

Nigerian Christians and National Rebirth: Nehemiah's Response in the Bible as a Paradigm

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ABSTRACT: *Nigeria in no doubt needs to be saved from her present predicaments. This work therefore has arisen from the present state of our dear nation Nigeria. The paper is a clarion call to Nigerian Christians for the rescue of our nation, using Nehemiah example. It is imperative to say Nigeria needs a rebirth at this critical time because of the vices that have penetrated every nook and cranny of the nation. It has been noted lately that the values, principles, love and unity that bind the country together have been eroded. This therefore necessitated the introduction of Nehemiah ideas in response to the state of his nation as a clarion call to Nigerian Christians both home and abroad to rescue Nigeria from her present predicaments. Nehemiah was a man who accepted responsibility on behalf of others. This paper adopted a systematic and scrupulous referenced study of primary materials such as archives, newspaper, government and non-governmental report and consultation of relevant books. The paper revealed that, Christians must be patriot just like Nehemiah who was concerned with the state of his nation. Christians should also emulate his efforts in rebuilding his nation despite the stiff oppositions he faced. In the same vein, Christians in Nigeria should arise and condemn social evils which permeate our contemporary Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Nehemiah, Response, Rescue, Nation, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

National rebirth means different things to different people. National rebirth is a shift movement from the known attitude, beliefs, and feelings towards a particular issue; Nigeria needs a rebirth at this period. Nigeria is presently considered outstanding or notorious country in every aspect of crimes. In fact, United State of America during the tenure of President Donald Trump recently put

Nigeria on controversial visa and travel bans list; this is not unconnected with the situation of things in the country. It may not be fallacious to say that all the policies of the past and present administration in Nigeria to address these inadequacies have proved abortive. President Olusegun Obansajo agitated for a country free of corruption, his administration introduced EFCC which stands for Economic and Financial Crimes Commission with the aims of exposing corrupt people in the country. He was however criticized for not being able to fight corruption to the barest minimum.

It is doubtless to say that the problem of Nigeria is more than corruption presently, the country is faced with insecurity, religious extremists such as Boko Haram groups and the likes have taking over Northern part of the country. Fulani herdsmen and farmers have become strong enemies in the Southeast, the high ways are no longer safe, kidnappers have killed people in their thousands, and millions of naira has been collected from people as ransoms. The politicians who are supposed to bring about changes are noted for nefarious acts ranging from embezzlement of money that are meant for developmental projects, given ammunition to the youth during elections which have led to proliferation of fire arms. This proliferation of fire arms have contributed to number of criminals and criminal activities in the country. Abuse of power and offices are equally associated with the politicians who are supposed to rescue the country from her present predicament. There is no doubt that all these call for the attention of Christians, and this prompts the initiatives for this work. Therefore, this paper examines Nigeria Christians and National Rebirth: Nehemiah's Responses in the Bible as a paradigm.

Historical Background of Nehemiah

The Bible depicts Nehemiah as the son of Hacaliah was a member of a prominent Jewish family. Nehemiah was loyal to Jewish orthodox religion. He was one of returning exiles during Zerubbabel, he lived in Suza the capital of Persian Empire¹. He was a cup bearer to king Artaxerxes who he served in Suza (Nehemiah 1:11, Nehemiah 2:1). The position of a king cup bearer was an honorable one and a position of trust. This is because a cup bearer then was saddled with the responsibility of making sure that the food and wine of the king were secured, protected and not allowed to be poisoned. Nehemiah's position therefore gave him the opportunity to be closer to the king. Everything about Nehemiah was recorded in the Bible, as it can be found in the book of Nehemiah a book of the bible named after him¹.

The Problem that Called for Nehemiah Intervention

The people of Judah were faced with some difficulties, such as invasion which led to insecurity, destruction of lives and properties and the general suffering of people. It was recorded in the Bible that God used some nations to punish the people of Judah and their kings for sins committed by them. God equally used smaller states such as Syria, Moab and Amon who took the advantages of

¹ <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/who-was-nehemiah-why-is-he-important-in-the-bible.html>. Accessed 18/11/2021

the attack of other nations to invade them, and took away their mighty men of valor and their properties. These were used by God to correct and redirect the people of Israel.

Judah was a vassal of Egypt during the reign of Pharaoh Neco who killed Josiah, Egypt was later defeated by Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. This made Judah a vassal of Babylon. God used Babylon invasion and the invasion of other smaller countries to punish the people of Judah who had turned away from true worship of Yahweh as at that time. Nehemiah being a Jew exile, who was serving king Artaxerxes in Susa, was greatly concerned about the state of his nation Judah. He along the line received the news of pathetic state of his nation from Hanani one of the Jews who came from Judah to Susa. When Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down more than a half-century after the completion of the rebuilding of the temple he sat down and wept (Neh. 1:4).

He was so concerned that the wall was broken because without a wall, the cities in ancient near East were not safe from bandits, gangs and wild animals.² It can be said as at that time that “*no wall means no city and no city means no temple*”³ The wall that was broken as at this time indicates insecurity of lives and properties. The wall was so important to any nation as at that time that nations without wall around them were considered as weak, without military strength, no justice and above all, lives and properties of people were not saved. Just as the case of our contemporary Nigeria. Moreover, during the second exile which was around 586BC, the temple and the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed and the city of Judah was left in ruins, the gates were destroyed and the survivors were in great trouble and shame. This was the situation of Judah as reported by Hanani who was one of the survivors of the situation.

When Nehemiah got this report he was sad and concerned being a cup bearer of king Artaxerxes, he used his vantage position for the benefits of his people. Nehemiah, prayed to God to grant him favor before he approached the king for permission. He was favored by king Artaxerxes who gave him permission to go and help the Jews rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. The king gave him all the needed support, he was given letter of authority by the king to collect timber needed for the work, adequate security were provided for him by king Artaxerxes. Nehemiah inspected the destroyed city at night and he equally stirred up public support for the task ahead. He gathered the leading Jews, including the priests, nobles and officials. He appealed to them to join him to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and save themselves from the disgrace they were suffering as a result of insecurity.

Nehemiah got public support and the rebuilding work started under his leadership and supervision. Meanwhile, he faced with stiffed opposition from Sanballat and Tobiah the enemies of Judah. He eventually rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and secured the lives and properties of his people. Morton

² (Google 2018)

³ <https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/ezra-nehemiah-esther/Nehemiah>. Accessed.23/5/2021.

H.V. view comes to mind here he affirmed that “when a person has gone up in the world and has achieved a position of power and eminence, it requires strength and beauty of character for that person to still love and remember the sample people from whom he or she sprang”⁴

Established fact to be gleaned from Nehemiah’s intervention

- Nehemiah took action for the welfare of his people the Jews,
- Through his love for his people and dedication to the king he was serving, made the king to support him in securing the lives and properties of his people by rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem
- He was a goal getter who was able to achieve his aim of rebuilding the wall despite the fact that he was in exile as at that time.
- He was a diplomatic leader who employed both physical and spiritual action in achieving his aim
- Nehemiah did not use his leadership position to enrich himself, he was selfless and honest
- He was a definition of a true patriot who never forgotten his race
- He was not ashamed to be identified with his people despite his vantage position as the king’s cup bearer.

What is National Rebirth?

Rebirth is to reanimate something that is ruined. Reanimation of something that has died or has been annihilated, it is also the revival of important ideas or forces usually as part of broad and significant change. It signifies renaissance, reawakening, return of resurgence. National Rebirth can be defined as the regeneration of a battered nation to an improved nation in all aspects. National rebirth can also mean national transformation which Bankole views as a “profound and radical innovation and metamorphosis that aligns an institution or state in a new direction and takes it to a completely different level of efficiency and effectiveness”⁵. National Orientation Agency is the national coordinating platform for mass mobilization and ethical re-engineering of the citizen.

The condition of Nigeria

Security of life and properties is one of the major needs of every human being. People are mostly religious in order to secure their lives and properties. Security brings about peace, unity and harmony, which in turn will lead to peaceful co-existence and development. It is no gain saying that peace and unity which brought about peaceful co-existence in Nigeria in the past years had been eroded in the recent years as a result of insecurity. The insecurity in Nigeria is almost leading to anarchy to say the least. There have been increase in civil unrest, religious violence, and political upheavals, Bankole affirmed that all these have led to increase in social vices such as

⁴ <https://www.bibkegateway.com/devotionals/women-bible/4477/07/12.accessed> 15/102021

⁵ Herbert Locyer, *The Women of the Bible* (Michigan: Zondervan, Publishing House, grand rapidis,1971),p.53

kidnapping, human trafficking, armed robbery, assassination, ritual killing, drug addiction and cultism among the youths⁶.

In other words, insecurity is the breach of security and peace whether it is caused by struggle for economic scarcity of resources, religious difference, politics, ethnicity or civil conflict that leads to destruction of lives and properties. It is the state of being opened to danger or threat. “it is a breath of peace and security, whether historical, religious, ethnic, regional, civil, social, economic and political that contribute to the re-occurring conflicts and leads to wanton destruction of lives and properties”⁷ The insecurity of Nigerians have increased in the past few years. It has gotten to the level inability of citizens to travel or even sleep with their two eyes closed. The roads linking towns, villages, and states are full of armed bandits and kidnappers. In the past, kidnapping and abduction are only within the North-Western state in Nigeria where Boko Haram is the major security challenges of the people in this part of Nigeria. It is a thing of sorrow and pity that these evils have spread to other parts of the country.

In the South West, there are news of kidnapping, armed banditry, killings, and abduction. Presently, there are news going around that Islamic State (isis) have already gained ground in the South West with their abode in Ogun State forests and other reserved forests in the southern parts of the country. The recent attacks on the people of Ibarapa, Igangan in Oyo state and other areas in Osun, Ondo and Ekiti states have created a lot of fears and panicking in the minds of the inhabitants of the South-Western part of the country.

Moreover, the problems between farmers and the herdsmen are another issue of insecurity in Nigeria. In the South-West, many farmers have been injured, farm produce worth millions of naira destroyed and in many cases farmers were killed or kidnapped for ransoms by the herdsmen killer squad. These have created enmity between farmers and Fulani herdsmen and by extension brewing ethnicity acrimony between the Northern parts of the country and the southern part. The issue of problem between the farmers and the herdsmen has led to shortage of farm produce in the region. Majority of farmers have left their farm settlements as a result of incessant attacks and killing which have not been checkmated and adequately addressed by government.

Corruption is another cankerworm and cancer that has eaten deep into the body and mind of average Nigerians. Corruption, no doubt in Nigeria and if left unabated will eventually kill the country, just as cancer slowly eats and eventually kills the carrier. Corruption is the perversion of public affairs for primitive advantage. He equally defines corruption as the use of unauthorized rewards to influence people in position of authority.⁸ Gibbons defines corruption politically as

⁶ Bankole tokunbo, *Social Change & Institutional Reforms in Nigeria* (Nigeria: Crowder Theological publishers, 2019),P.70

⁷ (Bankole 2019)

⁸ <https://researchcyber.com/insecurity-nigeria-causes-effects-solution.accessed> 12/04/2021

the way public office forsakes public advantages are achieved at the expense of public interest⁹. Corruption includes bribery, kickback, misappropriation, mismanagement, misapplication or the use of one's position to gain an undue advantage. He views corruption as any transaction which violates the duty of a public office holder and aimed at acquiring or amassing resources illegally for personal advancement and self-gratification"¹⁰ Corruption therefore, is wanton and greed to acquire public resources for self-gratification and use at the expenses of those that these resources are meant for.

Corruption has been identified as one of the major causes of insecurity in Nigeria. There is no doubt that, corruption is killing Nigeria presently, because of the numbers of corrupt practices that have left unabated among the politicians and political office holders, it is equally prevalent. Corruption has been identified to be one of the major causes of insecurity on Nigeria. Money that is meant for procurement of fire arms had been embezzled by some politicians and the Military officers saddled with responsibilities of such procurements. It has been observed lately that terrorists are more equipped with arms and ammunitions than Nigeria Military officers and other security agents. Security outfits have become so involved in crime that they can no longer curb crime. It has been observed lately that the terrorists are more equipped with arms and ammunition than Nigerian Military Officers. All these should be great concern for Christians in Nigeria. Another evil that permeates our contemporary entity called Nigeria society is the issue of youth unemployment, this has led to so many evils such as cybercrimes, arm robbery, civil unrest, killing and kidnapping.

Consequences of Corruption

Corruption has given bad image to our people in this country both at home and abroad, this is evidence in what the Nigerian both home and abroad are facing presently. The present situation of Nigeria is not unconnected with the visa ban placed on Nigeria by Donald Trump. Also the incessant attack on Nigerian in diaspora under disguise of xenophobia attack e.g. South Africa has been a source of great concern. It has been confirmed from what is going on that, the rest of the world no longer respect Nigerians even despite the nomenclature of being a giant of Africa. Also, the humiliation that Nigeria abroad are presently facing as a result of the state of the nation even within African countries calls for quick intervention. A corrupt country cannot be one of the great and develop nations of the world.

Corruption encourages laziness as those who engage in it get money easily¹⁰. The prevalence of yahoo and yahoo plus in our contemporary society is evidence that corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society.

⁹ Nkom, s. "Ethical Revolution as an Antidote for Corruption in Nigeria." Paper presented at the N.A.S.A. Annual conference held in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. May 10-13. (1988)

¹⁰ Gibbons, S., and Rowart ,D.S., *Political Corruption in Canada*,(Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1976),p.76.

Way forward Christians Intervention

Having extensively discussed some of the major problems facing Nigeria at the moment, it is imperative to note that all the problems facing Nigeria today is not peculiar to the Country alone, there were cases of famine, war and invasion which led to insecurity, destruction of lives and properties and general sufferings of people in the bible (I Kings 24:1-17). It is noteworthy that, all these are mostly corrected by the people of who had concern for their nation such happened in the Bible. Religion according to Bankole “is a primary force for social development. It encourages people especially religious adherents to development spiritual qualities that would enable them to sacrifice for their fellow human beings¹¹.”

One of the importance of Christianity or religion as a whole is the function it performs for society or an individual. Scholars have viewed religion as “system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of life¹²” Problems of life in this sense could be any of the problems previously discussed in this work. How then can Christians in Nigeria follow Nehemiah’s example and intervene in the problem of Nigeria. Christians are called to be the light of the word in Mathew 5: 15:16

Neither do men light a candle and put under a bushel
But on a candlestick, and it giveth light into all that are
In the house, let your light so shine before men
That they may see your good works and glorify
Your father which is in heaven.

The first thing in mind in order to curtail these evils is fasting and praying. Certainly, Christians believe in efficacy of prayers, no wonder the first thing Nehemiah did when he received the reports on the state of his nation and the people even before he approached the king for assistance, was weeping and mourning for their sins for some days. It was after this that he fasted and prayed. He interceded in the place of prayers and asked God to forgive his people of their sins which led to their insecurity and all the problems they encountered at that period. Nehemiah’s footsteps on the issues of repentance, fasting, and prayer should be followed by Christians at this period. It is the time for Christians to genuinely call on God on behalf of the country to intervene in the present predicament. Christian umbrella bodies should come together in one mind to rescue the nation at this period of time.

There is no doubt that all religions, Christianity not an exemption have their ways of passing the tenets of their religions to the younger generations. It can be said that it was as a result of Nehemiah’s knowledge of Jewish religion and values that prompted him to intervene in building

¹¹ Shuaibi Olarewaju M., “Corruption in Nigeria Causes Effects and Probable Solutions” Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research vol.1.no.8.2015. 2504-883.

¹² (bankole2019)

the walls of his city. Therefore, Christians leaders at this period irrespective of their denominations should teach their children who are considered the future of the church, families, society and the country at large how to be patriot. This can be done by inclusion of some basic tenets of civic education and Christian ethics into the children Sunday school manuals, and other relevant curriculum activities.

Another thing to put into consideration in order to curtail these evils as a matter of urgency by Christians being moral bastion of the society, is to organize seminars, workshops and conferences where both the Christians political leaders and the citizens will be given an insight on Nehemiah's strategies on how he rescued his nation from both internal and external enemies by building the wall. This in turn can be adapted by Christians at this critical time.

There are some Christian umbrella bodies such as Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) that can be charged with this onerous responsibilities that demand divine intervention. It is the role of these bodies to checkmate the abuse of power and privileges by those in position of authority. These bodies should address the level of decadences in the country which has skyrocketed to the level of totally collapsing. Proverbs 28:2 affirmed that, "when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" Adabembe¹³ affirmed that, this particular bible passage should be the watchword for Christian leaders and it should therefore be used to encourage their followers to actively participate in politics so as to choose people who are godly and will be truly committed and ready to restore the lost image of Nigeria.

Christian leaders just like Nehemiah must mobilize Christians in Nigeria to actively participate in politics which will give them the opportunities to be involved in governance of Nigeria. This therefore will bring about introducing Christian virtues into the politics and governance of Nigeria. The age long tradition of influence of money as a factor for electing people of questionable characters to position of authority must be discouraged.

Christian leaders in Nigeria as a matter of urgency must introduce national re-orientation programs starting from the local churches, to families and up to the national levels on the needs to eradicate social ills that permeate our contemporary Nigeria.

It is noteworthy to say that, some activities and attitudes of Christians and Christian leaders have contributed to moral decadence in Nigeria, by way of promoting and propagating get quick rich syndrome through prosperity preaching and staged miracles, much emphasis on payment of tithes and offerings and other nefarious acts, rather than base their preaching on salvation, moral uprightness, honesty, and absolute faith in God. Christian leaders must as a matter of urgency go

back to the real religion devoid of corrupt practices and emphasis on holiness and salvation of souls which will impact positively on people and the country at large.

Nigeria Christians in Diasporas should rise up to these challenges, just like Nehemiah did during his own time, when he used his position for the betterment and improvement of his people and nation as a whole. Christians in Diasporas must use their position to bring the attentions of international communities particularly the advanced countries to the groaning of Nigeria and rescue her from the present situations.

In conclusion this paper has presented the present situations of Nigeria, given a brief account of Nehemiah's responses to the needs of his people. The paper makes some salient points on how Nehemiah was able to rebuild the wall of his city which opened them up to insecurity. He was able to do this with great determination despite oppositions. The paper recommends that the fervent zeal and righteous enthusiasm of this patriot should be emulated by Church leaders and all Christians in our contemporary Nigeria.

The present situation in Nigeria where corruption, insecurity of life and properties, poor governance, misrule and inter-tribal conflicts is almost leading to anarchy calls for a patriot church leaders and Christians like Nehemiah who could damn all consequences and make things right. Church leaders are known as shepherds; they were called and commissioned to watch over their flocks. They can do this by taking actions at this moment; they must rise up to their responsibilities by being diplomatic leaders who will take both physical and spiritual actions to save this country just like Nehemiah. The influences of religious leaders on the adherent cannot be over-emphasized, it is therefore necessary for Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) to take actions towards the total cleansing of Nigeria by taken over the political stage of the Country.

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