

# **Politics and Integrity among Selected Old Testament Prophets and its Implications for Christian Leaders in Nigeria Political Space**

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## **Abstract**

This work discusses politics and integrity among some Old Testament prophets and how such understanding can affect Christian leaders in the Nigerian political space. Prophets were mouthpieces of God, who carried out God's message to the people and the nation of Israel and other surrounding nations. While some got involved in politics, some stick to their primary assignments. In present-day Nigeria, church leaders, particularly Church leaders, are seen to be the model of prophets of old. Using the historical-critical and exegetical methods of research, the work analysed the prophets and an attempt is also made to compare these Old Testament prophets who got involved in politics but kept their integrity with the present Church leaders in the political arena in Nigeria to see if they are keeping to their integrity or not. In the course of this research, it is pertinent to say that many Church leaders who are involved in politics lost their integrity as they become corrupt through looting public funds, power-drunk through abuse of office, or morally corrupt. There is, therefore, a need for present-day Church leaders to learn from the prophets in the Old Testament who kept to their integrity in order will promote peace, justice, and righteousness which will help a great deal in solving the problems facing the nation.

**Keywords:** Prophet, Church, Pastor, Politics, Integrity, Old Testament

## Introduction

Since Nigeria got its independence in 1960, governance has been either through a democratic or military rule. In the 59 years of Nigerian history as an independent entity and self-rule, the military has ruled for 29 years while democratic governance has been for about 30 years, with the longest uninterrupted being that from 1999 to date. During these democratic processes, the participation of Church leaders in partisan politics is not mentioned, though it cannot be completely ruled out.

This study, therefore, attempts to find out whether Church leaders got involved in politics and whether their involvement affected their integrity or not in the political arena in the governance of Nigeria. Using the historical-critical method of research, some selected Old Testament prophets who got involved in the politics of their day are discussed. This is to find out whether they maintained their integrity or not. This will then be implied to contemporary church leaders who are involved in politics in the present political dispensation in Nigeria.

It is worthy of note that Nigeria is divided among ethnic and religious lines and both individuals and the nations conduct affairs along these lines, therefore the role of religious leaders with integrity is necessary for the political arena to correct these ills,<sup>1</sup> yet even with their involvement, these problems persist. These are some of the concerns this study attempts to find out.

The main focus of this study is that the contemporary church leaders should take a cue from Old Testament prophets who got involved in politics of their day but maintained and upheld their integrity. Having done that, they can bring a lot of changes to the political arena to correct the dwindling situation of the nation. Furthermore, the study will serve as a wake-up call to religious leaders, especially Church leaders who are involved in politics, to live up to their responsibility by being examples of just, fair, and good leaders, and maintaining their integrity as mouthpieces of God.

## Brief Background of a Prophet and His Role

According to Myers, there are various Hebrew terms, which are employed to designate the person and office of the prophet. He explains that the most common word for prophet is נָבִיא *nābî*. (fem. נְבִיאָה *nābî·â*),

a general term thought to be derived from a root “to call,” thus “one who calls (or announces)” or “one (who is) called.” A distinct role is often suggested for רֹאֵה *rō·eh* or הֹזֵה *hōzeh*, both rendered “seer” (c.f. 1 Samuel 9:9), one who experiences and reports or interprets a dream or vision; such figures are frequently associated with ecstatic states. Other terms include אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים (*īš hā·‘lōhīm*) “man of God”; for example, in 1 Kings 17:18, 24), מַלְאָךְ (*mal·āk*) “messenger”, and עֶבֶד (*‘ebed*) “(his) servant.”<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, prophets were persons who spoke the words that God put in their mouths (Deuteronomy 18:18–22); they were messengers who reported God’s words, often saying, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel” (Judges 6:8; 1 Kings 11:29–31; 2 Chronicles 34:23), or “Thus says the Lord” (2 Samuel 24:11f; 1 Kings 20:13; 2 Kings 20:1; 2 Chronicles 12:5; 21:12).<sup>3</sup> During the early monarchy, there may have been a distinction between a “prophet” and a “seer,” but the nature of this difference is not preserved in the canonical text.<sup>4</sup>

From the above, the role of prophets in the Old Testament was to deliver God’s message to those he was sent to. This was done in the temple and the societies, proclaiming God’s word to the people, as noted by Wood that in every sanctuary, working alongside the priests, who had charge of the sacrificial aspect of the worship, there were prophets who declared the word of God publicly for the nation or privately for individual guidance,<sup>5</sup> to monarchs, as in the case of David and other Israelite kings and surrounding nations, or/and delivering words of wisdom.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the prophet’s sole responsibility is to proclaim God’s message to the people, kings, or words of wisdom and not in any case, to seek to rule.

Dirk Buursman gives a summary of the roles and responsibilities of a prophet to include being a spokesman for God, a watchman for the people and pointing out the sins of kings. Other roles include pronouncement of judgement on the people, predicting the future, called the people to repentance, gave hope to the people, interpret dreams, and writing down messages from God.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Nature of Politics in the Old Testament**

Politics, according to Cletus Tanimu Gotau, has a wide range of definitions. He opines that Political Science defines politics as the activity that has to do with power and influence in a democratic society. It has to

do with the allocation and distribution of resources. It determines who gets what, when and how.<sup>8</sup> Soannes and Stevenson see politics as the activities associated with the governance of a country or area.<sup>9</sup> While Merriam Webster sees it as simply the art or science of government.<sup>10</sup>

In the Old Testament, the nature of politics was theocratic and to a large extent, monarchical. Neusner et al observe that:

The political theory of Judaism emerges in the Hebrew Scriptures of ancient Israel as these writings are interpreted by the rabbis of the first six centuries C.E. in the Talmud of Babylonia and related documents. The Pentateuch portrays Israel as “a kingdom of priests and a holy people” and further takes for granted that this “kingdom” or “people” forms a political entity.<sup>11</sup>

They further stress that Scripture understands Israel not merely as a church or a voluntary community but an empowered society, with a government, laws and institutions. Scripture's portrait of the type of government varies in many ways. The Pentateuch takes for granted that Israel is governed by God through the prophet Moses<sup>12</sup> and similar can be said about other sections of the Bible. From this summation, one can see that though the political nature in the Pentateuch was theocratic yet God used few individuals to serve as leaders and involved in some level of governing as seen in the above statement.

### **Prophets and Politics in the Old Testament**

In the Old Testament, particularly in the Pentateuch, since the nature of politics was theocratic concerning the nation of Israel and also monarchical in other nations, one of the remarkable places in scripture that one notes the tussle for power or leadership is that of Miriam and Aaron who opposed Moses' leadership as given in Numbers 12.

During the times of Joshua and the Judges, the theocratic rule is seen where God chooses the person to be in leadership. This was the system of governance until the time of Samuel when the people demanded a human king, like other kingdoms (1 Samuel 8:5). This was a time that the kings were constantly craving power either within a family or clan. It was the duty of the prophets and to some extent, the priest, to install these kings in their positions of leadership. This was the case when prophets and priests began to get involved in the politics of their day.

Many prophets and priests were involved in politics in Old Testament time. For instance, Nathan, the prophet, influences the selection of David's successor (1 Kings 1:11-40). McCain asserts that Nathan urged Bathsheba to have Solomon anointed before Adonijah was anointed king. David agreed and Solomon was anointed,<sup>13</sup> indicating Nathan's involvement in the political affairs of his day. This was the last time of hearing anything about Nathan. In Amos, there was a priest who was deep into politics that he did not allow prophet Amos to prophecy in Israel. Amos 7:10-17 records this incidence and its consequences thereafter.

One outstanding issue in the Old Testament times regarding prophets is that no prophet craved kingship. For instance, during the time of Samuel, there was no king, he had the opportunity to make himself ruler over the people but he did not do so, but appointed priests in all the towns. Samuel remained focused on his role and responsibility and kept his integrity between God and the people.<sup>14</sup>

One other prophet who remained resolute in carrying out his responsibilities was Prophet Daniel. He was into governance while in exile to the extent that as a foreigner, he become one of the rulers in Babylon. He held on to his integrity and did not let himself be carried away with power. This was not to be without a price as constantly, he was put into series of tests which he passed. He also held on to his service to Yahweh even in a foreign land (Daniel 1:8; 6:1-5), just as his three friends –Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:16-18).

In the Old Testament, prophets who indulged and messed up themselves in the politics of their day were termed false prophets. This is ascertained by Jack Wellman that, most politicians are a little like the Old Testament false prophets of old, only telling people what they want to hear.<sup>15</sup> An example is seen in Amos 7:10-12-13, there was a priest who was deep into the politics of his day to the extent that he tried to stop Amos from prophesying. This was because they were full of lies and empty promises.

On the other hand, some prophets get involved in politics but remained focused. Franca S. Jando asserts that in the Old Testament, prophets realized their spiritual and political responsibilities to their people. That was why many of them delivered punchy oracles against Kings who abdicated the responsibilities to the people of Israel. For

instance, Prophets Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and so on kept many Kings on their feet and never kept quiet when the Kings reneged on their responsibilities.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Pastor and His Calling**

The word “pastor” is an old word that means *shepherd*, from the Greek, *poimen*. His roles include: **leading the flock**, spiritually and directionally, as they communally obey Jesus’ Great Commission and Great Commandment; and **feeding the flock**, offering spiritual nourishment and protection from false belief systems.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the term describing the relationship between a minister and his or her congregation. The term *pastor* is derived from the Latin word *passere*, meaning “to pasture” or “to feed” and in biblical terminology frequently refers to a shepherd caring for a flock and figuratively of a leader caring for followers.<sup>18</sup>

In describing who a pastor is, ctfsw.edu says, a pastor is all of these things and more. He is the one to comfort God’s people in distress, to challenge them in complacency and, above all, to love them in each circumstance.<sup>19</sup> S. Joseph Kidder outlines the roles of a pastor which include relating with God the Father through prayer, preaching the gospel, meeting the needs of the people, making disciples, living a life of service and sacrifice.<sup>20</sup> It is the pastor’s responsibility to build up the body of Christ by watching over the congregation (Acts 20:28; Hebrew 13:7) and countering false teaching (Acts 20:29–30).<sup>21</sup>

### **Church leaders and Politics in the Contemporary Society**

In the history of political governance in Nigeria, there is no clear mention of Church leaders, especially pastors, involved in forefront partisan politics or governance. They were seen as spiritual leaders and fathers whose role was relegated to prayers during occasions. For instance, in the constitution of one of the denominations in Nigeria, ECWA in particular, her 1989, 2000, 2010, and the recently reviewed constitution, it is stipulated that no ECWA officer at any level, is allowed to participate in partisan politics. Anyone officer so found is liable to be dismissed.<sup>22</sup> This shows that Church leaders were not allowed to be active in politics. For them to be involved in partisan politics, they must resign

from their position. Despite this, many Church leaders get involved in the contemporary Nigeria political arena.

While it is not bad or taboo for Church leaders or pastors to be in the corridors of power in a state or country as a whole, yet the issue is whether they still maintain and uphold their integrity. In an interview with Tony Rapu, he believes that it is not wrong for pastors to be involved in partisan politics. He stresses that people perform best in their areas of calling. People who are called to politics should go ahead and seek elective posts. If they happen to be pastors, there is nothing wrong with that. If they can manage both sides of their calling, that is very commendable. But whether a pastor is called to seek an elective position or not, all pastors should be involved in the political process of the country.<sup>23</sup>

Ola Obegunde observes that two factors influence the direction of development of nations, which are the character and nature of political leadership on the one hand and the system of governance in operation on the other.<sup>24</sup> Character of leaders involves integrity, which includes sincerity, honesty, trustworthiness, truthfulness, and hardworking.<sup>25</sup> These are very vital in the governance of a nation.

One of the challenges Church leaders face as they are deeply involved in politics is the tendency to lie. P. L. Tan opines that the "Truth in Government Act" was proposed by Representative Donald M. Fraser which would make it illegal for federal officials to lie to private citizens because according to Fraser, honesty is a one-way street. "Under current law, it is a crime for a private citizen to lie to a government official, but not for a government official to lie to the people." Perhaps officials should take an oath of honesty when they are sworn into offices.<sup>26</sup>

In party politics, one of the features is that of manipulation as noted by Maurice Deverger that parties, like all organizations, tend to manipulate their members, to bring them under the control of an inner circle of leaders that often perpetuates itself by co-optation.<sup>27</sup> This is evident and has contributed to affecting the integrity of Church leaders as the lines could not be drawn about when to abstain and when to participate.

As a pastor gets involved in politics, he should know that as he represents God as a minister, he should ensure that he attends to his duties and responsibilities as he should as a minister of God. The pastor is the

eye of God and a father to all in the political arena who despite differences, must work together for the good of both the religious and political dimensions of the people.<sup>28</sup> Samuel Alifa asserts that to be a leader of integrity, one must be a person with a large heart, with an expandable bosom that has enough room for individual men and women one is leading. One must be a father with a fatherly heart. One must not relate officially with the led but must adopt the led as his children.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, if Church leaders must be in the corridors of power within a political system, they must ensure that they represent God and the church well. Anything short of this is a failure on their part.

Therefore, when Church leaders get involved in politics, their integrity is put to test which in most cases, they fail. To an extent, they become worse at the end of their leadership rather than when they began. This makes and directs their calling and ministry into jeopardy and ridicule of the church and opens to the question of the integrity of the church as a whole. If as a pastor one fails in integrity, what more of one who is not a pastor.

From this study, it is worthy to note that Church leaders are involved and are involving in politics, but they did little or nothing to help in curtailing corruption and other ills going on in the country as Victoria Nakom Pali observes that the situation is attributed to bad leadership in the country. With dismay, almost all regimes in the nation end up with a bad record of exploitation and reckless plundering of the nation's rich resources for personal gain,<sup>30</sup> thereby, those religious leaders who got involved in politics could not maintain their integrity. Integrity has to do with not participating in corruption, not slandering others, and not viewing oneself as higher than one ought to be, as outlined by McCain.<sup>31</sup>

## **Factors Militating against Church Leaders' Integrity in Politics**

- 1. Quest for grip on power:** One of the factors that can lead to a pastor losing his integrity is the quest for power. He may tend to have power at all costs, not for anything but to subject others to himself. Most times this leads to loss of integrity in the face of people.
- 2. Quest for relevance:** Another factor that can militate the pastor to lose his integrity is the quest for relevance. To make himself relevant in the political realm, he tends to be corrupt, spiritually bankrupt, and to an extended loss of faith in God and pursuit of worldly things.
- 3. Quest for personal aggrandizement:** closely linked to the quest for relevance is the quest for personal aggrandizement. This is a situation whereby a person seeks to promote himself in all ramifications to the detriment of others at all costs. This may mean character assassination of others, false accusation, and demeaning of others for his gain. This is what Agang calls the commercialization of ethnicity, politics, and religion.<sup>32</sup>
- 4. The desire for cumulating wealth.** This is where corruption normally takes its course. When a pastor has a desire to accumulate wealth, he tends to do that in a corrupt way such as embezzlement of public funds, diversion of funds meant for public projects, salaries of workers and any other funds accrued for public benefit.
- 5. Self-glorification rather than God.** One of the factors that may lead a pastor to lose his integrity is the desire for self-glorification rather than God. Two outstanding characters in the Holy Bible who went that way are Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 and King Herod in Acts 12. They glorified themselves but God humbled them. Nebuchadnezzar was turned into an animal for seven years (Daniel 4:32-33) while King Herod died and was eaten by worms (Acts 12:23). This should serve as a warning to Church leaders and any political office or leadership-seeking person.

## **Effects of Church leaders losing Integrity**

The effects when Church leaders involved in politics are witnessed much on Christianity. Some of the effects when Church leaders who are supposed to live exemplary leadership but fail in their outward affairs. These are very disastrous. These may include:

- a. **Loss of Trust:** Rick Warren comments on the need for integrity in leadership but asserts that when the integrity is lost, it becomes a disaster. He comments that Integrity is the foundation of leadership. You only lead people if they trust you. If you lose people's trust, you've lost all. That's why the right to lead is earned, and it's earned by being trustworthy. I think the most damaging sin a leader can commit is to betray the trust of his people.<sup>33</sup>
- b. **Loss of Dignity:** when a pastor gets involved in politics and does things that made him lose his integrity, he also loses his dignity.
- c. **Loss of respect:** Losing respect is both at home and the society. To some, respect is earned outside the home only. McCain notes that many pastors and Christian leaders have lost the respect of their children. The children see the public life of their parents, they hear their preaching; they observe the respect that their father or mother gets from others. However, they see the true person and the hypocrisy at home, which is most unfortunate.<sup>34</sup>
- d. **Lack of economic and educational development in the nation:** Katsina and Agile asserts that lack of leaders' integrity explains the apparent failure of the development enterprise in the country, ranging from bad political leadership to economic policies that have no direct bearing on the poor, and the neglect of the educational sector which is the hub for moulding people in character and learning and the breakdown of the justice system.<sup>35</sup>

### **Suggestions on Church Leaders' Involvement in Politics**

When a pastor is involved in politics if at all he must, there are many things he should bear in mind.

1. He must be the light and salt in all his dealings and activities (Matthew 5:13-16). As a disciple and leader in the church, Chouinard opines that what Jesus meant to by being salt could be the indispensable role the disciples will have in the world, and their obligation to use their unique qualities to make a positive contribution. In the same way, if the disciples fail to fulfil their role by diluting the values and priorities of the kingdom, they become useless as agents of renewal and redemption. Like salt that has become worthless, disciples who fail in the mission are

discarded as useless for kingdom purposes.<sup>36</sup> Since as a servant of God, they as salt and light, must savour and illuminate God's ways, which alone can preserve and guide humanity.<sup>37</sup>

2. It is recommended that if a pastor must be in the political arena, he must maintain his integrity by clearly exhibiting good conduct, maturity, corrupt-free, and Christian behaviour as it should for a Christian. Ephesians 5:1-11 should be seen in their lives. Courson cautions that one should not be deceived if one has been walking with the Lord, but still succumb to fleshly indulgences, this shows that one is on shaky ground, not about the struggle a person has with his flesh, but about a lifestyle of embracing one's flesh. If one caters to his flesh day after week after month after year after decade, one needs to take a careful look at his/her spiritual standing.<sup>38</sup>
3. He must live an exemplary life for his followers, the church and society (Titus 2:7). Titus, was urged to set an example for the young men in the churches he led (see also 1 Timothy 4:12). His authoritative words could have no impact if not backed up by a blameless life of *doing what is good*. Titus's teaching should emphasize "self-control," while his lifestyle should be an example of how that self-control can be applied to daily living.<sup>39</sup>
4. Given the findings that most pastors and church leaders lose their integrity in the political arena, the researcher recommends that it is better if Church leaders stick to their responsibilities of being servants of God than craving for political power. If a pastor knows his calling, involving in politics should be out of his way. It is best if a pastor should concentrate on his calling and maintain his integrity than be in politics and get his integrity soiled. Cox asserts that:

One of the biggest reasons I generally say a pastor should stay out of partisan issues is because I believe it's too easy to become a pawn. As soon as a pastor promote a candidate, that candidate in their humanness will say or do something embarrassing, and my credibility will be diminished. Having said that, the gospel itself certainly has social implications, and we who guard and carry that gospel must concern ourselves with whether Christians within our culture are properly relating the gospel to their surroundings or not.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

This work has discussed Politics and Integrity in some selected Old Testament prophets and their implication on religious leaders in contemporary Nigeria. From the study, it is clear that Old Testament prophets did not get involved in the politics of their day as they kept to their primary role as the mouthpiece of God. In a situation where they got involved, they tried as much as possible to keep to their integrity and upheld same, although some lost their integrity, they were termed as false prophets. In the contemporary Nigerian situation, many religious leaders got involved in the political arena and lost their integrity, as one can see that despite how people hold them in high esteem, they could not solve the problem of corruption, ethnicity, and religious divide. This has cost them their integrity. The researchers are suggesting that Church leaders should not be involved in partisan politics, but in case they found themselves in it, they should not forget that they represent God in all aspects of their life and live lives of integrity so as the name of the Lord will not be ridiculed. They should also serve as examples in integrity for the saturation of the political arena and governance as this will help in no small measure to solve the many problems bedeviling the nation.

## ENDNOTES

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