

EXEGETICAL STUDY OF EZEKIEL 37 'VISION OF DRY BONE' AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S RESTORATION AND NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

A careful exegetical study of Ezekiel 37 shows that there are theological correlations between the context of the vision of 'dry bone' and the contemporary Nigerian situation. Thus, this paper investigates the theological implications of the Israelite situation of exile and the eventual restoration and nation-building in light of hope for Nigeria's situation. Therefore, this paper employs a secondary data collection method by reviewing relevant literature, and it uses in-depth exegetical analytical methods to analyse verse-by-verse, Ezekiel 37. At the same time, the theological significance of each passage is also discussed in detail, and their implications are examined in relevance to the contemporary Nigerian situation. This paper concludes that contemporary Nigeria is a perfect semblance of Ezekiel 37's vision of 'Dry Bone' with a poverty-stricken hopeless situation and enormous divisions, respectively. It is recommended, amongst others that, while Nigerians should keep hope alive and look forward to a better Nigeria, the government should ensure equality and provision of amenities to cater for the well-being of the people; then, moral values should be upheld by all stakeholders; and the Church should wake up to its civic and spiritual responsibilities.

Keywords: Ezekiel 37, Nation Building, Restoration, Vision of Dry Bone

Introduction

Ezekiel was from the Zadokite priestly tradition in Judah, exiled to Babylonia with King Jehoiachin and other Judahite nobles, and called to be a prophet to the Babylonian exiles.¹ The existing literary text he left behind includes him among the oral-literary prophets of Israel. Prophet Ezekiel, contra some Israelite prophets, used mostly prose narrative in his reported speech formula, with little poetry. Yet, his prophetic text encapsulates more sign-acts, oracular rebuke and elegy, symbolism and metaphors, and imageries and parables.

Ezekiel began his ministry five years after his captivity when he was about 30 years old.² Alexander³ observes that Ezekiel was a priest (Ezekiel 1:3) but never served in that office, as he was still a young man when he was taken captive during the reign of Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:10-16). Daniel was taken captive in the first captivity during Jehoiakim's reign, about eight years before Ezekiel was taken captive. Ezekiel was contemporary with Jeremiah and Daniel. Jeremiah was an old man who spoke to the remnant that remained in the land; Daniel spoke in the court of the king of Babylon; Ezekiel spoke to the captives who had been brought to the rivers of Babylon. While the other captives wept when they remembered Zion, Ezekiel exulted in the greatest visions ever given to any prophet.⁴

Biwul⁵ posited, "Ezekiel is the prophet of the Spirit, as Isaiah is the prophet of the Son and Jeremiah; the prophet of the Father." During the first years of the captivity, the false prophets said that the people would be returned to Jerusalem and the city would not be destroyed. It was not until the final

deportation, during Zedekiah's reign, that the city was destroyed – some eleven years after Ezekiel was taken captive. Jeremiah had sent a message to Babylon (Jeremiah 29) that the city would be destroyed. Ezekiel confirmed this message and warned the people that they must turn to God before they could return to Jerusalem. In many ways, Ezekiel spoke in the darkest days of the nation. He stood at the bottom of the valley in the darkest corner. He had to meet the false hope the false prophets gave and the indifference and despondency begotten in the days of sin and disaster. The people would not listen to him or his message. Therefore, as Gaebelien⁶ notes, he resorted to a new method: instead of speaking in parables, he acted them out (Ezekiel 24:24).

Ezekiel was the prophet of the glory of the Lord. Three prophets of Israel spoke when they were out of the land: Ezekiel, Daniel, and John. Each wrote an apocalypse. Although they used highly symbolic language, they saw the brightest light and held the highest hope. Ezekiel saw the Shekinah glory of the Lord leave Solomon's temple, and he saw the return of the glory of the Lord, which was projected into the future during the kingdom. The meaning of Ezekiel is seen in the coming glory during the kingdom. Ezekiel looked beyond the sufferings of Christ to "the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:11).

In Ezekiel 37, Israel's miraculous restoration is portrayed vividly through Ezekiel's vision of dry bones. In the vision, it is proclaimed that the Lord would miraculously not only revive the nation of Israel but also restore her and reunify with Judah – the northern kingdom and the other, the southern kingdom – and they would again become one.

Thus, this paper uses both primary sources to review relevant literature. Books, articles in journals, and others formed the relevant literature reviewed in relation to the authorship, context and purpose of writing, as well as other aspects of Ezekiel 37. Hence, this paper intends to study the restoration imports of Ezekiel 37 exegetically. Also, it explores the theological message of Ezekiel 37 for contemporary Nigeria for restoration and nation-building.

Background to the Writing of Ezekiel 37

Using oral oracles, visions, symbolic actions, and prophetic discourse as communicative modes⁷, and the purposeful adoption of stylistic literary tradition by Prophet Ezekiel in his 'vision of dry bones' has attracted a wide readership to the book of Ezekiel in general, of not only religious scholars but also scholars from other walks of life⁸ particularly Chapter 37. No wonder Greenberg posits that this passage, probably the best known of Ezekiel's prophecies, deserves its fame⁹ and it appears to be the most famous of Ezekiel's work¹⁰ and that no prophecy in the entire book of Ezekiel has captured the imagination of readers down through the centuries like the account of the revivification of the dry bones in chapter 37.¹¹

Exilic Israel was not only whisked away into a foreign land by the Assyrians (722 BC) and the Babylonians (605 BC, 597 BC and 587 BC) but also into a political and religious context quite remote to the Jewish culture and tradition. For the exilic Israel nation, exile did not only mean expulsion from God's land as retribution for violating his covenant¹² but also the demise of national Israel, even her identity as a people. Again, represented by the imagery of death, exile was Yahweh's punishment for Israel in the tune of spiritual infidelity, cessation and physical loss and the loss of everything; even exilic Israel lost all her institutions.¹³

Nevertheless, despite the disenfranchised, hopeless, traumatised and shattered conditions of Babylonian and Assyrian exiles, Yahweh decided to put on such an unbelievably dramatic display purposefully "to combat the despair which had settled upon the [agonising] exiles,"¹⁴ to restore His intended Israel nation and reactivate her ideal national identity. These may not have been possible if not for a righteous person like Ezekiel, who remained not only a righteous prophet but also a faithful watchman of the nation Israel. That is why a glimpse of hope of recovery from such an irreparable condition bewildered Ezekiel when he came face to face with the vision of the dry bones.

Exegetical Analysis of Ezekiel 37

The vision of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14 is said to have taken place in the valley of Mesopotamia.¹⁵ Visions are not new to Ezekiel at this point because this is the third of his four visions that are recorded, which are in 1:1-3:15, 8:1-11:25, and 40:1-48:35¹⁶. As a matter of fact, Ezekiel is full of apocalyptic thought that “emphasises an imminent battle in which Yahweh destroys evil, raises the righteous to power and affects a messianic type kingdom”.¹⁷ All these are expressed symbolically in the passage, which is probably the most well-known passage and vision in the entire book of Ezekiel.¹⁸

This well-known apocalyptic vision of the valley of dry bones pictures how Yahweh would restore His people. The exegetical analysis and interpretation of this chapter picture the future restoration of Israel in both spiritual and national revival and restoration.

1. The revelatory vision of the valley of dry bones (37:1-6)

1 הִנֵּה עָלַי יְיָ-יְהוָה וַיּוֹצֵאֵנִי בְרוּחַ יְהוָה וַיְנִיחֵנִי בְּתוֹךְ הַבְּקָעָה וְהִיא מְלֵאָה עַצְמוֹת׃
 2 וְהֶעֱבִירֵנִי עֲלֵיהֶם סָבִיב וְהִנֵּה רַבּוֹת מְאֹד עַל-פְּנֵי הַבְּקָעָה וְהִנֵּה יֹשְׁבוֹת מְאֹד׃
 3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בְּוֹא-אֲדָם הַתְּחַיֶּינָה הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְאָמַר אֲדָנִי יְהוָה אַתָּה יָדָעְתָּ׃
 4 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הִנָּבֵא עַל-הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם הָעֲצָמוֹת הַיְבֵשׁוֹת שְ�מָעוּ דְּבַר-יְהוָה׃
 5 כֹּה אָמַר אֲדָנִי יְהוָה לָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה הִנֵּה אֲנִי מֵבִיא בָכֶם רוּחַ וְחַיִּיתֶם׃
 6 וְנָתַתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם גִּידִים וְהַעֲלֵתִי עֲלֵיכֶם בָּשָׂר וְקָרַמְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם עוֹר וְנָתַתִּי בָכֶם רוּחַ וְחַיִּיתֶם וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוָה׃

The Lord lifted Ezekiel up by His Spirit and transported him in a vision to the middle of a valley full of dry bones. This may have been the same valley in which Ezekiel saw his vision of God's glory (3:22). In this vision, the prophet walked around among the very many dry bones that littered this valley. They represent the Israelites slain during the conquest of the land and now in exile for a very long time.¹⁹ Another common interpretation is that the bones represent “the resurrection of the gospel church, from an afflicted persecuted state to liberty and peace.”²⁰

The Lord asked Ezekiel if the bones could live again. The prophet replied that only the Lord knew (Rev. 7:14); He could make them live, Ezekiel believed, but he did not know if God would do that. The Lord also instructed Ezekiel to prophesy over the dry bones and to tell them to hear His word. The Lord told the bones that He would cause breath to enter them and they would come back to life (Hos. 6:2). The various occurrences of the Hebrew word רוּחַ (*ruah*) in this periscope sometimes mean breath (vv. 5, 6, 8, 9, 10) or wind (v. 9) or Spirit (vv. 1, 14), the context determines meaning.²¹ Finally, Yahweh would also put sinews on the bones, make flesh grow back on them, cover them with skin, and put breath in them. They would come back to life and know that He is Yahweh.

2. The impact of the prophet's obedience to the divine command (37:7-10)

7 וַנִּבְּאֵתִי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי וַיְהִי-קוֹל כְּהִנָּבְאִי וְהִנֵּה-רֹעַשׁ וַתִּקְרְבוּ עַצְמוֹת עֵצָם אֶל-עַצְמוֹ׃
 8 וַרְאִיתִי וְהִנֵּה-עֲלֵיהֶם גִּידִים וּבָשָׂר עָלָה וַיִּקְרָם עֲלֵיהֶם עוֹר מִלְּמַעְלָה וְרוּחַ אֵין בָּהֶם׃
 9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הִנָּבֵא אֶל-הָרוּחַ הִנָּבֵא בְּוֹא-אָדָם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל-הָרוּחַ כֹּה-אָמַר וְאָדָנִי יְהוָה מֵאֲרֵב רוּחוֹת בָּאֵי הָרוּחַ וּפָתִי פִּתְחוּ וְהָאֵלֶּה וַיִּחְיּוּ׃
 10 וַהֲנִבְּאֵתִי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי וַתִּבּוֹא בָהֶם הָרוּחַ וַיִּחְיּוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ עַל-רַגְלֵיהֶם חֵל גָּדוֹל מְאֹד-מְאֹד׃

Ezekiel spoke to the bones as the Lord had commanded him, and he heard a rattling noise as the bones began to come together. The prophet saw sinew, flesh, and skin come back on them, but there was no breath in them; they were not yet alive. Jamieson et al.²² states that this may imply that Israel hereafter, as at the restoration from Babylon was the case in part, shall return to Judea unconverted at first (Zech. 13:8, 9).

The Lord then told Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath and to command it in the name of the Lord to come from the four winds (that is, every direction) and give life to the bones (Isa. 43:5-6; Jer. 31:8). Ezekiel followed the Lord's instructions, and breath came into the corpses (Gen. 2:7; Rom. 8:1-17). They came to life, stood up, and formed a very large group of people, as large as an army.²³

3. The resurrection of the dry bones (37: 11–14)

11 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בְּנֵי־אָדָם הַעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה כָּל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל הִנֵּה אִמְרִים יִבְשׁוּ עַצְמוֹתֵינוּ וְאָבְדָה תְּקוּמָנוּ נִגְזְרָנוּ לָנוּ:
12 לָכֵן הִנָּבֵא וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הִנֵּה אֲנִי פֹתֵחַ אֶת־קְבָרוֹתֵיכֶם וְהַעֲלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם מִקְבְּרוֹתֵיכֶם עִמִּי וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־אֶדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל: ס
13 וַיִּדְעֻתָם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּפִתְחֵי אֶת־קְבָרוֹתֵיכֶם וּבַהֲעֲלוֹתִי אֶתְכֶם מִקְבְּרוֹתֵיכֶם עִמִּי:
14 וְנָתַתִּי רוּחִי בְכֶם וְחִיִּיתֶם וְהִנַּחֲתִי אֶתְכֶם עַל־אֶדְמַתְכֶם וַיִּדְעֻתָם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי נָאֻם־יְהוָה: פ

The Lord explained to Ezekiel that the bones represented the whole house of Israel (36:10). The Israelites were saying that they were like dry bones: they had been dead for a very long time spiritually and physically, and they had no hope of life in the future; they had lost all hope of becoming a nation again or of seeing God's promises to them fulfilled literally. This is because the Lord had 'cut [them] off' completely; the bones were separated from each other, and the Israelites were scattered over the earth.

Consequently, Ezekiel was to prophesy to them that the sovereign Lord would open their graves, cause them to come up out of their graves, and bring them back into the Promised Land. Then, they would know that He is God. This chapter, then, does not deal with personal bodily resurrection but with a national resurrection.²⁴ Thus, He promised again to put His Spirit within them, bring them back to life, and place them in their land (15-28; 36:22-32), and this would teach them that He is God.

It should be noticed that what God promised was not the physical resurrection of all Israelites individually sometime in the future, but it was both spiritual and physical restoration of the Israelites nation. This could genuinely be termed a 'rebirth' of the nation (Rom. 11:26-27).

4. The restoration of Israel to unified nation (37:15–23)

15 וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:
16 וְאַתָּה בֶּן־אָדָם קַח־לָךְ עֵץ אֶחָד וּכְתֹב עָלָיו לַיהוָה וּלְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲבֵרו וְלִקְחָה עֵץ אֶחָד וּכְתֹב עָלָיו לְיוֹסֵף וְעַץ אֶפְרַיִם וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲבֵרוּ:
17 וְקָרַב אֹתָם אֶחָד אֶל־אֶחָד לָךְ לַעֲץ אֶחָד וְהָיוּ לְאֶחָד בְּיָדָה:
18 וּכְאֲשֶׁר יֹאמְרוּ אֵלָיָה בְּנֵי עַמָּה לֵאמֹר הֲלוֹא־תִגִּיד לָנוּ מִה־אֵלֶּה לָךְ:
19 דִּבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶם כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הִנֵּה אֲנִי לֹקֵחַ אֶת־עֵץ יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר בְּיַד־אֶפְרַיִם וְשִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲבֵרו וְנָתַתִּי אוֹתָם עָלָיו אֶת־עֵץ יְהוּדָה וְעָשִׂיתָם לַעֲץ אֶחָד וְהָיוּ אֶחָד בְּיָדִי:
20 וְהָיוּ הָעֵצִים אֶשְׁר־תִּכְתֹּב עָלֵיהֶם בְּיָדְךָ לְעִנְיָהֶם:
21 וְדִבַּר אֲלֵיהֶם כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הִנֵּה אֲנִי לֹקֵחַ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִבְּיַן הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִלְכוּ־שָׁמָּה וְקִבַּצְתִּי אוֹתָם מִסָּבִיב וְהִבֵּאתִי אוֹתָם אֶל־אֶדְמַתָּם:
22 וְעָשִׂיתִי אוֹתָם לְגוֹי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ בְּהָרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִלֶּדֶךְ אֶתָּה יְהִינָה לְכָלֶם לְמִלֶּדֶךְ וְלֹא יִהְיֶה עוֹד לְשָׁנֵי גוֹיִם וְלֹא יִתְצֻ עוֹד לְשָׁנֵי מַמְלָכוֹת עוֹד:
23 וְלֹא יִטְמְאוּ עוֹד בְּגִלּוּלֵיהֶם וּבִשְׁקֻצֵיהֶם וּבְכָל פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי אוֹתָם מִכָּל מוֹשָׁבֹתֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר חָטְאוּ בָהֶם וְטִהַרְתִּי אוֹתָם וְהָיוּ־לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים:

The Lord also commanded Ezekiel to take two sticks. He was to write on one of them, "For Judah and for the sons of Israel, Judah's companions." He was to write on the other stick, "For Joseph and for the sons of Ephraim, Joseph's companions." One stick represented the Jews of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and the other the Jews of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Ezekiel was to next join the two sticks together in his hand, end to end, so they appeared to be one stick.

Mormonism teaches that the two sticks represent the Bible (the stick of Judah) and the Book of Mormon (the stick of Joseph), but the rest of the passage refutes this interpretation because such an interpretation is heretical.²⁵ When Ezekiel's audience asked him what his symbolic act represented (4:1;

5:1; 12:9; 17:12; 20:49; 24:19), he was to tell them that the Lord said He would combine the two parts of Israel into one whole nation (Isa. 11:12-13; Jer. 3:18; Hos. 1:11).

The prophet was to hold these sticks, on which he had written what the Lord told him, in the sight of the exiles. He was to explain that Yahweh promised to bring exiles from both kingdoms back into the land. He would make one United Kingdom of them again and set up one king over them. They would no longer be two divided kingdoms. These Jews would no longer defile themselves with idols, other detestable things, or transgressions of the Lord's (Mosaic) covenant. The Lord promised to deliver them from the many places where they had gone and sinned and to cleanse them, and they would enter into a proper relationship with Him. These are what Block²⁶ called the four dimensions of restoration: ethnic integrity (v. 21a), territorial integrity (v. 21b), political integrity (v. 22), and spiritual integrity (v. 23).

5. The Davidic leadership restored (37:24-28)

וְעָבְדִי דָוִד מֶלֶךְ עֲלֵיהֶם וְרוּעָה אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לְכֻלָּם וּבְמִשְׁפָּטִי יֵלְכוּ וְחֻקֹּתַי יַשְׁמְרוּ וַעֲשׂוּ אוֹתָם: ²⁴
וְיָשְׁבוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְעָבְדִי לְיַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ־בָהּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם וְיָשְׁבוּ עָלֶיהָ הָמָּה וּבְנֵיהֶם ²⁵
וּבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם עַד־עוֹלָם וְדָוִד עָבְדִי נָשִׂיא לָהֶם לְעוֹלָם:
וְכִרְתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם בְּרִית עוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אוֹתָם וְהָרַבִּיתִי אוֹתָם וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־מִקְדָּשִׁי ²⁶
בְּתוֹכָם לְעוֹלָם:
וְהָיָה מִשְׁכְּנִי עֲלֵיהֶם וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהָמָּה יִהְיוּ־לִי לְעָם: ²⁷
וְיָדַעְוּ הַגּוֹיִם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מִקְדָּשׁ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהִיּוֹת מִקְדָּשִׁי בְּתוֹכָם לְעוֹלָם: ²⁸

God's servant, David, would rule over the Jews and be their king (34:24; 2 Sam. 7:13, 16; Jer. 30:9; Hos. 3:5). They would have only one king who would shepherd them so that they would follow the Lord faithfully (Exod. 19:5-6; Deut. 26:18-19; Jer. 32:38). They would live in the Promised Land forever, and the Lord's servant David would be their appointed ruler forever. Given God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, this must refer to the Son of David, Jesus Christ, the Messiah.²⁷

The Lord also promised to make a covenant of peace with His people (34:25). He would plant them securely in the land and multiply their numbers (Gen. 22:17-18). He would also set His sanctuary in their midst, not temporarily as He had done with the tabernacle and temple, but His dwelling place would be with them forever (40:5-43:9; Zech. 6:12-13), and He would also establish an intimate relationship with them (Lev. 26:9, 11). The people of the world would know that He is Yahweh who sets aside Israel as sacred for His glory and special purpose in the earth when He would set up His sanctuary in Israel's midst forever (Exod. 19:5-6). And notably, this remains even till date.

Generally, while the words 'forever' and 'everlasting' occur five times in verses 25-28, there are 13 promises in verses 15-28 and 10 'I will' commitments. These all emphasise that the reestablished Israelites would live in the land forever and have an everlasting king, an everlasting covenant, and an everlasting sanctuary. In sum, Israel will enjoy three new realities: a new commitment to Yahweh's will (v. 24b), occupation of her hereditary homeland forever (v. 25a), and the rule of David forever (v. 25b). The visions in this chapter have been understood as having been fulfilled with the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity.

Theological Implications of Ezekiel 37 for Contemporary Nigeria's Restoration and Nation-Building

With the increasing threatening events and catastrophes, Nigeria is currently in a hopeless situation and uncertain future. Despite the immense blessings of natural wealth, Nigeria is inescapably marked by misery, material distress, deprivation, disease, and chaos. Other problems include natural and human disasters, political conflicts, economic misdirection, and, above all, insecurity with a high level of indiscriminate killings, kidnappings and insurgency.

The contemporary situation in Nigeria is no doubt a resemblance to that of Ezekiel 37's vision of 'Dry Bone'. Comparatively, the former situation of Israel is not so different from the current Nigeria nation.

Nigerians are exiled even in their own towns and cities. Fulani-herdsmen and kidnappers, amongst other militant groups, have become the Babylonians and Assyrians, holding Nigerians captives even in their country. Our political consciousness is nothing to write home about, while our identity and integrity, both at home and abroad, have been totally lost, and nothing is working. Thus, the current Nigeria needs restoration and reactivation, like the then exilic Israel nation.

The prophetic message of hope, resurrection, resuscitation, restoration and redemption contained in Ezekiel 37 resonates well with the contemporary Nigerian situation. Ezekiel himself acted in several ways as a Nigerian Prophet of hope. Therefore, the hope principle in the theology of 'dry bones shall live' in Ezekiel 37 holds some relevance for the contemporary Nigerian situation in the following ways:

1. Political Implication

The enigmatic Nigerian drama lies in how her political leaders go about the administration and governance. Most Nigerian political leaders act like the Babylonian captors by their attitude grounded on egocentric benefits and a protectionist motif of their future interests. Research indicates that through political protectionism, armed group ideology is becoming widespread in Nigeria, resulting in the rise in more ethnic militias and their fight for resource control and ownership.²⁸ A good example is the *Amotekun* security outfit in South West Nigeria. In many ways, these continue to contribute to the divisions in the Nigerian system.

Nevertheless, there is still hope for Nigeria. If Israel, which was in exile far removed from home, still remained a covenant people and her God kept His covenant fidelity despite her acts of covenant infidelity, the matchless richness of God's mercy, which can bring back the dry bone and the dead in sin shall prevail in Nigeria. The reality of a loving and providential God will undoubtedly be true for the politically powerful and the economically affluent. Consequently, the powerless and downtrodden are constantly asking whether the biblical claim, 'I am the God of all flesh', would see the wondrous restoration power of God in this country, and they would know that indeed, God is the Lord, and He shall be glorified from generations to generations.

2. Sociological Implication

Regional and geopolitical zones and ethnic and tribal segregation have created apparent boundaries, hostility, prejudice and discrimination among Nigerians, and these have been reflected even in the current national appointments. Except for achieving commercial and political goals and benefits, there can hardly be any well-cemented meaningful relationship among Nigerians. The loyalty of individuals is first to their ethno-tribal enclaves rather than to the long-cherished Nigerian brotherhood relationships when everyone was considered brothers.

Like Ezekiel was questioned whether the dry bones he saw would live, many disparaged Nigerians are equally asking whether the sociological cohesion expected of a functional nation can still be achieved. A restored post-exilic Israel was to become a unified state.

Similarly, hope for a better and more united Nigeria should be sustained. When those highly placed and high-class Nigerians seek to replace their attitude of arrogance, superiority and complacency with humility, brotherhood, compassion, philanthropy and demureness, this will achieve a cohesive, just and fair society for Nigeria. This will also become a reality when political and economic dominance and discrimination give way to a well-knitted sociological human relatedness in society.

These would work well 'by viewing others as equals and recognising their contribution to the well-being of society'. A socially cohesive society is achieved when the individual's sanctity and fundamental human rights are respected and protected.

3. Economic Implication

It is rightly pointed out by Tenai²⁹ that 'poverty continues to present an enormous challenge to the well-being of humanity'. The contemporary Nigerian economic bourgeoisie, cartels and the cabals with buzzard-like attitudes have hijacked the economic stream and blocked its flow to everyone.

Agreeably, poverty and its depriving, dehumanising, marginalising and excluding characteristics must be fought; yet, such effort is more a mirage than a reality for most poverty-stricken, hopeless Nigerians in contrast to the extremely wealthy ones existing in the same society. The condition is worsened in the face of corrupt governance and improper regulation of economic policies.

As a result, despondent Nigerians are lamenting like the Babylonian exiles, 'Our economic bones are dried up, and our hope for survival is gone; we are cut off' (Ezek. 37:11). They have become 'alienated from the commonwealth of [Nigeria]. This is where Ezekiel steps in with his message of hope for a better future economy in Nigeria. And even Christ showed up with grace, ready to bring back the poor, destitute and vulnerable, who once were far off, near to the comfort of this nation. And like the exiles, the poor and oppressed Nigerians are looking for an Ezekiel among their political leaders who will prophesy to them, 'Dry bones, live!' (Ezek. 37:9–10).

Yet, with God, nothing is impossible and irreparable. He can overturn the table of such seemingly hopeless economic conditions, for in Ezekiel, we see God as the giver of life, even life to dead and dry bones.

4. Ethical Implication

Corruption is a daily orchestrated music that strikes the loudest chord in the ears of all Nigerians. As Gwamnan³⁰ laments over the Nigerian condition, 'the pervasive influence of corruption permeates all facets of the Nigerian life today. It has risen to unprecedented heights in the country despite attempts to contain it, but most of the leaders and people in government are morally unfit for public office.

Corporate communal morality and moral rightness of existence in society have been redefined by many Nigerian leaders, politicians, academia, businesspeople, employers and employees, students and the like. Even the morality of marriage relationships and other forms of relationships is being redefined. Although Kunhiyop³¹ argues that Nigerian morality is knitted to a strong sense of community, hence 'the concept of shame is an important regulating factor in Nigerian morality'³², this understanding of 'shame culture' in Nigeria is fast being reconceptualised and redefined. The concept of a strong communal corporate existence that the 'common good takes precedence over the individual good' is gradually being replaced with the ideology of individualism of greedy material acquisition against the corporate good.

Most unfortunately, the Church, presumably the morally upright regulatory agency that plays the 'watchdog' over national corruption, is nowadays corruption-stinking. Worse corruption, immorality, social vices, discrimination, exploitation, extortion, etc, characterise the Church in contemporary Nigeria.

Now, it seems nowhere to run for Nigeria. But God, in His richness in mercy, will show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Nigeria. He, by His grace, safe us and grants us peace so that killings, kidnappings and insurgency can be a thing of the past in Nigeria so that we Nigerians will no longer be strangers and sojourners in our land but be fellow citizens of equal rights and benefits with high-class rich people in our society³³. The God of restoration shall bring our dead moral values and integrity to life as individuals and the nation as a whole.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Before being born again, we were all unbelievers, wretched and dead, and separated from God; but after being born again, believers have been resurrected from the dead and regenerated into a new life in Christ, having been raised seated with Christ (Eph. 2). These are vividly a similar message in the prophetic declaration to the dry bones, which having been dead, are brought to life and living (Ezek. 37). No gainsaying, the hope for the hopeless theology in Ezekiel 37's vision of dry bone has theological relevance to the contemporary Nigeria. Nigerian situation needs not only a restoration of hope but also a renewal of unity and nation-building; hence, the relevance of this paper.

However, no matter how seemingly rotten Nigeria is, there is still hope for Nigeria. If Israel's nation can be restored, Nigeria will be restored. Nigerians should keep hope alive and look forward to a better Nigeria. Importantly, the Nigerian government should ensure equality and provision of amenities to cater for the well-being of the Nigerian people. The government should put in place socially cohesive machinery that will ensure a peaceful society where individual and their fundamental human rights are respected and protected. Corporate communal morality and moral rightness should be upheld not only by the government but also by all stakeholders – family, school, church, traditional rulers, etc. The Church leaders should also help redeem the face of the Church by preaching morality in our society, and churches in contemporary Nigeria should wake up to their responsibility of flushing out corruption, immorality, social vices, discrimination, exploitation and extortion and all the like.

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