

Terror And Violence In Nigeria As A Hermeneutical Reflection Of The Book Of Habakkuk

Alozie Chukwunyere Iroanya

Jos Presbyterian Church Of Nigeria Jos Parish, Jos Plateau State

Abstract

This paper examines terror and violence in Nigeria as a hermeneutical reflection of the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk lived and prophesized in the inexorable built-up to the invasion of Judah and ultimate destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Habakkuk was perplexed that wickedness, violence and oppression were rampant in Judah, but God seemingly did nothing. The image of God as a cosmic patriarch who allows atrocity is revealed in such anguishing questions as “why do you look on those who deal treacherously and hold your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he? Habakkuk 1:13. Apparently why help the Babylonians, a wicked people, more godless and cruel than the Israelites? What is the point of demonstrating unfailing faith in a violent society? Against this background, the paper betook itself to critically reflect on the book of Habakkuk using hermeneutical and sociological paradigm to explore the general notion of violence in biblical and contemporary period. It discovered that societies are being torn apart by violence of all kinds leading to disruption of the ontological and teleological order. The paper emphasizes that religion must no longer play a tranquilizing role for consolidation of structural violence. Rather, the church like Habakkuk has a duty to unmask any religious system that conceals and justifies violence and oppression. The paper concludes that a paradoxical contrast between life inside the church and life in other daily activities is an urgent call to rethink the understanding of religion in Nigeria.

Key Words: Habakkuk, Religion, Violence, Theodicy, Social Transformation, Sovereign God

Introduction

God commissioned Habakkuk, a contemporary of Jeremiah and Ezekiel to lead in trouble times. His name means “to embrace” and he earned the title by wrestling with God in the beginning of his book and by developing deep intimacy with God by the books end. He lived at a time when society was shaken by violence. As Judah and Jerusalem had sunk deeper into disobedience towards God and His requirements, so the fabric of natural life had begun to come apart at the seams (Prior, 1998; Maxwell, 2002). The prophet lived and spoke in the inexorable built-up to the invasion of Judah and

ultimate destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Impliedly, he lived in the years following the reign of Josiah whom Jehoiakim succeeded as king in 605 BC (2Kings 22:1-2, 23:36-37; Jer. 22:16-17) (Barker; 1985; Prior, 1998). Jehoiakim exploited his subjects for his own aggrandizement and had no concern for justice and mercy. Those who held subordinate positions of power in the land - governors and judges took their cue from him.

The result according to Prior (1998:203) was “widespread oppression, injustice and violence. There was no hope of redress except in God and God did not seem to be taking any action to vindicate His own law or indeed His own character”. Accordingly, Habakkuk directs his passion and despair at God rather than at the king. In this sense, he is an unusual, if not unique prophet in the Old Testament (hereafter OT). The book gives profound insight into the prayer life of the prophet and in the process his whole relationship with God becomes public. It is a moving and challenging experience. He burned with zeal for God as much as if not more than with pain for the people (1:2 - 3). He poured out his heart to God in prayer, before pronouncing doom on the guilty. He was moved by the offensiveness to a holy God of people’s sins, and their violation of the law (1:4). He protests and argues about why God should have permitted or even decreed the fall of Israel from considerable social, economic and political height.

The image of God as a cosmic patriarch who inflicts or at least allows atrocity is revealed in such anguishing questions as “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil. And cannot look on wickedness. Why do you look on those who deal treacherously, and hold your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?” Habakkuk 1:13 NKJV. Ostensibly, why help the Babylonians, a wicked and cruel people more godless and cruel than the Israelites? Beginning with his own situation, Prior (1998) opines that Habakkuk found himself articulating timeless questions about the problems of evil and the character of God, about the apparent pointlessness of prayer and impotence of God, about the oppressiveness of unrestrained violence and the silence of God. The dilemmas are timeless, but so are the overwhelming powers of violence.

Apparently, the society today is being torn apart by violence of all kinds. The violence of war is now reproduced in a dangerously sanitized fashion and in the home front through television and other social media platforms (Ziglar: 2012; Iroanya; 2014: 625-639). Violence seems to have taken hold of so many aspects of people’s lives; on the streets and in the schools making it dangerous to walk alone in both city and country. The rate at which schools in Nigeria are being plundered is alarming. Regularly students and teachers are being abducted from one school or the other in Borno, Kaduna, Kastina, Niger, Yobe and Zamfara states. Currently, hundreds of abducted students and teachers are imprisoned in holes, hidden in forests, abused and molested with none to help. Contemporary violence places teachers in physical danger if they exercise a discipline which children will not countenance. Essentially, violence in the home has become widespread – by husbands to wives and by parents to children. In particular, there is increasingly frequent accounts of women being battered by their partners, of children being abused by adults and children beating up their parents (Bandy; 2013:2; Johnson; 2014:34; Anyagafu and Sam-Duru, 2014:39).

There is the purportedly legal and moral violence of the state and the illegal and immoral violence of non-state groups. To all these must be added psychological and verbal violence which may stop short of beating people up, but is only one step away

from it. There is road rage, mob violence, drunken mayhem, gang warfare, killer herdsmen, unknown gunmen, Boko Haram terrorism, and drug-induced assault. The killings and destruction of property of innocent citizens in different parts of communities of Bassa, Riyom, Jos North, Jos South and Barkin Ladi Local Government Areas of Plateau State since January 2021 will serve to illustrate this. Put more concretely, Nigeria is now what Thomas Hobbes called the state of nature where life is brutish, nasty and short. Prior (1998:205) in no less authority than Salman Rushdie asserts that “the barbarians were not only at our gates, but within our skins . . . Violence today is hot. It is what people want.” Against this backdrop, the contemporary society like Habakkuk lives in a violent world.

This exposition on the book of Habakkuk is aptly chosen. It reflects a realization of the fact that there is a major challenge facing the earth community such as; perverted justice and social oppression, destruction and violence, daily bombings and economic uncertainty, moral decay and sexual revolution. Others are poverty and starvation, hatred and fear, natural disasters and clash of counter cultures, kidnapping and abduction for ransom. All of these testify to the undeniable fact that Nigeria is in the downward spiral of violence which leaves her vulnerable. Also, it shows that there is an urgent need for God to use the Faithful’s testimonies in the midst of trials and tragedies for purposes grander than they can see or even imagine as they commit themselves to uncompromising obedience however uncertain or unrewarding may seem the immediate situation. Again the study calls the faithful not only to be models of human faithfulness but to be heroes of courage, obedience and faith. To focus on Leah Sharibu, a contemporary Christian heroine of faith will suffice. She is one of the school girls kidnapped by the Boko Haram (western education is a sacrilege) Islamic sect from the Government Girls Science and Technical College Dapchi, Yobe State. Boko Haram released everyone else except the Christian girl, Leah Sharibu who refused to convert to Islam. Four years after, she is still in their captivity.

Therefore, this study betook itself to critically reflect on the book of Habakkuk using hermeneutical and sociological paradigm to unravel the general notion of violence in biblical and contemporary period. Against this backdrop, the contemporary society like Habakkuk lives in a violent world. Here in Nigeria, Orhuagur (2008:5) succinctly states that even religion is

A major source of conflict between individuals or groups. Religious conflicts occur over religious beliefs, doctrines, practices or interpretation of holy books. For these reasons conflicts occur in African Religion, Islam and Christianity among others. In Christianity, the proliferation of churches and institutions is a result of a religious conflict in Nigeria.

Implicit in the foregoing, is that religion and her institutions are major sources of violent conflict and crisis, including terrorism not only in the contemporary period but also down the human history.

The test question here is; why does God allow this to happen? Why the apparent triumph of evil in the world created and ruled by a good, loving and sovereign God? How do you reconcile the oppressiveness of unrestrained violence, and the silence of God? Indeed, this paradoxical dilemma is inherent to the prophetic mission itself. This paper spotlights that time of violence, suffering and diseases reminds the faithful of the human capacity for sin. Slavery, torture, murder, violence, and gross immorality testify to human

awful wickedness. They also remind the earth community that such sin can never obliterate the image of God in which mankind was created. This paper was recently delivered as an exposition on the book of Habakkuk during the Ihechiowa Presbyterian Women's Guild Conference. It has been redesigned to fit this purpose. This opens the door to the literary features of the book.

LITERARY FEATURES OF THE BOOK

- a. **The Prophet's Questions 1:2-4.** In view of the foregoing, Habakkuk had cried out to God for divine intervention. He is now completely overwhelmed by the situation in which he lives. He was living in "the midst of terrible anarchy – violence, cruelty was rampant, crime was flagrant, lust was everywhere" (Morgan, n.d). As he turns to God, he used two phrases which were used by the Psalmists in their cries of lament and which remain today the heart cry of men and women at the end of their tether as they call out to God. O Lord, how long . . . ? Vss. 2-3 (cf. Ps. 10:1,13, 13:1-2, 22:1, 35:17, 42:9, 89:4). Behind how long? Is the unspoken cry, "I have my limits". Behind why? Is the insistence, "I must have reasons". God's silence is impenetrable and intolerable. Habakkuk's fundamental lament and complaint before God is expressed in one word "violence" (h'ama's, Vs 2-3). Ha'ma's is cold-blooded and unscrupulous infringement of the personal rights of others, motivated by greed and hate and often making use of physical violence and brutality. Notably, ha'ma's in a general sense is extreme wickedness or the sins of human beings, individually or as a community, against God or against other people. The word occurs 6 times in the book i.e. 1:2, 3, 9, 2:8, 17 (twice), 14 times in the Psalms and 7 times in Proverbs (Armerding; 1985; Obiorah, 2008).

It is important to point out that this word should not be confused with the homonymous Arabic acronym Hamas which when written in full is *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, which means Movement of the Islamic Resistance. This is a Palestine Islamic Organization founded in 1987. Having made this clarification, ha'ma's is therefore, a key word in the book of Habakkuk. Additionally, Obiorah (2008:236) reiterates this fact thus; "in the OT, ha'ma's as noun occurs about 60 times, and the corresponding verbal form is found eight times (Job 15:33, 21:27, Prov. 8:36; Jer. 13:22, 22:3; Lam. 2:6; Ezek 22:6; Zeph.3:4). On the strength of the above position, both the noun and the verb connote "violent action inflicted mainly on human beings by human beings. In a very few passages, the human action that ha'ma's depicts has nature as its direct object" (Obiorah; 2008:236). Habakkuk 2: 17 articulate such ecological violence. Planetary ecosystems are under violent assault from corporate interests on maintaining profit margin and the earth itself experiences terror and violence [Hab.3:10]. Equally, Genesis 6:11-13 is also "interpreted in the context of ecological violence in the OT, for human evil doing corrupts the earth" (Swart and Dam; 1996:178).

The form of the verb used in the text underscores sudden destruction of peoples and cities in war. Other rare objects of *ha'ma's* are Yahweh (Cf. Job 21:27) and His Torah (vs. 4 Cf. Ezek. 22:26; Zeph. 3:4). Violence is inevitably a renunciation rather than an affirmation of the will and freedom of God. A corollary to this is the contexts of *ha'ma's*, that is, the society where the ruling class, the rich, and the powerful perpetrate ha'ma's. Unfortunately, their victims are the poor, the needy, the weak and the helpless

(Cf. Amos 3:10, 6:1-3; Mic.6:12; Ps.72). This speaks explicitly to the fact that “The thoughts of his heart were only evil continually . . . the earth was corrupt in God’s sight . . . all flesh had corrupted their way . . .” The result? The answer is in the words of Genesis 6:5 - 11 “. . . the earth was filled with violence.” In Habakkuk’s time violence escalated by wrongs and trouble, destruction and violence, strife and contention Vs.3. In the OT, injustice and wrong doing are “correlated and used predominantly in contexts of perverted justice and social oppression. Destruction and violence are similarly associated with “the unjust oppression of the weaker members within a community” (Armerding; 1985:500).

But the most profoundly disturbing aspect was what had happened to the law. The law is slacked vs.4, that is, paralyzed, powerless or numbed. This refers to a general pervasive lawlessness in society, or more likely, to a virtually universal rejection of God’s law as the basis for personal and social behavior. This results in its being not simply ignored, but deliberately perverted. Those who should have upheld and applied the law had become venal and corrupt. Violence is fanned by such a lawless situation. The essential evil of the situation is summed up in the phrase “the wicked surround the righteous” vs. 4. Habakkuk’s use of these two categories, often on the lips of psalmists and prophets, indicates the essential godlessness of contemporary society (Armerding; 1985). Wickedness is always seen as defiant transgression of God’s law whereas righteousness comes from obedience to God’s law. If the wicked encircle the righteous, that means at the very least, that godless people outnumber God-fearers. Inevitably, it points also to the oppression of righteous people by the wicked, the immoral majority (Isa. 10:1-2).

In OT times, Armerding (1985:510) contends that justice is the application of the law by means of all the functions of government, that is, the priest, the prophet and the king. However, wherever Habakkuk looked, those in authority ignored the law. In this light, Calvin (1984) opines that no one dared to oppose the torrent, though frauds, rapes, outrages, cruelty and even murders everywhere prevailed. If any righteous man still remained, he dared not come forth into the public arena, for the wicked beset them on all sides. Consequently, Patterson (1991:140) posits that Habakkuk was “an unhappy, perplexed and greatly frustrated prophet”. Hence, Craigie (1985:84) queries

Why do good people suffer? Why do the ungodly flourish? Why are justice and mercy flouted with impunity? What is the point of praying? What is the point of having faith in God? What kind of God is He? Why put up with the hassle of being a prophet? Why not take the wings of a dove and opt out? Why is it all such a burden?

Without overstating the obvious, Habakkuk raises openly the kind of questions any thinking and believing person ought to ask (See Jer. 12:1-2, 4; Mal.3:15; Job 21:7-15).

b. God Replies To Habakkuk 1:5-11. God’s response asserts that this situation would not last for long because that generation was going to come under divine judgment at the hands of the Babylonians. This sets the scene for the book’s message: the wicked will not go unpunished (Uka; 2013:6). The Chaldeans in God’s hands are an instrument of chastisement against Judea (Jer.25:8-11). This is the work which the people of Judea would not believe if told vs. 5. So incredible would it appear that “God should so act towards His people and should use so unlikely an agent” (Guthrie and Motyer; 1992:769). For instance, the Chaldeans are a law unto themselves vs. 7b and mock all

authority vs. 10; they worship their own strength vs. 11 and with them might is right. Furthermore, God began by taking the prophet up on his complaint. God tells him: look among the nations and see vs.5. Habakkuk is thus instructed to turn his eyes away from his own little world and watch God at work on a wider canvas. God listened to Habakkuk's prayer very carefully, taking in the actual words the prophet has used to pour out his heart to Him. God responds specifically to His prayer by taking up his own vocabulary vss.2 – 4, 7, and 9. God listened to Habakkuk and addressed his burning concern in specific detail. He still does so today.

c. Watching and Waiting 2:1. Habakkuk teaches the faithful that he must learn to cherish the waiting time before he receives his answers. In chapter One, Habakkuk is positioned to watch and see. In Chapter two, Habakkuk is positioned to stand and see, while in chapter three, the prophet is positioned to kneel and see. Covertly, Habakkuk was playing the role of a watchman. The role of the watchman in Israel was crucial. It was an essential ingredient of any prophet's ministry (Hos.9:8, Ezek.33:1-6, Jer. 6:17). God appointed His prophets and He expected them to be His people's watchman. However, Baker (1988:58) observed that Habakkuk looks in "the other direction. He wants to see how God will act in the light of the stipulation found in the covenant, to which He also is a signatory, that sin necessitates punishment". In other words, Habakkuk is watching God to see whether He will keep His side of the covenant and judge the Babylonians for their violent cruelty, particularly to his own people. He is watching and waiting for God.

Such watching and waiting constitute a fundamental ingredient of faith in God. But it is often missing among activist believers following a shredded lifestyle in a frenetic generation. Often, Christians do not find it easy to watch and or to wait. They are much better at talking and doing. In particular, Prior (1998:228) notes that "we find it very difficult to watch and to wait for God to answer our prayers, especially the impassioned ones which are torn from broken hearts and baffled minds like Habakkuk's". Overtly, the faithful needs to learn the importance of watching and waiting from the prophet thus;

i. Watching and waiting takes time. In an impatient and instant generation, where time is money, the faithful needs the reminder that it takes time to watch and wait. Though the intercessor may know Isaiah 40:31 and Psalm 37:1-7, yet, they urge God to hurry up and give them His answer quickly. Two specific examples of men who watched and waited will illustrate the matter (See Dan.10:11-2; Jer. 37:1-21). Accordingly, Bruce (1993:857) states that "Yahweh's response to those who enquire of Him is never automatic."

ii. Watching and waiting make lonely work. Habakkuk 2:1, points to the reality of solitary sentry-duty. Agonizing with God on behalf of an apostate Church in a godless nation is lonelier when one is within the establishment and part of the institution than if one has chosen to operate as a lone- ranger.

iii. Watching and waiting calls for quietness. Habakkuk said, "I will . . . look forth to see what He will say to me" 2:1 (see Ps. 46:10). Prior (1998:231) opines that "the silence of God - mysterious, exasperating, consoling, pregnant with meaning – require our trust at least as much as does the Word of God. God does not talk all the time and God's silence is as emphatic as His speech".

iv. Watching and waiting requires perseverance. Resolve and determination are essential to the watchman's work. Watching and waiting involves not only time but perseverance (Isa. 62:6-7, Dt. 4:29; Ps. 145:18-19; Mt. 7:7-11, 26:36-45).

v. Watching and waiting imply being open to correction. In 2:1 the prophet declares “. . . What I will answer when I am corrected”. Habakkuk expected God to reprimand and correct him. When God decides to administer reproof, rather than to meet the watchmen’s desires, they can easily conclude that God is not listening, because His answer is not what they want to hear. Habakkuk’s reaction to God’s reproof would have a telling effect on his own spiritual condition and the effectiveness of his entire ministry. More so, during the watching and waiting, God gave him a vision.

d. Vision: The Blueprint for Building a Bridge to the Future (2:2-3). The prophet gives notice that the result of his disciplined watchfulness is a vision or revelation from God. He affirms that he was going to look to see what God will say vs. 1; as he expected, God gave him a vision in which He revealed what is in His mind. Through Habakkuk, God furnishes some instruction on vision for the contemporary church. First, a divine vision should be written down vs.2, distributed to people vs. 2 and acted on. Again, a vision motivates the watchman toward the goal vs. 3; it should not be discarded vs. 3 and will not fail vs. 3. More fundamentally, the just shall live by faith vs. 4.

Accordingly, the core of the vision is that the righteous shall live by his faith. This is the nub of the Christian Gospel. The significance of this vision is comparable to that of the Sinai Covenant. In fact, the Jewish Talmud records a remark made by Rabbi Simlai thus;

Moses gave Israel 613 commandments. David reduced them to eleven (Ps. 15), Micah to three (6:8), Isaiah to two (56:1), but Habakkuk to one: the righteous shall live by faith. Jewish scholars felt that these three Hebrew words fairly summarized the message of the whole Bible (Kaiser; 1992:162).

Therefore, Habakkuk looks back to the giving of the law and forward to the coming of the Gospel. Indeed, Paul’s treatment of the principle of faith in Romans takes the thrust of Habakkuk 2:4 back to Abraham (Rm. 4:3; Gn. 15:6; Hab. 2:3).

In similar situations in the faithful’s personal life, the process of waiting is as important as the moment of clarification and fulfillment. The faithful grows in faith by learning how to wait. Because the righteous shall live by his faith, God often chooses to keep him waiting so that he may learn to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). To this end, Habakkuk 2:4 is specifically the phrase which became “the watchword of Christianity, the key of the whole book of Habakkuk and the central theme of all the Scriptures” (Feinberg; 1976:211). Also, the greatest proof of the clarity of Scripture and the reality of the phrase: “the just shall live by faith” is found in Habakkuk 2:4. It is interesting, Wagner (1989:311-312) and Uka (2013:5) opines that these six words epitomize three whole epistles of Paul, namely, Romans (1:16-17, 5:1, 3:22, 4:5, 13, 10:6), which shows how a man can be just with God. “Shall live” is covered in Galatians (2:20-21, 5:5-6, 22-26), which emphasizes that portion of truth. “By faith” is covered amply in Heb (11). It is a proof of the promise in Habakkuk that it is quoted in all three of these books.

In the instruction, “Behold” vs.4, God is opening the prophet’s eyes to foundational truth. The proud Babylonians

Would fall, the righteous Israelite would live by his faith, that is, in this context, by his humble, steadfast trust in God. The righteous will not merely survive, but flourish. And the quality which produces this outcome is faith or faithfulness (Stott; 2003:65).

The affirmation is as relevant as ever. On this score, Keil (1986:73) avers that the Hebrew denotes

Firmness, an attribute of God, trust worthiness, unchangeable fidelity in the fulfilment of His promise; and as an attribute of man, fidelity in word and deed, and in his relation to God, firm attachment to God, an undisturbed confidence in the promise of grace.

According to Prior (1988:239) the word speaks of “trust through thick and thin in a trustworthy God, who stands by us through thick and thin as Savior – a veritable rock”. In addition, Calvin (1984:74) asserts that this is “a faith which strips us of all arrogance and leads us naked and needy to God”.

In the same vein, Hendriksen (1999:60-61) declares that faith is

Trust, confidence, learning on the everlasting arms, the conviction (Heb.11) that through Christ and His atoning sacrifice, my sins are forgiven, my debt is cancelled, and that, having now been adopted as child of the king, I am in my Father’s keeping, I am in His tender care whether walking, whether sleeping, I am in His care.

Against this backdrop, faith is the trunk of the tree whose roots represent grace and whose fruit symbolizes good works. It is the coupling that connects man’s train with God’s engine. Accordingly, Uka (2013:5) quips that

Faith is the only evidence that there is a relationship with God, if there is no faith, there is no relationship. It is faith that links us with our God, the Holy One of Israel, and the God who has revealed Himself to the world in Christ Jesus and is only sustained by the word of God”.

Inevitably, the consequences of living without this faith are devastating. It manifests in five-fold woes. They are summarized as points below.

- i. Woe Against Aggression 2:6-8. The Babylonians’ greed for conquest is condemned. Therefore Babylon’s blood would be shed (Gn. 9:6, Ex. 21:12-14, Rm. 13:3-4). In killing a human being a murderer demonstrates his contempt for God as well as for his fellow man.
- ii. Woe Against Self-assertion 2:9-11. The Babylonian’s pride in building is condemned. Though they thought their empire to be unconquerable, yet, they would suddenly come to an end (Isa. 14:3-8, Oba. 3-4; Amos 3:10-11, 5:11-12).
- iii. Woe Against Violence 2:12-14. Babylonian injustice is condemned. The Lord’s destruction of proud Babylon and all the worldly glory will cause His great glory to be known throughout the world (Ex.14:4, 17, Isa. 11:9, Rev. 17:1-19:4) (Barker; 1985:1390).
- iv. Woe Against Inhumanity 2:15-17. Babylonian rapacious treatment of her neighbors which stripped them of all their wealth is compared to one who makes his neighbor drunk so he can take lewd pleasure from the man’s nakedness (Barker; 1985:1390). The Lord will do to Babylon what she has done to others (2Kings 25:8-21 cf. Isa. 51:22-23). Babylonian violence was destructive of all forms of life, not only of lands and cities (Isa. 14:8).
- v. Woe Against Idolatry 2:18-20. The Hebrew word for idols means nonentities (cf. Isa. 41:29, 44:9; Jer. 10:15). The Bible condemns all forms of idolatry (Ex. 20:4-5; Ps. 115:4-8).

e. Habakkuk's Prayer 3:1-19. The prayer is in two parts. The first verse expresses the prophet's conviction about God's work in the world. The rest of the verse is a threefold request for that work to be renewed and once again revealed in the midst of the years. This has brought him to a new place of reverence in the presence of God: "Thy work, O Lord do I fear" vs.2 cf. 1:5. If then, God has worked in the past, not just once but on several occasions, there was good reason to trust that He would work again (Ps.44; 89). So Habakkuk prays: "Renew your work, Lord"; do it again, make it come alive. He prays again, "in wrath remember mercy" vs.2. The prophet finally felt so confident about God's goodness and power that he closed his book with a hymn of praise and trust (Hab.3:17-19). The rest of the chapter describes his experience of God and subsequent transformation. The following section seeks to apply the study to contemporary situations.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF DEMONSTRATING THE UNFAILING FAITH IN A VIOLENT SOCIETY

1. God Is Good and Sovereign. God is all powerful and so involved with what happens that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from His will (Mt. 10:29). He is completely in control of history at all times (Ex. 34:5-7; Dan.4:17; Acts 17:26). God is active in history even when He does not seem to be active. This theme runs through the whole Bible (Gen. 50:19-20; Job 42:1-3; Acts 1:15-20; Rom.8: 28-39). The classic picture of God's sovereignty over human rebellion is found in Psalm 2. A God who is not good and sovereign cannot demand goodness and service. Unlike all other gods, the biblical God rules by moral standard. In ascription of goodness to God the fundamental idea is that

He is in every way all that He as God should be and therefore answers perfectly to the ideal expressed in the word 'God'. He is good in the metaphysical sense of the world, absolute perfection and perfect bliss in Himself (Mk. 10:18) (Berkhof; 1994:70).

One ramification is that despite the victories of evil people and the sufferings of good people, a moral and sovereign God rules the world, and ultimately the good and evil will receive their just deserts. Furthermore, God is free and sovereign. In freedom, God judges that which are sown and set the harvest time (Gal. 6:7). As biblically portrayed, God's freedom is

Always freedom for the covenanted community and through them, freedom for humanity. Rather than being neutral or detached, this is a free God of radical passion who stands with humanity. And it is precisely as an expression of this stand for and with humanity that God also stands against an assortment of human actions and institutions, human oppression and carnage (Griffith; 2002:112).

God's freedom, God's lack of neutrality, God's standing for humanity by standing against inhumanity; these all emerge with particular clarity in the book of Habakkuk.

2. God Is Holy. As primary as ethics are, man cannot live by morality alone. Man is also instructed to lead holy lives, "you shall be holy because I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev.19:2). God is more than the source of morality. He is the source of holiness. It has been rightly observed that the ultimate problem of humanity is not evil but the problem of mankind's relationship with God. This is because the biblical answer to evil is

Not the good but the holy. Holiness is an attempt to raise man to a higher level of existence, where man is not alone when confronted with evil. Living in the 'light of the face of God' bestows upon man a power of love that enables him to overcome the powers of evil . . . We do not wage war with evil in the name of an abstract concept of duty. We do the good not because it is a value or because of expediency, but because we owe it to God (Griffith; 2002:125).

Accordingly, the call to holiness is the result of the nature of God (Lev. 20:26; I Pet.1:15-16). The holiness of God means for the world that

God cannot stand sin in any form, that sin will be punished wherever it is found, that God's holy eyes are 'too pure to behold evil and that God cannot look "on wrong doing' (Hab.1:13). Also, the holiness of God means that God will execute justice steadfastly . . . (Fubara-Manuel 2007:115)

Admittedly, the wicked will not go unpunished. This is the central thesis of the study.

Accordingly, Habakkuk 2:11 states that when a house is built by evil and sin, the "stone will cry out from the wall and the beam from the woodwork respond". This is a beautiful expression used to pronounce a curse against unscrupulous gain. All men and women who have become rich through injustice, violence, oppression and corruption and seek to escape retribution by running to foreign lands or surround themselves with armed security men and charms shall not escape. Misfortune, shame and death await them for the very money used to provide security and the security themselves, ill-gotten as they are, will mysteriously continue to fight them.

3. God Cares. Jesus taught His disciples that God is "my Father and your father" (Jn.20:17). That reassuring truth is clearly stated in Isaiah's words thus; "*Yet, O Lord you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter*" (64:8). In other words, Jesus showed them that God cared for them personally, just as a human father cares for his children. God Cares for the smallest details of man's everyday needs (Mt.6:28-32). Unlike the gods of Greek and Roman myths, who were short-tempered and immoral, Packer and Tenney (1980:544) asserts that

The true God is just and righteous (Lk.18:19). He intervenes to save His people from sin . . . so this holy God does not stand aloof from the affairs of men. He suffers their pain and even submits to the power of death to save His children.

This point is sufficiently significant to stress. On this premise, Ziglar (1998:186) punctiliously states that they believe in God is the assurance that there is "a just and loving God who has vested interest in me because He created me, that He loves me no matter what and that He hears and answers my prayer". This assurance moves you from frustration to inspiration as you refuse to quit in the face of life challenges.

4. Stewardship of Life and Creation Preservation. As God's representative in the creaturely realm, man is steward of God's creatures. He is not to exploit, waste or despoil them, but to care for them and use them in the service of God and humankind (Gen. 2:15).

5. Courage for Transformation. The key word for survival is courage which is a universal human need. Success is only for the courageous. Shakespeare has rightly said that "cowards die many times before their deaths, the valiant never taste of death but once (Okon; 2010:421). The author elaborates more by saying that the time has come for the Church to rise courageously and reclaim her lost glory. The church has been over-governed, over exploited and depersonalized by oppressors; the time has come for a

comprehensive reprisal. The church must fight to claim back her lost glory. Apparently, religion must no longer play a tranquilizing role for consolidation of structural violence. They are social responsibilities which the Church must accept as a challenge. Accordingly, it needs to be stated that oppressors will never allow God's kingdom to come in peace, except the Church gives them a good fight. Impliedly, she has a duty to unmask any religious system that conceals and justifies oppression.

Furthermore, it may be permissible to argue that there will be no lasting change except there are men of conscience at the apex of social transformation. Upon the unjaundiced reading of the above assumption, the first institution to be liberated is the Church. After that, all Christians must be mobilized for the fight against social injustice. On this premise, Okon (2010:422) prays in relation to courage thus;

God give us men. A time like this demands strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands. Men whom the lust of office does not kill, men whom the spoils of office cannot buy; men who possess opinions and a will, men who have honor and will not lie, men who stand before a demagogue and scorn his treacherous flatteries without winking. Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog, in public duty and in private thinking.

Consequently, the Church must monitor and galvanize the government on all matters of public interest.

Effects of Terror and Violence in Contemporary Nigeria

History provides abundant statistics on the acute problems of terror and violence. Terror and violence has continued to afflict the Nigerian society, a testimony to the grim fact that the contemporary society continues to be a violent and dangerous place. Precisely, violence has become most virulent in Nigeria's Fourth Republic due to several structural, institutional, policy and attitudinal factors. Uka (2016:110) captures the common causes of social conflicts as; land and boundary disputes, struggles for political power, the indigene/settler divide, diminished grazing land and encroachment of pastoralists onto cultivated land, political marginalization, social discontent, discrimination and hindered opportunities, historical grievances, ethnic chauvinism, religious-extremism, weak institutions, corruption and bad governance. Ethnicity as well as ethno-religious conflicts and violence has been largely the result of the failure of the state and poor orientation of citizens especially the rulers and elites. This is supported by Dike (2015:54) when he argued that; "Nigeria is undoubtedly one tense country as far as ethno – religious relationships are concerned. This has stretched the bonds of unity, the fabrics of nationhood, as well as the ingredients of citizenship identity thin to snapping point". Impliedly, ethno-religious violence continues to plague the unity and integrity of many Nigerian societies in spite of efforts to promote national unity and cohesion.

Consequently, widespread oppression, injustice and violence have assumed a more lethal form in the last few years. For instance, Boko Haram is seeking to establish a strict version of Sharia and to create an Islamic State in Northern Nigeria. For this reason, they have engaged in terrorist attack against Christians, Churches and other non – Muslim from other traditions. Uka (2016:309 – 310) has so aptly summarized the effects thus;

Many Christian villages in Kaduna, Bauchi, Plateau, Yobe, Borno and Adamawa states have experienced such attacks. Many Christians have fled from flashpoints in Borno and Yobe. Some have even abandoned their farms, shops

and other personal Belongings, only to hear later that the items were taken by their Muslim neighbors.

What it attests unequivocally is the fact that the insecurity challenge in the country is crippling economic activities and making the unemployment rate worse. Insecurity does not impact society only, but it reduces the positive benefits that security and peace bring to macroeconomic performance of the nation.

Toki Mabogunje, the President Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry posit that the security in Nigeria is;

Still a narrative of challenges, apprehension, anxiety, disrupted supply chains and increasing economic loss from the impact of insecurity....Insecurity and armed conflict results in death and injuries, paralysis of economic activities, GDP losses, cost of peace –building and peace – keeping activities and refugees and IDP camps...The economic impact of violence increased in 2019 to a total of \$ 453.1b or \$433 dollars for each person in Sub – Saharan Africa (Adenubi; 2021:1).

The point stressed here is that the security problem in Nigeria is easily seen in the inability of the Nigerian government to ensure the protection, integrity, and continuity of Nigeria's core values; its territory, infrastructure, officials, citizens, laws and institutions.

Accordingly, Nigeria has lost no fewer than 8, 343 persons to farmer-herder conflict since 2005 according to findings by Armed Conflict Location and Events Data Project (ACLED). ACLED noted that the casualties were a result of 1, 350 attacks spread across 16 states of the federation. The report which covered 2005 to 2021, put the number of killings in Benue at 2539 from 303 attacks, while Plateau, Kaduna, Taraba and Nasarawa states lost 2, 138, 1, 188, 755, 521 lives in 279, 160, 111 and 93 attacks respectively (Yakubu; 2021:1). In the same vein, suspected Fulani herdsmen have killed 548 people in repeated attacks on Irigwe communities of Bassa Local Council of Plateau State in four years. An advocacy group, Stefanos Foundation, which gave the figure in its fast-finding report on attacks on the community said 7576 houses and 580 farms were also destroyed between 2018 and 2021 (Omolaoye; 2021:1). Motivated primarily by impetus for forcible seizure of land and profit, bandits and Fulani herdsmen have also forced links with terrorists seeking religious cum political suzerainty through bloody conquest. As the Punch Editorial Board (2021:21) has clearly shown, the Global Terrorism Index has ranked Boko Haram and its offshoot, ISWAP and Fulani herdsmen among the world's five most deadly terrorists groups. Between them, they murdered 1, 000 in the North West in 2018; 2, 200 in 2019 and 1, 600 from January to June 2020. In June 2021 alone, they slaughtered 283 persons; while 525 persons were killed in the first six weeks of 2021.

Furthermore, data released by United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) in 2021 has revealed that more than 300, 000 children have been killed in Nigeria's North East and over one million have been displaced due to Boko Haram insurgency. Akhane (2021:1) illuminates the consequences posed by this; more than 600, 000 children have lost access to education due to disruptions in learning occasioned by kidnapping; an

estimated 2, 295 teachers have been killed and over 19, 000 others displaced; while more than 1, 400 schools have been destroyed, damaged or looted since the insurgency started in the North – East in 2009. In addition, from January to August 2021, more than 1000 children have been abducted in the country for ransom, with so many of them still in hands of their abductors. In fact, these attacks have been on the increase between 2020 and 2021 which led to the close down of many schools by the government due to fear of being attacked.

This coheres with the position of Isopi (2021:1)

More than two million remain displaced from homes, while hundreds of thousands are living under crowded displacement sites, without proper access to sanitation and clean water more than three million have food insecurity and an equal high number of children are suffering from acute malnutrition. The number of out of school children has also increased exponentially.

In particular, with the various forms of insecurity in parts of the country, such as Boko Haram in the North – East, banditry in the North – West and North – Central, IPOB agitations in the South – East, illegal oil bunkering in the Niger – Delta and separatist agitators in the South – West, Nigeria is faced with many woes. These include indiscriminate mass murder, creation of fear and instability, the destabilization of established society and repine (Dike; 2015 Livinus, 2021; Uka; 2016; Adenubi; 2021).

Conclusion

The story of God’s dealings with various categories of people in the Scriptures reveals that God can decide to put an end to a particular course in order to begin a new one. God can close a particular door when a fresh one needs to be open and He can do that though a crisis. Nevertheless, violence in the name of religion is a grave misapprehension of the tenet of that religion. The God the faithful worships is love and this love is intrinsically vertical and horizontal. These two dimensions are two sides of the same coin. It is worth elaborating this point a little, if only because it is overlooked so often. The clear surmise is that if the watchmen intend to serve God by loving Him, human beings should be the first objects of this. In exactly the same manner, Obiorah (2008:241) queries can one say that a violence-filled country like ours has lost the sense of true worship of God? This paradoxical contrast between life inside the Church and life in other daily activities is an urgent call to rethink the understanding of religion in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

Adenubi, D (2021, September 11). Insecurity crippling Economy, worsening unemployment. Retrieved from <https://www.punch.com/insecurity-crippling-economy> on September 11, 2021.

Akhane, S. (2021, September 13). Worry over mass abductions as schools resume today. Retrieved from

<https://www.m.guardianng/news/worry-over-mass-abductions..On> September 13, 2021.

Amadi, O. (2013, March 17). Man Beheads Father. Abakaliki: Citizens' Advocate.
Anyagafu, V. and Sam-Duru, P. (2014, June 20). Towards Ending Violence Against Women. Lagos: Vanguard.

Armerding, C.E. (1985). "Habakkuk" in The Expositor's Bible Commentary 7. Michigan: Zondervan.

Baker, D.N. (1988) Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah: Tyndale OT Commentaries 2 Vols. Michigan: Zondervan.

Bandy, F. (2013 February 25-27). Father Dumps 12 years Daughter in a Well . . . Owerri: African Herald.

Barker, K.(ED.) (1985). The NIV Study Bible. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.

Berkhof, L. (1994). Systematic Theology. England: The Banner Of Truth Trust.

Bruce, F.F. (1993). "Habakkuk" in the Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary 2 T.E.

McComiskey(Ed.) Michigan: Zondervan.

Calvin, J. (19984). Commentaries 14 & 15 edited and translated by John Owen. Michigan: Baker

Craigie, P.C. (1985). Twelve Prophets 1 and 2: The Daily Study Bible. Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press.

Dike, A.M. (2015). Church, Society and Globalization: Issues of concern. Jos: Challenge Publications.

Feinberg, C.L. (1976). The Minor Prophets. Chicago: Moody Press.

Fubara-Manuel, B.F. (2007). In the Missio Dei. Calabar: Presby Press.

Griffith, L. (2002). The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God. Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Guthrie, D. and Motyer, J.A. (1992). New Bible Commentary. England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Hendriksen, W. (1999). New Testament Commentary on Romans Vol. 1. Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust.

Iroanya, A. C. (2014). "Promotion of Justice and Human Dignity in Nigeria: A Christian Response Based on

Genesis 1:26 – 28" In International Research Council on Humanities and Social Sciences Studies on Africa Vol.1, No.1, 625 -639.

Isopi, S. (2021, October 26): Over Two million displaced in North East Nigeria. Retrieved from

https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/morenews/491723_on_October_26, 2021.

- Johnson, T. (2014, August 27). My Husband wants to kill me, Divorce seeking wife Tells Court. Lagos: The Nation.
- Kaiser, W.C. (1992). Micah to Malachi: The Communicator's Commentary Vol. 21. Michigan: Word Books.
- Keil, C.F. (1986). "Joel, Micah and Habakkuk" Commentary on the Old Testament 10th edition. Michigan. Eerdmans.
- Lininus, H. (2021, September 20). Insurgency; Over 5000 out of School Children Supported in Borno, Says UNICEF. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/insurgency-over-5000-out-of-school-children...on-March-29,2021>.
- Morgan, C. G. (n.d). Voices of Twelve Hebrew Prophets. Pickering and Inglis.
- Obiorah, M.J. (2008). "Howling like Dogs Psalm 59:6: The Experience of Violence in Psalm 59" in C. Obanure(Ed.) Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.
- Okon, E.E. (2010). "Religion and Violence: A Critical Option in the Struggle for Social Justice" in Uka, E.M.; Okoro, K.N. and Kanu, M.A (Eds) Contemporary Issues in Philosophical and Religious Discourse. Awka: Optimum Publishers.
- Okoro, K.N. (2010). "Religion and Terrorism: A Socio-Historical Reconsideration" in Journal of Alternative Perspective in the Social Sciences Vol.2, No. 2, 550-576.
- Omolaoye, S. (2021, September 11). 7,576 Houses Destroyed, 548 killed in Plateau Community in four years-Report. Retrieved from https://m.guardianing/news/7576_on_September_11, 2021.
- Orhungur, M.M. (2008). "Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution" in Obanure C.(Ed.) Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria. Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.
- Packer, J.I. and Tenney, M.C. (1980). Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Patterson, R.D. (1991). Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah. Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press.

- Prior, D. (1998). *The Message of Joel, Micah and Habakkuk*. England: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Stott, J. (2003). *The Message of Romans*. England: IVP.
- Swart, I. and Dam.C.V. (1996). *New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology and Exegesis Vol. 2* Carlisle: Paternoster Press.
- Uka, E.M. (2013). "The Prelate and Moderator of General Assembly Speaks" in 2013 All Presbyterian Conference Program. Calabar: Presby-Press.
- (2016) *My pilgrimage: An Adventure in God's Providence*. Calabar: Presby Press.
- Wagner, C.U. (1989). *Winning Words for Daily Living*. Michigan: Kregel Publications.
- Yakubu, D. (2021, August 30). Nigeria Loses 8343 Persons to Farmers-herders conflict, says Report.
Retrieved from [https://www.vanguardngr.com/nigeria-loses-8,343 -Persons on September 11, 2021](https://www.vanguardngr.com/nigeria-loses-8,343-Persons-on-September-11,2021).
- Ziglar, Z. (1998). *The Principles of Success*. Lagos: African Pastors -Literature Trust:
- (2002). *Raising Positive Kids in a Negative World*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.