

The Prophecy of Agabus in Acts 11:2-30 and its Lessons for Leadership Pro-Activeness Towards Disaster Management

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Abstract

Disaster is on the increase with its grave consequences for the survival, dignity and livelihood of the citizenry, particularly in developing nations. It is eroding many nations' hard-won development gains and its risk is becoming a global concern with its impact and actions in one region having impact on risks in another, and vice versa. An in-depth look into disaster and disaster management proves that geographical situation, people's unawareness and lack of preparedness are not only among the main causes of severe suffering from the effects of natural disasters, but leadership reaction and response to disasters being more reactive than proactive in almost all disaster prone countries. There is then the dire need for a proper understanding of disaster management and provision of the way out. An exegetic appraisal of Agabus' prophecy and its lessons could serve as proactive measures for leadership toward disaster management. Thus, creating an awareness of biblical end-time events as well as encouraging spiritual sensitivity to divine prophetic instructions and warnings for leadership.

Keywords: Prophetic Instruction, Leadership, Proactiveness, Disaster, Disaster management

Introduction

Disaster, loss and damage are on the increase globally with grave consequences for the survival, dignity and livelihood of the citizenry, particularly the poor. It also erodes nations' hard-won development gains. Disaster risk is increasingly of global concern and its impact and actions in one region can have an impact on risks in another, and vice versa. It has increased vulnerabilities in relations to changing demographics, technological and socio-economic conditions, unplanned urbanization, and development within high-risk zones, under-development, environmental degradation, climate variability, climate change, geological hazards, competition for scarce resources, and the impact of epidemics in disaster prone countries (NPDPM 2010).

The geographical situation, people's lack of awareness and preparedness in developing countries are among the main causes of suffering from the effects of natural disasters. Meanwhile, leadership reaction and response to disasters have been more reactive than proactive in almost all disaster-prone countries, particularly the underdeveloped and developing ones. There is a need to reverse the trend of increasing worldwide vulnerability, by providing access to knowledge and technology, increasing the public awareness, and considering managing the disaster as the main and key factor in development (Izadkhah & Hosseini 2008).

Based on the existing evidence, most times these vulnerabilities are the results of human errors rather than forces of nature, due to leadership witlessness to biblical injunctions, as well as spiritual insensitivity to prophetic instructions and warnings. Prophecy was not exclusive to any nation in ancient past; notable leaders and kings regularly consulted prophets when making decisions of national importance. Prophecy is a mechanism for God to communicate with the country or communities guided through the leadership that serves by divine right (Crvalho 2010).

Therefore, this article looks at the prophecy of Agabus as communicating God's direct message as a guide and warning to the community. It will then develop proactive measures and lessons that could help the leadership's response to the vulnerable communities, their livelihoods and settlements from the impacts of disastrous natural hazards.

Concept of Prophetic Instruction

Prophecy, in its etymological derivation, denotes that the Hebrew word for prophet is *nabhi*. Various proposals have been made by exegetes as regards the root of the word prophet. Vos (1975) explains the meaning of the first two radicals in the root-group as *nun* and *Beth*. The meaning fixed upon is to *spring*, to *gush forth*, or *passively to be sputtered, bubbled or gush against*. The *nabhi* therefore might be *the one gush upon by the spirit (so keil)*. Second, recourse has the Arabic connotation, in it *naba'a* means to *announce*. However, to *announce* in that *nabhi* is restricted to the announcer for the Deity, whilst the verb, in order is to give us help, which signifies announcement in general. The verb is derived from *nabhi* in its technical religious sense, which latter might have had another etymology. Third derivation, from the Assyrian, has been advocated, *Nabu* here signified to *call*, to *proclaim*, and to *announce*. The ideas of gushing, springing are likewise represented in the root: *manbau*, which is a fountain while *nibhu*, is a sprout. The concurrence of the Hebrew, Arabic and Assyrian in expressing this idea in the same root to which *nabhi* belongs is certainly remarkable (Matthews, 2001).

According to Udoette (2007), prophecy in Paul is a charism. Suffice it to say that for Paul charisms constitute God's call, addressed to each and every Christian in view of the Church, coupled with the ability to perform such services. To Sullivan (1982), charisms are the principles of individuation or differentiation of every Christian and so determine who plays what role in the Christian community, the body of Christ (*soma tou christou*). For Paul, "A Christian community without

the charisms operative in its members would be unthinkable; it would no longer be like a living body, and hence no longer a body of Christ". It is within the context of his theological reflection on the charisms (1Cor. 14: 12-14) that Paul discusses prophecy and its functions. Paul contends that *ho de propheteuon anthropos lalei* (he who prophesies to men) especially believers, speak to human beings for their moral up building, encouragement, and consolation. In general terms, prophecy is 'speaking the intention of God, interpretation of God's message to his people, and applying it to particular situations' (Nmah, 2009).

The Prophecy of Agabus in Acts 11:27-30

In the early days of the Church, Agabus was one of the several prophets in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-28). Prophets played an important role in the beginning of the Church. Paul listed Prophets along with Apostles as part of the foundation of the Church (Ephesians 2:20). Apostles and Prophets were given by God to equip the Saints and build up the body (Ephesians 4:11-12). The role of the Prophets was to reveal the secret things from God (Amos 3:7; Revelation 10:7). Agabus' prophecy was about a widespread famine that would severely impact the brethren in Judea; to which the Church in Antioch responded.

Acts 11:27-30. Now at this time some Prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸One of them named Agabus, stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. ²⁹And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. ³⁰And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

In this prophecy, Agabus indicated that a famine would severely impact the brethren in Judea. Luke also noted when this would take place-during the reign of Claudius (Acts 11:28). The brethren in Antioch responded by sending aid to the elders of the churches where the brethren were affected (Acts 11:29-30). This implies that:

1. The appearance of Agabus in the Church of Antioch exemplifies the importance and the functionality of prophecy in the Early Church. Luke mentions them several times in Acts (13:1; 15:32; 21:9-10). Paul lists prophets as belonging to a God-ordained function in the Church (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). The Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, and he ranks the latter next after Apostles (Ephesians 2:20). He also recognizes Prophets as having an important charismatic function in the community (1 Corinthians 14: 29-33; Ephesians 3:5).

2. At Antioch, Agabus prophesied through the Spirit that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world (Acts 11:28). Luke asserts that the Holy Spirit inspired him, and thus his prophecy has important meaning for the Church to prepare ahead. God has implanted and strategically located some men and women in the Church to be His mouthpiece, thereby providing divine direction, warning and succor to the entire community, a nation, and even the world at large. In the heat of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020, there were pockets of video clips of some prophecies warning about an impending global disaster, flying around in the social media. While these may not be all true, perhaps if they had been believed and acted upon, the crises would have been mitigated.

3. The Antioch church leadership and the disciples believed the Prophet and the prophecy, and organized a relief fund for the 'Mother-Church' (the Church in Jerusalem. Luke writes, "As each one was able, [they] decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea" (Acts 11:29). The

members apparently contributed money and goods to this special fund. In a later collection, organized by Paul for the churches in Judea, he advised that the Greeks should set aside a sum of money in keeping with their income (1 Corinthians 16:2).

4. The Antioch church leadership prepared and encouraged the brethren to contribute relief fund, sent it to the Elders in Jerusalem for distribution through Barnabas and Paul. Paul brought the relief fund to Jerusalem; this was probably referred to in one of the visits recorded in Galatians 1:18 and 2:1. (Sweeney, 2005; Andy Sochor, 2010; Carvalho, 2010).

Disaster

Disaster is the occurrence of a sudden or major misfortune which disrupts the basic fabric and normal functioning of a society or community. An event or series of events which gives rise to casualties or damage or loss of property, infrastructure, essential services or means of livelihood on a scale which is beyond the normal capacity of the affected communities to cope with unaided. Disaster also describes a catastrophic situation in which the normal patterns of life or eco-systems have been disrupted and extraordinary, emergency interventions are required to save and preserve human lives or the environment (William, Waugh Jr. and Gregory 2006). A disaster occurs when a disruption reaches such proportions that there are injuries, deaths or property damage, and when the disruption affects many or all of the community's essential functions such as water supply, electricity power, roads and hospitals. There are five major characteristics of disasters that make them hard to overcome as highlighted by Donahue and Joyce, 2001:

Disasters are large, rapid-onset incidents relative to the size and resources of an affected jurisdiction. These harm a high percentage of the jurisdiction's property or population, or directly impact the resources and personnel available to

respond and damage occurs quickly relative to the jurisdiction's ability to avert or avoid it.

Disasters are uncertain with respect to both their occurrences and their outcomes. The uncertainty that arises because hazards that present a threat of disaster are hard to identify, the causal relationship between hazards and disaster events is poorly understood, and risks are hard to measure. One could not specify possible damage, or a given type and severity of damage that will occur.

Disasters present emergency planners, emergency managers, and policy makers with countervailing pressures. Different issues arise at the same time to be addressed by the government; some often oppose government regulations. It becomes imperative for various levels of government to address the balance between providing relief to the victims of disasters and the need to avoid encouraging risk-accepting behavior.

Disasters are dynamic events. Disasters evolve as they progress, and they change in response to human actions and natural forces. This makes It is imperative that response strategies be flexible, highly technical requiring specialized expertise for both policy development and policy implementation and argues for the value of analysis in helping responders understand and adapt to the changing conditions they face.

Disasters are relatively rare. Most communities experience few, if any, disasters during the average time in office of a political official or the average time of residence of a citizen. Thus, many communities are unlikely to have recent experience with disasters, and governments may feel little imperative to build their disaster-management capacity, even if the hazards are real and the risks formidable (Waugh , William L ., Jr . 1993).

These inherent qualities of disasters leave governments in a quandary about what to do to manage them. More specifically, the magnitude, scope, uncertainty, dynamism, and infrequency of disasters give rise to some important questions about the management.

Disaster Management

Disaster management is the effort of communities or organizations to plan for and coordinate all personal and materials required to either mitigate the effects of, or recover from, natural or man-made disasters. Disaster Management is the coordination and integration of all activities necessary to build, sustain and improve the capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to and recover from threatening or actual natural or human-induced disasters. It is a multijurisdictional, multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary and multi-resource initiative (Waugh and William 1993) . Disaster planning should aim to prevent disaster from occurring, and failing that, should develop a good action plan to mitigate or lessen the effects of any disaster. In order to avoid, or reduce significant losses to a business, disaster managers should work to identify and anticipate potential risks, hopefully reducing their probability of occurring. In the event that an emergency does occur, managers should have a plan prepared to mitigate the effects of that emergency, as well as to ensure Business Continuity of critical operations post-incident (Coombs, 2007).

Disaster management plans and procedures should include the identification of appropriately trained staff members responsible for decision-making when a disaster occurs. Training plans should state the nature and frequency of training and testing. Testing of a plan's effectiveness should be carried out regularly. In instances where several organizations occupy the same space, joint disaster plans, formally agreed to by all parties, should be put into place.

The paramount goal of disaster management activities is to reduce, as much as possible, the degree to which a community's condition is worsened by a disaster relative to its pre-disaster condition. There are many actions undertaken by participants in disaster management that support this goal both pre-disaster (to forestall or reduce potential damage) and post-disaster (to recover from actual damage), and ideally these activities would reduce the potential effects of a disaster to the point of elimination (Waugh and William 2006).

Disaster Management Approach

Successfully diffusing a crisis requires an understanding of how to handle a crisis before it occurs. As leaders take significant time strategizing on how to achieve business or academic objectives according to the organization's vision and mission, the same vigor ought to be used in planning for crises. They should not wait to use a reactive approach; they ought to integrate crises management into strategic planning processes and statements of corporate excellence. The way teams are vital in performing varied organizational tasks, strategic planners should come up with various crises management teams with clearly defined team tasks should a crisis occur. Training and workshops in crises management should be provided. Every leader and organizational members should be involved in crises simulations in order to transform the organization from being crisis prone to being crisis prepared (Waugh and William 2006).

Leadership Pro-Activeness towards Disaster Management

The first step in mitigating the hazardous events and reducing vulnerability is to recognize the importance of preventive concepts rather than responsive strategy, thus addressing hazards and vulnerability before rather than after events. Therefore, performing development acts while avoiding disasters is a key issue for the safety of the community in future. Preparing for the future hazardous and extreme events

by all means ranging from education and training at all levels of community up to preparing various disaster scenarios for managing the emergency situations which can be created by future events (Izadkhah and Hosseini 2008). In maintaining preparedness in the case of disaster which usually happens in relatively long time distances, leaders are advised on the following:

- Apply the Concept of Disaster Prevention

The concept of disaster prevention is proactive in nature as it reduces the probability of loss before it becomes a real threat or tragedy, and minimizes the magnitude of damage. It is cost-effective, since it reduces emergency, recovery, and reconstruction expenditures. Consequently, it is important to prioritize disaster prevention, making this strategy a part of, or even central to the development process in disaster-prone as well as developing countries. The process could be achieved by enacting appropriate policies and development plans, implementing useful and effective tools and measures, education, training and information, and stakeholder participation (Davis, Hosseini and Izadkhah 2003).

- Shifting to Preventive Ideology

In recent years, a more comprehensive approach to disaster risk management has emerged, this approach has three distinct but interrelated components: hazard assessment, vulnerability analysis, and enhancement of management capacity, which is more closely integrated with the ongoing development processes. Leadership should not view disasters as extreme events created entirely by natural forces but as unresolved problems of development, and the risks (physical, social, and economic) unmanaged (or mismanaged) for a long time will lead to occurrence of disasters (Hosseini and Izadkhah 2008)..

Leaders should influence the way disaster management programmes are being planned and financed, by changing the approaches from relief and response to risk management. Attach initiatives aimed at reducing social and economic vulnerability and investing in long-term mitigation activities, which are funded by donors and development banks on humanitarian assistance and relief, as well as on post-disaster reconstruction (Yodmani 2001).

In shifting from relief and response attitude to preventive ideology, the following actions should be embarked on:

- All development acts considering the avoidance of disasters should be performed
- The vulnerability of all existing buildings and facilities should be reduced
- Acquiring and maintaining the preparedness.

The leadership should ensure that the principles of the resistant design for disaster should be followed in design of building and facilities, the location of buildings and facilities, particularly the critical ones should be selected based on hazard microzonation maps, in order to withstand higher loads (Ghafory-Ashtiany, and Hosseini, 2007).

Developing Proactive Means in Disaster Management

The trend of increasing worldwide vulnerability to natural hazards can be reversed by providing access to knowledge and technology, increasing the public awareness, and considering the safety measures as the main and key factors. Therefore, there is a need for leaders to establish a culture of safety among various groups of the society, which could be achieved through the long-term process of education for raising the public awareness, to create sensitiveness and belief on the fact of disasters in order to take an effective action. In developing

proactive means in disaster management, leaders are encouraged to:

Develop Structural safety:

Structural safety is also a very important element in prevention. Structural safety, itself, has two aspects:

- Design and construction of future buildings and facilities based on specific standards to prevent them from disastrous damages.
- Increasing the seismic safety of existing weak buildings and facilities by decreasing their structural vulnerability through seismic retrofit. (Parsizadeh et al 2007).

Disaster Education and Training

Education is one of the best media for making a community prepared for disasters. Leaders could organize educational program for young children and adults on disasters, incorporating various aspects and materials on health, safety and hazards into the formal school curriculum. This is to increase the knowledge and understanding of children and adult about risk and teach preparedness on how to react in times of disasters (Twigg 2003).The purpose was to include the information that may be used by children as the next generation in order to equip them as future leaders in raising community awareness (Izadkhah and Hosseini 2005).

Improving the Level of Preparedness and its Maintenance

Leadership is encouraged to establish The “Disaster and Safety Drill” programme with the cooperation of Ministry of Education, and other Disaster management bodies. The purpose of these drills is to prepare students and other populace for the appropriate and timely responses during disaster (Izadkhah and Hosseini 2005). In addition,

information and Communication Technology (ICT) could be used increasingly for disaster mitigation as means of disseminating information. An app could be designed for disaster prevention and management. Communication technologies, skills and media are important tools in linking the scientists, disaster management authorities, and the public and can be useful in educating people on disaster preparedness, getting information about upcoming hazards and providing the officials with necessary information. These different tools will inform people about hazards, help in assessing the damage, collecting information, coordinate the activities and to motivate people, etc. (Hosseini and Izadkhan 2006).

Preparing Communities roles in the Face of Disaster

Leaders should enlighten the local community on the role to play in the success of the pre-disaster management. To cope with the disaster, the local community's structures shall perform the following functions in disaster management following these five key guidelines as a precautionary measure (Abidin and Khairuldin 2018):

- Ensure commitment and preparedness of community members to disaster management by getting information about the kind of disaster in your area.
- Sensitize and build the capacity of communities that constitute disaster fronts in preparation for initial response to disaster threats.
- Make sure the disaster alert system is active, for local disaster preparation information.
- Mobilize community resources and build community capacity and resilience to prepare for, respond to and mitigate the impact of disasters.
- Remove the barrier and make sure all loose ends are tightly closed so that there will be no obstruction during escape.

- With technical support from all disaster management bodies, community structures shall develop and adopt disaster management strategies.
- Ensure that all members of your family know how to act in emergency at home (Disaster Portal, 2014).

Encouraging Volunteerism in Disaster Management

Volunteers in Disaster Management are individuals or groups with specialized or basic training in different areas of disaster management. Volunteerism refers to rendering of time, skills, experience or resources for the advancement of disaster management. Volunteer group can serve an important purpose in this situation as it could cause major changes in existing communities (Sugiman, 2000). They shall be established in collaboration with the available disaster management bodies to tap into the huge knowledge and experiences of specialized skills of personnel living or working in the country. Volunteers in disaster management shall perform the following functions, amongst others:-

- Assist in search and rescue operations in case of disaster.
- Function as emergency personnel that can render specialized assistance to disaster survivors.
- Give useful information of places prone to both human-induced and natural disasters.
- Partake in simulation exercises.
- Help in direct distribution of relief materials in emergency situations.
- Take part in activities that will lead to disaster risk reduction measures in the community.

Volunteers shall perform their duties in an organized manner and under the supervision of and guidance of the disaster bodies in preparing for, preventing and responding to disasters. The leadership shall sponsor the training in Basic Life Support, disaster preparedness and response, relief,

prevention, mitigation, contingency planning, recovery, capacity assessment, water and sanitation (Watanabe, 2000).

Preparing Disaster Emergency relief Centers

A disaster preparedness plan can take several forms, ranging from a broad mitigation and preparedness strategy to a detailed contingency plan for responding to a particular hazard. In this case, leaders' operational priorities centers on saving human life, meeting people's emergency needs (principally medical care, food, shelter and clothing) and restore facilities that are essential for health, safety and welfare (e.g. hospitals, water and sanitation, power and transport). In preparing disaster emergency relief center to meet the above mentioned plan, rehabilitation and reconstruction should be included in the proactive strategic plans, which should be properly integrated with emergency response (Mowforth 2001).

Conclusion

The geographical situation, people's unawareness and lack of preparedness in developing countries are not only among the main causes of severe suffering from the effects of natural disasters. In most cases, leadership reaction and response to disasters have been more reactive than proactive in almost all disaster-prone countries. However, most times these vulnerabilities are the results of human errors rather than forces of nature, due to leadership unawareness to biblical end-time events, as well as spiritual insensitivity to prophetic instructions and warnings. Lessons are developed from Agabus' prophetic instruction as proactive measures to help leaders reach vulnerable communities, their livelihoods and settlements from the impacts of disastrous natural hazards. There is the need to develop and apply the concept of disaster prevention, shifting to preventive ideology by developing structural safety through disaster education and training. In addition, improve the level of preparedness and its

maintenance, encourage communities' input and volunteerism in Disaster Management as well as establishing disaster emergency relief centers.

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