

## **Prayer And National Security: A Study Of Isaiah 58**

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### **Abstract**

One of the obligations of a nation is to provide security for its citizens. In Nigeria today, security has been hampered by a number of activities, particularly by that of the Boko Haram sect. The paper presents that well-principled prayer can go a long way in stemming the tide of insecurity in Nigeria. The paper acknowledges that prayers are being said by various religious groups but there is something lacking. Hence, the message of Isaiah 58 maintains that prayers go unanswered because the religious practices of the people are shallow and mixed with compromises. The study employed the biblical analytical method and the findings indicated that this situation can be averted if the right principles of prayer were followed by those who are praying for the peace of the nation.

### **Introduction**

In simple terms, security which is a basic human need means safety from harm. It refers to the various activities aimed at protecting a country, building or person from attack or danger. Security is so fundamental to life and existence that every nation endeavours to ensure the safety of lives and property of its citizens. Suffice it to mention that one of the principal obligations of a nation is to provide security for its citizens. In addition, the fundamental human right to life demands that the government protects her citizens from abuse and attack by other citizens. On this, Fagothey (1953:243) rightly stated that “the right to life is the most fundamental because there can be no further rights or duties unless there is someone there to have them.” According to the Universal Declaration of Human rights; article 3 (1948), “everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” More so, the Nigerian constitution recognizes the sanctity of human life and clearly indicates that the lives of its citizens are held in the highest regard and are guaranteed against attacks. The government with the assistance of various security agencies is saddled with the responsibility of protecting her citizens from unwarranted actions which hamper security.

National security promotes internal unity, maintains law and order and ensures the safety of lives and property of citizens. It therefore, aims at achieving and sustaining a stable state of national survival. In fact, security is paramount for any nation that seeks sustainable development because porous security system poses a challenge and hampers development. Insecurity hugely affects not only an individual who is a victim of the perils of an insecure environment but the society as well. It incapacitates an individual and makes it almost impossible for one to make meaningful contributions to societal development. On the other hand, security challenges decimate the spate of national development because the money that would have been invested in the development of other sectors is apparently diverted to the abating of the challenges.

Over time, religious extremism and ethnic intolerance have posed a threat to the peace and security of our dear nation. Thus, the incessant and widespread killing across the country is an indication of the dearth of security and also an infringement of the human right to life. In Nigeria presently, the increasing wave of insecurity occasioned particularly by the inhumane activities of the dreaded Boko Haram Islamic sect is quite alarming. This sect is generally known for gruesome activities in various parts of the country particularly in the Northern states. They engage in series of attacks in which lives and property worth millions of naira are lost. The incessant destructions of many churches, police stations, banks, military offices and facilities mostly done through bomb explosions undermine the economic development of the country. More so, the activities of kidnapers, armed robbers, assassins and ritual killers have also heightened the level of insecurity in some parts of the country. In fact, these security challenges have drastically increased the country's security budget thereby weakening the economy and impeding national development. Economic productive activities and inflow of investments have been hampered by these attacks because it discourages foreign investments that may possibly strengthen the Nation's economy.

Interestingly, the Nigerian government has not kept folded hands to the outrageous development arising from the various heinous activities launched by various extremist groups and its detrimental tendencies to the growth of the country but has taken several measures to see that tranquility is restored in the country. For instance, the Federal Government formed a Joint Task Force (JTF) made up of policemen, soldiers, and State Security Service (SSS) to combat the insurgences of the Boko Haram sect. So far, the collaborative efforts of the JTF have checked their activities to an extent. However, it is observable that these security challenges are still unabated and in fact persistent. In the face of these persistent and increasing challenges, there is an urgent demand to diversify the strategies for a possible speedy solution to this anomaly. Iredia (2011) agrees that there is no doubt that the insecurity situation in the country calls for extra-ordinary measures to combat it.

Arising from the foregoing, the paper therefore opines that well-principled prayer can go a long way in abating the wave of insecurity in Nigeria. It is an undeniable fact that various religious groups have not relented in praying for the

peace of the country. However, the spate of insecurity has been on the increase despite the huge amount of prayers been said by adherents of various religions both within and outside the country. Hence, the message of Isaiah 58 maintains that prayers go unanswered because they are said by people with false religious observances. The religious practices of the people are shallow, mixed with compromises and therefore unacceptable to God. There is no nexus between their confessions and actions. The interest of this paper, therefore, is to borrow a leaf from the reflections on prayer in Isaiah 58 and apply its principles as a panacea to the security challenges in Nigeria.

### **The Concept of Prayer**

The various scholarly attempts to define prayer have proven a difficult task. This is because of the various religious backgrounds and worldviews that are connected with the act of prayer. Ekwunife (2007:6) understood this and noted that “an attempt to conceptualize and define prayer will seem to give an incomplete picture of its encompassing reality.” In spite of this difficulty in definition, prayer is obviously regarded as a fundamental characteristic of every religion because it is the only means through which a religious believer seeks contact with the object of worship. This is to say that it is an essential activity of adherents of any religion. Without the practice of prayer, none of the other religious claims can be true, because they all depend on some form of communication to a supreme being. In fact, prayer is the heart of all religious beliefs and practices. Inge (1920:11) posits that “prayer is the very breathing of the soul, the pulsation of the heart of religion. Let no one think that he is religious, or knows what religion means, if he does not pray habitually and spontaneously”. It is vital to note that prayer presupposes the existence and belief in the personality of a transcendental reality, his ability and willingness to communicate with us, and his personal control of all things. Little wonder, human beings have recognized the indispensability of prayer and have also utilized it in daily life situations. More often than not, the act of prayer is seen as a covenant relationship between a religious devotee and God which avails the devotee an opportunity of having a personal knowledge of God. On this, Ifesieh (1989:100) avers that “prayer is the most practical demonstration of man’s relation with his source of existence”. In prayer, God invites us to commune with Him while we manifest our devotion to Him through worship. Douglas (1990:958) rightly observed that “the biblical doctrine of prayer emphasizes the character of God, the necessity of a man’s being in saving or covenant relation with him, and his entering fully into all the privileges and obligations of that relationship with God.”

The Bible presents us with a wide spectrum of men and women at prayer. Some stand with hands lifted up to God, others kneel, and still others prostrate themselves before the majesty of their Lord. Some mumble inaudibly, while others cry aloud as if to bridge the gap between heaven and earth by sheer vocal power. Some pray in temples and synagogues, while others withdraw to hills or gardens to be alone with God. (Martin, 1964) The act of prayer is sometimes accompanied by

either fasting or sacrifice mainly done to intensify the effectiveness of the act. Nevertheless, the core of the idea of prayer is neither centered on the length of the words nor the position which one takes while praying; but rather the expression of worship and submission to a Supreme Being. In that vein, Martin (1964:640) rightly posited that “the criterion of acceptable prayer is not length or poetic grandeur, but the expression of submission to his will, desire for the advance and consummation of his work among men, and praise to his holy name.” Be that as it may, an acceptable prayer must be from a sincere heart, offered in faith, reverence and godly fear, with a humble sense of our insignificance as creatures and of our unworthiness as sinners, and with unhesitating submission to the divine will. [http://www.helium.com/items/504211-](http://www.helium.com/items/504211) Christian prayer normally includes invocation, confession, thanksgiving, petition, intercession. It follows the pattern of the prayer generally known as the Lord's Prayer given by Jesus Christ to his disciples as recorded in Matthew 6:9-13.

### **The State of Security in Nigeria**

The thrust of this section is to make bare the state of insecurity in Nigeria. It is understandable that security is not necessarily the absence of harm or threats but the ability to respond to the threats with expertise and speed. From the foregoing, it is common knowledge that in recent times, Nigeria has been characterized by a number of worrisome security-related developments. Eyiango and Athekame (2011) rightly pointed out that it is common knowledge that Nigeria currently faces some security challenges quite different from what it used to know. The spate of bomb blasts, criminalities and suicide attacks in recent times and aimed at prime targets in parts of the federation, are emerging trends of terrorism in the country. Kidnappings, armed robbery and political assassinations, are added dimensions to the security crises, which are stretching the nation to its limits, sometimes threatening the very fabric of its existence. Suffice it to mention that Nigeria is currently experiencing a porous security system arising from the heinous activities of armed robbers, kidnapers, hired assassins, ritual murderers etc. Some other security problems currently confronting the nation have been identified by Abubakar to include, political and electioneering conflicts, socio-economic agitations, ethno-religious crises, ethnic militias, boundary disputes, cultism, criminality and organised crimes. These problems individually and collectively constitute threats to the peace, security and development of the country. Of these, concise attention would be given to ethno-religious crises, kidnapping and Boko Haram insurgences because they are the bane of security challenges in Nigeria.

Over time, religious extremism and ethnic intolerance which are manifest in the incessant and widespread killing across the country have exacerbated the problems of the country and is an obvious indication of the dearth of security in our dear nation. A document of National Security Strategy for the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2011:21) states that the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination estimates that since 1999, 13,500 people have died in Nigeria

as a direct result of ethnic and religious violence. The heterogeneous nature of Nigeria has serious implications for its religious practices which in turn leads to security challenges. Nigeria has three major ethnic groups: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The Northern part of Nigeria is largely Muslim while the South is mostly dominated by Christians. Religious pluralism which gives rise to intolerance has become a major ground for division among religious communities with differing beliefs and practices. The source of ethnic and religious crisis in Nigeria can be traced to the British colonial policy of lumping people of different religion, culture and language for their personal economic and political aggrandizement. The British colonial leaders advocated and sustained a political system that favoured the North against the South. Britain was a Christian country, yet it hindered the spread of Christianity in the North to the advantage of the Muslim population. Consequently, religion has played a core divisive part in Nigeria. In Nigeria today, there is bitterness, conflict and animosity between Muslims and Christians and among other ethnic groups. Religious fanaticism and intolerance is responsible for the massive killings and wanton destruction of properties in Nigeria. Apenda (2011:332) posits that

When a society is composed of mutually intolerant religions like Islam and Christianity, there is always the danger of clash of interests. This could be caused by a fanatical religious group who feel oppressed by the other religious group that seeks to establish a dominant position within the society.

It is obvious that Christians frequently face opposition in most areas controlled by the Muslims. The Muslims do all within their reach to ensure that Christians are made uncomfortable and Christian religion suppressed. Constant ethnic and religious conflict is a threat to peaceful co-existence of the different ethnic groups that make up the country. Ilesanmi (1997:299) noted that “During the last ten to fifteen years, the negative aspects of religious pluralism seem to have determined the relationship between the religious communities in Nigeria, threatening the process of national integration and questioning the stability of the Nigerian state.” The mutual distrust among various ethnic groups in Nigeria is the main causes of social and political upheavals.

The outrageous menace associated with the activities of kidnappers in various parts of our country has drastically contributed to the insecure state of the country. In support of the above view, Adibe asserted that

Kidnapping, the taking away of a person against his or her will, usually for ransom or in furtherance of another crime, is becoming everyone’s nightmare in our dear country. Daily, we read stories of people being abducted as they go about their daily businesses.

Since this criminal act attracted national attention in February 2006, when Niger Delta militants kidnapped foreign oil workers to show their agitation, kidnapping has become both ubiquitous and commercialized. Needless to say that it has spread from the Niger Delta regions to virtually every nook and cranny of the country, with

some states being the most affected. At a time, kidnapping was regarded as a business one could engage in to make money. It became so severe in Aba city of Abia state that no day passed without someone being kidnapped. At the onset, their targets for perpetrating this evil were the wealthy class of people and the ransom demanded was high but presently, their victims are also those of low economic status including drivers, barrow pushers, teachers and people from all walks of life. Those behind this appalling act are also from different walks of life but worthy of mention are armed robbers, professional 419ers, unemployed, etc. Therefore, it is doubtless that Nigeria is today one of the major countries of the world where kidnapping goes on. This on-going trend has obvious implications for the development of the country because insecurity generally hampers development in any country.

The security challenges emanating from the activities of the Islamic extremist sect popularly known as Boko Haram have reached an alarming state. This group involve in gruesome activities in various parts of the country particularly in the Northern states. They engage in series of killings and attacks in which a number of Nigerians are killed and properties worth millions of naira lost. They make use of high caliber bombs and other weapons of mass destruction to execute their dreadful plans. The unremitting spate of bombings in the country by this sect is an indication of the dastard state of insecurity in our country. For instance, Maiduguri; the capital of Borno state had been characterized with daily bomb blasts, shootings, and successive killings. According to a report of the Human Rights Watch (HRW) in <http://www.newsdaily.com/stories/tre80ho-us-nigeria-sect> "The Nigerian Islamic Sect Boko Haram has killed at least nine hundred and thirty-five (935) people since it launched an uprising in 2009, including more than two hundred death casualties in the first weeks of this year." Their activities have led to the incessant destructions of many churches, police stations, banks, military offices and facilities. Unfortunately, the heinous activities of this sect has created and sustained an atmosphere of fear in Nigeria so that people live in palpable fear of real and imagined terror not being sure of the next minute.

### **A Concise Overview of the Book of Isaiah**

The book of Isaiah is considered the longest prophetic book of the Old Testament and therefore, classified under the Major Prophets in the classification of the books of the Old Testament. The idea behind this classification is that it covers a large period of time and has much prophetic messages. In support of the above view, Mosley and Bond (2003:837) established that, "The book of Isaiah stands at the head of the classical prophetic books both in the order of the English canon as well as the Hebrew canon. The English division of scripture into "Major Prophets" and "Minor Prophets" places Isaiah first among the Major Prophets". Traditionally, prophet Isaiah is considered the author of the book but in the late 18th century, there was no longer a consensus regarding the authorship of this book. This is because of the division of the book into sections with these sections having diversity in style,

vocabulary, message and historical perspective. To that effect, modern scholars have maintained that there are multiple authors namely Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah with Isaiah authoring only the first thirty-nine chapters.

### **Delimitation of the Text; Isaiah 58**

In a study of this nature which singles out a particular chapter of the Bible, it is necessary to delimit the text. Mundele (2012:33) stated that “to delimit the text that one wants to study is the first step the researcher has to do, whatever the method or approach he applies.” This examines why only Isaiah 58 is studied as against the whole book. In this sense, Isaiah 58 is seen as a literary unit that has a cohesive and significant message in itself. Mundele further opined that “a literary unit is a biblical passage that has significance in itself.”

It has been noted above that the scholarly debate concerning the authorship of the book of Isaiah is based on the diverse styles and messages in the book. The book of Isaiah has been divided into three sections, originating in different ages and marked by distinctly different theological outlooks and literary styles.

**The first Isaiah (chapters 1-39)** – The message of this part is that ritual sacrifices to appease God are rendered unholy when offered by those who deal unjustly with others, particularly the less privileged and the poor. There are pronouncements primarily against foreign nations and enemies of the kingdom of Israel and Judah. Various apocalyptic poems and hymns of deliverance, eschatological prophecies concerning the final Day of the Lord, and pronouncements of eternal doom and salvation are also covered in this section of Isaiah.

**The Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55)** – This section buttresses the supremacy of God and maintains that Israel, his servant, is to be redeemed from affliction and suffering which God had placed them for a brief moment because of its past blindness and deafness to his law.

**The Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66)** - These chapters express the relationship between suffering and sin, which are applied more narrowly to the remnant of Israel. Its liturgical character places greater emphasis on ritual requirements, such as the observance of ritual fasts and the Sabbath.

Understandably, Isaiah 58 falls under the third Isaiah but is considered a distinct literary unit because of its well-defined theme which discusses “false and true worship” even as indicated in its chapter title in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Narrowly speaking, it centers on the act of fasting as an aspect of religious worship with the intent of highlighting what the act entails and how it should be observed.

### **Analysis of Isaiah 58**

For a better interpretation, this text would be analyzed according to its sub-themes which are as follows:

#### **Isaiah 58:1-2: Israel’s hypocrisy announced**

These verses begin with God's instruction to prophet Isaiah to emphatically deliver a message to His people; the house of Jacob. "shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!" (vs.1). This speech begins typically as a prophetic judgment. (Carroli StuhlmueLLer, 1989) Some other prophetic messages in the Old Testament begin in this way. According to Sweet (2008), the opening command from God to Prophet Isaiah in vs. 1 is the most basic job description of a prophet. The primary role of prophets was to call God's people to repentance, to demand their return to obedience and to remind the people what it means to live lives in keeping with the covenant.

The people of Jacob are very special to God but He was displeased with the nature of their religious practices and therefore instructed prophet Isaiah to vehemently announce their transgressions to them. It is appropriate to note that the people of Jacob sought after God daily and delighted to know His ways. Therefore, the issue was neither that they did not know God nor His ways; rather it was that their religious practices were characterized by hypocrisy and compromises. Suffice it to note that the people of Judah treated with contempt their unique covenant relationship with God and forsook Him. Dolphin (2002) described Israel as "a people who are quite happy with the externals of religion; prayers, temple sacrifices and worship services. They are proud to be God's chosen people but God is not experientially real to them."

#### **Isaiah 58:3-5: Israel's complaint and false fasting analyzed**

The Hebrew word for fasting is transliterated *tsuwm*. Literally, '*tsuwm*' which is synonymous with '*innah nephesh*' means to afflict soul or self i.e. practice self denial. According to Nelson (1986), fasting means going without food or drink voluntarily, generally for religious purposes. It was sometimes done as a sign of distress, grief, or repentance. Carroli StuhlmueLLer (1989:345) explains that "fasting reaches far back into Israelite history, enabling people to release grief at times of bereavement and national tragedy." As noted in ISBE Bible Dictionary, "it is necessary to get rid of some modern notions associated with fasting before we can form a correct idea of its origin and significance in the ancient world." Notably, the ancient notion of fasting was constantly associated with "wearing of sackcloth," and "putting of ashes on the head," It also had a therapeutic perspective in that in the treatment of many ailments, the dieting of the patient is an essential part of the remedy. From the above analysis, originally, the act of fasting emphasized on the outward rather than the inward heart-felt observances. Importantly, the thrust of the act of fasting is more than that and therefore, this ancient notion of fasting must be put aside for a proper understanding of its theological significance. Little wonder, Prophet Isaiah emphatically mentioned that "is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes," is not an acceptable fast to the Lord. (Is. 58:5<sup>b</sup>)

In these verses, the house of Jacob bitterly complained and concluded that her fasts were not acceptable to God and thus; ineffective. "why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice" (vs.3) Obviously, it was

their false practices of religion which produced that wall of separation and made their fasts unacceptable to God. They placed more emphasis on the outward observances of fasting which is shown in vs. 5<sup>b</sup> “Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?” In as much as these acts are not condemned, they do not on their own form the core of fasting. Caroli Stuhlmueller (1989:345) avows that “Israel’s desire for external ritual and fasting contrasts with Yahweh’s desire for compassion toward the poor”. Their problem was that they thought these outward acts were enough proof of their devotion to God; a guarantee of their fast being acceptable to God and their prayers answered. They mistakenly believed that outward fasting was meritorious before God. Their religious observances were hypocritical and mixed with compromises. According to Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary in <http://www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?b=23&c=58&com=mhc> “if a fast does not express true sorrow for sin, and does not promote the putting away of sin, it is not a fast.” Vs. 3c-5 show how Israel observed their fast and the same accounts for why God would not accept such a fast.

“Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?”

Israel’s fast days are characterized with pleasure and wickedness in forms of injustice, covetousness, quarelling and fighting. In deed, these acts do not align with the right observances of fasting.

#### **Isaiah 58: 6-14: True fast and its rewards**

This section which carries the core message of Isaiah 58 discusses how fasting should be observed. God, through His oracle; the prophet specifically describes what fasting should be:

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and

your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. Is. 58: 6-12

These verses show that being liberal and merciful is more acceptable to God than mere outward fasting, which, without them, is hypocritical and vain. The thrust of Isaiah's message to Israel is that true fasting must be from a pure heart; devoid of false religious observances. The kind of fast that God desires is to desist from injustice, to set aside our own pleasure and to share with the needy. Verse 13 talks about Sabbath as a holy day of the Lord and also rebukes the house of Jacob for dishonouring the Sabbath as she does her fast days. More so, verses 8-14 are a sort of covenant between God and Israel in that God makes clear promises to them if they honour their fast days and the Sabbath.

#### **Poetic Techniques in Isaiah 58**

A proper reading of Isaiah 58 clearly indicates that the prophet carefully employed some poetic techniques to get down the message of his prophecy to Israel.

#### **Synonymous parallelism**

In a synonymous parallelism, the second line corresponds to the first by having similar words, or synonyms. The idea in the first line is "repeated in the second line. However, it is more than mere repetition because the idea stated in the first line is in the second line, heightened, intensified, clarified, vivified or elucidated. (Obiorah, 2010)

Below are the verses that are synonymously parallel:

#### **Verse 1: lines a and b**

Shout out, do not hold back!  
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

The sense in the two lines is that the prophet should raise his voice and make it loud. "Shout out" is synonymous to "lift up"

#### **Verse 1: lines c and d**

Announce to my people their rebellion,  
to the house of Jacob their sins.

"God's people" and "rebellion" corresponds to "the house of Jacob" and "sins" respectively.

#### **Verse 2: lines a and b**

Yet day after day they seek me  
and delight to know my ways,

The two lines are parallel to each other because one who seeks God, delights to know His ways

**Verse 3: lines a and b**

Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?

The idea in the two lines is that Israel fasts but God does not take note of it. “To see” and “to notice” mean the same.

**Verse 4: lines a and b**

Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight

and to strike with a wicked fist.

The idea in these lines is that one who fights, strikes the other with the hand.

**Verse 9: lines a and b**

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;

you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

The point of these lines is that Israel calls unto God and He answers

**Verse 10: lines a and b**

if you offer your food to the hungry

and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,

The lines are parallel because one who offers food to the hungry, satisfies their needs. The afflicted soul is parallel to the hungry, and probably designates those who have suffered an unjust oppression.

**Chiastic Parallelism**

In this type of parallelism, there is an inversion in the second of two parallel phrases of the order followed in the first. The content of the lines is so arranged to form the letter X (Obiorah, 2010)

**Verse 10: lines c and d**

then your light shall rise in the darkness

and your gloom be like the noonday.

In these lines, the position of “noonday” in line d which parallels “light” in line c is inverted. The same is the case of “darkness” and “gloom”

**Ellipsis**

This is an omission of a particle, word or group of words within a poetic or grammatical unit, where its presence is expected. This occurs in the first verse of the text.

**Verse 1: lines c and d**

Announce to my people their rebellion,

To the house of Jacob their sins.

The word “announce” is omitted in line d

### **Simile**

A simile states that one thing is like another.

#### **Verse 1: line b**

Lift up your voice like a trumpet.

#### **Verse 10: line d**

and your gloom be like the noonday

#### **Verse 11: lines d and e**

and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water,

### **Application of Isaiah 58 to the Problem of Insecurity in Nigeria**

It can never be an overstatement that the core of any analysis of a biblical text is to address an area of concern, a condition to be improved or a difficulty to be eliminated in the society. This is to say that any study of a biblical passage should be geared towards meeting a need. This is in fact, what every research aims at. This section of the work tries to determine the appropriateness of Isaiah 58 to the security challenges in Nigeria. This would be done under the following sub-titles

#### **Israel; a nation that fasts and prays**

Israel was a nation that desired to know the dictates of God. They severally fasted and prayed to the extent that they observed that their fasts were not noticed by God. In the same vein, it is not debatable whether adherents of various religions in Nigeria are praying for the peace and security of the country. In fact, some have thought that prayers alone cannot solve the problem and so have intensified it by adding fasting. Osogbo (2013) re-echoed that “interestingly, many Nigerians have recognized that only prayers can save Nigeria.” Numerous prayer programmes have also been organized to such end such as the one tagged “The Nation Prays”. Interestingly, some important figures in the country such as President Goodluck Jonathan have also accepted that the country’s present security challenges can only be surmounted through divine intervention. In his address while at the Redeemed Christian Church of God Grace Land, where he came to seek for prayers from the General Overseer; Pastor Enoch Adeboye, he emphatically stated that “prayer is the master key to solve any known and unknown problems confronting humanity but when there is lack of humility on the path of those seeking for an end to their problems, how can God arise and answer such prayers?”(Osas, 2012) More so, Shuaibu (2012) quoting Governor Isa Yuguda of Bauchi State said that the governor has urged his colleagues to make prayers their cardinal objectives as part of their resolve to address the current insecurity problems in the country. He further said that “He hopes that everyone will emphasis on prayers, presenting the challenges of our country to God in prayers. Prayer is the solution to all the security challenges.”

According to Barillas (2009) “Archbishop Onaiyekan urges Nigerians to pray for their country. The bishop has said that at the end of every Mass celebrated in his diocese, two prayers should be inserted before the dismissal of the congregation. These are ‘Prayer for Nigeria in Distress’ and the ‘Memorare’ - “The Traditional Prayer of the Church, to implore the powerful intercession of our Most Holy Mother Mary, to protect us, our communities, and to convert the hearts of the evil people who go around sowing death and terror in the nation”.

### **Israel’s fasts were unacceptable to God because of their sins**

Generally speaking, Nigeria is a religious nation. This is so because her over 140 million people are adherents of one of the three major religions found in the country either as individuals or groups. (Ezeme, 2008) It can be said that Nigerian Christians are very delightful of the ways of God. This is evident in their devotedness to church activities and other religious obligations. More so, in Nigeria, Christianity is growing everyday, evident in the large number of churches spread across corners of every street.

An average Nigerian Christian believes that the tide of insecurity can be stemmed by God through intensive prayers. There is no gain-say that prayers are being said by many unanimously aimed at the peace of the country. However, it is worrisome that it is apparent that these security problems are still on-going. It can be inferred from the biblical text under study that, perhaps, those who are praying for the country are not doing so out of a pure heart and total devotion to God. Their life-styles are not aligning with the dictates of God. Their confessions differ from their actions. Suffice it to mention that some Christians have become irreligious owing to the kind of live they lead. There are those who practice all sorts of wickedness and would still pray for God’s intervention; expecting God to answer them. Injustice, bribery and corruption are the order of the day for some Christians. Even kidnappers, thieves, ritual murderers attend church services and pray along with others for the peace of the nation. Some fast for Nigeria, but are also persistent in their sinful ways. They attend religious programmes and effectively take part in religious rituals and practices but still have their prayers unanswered because they live in compromises and their lifestyles contradict their faith. Udeolisa (2011:8) opined that “the contemporary Christians attend churches only for the fulfilment of miracle in their lives. They are engrossed in selfish desires to acquire comfort and wealth at the expense of others. Many visit the church to claim the promise of prosperity, business successes, various levels of achievements etc.” in the same vein, Kagarko (1976:136) noted that “Even Christians have so suppressed their consciences that to cheat and exploit the less privileged no longer bothers them. Members of the Christian community are increasingly becoming materialistic such that some prefer loosing brothers and friends to loosing money” How would such a prayer be answered? It was the same that made Israel’s fast unacceptable to God and they complained that their seemingly fervent religious observance is going unnoticed by God. There are many rituals and practices that are unique to religion in

general and Christianity in particular: the Sabbath, prayer, fasting, sacrifices, offerings, etc. and human being often think that following the outward rituals peculiar to these practices is, in and of itself, enough. God, judges not just appearances but a man's thoughts and heart and teaches that such outward practices are not enough.

### **Prophet Isaiah boldly declared the message**

In Isaiah 58, prophet Isaiah was commanded to announce the sins of Israel to them, which he did boldly; without mincing of words. Notably, some Nigerian pastors and prophets have prophesized in the wake of the security challenges affecting Nigeria. However, the question is "are these numerous prophecies proving a solution to these challenges?" Notably, some pastors and prophets have taken advantage of these security anomalies to enrich themselves. They have turned their prophecies into money making ventures. According to Ituma (2000:21) "The work of the clergy is presently becoming like the secular business world. Hence, whoever hits hard luck in his business sees it as a call to the ministry." To some, prophecy is a spiritual exercise done primarily to seek God in worship or in difficult situations, but to others it has become a lucrative business that should yield money. Akukwe in <http://nigeriamasterweb.com/blog/index.php/2012/05/24/nigerian-pastors-the-lucrative-presidential//.com> toed this line when he asserted that

The attempt by President Goodluck to seek divine guidance in the handling of the affairs of Nigeria was hijacked by different groups of religious leaders especially from the different Orthodox and Pentecostal denominations who turned the exercise into a multibillion naira business. Immediately president Goodluck signified his intention to contest for the Presidency, coupled with the threat of PDP northern elders on zoning, a financial breakthrough came for those spiritual leaders. The Christian Association of Nigeria, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria and some groups under the Anglican Communion made brisk business out of the situation. Money ranging from tens of millions to hundreds of millions of naira was released numerous times for this prayer project. Some conferences were sponsored by the presidency. Some pastors collect the names of their church workers and forward to the prayer coordinators in the State House as an evidence of a standing prayer group. They used this tactics to collect money running into billions of naira from the president. They see divine visions on how all the enemies of Goodluck will be crushed but no vision yet on how to bring peace to the troubled nation.

The security lapses in Nigeria which would have been an opportunity for these prayer warriors to manifest the power of God have been taken as an avenue to enrich their pockets. It is in fact, painful, to note that the Boko Haram insurgence has become another source of income to the so-called "prayer warriors". Various

prayer groups are receiving money from the president with the promise of securing him from the attacks of the Boko Haram sect.

### **Recommendations**

- (1) Various religious groups should intensify prayers for the peace and security of our country. This can be collectively done through national prayer conferences that would bring together people of various religious denominations. Prayer retreats can also be organized at the local level so that members of religious groups can actively participate.
- (2) Leaders of various religious groups should endeavour to inculcate right virtues in their members by emphasizing on teachings focused on righteousness so that their members would seek God from an upright heart.
- (3) Various religious leaders should organize teachings and seminars aimed at enlightening their members on the importance and the proper way that the act of prayer and fasting should be observed.
- (4) Pastors, prophets and leaders of various prayer meeting groups should not take advantage of the security challenges in Nigeria, to enrich themselves; rather they should pray earnestly and also guide others to do the same.
- (5) Adherents of various religious denominations should practically adhere to the teachings of their faith; backing up their confessions with their actions. It is an earnest prayer said by a right person that God answers.
- (6) As many individuals and groups who are praying for the peace of the nation should exhibit the virtue of patience because God's ways are not our ways and with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. (2 Pt. 3: 8<sup>b</sup>). Persistence and patience are the keys to receiving from God.

### **Conclusion**

It is no debate that Nigeria is replete with security challenges as these challenges and its effects have become almost ubiquitous and conspicuous to all and sundry as many in time past and even recently have become victims of loss of lives and property. Cases of ethno-religious crises, kidnappings, bombings, etc. have become recurrent in our daily local and national newspapers. Obviously, the activities of assassins, ritual killers, kidnappers and religious extremists have left our country in a dastard state that people are constantly living in fear of terror.

This paper noted and appreciated the painstaking efforts that the Nigerian government had put in place to eradicate these anomalies. However, these problems are understood to be unabated. This paper, therefore, submitted that well-principled

prayer can go a long way in abating these problems. There is a call for Nigerians from various religious groups to intensify the prayers geared towards the security of the nation. More so, these prayers must be from a pure heart, devoid of wickedness as exemplified in Isaiah 58. It is hoped that the recommendations put forward in this discourse would go a long way in making Nigeria terror-free and habitable for both its citizens and foreigners.

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