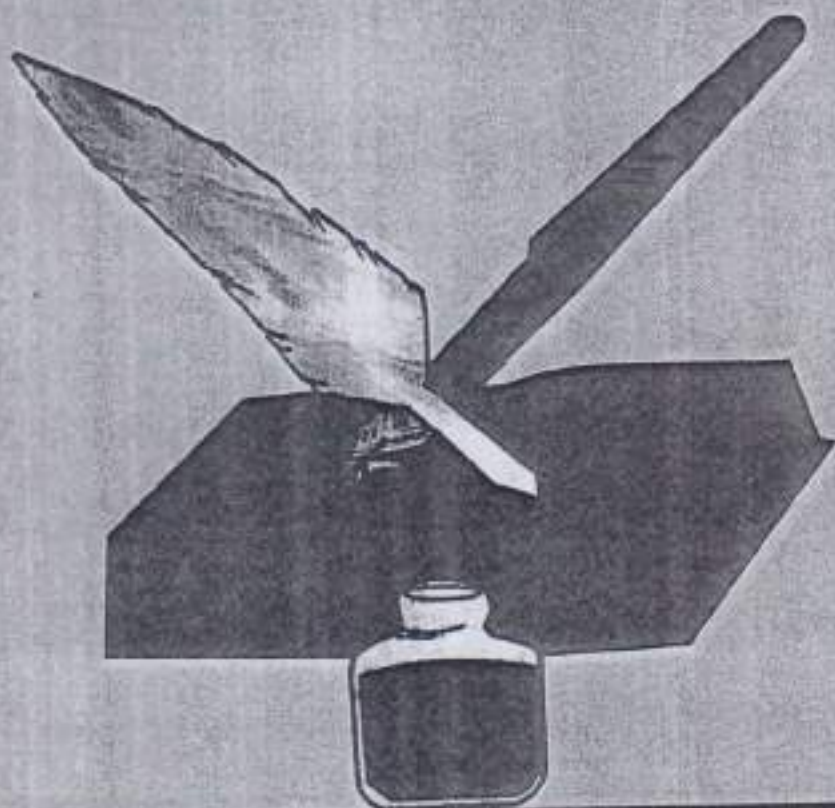




JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION
AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA



Vol. 10 No. 1 December, 2021

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THE CALL OF PROPHET JEREMIAH AND ITS REFLECTIONS IN MOSES ORIMOLADE'S PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

The Phenomenon of call is common to all religions in the world. It is held in some religious quarters that no human qualifies to be engaged in any religious activity without evidence of divine call. This study argued that divine call is an essential credential for religious service. Jeremiah in 1: 4-5 was chosen as a text of investigation to establish one of the unique ways that Yahweh has ever engaged humans in his work. As a corollary, the study explored the parallel between the call of Jeremiah and that of Moses Orimolade of Nigeria. The study was premised on African Biblical Hermeneutic. Study revealed that the duo received divine call while they were still in the womb. The call of God on both Prophets made them to command the respect of the people and rulers in their time. Divine call attracted persecutions, misgivings, hatred and the like from religious and political functionaries as evident by constant clashes with them in the performance of their prophetic duties. Their calls and ministries were impactful, long and over lived them because of divine and human support they received. As God's mouth piece they delivered oracles to their audience on issues that threatened the existence of humans without fear or favour. Their lives were characterized by holy living, humility, fear of God, prayers, boldness, and sincerity. The parallel between the call of Jeremiah and Moses Orimolade are indications of divine seal on the lives and ministries. It is therefore recommended that the Prophets in our contemporary time should emulate these Prophets so as to make their lives and ministries impactful.

Key words: Call, Prophet, Jeremiah, Moses Orimolade, Impactful and Nigeria.

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Introduction

Prophets in ancient Israel were accorded honour and dignity by their audience because they were considered as messengers of Yahweh. It was through the Prophets that Yahweh unfolds his plans and purposes on issues such as moral, spiritual, economic, political and eschatological hope for his chosen people. The Prophets were men and women who spoke authoritatively for Yahweh. The Prophets foretell events or occurrence before they happen. The Prophet also forth tell. In other words, Prophets speak, assess, and comment on happenings in their immediate society. In this manner, the Prophets address the wrongs in their society. The Prophets were men and women called at different times from different backgrounds to speak for Yahweh on particular issues.

Jeremiah, the Prophet came from the priestly class before he started his prophetic ministry after he was convinced beyond doubts that he had received divine mandate to be a Prophet. In ancient Israel, there were true (divinely call) and false (no evidence of divine call) Prophets. Both claimed to prophesy in the name of Yahweh. This study therefore, argued that divine call is not only an essential credential for religious service but for any human to be fulfilled in all life endeavours. Jeremiah Chapter 1: 4-5 was chosen as a text of investigation to establish one of the unique ways that Yahweh has ever engaged humans in his work because it started while Jeremiah was still in the womb and its parallel with that of

Moses Orimolade of Nigeria. The study was premised on African Biblical Hermeneutic, which rereads biblical passages in African context (Adamo, 2015: 31-52).

Necessity of Divine Call in Prophetic Ministry

One of the most significant areas in Prophet's experience is the conviction of being called by Yahweh to undertake a task. A Call is an invitation to do a task (Awojobi, 2021: 4). Irrespective of the background of the Prophet, it is the call that provides direction for the task ahead. It is divine call that made a Prophet different from a Priest and Levites because they do not receive the office by inheritance. Prophets were men and women carefully selected by Yahweh for specific assignments that led them to many dangerous places and situations. The Prophet is "one who speaks on behalf of another" (Isaac & Adeleye, 2020: 159). They are persons that are divinely endowed with charisma (Asha, 2018: 224).

The Hebrew word for Call is *qara*, connotes "summon" or "appoint" into another position or office different from the one the individual called is currently serving. It also means to get the attention of a person (Gen. 3: 9; 21: 17; 22: 11, 15; Exo 3: 4; 19: 3, 20; 24: 16; 31: 2; Lev 1: 1; Num 12: 5; 1 Sam 3: 4, 6, 8, 10). Divine call is a summon from God to a person or group to undertake a specific task. It is a command from God and positive response is expected. Sometimes, human beings can refuse to obey the call (Isa 65: 12; Jer 13: 10) or "

seek to avoid it (Exo 3: 11; 4: 1, 10, 13; Jer 1: 6). God can use anybody at any point in time. For instance, God called Cyrus "by his name" and as "His anointed" and used him to fulfill his plan for Israel (Isa. 45: 1-4). The verb *qara* is used about 461 times in the Old Testament. The verb *qara* could mean "the giving of names" (Gen 1: 5, 8, 10; 5: 2; 17: 5, 19; 21: 12; 35: 10); "proclaim" His own name (Exo 33: 19; 34: 6). In other words, it is an act of revealing God's glory. The Hebrew word associated with *qara* is *malakuth* which means the act of committing or sending to; the act of entrusting, as a charge or duty. The call is usually followed by a commission (Banjo, 2017, 19).

Gleaning from the Old Testament, there are three things that make divine call unique in prophetic ministry. Firstly, divine call break the person called from his or her past social life. For instance, it was divine call that made Elisha to leave his lucrative business to follow Elijah and ministered to him (1 Kgs. 19). Amos was a prosperous farmer, but when the call came he left all to obey Yahweh. Secondly, divine call deepens the knowledge and worship experience with Yahweh. In other words, the Prophet now has a better knowledge of God. Prophet brings his past experience to bear in his new vocation. The past experiences and divine call bring the Prophet into an intimate relationship with God and as such he is able to operate at a higher and intense

level (Folarin, 2015: 25). Thirdly, divine call makes the Prophet to be under divine compulsion to proclaim the message of Yahweh. The Prophets in the Old Testament often use the prophetic formula: "This is what the Lord says" to convey the oracle from Yahweh to their audience. For instance, Prophet Amos declared: "The Lord has spoken, who can but prophesy" (3: 8). This statement suggests that the one to declare the oracle of Yahweh is the person who he has sent. The one who will prophesy must have an intimate relationship with Yahweh and demonstrate his willingness to accept the cost to serving God. It means that the oracle which the Prophet declares what he overheard in Yahweh's council (Awojobi, 2020: 79). Therefore, the Prophet because he has been called by Yahweh has become his spokesman and an Ambassador. No man becomes a Prophet by inheritance but by divine call.

Anyone without divine call could not be recognized as a true prophet of God but rather a false one. The idea of false prophet first came to mind in the book of Deuteronomy, "... but the prophet which shall presume to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die..." (Deut. 18:20). This is the first passage that gave us the possibility of false prophet hood, in the scriptures. Besides, those that professed to be true prophets themselves refer to those false prophets, time without number.

Prophets like Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah to mention a few fought against the false prophets of their time.

Background of the Book of Jeremiah

The title of this book was derived from its writer, Jeremiah, in the early seventh and late sixth century B. C. The book occupies the second position among the latter prophets of the Hebrew Bible (Constable, 2010). The book of Jeremiah is rewarding, especially when studying the prophet himself, the literary form and the historical context of the prophet's ministry. The meaning of the word "Jeremiah" is not clear. It could mean "Yahweh founds or establishes," "Yahweh exalts," "Yahweh throws down," "Yahweh hurls," or "Yahweh loosens." (Constable, 2010)

While some scholars opine that the composition and structure of Jeremiah as we have it today came from redactors, others believe that prophet Jeremiah himself was responsible for the final form of the book (Constable, 2010). However, some maintain that Jeremiah's secretary by name Baruch was responsible for the final copy of the book (Constable, 2010) (Jer. 36:17-18; 45:1). For centuries no serious questions were raised about Jeremianic authorship. However, the acceptance of Wellhausen's source - critical analysis of the Pentateuch in 1878 made scholars to query the traditional position of the Old Testament books (Wellhausen, 1957: 24). Some scholars opined that the book consists of four distinct parts: Chapters 1-25; 26-45; 46-51 and chapter 52. Scholars are not

in agreement on how the collections came together (Eissfeldt, 1965: 356-358). Harrison stressed that the process of transmission was not as complex as presented by critical scholars. He admitted that it is almost impossible to conjecture the manner in which the prophecy was given his final form (1969:815- 817). Nevertheless, other scholars affirm that Yahweh was ultimately responsible.

It should be noted that chapter 36 indicates that the earliest collection was made by Jeremiah himself when he dictated messages to Baruch that he had delivered prior to 605 BC. When these scrolls were destroyed by Jehoiakim, Jeremiah dictated them again. The remainder of the book (Chps 1-25) that speaks of Jeremiah in the third person singular was believed to have been collected later by someone other than the prophet. Speaking on the collection and the arrangement of the materials for the book Soggin said that the "whole book gives the impression of having been assembled with almost a complete lack of criteria." (1976: 289).

In the light of the foregoing we would approach the book of Jeremiah in this study with the supposition that the editor or the editors of the book collected and arranged the oracles delivered by Jeremiah at various moments of his life and ministry. The editor also edited these materials because it was finally produced for reading. The book tells us more about the prophet than any other prophetic book reveals about its writer. It is

highly biographical and autobiographical (Jer. 10:23-25; 11:12-18; 6; 15:10-14, 15-21; 17:9-11). The book of Jeremiah provides a record of the sermons, discourses and oracles delivered by the prophet. To a large extent the book was written to demonstrate the divine authority and reliability of the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. The book stresses the inevitable and inescapable judgment of God on Israel for her sin. It maintains that the Hebrew nation will experience captivity because of idolatry and sinful indulgence.

The Call of Jeremiah (1: 4-5) and Moses Orimolade

In this segment of our study, a comparative analysis of the call and ministry of Jeremiah and Moses Orimolade was done under the following headings:

1. Priestly Background

Gleaning from the book of Jeremiah, the Prophet came from the priestly family. Jeremiah was born at the end of the reign of Manasseh when the Assyrians were in control of the larger part of the Near East. At this time Judah had become a vassal state of Assyria and King Manasseh had embraced the religion of the Assyrians. Jeremiah came from the town of Anathoth, about 5 Kilometres Northeast of Jerusalem. His father's name was Hilkiyah and he belonged to a priestly family from the descendants of Abiathar (I Kings 2:26-27). In a similar fashion, Moses Orimolade

was born into the family of an African Traditional Priest. Prophet Moses Orimolade was born to the royal family of *Omo'ba Ode Sodi* of Okorun Quarters, Ikare, in the present Ondo State, Nigeria in 1879 (Omoyajowo, 1999:118). His Father Tunolase was a popular Ifa Priest and powerful herbalist. People from all walks of life did consult him to know what the future hold for them. Orimolade's mother was called Abigail Odijoroto. Many mysterious occurrences were said to have characterized the birth of Moses Orimolade and life.

2. Called in the Womb

The Call of Jeremiah was unique and special because not many Prophets in the Old Testament were called in that manner. The narrative of his call took the form of a dialogue; God spoke, Jeremiah answered, and God spoke again. It was clear from God and Jeremiah's interactions that he had been chosen as a prophet as far back as conception. Before birth, he was chosen, set aside and appointed to the prophetic office.

Also, prior to the birth of Moses Orimolade, Ifa oracle predicted that the baby would be a powerful messenger of God and that the parents should treat him with care (Ayanda, 2007:58). He was reported to have spoken to his mother while he was in the womb. For instance, one day when the mother was carrying his pregnancy. On her way to the farm to fetch some firewood she stumbled on a tree and struck her foot by a tree on the roadside. She

immediately heard a voice greeting and consoling her saying: 'Take care, be careful'. Looking all around and seeing nobody, she became afraid and agitated. When she asked who was speaking, the answer was that: 'I am the baby in your womb' (Idowu: 2009: 27-28). Orimolade was reported to have attempted to walk on the day he was born but his father used his power as a witch doctor to stop him. This made him to be crippling in his early days in life. (Ogunewu, 2015:27).

3. Yahweh Announced the Call

In ancient Israel, one of the factors that distinguished a genuine Prophet from a false one was the evidence of divine call. Whenever Yahweh himself announces the Call of a Prophet the people noted such pronouncement and as such respect and honour the person. Jeremiah received the call to be a prophet in 627-626 B.C in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (Jer. 1: 1-10) (Von Rad, 1962: 161). The inauguration of Jeremiah's prophetic career is presented in a stark contrast to that of Isaiah and Ezekiel. Both calls were accompanied by visions from Yahweh. They were overcome by a sense of national and personal sin. For instance Isaiah cried out in dismay before Yahweh who appeared to him. Likewise Ezekiel fell down upon his face before the glorious spectacle of the reigning God (Isa. 6; Ezek. 1).

However, the call of Jeremiah was strange but clear. There was no vision, but simply "then the word of the Lord came unto me saying (1:4). This

suggests that it was Yahweh that released the word. The specific indication that the word of the Lord "came" to the prophet emphasizes the objective and real character of this formula of revelation; the word did not originate in his mind, but occurred, manifested itself, and thus was received and communicated by the prophet. God spoke to him as a familiar friend, one who was already in an intimate fellowship with him. As for Jeremiah, God told him specifically, "before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you come forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet unto the nations..." (Jer. 1:5) Therefore, the call of God upon these prophets made them to be recognized and their words authoritative. Jeremiah was very conscious of the fact that he was called to be a prophet (Jer. 1:5; 19: 14; 26: 12), and this awareness was endorsed throughout his book (8; cf. 2:30; 5:13; 26:16-19). The title nabi occurs 95 times in his book and the verb in hitpa'el 5 times and in niphal 35 times. The Bible declares: "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you..." To form is to create. This is an indication that God even knew the future of the individual child before birth (Gen 25:23; see Isa 49: 15; Rom 9: 11-13). The beginning of one's life on earth is sometimes viewed as "when he comes out of his mother's womb" (cf. Job 3: 11; 10: 18), and the Lord is the one who attends when a child is taken out of the mother's womb (Ps 22: 10). The womb is crucial to the formation and the birth of a child.

The Hebrew word for the womb is **בטן**. There are four basic meaning of the Hebrew word **בטן** beten- belly stomach. They are: (a) the abdomen/ belly (b) digestive organs (c) the Organs of procreation (d) rounded projection. In the case of Jer 1: 5 the organ of procreation (womb) is the most suitable. Yahweh forms human beings in the "womb" and cares for the unborn (Ps 139: 13; Eccl 11: 5).

The basic meaning of this root **יצר** is "to form," "to fashion. While the word occurs in synonymous parallelism with "create" and "make" in a number of passages, its primary emphasis is on the shaping or forming of the object involved. As with many Hebrew words of theological significance, the root **יצר** may be used of human as well as divine agency. When used in its secular sense it occurs most frequently in the participial form meaning "potter," i.e. one who fashions (clay). The word is used in this form frequently in the prophets where "the potter" provides an apt vehicle for the communication of the prophetic message (Isa 29:16; Jer 18:2, 4, 6; Zech 11:13). The concept of "fashioning" is particularly clear in Isa 44:9-10, 12 where an idol is pictured as being shaped by hammers (v. 12). See also Hab 2:18. The same concept is evident in the use of the word in Ps 94:20 where wicked rulers use the law to devise or frame means of wrongdoing.

God appeared to Orimolade in a dream and called him into the prophetic ministry. In that dream, he was

instructed by God to collect some water from a flowing stream to wash his legs. Orimolade was obedient to this instruction and thus he partially regained the use of his legs, though he still limped for the rest of his life (Ogunewu, 2015:27). Also, in the dream, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him and gave him three objects: a rod, a royal insignia, and a crown. The rod signified his victory. The insignia implied "the unction to make divine utterances, while the crown indicated that he has been endowed with honor and multi-respect which would make people bow before him to receive blessing" (Oshitelu, 2007:48).

Orimolade was called into the office of Prophet and Evangelist. As an Evangelist, he preached the gospel across major cities in Nigeria with signs and wonders following. The Anglican church in which he belong challenged him on the operation of his ministry saying that it was not compatible with the beliefs and practices of the church as such he was later forced out of the church. Though unlearned, the proficiency with which he recited the Bible was astounding. (Ayandele, 1966: 267). Between 1916 and 1924, Orimolade preached the gospel with signs and wonders in many parts of Yoruba land, Mid-Western and Northern Nigeria. He was called Baba Aladura (The Praying Father) because he visited many people and prayed for them.

4. The Audience Recognized the Call

In ancient Israel, the recognition of an individual by the society as a Prophet was very important to the life and ministry of that Prophet. The Prophets were raised up by Yahweh from the society (Deut. 18: 15) and are seen by the society as political and religious leaders, preachers of the law, predictors of future judgment, watchmen, intercessors and persecutors against covenant breakers (Awojobi, 2018: 117). The society sometimes takes a more active role in evaluating the credentials of a Prophet without recourse to the Prophet or the one who called him to the office. The society in most cases provides the necessary support for the Prophet to function and can also withdraw the support when it perceived that the Prophet has deviated from the original call.

Jeremiah's ministry started in the seventh century and extended into the sixth century. He is identified as the son of Hilkiah and as a member of the priestly family at Anathoth in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin. It would be recalled that Abiathar, a native of Anathoth who was a priest during the reign of David in Jerusalem, was retired and banished by Solomon to his hometown (2 Sam 20:25; 1 Kings 2:26-27). Jeremiah was thus clearly portrayed as one of the priestly descendants of Abiathar and therefore as a member of one of the Levitical groups that carried the old Ephraimite tradition and were involved in Josiah's reforms.

Some scholars were of the

view that, Jeremiah's father Hilkiah may have even been the same priest who found the Deuteronomistic law book in the temple. In the time of Jeremiah his relatives were still occupying high positions in the political and religious establishments in Jerusalem. For instance, his uncle Shallum was a member of the Levitical priestly group. Shallum was believed to be the husband of Huldah, the prophetess of whom Josiah inquired concerning the book found in the temple (2 Kings 22:14). Shallum's son, Manseiah was keeper of the threshold in the temple during the reign of Jehoiakim (Jer. 35:14) and may have been the one sent with Shaphan by Josiah to initiate repairs on the temple (1Chr. 34:8). Therefore, Jeremiah was not only related to the priestly bearers of the Ephraimite traditions but also to members of the central political and religious establishments. It is then correct to say that members of the Anathoth priesthood constituted the initial support group for Jeremiah's prophetic activities.

In the same way, Orimolade was accepted by his audience as a Prophet of God. He started his evangelistic work from his own home town of Ikare, Nigeria. At this time there were pockets of Christians in this part of the country and they were under great persecution. Thus the entry of Orimolade into the religious fray at this time, when the Christians in Ikare needed a leader and a rallying point could not have been more auspicious. There were manifestation of signs and wonders in.

his preaching. This led to increase in the number of Christians as people got converted. Orimolade's evangelistic efforts continued to bear fruits as members of his immediate family were not only converted to Christianity but also gave him their maximum support (Idowu, 2009: 50-51).

5. The Prophets were greatly used by Yahweh

One of the main roles of the Prophet is to serve as the mouthpiece of Yahweh (Dada, 2018: 180). The Prophet is an individual appointed by Yahweh to declare his will or counsel to an individual or a group of people at a particular time. The Prophet as the mouthpiece of Yahweh is expected to receive oracles דברייהוה and communicate same to his audience. Hence, the prophets in the Old Testament were first and foremost preachers of God's word (Jer 18: 18; 27: 18). The word דבר "came" to them (Jer. 1:2, 4; 2:1, etc), is within them (Hab 2:1), is spoken to them by the Lord (Jer 46: 13), which again enables them to speak in the name of the Lord (Deut. 18:20), or else that the Lord spoke through them (Jer 37: 2; cf. Hag 1: 13 etc).

Jeremiah was regarded as the greatest prophet before the exile. His ministry had considerable influence in the political and religious life of the Hebrews. His ministry covered the reign of six kings. Jeremiah was actively involved in the palace for the sheer love he had for his nation. He was very committed to the course of his country. He was wholly patriotic and

nationalistic. Jeremiah advised his people to accept colonial rule for the benefit of his nation, but he stuck to his way of life as a Hebrew and also tenaciously held to the sovereignty of his nation as a patriot.

Orimolade preached the gospel across major cities in Nigeria with signs and wonders following. He was a devoted member of the Anglican Church but was later excommunicated from the Church on the grounds that his way of ministry did not conform to the Anglican practices (Ayandele, 1966:267). Between 1916 and 1924, Orimolade preached the gospel in many parts of Yoruba land, Mid-Western and Northern Nigeria. He was popularly known and addressed as Baba Aladura (The Praying Father) because he was very prayerful.

Prophet Moses Orimolade founded the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church. Although some members of this church believe that, the C & S Movement was not founded by man but God (Ayegbonyin & Ishola, 2015:81). The church started as a prayer group in 1925 under the leadership of Moses Orimolade Tunolase in Lagos, Nigeria after God appeared to him in a vision, informing him that the new church would have members throughout the world (C&S, 1990). Moses Orimolade preached Christ until his death on 19th October, 1933.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is divine call that made a Prophet different from a Priest and Levites because they did not ere

receive the office by inheritance. This study revealed that as the call of Prophet Jeremiah was unique in the Old Testament, so was that of Moses Orimolade of Nigeria. Both of them were specially called by Yahweh from the womb as His mouthpiece to their generations. They enjoyed the support of God that called them and the people that they served. Their ministries cut across ethnic and national boundaries. In the face of persecution, they declared the oracles of Yahweh boldly and clearly not minding the negative reactions from their audience especially those in the corridor of power. They were preachers, healers, reformers, instructors, and restorer of their generation. Their lives were characterized by holiness, righteousness, intimacy with God, simplicity, respectability and prayers. The contemporary Prophets are enjoined to emulate these ancient personalities so that their lives and ministries can be impactful.

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