

## A Hermeneutical Appraisal of Jeremiah's Leadership Roles and its Implication: an antidote to Social Injustice in Nigeria.

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examined a Hermeneutical appraisal of Jeremiah's leadership roles and its implication. The work discussed the scholarly opinions on leadership as well traced the historical life style of prophet Jeremiah (one of the 8 century ethical prophet) and his religio-political influence to the Jews as an antidote to social injustice in Nigeria. Historical analysis of data collection was used to carry out the information. The findings revealed that our nation (Nigeria) has been saturated with all sorts of social injustices just like the Jews in the time of prophet Jeremiah which has led the own nation (Nigeria) into slavery and agony under our elected and appointed leaders. This paper thereby concluded and recommended that the fact that God punishes and save the recalcitrant nation is maintained. It is used as the heuristic device in the post biblical period to explain national calamities resulting from conflicts between the Jewish people and larger gentile world. Hence, Nigerians should retrace their part back to God and the leaders should be approachable because they are the mirror to the oncoming generation.*

**KEY WORDS:** Hermeneutical, Jeremiah, Leadership, Antidote, Social Injustice

### INTRODUCTION

Social injustice is the fundamental crisis of social justice and is emanated in the leadership management and persistence self centeredness, in which the interest or benefits of the citizens from certain leaders are been personalized, embezzled and mismanaged instead of sharing and honey the citizens, lust prevails over by denying the people the love and care they deserved. Economic, Socio-political and Religious Injustice has been in existence for over many decades, and was there practiced by the chosen people (Jews) of God in the days of the biblical records. This had led the people to encounter severe punishment and they suffer oblivion under different oppressors. Although, this is a heuristic device used in the post biblical period to reveal the people's calamity to the world as well a means to return them to God. In Nigeria today just like the days of prophet Jeremiah, social injustice among the elected, appointed, nominated and even among the whole nation has been given appreciative mind, people hardly see it as something bad or evil in our society but as a game of the brain. Our leader's intentions have been diverse from the well being and pleasure of their people and this has tumbled the affairs of the nation (Nigeria). Nigeria leaders of all sectors disguised before they attain office to be love, compassionate, caring, stewardship, motivator, role model, adaptability and charisma like prophet Jeremiah but revise is their case, in fact they are scar and thorn in the heart of the nation. However, this research considered prophet Jeremiah's leadership roles as a germane to reduce high level of social injustice in Nigeria.

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## LEADERSHIP

For better understanding, some scholarly perspectives concerning the concept of leadership would be considered. In the transformational leadership model, leaders set direction and help themselves and others to do the right thing to move forward, crates an inspiring vision, motivate and inspire others to reach that vision. They also manage delivery of the vision, either directly or indirectly, build and coach their followers<sup>1</sup>. According to Prentice, leadership is the accomplishment of a goal through the direction of human assistants or is a person who successfully marshals his human collaborators to achieve particular ends<sup>2</sup>. Cohen also gave his definition as leadership is the art of influencing others to their maximum performance to accomplish any task, objective or project<sup>3</sup>. Leadership is the lifting of a man's performance to a higher standard, the building of a man's personality beyond its normal limitations<sup>4</sup>. In other word, leadership is a communication process of influencing and directing people to commit to and achieve a shared goal voluntarily in a given situation<sup>5</sup>. This concept runs across all sectors; political, Economic, Social and Religious. It is an art of appointing, nominating and electing somebody into the position of authority to effectively lead his followers to the green pasture. This has been the notion of the people been governed.

## BRIEF HISTORY OF PROPHET JEREMIAH

Jeremiah's Ministry was active from the thirteenth year of Josiah, King of Judah in (3298) or 626BC, until after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 BC<sup>6</sup>. This period spanned the reigns of five Kings of Judah; Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah and his (Jeremiah) final year of prophecy was given to be 595BC. Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, a *Kohen* (priest) from the Benjamite village of Anathoth in Northern Judah, he was a descendant of Abiathar, one of king David's high priests, who was loyal to Israel's roots in the law of Moses, and been deposed and exiled to Anathoth by King Solomon. The lineage of Abiathar represents off strand of Mosaic and prophetic faith that consistently raised voices of critique toward the policies of Israel's kings and religious leaders<sup>7</sup>.

Jeremiah came onto the scene about the time that King Josiah began his reforms, trying to undo the corruption of kings such as his grandfather Manasseh. Josiah reforms gained impetus from the rediscovery of the book of the law; Jeremiah surely supported this effort to reinstate Mosaic faith at the heart of the Hebrew nation. Josiah's reforms ended following his early death at the age of 39 years on the battle held ironically killed by the Egyptian Pharaoh (II Kings 23:29)<sup>8</sup>.

The difficulties he encountered as described in the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations have prompted scholars to refer to him as the "Weeping prophet". Jeremiah was called to prophetic ministry probably in C. 626 BC and also called by Yahweh to give prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction that would occur by invaders from the north<sup>9</sup>. This was because the Israel had been unfaithful to the laws of the covenant and had forsaken God by worshipping Baal. The people of Israel had even gone as far as building high altars to Baal; in order to burn their children in fire as offerings<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, the nation had deviated so far from God that they had broken the covenant, causing God to withdraw his blessings. Jeremiah was guided by God to proclaim that the nation of Judah would

faced the wrath of God such as; famine, plundered and taken captive by foreigners who would exile them to a strange land.

However, Huldah (a prophetess) was a relative and contemporary of Jeremiah while prophet Zephaniah and Isaiah was his mentor<sup>11</sup>. According to this text, Josiah's reforms were insufficient to save Judah and Jerusalem from destruction because of the sins of Manasseh, Josiah's grandfather and Judah returned to idolatry (Jer. 11:10ff). Such was the lust of the nation for false gods that after Josiah's death, the nation quickly returned to the gods of the surrounding nations but Jeremiah was said to have been appointed to reveal the sins of the people and the coming consequences<sup>12</sup>. Although, Jeremiah resisted the call, however, the Lord insisted that Jeremiah "go and speak" and he touched Jeremiah's mouth to place the word of the Lord. God told him to "Get yourself ready" the traits and practices that Jeremiah was to acquire are specified in Jeremiah and include not being afraid, standing up to speak, speaking as told and going where sent.

## **THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH**

The book of Jeremiah is the Second of the latter prophets in the Hebrew Bible and the second of the prophets in the Christian Old Testament. The superscription at Chapter 1:1-3 identifies it as the words of "Jeremiah son of Hilkiah", and place the prophet historically from the reforms of king Josiah in 627 BC to the assassination of the Babylonian appointed governor of Judah in 582<sup>13</sup>. Among all the prophets, Jeremiah came up clearly as a person ruminating to his scribe Baruch about his role as a servant of God with little good news for his audience. The book is written in a very complex and poetic Hebrew (Jer. 10:11); curiously written in Biblical Aramaic, it has two distinct though related versions, one in Hebrew and other in Greek translation<sup>14</sup>.

Scholars have had differing opinions as to how to reconstruct the historical aspects of the book of Jeremiah due to the difference versions contain when compared with each other. The book is a representative of the message and significance of the prophet substantially intended for the Jews in Babylonian exile: its purpose is to explain the disaster as God's response to Israel's pagan worship. The people said Jeremiah is like an unfaithful wife and rebelliousness make judgement inevitable, although restoration and a new covenant are foreshadowed<sup>15</sup>.

### **Structure of the book**

According to Michael D. Coogan cited by Biddle E. Mark that it is difficult to discern any structure in Jeremiah, probably because the book had such a long and complex composition<sup>16</sup>. It can be divided into roughly six sections:

Chapter 1-25; the earliest and main core of Jeremiah's message

Chapter 26-29; biographic material and interaction with other prophets

Chapter 30-33; God's promise of restoration including Jeremiah's new covenant which is interpreted differently in Judaism than it is in Christianity

Chapter 34-45; mostly interaction with Zedekiah and the fall of Jerusalem

Chapter 46-51; divine punishment to the nations surrounding Israel

Chapter 52; appendix that retells 2kings 24: 18, 25:30.

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**Theme of the Book****i. Covenant**

Much of Jeremiah's prophetic preaching is based on the theme of the covenant between God and Israel. Jeremiah insisted that the covenant is conditional and can be broken by Israel's apostasy (worship of gods other than Yahweh, the God of Israel). The people said Jeremiah is like an unfaithful wife and rebellious children: their infidelity and rebelliousness makes judgement inevitable<sup>17</sup>. With these, references to repentance and renewal, although it is unclear whether Jeremiah thought that repentance could ward off judgement or it would have to follow it. But the theme of restoration is strongest in chapter 31:22 which looks to a future in which a new covenant made with Israel and Judah, one which will not be broken. This is the theme of the "new covenant" passage at chapter 31:31-34, drawing on Israel's past relationship with God through the covenant at Sinai to foresee a new future in which Israel will be obedient to God<sup>18</sup>.

**ii. Confession**

Scholars have identified several passages in Jeremiah that can be understood as "confessions", they occur in the first section of the book (chapter 1-25, 11:18, 12:6, 15:10-21, 17:4-18 and 20:7-18). In these passages, Jeremiah expresses his content with the message, he is to deliver, but also his steadfast commitment to the divine call despite the fact that he had not sought it out. However, in several of these confessions, Jeremiah plays that the Lord will take revenge on his persecutors<sup>19</sup>. Jeremiah's confessions are a type of individual lament; such laments are found elsewhere in the Psalms and the book of Job. Like Job, Jeremiah curses the day of his birth (Jer. 20:14-18, and Job 3:3-10), moreover, Jeremiah's exclamation for hear the whispering of many terror is all around; Jeremiah's Lamentation is made unique by his insistence that he has been called by Yahweh to deliver his messages. These laments provide a unique look at the prophet's inner struggle with faith, persecution and human suffering<sup>20</sup>.

**JEREMIAH AND THE EXILES**

Jeremiah's letter was addressed to the exiles that had been to Babylon in the first deportation of 597 BC. The immediate purpose was to allay a dangerous revolutionary agitation which had sprung up among the exiles in sympathy with a projected rebellion which was being fermented in Jerusalem. Jeremiah's letter employed the exiles to settle in Babylon and live normal lives. Though, his letter is of great social, political and religious significance. It gives some idea of the kind of life which the exiles should live in exile such as; building homes for themselves, tilling the soil and children production<sup>21</sup>. Jeremiah in his revelations to the people of Judah as a result of not abating social injustice among them shows that the exile was permitted by Yahweh and it would be long as their punishment for the wickedness and apostasy of the people of Judah. It also appears that the exiles had freedom of locomotion and association as well as allowed to carry on prophetic activity. More significant, the social aspect of their lives was the religious ideas which the prophet imported.

Jeremiah asked the exiles to pray for their oppressors, it looks that this is the only place in the whole of the Old Testament where one finds this idea of praying for the enemies. However, Jeremiah the demolisher of false hope offered positive hope, for the exiles as an interim (Jer. 29:10-14) beyond which lay God's future. Thus, unexpected is hope in Jeremiah that some have



doubted that he had any as Jerusalem was falling, he attested his belief in the future of his people, and on the soil of Palestine; by buying real estate (Jer. 32:6-15), declaring that houses, fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land<sup>22</sup>. Truly, this was scarcely hope, but a sheer triumph of faith in Yahweh's purposes over Jeremiah's own hopelessness but in a new redemptive act (Jer. 31:31-34) Yahweh would again call his people as he once had from Egypt and forgiving their sins, would make with them a new covenant, inscribing its law on their hearts.

### **JEREMIAH AND RELIGIO-POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF THE STATE**

Jeremiah's religio-political activity involvement came in the year 594 BC when the Egyptian agents formed a coalition consisting of Edom, Moab, Amon and Phoenicia against Babylonian. Emissaries were sent to Zedekiah to join their revolutionary movement but Jeremiah stepped in and discouraged the king. At the command of Yahweh, he made thongs and bars' yoke and put them on his neck prophesying that it was Yahweh's demand for his people (Israel) to submit to Babylon<sup>23</sup>. He further prophesying that from the time being Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's weapon to subject and torment his people for their social illness then, Plotting against him was to revolt against Yahweh; "why should this city become a desolate? Then, serve the king of Babylon and live" (Jer. 27:17)<sup>24</sup>. Although, Jeremiah was countered and encountered conflict with the nationalistic prophets led by Hananiah who pronounced that Nebuchadnezzar's punitive measure of 597BC was a temporary setback and that Yahweh would break his yoke, as well return the exiles and the Temple's treasures, including king Jehoiachin would be back to Jerusalem.

He dramatically took off the bars yoke on Jeremiah's neck and broke it saying, "so shall Yahweh break the yoke of the Babylonian king from the neck of all nations"<sup>25</sup>. To counteract this, Jeremiah remade a yoke of iron and said; "an iron yoke of servitude to Nebuchadnezzar", the yoke would not be broken by human effort because he (Nebuchadnezzar) was an instrument of Yahweh's purpose. Thus, King Zedekiah did not join the revolt in 594 BC. In 588 BC, another revolt was instituted by Egypt, this time; it was centers in Amon and Judah. Then, a siege was laid by Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem. However, Jeremiah never wavered in his conviction that only solution was the people's surrender<sup>26</sup>.

It is showed from the above view that Jeremiah was a prophet and a state man who advocated unwavering submission to his people and this may be interpreted as enlightened and justified political judgment, and a clear perception of the forces that were shaping the immediate future. It must be recognized clearly that Jeremiah was fundamentally sure that Yahweh, the sovereign Lord was using Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar as his instrument to correct social injustice among them and for them to ameliorate their ways.

### **JEREMIAH'S LEADERSHIP ROLES' ADMISSION AS A PANACEA TO NIGERIA SOCIAL INJUSTICE**

The major problem confronting our nation Nigeria today is the high level of social injustice which has characterized all sectors in the nation. In fact, our recent exposure to social injustice such as high level of embezzlement, corruption, arson and looting, mass killing by the Fulani

herdsmen, bribery, dishonesty, false judgment in our law courts, money laundry, maltreatment by our political leaders, human trafficking and severer levels of servitude that gains ascendancy in Nigeria, just like the days of Jeremiah has motivated the researcher to question why social injustice saturated our nation (Nigeria) at high levels which has sold the nation into slavery under severer contemporary elected Nebuchadnezzar to govern us and the own nation becomes hell, unbearable to live. Innocent and lesser class citizens were living in agony even the so called religious leaders were also involved in committing advance levels of injustice which jeopardize, crumble and kill the wealth, welfare and franchise of the citizens. None of these religious leaders stand like prophet Jeremiah to disseminate God's mind even at the point of death to the citizen of this nation, most especially to our political leaders, to rebuke and fortified their evils. Hence, there is urgent need for leaders of all sectors who possessed some traits such as; responsibility, adaptability, assertiveness, charismatic, skill development, not aggressive to control, high tolerance for frustration, God fearing etc like prophet Jeremiah who would rise up for the deliverance of this nation from her current worst situation. This paper therefore concluded and recommended that the fact that people (citizens) of this nation believe and cast their last hope on their religious, political, social and economic leaders should be the more reasons why leaders should discharge their duties immensely without bias. People holding power, depending on their degree, should not entertain timid, scare and ashame to relate the mind of God and the theories stipulated in the laws of the nation to their people just like prophet Jeremiah.

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