

## **Responding to Security Challenges in Nigeria: A Reflection on Nehemiah 4:1-23.**

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### **Abstract**

*Insecurity is an epidemic that has eaten deep into every aspect of life in Nigeria, and this has contributed to the increased rate of poverty in the nation. Nowhere is truly safe in the country and no one is immune to the ranging violence. The privileged few that have acquired assets or resources through genuine labour or others through illegal means are on alert for fear of not knowing what may happen to them any moment. The poor masses are also not left out from becoming victims of incessant insecurity. Kidnapping, ritual killing, child trafficking, corruption, embezzlement and robbery, oppression of the poor, assassination, and terrorism in the society are clear pointers to the fact that there is insecurity in the society. Those in leadership positions used their power to drain the resources that are supposed to be shared in form of providing social amenities to the citizenry. The church of God that should provide solutions to this menace through prayers and raising responsible membership of the community is one of the focal points of attack in the ongoing devastation. In the light of this, an effort is made in this paper to discuss the causes of insecurity and how it should be responded to using the biblical example of Nehemiah in Nehemiah 4:1-23. Theoretically, Nigeria's situation vis-à-vis the role Nehemiah as a leader played in responding to insecurity in Nigeria is the core of this work. An exegetical method is adopted in this work to investigate the nature of insecurity in Nehemiah's time, how he*

*responded to them and draw implication for the check in Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that no level of devastation is too bad to be restored when necessary steps are taken and responding to security challenges just like Nehemiah request proactive leadership and corporate involvement of citizens. In order to create an enabling environment for sustainable development, the paper recommends, among others, that the Nigerian state should put in place good governance, viable anti-terrorism measures and build strong legitimate institutions that can meet the needs of the masses.*

**Keywords: Security, Challenges, Response**

## **Introduction**

Insecurity in Nigeria has recently assumed an alarming rate affecting every facet of Nigerian life with no end in sight. Although, insecurity is not a challenge that is unique only to Nigeria because other nations also face the challenge; however, the management of the menace has become a concern of its citizenry. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria specifically states that “The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government,” unfortunately, government on this wise has failed to provide a secured and safe environment for lives, properties and general wellbeing of the citizens.<sup>1</sup> Criminal activities such as ritual killings, militancy, kidnapping, oil bunkering, rape, child-trafficking, stealing and robbery, assassination, banditry and terrorism in the society are clear indications to the multiplying effect of insecurity in the country.

Insecurity can be described as the extreme opposite of security. Insecurity as an antithesis of security refers to a condition that exists due to lack of effective measures put in place to protect individuals, information and properties against hostile persons, influences and actions. Similarly, it can also be seen as a situation in which individuals in a given

society cannot go about their normal daily activities as a result of threat to and harmful disruption of their lives and property.<sup>140</sup> To this end a more generalized opinion refers to insecurity as a state of being subject to fear, threat, danger, molestation, intimidation, harassment and so on, in all aspects of life. This implies that threat to human life does not only emanate from situation of violent conflict such as Boko Haram insurgency, and Fulani herdsmen activities alone but also from other non-conflict sources like robbery and injustice in the rule of law.

The wave, dynamics and sophistication of security crises have led to various social consequences particularly on the economy. It is obvious that commercial activities have become paralyzed in the country but more severe in areas worst hit by insecurity. For fear of the unknown, many of the best brains and manpower have fled for fear of either being kidnapped, killed or maimed to greener pasture. On this Ewetan and Urhie affirm that, the situation will remain if not worse because the law enforcement agencies appear unprepared for the present challenges.<sup>141</sup>

Hence, despite the great potentials for greatness that the country has especially with its large population made up of a dynamic work force, a growing economy, abundant natural resources, diverse raw materials, huge oil deposits and a reservoir of intellectuals, how does she find herself in this degrading state and numbered among the poorest nations of the world, yet unsafe; and what is the hope of her future prospects? These are the concerns of the paper.

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<sup>140</sup> E. O. Ojo, *Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria* (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Limited, 2006), 24.

<sup>141</sup> O.O. Ewetan and E. Urhie, "Insecurity and Socio-economic Development in Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Development Studies*. Vol. 5, No. 1, 2014:16-22.

## **Causes of Insecurity in Nigeria**

### **Weak Security and Judiciary System**

The statutory role of maintaining law and order in any enlightened society rests squarely on the law enforcement agents. Unfortunately, it would appear as S. Iygeal has pointed out that the law enforcement agents appear unaware, unprepared or reluctantly nonchalant to the occurrences of security breaches in this nation.<sup>142</sup> He further noted that at other times, even when they hear of violence, criminal activities or likely breach of security, they ignore or sluggish to act for fear of death or harm befalling them. Achumba, Ighomereho and Robaro in their study also revealed that even when security personnel have the basic training and equipment, some of them get influenced by ethnic or religious sentiments and are thus easily swallowed by their personal interest to serve their people instead of the nation.<sup>143</sup>

Consequently, rather than being national peace keepers saddled with the responsibility of protecting Nigerian citizens, they take sides and fuel insecurity through either leaking vital information or aiding and abetting criminals to acquire weapons or escape the long arm of the law. This perhaps explains why some individuals have called for the posting of security personnel to their state of origin. Honestly, the rising crime rate has damped the hope of the public on the capacity of the police and other security agencies to ensure the safety of people's lives and property. The general feeling is that the police can neither solve the crimes already committed through arrest and successful prosecutions, nor prevent or, at least, reduce the incidence of crimes.

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<sup>142</sup> S. Iygeal, *Immediate Causes of Crimes, Insecurity and Instability in Nigeria*. News Diary online, 16th December, 2012, 45.

<sup>143</sup> Achumba O. Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, "Security Challenges in Nigeria and the Implications for Business Activities and Sustainable Development", *Journal of Economic*

Closely associated with the aforementioned is the weak judicial system in Nigeria. According to the constitution, the judiciary is charged with the interpretation of the law and adjudication in civil and criminal cases. This is to ensure that the rules are not broken, and social order is maintained. Therefore, the impunity to certain individuals enhanced by the weakness of the Nigeria legal system encourages looting and embezzlement of public funds and other criminal offences.<sup>144</sup> On this note, one can affirm that improper management of the law and law enforcement agents are key causes of the insecurity currently ravaging the stability of the nation.

### **Poverty and Unemployment**

A poor economy that is characterized with poverty and unemployment rate appears to have been the bane of the Nigerian society. Each passing year, institutions of higher learning produce graduates who regrettably are thrown into the street with no hope in sight for jobs. In an effort to keep body and soul together, some become frustrated and go into violent and criminal acts such as kidnapping, internet fraud, armed robbery etc. government has failed to put in place necessary measures that will reduce unemployment and poverty, which have been the major causes of insecurity in this nation.

### **Porous Borders**

A border is a line of separation between two countries, administrative divisions, or other areas. It has been observed that the porous borders in Nigeria which facilitates unrestricted and untracked movements of people have greatly contributed to insecurity in Nigeria. Apart from unrestricted and untracked movements of individuals into Nigeria, arms and ammunition whether light, small or heavy have found

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<sup>144</sup> Charles A. Oputa, *Judicial Ethics, Law, Justice and the Judiciary in 1990 Judicial Lectures* (Lagos: MIJ Professional Publishers Ltd., 1991), 12.

their way into Nigeria. Most times, this happens undetected and have been used by religious fanatics, insurgents, and militia to wreak havoc on Nigeria's social order with little or no response from law enforcement agents. Therefore, the porosity of the country's border has led to uncontrollable influx of migrants, mainly youths from neighboring countries particularly Niger, Chad and Benin Republic who have been majorly responsible for some of the criminal acts in Nigeria.

### **Ethno-Religious Conflict**

Suspicion and mutual distrust among the various ethnic groups as well as the major religions in Nigeria have contributed to the security challenges in the nation. Two dominant religions exist in Nigeria-Islam and Christianity and there have been frequent and persistent religious clashes between them and the end seems not coming. In all parts of the country, ethno-religious conflicts have assumed alarming rates, making mockery of different security order. In fact, before the advent of the dreaded religious sect (Boko Haram), there were instances of security crisis due to the activities of religious fanatics in the country particularly in the north.<sup>145</sup> This reality has threatened the peaceful coexistence of the populace and making life unbearable for the masses. Many have lost their loved ones and valuable properties on the basis of crisis in the country.

## **NEHEMIAH'S RESPONSE TO NATIONAL SECURITY**

### **An Overview of the Book of Nehemiah**

The Book of Nehemiah is the last historical book of the Old Testament and is a narrative history, with Nehemiah being the primary author. The events of the book took place in the Persian city of Susa in around 444 B.C. and the account concludes around 430 B.C. The main theme of the book is

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<sup>145</sup> S. L. Ezeoha, "Causes and Effects of Insecurity in Nigeria," *The National Scholar*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (2011), 31-32.

centered on the exile and return of the Jewish community with Nehemiah spearheading the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem, Judah's capital city. The name "Nehemiah" means "Yahweh has comforted" or "Yahweh comforts." This name describes the act of Yahweh and His intention for the Jews through Nehemiah. One observes instances throughout the book where the Lord used Nehemiah to revive the spirit of, and bring hope to the discouraged remnant which had returned to their homeland.<sup>146</sup> Very little is known about Nehemiah's childhood, youth, or family background, other than his father's name, Hecaliah (1:1), and that he had a brother named Hanani (1:2). He was an exiled Jew who had risen to prominence in the Persian Empire.

The book begins by telling the reader about Nehemiah's current occupation, which is cupbearer to Artaxerxes, King of Persia. His appointment to this position provides insight into Nehemiah's life and character- a cupbearer would be a person who was wise, discreet, consistently honest, and especially trustworthy. Nehemiah serves as the primary political leader and Ezra serves as the spiritual leader, working together to rebuild the wall and restore the homeland of the Jews after the Babylonian captivity.

Nehemiah's principal purpose was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem; a task attempted in the past under Zerubbabel's leadership, but which had not been brought to fruition. This concern of Nehemiah can be observed from the first question to Hanani upon his return from Jerusalem concerning the welfare of the Jewish remnant in Judah and the state of the city of Jerusalem. The news of the devastation and shameful state of Jerusalem and the remnant caused intense grief for Nehemiah and was carefully revealed unto the king. Finding favor with the king, his request was granted, and he was furnished with letters of authority to rebuild the walls of

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<sup>146</sup> Mervin Breneman, "Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther," *New American Commentary*, vol. 10, B&H, 1993, 54-57.

Jerusalem. However, he was confronted with certain challenges which almost made the work impossible. A few of the challenges encountered are:

### **The Enormity of the Work**

Nehemiah began his activities with a thorough study and careful examination of the level of devastation the nation has suffered by using the word *ha'c.aew* "I went abroad." It is a declaration of an explorative adventure towards finding truth that will become the basis for proactive actions. To this end, he confirmed the report of his brother that truly the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates burned with fire. He did so at night, apparently to avoid letting others know his plans before they were firmly fixed in his mind. During these night hours he gained perspective and, as outlined in chapter Neh. 3, developed an effective plan to accomplish the task he had come to Jerusalem to perform.

After Nehemiah had completed his secret survey and was satisfied that he had developed a workable plan, the time had come to reveal to the Jews i.e. common people, priests, nobles, officials why he was in Jerusalem. First he challenged them to notice their deplorable circumstances, which had brought them trouble and disgrace (cf. 1:3). Then he challenged them to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem.

### **The Provocation from Enemies**

Verse 1, began with the verb *וַיָּבֵן* Waw Consecutive, Qal impf. 3MS from the root *בָּנָה* one of the most common verbs in the Old Testament with its equivalent in the New Testament *ἐγένετο* which is the verb "to be" meaning "he became," or "he was." This verb occurred over 3500 times, and basically means "become, fall out, happens, come to pass, occur."<sup>147</sup> The use of the verb *וַיָּבֵן* with waw consecutive *w* depicts the

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<sup>147</sup> Grisanti, Michael. *The World and Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publisher, 2011), 45.



narrative nature of the passage. Although the verb has several uses, but here, it is used to connect the verse with what was happening before. Even though the verb is rendered imperfect, but due to the inversive nature of the waw consecutive, the imperfect verb וַיְהִי is thereby translated in a perfect sense to mean “he became” instead of “he will become.” The verb expresses the idea of something coming into being or happening, that is, a disclosure of an event.

The verb is followed by כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע סַנְבַלַּט וְטוֹבְיָהוּ וְהָעֲרָבִים וְהָעַמּוֹנִים וְהָאֲשְׁדּוּדִים meaning “when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls”, basically, the verb שָׁמַע means “he heard,” that is, to hear something with one’s ears. According to W.E. Vine, there are several nuances of the verb. שָׁמַע can also be used of eavesdropping, or intentionally listening in on a conversation.<sup>148</sup>

In this context, to hear means not only to hear what is said, but to act on its content. So, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious. Prior to this, there is a historical rivalry between the Samaritans and the Jews, and Sanballat was the governor of Samaria during this period. Meanwhile, the state of Samaria also appeared to have assumed some form of a temporary administrative control over the affairs of the Judean region prior to the appointment and arrival of Nehemiah as governor. So, it is likely that even though the Judean region possessed a certain form of administrative independence during and after the exile, the state of Samaria also exercised some level of temporary control at some point over the affairs of the Judean region.

שְׁמַעַת-הַחוּמָה “the wall” which is the object of בָּנָה signifies a means of defense. It has two connotations namely, the physical and the emotional dimension. A wall protects a town

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<sup>148</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1966), 731.

or a city against invasion, at the same time, gives its inhabitants a sense of reputation and honor. The fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E under Nebuzarradan, the commander of the army of Nebuchadnezzar has led to the ruins of its wall and temple. This implies a city without a wall was considered an open country that was vulnerable to attacks and invasion. In fact, the deity of such town or city is always mocked among comity of nations. Therefore, the anger הרה of Sanballat was premised on the fact that if the wall could be raised up, Jerusalem was on her part to greatness again and his domination would soon be terminated. The extent of Sanballat's anger is indicated through the use of ויחר "and he was enraged or furious," which serves much as a hendiadys referring to the same disposition.

### **Nehemiah's Response to the Predicament**

It was the intention of Sanballat, Tobiah and their allies וּלְצַשׁוֹת "to stir up" and cause disagreement among the people. However, Nehemiah's response to this threat was again through prayer. In verse 3 of chapter 4, the people prayed to God. Nehemiah knew the importance of prayer and that was the first step taken in responding to the threat. Prayer is a potent force that brings God into the scene particularly in the defense of those who trust Him wholeheartedly. It is an expression of total dependency on His ability to rescue in the time of trouble.

Secondly, he adopted the defensive approach by appointing מְשָׁמְרִים "guard" for the people day and night as they build the wall. This was to give them a sense of security against any attack from the enemies. He said, "each of the builders had his sword strapped around his waist while he was building, and the trumpeter was beside me." They were thoroughly prepared to meet the enemy at a moment's notice. The builders were armed, and the trumpeter was ready to sound the alarm immediately when Nehemiah gave the command. The guards were armed with חַרְבוֹת "swords," רֶמְחֵי "spears" and

תַּחֲבֵלִים “and bows”. These weapons were not to be used for attack but for defense.

Thirdly, they adopted division of labor in approaching the security challenge that confronted them. It was a well-structured plan which requires the division of the entire work force into two halves. The first half was to engage in the building work, while the second half was to give defense to them. The officials and nobles were also engaged in giving security support to the people. Even those carrying materials were doing so with a high sense of security with one hand on the swords and the second on the material. Even those buildings were with swords fastened on their sides. Nehemiah served as the chief commandant having the one with the trumpet by his side.

### **Deductions from Nehemiah for Responding to Insecurity in Nigeria**

Just as it was in the days of Nehemiah so it is with Nigeria today. Insecurity has become a hydra headed monster which security agents in Nigeria appear incapable of handling vis-à-vis its multifaceted manifestations like bombing, kidnapping, destruction of lives and properties, creating fear etc. The ongoing analysis on the level and dimensions of insecurity in Nigeria reveals its alarming increase in recent time, which constitutes serious threats to the human society, hinders business activities and discourages local and foreign investors, all of which retards Nigeria’s socio-economic development. Lessons taken from Nehemiah’s approach therefore provide the following ways to respond to security challenges facing the country:

Self-sacrifice on the part of the leaders. Good leadership is fundamental to any secure and developing society. A community will enjoy peace and harmonious coexistence to the degree to which the leaders are selfless. Greed and corruption are clear indications that the leaders are not

concerned about the people but themselves. Government at all levels should ensure that rising poverty indices are reversed and realistic social security programs are pursued and systematically implemented to ensure that the populace meet their basic needs. This commitment from the leaders will reduce the security challenge currently on the increase in this nation.

In the same vein, leaders must be proactive in dealing with security issues and threats through strategic modern methods of intelligence gathering, and intelligence sharing, training, logistics, motivation, and deploying advanced technology in managing security challenges within the sphere of the influence of their power. These will help them gather information sufficient to prevent a crime that is yet to be committed, intervene in one that is ongoing or investigate a crime that has been committed.

Furthermore, the real panacea for solving insecurity challenge in Nigeria is for government to fast track the pace of development in all strata of life. Development within this context includes creating an economy with relevant social, economic and physical infrastructure for business operations and industrial growth, to provide gainful employment, high level of educational facilities, and medical care for the people. Banditry, ritual killing, internet fraud, kidnapping, robbery, assassination etc. will become a thing of the past in this country if the youth which constitute the largest portion of the society are gainfully employed.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the insecurity challenges faced in Nigeria vis-à-vis Nehemiah's approach for responding to the challenge. Security is a necessary ingredient for the growth, progress and political stability of any society. As revealed from the study, insecurity has remained a puzzle for the Nigeria government and appears intractable due largely to its predisposing factors such as unemployment,

poverty, porous borders, inequality, lopsided development and weak security and judicial system. The government and all stakeholders should wake up to this clarion call and do the needful with honest and good intention having the masses in view for all actions. The government should in addition to creating jobs for the teeming unemployed youths also provide modern and sophisticated weapons for the various law enforcement agents, enhanced packages (life insurance inclusive) as well as training and retraining of men and officers of the force as well as judicial officers should be a constant occurrence.