The Implication of Amos' Prophecies for Social, Moral, Religious and Injustice in Nigeria

Oluwafemi Joseph Alao

Abstract

The focus of these paper is to attempt the social, Moral and Injustice in Nigeria, using Prophets Amos' as a paradigm for the Pastor's in Nigeria. At first the researcher will address the empirical analyses of the country, the Economics, Social, Religious and Injustice at the time of Amos' which average of Nigerian are also passing through in the country today, the function and duties of the Prophet Amos' which will propel the mind of the pastor's in Nigeria today.

The oracle of prophets Amos' concerning the social, moral and injustice of the nation which will be used as a medium to disseminate the mind of God to the nation by our pastor's, and the relevance of Amos' message to the situation in Nigeria which will be implication for the society at large. And at the end the researcher recommend that Nigeria government must fight corruption and corrupt people in the society, Nigeria government should fight poverty and unemployment Pastor's, Prophets must speak the mind of God, Pastors and Prophets should update their members on sound doctrine, They must also always be on the vanguard of promoting social change. Christian scholars should encourage publication on the area of moral responsibilities in the society and for the society. These will help people to be aware of their social right and responsibility in the society.

INTRODUCTION

The federal republic of Nigeria is a federal constitutional republic in West African, also refer as the giant of Africa. Bordering Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the north. Its coast in the south lies on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. And comprises 36 state with the capital in Abuja.

Nigeria has fertile agricultural land, extensive mineral resources and vast oil reserve highly dependent on income from export of crude oil and gas income accounts for 95% foreign exchange earnings. But much revenue had been lost through capital flight by multinationals, squandered on prestige projects, embezzled by a series of corrupt rulers and wasted through inability to harvest and refine all that is drilled.[367]

'Bunkering' (illegal siphoning by local militia and gangs) and other disruption from disgruntled locals, who see no benefit from the untold oil wealth, often, bring production to a standstill, threatening the entire nations economy. Ubiquitous at every level of society, corruption is a massive evil in the country.[368]

Repayment of external debt is nearly done, heralding a potential increase in economic progress despite reforms, central commercial banks remain fragile and need stabilizing, and infrastructure is often sagging. Yet, majority of her population live below poverty line.

Independent from Britain as a federation in 1960, component states now 36 with a federal capital area. Vast difference between the feudal, predominantly Muslim north and the more developed, largely Christian south plus, the rivalry among Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo constantly generate tension Muslim machination to extend political economic control are the main causes for the turbulent post-independence history of tension, violence, coupes and civil war.[369] Many analysts are of the opinion that leadership is one of the major reasons for the underdevelopment in Africa. S.O. Abogunrin, Christian theologian put it pointedly like this:

"Why is Africa poor and why has it refused to develop technologically in spite of the natural and human resources? The reason for the political, social, economic and spiritual crisis facing Africa is bad Leadership".[370]

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[367] Operation world, 7th Edition (2010) Personal CD-ROM- Pdf/ History of Nigeria.

[368]Ibid, 643.

[369]Ibid, 646.

[370] Abogunrin, Samuel, Oyinloye. "Globalization, *Technology and Theological Education:* Keynote address delivered at the Biennial conference of WAATI, Buruku, Jos Nigeria, 2nd August 2004.p. 7. It should be stated that National

Poverty has continued to overrun Nigeria largely because of the lack of commitment, on the part of our leaders, to its eradication[371]. There is a dearth in many spheres of Nigeria life.

Social, Moral, and Religious condition during the Time of Amos'

Social Condition:

The nation was divided very sharply into upper and lower classes, the former consisted of the possessors of the land and the merchants, from them were supplied the King's counselors and the administrators of Justice, the other stratum of Israelite society was composed of peasants or laborers'.[372]

Moral Condition:

This was characterized by luxury and self-indulgence on the part of the richer element. The book of Amos furnishes details, the dwellings of these men were of 'hewn stone' and somewhere ivory-fitted were built in the combination of summer house and winter house, though it would be a mistake to lay too much stress upon term which Amos employs to denote the dwellings of the upper-class is 'palace', or castle Hebrew 'armon. In the house were couches, often inlaid with 'ivory' and furnished with 'damask' cushions.[373] Food might be of choice 'lamb' or of calves of the stall, wine was drunk by the bowful the woman being drinkers are much as their husband with the choicest of oils the people anointed worse, however, than

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Development is a complex concept which includes educational, industrial, technological, medical, communication, transportation, legal and administration dimensions. The author considers the goal of the total development of a society to be better welfare of 'human' life. According to S. F. Ogundare, the major values of development are life sustenance, self-esteem and freedom from servitude. "Social studies Education and Nation Building," 3.

[371] Sonala. Olumhense, "*the African Poverty Snake-Pit," the Guardian,* Sunday, September 19, 2004, 52.

[372] S. Bendo, *the Social Structure of Ancient Israel: from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy* (Jerbs 7; Jerusalem: Simor, 1996), 345.

[373] Ibid, 324.

self-indulgence was the oppression of the weak by the strong, they 'trampled' upon the poor'. This vice exhibited itself in two special forms.[374]

Judicial or Social Condition:

There was injustice as judges accepted bribe and the oppressive creditor delivered into slavery the poor man whose debt was but the value of 'a pair shoes.'[375]

Religious Condition:

There is frequent allusion in the books, of kings to the two gold-covered images of young bulls, "symbols of strength' virility and fierceness", which were used at this time in the worship of Jehovah. These sanctuaries at Bethel and at Dan are referred to in the chapters of Amos and there were other shrines at Gilgal and Samaria, while to Beer-Sheba in the south of Judah pilgrims perhaps went even from the kingdom of north Israel.[376]

Then emerged Prophet[377] Amos in Israel in the eighth century B.C. with powerful message from God to reform the nation and eventually purify Israel from all her wickedness by pronouncing judgment on the northern kingdom so that she might change. Indeed our society needs someone like Amos to pronounce judgment for the wicked people in our nation and if our Pastors in Nigeria can emulate this act, things will be meaningful.

The Purpose of the Prophetic Ministry vis-a-vis the Pastor's Responsibility in Nigeria

[374] Brueggemann. W, *the Prophetic Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 453.*

[375] Ibid, 336.

[376] Dearman. J. A, "*Hebrew Prophecy and Social Criticism*: Some Observation for Perspective," (London: SCM, 1986), 131-132.

[377]Danny McCain*, We Believe: An introduction to Christian Doctrine, Vol. 2* (Jos: International Institute For Christian Studies, 1996), 170.

The Old Testament prophets played an important role in shaping the course and context of Israelite history and religion[378]. This is because the prophets were actively involved in the political, religious and economic life of the nation of Israel. It was through the prophets that God disclosed his intention and will to the people in politics, business and interpersonal relationship. This therefore places ancient Israelite prophets in a strategic position.[379] They stand as a watch man for their nation because they could see what people has not seen and God do speak to them as a one in the same council,[380] they also stand in the gap between the nation and the God of Israelite so these give the prophet a notable role in shaping the religious, economic and social life of their people.

These are their functions.

The Prophets as Religious Thinkers

This is one of the key functions of the Prophets in Israel because it got to a time in which the worship of Yahweh went through series of challenges.[381] It went to the extent that the worship of Yahweh had been forgotten in Israel.[382] The consequence of this is that the distinction between Yahweh and pagan gods has been obscured.[383] So people are seeing Yahweh worship as of polytheistic religion. These make the Prophet as the religious thinker to call for reform because they know the consequence of worshiping other gods. The early attempt to reform the society was carried out by the Prophets. The activities of Elijah can be understood against the backdrop of this prevailing situation. As deep religious thinkers, the prophets saw the shift of allegiance from Yahweh to the emerging world powers in ancient

[378]Griffin. N.P, *the God's of the Prophets:* An Analysis of Divine Action. (Sheffield: Academic Press. 1997), 34.

[379] Ibid, 36.

[380]D. A. Akao, *Old Testament Theology* (Ibadan: Centre for External Studies, 1992), 39.

[381] J. Bimson, *The World of the Old Testament* (London: Scripture Union. 1998), 54.

[382]Godwin o. Akintola, *Prophecy and Social Change in the Old Testament,* (Ilorin: Amazing grace prints media, 2008), 110.

[383]A. O. Dada, *the Prophets, (*Abuja: National Open University of Nigeria, 2009), 27.

Near East as an abomination.[384] The prophet sees Yahweh as the Lord over all creation and all powers were subject to him. Also Prophet Amos fought rigorously for the act of idolatry during his time, and at last we could see the entire Prophet admonishing the people to serve Yahweh according to His commandment that He alone should be worship.[385]

The Prophets as Social Activists

An activist is someone who stands vigorously for social change.[386]So in the light of this, the Prophet stands for social change, and they are actively involved in the political life of Israel as a nation,[387] they are active in the appointment and deposition of kings, the Prophets were also helping man see the standards God as set for His righteousness to bring change in social and moral reformations of the people.[388] The same Samuel who nominated the peasant farmer's son, Saul, to be king with the words, "Yahweh has anointed you over his people" also had him removed with the following words, "the Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to one who is better than you."(1 Sam 15: 28).

The next king, David, was fortunate because after the Bathsheba episode the same Nathan who, after the conquest of Jerusalem, had promised him that his dynasty would be eternally established on the throne, only also rebuke him: Samuel anointed David immediately after the dispute with Saul.[389] Elijah encouraged Jeroboam to rebel. Even Nathan's speech attacking David indirectly promoted Absalom insurrection. Moreover, the end of Omri's dynasty was the responsibility of Prophet Elisha. He was the one who

[384] K. P. Kareem. "*Ancient Prophets in Israel" a* handout (Igbaja: Ecwa theological seminary, 2013), 20.

[385] In Deuteronomy 11: 22-28 one could see how God admonished the Israelite not worship other gods. In Hebrew language we have what we call infinitive absolute which have the sense of re-enforce the verbal either that they shall always guide the law. See. K. P. Kareem, *Hebrew2 without tears handout* (Igbaja: Ecwa Theological Seminary), 12.

[386] Oxford University, *Oxford English Mini dictionary 6th edition, www.mobi-systems.com 2000-200.*

[387] A. O. Dada, *the Prophets, (*Abuja: National Open University of Nigeria, 2009), 27.

[388] Baba. D. Baba, *A Biblical Guide in the Study of the Minor Prophets* (Niger: Pyla-Mak Services pub, 2008), 7.

[389] Ibid 8.

accomplished the task of cleansing the political terrain that had long been defiled by this dynasty (2 Kings 9:10).[390] One could see vividly that if Pastors in this 21st century can emulate the ancient Prophet the society will be change for the better.

The Prophets as Social Reformers

Social change as a social phenomenon is defined as alterations in basic structure of a social group or society.[391] Israel had developed in economics and sociology because by the time Solomon introduced tax and the civil service, it brought about a further disintegration of the old social order within the time of Israel. It even went to a time in which the landowners who were living in the towns, gained control over the poor masses and the result were severe social injustice. The villagers are increasingly poor because they are the one working for the little but influential landowners. The Prophet condemned the act of injustice and those who exploited and despised the poor.[392] Community is not a human invention. It finds its true and original meaning in God, who is one the only self-existence,[393] so our society is of God not human invention but God has given us the power to be able to govern ourselves in good atmosphere.

The Prophets as Military Strategists

Anytime the Israelite are about to wage war, the act of consulting the prophet is always on their minds, one could see these in 1 King 20, in which a war between the Northern Israelite and the Syrian, besieged Samaria and boast to his Northern Israelite opponents that the rubble of Samaria would be sufficient "to fulfill the hollow-hands all the people who follow me". Though the situation seems hopeless, Even in numerical figure the superiority of the Syria is indisputable. Surprisingly, Prophet Elijah came to Ahab king of Israel and announced "Have you seen all this roving pack?

[390] Ibid 9.

[391] S. O. Abogunrin, *African Journal of Biblical Studies* (Ibadan: department of religious studies, 2010), 102.

[392] A. O. Dada, *the Prophets, (*Abuja: National Open University of Nigeria, 2009), 42.

[393] S. W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, (Kenya: Word Alive pub, 2012), 147.

Behold I will give it into your hand this day, and you shall know that I am Yahweh"[394] (1king 20: 13).

The Oracle of the Prophet Amos'

Amos' message was given at a time of prosperity. It announced impending doom and judgment, for with the prosperity had come its attached vices of extortion, hypocrisy, corruption and social injustice. Frequently the prophets complained about the times of prosperity (Isa. 1:17-23; 3:14; Mic. 2: 1-2, 8-11. 3:6). In Hosea 12:9, Ephraim says, "Yes, I have become rich, I have amassed a fortune," and according to Isaiah, "The land is full of silver and gold, and treasures past counting (Isa. 2:7). A major cause for complaint was the control of the land by the wealthy in such a way that it led to the impoverishment of the poor. The officials of the monarchy drew their profits from their posts and the kings' favours. The wealth of the rich was badly distributed and obtained through injustice (cf. Mic. 2:2; Hos. 12:8).[395]

The basic faults in society which aroused Amos were the luxurious life of the richer classes, the injustice of the courts, oppression of the poor and weak, immorality, and hypocrisy in worship. First there was the luxury and indulgence in extravagant building, in food and drink and in idleness, all of which were helping to sap the national character. The extravagance of the buildings was referred to by Amos when he speaks of the summer and winter houses (3: 1 5) some of them constructed from hewn stone, which was unusual (5:11; cf. Mic. 6:15). The fittings of the houses of the rich were also considered worthy of mention. There were costly furnishings, beds inlaid with ivory and provided with damask cushions (3:12-15; 6:4). The occupants of these homes would appear to have had as their *motto* Isaiah's saying: "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die!" They excelled in drinking wine, often from sacral vessels (2:8, 9, 12; 6:6), and their womenfolk, the 'cows of Bashan' (4:1) drank as much as their husbands (4:1; 6:6). Their banqueting tables were provided with the choicest foods;

[394] Godwin O. Akintola, *Prophecy and Social Change in the Old Testament,* (Ilorin: Amazing grace prints media, 2008), 104.

[395] Stephen J. Bramer, *The Literary Genre of the Book of Amos*, (Journal: Bibliotheca sacra volume: BSAC 156:621, 1999), 47.

lambs, calves, fatted beasts (5:22; 6:4). The prophet sums up the luxury of the wealthy in 6:4-6.[396]

The prophets often complain about the venality of the judges (Is. 1:23; Mich. 3: 1-3, 9-11; 7:1-3) and Amos is no exception for he found injustice in every aspect of Israelite life. The judges' act corruptly in the oppression of the poor for the sake of money: even for a pair of shoes. The judges receive money for the betraying of the innocent and the cheating of the needy out of their land: 'they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes' (2:6). Their transgressions are many and the true administrator of justice 'at the gate' is hated. Those who seek justice are trampled underfoot through the very institutions which are intended to secure justice (5:7; 12 cf. Lam. 3: 19). The message of the Lord was addressed to the corrupt administrators in 6:12.

Amos charged Israel with injustice, avarice, oppression, immorality, profanity, blasphemy, and sacrilege: seven deadly sins. These same sins characterize our society today. We are in danger of doing what the Israelites in Amos' day of material prosperity did. We can wrongly conclude that our prosperity is a reward from God: that He is blessing us for our goodness.

The Implication of Amos' Message for Pastor's in Nigerian

The historical context of the book of Amos was a time where the powerful and rich in Israel completely outweigh the poor people. The rich are explained as "laying upon beds of ivory, stretched comfortably on their couches, they eat lamb taken from the flock and calves from the stall!" (Amos 6:4). This shows the judgment Amos has of the Israelites and demonstrates how important Amos holds Social Justice.

It also exhibits the context of the time, showing that it was a time of power and money and those who had neither were treated accordingly. This is written during a time after Solomon's death where there was a border between the south and North, and the north had its own capital Samaria and

[396] Gerhard Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos*, (Grand Rapids: Baker 1991), 171.

king. Jeroboam II had been the king of the North for a long time, he was very powerful and no one was strong enough to attack him.[397]

The writing in this book is based on Amos emphasizing social justice.[398] Amos condemns all acts of unjust and believed that God would punish Israel for the behavior of the powerful people. Throughout the book is quite evident that Amos is harsh and blunt. Newland suggests that Amos was the prophet who would roar like a lion.[399] Amos is angered by the actions of the people of Israel, especially the rich and powerful and believed that he was designated to protect all the people of Israel, the poor from being hungry and the rich from being greedy.

The main theme of Amos is the idea that Israel will be destroyed because of the actions of its people. Israel will not listen to the word of God so will consequently be destroyed. Amos' ambition is to spread the word of the God and for the people of Israel to follow God, rather than the powers, such as the King and Priests. After so long trying to preach the word of the Lord, Amos is sent back to the southern Kingdom of Judah by the High Priest.

Another theme is the way that it angers Amos that people who go to religious ceremonies do not practice the ways of God, justice especially (9: 1-2). The main messages I saw delivered from the Book of Amos was that he was the prophet of justice and that he spread the word of God to try and equalize people, so that there was no rich and no poor. Amos 2:7 demonstrates hatred for the rich stating 'They trample the heads of the weak into the dust of the earth, and force the lowly out of the way'. A common and stand out theme of the book of Amos is God's destruction of Israel is due to the injustice and hypocrisy of the wealthy and the ruling class. Also

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[397] R. Crotty and B. Kiley, *The Beginning: The Story of God's People* (Blackburn: Harper Collins Religious, 1998), 12.

[398] All these judgment result from the people's many sins- sins that entailed rebellion and failure to live up to God's standards. In the light of the corruption of the times, the prudent man said nothing, because anything he might have said would have been unavailing. See [398] Kenneth L. Barker John R. Kohlenberher III, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* Abridged Edition Old Testament, (U.S.A: Zondervan, Grand Rapids 1994), 1447.

[399] M. Newland, *A Popular Guide Through the Old Testament* (Winona: St Mary's Press, 1999), 7.

the judgment that Amos made of the people of Israel who were in charge and had all the power, these are the people that ultimately, with the judgment of Amos saw Israel be destroyed.

The book of Amos is one of the most eloquent cries for justice and righteousness to be found in the Bible. And it came through a humble shepherd who dared to deliver GOD's message to the wealthy and influential people of his day. His message is just as timely for our world, since GOD still places a higher value on justice and righteousness than on silver and gold and the things that money will buy.[400]

Amos stresses that rectitude and righteousness are essential to a healthy society.[401] Religion is something more than the observance of determined festivals and the celebration of sacred assemblies; true religion demands an upright life. The way that a human treats others, reveals how his relationship with GOD is. Jesus said that the greatest of all the commandments was to love GOD. The second was to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is the message of Amos, and one which we need nowadays. We live in a modern and materialistic society. But we mustn't deceive ourselves that the modernness of our surroundings constitutes a blessing from GOD. The tendency to think that we can please GOD with material offerings hasn't abandoned us. Material prosperity often leads to moral and religious corruption. The external observance of Christian rites isn't sufficient. GOD demands our obedience; an agreeable disposition of the heart that leads to actions in favor of the human beings that surround us.

Conclusion

The researcher as demonstrate intensively on the injustice and immoral act of the Israel during the time of Amos vice a vice Nigeria. It should be noted here that if the society will be a holistic environment, there is need to follow the pattern of Amos by our Pastor's, teachers and lecturer in religious matters in other for our country not to fall into the pit dig by our hands. And to curb immoral, and injustice in Nigeria these recommendation needs to be followed.

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[400] W.L Liefeld, "*The Wandering Preacher as a Social Figure in the Roman Empire"* unpublished (Columbia University: Ph.D. Dissertation 1967), 239.

[401] Kenneth L. barker, 1447.

Recommendations

1. Nigeria government must fight corruption and corrupt people in the society.
2. Nigeria government should fight poverty and unemployment.
3. Pastor's, Prophets etc. must speak the mind of God, stand for the truth and speak against the social, religious, and moral around them. They will only prove themselves to be true ministers of God when they speak against evil and corrupt people in the society just like Amos did.
4. Pastors and Prophets etc. should update their members on sound doctrine so that they will be able to avoid social and moral problems in the society. They must also always be on the vanguard of promoting social change.
5. Christian scholars should encourage publication on the area of moral responsibilities in the society and for the society. That will help people to be aware of their social right and responsibility in the society.

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