

JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS IN RELATION TO INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This research attempts to find a solution to the incessant security challenges in Nigeria in the message of the prophets of eighth century Israel regarding justice and righteousness. During this time, the wealth of the nation was concentrated in the hands of the upper class that marginalised others, dispossessing them of their property. In their criticisms of the oppressors, the prophets predicted God's judgment in terms of social disorder, anarchy and captivity. But all these could be averted if the leaders would uphold justice and righteousness; the warnings were not heeded and the predictions came true. As in ancient Israel, Nigeria has been witnessing many security challenges, and one major factor for this is the marginalisation of the citizenry by government and politicians. Due to corruption and negligence on the part of Nigerian leaders, society is made volatile for insecurity. One way of solving the problem of insecurity in Nigeria is by applying the principles of justice in all aspects of governance.

INTRODUCTION

The themes of justice and righteousness are central to the message of most of the Old Testament prophets but this article concentrates on those of the eighth century, namely Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah. By the mid-eighth century B.C.E., Israel and Judah witnessed significant peace and prosperity but the wealth was concentrated in the hands of the upper class that oppressed and impoverished others; this situation eventually gave rise to discontent and anarchy in the land. The prophets of the time saw the application of the principles of justice and righteousness as the solution for the socio-economic disorder. Similarly, in Nigeria most of the unrest, violence and conflicts can be traced to neglect of the principles of justice. This research seeks a solution to insecurity in Nigeria in the prophets' preaching on justice and

righteousness. The paper begins with a discussion of the concepts of justice and righteousness in the Old Testament, after which it examines the socio-economic context of the eighth century prophets and their teachings on justice and righteousness. The essay continues by identifying the indices of insecurity in Nigeria, and ends with the application of the prophets' message to the Nigerian situation.

THE CONCEPTS OF JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The concept of justice

The commonest Hebrew word for justice is *mishpāt* which derives from the root *shapāt*, simply translated as "to judge". However, the meaning seems to be broader than that. According to Culver (1980:947), the verb also means "to rule" or "govern". In other words, the primary sense of *shapāt* is to exercise the processes of government. Richards (1991:368) also affirms that in ancient times the term combined all the legislative, executive, and judicial functions of government (cf. Culver 1980:947). Accordingly, in the Old Testament the word is used to designate various actions within the context of governance. It means to act as ruler, both divine and human (Gen 18:25; Exod 18:13, 15; Num 18:22–24; Deut 1:16; 1Sam 7:16, 17; Ps 72: 4; 96:13). It also means to decide cases of controversy as a judge in civil, domestic, and religious cases (Deut 25:1; Ps. 72:2–4).

Apart from *mishpāt*, several other nouns derive from the root *sh^epaṭ* (Culver 1980:949). *Shepḥet* (which always appears in the plural *sh^epōṭîm*) and *sh^epōṭ* denote judgment in the penal sense, that is, punishment. In several cases the terms connote divine punishment. Thus, the plagues of Egypt are divine *sh^epōṭîm* (Exod 6:6; 7:4; 12:12); and God punished Jerusalem with *sh^epōṭîm* in the forms of sword, famine, evil beasts and pestilences (Ezek 14:21). The punishments imposed on law breakers by civil magistrates are also called *sh^epōṭîm* (Proverbs 19:29).

The noun *mishpāt* occurs over 400 times in the Old Testament (Richards 1991:368), and is used to designate almost any aspect of civil or religious government. It refers to the act (Deut 25:1; Joshua 20:6), place (1 Kgs 7:7), process (Job 22:4;

Ps143:2), and case (Job 13:18) of litigation; it also means a sentence or decision issuing from a magistrate's court (1 Kgs 20:40; cf. Jer 26:11, 16) (Culver 1980:949). As Richards (1991:368) puts it, "*mishpāt* can be a case in litigation, a judicial decision, the execution of a judgment, and even a statement of the code against which actions are to be judged. In essence, then, justice has to do with one's rights and duties under law".

The term is also frequently used to denote sovereignty, the legal foundation of government in the sense of ultimate authority or right. In this context, "The *mishpāt* is God's" (Deut 1:17); the magistrate's *mishpāt* is conferred by God (e.g., the Messiah's magisterial authority in Ps 72:1–2). This justice is primarily an attribute of God, all true *mishpāt* finding its source in God himself and therefore carrying with it his demand. Yahweh is the God of justice (Ps 37:28; 36:6 [H 7]). *Mishpāt* as justice, that is, rightness rooted in God's character, ought to be an attribute of man in general and of judicial process among men (Ps 106:37) (Culver 1980:949). *Mishpāt* also designates an ordinance of law – often used co-ordinately with *hōq* (ordinance) (Exod 15:25) and *tôrâ* (law) (Isa 42:4). Thus, the Pentateuchal ordinances are *mishpāt* (Lev 5:10; 9:16, et al.). In fact, the individual ordinances of Mosaic law are *mishpāt* (Deut 33:10, 21; Ps 119). It also refers to a plan (Exod 26:30) or custom (2 Kgs 17:33) or even a fitting measure taken (1 Kgs 5:8).

In view of the above analysis, Culver (1980:948) is right to affirm that the central idea of *mishpāt*, "if to be rendered by a single English word with similar range of meaning, ought by all means to be the word 'justice'". This view is supported by many modern translations of the Bible. It is true that some English versions, especially older ones, translate *mishpāt* as "judgment"; for example, in Isaiah 1:27 both the King James Version (KJV, 1611/1769) and Duay Rheims American Edition (DRA, 1899) translate it as "judgment". However, it appears translators began to appreciate the inaccuracy of this translation right from the beginning of the twentieth century; hence the American Standard Version (ASV) of 1901 renders *mishpāt* as "justice". Similarly, the Revised Standard Version (RSV, 1952) and the New King James (NKJ, 1982) have "justice". In the same vein, most modern versions such as the New

International Version (NIV, 1984), the New American Standard Bible (NAU, 1995) and the English Standard Version (ESV, 2001) all translate *mishpāt* as “justice”.

The concept of righteousness

If *mishpāt* is better translated as “justice”, then in certain contexts it is a synonym of *šdq*, particularly as used in the prophets. It appears in four major forms, “to be just, righteous”; *šedeq*, (masc. noun), “justice, rightness”; *š^edāqâ* (fem. namely *šādeq*, noun), “justice, righteousness”; and *šaddîq*, “to be just, lawful, righteous”. Etymologically, the root is said to signify straightness in the physical sense; it also means a norm (Payne 1978:680; Snaith, quoted by Stigers 1980:752). However, with time the root acquired conventional meanings so much so that by the patriarchal age it has the abstract meaning of conformity, by a given object or action, to an accepted standard of values (e.g., Jacob living up to the terms of his sheep-contract with Laban in Gen 30:33) (Payne 1978:681). Stigers (1980:752) may therefore be correct to assert that the root basically connotes conformity to an ethical or moral standard, which agrees with Richards’ (1991:368) view that the root *šdq* with its derivatives “has in common the idea that moral and ethical norms exist and that actions in harmony with the norms are just, while actions not in harmony with them are unjust or constitute injustice”. Similarly, Koch (1997:1049) asserts, “Indubitably, *šdq* values some human and divine modes of behavior positively”. This connotation is perhaps best seen more clearly in its use in Leviticus where all of the deliverances or decisions of the judges are to be according to truth and without partiality (Lev 19:15). It is applied similarly to weights and measures (Lev 19:36); commercial fraud and deception are not allowed. In both these usages is seen the basic sense of “not deviating from the standard” (Stigers 1980:752).

Stigers identifies three aspects of personal relationships described by the term *šedeq* or *š^edāqâ*, namely, the ethical, forensic, and theocratic. The ethical aspect involves the conduct of men with one another. The man who is righteous tries to preserve the peace and prosperity of the community by fulfilling the commands of God in regard to others. The *šaddîq* (righteous one), like Job, delivers the poor and

orphan, helps the blind along the way, supports the weak and is a father (provider) to the poor (Job 29:12–15). The *ṣaddîq* gives freely (Ps 37:21) without regard for gain. The presence of this kind of person is the exaltation of the nation (Proverbs 14:34). When men follow God, righteousness is said to dwell in the city (Isa 1:21) but when sin rules, it becomes a harlot. To rule on behalf of the wicked for a price is perversion of righteousness, for it takes away the righteousness (decency, Godlikeness) of the righteous (Isa 5:23). David was (more) righteous than Saul because he refused to slay Saul when unprotected (1 Sam 24:7), even though God seemingly had given Saul into his hands.

In Stigers' exposition, the forensic aspect of *ṣdq* applies to the equality of all, rich and poor, before the law (i.e., in the context of crime or litigation). In the Old Testament law, to be innocent and to be righteous are one and the same. In terms of an individual involved in litigation, to be righteous means to be free from guilt in relation to any infraction of law (Gen 30:33). One is righteous who is declared to be right (Exod 23:7; Deut. 25:1). The *ṣaddîq* (irrespective of his/her status) must not be put to death (Exod 23:7) for the law does not condemn him/her. The man who has the position of right in litigation must not be turned aside (Isa 5:23), that is, must not be denied justice. There is an aspect of the forensic usage of *ṣdq* which describes God's righteousness (Stigers 1980:753). In this usage, like *mishpāṭ*, *ṣdq* is used attributively when applied to God himself as to his character. The Lord is the just judge (2 Chron 12:6; Ps 11:7; Jer 12:1; Lam 1:18) even to the utmost degree as the judge of all the earth (Deut 32:4; Ps 119:137; Isa 5:16). Therefore his standards, his judgments set out in his word are righteous (Ps 119:144, 160, 172). God's hate of sin and love of righteousness (Ps 45:7 [H 8]) expresses his essential righteousness. Hence righteousness and judgment are the habitation of God's throne; that is, they always characterise his actions (Ps 97:2).

The theocratic aspect is applicable to the nation of Israel. In this sense when the nation is obedient to the covenant it is a way of righteousness (Ps 1:1–6; Deut 6:25). God is righteous under the covenant when he delivers his people from trouble (Ps 31:1 [H 2]), their enemies (Ps 5:8 [H 9]), the wicked (Ps 37:6), and when he is vindicating

Israel before her foes or executing vengeance on them (Jer 11:20). In this last event the Lord is both righteous and the saviour (Isa 45:21). As noted by Koch (1997:1046–1062), the term *šdq* is capable of various interpretations as used in the various portions of the Old Testament. However, in view of our focus the term is appropriated in this work in its description of human behaviour in interpersonal relationships.

At this point, it is important to note the mutual correlation between *mishpāt* and *šedeq/š^edāqâ*. As seen earlier, some interpreters have recognised the fact that “justice”, rather than “judgment”, should be a more acceptable translation of the former, in which case it is synonymous with *šedeq/š^edāqâ*. In other words, in certain contexts *mishpāt* and *šedeq/š^edāqâ* mean the same thing, that is, “justice”. Payne (1978:680) examined the use of the two terms in the Authorized Version (AV) and Revised Version (RV) and reached a similar conclusion:

The word ‘justice’ occurs 26 times in AV Old Testament, once translating the Hebrew *mishpāt* but elsewhere *šedeq* or *š^edāqâ*. The more frequent rendering of these latter nouns is ‘righteousness;’ but when *mishpāt* and *š^edāqâ* appear together, the AV translates the whole phrase as ‘judgment and justice’ (2 Sam. 8:15; cf. Gen. 18:19), though the RV renders the same combination as ‘justice and righteousness.’ In the AV, therefore, ‘justice’ must be understood as being the same word as ‘righteousness.’

Motyer (1994:801) affirms the mutual correlation between the two words, saying that “where ‘justice’ and ‘righteousness’ are used together (e.g. Isa 5:16), righteousness is a summary word for the principles inherent in divine holiness, and justice is the practical application of those principles personally and socially”. The fact that the two terms are sometimes synonyms is further buttressed by the modern dictionary meaning of “righteousness” as “virtue”, which in turn means “justice”, “honesty”, and “rectitude”, among other terms (Microsoft 2009). It is in this sense that the use of these two terms in the prophets is best understood. As we shall see presently, in many cases the terms occur together in the prophets’ indictment, and in fact, as demonstrated by Payne above, may be translated interchangeably.

THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF THE EIGHTH CENTURY PROPHETS

Before we study the preaching of the prophets on justice and righteousness, it is important to briefly examine the historical and socio-economic context of the eighth century prophets. The eighth century B.C.E. witnessed significant peace and prosperity in both Israel and Judah. Northern Israel was ruled by Jeroboam II (786–746 B.C.),¹ while Judah was ruled by Uzziah (783–742 B.C.), Jotham (742–735 B.C.), Ahaz (735–715 B.C.) and Hezekiah (715–687 B.C.) (Lundbom 2010:42, 48, 57, 63). Jeroboam II and Uzziah were both strong kings, having restored the combined national borders to nearly what they were at the time of Solomon. According to Lundbom (2010:42), the Assyrians had the Syrians in check by 802 B.C., but by the mid-eighth century Assyria herself was weakened by internal dissensions and threatened with disintegration (Bright 1981:256). There was no problem with Egypt, and both Israel and Judah appear to have been at peace. Full advantage of this political situation seems to have been taken so much so that prosperity unknown since the time of Solomon ensued. Agriculture was the primary means of subsistence. The fertile regions of Samaria produced wheat and barley and, as the Samaria Ostraca attest, the hillsides yielded grapes and olives. Moreover, the major international trade routes once more passing through Israelite territory, tolls from caravans and free interchange of goods poured wealth into the country. Phoenicia provided Israel with luxury items such as ivory while Israel in turn traded grain, olive oil and wine with her. At the same time Israel supplied Egypt with olive oil and wine. Judah, too, reached the zenith of its economic and military power in the reigns of Uzziah and Hezekiah (Bright 1981:259; King 1989:4; Moore and Kelly 2011:277).

Unfortunately, the wealth was concentrated in the hands of the upper class, which marginalised the others and dispossessed them of their property. Apparently, a wealthy merchant class emerged with a hereditary status, sharing the nation's wealth with the nobles and building for themselves elaborate homes. There developed the

¹ There is yet to be a chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah agreed upon by all scholars of biblical history. The one followed in this study is that found in Bright (1981), which Moore and Kelly (2011:270) affirm is generally accepted.

habit of money-making through land grabbing, together with the emergence of an aristocratic class of landowners that dispossessed the small farmers by illegal means to make the development of large estates possible (Robinson 1979:63; Evans 1992, quoted by Agboluaje 2007:177). Strydom (1995:400) affirms that the issue of landownership was at the centre of the social criticism of the eighth century prophets; it was the one sphere of life within which people, especially the poor, were exploited beyond all limits. However, the less privileged were marginalised in several other ways. In the administration of justice, the local courts received bribes from the rich and turned justice against the poor. The upper class lived in opulence at the expense of the poor; the latter were also cheated by the merchants who manipulated weights and measures against them (Evans 1992, quoted by Agboluaje 2007: 177; Otuibe 2003, quoted by Ogedegbe 2007:189). In Longman and Dillard's (2006:431) summary, particularly concerning northern Israel:

The material prosperity that had accompanied political and military successes under Jeroboam II had created a powerful and wealthy upper class in Israel. New levels of leisure and disposable wealth had brought open vice. Alcohol abuse had now become a problem even for women. For the wealthy justice could be purchased, while those less fortunate were reduced to chattel; the poor and needy were crushed by the powerful.

THE EIGHTH CENTURY PROPHETS ON JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

It is against the background of the socio-economic context described above that the prophets' indictment on justice and righteousness can be appropriately appreciated. The four prophets who featured during this time were Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah. Amos, a shepherd and a dresser of vines in Tekoa, a Judahite city just south of Jerusalem, prophesied against northern Israel (Amos 7:15). He preached during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah (783–742 B.C.E.) and Jeroboam II (786–746 B.C.E.) in

Israel (Lundbom 2010:42).² Hosea was a native of northern Israel. The superscription to his book has him prophesying during the reigns of Jeroboam II and Joash in Israel, and Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah in Judah. Thus, Hosea was Amos' contemporary. However, according to Lundbom (2010:48), Hosea was active in the years just prior to Samaria's fall but "most scholars doubt that he was around in Hezekiah's reign (715–687), which, if he was would mean that he survived the fall of Samaria in 722. It is possible he was active for thirty years or so between 755 and 725." Going by the superscriptions to their books, Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries who prophesied a few decades after Amos and Hosea. They had their ministries in the reigns of Jotham (742–735 B.C.E.), Ahaz (735–715 B.C.E.), and Hezekiah (715–687 B.C.E.) (Lundbom 2010:57, 63).

As we read in their books, the prophets' preaching on justice and righteousness indicates a process of wealth accumulation by the rich which consequently accounted for the oppression of the poor. And as we shall see presently, their condemnation revolves around issues such as marginalisation by the leaders, land seizure, bribery, cheating, violence, robbery, killing, and so on. Micah condemns the rulers who were entrusted with the administration of justice, who instead were committing injustice and heartless exploitation against the governed; they "... who tear the skin from off my people, and their flesh from off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a caldron" (Micah 3:2–3, RSV). In his exposition on this passage, Waltke (1994:826) says, "By reducing their subjects to grinding poverty, and living off their fields and labours, they (the rulers) were sending them as skeletons to an early grave". Isaiah (10:1–2) condemns the rulers and law makers for making decrees to legalise their atrocities against the people. "Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey" (RSV). In the opinion of Bright (1982:498), this passage refers to rulers who issued unjust laws designed to

² Recently, Strijdom (2011:221-254) proposed a later date of 738–732 B.C.E. for Amos' prophecy.

deprive the helpless of their rights perpetually. As Kidner (1994:640) puts it, for these selfish leaders, cheating their subjects became exploits of a life-time, finding their way through the laws of the land.

Amos particularly condemns the rich in strong terms. The rich men of Samaria were living the easy life (6:1, 4–6), living in the most comfortable houses and enjoying the choicest meals but had no concern for the plight of the others. Motyer (1994:802) describes these people as the self-indulgent, socially uncaring leaders whose position centralised them in the mind of the people but who centralised themselves in their own minds until self-concern finally obliterated concern for others. The wives of these leaders dominated their husbands in their insistence on gratification (Motyer 1994:799), thereby exploiting the position of their husbands to oppress the poor. The prophet describes these women as “cows of Bashan” (4:1). Hyatt (1982:620) affirms that Bashan was a fertile district east of the Sea of Galilee noted for its prize cows. Thus, the prophet here deliberately contrasts these wealthy, plump women with the oppressed and crushed poor.

Strydom (1995:400) observes that the prophets considered the issue of land ownership as one of the worst examples of social injustice in the eighth century. Isaiah (5:8) criticises the rich landlords and government officials for the way in which they confiscated the houses and land of the poor, with the result that they themselves owned more and more houses, and bigger and bigger pieces of land. In a similar way, Micah (2:1–5) criticises the leaders. If they desired a piece of land, they simply stole it; if they wanted a specific house, they seized it. In the process they resorted to violence against a man and his house/land which he had inherited from his fathers. Sometimes these oppressors drove the widows from their houses, leaving them and their children homeless (cf. Micah 2:9). In Amos 2:6 and 8:6 it is stated that the needy were sold for a pair of sandals. Strydom (1995:401, 402) sees this as a metaphor describing the way in which the land, houses and property of the poor were sold or confiscated. When a debtor was not able to pay off his debt, the creditor simply clamped down on the man’s property and confiscated it. The debtor and his household could even be taken as slaves, or otherwise they could sometimes rent (their own) land

from the landlord. The rent or levy normally had to be paid by means of a share of the crop. This share, however, was often so big that the farmer and his family were left with virtually nothing to live on.

However, Motyer (1994:797) applies the Amos passage to the corrupt judicial system, explaining the word “needy” as referring to “those who cannot resist or those who have to bend to superior will and strength, those who socially have no means of redress”. Against this class of people the judges took bribes, selling verdicts for as little as a pair of sandals. He conjectures that it is also possible that cases were brought over as small a matter as shoes. What is important here is that whether through land seizure or in the courts, the poor were being oppressed by the rich. Isaiah (1:23) indicts the judges as rebels who sided with the thieves by taking bribes and running after gifts. Similarly, Micah (3:11; cf. 7:3) accuses the rulers and judges of bribery because the manner in which they investigated crimes was determined by the bribes they received.

The prophets also condemned injustice and dishonesty in the marketplace where the rich cheated the poor with bad scales and false weights (Amos 8:5–6; Micah 6:11). In the Amos passage, Motyer (1994:805) perceives in merchants the triumph of profit motive over religious devotion, commercial honesty, and even humanity. They were anxious for the religious festivals to be over so that they could sell and make profit; selling less but for more money, hence, the tampering with weights and measures. The festival period should pass quickly so that they could “buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals” (Amos 8:6). Motyer observes the triumph of profit motive over humanity. In this context, silver might be a loan made to the poor (cf. 2:7a) and sandals the purchase he made on credit, while privately the trader had in mind to take the poor into slavery for defaulting on the debt (cf. 2 Kgs 4:1).

The prophets did not only condemn the injustice and unrighteousness of the people of Israel and Judah but also predicted doom arising from the vices. They saw not only invasion and captivity by Assyria (Isa 10:5; Hosea 11:5 ff.) but also social disorder and anarchy in the society. As a result of injustice against the poor, Amos said, “The land shall tremble and everyone mourn; ... and all of it rise like the Nile, and tossed about

and sink again like the Nile of Egypt” (8:8, RSV). Hosea similarly sees the land mourning due to injustice done to the needy. In his book we see the graphic picture of the plots and counter-plots that had torn the polity asunder, the complete collapse of law and order in which neither life nor property was safe:

There is no faithfulness or kindness in the land; ... there is lying, killing, stealing; ... they break all bounds and murder follows murder. Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish ... The corruption of Ephraim is revealed, and the wicked deeds of Samaria; for they deal falsely, the thief breaks in, and the bandits raid without (Hosea 4:1–3; 7:1, RSV).

The prediction and experiences of these prophets are apparently corroborated in the corresponding historical events. Before the capture of northern Israel by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., the inner weakness, the seething discontent within the land, the social disintegration, was already manifest. This can be seen in the anarchy recorded in 2 Kgs 15:8–31, where four kings occupied the throne and two were murdered within two years, rival kings probably claiming authority during the same period. It was in such a period, during the reign of one of the usurpers, Pekah (734–732 B.C.) that the Assyrians under Tiglath-Pileser III started the invasion and captivity which northern Israel never survived, for in 722/21 B.C. Sargon II finally took Samaria (Bright 1981:275).

For this chaotic situation the prophets saw a solution in the application of justice and righteousness. The land was sick and could only be healed by justice and righteousness; justice and righteousness should replace bloodshed, oppression, hatred, cheating and perversion (Isa 1:27; Amos 5:7; Micah 3:9). What God required from the people was justice; it was the ideal, the standard that he wanted (Micah 6:8; Isa 28:7). Therefore, the people should seek, establish, grant, uphold, and love justice (Isa 16:3; Amos 5:15; Hosea 12:6). Amos’ emphasis on the significance of justice and righteousness in establishing peace and order in the society is seen in 5:24: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (5:24). In the words of Richards (1991:369), in these passages the prophets illustrate the

expected actions of a just individual and the just society: “They show that justice is doing good to others and showing an active concern for the well-being of the weak. The just society and the just individual alike demonstrate this active concern to meet the need of the powerless and to defend the oppressed.” Next, we shall examine how the prophets’ preaching can be applied as a solution to the situation of insecurity in Nigeria.

INJUSTICE AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

Indices of insecurity

In the above discussion, we have seen how injustice against the underprivileged led to discontent and anarchy in ancient Israel. Similarly, in Nigeria much of the unrest can be traced to the marginalisation of the common person by government functionaries and politicians. Nigeria has witnessed (and is still witnessing) a lot of insecurity but here we are illustrating it mainly with the militancy that raged for decades in the Niger Delta, electoral violence that has bedevilled all elections, and the most dreaded Boko Haram insurgency. Until the so-called Amnesty Programme of the administration of Yar’Adua and Jonathan in 2009, there was untold unrest in the Niger Delta arising from controversy over the distribution of the proceeds accruing from petroleum. From 1975 to 1980 Nigeria experienced what was called the oil boom (Obafemi 1994:49) but it had little or no positive impact in the lives of the majority of Nigerians. However, the Niger Delta people suffered most as they were not only neglected, but had to abandon their land on which they used to earn their living to the oil companies with little compensation, in addition to the attendant environmental degradation (Ojo-Ade 1999; cited in Ademiluka 2011:50). This situation led to the agitation and eventual militancy by movements and groups that ravaged the region for years. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) was led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was later killed by Gen. Sanni Abacha in 1995 in the heat of the struggle. In 1999, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) led the conflict between the Ijaw and the Nigerian Federal Government in which scores of people were killed in the notorious

Odi massacre. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) was perhaps the most noticeable in what was called the “oil war”, carrying out attacks on the oil companies’ installations. Kidnapping (which today has become a lucrative business of criminals), also became an awful aspect of the war. On 15 May 2009, a military operation began against MEND in response to the kidnapping of certain Nigerian soldiers and foreign sailors. Thousands of people fled their homes and hundreds of people were killed on account of the offensive (Ojo-Ade 1999, cited in Ademiluka 2011:50–57). Recently, another group of militants emerged calling itself Niger Delta Avengers, blowing up gas and oil pipes almost on a daily basis.

However, the most critical challenge to security in Nigeria in recent times is that coming from *Jamā’atu Ahlis Sunnah Lādda’awatih wal-Jihad*, better known by its Hausa name, Boko Haram. It started in the form of isolated incidents in Borno State but later spread to neighbouring states including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Schools, markets, churches, mosques, houses, university campuses, police units, the United Nations (UN) secretariat in Abuja have all been attacked, killing people and causing monumental destruction of property (Ogunyemi 2012:36). The havoc caused to human lives and property by the sect is indescribable. However, the incident that has had the most harrowing effect on Nigerians is the abduction of over 200 school girls from Chibok in Borno State in April 2014. And in spite of the concerted effort of the Nigerian military and neighbouring nations, the children are yet to be rescued. According to Olanisebe (2015:492),

Some people have asserted that the number of people that have been killed by Boko Haram is more than those who died during the civil war in Nigeria. Many lives have been lost, property worth billions of Naira, and the fact that nobody is insulated from the attack, for government officials, traditional rulers, police and military formations and church worshippers are targets. There is panic on a daily basis.

Another regular source of insecurity in Nigeria is electoral violence, with reports on elections in Nigeria indicating a culture of violence. All the general elections conducted since independence (1964/65, 1979, 1983, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015)

have been marred by various degrees of violence, always involving wanton loss of lives and property (Smith 2002, quoted by Orji and Uzodi 2012:9). A current source of insecurity is that coming from herdsmen. In the past they limited their activities to destroying people's farms but now they also attack villages, killing innocent persons.

Corruption as injustice

As in ancient Israel, in Nigeria insecurity as described above can be accounted for by marginalisation of the citizenry by government and its functionaries, giving rise to a situation where the ruling class and politicians live in affluence while the majority of Nigerians suffer neglect and concomitant poverty. The nation's resources that are supposed to be expended on the various aspects of the economy are embezzled by government functionaries and their surrogates. Thus, in this context marginalisation and corruption are interwoven. Former governor of the Central Bank, Lamido Sanusi, once alleged that 25% of the annual budget goes to the law makers as salaries and allowances. The general attitude of the ruling class to the state coffer is summarised by Ogunyemi (2012: 36) as follows:

In the midst of grinding poverty among the citizenry, the political class displays ostentatious lifestyles; using their privileged positions to corner a disproportionate slice of our common weal. It is on record that Nigerian political office holders enjoy salaries and allowances as well as perquisites above their counterparts elsewhere in the world. Example has been made of the billion naira spent for feeding and kitchenware at the Presidency. In other climes where democratic culture is better entrenched, Presidents are reputed for feeding themselves, their families and private guests from their personal incomes. Like the Executive, legislators insult the sensibilities of fellow Nigerians. They annually appropriate scandalous votes to themselves and yet occasionally take commercial bank loans to support their insatiable appetites for jumbo allowances.

Ogunyemi's claim is supported by the fact that many dignitaries have been accused of or indicted for corruption in recent times. Former military head of state Sanni

Abacha's loot of billions of naira is still being recovered by successive governments after him. The case of money laundering involving former Governor of Delta State, James Ibori, is still on in the UK. He was convicted in April 2012 by the Southwark Crown Court in London for money laundering valued at about 77 million dollars (about ₦12.17bn). It is important to note that Ibori's wife Theresa, sister Christine Ibori-Idie, and mistress Udoamaka Okwonko had in June 2010 been sentenced to 5-year imprisonment by the London court for related offences (Awuzie 2012:41). Farouk Lawan was the chairman of the House of Representatives Fuel Subsidy Probe Panel. He was alleged to have demanded and received a bribe of \$620 000 from oil magnate, Femi Otedola, in order to influence the report of his committee in favour of the latter (Omonobi 2012). The case has been in court since 2013. Another popular fraud saga in 2013 involved Abdulrasheed Maina, chairman of the Pension Reform Task Team (PRTT), who was indicted by two Senate committees for having mismanaged a ₦469 billion pension fund (Ademiluka 2015:25). The case is still in court. Also in 2013, the Nigerian Judicial Council (NJC) set up a committee to investigate another pension fraud involving an Abuja High Court judge, Justice Abubakar Talba, over his alleged role in the plea bargain saga between the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and a self-confessed pension thief, Yakubu Yusufu. Yusufu had pleaded guilty to stealing ₦27 billion of about ₦30 billion he was charged with by the EFCC. Justice Talba sentenced him to two years in prison each on a three-count charge with an option of a fine in the paltry sum of ₦750,000 on each charge. He promptly paid the fine and was set free, but rearrested after public outcry and criticism (Ademiluka 2015:26). This is just one case out of many illustrating corruption of the Nigerian judiciary, similar to the involvement of the judges in injustice in ancient Israel.

The previous government of Goodluck Jonathan is being probed, and revelations are being made of corruption involving billions of dollars. The former minister of petroleum under Jonathan, Diezani Alison-Madueke, is currently facing trial in the UK for alleged money laundering. The National Security Adviser to Jonathan, Sambo

Dasuki, along with many others, is under investigation for alleged corruption involving some \$2.1 bn.

Unemployment, poverty and unrest as effects of corruption

The injustice of government functionaries and politicians sitting on the nation's resources is one of the factors that led to the current high rate of unemployment and the attendant poverty in the land. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the rate of unemployment rose from 11.9% in 2005 to 23.9% in 2011 with states like Yobe, Zamfara and Niger recording unemployment rates as high as 60.6%, 42.6% and 39.4% respectively. Concerning unemployment the present writer states in another place, "It is as if there has been a permanent embargo on employment. The number of graduates roaming the streets desperately in search of a job increases yearly by the thousands. Groups of retirees and retrenched workers have joined the number of beggars on the streets" (Ademiluka 2007:37). The Bureau puts the percentage of Nigerians living in absolute poverty (i.e., those who can afford only the bare essentials of food, shelter and clothing) at 54.7% in 2004, 60.9% in 2010 and 69% in 2012 (see Orji and Uzodi 2012:29; Omar 2012:10). According to Danjibo (2011:136), more than 70% of Nigerians live below the poverty line of US\$1 per day despite huge revenues accruing to government.

Hence, insecurity in the form of unrest, electoral violence, insurgency, and others is an outward expression of frustration arising from injustice. In other words, the society is made volatile for insecurity as a high percentage of the youth are unemployed and therefore hungry and frustrated. Some writers have emphasised this fact particularly in relation to electoral violence. Aniekwe and Kushie (2011:20) affirm that gangs usually hired for electoral violence are primarily unemployed youth. Maslow (1954, quoted by Obakhedo 2011:102) also identifies poverty/unemployment as part of the factors that cause electoral violence in Nigeria. Similarly, Orji and Uzodi (2012:13) believe that marginalisation leads to insecurity:

A high rate of illiteracy, unemployment and poverty is a vital sign of underdevelopment. In Nigeria a large section of the population lacks

access to opportunities and resources to actualize their potentials. This situation breeds a class of economically marginalized people (mostly youths) who can be used to perpetrate electoral violence. This group of people is pliant and easily enticed by the wealthy violent entrepreneurs who sponsor most of the violent political encounters.

Thus, in Nigeria, as in ancient Israel, the upper class marginalises others by encroaching on the resources of the nation. This injustice leads to unemployment which in turn creates abject poverty among the citizenry, and hence a society volatile for insecurity. In the section below we examine how the message of the prophets on justice and righteousness can be applied as a solution.

APPLYING THE PROPHETS

As seen earlier, the prophets admonished the oppressors in ancient Israel, namely the rulers, landowners, judges and merchants to uphold the principles of justice and righteousness towards the underprivileged. It is by so doing that the land would know peace. In the same vein, Nigeria would be a peaceful nation if the leaders would apply the principles of justice and fairness. As seen above, a major cause of insecurity is the injustice done to the citizenry arising from corruption by government functionaries and politicians. The latter sit on the resources of the country thereby denying the others means of livelihood, which leads to frustration and rampant violence. Hence, the first step towards achieving peace is to tackle the problem of corruption. To start with, government must show more commitment to fighting corruption through leadership by example so that they can be in a position to enforce the relevant anti-graft laws. This proposition is significant in view of the fact that in Nigeria, government is not only involved in corrupt practices but also abets corruption in various ways. Sometimes government apparently protects culprits. The cases of the oil subsidy and pension scams mentioned above are examples. It was only when human rights lawyer, Festus Keyamo, threatened to personally charge Farouk Lawan that the Federal Government under Goodluck Jonathan reluctantly took the matter to court

(Ademiluka 2013:19). In the case of Maina, even when the audit report from the office of the Auditor-General of the Federation found him culpable, government did nothing (Ademiluka 2013:19). In 2013 former governor of Bayelsa State, Diepreiye Alamiyesigha, topped the list of criminals granted state pardon by Goodluck Jonathan. In 2005 Alamiyesigha was convicted in the UK for money laundering but he managed to flee to Nigeria disguised as a woman. Subsequently, he was arrested and prosecuted by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). In July 2007, Alamiyesigha pleaded guilty to a six-count charge of making false declaration of assets and money laundering and was sentenced to two years in prison. In spite of all these offences President Jonathan bestowed a state pardon on him (Ademiluka 2013:20). (Recently the UK reopened Alamiyesigha's case calling for his extradition from Nigeria to the UK but unfortunately he died a few days after the news.)

However, to engender justice in Nigeria, government has to do more than shun corruption. It should formulate policies that would ensure the enforcement of the principles of justice as seen in the message of the prophets, that is, in terms of doing good to others and showing active concern for the well-being of the less privileged. Most of the unrest, violence and conflicts that Nigeria has witnessed and is still witnessing could have been averted if the leaders had been conscious of these principles, if they had cared for the rights of the ordinary Nigerians. A good example of the connection between the violation of justice and insecurity is the unrest in the Niger Delta. As already mentioned, successive governments, being oblivious of the principles of justice, equity and fair play, neglected the region for years; hence the agitations and the eventual collapse of law and order in that area for decades. In fact, many individuals and groups emphasised the need for sincerity and justice in solving the problems of the Niger Delta. In the assessment of Professor Tam David-West (2009:4), for example, the Amnesty Programme would fail like the previous efforts unless government addressed the fundamental issues that led to militancy; and he summed up all these issues under the principles of justice. (It should be noted here that the unrest in the Niger Delta subsided considerably with the amnesty granted to

militants by Yar'Adua in 2009, and the creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) by the Jonathan administration a few years ago.)

All the cases of corruption and embezzlement of money by governors, legislators, government appointees and other politicians mentioned above arose from the neglect of the principles of justice, fairness and equity. For example, whereas one individual, Maina, allegedly mismanaged ₦469bn pension fund, and Dasuki and a few others shared \$2.1bn, millions of pensioners and other Nigerians are languishing in poverty. Whereas children of politicians school abroad and come home to dominate employment opportunities, graduates who are children of the ordinary citizens roam the streets for years seeking for job. Injustice in this form is one of the factors that created the volatile environment for the current state of insecurity in the country. Hence, the cry of the prophets of ancient Israel for justice and righteousness is relevant here, especially considering the terms in the secular perspective in which case they would encompass virtues such as honesty, truthfulness, integrity, transparency, and accountability. In other words, an extension of the application of the prophets' message on justice and righteousness to the Nigerian context would involve urging government and all law enforcement agencies to demonstrate stronger commitment to equity, transparency and accountability in all aspects of governance. Ogunyemi seems to recognise this fact when he says, "To fix the security challenges therefore would require, at the barest minimum that we demonstrate a strong commitment to transparency and accountability in the political process" (Ogunyemi 2012: 37).

CONCLUSION

This essay applies the words of the eighth century prophets of ancient Israel on justice and righteousness to the current insecurity in Nigeria. The eighth century B.C.E. witnessed significant peace and prosperity in both Israel and Judah. However, the wealth was concentrated in the hands of the upper class which marginalised the others, dispossessing them of their property and expropriating the nation's wealth in building for themselves elaborate homes, among other luxuries. Hence the prophets' criticism

revolves around vices such as land seizure, bribery, cheating, violence, robbery, killing, and so on; and in all these the common man was at the receiving end. In their intervention in the chaotic situation, the prophets predicted God's judgment in terms of further social disorder, anarchy and captivity. But all these could be averted if the leaders would uphold justice and righteousness. As in ancient Israel Nigeria has witnessed, and is still witnessing, insecurity, especially in form of unrest in the Niger Delta, incessant electoral violence, and the much dreaded insurgency of Boko Haram, among others. Furthermore, as in ancient Israel, all this can be accounted for by the marginalisation of the citizenry by government and its functionaries: the ruling class and politicians live in affluence while the majority of Nigerians suffer neglect and concomitant poverty. In other words, due to corruption and negligence on the part of Nigerian leaders, the society is made volatile for insecurity as a high percentage of the youth are unemployed and therefore hungry and frustrated. Hence, one way of solving the problem of insecurity in Nigeria is by applying the principles of justice and righteousness as preached by the prophets. The application to the Nigerian context would involve urging government and all law enforcement agencies to demonstrate stronger commitment to equity, fairness, transparency, honesty and accountability in all aspects of governance.

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