

Rereading Amos 7:8–17 in the context of the ‘professional’ prophets in Nigeria

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Examining the prophetic commission in Amos 7:8–17, this article argues that it points towards complete repudiation and disdain for the office of the professional prophets in Israel. This anger of Yahweh against Amaziah, his wife and his children for his role in King Jeroboam’s II bad leadership in Israel were analysed in relation to contemporary professional prophesying in Nigeria. Just like the ancient Israelite society, most Nigerian priests and prophets are interested in prophesying for financial gain from those in leadership positions. This is why most of their prophecies are not geared towards reprimanding political leaders concerning their actions. Instead, the professional prophets conspire against any priest or prophet who tends to speak the truth. It was concluded that for Nigeria to achieve the needed development, priests and prophets should not engage in prophecy for material gain.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The research on Amos 7:8–17 in the context of the ‘professional’ prophets in Nigeria is based on the current prophesying for financial gains that are rampant amongst priests and members of the clergy in Nigeria. They never warn political leaders against their wrong actions. It was discovered that most of these prophecies are geared towards gaining inordinate favours, political and financial inducements from those in political leadership. Disciplines implicated include Sociology, Church history and Dogmatics.

Keywords: priests; prophets; prophecy; Amos 7:8–17; Amaziah; professional prophets in Nigeria.

Introduction

In the Old Testament, the prophet serves as God’s representative to the people. The prophet is the person who delivers divine revelation about God’s will in a community, state or any social environment. In prophecy, God speaks through the prophet rather to them (Alter & Kermodé 1987:225). A prophet delivers the deity message without fear, favour or any benefits (social, political, economic or otherwise). This research adopted Häring’s (1979) explanation of the prophet. He sketches that the prophets most violently protested against the great evils of injustice, war, hatred and mercilessness because of the fact that these moral evils can cause a breakdown of faith in the God which a specific religion teaches if the representatives of that religion make no realistic protest against sins (Häring 1979). Any prophet who fails to protest against evils of injustice, war, hatred and other social ills in the society on the basis of social, political, economic, religious or any other gains accruable to his prophetic office is called a professional prophet. A professional prophet earns his living by prophesying in the name of God for personal gains.

Amos 7:8–17 presents a narrative of the professional prophet. It is a narrative that concerns the priest Amaziah and Amos. In the pericope, Amaziah was a palace priest to Jeroboam II in northern Israel. Amaziah had won the heart of the king because of the favourable prophecies coming from him on the northern Kingdom. Amidst Israel’s social and economic sins, Amaziah still assures king Jeroboam II that God was in full support of Israel and his people. The narrative further reveals that Yahweh was not happy with the developments in northern Israel. Thus, Yahweh sends Amos to the northern kingdom to tell the people and the king that he is very angry with their way of life, and thus he will allow their enemies to triumph over them, and the house of Jeroboam II would suffer for his sins. Amaziah was not happy with the coming of Amos to Israel to prophesy. Campos (2011:13) reveals that Amaziah’s greed influenced him to suspect Amos of prophesying for gain just as he has been doing all this while. The narrative tells about Amos’s reply to Amaziah’s accusation. Amos claimed that he was not a professional prophet and instead had come to north at Yahweh’s instruction. Amos had become an embarrassment to the political

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and religious establishment in Israel (Constable 2012). Amos 7:8–17 presents a comparable case of professional prophesying in Nigeria, in which people prophesy for material and other benefits from those in positions of political power.

Nigeria is made up of over 180 million people with three major religions – Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. Nigerian people are highly religious in all areas of their lives. Most political office holders in the country depend on priests and their prophecy for spiritual safety. There are special priests who occasionally go to the residence of political leaders in Nigeria to pray and prophesy to them. Some of them have been given comfortable rooms and houses in corrupt leaders' residences. Unfortunately, blessings, prosperity, protection and long time frame of their leadership are themes of the prophecies of these professional prophets. These priests who engage in professional prophesying never engage these leaders to change from the obscene habit of financial misappropriation, nepotism, hubris and narcissism, amongst others. Other sincere priests who have come out to prophesy against the social evils perpetrated by those in leadership positions in Nigeria are threatened by the professional prophets. The aim of this article is to examine the prophetic commission in Amos 7:8–17 and the problem of professional prophesying in Nigeria.

Amos 7: 8–17 has two significant narrative episodes. The first is the vision report (vv. 8–9) concerning God's anger against Israel and the second is a narrative that endorses the fulfilment of the vision in verses 8–9. It is on the basis of the narrative structure of verses 8–17 that the researcher engages this text through the narrative analysis methodology. The narrative analysis is a genre of analytic frames that enables researchers to interpret stories that are told within the context of research and/or are shared in everyday life (Allen 2017). It is concerned with a situation when one or two speakers share experiences concerning an event. In the study pericope, Amos and Amaziah share prophetic experiences and histories. In this pericope, the narrative analysis aims at identifying the kinds of stories told about the professional prophets and the kinds of stories representing the phenomenon in Nigerian culture and society. Narrative analysis is very suitable for measuring life problems and stating the significance of the experiences obtained from the stories which are being used to measure life problems and exigencies.

Problem statement

Literature on the repudiation of professional prophets in Amos 7:8–17 is scarce. Paul (1971) concluded that the pericope is concerned about the rise and decline of the empire of Jeroboam. Cohen (1965) argued that Jeroboam performed so well as a leader that even Amos attested to it in Amos 6:14. Tucker (1973:423) revealed that Jeroboam was silent in speech with regard to Amos's prophecies, which shows that he has been found wanting in his leadership. The researcher will be

toeing a different line of thought. This will be in line with the fact that prophecy should be able to interpret the spiritual meaning of present events, condemn wickedness and corruption, and also make warnings or promises about what God is going to do within history (warnings that the wrath of God is coming upon greedy and murderous people (Preus 2001). The question that comes to mind is this: Is it because of what the professional prophets get from bad leaders that makes them unable to criticise their actions? Why is it that prophesying in Nigeria is completely void of social and ethical issues? This work would examine why prophecies concerning the condemnation of social evils by those in political leadership are scarce. Succinctly, the problem of false prophecies will be analysed in the context of its contribution to the corrupt leadership of Jeroboam. Through narrative analysis, the contribution of professional prophets to the bad leadership that has continued to thrive in Nigeria will be analysed in light of Amos 7:8–17.

The context of the study

The context reveals how Amaziah, priest-in-charge at Bethel, forwarded to the king an accusation of conspiracy against Amos, based on the prophet's public prediction that Jeroboam would die by the sword and the people would go into exile (Blenkinsopp 1996:77). The four characteristics of prophecy include threat, promise, reproach and admonition. These characteristics are summarised in the historical and immediate context of Amos 7:8–17.

Historical context

Amos was one of the herdsmen in Tekoa (Am 1:1) and also a gatherer of sycamore fruit (Am 7:14). He was called by God to go and prophesy his judgement to the house of Israel because of the perpetual sin of idolatry and corruption. Amos was able to utilise imagery to illustrate the power of God in terms of natural elements, such as disaster and epidemic. Amos came down very hard on the northern kingdom of Israel because of their false religion that betrays their supposed love and fidelity to Yahweh.

Amos 1 begins with the visions of Amos during the reign of Uzzah of Judah (783–742 BC) and also Israel's king, Jeroboam (786–746 BC). It gives the reasons why God will judge Israel and the punishment upon Israel. Amos 2 gives the reasons why God will judge Moab, Judah and Israel – mainly because of the sin of corruption, social injustice, immorality and idolatry for which God destroyed the Amorite before their very eyes. Amos 3 re-emphasised God's plan for punishing the house of Israel for its iniquities. They fail to do the right thing notwithstanding the prophets that God had sent to them before this time. Amos 4 discloses God's punishment on the Bashanites who reside on the mountain of Samaria who maltreat the poor and 'crush' the needy (v. 1). Also, the growth of former religion in Israel in the midst of corruption was condemned by God. Amos 5 tells of God's condemnation of Israel and promise of deportation and the call to seek good and avoid evil. Amos 6 condemns those who are relaxing and

trusting in their strength and a promise of raising a nation against Israel. This nation will punish the house of Israel with severe affliction. This article commands Israel to take note of nations that are comparable to their own and draw the relevant lesson. Amos 7:1 begins with a collection of visions which could be seen in 7:1–3, 4–6 and 7–9. In the first structure verses 1–3, Amos succeeded in pleading with God to have mercy on the house of Israel. In the second structure (vv. 4–6), Amos once again succeeded in pleading with God to have mercy on the house of Israel. In verse 7ff., God refuses to listen to the pleading of Amos for mercy. The period of threat and admonition was over; it was the time of the promise of punishment in verses 8–17.

The immediate context shows that the northern kingdom of Israel at this point had Jeroboam II as their king. Amos rebuked their sins and announced how God's punishment will come. Samaria and Bethel were the places where the abominations of Israel were committed. Amos warned about the dissolution and destruction of Israel and the punishment of the house of Jeroboam. Amos rebuked and condemned Israel to judgement. Amos 7:8–17 presents an interpretation of the third vision which shows that it was fulfilled in the collapse of the northern kingdom under Assyria. The two *a priori* visions were averted because of the intervention of Amos.

The priest of Bethel, Amaziah, expelled Amos from the northern kingdom. Amos's prophecies were rejected because he was misunderstood to have said that King Jeroboam II would die by the sword of his enemies. Amos told Amaziah, who misunderstood his prophesy, that he was not a 'professional prophet'. Indirectly, Amos was announcing that Amaziah was a professional prophet because he was busy prophesying to sustain the benefits he derived from being a cabinet priest to Jeroboam II. The narratives of Amaziah, Jeroboam and Amos are chiasmic in nature. Priest Amaziah answered to King Jeroboam II, then Amos answered to Yahweh. According to the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (2019), Amos announced that Amaziah will be judged and killed along with his king Jeroboam who has felt comfortable with the false prophecies of Amaziah.

The prophecy of Amos was delivered at Bethel until his expulsion by the priest of Bethel, Amaziah. Amaziah prophesied that Jeroboam will continue to prosper *vis-à-vis* the land of Israel. He also prophesied that God is with King Jeroboam, notwithstanding the prophecy of Amos about the destruction of Israel and dethronement of Jeroboam II.

Structure in the narrative (vv. 8–17)

Several structures have been proposed for Amos 7:8–17. Mays (1969) classified the pericope as the priest's report to the king (vv. 10–11), the priest's command to the prophet (vv. 12–13) and the prophet's reply to the priest (vv. 14–17). His classification was based on characters, speech and reports

in the text. Furthermore, Tucker (1973) distinguished two events in the study of the text: Amaziah's report to Jeroboam (vv. 10–11) and his confrontation with Amos (vv. 12–17). However, the researcher adopted a threefold division, namely, verses 8–9, verses 10–11 and verses 12–17. Verse 9 does not fit in Amaziah's speech report (vv. 10–11) and the style of verse 9 does not fit the narrative's style (Wolff 1977).

This structure was adopted because verses 8–9 constitute the last vision that heralded verse 10ff. From verses 10–17, the narrative is between the priest Amaziah and the prophet Amos. Verse 9 closes the third vision (vv. 8–9). For the matter of understanding, Chapter 7, verses 1–3, covers the first vision; verses 4–6 cover the second vision, whilst Chapter 8, verses 1–3, covers the fourth vision. Furthermore, Chapter 9, verses 1–6, covers the fifth vision.

Amos 7:8–17 is the climax of all the warning's that Yahweh gave to the Israelites. It ensued between Yahweh and Amos (vv. 8–9), Amaziah and Jeroboam (vv. 10–11) and Amos and Amaziah (vv. 12–17). Verses 1–7 concern the revelation that the Lord showed to Amos and Amos's prayer to God to have mercy on the people of Israel, whilst verses 8–17 were concerned with the judgement upon the house of Jacob, without any pleading from Amos. Klingbeil and Klingbeil (2007) reveal that:

The two protagonists of this narrative involve Amos himself and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel (7:10) who sends a message to Jeroboam II, king of Israel, complaining about the prophetic ministry of Amos in that particular location. (p. 166)

From Amos 8, the visions which God revealed to Amos in verse 7 of Chapter 7 continued with the revelation of a basket full of summer fruit signifying the destruction and end of Israel.

Closing reading of the text

God's judgement upon Israel through Amos

The first part (vv. 8–9) shows Amos prophesying that Israel will be destroyed and its sanctuaries will be laid waste. It also condemns the house of Jeroboam. According to the vision, God will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel. In verse 9a, the Hebrew word *yehērābū*, which means 'to lay waste', 'to destroy' or 'to kill' (a verb, Qal imperfect, third person masculine plural), shows the fate of Israel and the house of Jeroboam. It is in the imperfect because of that fact that the judgement of God is in the pipeline and the approach of Israel to this judgement may or may not circumvent the upcoming desolation. In verse 9b, *qamtî* (I will arise) indicates that a strong hand will be used by God against the house of Israel. It may be to show how radical and complete in the destruction that Yahweh will be on Israel.

Amaziah's false prophecies

The second part (vv. 10–11) tells about the false prophecies of Amaziah. Amaziah prophesied against the prophecies of Amos in verse 9. Tucker (1973:424) analysed the pericope as

follows: 'it provides direct insight into how the prophets were perceived by their followers and their opponents and indirect insight into how the prophets perceived themselves'. In verse 10, Amaziah told Jeroboam that Amos has conspired [*qāšar*] to destroy the land of Israel. The Hebrew word *qāšar* is a verb, third person qal perfect, which means 'he conspired'. In this context, Amos was accused by Amaziah of conspiring through prophecy to overthrow Jeroboam. Constable (2012) revealed that Amaziah refuted Amos's prophecy because previously internal revolts against a king had sometimes followed a prophet's pronouncements (cf. 1 Sm 16:1–13; 1 Ki 11:29–39; 1 Ki 16:1–13; 1 Ki 19:15–17; 2 Ki 8:7–15; 2 Ki 9:1–28; 2 Ki 10:9). Unfortunately, Amaziah takes advantage of his godliness, and governed by the hopes of wealth and preferment, is ready to think these as the most powerful motives with others also (Henry 2005). However, those who have a warrant from God, like Amos, ought not to fear the face of man (Henry & Webster 2010:559). Williamson (1990) revealed that curse units can also be delineated: the king's (vv. 10–11) and the priest's (vv. 12–17). Williamson (1990) observed that the death of the respective character is mentioned at the end of each curse unit (vv. 11b, 17e), with a phrase about exile following it (vv. 11c, 17f.).

Amos was able to confront and deliver the oracle of the Lord, hook line and sinker – just as he was instructed. Amaziah speaks about it as a conspiracy against the kingdom of his benefactor. Amaziah was able to exert much pressure on the Israelite society because the king sees him as Yahweh's representative and mouthpiece. Amaziah also has a sugar coated tongue which he uses to convince and confuse Jeroboam II.

The implications of the false prophecy of Amaziah

The third part (vv. 12–17) reveals the call by Amaziah for the expulsion of Amos. Amaziah questioned Amos's stay in Israel and requested that he should leave Israel with his prophecy of doom (v. 12). This part shows the punishment of Amaziah's family for his sin of trying to silence the prophet. Amaziah was using his prophecies for financial gain, and he saw Amos as a threat to his profession. There is nowhere in the pericope where we were told that the king authorised Amaziah to expel Amos from Israel. Amaziah challenged Amos directly with a command as if he was both a cult prophet and the King of Israel and Amos, in his nascent style, responded first directly and then with a prophetic speech (Tucker 1973). In verses 12–13, Amaziah had been blindfolded by the king's material benefits. The Hebrew word *lēk* (go) was used by Amaziah against Amos. Amaziah was pursuing Amos to go out of Israel so that he can continue to enjoy the political and economic benefits of his position as the priest of Bethel. Amaziah knew that if Amos is allowed to stay, the king would know the lies which he had told against Amos's oracles. According to Williamson (1990), in verse 14, by calling Amos a seer, Amaziah attacks his legitimacy, declaring Amos as a professional prophet, going to the north to sell his prophetic services. Amos denied that he was a *nābî* or a

member of the prophetic conventicler [*a ben-nābî*]; he asserted that he had his own occupation that provided the needed support, and informed Amaziah that he had nevertheless been called by Yahweh to carry out an *ad hoc* commission to prophesy to the people of Israel (Blenkinsopp 1996:77).

Amaziah's report was false. Firstly, the prophecy did not say that Jeroboam would be killed. Secondly, it falsely attributed the prophecy to Amos instead of to God. Thirdly, he failed to mention the remote and immediate cause of Amos's prophecy, which is the sins of Israel. In verses 16–17, a curse was laid on Amaziah for wrongly instructing the king, for attacking Amos and for compromising in his oracles as a prophet. In verse 17, *lākēn* (therefore, now) indicates the resulting action of Amaziah's negation of the prophecies of the Lord through Amos. Amos told Amaziah that now his wife would metamorphose into a harlot. Furthermore, his children would be killed. Not only that, the prophecy that Israel was going into captivity would come through, but would not be witnessed by him. This is why Giere (2010) explained that Amaziah's meddling attempt to stop Amos' prophecy returns as a judgement upon his wife and children, his land, himself and all of Israel. The result for Amaziah the priest is destruction, desolation and impurity, and for Israel, it is an exile. In fact, Blenkinsopp (1996:73) revealed that the prediction against Amaziah, of a violent end by Amos, was the occasion for the confrontation in the first place.

Furthermore, the illegitimacy of the northern priesthood is highlighted by Amaziah's owning land. Representing that office, he is dedicated to the wealth provided by the kingdom and not truly to YHWH. Campos (2011) stated that in the deuteronomic priestly rule, the priests and Levites do not own land and accumulate wealth from it (Dt 18:1d, Nm 18:20, etc.).

Prophecy in the ancient near east

Prophecy was not peculiar to the ancient Israel, but the ancient Near East has a form of prophecy in their parlance. Looking at several texts from the Ancient Near East (ANE), prophecy in Israel would be understood in this light. Mesopotamia city of Mari and the state of Egypt provide clues to the existence of prophecy in the ANE. The Mesopotamian, Egyptian and biblical prophetic texts alike depict close relationships between prophecy and kingship (Couey 2008:308).

Firstly, according to Redditt (2008:2), the 28 letters found at Mari, a city in the middle Euphrates valley from the mid-third millennium to its destruction in 1762 BCE, mention prophetic figures, male and female, called *apilu*. Parker (1993:52) said that 'the letters are themselves direct testimonies to what the officials thought appropriate to tell the king, and invite an investigation of the attitudes of these officials towards the prophets/prophecies'. According to Redditt, these prophets claimed to have received message from their gods Adad or Dagon and frequently quote what the gods said. Prophecy in Mari 'appears ready to recognise

God at work in Mari prophecy to the extent that it calls on man to deny his power struggle and give himself for human need' (Walters 1970:80).

Secondly, in Egypt, the prophets divined by manipulating various objects and interpreting dreams or signs and also occasionally predicted the future (Redditt 2008:3). Redditt (2008) further adds that:

The Journey of Wen-Amon to Phoenicia is the oldest literary reference to prophets in Canaan. It relates to the trip of an official of the temple of the Egyptian god Amon at Karnak to Byblos on the coast of Phoenicia to purchase lumber for a ceremonial barge for the god. He narrates an incident that occurred while an official from Byblos was offering sacrifices to his gods. During the ceremony, a god seized one of the attendants, as evidenced by his ecstatic, frenzied behavior. In this frenzy, he directed the Prince of Byblos to conduct business with Wen-Amon. Such frenzied behavior was also attested in eleventh-century Israel by the prophetic group surrounding Samuel and influencing Saul as well (1 Sm 10:5–10; 1 Sm 19:20–24). (p. 3)

Also, in Egypt, the Prophecies of Neferti is set in the court of King Snefru (c. 2575–2551 BC), the ruler of Egypt during the Fourth Dynasty (Wiki 2019). The Neferti is summoned to the court so that he can entertain the king with prophecies; and he is asked to speak about the future rather than the past, the sage prophesies the downfall of the Egyptian nation by civil war, leading to the eventual atonement of the nation through the rise of a great king (Wiki 2019). Furthermore, Couey (2008:300) lucidly captures the fact that these rulers depended upon their officials for continuing assessment of prophetic activity in their kingdoms, as evident in reports from such officials to their respective rulers.

It would be wise to say at this juncture that Israel prophetic style did not emerge from a vacuum. This is because of the fact that the people of the ANE were able to engage in ecstasy and frenzy in order to know the will of their gods and relate it to their people.

Prophecy and political leadership in Nigeria

Just as the time of Amos had the flourishing of prophets who prophesied for personal gains, the Nigerian context in recent times has been besieged by prophets who prophesied for personal gains. These are the professional prophets.

Professional prophets are those prophets who are engaged in prophesying for personal financial gains. Their prophecies are not inspiration or communication from God. According to Irekamba and Adebumiti (2019), professional prophets prophesy for their stomach. They do that for financial gains, in the bid to make a living. In Nigeria, Abioje (2017:6) acknowledged that the prevalent image of Christian prophet is that of a miracle worker and fortune/future teller of things concerning witchcraft and bad luck rather than efforts geared towards social sanitisation.

Political leadership in Nigeria is embedded in rigid corruption and conspiracy by the priestly class. There is a form of corruption which is 'chop and I chop' syndrome. Beginning from the federal to the state level down to the local government level of leadership, politicians are stealing millions of naira from the national coffers for their personal use. As the leader is stealing part of the national money, those under him are also stealing. Unfortunately, no priests or prophet who is close to these politicians has seen the necessity to reprimand or warned them, as in the case of Amos. This is the job of the priests and prophets as God's agents (Abioje 2017).

Prophecy in Nigeria is a trade making venture. Politicians now visit religious centres, donate thousands of naira and the prophet gives prophecies of safety and protection for the corrupt politicians. For instance, a Nigerian priest was quoted as saying that any politician who wants to win election must see him or else he will fail elections. Quoting the Nigerian priest Rev. Fr. Mbaka, Tobi (2018) said that the priest once told to an aspiring politician named Peter Obi the following:

Former governor, listen, so that we won't be deceiving God. As you are standing in the presence of these children of God, tell God what you will do for Him ... It means you don't want to do anything for God. Let me believe in fear, but this is a political statement. God hates stinginess. What I am saying is not for your pleasure. I am saying what will save your life, otherwise, you and Atiku will fail. The way you and Atiku are moving will end in shame. (p. 1)

This shows that a Nigerian leader is declared morally upright, if he has settled with the priests financially. The priests pronounced God's blessings on him notwithstanding the leader's corrupt practices. This is a foremost activity of the professional prophets in Nigeria.

The residence of political service holders in Nigeria usually has religious chapels, which in the context of this article is a church. These chapels are run by priests and other members of the clergy. The political leader, if a Christian, attends these chapels on some days of church services, especially on Sundays. Messages are taught by the presiding priests, who intermittently issue messages of prosperity and peace, and prophesy of better future and well-being of the politician and his cronies, instead of reprimanding and warning the politician about the anger of God with regard to the corrupt practices he has engaged himself in. It is important to note at this juncture that prophecy is not concerned merely with enthroning political leaders. It also monitors the spiritual and moral rectitude of those enthroned as well as the conduct of the entire populace (Abioje 2017).

It could be recalled that the then Finance Minister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, repeatedly warned political office holders on the need to manage efficiently the resources of the country. However, her advice was taken with a pinch of salt. Nigeria entered into critical economic recession in August 2016. The researcher begins to wonder how Nigerian priests, with

intimidating numbers as the sand of the sea, could not prophesy concerning the looming recession that was steering the country on the face. At least it would have helped in the aspect of pre-emptive measures. Instead, they were busy prophesying about how great Nigeria would be and how successful the government of the newly elected president would be, just because of the yearning for financial and sexual inducement and financial gains from those in political power.

Also worrisome is the attitude of priests from the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Most of the Pentecostal priests rarely prophesy against the evils perpetrated by those in political leadership. Their interests are only on the binding of demons, and the casting of witchcraft bad luck, forgetting the fact that a morally sanitised society could reduce their prayer points, thereby reducing their stress. In the words of Beyer (1998), Pentecostal churches in Nigeria show apathy to reprimanding political leaders or involving themselves on anything related to the government. Lending further claims, Abioje (1998:35) stated that although some Christian prophets engage in divination in one form or another, it has not been applied to political leadership in Africa by Christians. It is highly obscene that in the midst of all the social evils committed by political office holders, the so-called priests and prophets are silent about religiosity.

Prophecy in Nigeria is a mind-blowing phenomenon because members of the political class besiege churches to hear from God notwithstanding their corrupt practices. Politicians are eager to know if they would win elections coming up or not. They are eager to hear about the good things or bad things that would befall their political enemies. It is on this premise that ministers in Nigeria capitalise on the growing desire for a prophetic declaration by the low and the mighty to explore and exploit prophetic oracles from God or mammon, or from intuition. This is why different prophecies, false and contradictory in nature and approach, are glowing and blossoming amongst ministers in Nigeria. The enthronement and dethronement of leaders are prophesied. The priests prophesy more when they see more offerings are dropped at the altar when they were prophesying. Unfortunately, members of the political class failed to understand that most of these priests and prophets based their prophecy on intuition, psychology and body language. This they do to gain political and economic support and relevance. The besieging of worship centres by politicians means much money for them for false prophets. Hence, they must prophesy something to politicians, which most often are against the politicians' political or economic enemies. Gbenga (2017) observed that many of the prophecies were based on what catches their fancy and on the spur of the moment and also based on intuition or pressure from society. When the prophecy starts, one begins to hear, 'Ride on Pastor', 'Speak to Me', 'Sir, Amen', 'Kill my Enemies' and a host of other jargons.

Amos 7:8–17 in the Nigerian context

Amos 7:8–17 presents an Israelite society that is highly religious in ritual activities but deficient in social and moral ethics.

Although there was a great outward show of religious observance, including sacrifices and offerings, the priesthood and their prophecies had been defiled (New World Encyclopaedia, n.d). Because of the lust for material things, Israelite kings and their priests became convincingly interested in material things, making their religion a polytheistic religion – a belief of God and materialism. This is in correspondence with the situation in Nigeria. Nigerian leaders are highly religious. They steal religiously, campaign religiously and abuse the citizens religiously. They pay very handsome tithes and offerings. Little wonder that the front seats are reserved for these leaders and their cohorts by the members of the clergy in Nigeria. It was in this mood that Odumuyiwa (2001) lampooned Nigeria as a religious but criminal society.

Israel was a materially prosperous nation. Under the Kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam II was very prosperous and they enjoyed a substantial period of peace and security. However, King Jeroboam II was not careful in harnessing the resources for the glory of God. This is because of the connivance of the palace priest, Amaziah, with lust, concerning his inability to advise the king on the need to do the right things. Instead, the priest, Amaziah, was interested in his selfish gains of financial earnings that he gets from prophesying peace and prosperity in the midst of blatant and obscene corruption and misappropriations.

Verse 17 of Amos 7 reveals that Amaziah owned landed property which was against the laws guiding priesthood. This further tells that he had acquired so many financial gains from Jeroboam II's corrupt leadership. That is why he was able to acquire landed property here and there. Amos has to prophesy against the destruction of his landed properties. He told him, '[y]our land will be measured and divided up ...' In Nigeria, most of the gigantic church buildings and schools owned by churches were financial gains received from professional prophesying at the favour of those in leadership positions. Thus, for them to criticise corrupt leaders is like biting the hands that feed them. Even those who hypocritically criticise those in power sometimes, they still go after the same people in power for favour to meet their personal needs.

From Amos 7:8–17, Amos was not afraid to tell the king and his corrupt government and idolaters the prophecy which the Lord had given to him. He bluntly revealed to the king the dangers that await Israel and himself, if they continue to remain in her false worship and promote social crimes and injustice. It is sad to note that in Nigeria the reverse is the case. Prophecies are made in televisions, radios and the social media. Prophets in Nigeria cannot warn a corrupt president, face to face, and utter the oracles of the Lord without fear or favour.

Amaziah gave false prophecies which were in its entirety accepted by Jeroboam II and the people of Israel. He prophesied on the goodness and favour of God on the people of Israel. He capitalised on his closeness to King Jeroboam. It is important to note that during the monarchy this close

relationship existed between priests or prophets and the king. Amaziah benefitted from this development. Amaziah attacked the prophecies of Amos, calling them conspiracy all in the name of enjoying the friendship and benefits of the king's throne. This is similar to what is obtainable in Nigeria. Real prophecies in Nigeria have received so many condemnations from politicians and perpetrators of immorality. This has led to intimidation by Department of State Security Service, army, Police (at the instruction of the government) against those priests and prophets who prophesy doom for leadership in Nigeria. Furthermore, just like Israel, false prophets are gaining grounds in Nigeria. This is because of the economic and political benefits that come with their false prophecy. Amos, to prove that his prophecy was from the Lord cursed the household of Amaziah. According to Ritenbaugh (1992):

Amaziah's wife and children are included in the curse for two reasons. First, as shown earlier, a leader determines the course of those under him. Any curse that fell on Amaziah would also, to one degree or another, affect his family. Second, it is a biblical principle that families are often unified in belief ... Because of his bold denunciation of God's prophet, Amaziah would suffer, and his family would suffer with him. God would see to it that this priest of Bethel would witness in a personal way the coming destruction of the nation as it fell upon his family with a vengeance. (pp. 1-2)

In Nigeria, once a prophet is threatened by the secular government, the remaining prophets hide in their shells. This indicates that they know that their prophecies were false. They know the falsity in their prophecies that is why they cannot stand for what they believe amidst little opposition or confrontation. Because of the overemphasis on prophecies, priests and prophets are led to pronouncing false visions. A religious society usually seeks spiritual means of survival, be it from God or the devil. These visions embody redemption and salvation for the people in the name of God. Thus, what are seen in Nigeria are different prophecies on the same issues by different prophets for selfish aims and profits of the prophets. This is the reason why Nigeria is wallowing in poverty, terrible leadership, corruption and other immoral vices; thus, people are prepared to do whatever they can to migrate out of the country.

Recommendations

Nigerian priests and prophets have to learn a great deal from the study of the text. They include the following:

- Any prophecy that God gives to a priest, or a prophet or anybody, the person should not be afraid to speak it out. This may be a way of God saving the nation from financial, moral or economic collapse.
- Those who have been engaging in professional prophesying in Nigeria should look at what happened to Amaziah and learn their lessons. For every ill-gotten weight will be lost in a strange way. Priests who have been prophesying for financial gains just like Amaziah will soon find out that they were only short-sighted and foolish. Their job is to prophesy the truth and forget

about the financial benefits they get from telling false prophecies.

- It is not a must that every priest must prophesy. When a priest practices divination (false prophecy), he is likely going to face the wrath of God like Amaziah, which may bring a curse on his lineage by God. Ministers should prophesy according to the spirit of the Lord and not according to the personal intuition, which constitutes witchcraft.
- Prophets who prophesy the truth to those in political leadership must be prepared to face persecution and opposition. However, they should know that they have the backing of God just like Amos and they will be blessed in the short and long run.
- Furthermore, those who are priests and are close to political leaders should stop hindering reprimands and warnings from other prophets (other than them) against their benefactors (the political leaders concerned). Just like Amaziah, if they are not careful, they and their family may face the deserving consequences.

Conclusion

I have argued that part of the problem of poverty, corruption and underdevelopment in Nigeria is a result of the failure of prophets and members of the clergy. This is because they fail to reprimand, lampoon and warn those in political leadership in Nigeria. In fact, they prophesy 'peace, peace', where there is no peace. A prophet is supposed to be a fortune teller and also a person who liberates the citizens from an exploitative and oppressive government. A priest is supposed to portray the image of God. Shields (2004) explains that the ethical concern of the prophets is derived from the fact that God is holy and righteous, and demands the same from his people. At the end of Amaziah's reign, everything he acquired through prophesying for financial gains was lost. He lost the ill-gotten landed property. His wife who joined and encouraged him to contribute to in his professional prophesying was cursed to be a prostitute. His children who participated in their father's ill-gotten wealth were cursed with death. After Amos, other prophets in Israel continued in Amos's pattern. They warn their political leaders against engaging in corruption and any other social vice. They were poised for social sanitisation. This is a model that is worthy to be emulated by Nigerian priests and prophets.

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