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AFRICA AND AFRICANS' CARE FOR THE VULNERABLE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: GOOD NEWS FOR CONTEMPORARY AFRICA AND AFRICANS?

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the attitude of Africa and Africans to the poor and the needy in the Old Testament and the modern attitude of Africa and Africans (most especially Leaders) to the Vulnerable. The paper glanced through the Scripture for what it says regarding the poor and the needy and the various terms used to help the poor and the needy. It also examined the terminologies used for Africa and Africans in the Old Testament and critically discussed Africa and Africans care for the destitute in the Old Testament. The article further looked into African core values as they relate to the current attitude of Africa and Africans to the poor and needy. It draws a conclusion that the contemporary attitude is nothing but bad news as against the legacy of Africa and Africans in the Old Testament. For instance some Old Testament personalities like Ebed-Melech, Zephaniah and the queen of Sheba's origin were traced to African roots and they played significant roles through their care and loving spirit in assisting the needy and the less privileged irrespective of their colour and race in the Biblical period. Their giving spirit contributed to the success of the temple of God in the land of Israel built by King Solomon unlike some contemporary leaders in Africa that are noticeable for their misappropriation of funds for selfish and frivolous ends.

Keywords: Africa, care, oppression, poor, poverty, old testament, Leaders, attitude, terminologies, Legacy.

INTRODUCTION

An investigation into the attitude of Africa and Africans to the poor and the needy in the Biblical Scheme and especially in the Old Testament is a noble task, The rate of poverty and the distribution of the poor in Africa today are alarming. One (Odorige) in a video clip once said the Africans have become poverty capital of the world as 6 Nigerians slide into poverty every minute while 44 Indians get out of poverty every minute. In like manner, Harber Sabane, an elected major of one of Africa's oldest cities of Timbuktu, Malí was quoted to have said some ycars ago "we are very, very, poor" (Kunhiyop, 3-28). In 2016, the top ten (10) poorest countries of the world were said to be located in Africa these include: Malawi, Burundi, Central Africa Republic, Niger, Liberia, Madagascar, Congo Democratic Republic, Gambia, Ethiopia and Guinea. No African country is listed among the top ten (10) richest countries of the world which are: Australia, Canada, San Marino, Switzerland, United State of America, Brunie, Norway, Singapore, Luxemburg and Qatar (Ige, 2017:12). The question is: is Africa really poor? Africa is high in natural and human resources, Africans natural resources include: Crude oil, Diamond, Gold, Coal, Lime stone, iron and steel, 'Tin and Columbite, timber.

Colton among other valuable natural resources that cannot be found elsewhere in the world and A vast fertile land for agriculture. According to Ige, Africa is unarguable one of the most fertile regions of the world and the richest continent on Earth in terms of natural resources (13) Japan, one of the most powerful economies in the world has no raw materials (Ige, 68). One may ask, what then account for Africa's poverty? But some people attributed the poverty of some African countries to bad leadership quality and misappropriation. Also bad governmental policies and lack of strategic plans. The most resent one is the naira redesign and cashless policy in Nigeria without adequate preparation for the negative effect of the implementation. In Africa today the rich are getting richer while the poor are also getting poorer. The poor are mercilessly marginalized, oppressed, neglected and deprived of the wealth of the continent by the leaders and their cronies. African leaders and their collaborators built and acquire aesthetic properties outside Africa with stolen wealth from Africa living majority of the Africans in pains of poverty, malnutrition and the continent undeveloped. For instance, one (Odorige) talked about colonialism in Africa as a genesis of terrorism today we have a new dimension of colonialism in Africa as African leaders continue to impose themselves in power and to steal and hide money in European banks. It took Switzerland twenty years of litigation and foot dragging before they reluctantly repatriated $1.4 billion dollars stolen and hidden in their banks by the late Nigeria military head of state, General Sanni Abacha. Interest on that amount was lost. The most unfortunate incident is that the loots are being re-looted by our so called leaders that supposed to see public office as a call to service. In the same vein, it was reported that one trillion dollars is stolen yearly by African leaders and hidden abroad while Africans desperately trying to escape from their various countries through the Mediterranean Sea.

The presidential candidate of the Labour party Mr. Peter Obi while addressing the media in Abuja on the 02/01/2025 according to Arise News stated that the economic and the security situation of our country is worsening daily despite contrary position and claim by the Government. In all spheres of human endeavor our national challenges are visibly worsening by the day. Our nation has reverse indices that are clearly indicative of decline thus Nigeria remains one of the capital poverty-ridden countries of the world with over Hundred million in extreme poverty and more than one fifty million in multi-dimensional poverty the situation has deteriorated significantly in the past 18 months we are falling from being the highest GDP in the Africa in 2014 at $574 billion dollars and the capital of about 3500 dollars to now ranking the fourth with a GDP less than 50 percent of what we were in a decade ago about 200 billion with per capital less than a third about 1000 our nation remain one of the most insecure and the least peaceful in the world today.

According to the global peace index report, Nigeria ranks 143 out of 163 country in times of peacefulness. However, most Nigerians who depend largely on their farms for survival are now in internally Displaced person camps (IDPC) across the nation because of the activities of Boko-Haram militants which have been described as ethno-religious crisis fueled by poverty by a former federal road safety corps chief, Osita Chidoke (Ehikioya and Ogundele 7). Herdsmen search of gracing land for their cattle's have equally massacre innocent souls and destroy Farm lands culminating in shortage of food and increase poverty. Herdsmen have used their private business to displace farmers in their thousands from their farmlands and

villages (The Punch 13). Such volatile social situations had driven several companies away and may hinder foreign investors. How can we reduce the increase in the number of the poor and poverty in Africa and Nigeria in particular?

In the light of the above, this work-employs descriptive and narrative approaches to engage its study and propel it to reasonable conclusion. The paper brings to lime light the truth that Africa and Africans are not terrible or bad people to be feared or abandoned but are loving hospitable and caring especially for the destitute irrespective of race or colour in the Biblical period. The paper suggests that if Africa and African cultivate this value today, there shall be peace, political stability and socio-economic development.

1. The poor in Biblical perspective; looking at the scripture critically, one might discover that the existence of poverty began from the fall of man in Genesis. At creation, everything was adjudged very good. Not until the fall of man. The ground was good and man was to plough for it to produce man's survival (Genesis 1:31· 2:15) things changed as a result of the fall, when God says to man "cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life, thousand thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:17-19). Therefore, poverty and the poor entered the world as a result of the curse on man for the sin committed. The Bible also recognizing the poor and needy its state that "there will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to open handed towards your brothers and towards the poor and needy in your land (Deuteronomy l5:11). The terms used for the "poor" in the scriptures, as shall be seen below, have both spiritual perspective represents the meek in spirit" the humble or lowly" as contain in Matthew 5:3. Luke 6:20 and James l:9a, This paper however discusses the poor in the material perspective. As throughout the life and ministry of Jesus Christ the poor had a prominent role, they are not to be neglected. In (Luke 19:16-21). In His mission Statement, Christ says he was sent to preach to the poor (Luke 4:18-19).

2. The poor in the Old Testament.

Poverty in the Old Testament denotes lack of materials resources and economic goods as well as political and legal powerlessness and oppression (Pleins 402-414). In her book, Bible of the oppressed, Elsa Tamez write, 'for the Bible, oppression is the basic cause of poverty.... The oppressor steals from the oppressed and impoverishes them. The oppressed are therefore those who have been impoverished, for while the oppressor oppresses the poor because they are poor and powerless, the poor have become poor in the first place because they have been oppressed.

The principal motive for oppression is the eagerness to pile up wealth, and this desire is connected with the fact that the oppressor is an Idolater (3).

While different Hebrew terms are used to refer to poverty and the poor (e.g *ebyon* = the beggarly poor; = the poor peasant farmer; *mahsor* = the lazy poor: *misken* = poverty is better; rash = political and economic in priority; and ani = the injustice of oppression) (Pleins 403 –

413). The most predominant use is that of the term describing poverty caused by oppression (*ani /anawim*).

In the legal sections of the Bible ancient Israel wrote legislation intended to ameliorate the suffering and exploitation of the poor, or the concentration of power and resources in a few hands. Historically, laws are written to address specific problems and issues. Implicitly, ancient Israel's laws sought to provide justice for the poor who would otherwise have been victimized.

Therefore, specific measures were taken to ensure the protection of the poor and most vulnerable. People in society - widows, resident. aliens and fatherless, minor children.

Consequently, the law stated that during harvest, something had to be left behind for the benefit of the poor (Deu. 24:19-22, Lev, 19:9-10) 23:22) and charity toward the needy was to be practiced.

In addition, institutions such as the fallow/sabbatieal year and jubilee, year were put in place. During the year of jubilee year were put in place. Property returned, and debt slaves freed.

The prophets also criticized its injustices of their times. (Amos 5:24; Micah 3:9-11; Isaiah 5:7-8 and Jeremiah 22:3).

The above submissions suggest that the scripture has no support for the neglect of the poor and needy either in the church or in the society. This brings us to the identity of Africa and Africans in the Old Testament

Africa and Africans' Identity in the Old Testament

The term "Africa" does not appear in either the Old or New Testament. Adama shows that there has not been a unanimous agreement among eminent scholars (anthropologists, Egyptologists and Africanists), concerning the exact racial classifications of the people of Africa, the fact that Africa is the cradle of one of the earliest and most spectacular civilization as antiquity has been generally accepted (ll) on the basis of archaeological and historical records discovered in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Greco-Roman world, Africans have shared this civilization, either through military or trade interactions. With other nations of antiquity. The term chiefly used to identify the Africa and Africans in the Old Testament is *"Kush"*.

According to Adamo, the most popular and the most frequent used terms which refer to Africa and Africans in ancient Egypt and the OT are *Kuash*/*Kush*/*Kesh*/*Kush* (140).

In the Old Testament Kush and Kushites are used to refer to Africa and Africans in terms of a particular, geographical location, and as names of persons who came from Africa or whose ancestors are of African origin. In terms of a geographical location, it is described as the extreme part of the world (Ezekiel 29:10: Isaiah 45:14. Job 28-19).

The inhabitants of *Kush* were described as tall and smooth-skinned people. Their blackness becomes proverbial (Isaiah l8:21; Jer. 38:6-14; 39:16-18). Moses' wife was from *Kush* (Num.

12:1-3). A Kushite man was a messenger who reported the death of Absalom to David (2 Sam. 18:21, 31-33) Ebeb-Melech, the Kushite in the palace of King Zedekiah rescued prophet Jeremiah from death (Jer. 38:6-14; 39:16-18) their power was comparable only to the power of the Assyrians. Judah depended on them and the Egyptians for deliverance from the hand of the terrible Assyrians (2 Chron. 12:3-9; Isa. 18:2; 1 kings 18:19-21: 2Chron 32:9-15: 3-9), However, despite the mighty power of the Kushites, they experienced defeat during Zerah and Asa's encounter (2chron. 14:9-15) and encounter with the Assyrians (2king 18:21). *Kush* like any other nation, was also subjected to God's Judgement (Ezekiel 30:4). The prophet Zephaniah prophesied the conversion of the Kushites who would bring tribute to *Yahweh* (Zeph. 3:10). They would stretch their hands to God (Psalm 68:31) there will be one of the nations who will acknowledge Zion of their spiritual home (Psalm 87:4-5) Africa and African care for the poor and needy in the Old Testament we shall at this very point examine how Africa and Africans demonstrate their care and loving spirit in assisting the needy and less privileged irrespective of color and race. It is important to note that Ebed-melech (Jer. 38:1-7: 12-13 and 15-17) who is an African or a person of African descent, became an example of courage, faith, compassion and kindness to Israel by delivering one of her greatest prophets. Ebed-melech taught the weak king (ZedekKlan) and his people in the sense of right and wrong. When the weak king Zedekiah, could not decide what to do with prophet Jeremiah (because of the fear of his prince's who wanted the prophet to die) and allowed the princes to put the prophet in the cistern to die. Ebeb-melech, the African, with great courage and faith went the king challenged him and taught him the sense of right judgement (Jer. 38:1-13).

Prophets played a very significant role in shaping not only the religious but also the political and economic life of Israelite society. The fact that prophet Zephaniah has been shown to be an African African ancestry demonstrates a significant place given to Africans in the religious life of ancient Israel and in their struggle for survival.

The Africa and Africans have a giving spirit. The queen of Sheba came from African and the Ophir is one of the tribes in Africa. The temple, one of the most important religious institutions in Israel, was built and supported with African wood. This same temple was decorated with African gold, silver and many precious stones which the queen donated to King Solomon as gifts. 1kings 10:1-13 says, that some gold, silver, precious stone spices were brought to Jerusalem. The military and the political role of Africa and Africans in ancient Israel is evident from their intervention during Israel's crises. An African called Kush, was present in King David's army as one of his protectors (2 Sam. 18:21-32). King Hezekiah put his trust on the African rulers for deliverance from Assyrians (Isa. 20:5-6). In ancient Israel, the economic contribution of Africa and Africans is evident in Sheba's visit.

Core African values

The value of mutual support, sharing, and caring are consistent with the African's sense of responsibility to other. This enhances his or her ability to fight against poverty. Charity, generosity, kindness, and arms giving, among others, are some of the ways Africans take care

of one another in the midst of poverty. In the religious milieu of Africa generosity and arms giving are considered to bring people nearer to God and also to avert calamities or even to avoid hell (Adamo 240).

In some African communities, leaders like chiefs, kings, queens, or other authority figures are expected to be benefactors of the poor. According to Roscoe, (In Zambia, the chief is expected to feed the poor, the outcast, and the stranger. In Uganda's kingdom of Bunyoro, the coronation oath included promises to treat poor and rich equally, and to care for orphans (12-13).

Unfortunately, in Africa society today, these cultural values and practices are eroded. Could it be a result of our political system and economy as we observe in Israelite history? A decline for contemporary Africa and Africans, the present socio-economic situation of Africa is hopelessly discouraging. Africa economy has been seriously mismanaged by its leaders and their collaborators to the point that today, most African nations have become dependent on foreign nations. The government in Africa today is best described as "lootacracy" In Nigeria for instance, past leaders Sanni Abacha is known to have looted the treasury of not less than $20 Billion to his coffers. Recently $1.4 billion dollars was repatriated from Switzerland among the Abacha looted funds. Nigeria leaders like some other African leaders ruin their own economy to develop other people's economy according to Fedrick report that $1 trillion dollar is stolen yearly by African leaders hidden abroad.

Today, most African nations are almost or totally dependent on Arab or western Nations. Nigeria, for instance, import virtually all finished products including petroleum (of which she exports the crude) and even tooth pick. There are no good hospitals in Nigeria. Nigerian leaders travel abroad for medical check-up and treatment. The then president of Nigeria Mohammadu Buhari spent 107 days in the United Kingdom to seek medical treatment without publicly disclosing his expenses which he took from National Treasury (Fredrick).

The present situation of Africa and Africans in collapsing the economic situation of the Africans by her leaders became a sad news from the good legacy of Africa and Africans as against the good news from the good legacy of Africa and Africans in the Old Testament. What legacy is the present generation of African's laying for the future generation?

It is important to note at this junction, that the land of Africa is blessed in both human and natural resources. Therefore, foreign investors should be allowed to boost her economy. The Fulani Herdsmen, boko-Haram militants, the Niger delta militants (the "avengers" blowing up oil pipe lines and I movement for the emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), the kidnappers, and the like in Nigeria possibly need drop their weapons of destruction to make room for peace and allow foreign investor to be confident to stay to enhance the eventual growth of the economy. What has become of the cherished African core value in the contemporary Africa? As observed, perhaps the attitude of Africa and the Africans to the destitute in the Old Testament time, the care, love, generosity and military might demonstrated are core African values and notes urgently needed in modern Africa by Africa and the Africans, one of the things that can curb poverty in Africa most especially in Nigeria

is to conduct a nationwide population and housing census with matter of urgency, because it provides the accurate figure of the of the number of persons and housing types and their characteristics in every town, village or locality. In which the information that will be collected cam help provide data for planning and programs in education, and health. There is a saying that if you think education is costly try ignorance. Therefore, education is light and health is wealth (Hosea 4:6a; Daniel 9:2 and 3 John 2)

CONCLUSION

This paper investigates Africa and the African in the Old Testament era and their attitude to the poor in relation to the modern time. There seem to be a wide gap between the two worlds in the attitude to the poor and possibly concern for their native home. Cotemporary Africans should emulate the Africans in the Old Testament world by accommodating others, show love, be hospitable, care and give gift Africans should learn from their past glorious history and how their traditional institutions functioned. This is essentially a return to our roots. By the same token. Africans should also learn from their past mistake and avoid them in the future. As in the biblical witness. Africans must heed the prophetic voice for repentance and renewal and seek to return themselves and their systems of government.

Finally, we should realize that Africa is a great continent with a great history and culture. This fact should not be overshadowed by the crisis of poverty or by those who seek to obliterate this reality through misrule, self-aggrandizement or mismanagement of the economy. As Proverbs 2:9 eloquently states, "Then shall thou understand righteousness, and judgement, and equity."

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