

Old Testament Prophets and the Question of Integrity in the Context of Contemporary Prophets in Nigeria

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Abstract

Integrity has been an issue of contempt among the Nigerians and has negatively indented the indigenes in other nations of the world. Unfortunately, the issue of integrity is the same among the prophets in the Old Testament and the contemporary prophets. The study is interested in giving a vivid description of what was obtainable in the Old Testament and the Christian ministers of the 21st century. The ethos of Christianity naturally believes that integrity is part of the religion. The study adopts a descriptive method for the gathering of its data. The primary data is from the Old Testament Bible and the secondary data was collected from books and other related materials on integrity. The paper realised the ambiguity of the assumption that the Prophets in general are closer to God. Both the Old Testament and current dispensation prove that issues of soiled integrity exist among the Prophet-hood in the Old Testament and our current dispensation. The paper recommends that the prophets of the current dispensation should not be mute like prophet Micaiah, but be active with integrity to impart the political era of Nigeria.

Key Words: Old Testament Prophets, Integrity, Prophetism in the Old Testament, Prophet Micaiah, Prophet Zedekiah, Politics in Nigeria.

Introduction

As the prophets in the Old Testament had an input in the polity of their days, so are Christian ministers of this current dispensation. The study reveals the way leaders in Israel- both Judges and Kings were been influenced by the integrity of the prophets and otherwise. The polity of leadership in Israel is drenched in theocratic governance, which is God's government. Theocratic governance is potent in the activities of the prophets of the Old Testament as the prophets with different kinds of foci did influence the government of the kings. The prophets with integrity will influence the government positively while the prophets without integrity will mislead the leadership of the people of God.

Across the study, the words, YHWH, Yahweh, LORD and God will be used interchangeably for God, the maker of heavens and the earth. The attributes of the prophets will depict the prophets with integrity and the ones without integrity. The stories of the prophets' integrity, types of government and how the prophets influence both positively and negatively the leaders and the led in Israel and Judah are touched at the course of this article. It has been revealed that the government of the people of the Old Testament in the Kingdom of Israel saw Prophets as the ambassadors of YHWH who are extremely important in relationship affairs.

This study descriptively looks at the history of the Old Testament, its prevalent implication and the likelihood of the prophets with integrity in the future prophecy. History is an integral narration or description of past events or facts written in historical research which may be considered as embracing the whole field of human past as broad as life itself.¹ The study observes God's theocratic leadership in the days of the Judges and of the Kings, most profoundly, the era of King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah. The methodology unveiled the integrity of the two prophets: Zedekiah and Micaiah.

It was realised that many people in our current dispensation have a high level of dependence on the ministries of the prophets in Nigeria. In contrast, some people have misconceptions through the lack of integrity of the fake prophets, to the extent that they do not believe any longer in the existence of any godly prophet.

Prophetism in the Old Testament

Prophecy is linked with either prediction- telling of divine mysteries beforehand or meditation, speaking on behalf of God about past, present and future.² In the prophetic text, human beings act as a medium. God owns the message and humans serve as the mouthpiece. The medium may add or minus from the messages through human errors. The means of conveyance is commonly stated as “thus says the Lord”. According to Songer, prophecy is the reception and declaration of a word from the Lord through a direct prompting of the Holy Spirit and the human instrument thereof.³

Prophecy is divinely inspired revelation or interpretation. Although prophecy is perhaps most commonly associated with Judaism and Christianity, it is found throughout the religions of the world, both ancient and modern.⁴ The canonicity of the Old Testament has the classification of the entire books of the Old Testament into Torah, Naviim and Kethubim. The second state of the classification, which is Naviim means the Prophets and it presents the significance of the Prophets. ⁵נְבִיאִים This could be transliterated as nabi' (nabia). The meaning of נְבִיאִים is mouthpiece, prophet, the sent or oracle. In the Modern Hebrew Language, the 'b' is preferably pronounced as the letter 'v'. The plural form is הַנְּבִיאִים members of prophets' guilds 1 Kings 20:35⁶, pronounced as 'nabi'him'. The Prophetic office was instituted in Deuteronomy 18: 15-18 and immediately anticipated in the greater Prophet, Messiah.⁷ The Prophets who are the carriers of the Oracles are called men of God. Douglas says that the title 'Man of God' was first used for Moses⁸ (Deuteronomy 33:1). Prophecy has its source in the 'Spirit of God'. This is clear in the New Testament where it is represented as the gift or act of the Spirit (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4: 8).⁹

The theocratic government of the leaders of Israel made the prophets forcefully be recognised. There are two ways to Prophecy in the Old Testament, they are, foretelling and forth-telling.¹⁰ The existence of the bad and fake prophets has been in existence since the Old Testament days, which will corroborate what exist in the church in our dispensation. The prophets cannot exist aloof, there will be interaction with the masses amidst whom they operate. Little wonder while a scholar called Levi calls

the Prophets, Isaiah as a case study as, a man of the city.¹¹ The prophets both in the Old Testament and our contemporary age exist with their ministries among the people. Asaju recalls that a prophet chosen by God to deliver an oracle must first make his mind receptive to divine revelation.¹²

Leadership in Israel in the days of Prophets

Leadership in Israel is a God-led type of leadership that is termed theocratic government. Theocratic is a compound word taken from *theos* and *cratic*, which simply connotes YHWH's government. It is God's personally arranged government. Government is the institution that coordinates the day to day activities of a state in terms of law-making, interpretation of the law and its execution. The government can also be seen as an entity that regulates the activities of a given people in order to enhance their living and existence.

The personality of the head involved in the theocratic government has no technical know-how of anything. Such a king must never take any initiative of anything without instruction from God. YHWH must be consulted for any disposition. The LORD expects absolute reliance on Him. YHWH must be worshipped by such King and consulted for everything in anything to be done. YHWH made calls at Will to whosoever HE wants as a leader. There are two types of theocratic government as deduced by this study. They are:

- i. YHWH's Enforced- Theocratic Government
- ii. YHWH's Permissive Will- Theocratic Government

i. YHWH's Enforced Theocratic Government is solely acted and moved by God. The person who is to lead the masses is solely chosen by God. It may be with or without the interest of the main actor who is destined to deliver Israel from her enemy. It is a God's raised or enforced leadership which is confirmed in Judges 2: 16- *Nevertheless the LORD raised Judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who spoiled them.*

The word 'raised' or 'enforced' connote the strong intent of YHWH to use a particular personality for the deliverance of Israel. This is paramount in the Judges' history. The leadership in the book of Judges was saddled with responsibilities to lead the chosen people of Israel for a particular time. This kind of leadership responsibility is not gender bias.

Both males and female personalities perform in the YHWH's enforced theocratic government. A woman like Deborah was singled out as a great Judge over Israel. Deborah was a Prophetess and responsible married woman- wife to Lappidoth had the chamber where she judges Israel under the Palm Trees between Ramah and Bethel (Judges 4: 4-5). It is rather unfortunate that the author of Judges ends his story with the state of anarchy. This influences the words; *In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes* (Judges 21:25). It was at this period of anarchy that the events in the book of Ruth took place (Ruth 1:1).

Under the YHWH's enforced theocratic government, several governments of Judges reigned. Majority of these Judges related to God and Israel like Prophets. The unique significance of Judges is their attributes of speaking with God and conveying messages to Man/Israel; the majority of them were Prophets. It, therefore, means that it was a theocratic government, where the majority of the leaders were prophets. It will be expedient to create space for their enumeration in this study. They are Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson, Eli and Samuel. The Judges are of two classes. They are the minor Judges and the major Judges.¹³ The minor Judges have short accounts, their years may be long, but their history is precisely short. And the major Judges had lengthy accounts of performers.

The cases of all the calls in Judges for somebody to lead Israel were through the ease of enforcement and/or situational enforced theocratic rule. The situation that brought in Samuel was because his Mother was barreled and desperately in need of a son to be given back to YHWH. Through Hannah's desperation, Samuel who was not a Levite but he occupied a Priestly seat and became a Judge over Israel as a Prophet after Eli. The ministry of the Judges exists among the leaders of Israel. All the assignments of the Prophets among the masses of Israel are summed up in Jeremiah 3: 12, 14, 20. This is referred to as *shuv* meaning turn or return.¹⁴ YHWH's Enforced Theocratic Government is on who God picks to occupy the leadership seat. It does not give room to the input of Man on who comes in as the leader of God's people. It is solely God's decision,

as masses have no option other than to receive the leaders that will be given to them.

ii. YHWH's Permissive Will- Theocratic Government has the Will of God granted to both godly and the ungodly kings in Israel and Judah. The History of this is domicile in the books of the first and second kings and first and second chronicles. Unlike the former type of theocratic government, YHWH's Permissive Will Theocratic Government involves God's approval into the leadership of Israel and sometimes people pressing their ways into the theocratic leadership with the LORD watching and/or permitting the same. The choice of Saul and David the first and the second kings of Israel, respectively, is so clear to be God's absolute approval of the Theocratic Government.

The Kingship of Israel does not only rest on who can lead them to battle, but also on having a centre around him by which all Israel must be gathered.¹⁵ The Kingship commands the authority through which God's law should be enforced to the whole nation of Israel. God through Prophet Nathan moved Solomon to the Kingship of Israel through the promise of consolation been given to David after the loss of the first son Bathsheba, Uriah's Wife. Rehoboam got to the throne through biological heritage, while Jeroboam took over a new region larger than another part. Subsequently, some people were forced in their interest into Kingship without repulsion from the LORD.

The uniqueness of theocratic government in the Permissive Will-Theocratic Government is the involvement of at least a Prophet in the government of both the Enforced Theocratic Government and Permissive- Theocratic Government. The Prophets in the scenes make the mind of YHWH known to the Kings who are on the throne. The Prophets push in God's intents and warnings to the Israelites through the Kings. In either of the types of the theocratic government, the LORD plans to have Prophets with integrity in the leadership of Israel. On the clear ground, the integrity of the Prophets should be an impetus and great influence to leadership and masses of Israel.

Integrity in the Leadership of Prophet Micaiah

The corruption of the Prophets negatively influenced the corruption of the masses in the Old Testament. The affected integrity of the prophet held back the masses from true integrity. The prophets are planted by God among people to check them. If therefore there is no integrity with the person who can check the masses, they cannot be under control. The prophets would have been able to put their people under the theocratic government if they have respect for integrity.

Micaiah, son of Imlah in the Old Testament scripture was one of the successive prophets of Elijah. Elijah had disciples in his college of prophets in his days. The same replicate itself in the ministry of Elisha. It was not only Elisha that succeeded Elijah. Elisha was pronounced among the four prophets who schooled under Elijah because God chose him as successor to Elijah. This made Elijah be the only person who followed Elijah up to where the chariot of fire lifted him. Micaiah was one of the four successors of Elijah who schooled under Elijah. Micaiah must not be confused with Micah. Micaiah like his boss Elijah was fearless and have no reservation of words in facing King Ahab. Micaiah was a prophet with integrity and proclaimed the same in all places in Israel.

The scenario that pronounced out Micaiah as a man of integrity was the event in 1 Kings Chapter 22. King Jehoshaphat of Judah and King Ahab of Israel were with a mind to get Ramoth Gilead back from the King of Israel. Ahab made the proposal to Jehoshaphat of a need to take over Ramoth Gilead. The positive response of Jehoshaphat was with a quest of confirmation of God's support of the mission. Ahab consulted his royal four hundred Prophets who often enjoy the constant palace remuneration with a quest- 'should I go and attack Ramoth, or not? Attack it they answered. The Lord will give you victory (1 Kings 22: 6). In this historical narration, Jehoshaphat could identify the voice of God and knew that all he had heard are not from Yahweh of Israel. He requested more if there is another prophet and the response of Ahab was 'that there was one who will never speak well about me'.

Micaiah is identified as a man of integrity who will never compromise his stand through the affluence of man. In verse eight of Chapter 22, Ahab confessed that he hated Micaiah. This is what many prophets are running

away from. They want the kings and leaders of the government to love them and makes them enemies to God.

Integrity in the Leadership of Prophet Zedekiah

Zedekiah son of Chenaanah (1 Kings 22 verse 11), was the opposite of Micaiah, he came out with the iron horns and drag the same around as the expected way that YHWH has declared that the Syrian Army will be dragged. It is interesting to note that the servant who went to call Micaiah gave him the update that all the Prophets around spoke good about fighting Syrians and that Micaiah should do the same, but in his response, he said he is bound to pronounce only what God ask him to say. The integrity of an Old Testament prophet will make the prophet stand by his words irrespective of the aftermath.

Ahab knew what will be the message from Micaiah. The first response of prophet Micaiah was positive, but Ahab rebuked him to tell him the truth of what the LORD says. Then Micaiah responded that he saw the Army of Israel scattered like sheep without a shepherd. Zedekiah, a prophet without integrity slapped Micaiah, depicting proof with his confession that the spirit of God has left him to give out the truth to Micaiah. It means that Zedekiah has nothing from God as at the time that he first said, 'thus says the LORD.' It means that Zedekiah in the first instance told lies against God by saying to people what God has not sent him. The four hundred prophets did the same thing.

The integrity of the Old Testament prophets starts with saying what God orders His Prophet to say. In the context of the story above, Zedekiah and the four hundred Prophets always speak sweet things that the leadership of the Government want to hear not what God want them to relay to the leaders and the led. The lack of integrity in the Old Testament affected many prophets. The proof of the above context is the ratio of one to four hundred prophets.

Ahab ordered Micaiah to be taken to Amon the governor of the city and Prince Joash, his chief prison officer, for imprisonment with bread and water of affliction. In verse 28, Micaiah exclaimed that if Ahab should return, then the LORD has not spoken through him and he called the congregation to witness the conversation between him and Ahab. There

is often the prophetic revolution caused by the instruction of the prophets. Israel believed that the words of prophets is the words of Yahweh. The revolution of Jehu was prophesied by Elijah and implemented by Elisha.¹⁶ The story concludes that Ahab did not return alive, even, Jehoshaphat narrowly escaped death from the battlefield. This was according to the words of Prophet Micaiah, the Prophet with integrity.

Integrity in the Prophetic Leadership of Micaiah and Zedekiah in Relation to Prophets in Contemporary Nigeria

There is a need to ask what makes someone a Nigerian. Ajayi proves that every citizen of Nigeria shall be entitled to participate in the election and benefit of every right provided for the citizenry according to chapter III of the 1999 Constitution.¹⁷ A Nigerian Prophet is entitled to every emolument for the citizenry of the Country and respect from indigenes. About thirty years ago, putting on a clerical collar, pastoral appearance, and Christian stickers on properties were the strong identity of reverence and regards in the society. Currently, the prophetic attributes are often been displayed by Christian ministers in different areas of callings. The case is far different today as wearing Christian appearance times are been used by some unbelievers to deceive innocent people. The rogues have found themselves in the use of such pious identities to dupe masses.

Formerly, the indication about God is highly revered by Nigerians. Unfortunately, nowadays, it conveys neither meaning nor any indication of a pious life. People around questioned the possibilities of still having a 'man of God' without soiled integrity. Every goodness and godliness of the past has suddenly changed. In December 2019, somebody urged me to join a Christian meeting on the WhatsApp wall. Shortly, a message was sent to me and almost immediately a call came in requesting the number that just entered my phone to be linked up with the meeting. In ten minutes my younger sister called me that my account has been hacked. Unfortunately, the evil person used my name and identity to send dubious messages 'in the name of the LORD...' Ever since then, I have stopped believing everything that poses to be Christian. 1 John 4: 1 admonishes that we should test all spirits. Here is the vivid citation, 'Beloved, believe not every spirit whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the World'(KJV).

There are therefore many false prophets who profess Jesus Christ, but do practice falsehood; they are devil incarnates. They act in no distance from the acts of devilish Herbalists. They deceive people with the message that it is well when it is not well.

Currently, there are several issues of ritual killings in the Church, the burial of live baby on the altar of the Church, etc, which amount to a questioned integrity on the part of the Church of God. Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N.) has no grip of control on many perpetrators of evil. Some of them will not even identify with any Christian body. The menace is much as many Christians are out there with leadership titles without discipliners. It was like the days of the Judges when there was no king in Israel and everybody does what seems right in his sight. Some Prophets in Christendom of Nigeria are of questionable characters like the prophets of the Old.

Some Prophets in Nigeria who are close to the government will never give a word of warning against their evil deeds because they have been muted with gifts that have closed their eyes. Therefore, godly impartation is far from our leadership of Nigeria by the Ministers of the Gospel or the Prophets of our contemporary age.

The scope of this study will give a few instances to present the bad ongoing scenario over the lack of integrity in the lower cedar of the Churches in Nigeria. It was reported that Nigeria Police arrested a twenty-three-year-old boy named Adeeko Owolabi who corroborated with a white garment prophet, Segun Phillip, to kill his girlfriend, Favour Daley-Oladele, a Lagos State University Student of the Department of Sociology for ritual.¹⁸ The body of the poor girl was traced to Ikoyi-Ile in Osun State where Philip was a Pastor.

The Cherubim and Seraphim Unification Church of Nigeria, which is a part of the classification of the C and S churches worldwide denied media reports that the accuser, "Prophet" Segun Philips, who was responsible and played a role in the killing of Miss Favour Daley for ritual purposes is a member of the church of C & S.

The Federal Government has been urged to come up with policies to checkmate the activities of churches and pastors in the country, hence “Churches should not operate in secrecy as this action denied government and some people opportunity to know what the Pastors are doing within the four walls of the Church.” He argued that most churches are now into ritual killings.¹⁹

At the peak of the above story on 1st January 2020, the Cherubim and Seraphim Church that Philip confessed to having belonged disowned him openly. Tony says that Churches have become fetish ritual dens. This has relegated the reverence been given to the ministers of God in Nigeria to zero level. Tony insisted that the church is a place of worship and the priest or pastor is supposed to be the person who ministers to the people about the Bible and Christianity. Asides, Tony concludes that all Pastors are rogue. He does not believe that any Pastor has any integrity. This is a huge problem as many other Nigerian prophets still hold firm to their integrity.

It is difficult to believe people like Tony that any prophet of our contemporary age in Nigeria has any integrity. Many believe that the Church programmes are been arranged for the sake of tithes and offerings. The condemnation cast by Tony on all the contemporary prophets in Nigeria is not true as there are many prophets in Nigeria like the days of Elijah who have not to bow down to Baal or other gods nor lost their integrity.

A true study of Nigerian prophetism will clearly show, without any bias that some ministers of God still own integrity. Many of such good prophets or ministers of God with integrity in Nigeria are not popular but are very conscious of the kingdom of God. So they distance themselves away from whatever can soil their names. So, integrity is their watchword. There are ministers and/or prophets in Nigeria who are with undoubted integrity.

The main problem that stands against the integrity of the contemporary prophets before the government and the masses is the neglect of the great mandate of saving souls to the love of wealth and money. Contemporary pastors must labour, in a special manner, for the conversion of the

unconverted.²⁰ Any Prophet found amidst the love of wealth and money will lose the focus and his integrity. Contentment is the rule of the integrity's game.

There is a need for the contemporary prophets to give some precautions in redeeming the image of the prophets. This attempt is encapsulated in the words of Henry Venn. The command is not only to serve the LORD, but to serve him with all our strength: not only to love our neighbour, but to love him as ourselves, to demonstrate that we do this with every temper, by every word, by every desire, and by every thought.²¹ If this is been practised by the contemporary prophets, surely the lost integrity will be regained in course of time.

Many of the prophets who are close to Aso Rock of Nigeria would have impacted Nigeria through pieces of approach to the government, but they have been muted with the perquisites and undefined remuneration from the Presidency. Therefore, everything that the leaders do is right in their sights.

Attributes of Prophets with integrity in both Old Testament and our contemporary are:

- Prophets with integrity are fearless
- Such will not expect any remuneration before disposing of their duty
- They cannot be bought with money
- They do not look for what to derive from the prophetic work before they do their work
- They are governed by the Spirit of God
- Their words always come to pass, have spoken it
- They are not usually friends of the government because the truth must always be told to everybody including the leadership
- Prophets with Integrity seek how to lead people to God
- The will of God is the paramount proposition of the Prophets with integrity'
- Prophets with integrity cannot be charmed with the love of wealth
- Prophets with integrity cannot be bought with money

These are good attributes that good prophets in Nigeria should emulate.

Recommendations

The study recommends that prophets with integrity and ones without integrity were in Old Testament and are currently in our dispensation, as the Prophets with integrity must not keep mute like Micaiah, son of Imlah, to contribute to the growth of Nigeria polity. Ministers in the churches should join Nigerians and impact changes in the situation of the country. Staying away from politics will not affect any good change. If polity is a bad game, it demands a good person to change the bad in the political system. Polity has been bad since the Old Testament days, but people like Micaiah remained within the circle to raise corrective measures.

Conclusion

The lack of integrity in the ministry of the prophets has not just started. It has been the problem from antiquity. As it was, in the beginning, is now and ever shall it be. Prophets with integrity and ones without integrity have ever been having their ministries simultaneously, only the output of their ministry place them in the class of integrity and lack of integrity.

ENDNOTES

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