

Old Testament Prophets and the Question of Integrity: Implication for Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

Integrity is an essential element of good governance. The sense of integrity displayed by the Old Testament prophets presents them as mouthpieces and intermediaries between God and man. This equally enabled good governance in the society they ministered. There are many types of research on Old Testament prophetism, but with little or no connection to good governance in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, examines selected Old Testament prophets and the question of integrity as reference for good governance in Nigeria by using prophet Amos and Jeremiah as examples of Old Testament prophets. The historical method is used for data gathering while the content analysis method is used for data analysis. Primary data is sourced from the Bible while secondary data is sourced from books, journals, dictionaries and the internet. The result shows that integrity is vital for good governance in the management of resources, security, equity, and the development of infrastructural facilities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Integrity, Old Testament prophets, Governance in Nigeria, Prophetism in the Old Testament, good governance.

INTRODUCTION

Integrity is a vital tool and basic requirement for prophetism and good governance in the Old Testament. As important as prophecy is in the history of the human relationship with God, without integrity on the part of the prophets as leaders, it is useless. The prophets displayed a high sense of integrity as the mouthpiece of God. "They were messengers of God delivering His words of judgment as well as His words of encouragement and hope".¹ They did not speak for themselves but God who had sent them and they delivered the message(s) as instructed by God irrespective of the content whether pleasant or aggressive. Integrity in governance deals with "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles".² It also involves trust, reliability, accountability, fairness to all among others. Inability to display all these as leaders are considered as bad governance. Good governance encompasses the use of political authority to manage resources for the social economic and religious development of a nation or an organization.³

So many articles have been written on leadership, integrity and good governance, yet, governance in Nigeria still lack appreciable integrity. Hence, there is a need to explore integrity as a core factor for good governance as evident in the ministry of the Old Testament prophets and use it as a reference for good governance in Nigeria. The historical method of research is used to collect data from the primary source, the Bible, and secondary sources (books, journals, dictionaries and the internet). Data is content analysed.

This work is significant in that it explains prophetism in the Old Testament and how Amos and Jeremiah in their duties as religious leaders displayed integrity through selfless activities, accountability, humility, honesty, reliability and fairness to all to build their nations socially, religiously and economically and how this can be a reference for good governance in Nigeria.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Integrity

Integrity according to Oxford Dictionary means: "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles".⁴ It is also defined as the "quality or state of being complete or undivided".⁵ It is equally the "practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising

adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values”.⁶ The two important ideas of integrity are truth and honesty. Hence, “people with integrity are generally known to be trustworthy, honest and kind”.⁷

Prophet

According to Folarin, four words “hold the key to the concept. These are the Hebrew words, *nabhi*, *ro’eh* and *chozeh*; and the Greek word, *prophetes*. Among the four words, *nabhi* is the most significant”.⁸ According to the interpretation of other Semitic languages, *Nabhi* in ‘Akkadian word, *nabu* means ‘to call’, the Arabian word, *naba’a* means ‘announce’ and the Ethiopian word, *nab’aha* means ‘to speak’. Prophets mean ‘an interpreter’.⁹ These words explain that the main task of a prophet is to speak. The other terms, *ro’eh* and *chozeh* mean ‘seer’. The roots of the words mean ‘see’. This means that a prophet is a person endowed with supernatural power to see and authorized as God’s spokesman in whose words a divinely communicated power resides.¹⁰ In other words, a prophet is a person chosen by God to say the things God wants to tell people.¹¹

Good Governance

Governance according to Ali, Manu and Mafindi by Huda, is the “act or process through which decisions and policies are made and implemented in the conduct of affairs and management of resources by public institutions”.¹² Also, Muyiwa in Huda defines it as a “means of managing a country’s economic and social resources for development”.¹³ Hence, governance entails having power and authority to manage the affairs of a nation. In other words, good governance is “a model of governance that leads to social and economic results for citizens”.¹⁴ Good governance is characterised by having respect for everyone, displaying humility, taking responsibility for actions, giving others the benefit of doubt, putting others’ needs first, showing respect and rendering help to people in need, choosing honesty in all things not minding the cost, showing kindness always, displaying reliability and admitting fault when wrong and apologize if need be.¹⁵

GENERAL APPRAISAL OF GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

In recent years, Nigeria as a nation is faced with a multiplicity of challenges.¹⁶ Among many which attract much attention is bad governance. Nigeria has experienced different regimes of government ranging from military to civilian but the same prevailing problem is lack of integrity, a core factor for good governance. Musa says, "the issue of corruption and poor governance is real in Nigeria".¹⁷ Many characteristics of poor governance such as political corruption, poverty, insecurity of lives and properties, noncompliance to the rule of law among others are evidenced in Nigeria governance.

Politically, there is corruption. Many leaders lack integrity by indulging in greed, nepotism, dishonesty, favouritism, embezzlement, bribery and a host of others. People see key political leaders "living beyond their means in terms of the type and number of properties they own".¹⁸ According to Olatunde money meant for putting in place social amenities and infrastructural facilities, creation of jobs, prompt payment of workers and pensioners' entitlement, creation of a conducive environment that can stabilize local investments thereby attract foreign investors for economic development and employment are being diverted into personal local and foreign accounts by political leaders.¹⁹

Also, economically, "the scale of poverty is widespread".²⁰ People cannot avoid balanced nutritious diets, live in substandard houses, are unable to offer sound education to children, lack access to potable water, good roads and health facilities, Atere sees poverty to "manifest in the inability to acquire the necessities of life that are essential for a standard quality of life".²¹ Moreover, as evidenced in Nigeria governance, there is the insecurity of lives and properties. Reports on social political and religious crises leading to mass killing, criminal activities such as armed robbery, theft, ritual killing, kidnapping, raping and website fraud increase every day.

Equally, as observed by Musa, there is noncompliance to the rule of law. "There is widespread abuse of executive powers".²² The political leaders have enormous powers that they use to their advantage. The system of checks and balances put in place through the law is ignored. From the general discussion on Nigeria governance, all the features of Nigerian governance are characteristics of poor governance.

PROPHETISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

According to the conservative view, prophetism in Israel is traced to the Mosaic period. Folarin says that the reasons behind the Mosaic origin are because:

- 1) Moses was the standard of comparison for prophetic personages (Deu.18:15, 34:10).²³
- 2) It was from the Mosaic age many other prophets were mentioned in Israel (Aaron-Ex.7:1; Miriam Ex.15:20; Deborah - Jud. 4:4; etc).²⁴
- 3) The word 'prophet' only appeared in Gen. 20:7 referring to Abraham before the time of Moses. Laney explained that the isolated appearance of the term before the Moses era should not be judged as the origin of prophetism with Abraham.²⁵ Hence, formerly prophetism is believed to have started with Moses.

From this period of the origin of prophetism, another form of prophetism began with Samuel. At this time, prophets increased numerically and there came, the era of group prophets (I Kings 13:11, 20:35; II Kings 4:38, 6:1-7). According to Blunt in Folarin, Samuel did not train them on how to prophesy but how to carry out the prophetic functions and acts.²⁶ Hence, he organized them into groups.

Later, prophetism developed to court prophets who “were God-directed advisers to and critics of the kings”.²⁷ They were guardians of the monarchy ensuring the kings fulfilled their theocratic duties and keep the terms of the covenant.²⁸ Examples of court prophets and kings they ministered to include: Nathan - David (II Samuel 7:2; 5:16; K King 1:34); Ahijah – Jeroboam (I Kings 11:29-39; 13:1-9; 4:2-8); Shemaiah – Rehoboam (I Kings 12:22-24); Jehu –Baasha (I Kings 16:1-4); Elijah – Omri (I Kings 17: 1-2); Elisha –Jehu (II Kings 8:15), and many others. From this stage, we had the classical prophets who “were the fearless, solitary prophets whose messages are kept for us today in the writings that bear their names”.²⁹ They boldly declared God’s messages with integrity without compromise. Examples include Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Hosea, etc.

The prophets as representatives of God declared the words of God to the people of Israel and urged the people for a positive response. They performed unique functions in Israel and declared God's word to different kings for various reasons. For instance:

- Azariah assured and encouraged Asa of God's presence and adherence to Him for support. (II Chro- 15:1-2).
- Jehu pronounced doom on Baasha for provoking God to anger by the worship of idols (I Kings-16:7)
- Elijah predicted drought and rebuked Ahab after killing Naboth (I Kings 21:17-24)
- Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's mysterious dream. (Dan-2:14-28)
- Isaiah encouraged Ahaz to put confidence in God for victory (Isaiah-7:3-9).
- Jeremiah instructed Zedekiah to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer-38:17-21)etc.

Without compromising words, they all discharged their duties faithfully. Equally, with sincerity of heart, the prophets performed the following roles:

- Rebuke. They rebuked sin and called for repentance.
- Encouragement to the people of God.
- The revelation of facts about God and His creation.
- Establishment of the schools of prophets to train and educate young prophets on the need for integrity in their display of duties.
- Information on the action to be taken on specific occasions. e.g. God instructing Moses during the wilderness journey on what to be done by him and the people. (Exo.16:4-33; 17:1-7; Num.11:16-23, etc).
- Authenticating a divinely appointed leader or prophet (ISam3:19-21; 10:2-9; I Kings13:3; Jer28:15-17).
- Fore telling and laying the foundation for the future activities of the Messiah.

All of these functions were performed without compromise or prejudice.

The Old Testament prophets were called at different critical times and for different purposes. But all shared "a common message of judgment on the self-sufficient and hope of all who long for God's kingdom"³⁰.

Socially, in the society they ministered, the poor were oppressed and denied justice by the rich (Amos 2:6ff; 5:11; 8:4-6), there were lying, murder, stealing, adultery, blood bath, highway robbery, deceit,

drunkenness (Hosea 4, 6, and 8), etc. There was insecurity everywhere. Corruption was on the increase and good morals were more or less non-existent. False scales were used for measurement with inflation of prices (Amos 8:5)

Also, judicially, the judges were corrupt. There was no consideration or justice for the poor who were robbed and dispossessed of their properties. (Amos 5:12). The rich bought over the judges for wrong judgment. Shields explained that Amos renounced his hearers of turning “justice into bitterness and of casting righteousness to the ground (Amos 5:7)”.³¹

Equally, religiously, Israel was religious but godless. Vangemeren says, "even though Yahweh's shrines were lavishly supported but many of the shrines were open to pagan worship with the fertility cult practised everywhere".³² (Amos 4:4ff, 5:21-24; Hos. 1-3, 4:11-14). Even the "official state religion absorbed pagan rites (Amos 2:7ff; 5:26) and also copied pagan cults in appeasing the Deity by ritual and sacrifice to secure peace instead of worshipping Him in righteousness".³³

To this corrupt society, the Old Testament prophets ministered with integrity and sincerity of heart. For instance:

- 1) Moses ministered to the Israelites by not taking anything into consideration of his service (Num. 16:15)
- 2) Samuel exact nothing from the Israelites for the services he rendered to them (I Samuel 12:4).
- 3) Jehoiada and other priests supervised the repair of the temple by paying the dues of those working on the repair of the temple appropriately. (II Kings 12:15-22).
- 4) Nehemiah reformed the civil service and received no compensation for the service (Neh. 5:14-19).
- 5) Amos did not compromise his message despite Amaziah's threat (Amos 7:7ff) etc.

The Prophets spoke of God's Judgment fearlessly, pleaded for repentance and envisioned transformed humanity and new world order.³⁴ Through the sincerity of the prophets, the Israelites heard, obeyed the voice of God and received a new vision for life.

CHARACTERISATION OF SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS IN RELATION TO INTEGRITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

The Old Testament prophets according to Vangemeren were empowered servants of God to withstand the pressures of their time to speak the word of God and discharge the office faithfully.³⁵ Some of them went through a visible change (Eze.3:12, 14, 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5) with evidence that God had spoken (Amos 3:7-8). Hence, they declared God's word as God's spoke person who does not serve himself but the Lord. (Deut. 18:18-19; Ex. 4:10-16; 7:1). Distinctively, Amos and Jeremiah as selected Old Testament Prophets exhibited some basic qualities such as accountability, boldness to declare God's message, the fear of God for fair judgement, honesty not compromising God's message giving room for favouritism, selflessness by not making the prophetic/leadership position hereditary by depriving others the opportunity of leadership position and disciplined by living independently not collecting bribes or enriching themselves at the expense of the masses.

All these form the basis for their success in the prophetic office and good governance. Hester also highlights the following to be the basic characteristics of prophets:

- 1) They were influenced and motivated by their call to speak to their societies (Jer-1:7-10; Amos 3:8).³⁶
- 2) They were "conscious of God's authority and on this basis, they spoke courageously and uncompromisingly".³⁷ (Jeremiah 1:10-19).
- 3) They were men of the spirit who communicated with God from time to time. (Jeremiah 2:1-10; Amos 4:1-13)
- 4) They were faithful and fearlessly rebuked the evil practices of the individual and nation such as oppression of the poor, killing and idolatry. E.g Amos against Amaziah (Amos 7:10-17)
- 5) The prophetic office was not hereditary (Amos 7:14).
- 6) They were rugged individuals who do not seek people's attention. They live independently and this helps them to avoid bribery and corruption, fraud and embezzlement.

All the above characteristics helped them to speak for God and with authority. "They repeatedly claimed that their very words were words which God had given them to deliver (Num. 22:38; Deut. 18:18;

Jer. 1:9).³⁸ They came with a sincere 'word from God, spoke on behalf of the great king, Yahweh and did not look for the kings' favour".³⁹ They constantly reminded Israel of the terms of her covenant with God calling them to repentance and warning them that penalties of disobedience would soon be applied (II Chro. 24:19; Neh. 9:26, 30; Jer. 7:25; Malachi 4:4-6) without compromising their words. This resulted in attaching great authority and respect to the prophetic office in Israel. Grudem says; "whatever a true prophet received from the Lord, he spoke. What the Lord thus spoke through the prophet had absolute divine authority extending even to the very words the prophet used".⁴⁰

THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Nigeria as a nation for years has experienced instability politically, economically, morally, socially and religiously. Just as in the prophetic era, there is corruption, murder, insecurity of lives, robbery, injustice, drunkenness, shedding of innocent blood, greediness, selfishness, godlessness etc. Musa exclaimed that the "issue of corruption and poor governance in Nigeria is a reality".⁴¹ The magnitude of suffering is high as people live substandard lives. There is bribery, embezzlement, fraud and mismanagement everywhere, people are valued and given recognition by the amount of wealth acquired even when acquired at the expense of the masses.

For good governance in Nigeria, there is a need to place integrity as a core factor for the acceptability of any individual aspiring for a political appointment. It has been proven from the prophetic days that integrity promotes good governance. All the Old Testament kings (e.g. David, Hezekiah, Josiah, Jehoshaphat etc) who gave integrity a priority in the monarchial reign succeeded while those (e.g. Saul, Zimri, Ahab, Rehoboam etc), who were less concerned about integrity failed.

Integrity gives room for good governance and competent management of a nation's resources in a transparent and result-oriented manner.⁴²

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above, it is recommended that:

- All leaders must be tested and measured with integrity and boldness to confront any opposition to integrity and good governance.
- All individuals aspiring position of responsibilities should be considered qualified with a criterion of the fear of God which embed integrity.
- Seminars and workshops should be organized for leadership aspirates on the mandate and importance of integrity in their administration and personal life as Samuel established schools of prophets for enlightenment on the need for integrity and good governance.

Individuals to be considered for any post must be individuals worthy of emulation as seen in the case of Moses and Samuel.

CONCLUSION

The Old Testament kings, prophets and leaders who displayed integrity were successful and celebrated as heroes. For Nigeria to have a new experience economically, politically, socially and religiously, there is a need to follow suit and tread the path of integrity as the Old Testament prophets did. The Old Testament prophets and leaders were people with servanthood and selfless spirit. Leadership as explained by Musa "is a process of influencing people to accomplish certain tasks or achieve the desired result".⁴³ It involves knowing the needs of people and sacrificing to bring satisfaction and joy to the people in need. Integrity was the ultimate goal of the Old Testament prophets. It was valued above wealth and fame. There were oppositions and ridiculing from corrupt and unjust people but they were accomplished and triumph for God was their refuge. For good governance in Nigeria, selflessness, servanthood and integrity must be put in place. Having explored the topic, "Old Testament Prophets and the question of integrity: implication for good governance in Nigeria". It is not a gainsaying that integrity is a core factor needed in Nigeria for positive change socially, economically, politically and religiously. Integrity encompasses openness, transparency, accountability, respect for the rule of law, fair justice, selflessness and respect for fundamental human rights. The Old Testament prophets

demonstrated these qualities not minding the arrogant, selfish and godless people they were sent to minister to. They fearlessly denounced the sins of their time and reconciled men back to God. Equally, for Nigeria to experience, peace, joy, progress and success, there is a need for the leaders to display integrity in all facets of assignment or administration.

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