully engaged, shortly after graduation from tertiary academic institutions. Virtually all graduates and even school leavers had something to do. There was, then, no room for them to ruminate on doing something that was either destructive or disruptive. Governments at the three tiers should ensure that job placement is guaranteed among the youths in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

This work has succinctly examined Matthew 24:6-7. The paper has carried out the exegesis of the text. It has theologically assessed the insecurity prevalent within the nooks and crannies of the country. It is observed in the process of assessment that what could be responsible for the seemingly intractable security problem in the country is probably the coming of the close of age. Contemporary happenings attest to Paul's prediction in his letter to Timothy that in the last days, there will come times of stress, as noted in the body of this paper. The time of upheaval is found in virtually everywhere. There is pandemonium in almost all parts of Nigeria. Peace appears to have eluded the entire nation. There is no rest of mind anywhere. People are afraid of armed robbers and or kidnappers. It appears that virtually everybody is unsafe in the contemporary Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that government should provide security and job opportunities for the growing population of young people.

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