

Lessons From the Exemplary Lifestyle of Samuel for Nigerian Pastors

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Abstract

The menace of false pastors is on the rampage in Nigeria. The problem appears more complex with the difficulty posed by any attempt to distinguish between true and false pastors. The nefarious acts of the latter, has heightened the on-going questioning of the integrity of Pastors generally in the Nigerian society. Hence, this paper focused on exemplary lifestyle of Samuel in 1 Samuel 12:1-5. It employed three theoretical tests namely theological test, practical test, and moral test to investigate the call narrative of Samuel and his stewardship in ministry. Historical-Critical method was used to unravel the issues at stake. It was discovered that no matter how powerful, effective and charismatic a pastor's ministry may appear outwardly, if the life and ministry of the pastor in question are not truly above board, it is set to bring woes to the society at the long run. It is recommended that a pastoral ministry full of integrity should be built on impeccable character.

Keywords: Lessons, Exemplary, Lifestyle, Integrity, Pastors, stewardship

Introduction

The increase in the rate of false prophets and their activities in the society have raised concern as whether genuine still exist nowadays. There seem to be a lot of wolves in sheep clothing, whose primary aim is to make false prophetic pronouncements in order to deceive their unsuspecting clients and rip them of their hard earned money. They rob and utter vain prophecies and visions, leading many people astray. Some of them sleep with women who are in need of having children, thereby destroying many homes and marriages in the process. Some of these false prophets prey on the ignorance and gullibility of people desperately trying to find solutions to their problems.

Be that as it may, what cannot be ignored are the facts that the Bible has evidences of some prophets including prophetess who from their call narratives, prophetic oracles and personal lifestyles demonstrated high level of integrity. One of such prophets is Samuel, whose story is situated between 1 Samuel 1:20 and 1 Samuel 25:1. Samuel was born into an Ephraimite family of Ramah. His parents were Elkanah and Hannah; the latter had previously been barren, and she dedicated¹ Samuel before his birth as a Nazirite. After his weaning, therefore, he was brought up in the Shiloh¹ temple by Eli (1 Samuel 1). At very tender age, he experienced the prophetic call, and in the process of time 'was established as a prophet of the Lord' (1 Samuel 3).

In his old age, the tribal elders alongside the Israelites requested for a king. At first, Samuel was not favourably disposed to it but after receiving divine direction and guidance (1 Samuel 8), he met Saul and anointed him king over Israel. During his farewell speech (1 Samuel 12:1-25), Samuel made sure that the people had nothing to indict him and had no complaint about him. He had never used his leadership position for personal gain; he had treated all men justly and impartially. When the people declared Samuel innocent of wrongdoing, he told them that the Lord would be a witness against them if they later tried to bring a charge against him (verse 5).

The people's response to Samuel's challenge attested to a life of integrity and transparent holiness (12:4-5). The power of Samuel's prophetic ministry was the power of his life. His life and conduct was in tandem with what he preached and taught the people of Israel. The word being preached had become the flesh of the preacher himself.¹ Samuel set the seal on his accountability by calling on the Lord God and Saul to be witnesses. Samuel knew that people might be afraid to speak up. But God knows what no one else may know. He is the righteous judge and the one who will make the final judgment on the integrity with which all people saddled with religious and political leadership have worked. No doubt Samuel was indirectly acting as role model for Saul, a young man just coming into leadership. However, the standards Samuel had set in this context can serve as lessons as well as challenge for all religious leaders particularly pastors in Nigeria.

Exegetical and hermeneutical tools were employed in a close rereading of the pericope (1 Samuel 12:1-5). Exegesis is a research methodology used in religious studies to examine ancient religious documents. The essence is to understand the message of the book by enquiring into the context that produced the message. To use the bible as example, those who spoke in the pages of the book addressed a people. To understand the message they intended their audience to receive a modern enquirer understand the personality of the speaker as well as the audience.¹ On the other hand, hermeneutics involves the art of interpreting a text. Interpretation is the process whereby what is observed in a given text is explained to an audience in such a manner that they form a clear mental picture of what the text has to say. In other words, hermeneutics has to do with the interpretation of the textual evidences. This is derived from a diligent study or observation of the text, particularly considering the context.¹

Overview of Old Testament Prophetic History

H.L. Ellison stated that "The prophet is not defined or explained in the Old Testament; he is taken for granted."¹ Ellison goes further to suggest that the reason is because he has existed from the very first (Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21), and has not been restricted to Israel, e.g. Baalam (Numbers 22:5), the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19). There are true and false prophets among the nations, just as there are in Israel. But Prophet Amos distinguishes between Israel's prophets and the rest found in other places by emphasizing that the prophets of Israel are a special gift of God (Amos 2:11) without actual equal among the Canaanites.¹ The Hebrew term, which the Greek attempts to translate, is *isbyin* (*nabi*). The derivation and basic meaning have been an issue for scholarly debate, partially on the grounds of the formation and meaning of the Greek word, rather than the Hebrew. It now appears well established that the etymology *bn(nb)* means "to call" and that its morphology supports the meaning, "one called."¹ In religion, according to Vincent G. Nyoyoko, "A prophet is an individual who has been contacted by, or has encountered, the supernatural or the divine, and serves as an intermediary with humanity, delivering this newfound knowledge from the supernatural entity to other humans."¹

The prophet was also known as a "seer," which means "one who sees in a vision." 1 Samuel 9:9 suggests that the term "seer" was earlier and came to be replaced by "prophet," but if there was ever any clear-cut difference, it had become indistinct by Old Testament times. Other terms for the prophet include "man of God," "watchman," "messenger of Yahweh," and

“man of the spirit.” These terms are actually employed to describe the prophet’s activities, although at different occasions they appear to have become titles. They are important dimensions, aspects and perspectives to an understanding of the prophet in the Old Testament.¹

They prophets were men who had encountered the Divine presence in connection with a call to serve; they were worried by the disconnect between the lifestyle of their nation and its people in relation to demands of the Sinai Covenant, this propelled them to proclaim the Word which stirred within them from the Divine presence. They were “forth tellers,” not primarily “foretellers”¹ – the preachers of ancient Israel and Judah who were dedicated to the Divine Covenant morality to which their nation had become committed at Sinai. They were the “Covenant conscience” of the ancient Hebrew-Jewish people.¹

There were three designations traceable to the Old Testament prophets. These are the Seer, Ecstatic prophets, and Solitary prophets. It has been noted that when Saul’s servant advised his master to consult Samuel, he did that with a rider that “... all he says comes true...” (1 Samuel 9:6). In this context is set forth the prominent feature in prophecy in its nascent stage in Israel. The proof therefore of the operation of God’s spirit within a prophet was recognized to be his ability to foresee the future and predict coming events. However, in the case of certain prophets there is little evidence of this predictive element, but it was generally seen by the prophets themselves as the undeniable sign that God was with them.¹

The prophets referred to in 1 Samuel 10:5 were ecstatic who went about the country in groups and who, by rhythmic movements like in a dance, by music, even by bodily lacerations, intended to induce a state of ecstasy, in which, released from the inhibitions and restraints of sentient life, they became, they believed, more fitting instruments of God’s spirit and declarers His Word. Ecstatic prophets were not peculiar to Israelite prophetic tradition. They probably had their origin in Asia Minor; they represent a level of prophecy which over the years was superseded in Israel. As a type they remained active in the service of Baal after they had faded out in the service of Jehovah.¹ Reference is made to these guilds mainly in the narratives in relation to Elisha in the Old Testament, but by that time they had become degenerate to a large extent. They were representatives of the maintenance of the established system; to that end they were willing to pander to the pride and prejudices of those who consulted them and seem to have sought beyond all else to remain relevant and popular in office.

The history of Israel’s prophetic tradition has yet another type of prophet who was neither ecstatic nor member to a community. These category of prophet were like solitary workers, they were valiant for the faith, were unafraid to criticize the established order in religion or in politics, and, while they might at some point get in touch with the guilds of prophets, they were never one with them. A classical example is Micaiah ben Imah in 1 Kings 22. He was fearless and proclaimed his message even when that was at the risk of his own life and contradictory to every other word spoken in God’s name by other prophets. Such men regarded as the saviours of their people from error and illusion, from faithlessness and treachery; they were like the defense of Israel. On the other hand, they were often unpopular, uncompromising and regarded as prophets of doom and woes.

An interesting aspect of Israel’s prophetic milieu is the format the prophets employed in the presentation of their individual messages to the people. The prophets presented their message from God in many different forms, each of which contributed to getting people to heed what God had to say to them. Sometimes they presented it as if they were watching a lawsuit in which God was the Judge and his people were the defendants. When this is the case their prophecies often contain a summons, a charge, evidence and a verdict (Isaiah 3:13-26). At other times, the prophet’s message is presented in as an oracle of woe. Such oracles are accompanied by an announcement of distress, a statement of the reason for the distress and a prediction of doom (Micah 2:1-5; Habakkuk 2:6-8; Zephaniah 2:5-7).

There are also cases in which the message of the prophet came in the manner of a promise of future blessings (Jeremiah 31:1-9; Hosea 2:16-20; Amos 9:11-15). These blessings were usually connected with the covenant categories of life, health, safety and agricultural abundance. Some of the prophets made their messages memorable by acting them out. This is seen in Ezekiel 4 and 5 for example. The prophets' messages also came in the form of poetry, which made them easier for their audience to remember.

Historical Context of the Book – Samuel

The name Samuel means “heard of God.”¹ Samuel was born at a period when the nation of Israel was in a very bad state, both politically and spiritually. After the successful conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, Israel then continued to be ruled by Judges for the next three centuries. Repeatedly, however, the Israelites disobeyed God and violated the Covenant that had been made at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:1-8), and which was later renewed by Moses on the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 29:1-29) and by Joshua at Mount Ebal and at Shechem (Joshua 8:30-35; 24:1-27). Israel's repeated disobedience prompted God's punishment on them by allowing foreign nations to attack them. And by the beginning of 1 Samuel, one of those nations (the Philistines) was at the verge of annihilating Israel. The tribes of Israel were disunited and demoralized; anarchy reigned and everyone did as he deemed fit (Judges 21:25). It was Samuel that God used to bring about change.¹

A major Philistine victory was followed with the capture of ark of covenant, the death of Eli and the transfer of the priesthood from Shiloh (1 Samuel 4). With Samuel's appearance on the scene, he mustered the Israelites troops at Mizpah and won a victory over the Philistines. He thereafter assumed and fulfilled the role of judge in Israel, with a circuit in Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah and Ramah (1 Samuel 7). It was not long after the demand of the people of Israel for a king and the subsequent anointing of Saul as king of Israel by Samuel, a breach occurred between Samuel and Saul, when the latter took it upon himself to offer sacrifice before battle (1 Samuel 13). It was compounded further when Saul later broke a solemn oath in sparing the life of Agag. Samuel himself killed Agag, pronounced that God has rejected Saul from being king, and then retired at Ramah (1 Samuel 15). His final recorded act was the anointing of David, privately, to be the next King of Israel (1 Samuel 16). Prophet Samuel later died in Ramah and buried there (1 Samuel 25:1).¹

The Pastor and Nigerian Experience

Terms such as pastor, shepherd, minister, priest, vicar, prophet, and apostle are often employed in religious parlance and especially in the church setting for God's servants who have been entrusted with one responsibility or the other in the vineyard of God. The words are used interchangeably.¹ These words are from the Bible, they form the bases for the titles which denominations use for their ordained leaders. Sunday Aluko's view is of great significance to this paper:

Let's review some of the titles our denominations ascribe to themselves. We have Prelate, Pope, Primitive, Patriarch, Cardinal, Archbishop, Baba ladura, Superior Bishop, Overseer, Moderator, Superintendent, Presbyter, Pastor, Reverend, Shepherd, Evangelist, Vicar, Apostle – Wo – Leader, Most Senior Apostle, Presiding Bishop – What have you? All these names or titles have shepherd undertone. They are chosen for administrative purpose in the denominations that care for any of them.

This work adopts the term “Pastor” because there are indications that more Christians, Christian bodies, and denominations are gunning for the word Pastor for any category of ordained Church leaders nowadays especially in the hinterlands. The term “Pastor” has assumed an important meaning in the sense that it is often used to describe a minister in a given

religious tradition in contemporary time. A pastor is seen as a shepherd whose main preoccupation is to look after his congregation and see that they are well fed with spiritual food.¹ The term “Pastor” is also used to designate the head of a local congregation. It is really the Latin translation of the Greek word “*poimen*” which connotes a herdsman, a shepherd, and the word “*poimenic*” means sheep while the word “*poimoino*” entails to feed, to tend a flock or to shepherd the sheep.¹

The term “Shepherd” comes closer to the functions of a pastor. Like a pastor, a shepherd takes care of the sheep and the sheep in the context of this paper are God’s people. The term refers to a rich scriptural figure that finds its beginning and end in God who is regarded as the “Shepherd of Israel.”¹ The shepherd is the one who provides full and complete care for all of his sheep. Sheep are helpless¹ are followers¹, are likely to wander and stray¹, but under the care of a shepherd they do not lack.¹ Jesus Christ was many things to many people. He called himself different things at different times. At one time he said he was the way, the truth and the life. He announced was the door. He declared that he was the bread of life and the light of the world. But one of the most vital things that Jesus proclaimed was that he was the good shepherd.¹

In the remote past, a pastor was almost everything to the villages, communities, cities, even toady the ministry of a pastor is accorded high respect and regard among many Nigerians. This is largely due to the fact that a pastor is regarded as the spiritual leader of the people under his/her pastoral oversight. At the same time the life and character of a pastor is more often than not held as a standard for godliness and moral uprightness. But the story line appears to have changed from what it used to be in many quarters toady. There are reported cases of pastors who have indulged themselves into despicable lifestyle, to the point that they have been a caricature of what an Ideal pastor should look it.

Samuel’s Stewardship as Lessons for Pastors (1 Samuel 12:1-5)

“And Samuel said to all Israel, “Behold, I have hearkened to your voice in all that you have said to me, and made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walks before you; and I am old and gray, and behold, my sons are with you; and I have walked before you from my youth until this day. Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.” They said, “You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man’s hand.” And he said to them, “The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they said, “He is witness.” (1 Samuel 12:1-5)

It was at Gilgal, that Samuel held a service during which he transferred power the leadership of the Israelites from himself to Saul. There he delivered his famous farewell speech which was full of challenges. Three theoretical tests are employed to highlight and summarized the prophetic ministry of Samuel. The theological test theory has its root in Deuteronomy 13:1-3, which maintains that even if a prophet’s sign comes to pass, but later the same prophet tries to lure them to follow after other gods, that prophet is not from the LORD. In fact, there is a strict provision for death penalty to be meted on the false prophet. In other words, if a prophet performed signs and wonders to give validation to his message, but his message contradicts the truth that the LORD himself brought them out of Egypt and therefore should be worshipped only, that prophet is false. Thus, every true prophet must underscore the fact that the Israelites are a community to whom Yahweh is manifest, they covenanted with Yahweh, and are instructed by Yahweh.¹

The practical test theory (Deuteronomy 18:20-22) upholds that a prophetic oracle which did not come to pass is not from the Lord. However, it should be noted that there are cases in which a given prophetic word came to fruition after many years, decades, and centuries after

the death of the prophet who delivered the message. The moral test theory (Jeremiah 23:9-14), on the other hand, is first to be applied on the lifestyle of the prophet or prophets as the case maybe and then to the tendency of the message they preached (Jeremiah 23:13-14). Do they strengthen the hands of evildoers, assuring them that they need not fear judgment to come (Jeremiah 23:17)? Should a prophet's message scale the both theological test and practical test, but his life does not reflect that of godliness, righteousness, and holiness, the prophet in question should be regarded as a false prophet. It is difficult to imagine that Nathan would have had any effective word of reproach for David, if he himself had been a man of unbridled passions.

Samuel's ministry provides a unique model of how the above three tests can be beautifully blended in the lives of present day prophets (pastors). Samuel defended his own ministry and warned them of straying from God. Outgoing leaders should be ready to give a transparent account of their stewardship to stamp their integrity on the minds of those they led and to lay a firm foundation for the incoming young leaders. Hence, Samuel presents his life for public scrutiny, with the words, "Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed (12:3a). Few pastors have the courage to do this. Many men of God are so secretive about their affairs that people including their followers find it hard to make any comment on their ministry.

The leadership concerns that Samuel specifically mentions as the grounds for evaluation are those that God had earlier spoken of (1 Samuel 12:3b; Deuteronomy 17:14-17). Like Saul, the new leader, and many pastors are daily faced with the temptations to use their position to amass wealth or to take advantage of their followers including the unsuspecting public for personal use and gain. Samuel had acted with integrity in the financial aspect. He had defrauded no one and had taken no bribe from the hand of anyone. He had not oppressed anyone or denied anyone a fair hearing of his or her case.

Samuel provides a paradigm of how pastors should handle any change of leadership in our churches in Nigeria. There are pastors who hold tenaciously to power until death do them part. They leave no directional materials successors, and so set them up to fail. By contrast, Samuel created a time of transition, where both he and Saul could work together. In this manner, Samuel's name and influence helped to mobilize the people to rally round Saul. Thereafter, he gradually faded out of the picture and allowed the new leader to assume full leadership.

Despite the corrupting influence of Eli's sons, Samuel was ministering before the Lord (2:18). Samuel by this challenges all men of God irrespective of categories to come to terms with the fact that true knowledge of the Lord comes out of deep and regular interaction with him. It is by having such unbroken communion with God that his preferences, desires, and will naturally become the watchword of his servants. Pastors should aim at having experiential encounter of God's presence on regular basis. Ministry alongside with its demands and activities can make pastors develop a feeling of presumptuousness about their personal growth and relationship with God.

Greed and immorality are rampant among ministers in our day due partly because many have stagnated in their knowledge of God. They neglect the ministry of the word and instead go after the pursuit to make a good living out of the ministry. Unlike Eli's sons, whose interest was to take the best portions of peoples' offerings for themselves (2:13-16), Samuel was fully committed in his regard for the Lord. Although living at the temple, Samuel was exposed to ungodly influences through Eli's wicked sons (2:12) but the former remained was corrupted by their negative lifestyles. In the King James Version they were described as 'sons of Belial'.¹

Samuel experienced the favour of both God and the people while growing and in his entire prophetic ministry. Anyone who wants to succeed in ministry must enjoy both. However, care must be exercised to ensure that God's favour is given first priority and must count far

more than the favour of people. This is because it more important to pursue right standing with God than to seek public approval and attention. God gave Samuel a divine introduction from Dan to Beersheba, that is, throughout the whole land from north to south (3:20). Samuel did not have to launch a publicity campaign, like many pastors do nowadays, with posters to inform people that he was now the anointed prophet in town.

Samuel's response to his first vision of God was to lie down until morning (3:15a). This posture suggests that he probably pondered over the implications of the message for his own life and being sobered by the fact that God has bypassed his master to speak to him directly. Samuel's response is a model of how pastors especially those who are still young in the ministry, ought to respond to God's word. They should not become overexcited by the messages, visions, and revelations they have received from God, but should ponder on and discern what the next line of action should look like.

Conclusion

Samuel was an outstanding man of God. He was called by God to be a prophet at youthful age and in a period when God's people were experiencing serious challenges spiritually and otherwise. He had a great reputation in ancient Israel. Samuel exuded unparalleled integrity in the midst of spiritual and moral decadence.

Like Eli, Samuel had two sons (8:2), who failed to walk in the footsteps of their father (8:3-5). They did not follow the good example of their father who never accepted bribes and did not pervert justice, and his personal integrity was acknowledged by God and the people of Israel. God bore witness to Samuel's ministry when he responded to Samuel's prayer by sending thunder and rain, which was most unusual at harvest time (12:16-18). Samuel was a prophet who would not minimize God's severity against sin, and yet also one who never missed an opportunity to point those around him to the saving grace of God.

Prophet Samuel's exemplarily prophetic ministry is a beacon of hope as well challenge in a difficult dispensation as it is being experienced today in Nigeria. His life of unparalleled integrity has so much to teach people who are saddled with leadership position in both religious and political spheres in Nigeria, especially pastors.

Recommendations

The paper recommends the following:

- a) Nigerian pastors should emulate Samuel by speaking the truth at all times irrespective of threats, oppositions and challenges of life.
- b) Pastors should focus more in building their character than outward charisma for fame and worldly gain thereby striking a balance to charisma and character.
- c) Pastors should understand leadership as stewardship and not just power and prestige.
- d) Accountability should be upheld as evaluation of leadership.
- e) The Church and Society should reward leaders with integrity and discipline the immoral pastors objectively according to the Word of God.

Endnotes

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