

## EXEGETICAL SURVEY OF PSALM 137 AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN CHRISTIANITY

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### Abstract

This work studied Psalm 137 and its implication for contemporary Nigerian Christianity. The biblical rhetoric analysis was employed in the work and it was found out that Psalm 137 is a Psalm of lament composed during the exilic period. This captivity, the work showed, was the corollary of long-time deviation of the people of Israel from the commandments of God as stipulated in the Sinai covenant. Like the situation in Israel prior to the exile, the work equally found out that present Christian practice in Nigeria is tainted with ungodly behaviours that are at variance with God's commandments. In this regard therefore the message of Psalm 137 rings a warning bell to Christians in Nigeria who are enmeshed in any ungodly behaviour to repent in order to avert the wrath of God. The work recommends that Christians in Nigeria should always strive to live according to the commandments and laws of God.

**Key Words:** Psalm 137, lamentation, God's commandment, Nigerian Christianity, immoral behaviours

### Introduction

The Hebrew text of Psalm 137 is a Psalm of lamentation. In fact, according to Anderson (1992), Psalm 137 oscillates between individual and community lament. To understand the lamentable tone of this Psalm is to understand the religious history of Israel as it relates to her covenant relationship with God. The relationship Abraham, one of the patriarchs of the Israelites, had with God cemented Israel's position as a special people of God. The liberation of the people of Israel from the shackles of bondage in Egypt was a testament to this. As a way of concretizing this relationship, God and the people of Israel entered into a covenant relationship at Sinai.

In this covenant relationship, certain laws/commandments were to be kept by the people of Israel. As Odo (2013) pointed out, the people of Israel willingly consented to their keeping of these commandments set forth by God. However, as time passed by, the people of Israel deviated hugely from their covenantal track and violated God's commandments. Through the messages of many Old Testament prophets, God warned the people to return back to him but all was to no avail. In fact, apostasy, syncretism and all manner of vices became the order of the day in ancient Israel (Okwueze 2001).

The corollary of this continuous apostasy and vices was the attraction of God's wrath on the people of Israel. Foreign super powers were sent by God to enslave and subjugate the people of Israel. In other words, foreign super powers were sent to take Israel into shameful captivity. It was therefore in such a mournful situation that Psalm 137 was composed to mourn the extremely bad calamity that befell Israel and also, to pledge alliance to God's commandments.

In relationship to the above, the context in which this research work studies the pericope of Psalm 137 is paralleled to the situation of vices which existed in ancient Israel prior to the



captivity. Precisely, contemporary Nigerian society is marred by all kinds of evils which are huge deviations from the laws and commandments of God. Even Nigerian Christians are not left out of these evil practices. As scholarly works have shown, present Nigerian Christians indulge in evil, shameful and ungodly behaviours which are at variance with God's laws (Awada 2008; Uwaegbute 2014; Odo 2013; David-West 2013).

In this regard, this research work is geared towards a critical study of Psalm 137 in other to relate how it calls Nigerian Christians to return back to God by doing His commandments. The methodological tool adopted in this research is biblical rhetoric analysis. Some recommendations are also given based on the finding of the research on its study of Psalm 137.

### A Study of Psalm 137

The calamity that befell the ancient Israel had a link with their stubbornness and adamancy to the words of God through his messengers. God spoke to his elected people through his prophets to return to him and adhere to his commandments but they ignored him by not heeding to the voices of his prophets. Israel abandoned the ways of her God and turned to the Canaanite ways of practicing Baalism. As a result of this, Yahweh's prophets foretold doom and impending peril for the people. They became consistent in admonishing the people to repent and come back to God in order to avert the impending doom that was about to envelop them. Yet Israel gave no encouraging attention to the voices of God's messengers. In the same way they did not consider their unfaithfulness and violation of God's commandments as sinful. Thus, the people laced themselves with false illusions that they were God's elected and for this reason were entitled to a glorious future in spite of their violation of God's commandments.

***Socio-religious state of the pre-exilic Israelite society.*** A survey into a socio-religious state of the ancient Israel in the pre-exilic era speaks of her gloomy state. There was an outstanding moral decline of the people. Moral laxity and social injustice were the order of the day. Speaking on the condition of the Israelite society at this period, Okwueze (2010,p.149) observed that "at this period both the Israelite and Judean societies have become so well developed that the vices and evils which torment civilized societies had already set in." The socio- religious life of the Canaanites was a great attraction to the people of Israel who embraced the sedentary life upon establishing themselves in Canaan. Thus, the life of close interaction between them had a remarkable impact on the people of Israel. Heaton (1961, p.71) rightly posited that "It requires little imagination to appreciate that the Israelites were solely tempted to abandon their God for Baal and being now in Canaan to do as the Canaanites did." Accordingly, Wright (1962) observed that:

So great was the borrowing of the Israelites from Canaanite that it has been a common view among biblical students that before the prophetic reactionary movement got under way Israelite religion like her material culture was so similar to that of Canaan as to make it virtually impossible to distinguish the two in vital matters(p.117).

The effect of the culture contact that occurred between the people of Israel and the Canaanites tempered the faith of the ancient Israel as it exposed her to syncretism. Hence, Israel started indulging immoral behaviour and other social vices like the Canaanites did. This was the socio-religious state of the ancient Israel when Amos lamented that "in the same animalistic manner a man and his father go into the same maiden so that my holy name is profaned" (Amos 2:7). Motyer (1974) explained that the socio - religious condition of the pre-exilic era adored what was traditional but has nothing of spiritual commitment. Substantiating this point of thought Ugwueye (2002) averred that the religious state of the ancient Israel at this period could be best described as religiosity without religion. It is



doubtless that the escalation of moral promiscuity and injustice, at that period attracted the volumes of prophecies that punctuated that period advising the Israelites to repent and come back to God. Put differently, it was against this backdrop that God's prophets spoke to the people that they were beclouding themselves with false illusion and belief. Speaking in line of this opinion Lindblom (1973) spoke thus:

The relative paucity of references to the covenant in the pre exilic prophets is presumably to be ascribed to the fact that the juridical character of this idea led the people to make claims on their God as of right and to cherish ambitious dreams of a supposedly inevitable glorious future. It was a prime task of the pre- exilic prophets to combat such false illusions (p.329).

Undeniably, the Israelites were God's chosen race to which he promised a glorious future. But this promise of a glorious future was coated with a conditional clause. The glorious future promised to the Israelites would be attainable if only they adhere to the covenant they had with God. Therefore, anything short of that would make the promise unattainable. The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC was as a result of Israel's dissident to the warnings of God's messengers to her to embrace the right path and observe his commandments. Thus, God employed Babylon as his rod to chastise the Israelites for not keeping to the covenant they had with him at Sinai. The Babylonians came and took them into exile in a more dehumanizing manner and devastated their temple. It was during this period of shameful exile in Babylon that this fascinating poem of lament (Psalm 137) was composed as Israel realized her sins and thus turned to God soliciting for his mercy.

The Book of Psalms which perhaps is complex to ascribe date of composition and authorship falls under the category of books in the Hebrew Scripture designated as *Ketubim* in Hebrew; this means "writings" in English. A close study of the Psalter in the Old Testament has unveiled that David is not the authorship of most Psalms that bear his name in their superscription. Buttressing this line of thought for instance, Okwueze (2001) argued that the heading to Psalm 30, "A Psalm of David; a song at the dedication of the temple" suggest a historically impossible situation. Explicating further, he averred that the temple was built by Solomon, David's son, who succeeded him after his death. Arising from this background, therefore David could not be regarded as the authorship of this Psalm, a song at the dedication of the temple. Putting the point straight Okwueze (2001) posited that it is therefore not historically realistic to say that David was present at the completion and dedication of a temple which was only started after his death. Admittedly, it is really difficult to date accurately the date of the composition of most psalms if not all the Psalms in the scripture. However, certain indications will not infrequently help to decide within what period a particular Psalm is likely to have been written or composed and in most cases this is as far as we can get with any feeling of certitude to the date of a Psalm (Okwueze 2001).

Interestingly, the social setting or *sitz- im leben* of Psalm 137 has been described as the exilic era. It has double *sitz im-leben*. Pemberton (1988) and Van (1958) maintained that the issues surrounding vv 1-6 were displacement, loss of influential position and power, forced labour in the irrigation Canals of Babylon. While the social setting that adored the second part vv 7-9 was the collective experiences of the destruction of Jerusalem and the more personal and particular pathos of the atrocious dashing. Put differently, the upwelling of agony and pathos that accosted the forceful migration and great destruction of Jerusalem was so devastating on the people of Israel. The internal evidence in Psalm 137 suggests strongly that the period of its composition is unmistakably the era of Babylonians' subjugation of the Jews during the exile. In accordance with this line of view scholars such as Charles (1907), Hans (1971) Beaucamp (1979), Watter (1984), William (1993), consented that Psalm 137 was composed during the exile. Additionally, Childs (1992) opined that although, specifying the composition of a Psalm to a definite phase is difficult, it is



exception. Contributing vividly Joachim (1987) remarked that Psalm 137 was the only Psalm that could be reliably dated to the exile. Deviating from this school of thought other scholars such as Artur (1962), Mitchell (1970) and James (1994) argued that in spite of elements of historical references in Psalm 137 its period of composition is debatable. Hence, the final editor of this Psalm did not state it. However, they averred that the composition of the Psalm is perhaps the post exilic period. Disregarding the view of these scholars that Psalm 137 is post exilic, this present research agreed with the view of Childs and others that Psalm 137 was composed during the exilic era.

### ***Literary Form of Psalm 137***

A study of Psalm 137 has identified that the Psalm swings between individual and communal Lament. This is clearly outstanding in the text. Reading from vv 1-4 underscores the communal lament of the people of Israel while vv 5-6 is enveloped with individual lament. Impressively Psalm 137 which is a mixture of communal and individual lament has an element of a Zion Psalm. Supporting this view of reasoning, Anderson (1992) opined that Psalm 137 complexity is due to the fact that it begins as a communal lament (vv 1-4), has elements of a Zion Psalm. Commenting on the literary form of the Psalm, Allen (1968) argued that Psalm 137 is a complaint poem. In his contribution McCann (1993) grouped it along side with Psalm 109 and 82 in a section entitled prayer and activity: vengeance, catharsis and compassion. Hans (1934) in John (2012) explained that Psalm 137 is a ballad. Ugwu (2001) explained that a ballad is a short narrative song presented and transmitted orally among illiterate or semi-literate people. In continuation, John (2012) posited that Psalm 137 is a lament Psalm composed in the exilic period. Wilson (1985) maintained that the Psalm is a lament Psalm but the final redactor of the book of Psalms decided to put it in the midst of halleluiahs and thanksgiving Psalms. A close study of Psalm 137 has revealed that it is a poem of lament. Hence the outstanding indices of the Psalm of lament adorn this Psalm. Accordingly, Obiora (2012) explaining the five elements of Psalm of lament averred that in Psalm of lament there is an invocation of God's name by the psalmist to come to his help.

The second is the description of the life situation of the petitioner that requires urgent attention from God. Explaining further, she posited that in Psalm of lament there is an element of psalmist's prayer for help. Another element that is salient in the Psalm of lament is affirmation of trust in God and finally the last element that often coats the Psalm of lament is a vow to praise God. It is important to note that in some Psalms of lament that it is not all the above five elements mentioned are outstanding. But interestingly, all the above five elements are employed by the psalmist to polish Psalm 137. The researchers wheel below to explain how these elements are found in the Psalm. A critical examination of Psalm 137 identifies the psalmist's invocation of God's name and a prayer for help in verses 7 and 8 of this Psalm as the petitioner suddenly turned to God and intones thus: Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites, the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said "tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundation." An analysis of the above expression of the psalmist's no doubt underlines his call and a prayer for help. The above lamentation of the psalmist's plea to God that the enemies of Israel's little children be seized and dashed against the rock is embellished with pathos.

In addition, the description of a life situation of the petitioner that requires urgent attention is found from verses 1-4 of the Psalm. In the first segment of the Psalm, there is a description of the life situation of the exiles in Babylon. The exiles sat down near the river side in Babylon and wept upon remembering Zion. Thus, they hung up their harps in the willows there and refused to use them to entertain their tormentors. Admittedly, these verses implicitly describe Israel's life situation in Babylon that demands sincere lamentation. Furthermore, a thorough study of the Psalm 137 has unveiled that the element of



of trust in God and a vow to praise God are both inserted in verses 5 and 6 to decorate the Psalm. Examining the psalmist's words in the above verses buttresses this point. If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth If I do not set Jerusalem Above my highest joy. Truly, the above declarations are punctuated with the psalmist's affirmation of trust in God and a vow to praise God. Put differently, it is quite fascinating to discover that the same verses which contain the poet's affirmation of trust in God simultaneously express his vow to God. Thus, Psalm 137 is unarguably a Psalm of lament.

### Poetic Techniques in the Psalm

Poetic techniques consist of various literary tools employed by the poet to polish the poem. In other words, poetic techniques are condiments with which poetic expressions are (cooked) made. Some of these poetic techniques are used by the psalmist to decorate Psalm 137. The poetic technique called *repetition* is found in verses 5 and 6 of the Psalm. The phrase "if I" is repeated three times in the Psalm. In addition, the Hebrew term (*im-lō*) which is translated "if I do not" is repeated twice in verse 6.

*Erotesis* as a literary tool is found in verse 4 of Psalm 137. This verse kicks off with the Hebrew exclamatory particle 'êk (how). It is a literary device that is used to ask a question without necessarily waiting for an answer. Speaking on this fascinating literary technique Bullinger (2003) explained thus:

This figure is used when a speaker or writer asks animated questions, but not to obtain information. Instead of making a plain and direct statement, he suddenly changes his style, and puts what he was about to say or could have otherwise said, into the form of a question without waiting for an answer. Instead of declaring a conviction, or expressing indignation, or vindicating authority, he puts it in the form of a question without expecting a reply (p.943).

Speaking graphically, the psalmist's poetically polished his utterances with the literary figure of *erotesis* that is used to ask a question in passing without waiting for information.

'êk nāir 'et-šir-YHWH 'al 'admat nēkār (How shall we sing the Lord's song in foreign land?)

The Hebrew phrase 'êk nāšir which could be translated "how shall we sing" is laced with *cohortative*. *Cohortative* in Hebrew grammar entails first person indirect imperative. Accordingly, Lambdin (2010) rightly posited that the first person indirect imperative is called *cohortative*. A critical assessment of the above psalmist's utterances discloses laudably of the exiles refusal to their tormentors' request of a Zion song. But instead of making this affirmation plainly the poet turned it into a rhetorical question to express Israel's distastefulness for the request. Another outstanding literary device called *apostrophe* is discovered at the end of the last verse of Psalm 137. This literary tool is sometimes referred to as *epiphoneme* or striking reflection. Obiorah (2012) explained that *apostrophe* is a technique whereby the speaker suddenly directs his address to someone thereby interrupting the course of the exposition. This sudden exclamatory address of the psalmist conclusively wraps Psalm 137

It might interest one to observe that verses 5 and 6 which are coated with repetition are also embellished with jussive and self imprecation. The poetic technique known as *anadiplosis* which is a kind of repetition whereby the last part of a line is repeated as the beginning of the next line is employed by the poet in verse 7 of this Psalm. Accordingly, Obiorah (2012) explained that this literary device is also called terrace pattern and it is a form of repetition where the last part of a line is repeated as the beginning of the next line. The Hebrew word ('ārū) which means tear and ends the first stich of verse 7 is repeated as the beginning of the next stich of the same verse. Groves (1987) rightly observed that in this



section the Psalm moves from the communal collective first person plural to the individual first person singular. The psalmist's self imprecating vow is heard for the first time. The structural beauty that adores this Psalm perhaps attained its apogee in verses 5 and 6 of the Psalm. Interestingly, this could be seen in the poetic chiasmic tool employed by the psalmist to embellish this psalm. Obiorah (2012) aptly posited that Chiasmus is the inversion in the second of the two corresponding phrases of the order followed in the first. In Hebrew grammar, it is constructed thus:

*im-eškkāhē yərūšālāim tiškkah yāmīnī tidbbaq-lešōnī im-lō'*

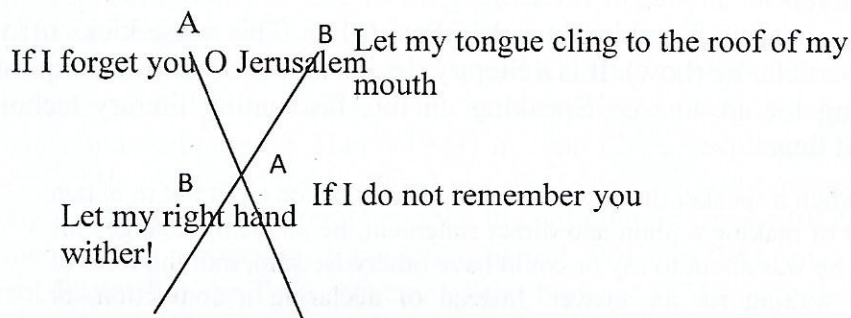
*'ezkkārēkī -im-lō 'aāleh 'et- yərūšālāim 'al rō 'š šimhātī*

*(If I forget you O Jerusalem,*

*Let my right hand wither!*

*Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth*

*If I do not remember you)*



The above presentation x-rayed a chiasmic demonstration of the Psalmist's utterances. The psalmist who speaks in first person singular symbolically evoked a curse on the people of Israel in captivity should they forget and do not set it upon their highest joy.

In addition, there is use of synonymous parallelism in verse 8. The phrase daughter Babylon is synonymous to the word devastators in verse 8. James (1981) rightly remarked that in verse 8 "daughter Babylon" is bound in synonymous parallelism to the devastator. Obviously, Psalm 137 is unmistakably a poem alluding to the destruction of Jerusalem. Ugwu (2002) aptly posited that allusion is a literary technique of making reference to a person, place or mythology.

The two Hebrew words *tōlālēmū* and *šōbēnū* (our captors and our tormentors) that are found in the first segment of this Psalm occurred only here in the Hebrew scripture. Hence, they are technically referred to as *Hapax Legomenon*. These words are traditionally rendered "our captors and our tormentors" (John 2012,p.279). Substantiating this observation, Greenspahn (1984) rightly averred that both are *hapax legomena*.

### ***A Close Reading of Psalm 137***

A study of Psalm 137 has indeed identified nostalgia for Zion, recommitment for Yahweh and imposition of curse on Israel's enemies as the three central motifs of Psalm 137.

***Nostalgia for Zion:*** The first four verses of the Psalm deal with Israel's longing for Zion. Hence, they are entitled nostalgia for Zion. The exiles sat down near the irrigation Canal in Babylon recounting their ordeal and weeping as they remembered Zion. They did not consider it appropriate to sing a Zion song to their captors a song meant only for their God-Yahweh. It was on the basis of this reason that they hung up their harps on the willows there



requesting that they should sing them a Zion song. The poet coated the unflinching faith of the exiles in the use of the *eretrosis* inserted in verse four of the Psalm. Augustus (1960) rightly maintained that in a posture of sorrow and with head bowed in humiliation, the Israelites hung up their harps and refused to play them to please their captors. The psalmist seemed to exhibit that the exiles were not troubled by their captors' request of a song. They instantaneously became inflamed and furious when their tormentors requested them for a Zion song. Israel's annoyance to her mocker's request for a Zion song was coated in the rhetorical question "how could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" In other words, the song of Zion was a song composed to worship God and not a song to entertain the Babylonian's overlord. In addition, a study of the poem discloses that this first segment of the Psalm is enveloped with synonymous parallelism in verse 3 as the psalmist intones thus:

"For there our captors ask us for songs  
and our tormentors asked for mirth saying "sing us one of the songs of Zion"

The synonymous words are captors and tormentors. The word "tormentors" is not only synonymous to the term captors but also heighten its meaning. Hence, the Israelites were not only taken into captive but were also tormented.

**Recommitment to Yahweh:** The second segment of the Psalm covers verse 5-6 and it is entitled in this study "recommitment to Yahweh". A critical study of this Psalm has unveiled that this division of the poem is laced with the poet's self imprecation. Put differently, the poet who symbolically represents the whole Israelites in exile imposed a self curse on the exiles should they forget Jerusalem and do not regard it as their highest joy. Israel's violation of God's covenant led her to the shameful captivity. But impressively, the bitter experience of exile later brought her to recommitment to God. The poet's imprecations upon himself who symbolically stands for the whole exiles saying: "if I forget you O Jerusalem let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy" are no doubt enshrined with the poet's recommitment to Yahweh. The bitter experience of captivity perhaps greatly bent Israel's adamancy to recommitment to God. Admittedly, reading in-between lines of this fascinating poem unfolds that the second division of the Psalm is coated with Israel's genuine repentance and recommitment to Yahweh. Hence she could not have vocalized such imprecations upon self if she had not really repented and thus turned again to God.

**The Imposition of Curses on Israel's Enemies:** The third segment of the Psalm 137 is decorated with the psalmist's plea to God soliciting that Israel's enemies be rewarded accordingly-the Edomites and the Babylonian devastators who inflicted pains upon Israel. It is quite pathetic that the Edomites who were the progenies of Esau, that had a consanguineous relationship with Jacob, could do such a wicked act against the descendants of their forbear's bother-Jacob. Evidently, reading the book of Lamentation 4: 21 and Obadiah from v 8-15 adjudge that the Edomites were culpable of the heinous act against the destruction of Jerusalem. John (2008) rightly remarked that the Edomites deserve precedence in this imprecation because not only were they geographically neighbours of Israel but also, as descendants of Esau, they were related to the Israelites by blood. It was against this fact, that the poet's reminiscence of the Edomites' voices encouraging the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem "tear it down! tear it down, down to its foundation" triggered the poet's barrage of agony against the Edomites. Hence, he suddenly turned to God soliciting that enemies of Israel's little ones be seized and dashed against the rock. Dahood (1970) posited that to the psalmist, the law of retaliation for cruelty seemed only just and shocking form in which the poet expresses his desire for the extermination of Israel's enemies and how they must be judged in the light of customs prevailing in his age. It is really impressive to discover that the



Hebrew word *zākor* is embellished with jussive which is a kind of imperative. The psalmist's upwelling of annoyance against the Edomites is underlined in his exclamatory address to God as he intones:

*zākor YHWH hā'omārim libnē 'ēdōm 'et yôm yarušālāim hā'omārim 'ārū'ārū 'ad haysōd bāh* {Remember O Lord against the Edomites, the day of Jerusalem's fall how they said "tear it down! Tear it down, down to its foundation"}.

Examining critically the above expression of the psalmist explains that he was not merely making an exclamation to God but was also commanding Him perhaps, to reopen the scene of the destruction of Jerusalem and see the heinous acts of the Edomites in the destruction of Jerusalem. The poet's recollection of the Edomites' voices charging the Babylonians to ravage Jerusalem "tear it down! Tear it down, down to its foundation" inflamed him greatly. Conclusively, the poet wraps this Psalm of lament underlining the imposition of curse on Israel's adversaries as he employed a literary figure of apostrophe to add feeling to the simple piece of information and express it forcefully to mark the end of this poem of lament.

### **The Implication of the Message of Psalm 137 to Contemporary Nigerian Christianity**

The aftermath of the rebellion and violation of God's law by the ancient Israel triggered the wrath of God on her. God employed the Babylonian empire as his tool to chastise the people of Israel. The severity of inhuman treatment unleashed to her by her tormentors exposed her to repentance. Hence, she sat beside the irrigation canal in Babylon weeping and longing for Zion. Obviously, the present Nigerian society like ancient Israel, is guilty of the violation of God's commandments; Nigerian Christians most inclusive. It is on the basis of this backdrop that this research paper exposing the religious, political and socio-economic situations of Nigerian society brings to the fore the implication of the message of Psalm 137 to contemporary Christianity in Nigeria.

**Religious situation of Nigeria society:** It is on records that Nigeria is a multi-religious nation. Odo (2012) asserted that apparently three outstanding religious groups are in existence in Nigerian society with a remarkable number of adherents to each one of the group. Hence she has been described as a multi-religious nations as many of her citizens profess to different religious beliefs and practices. Ugwuweye in Odo (2009) remarked that Nigeria has almost 21 million active evangelical and Pentecostal Christians which is one of the largest in the world. Speaking paradoxically Onunwa (2012) exclaimed thus:

It is still an irony that Nigeria claims to be one of the most religious nations in the world and yet she is one of the most notorious corrupt nations. Her citizens are insulted all over the world. Even many nations that do not claim to be religious have warned their citizens against doing honest business with Nigeria. At the John F. Kennedy Airport in U.S.A a big Bill Board reads go to Nigeria at your own risk. Transparency international still places Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations of the world. Yet Nigeria has the largest number of Christians in the Black world (p.8).

Admittedly, it is really ironical that in spite of all impressive exhibitions of religiosity among the Nigeria populace that her religious tendency and practices do not balance up with her morality. In a point of fact, this, similarly was the religious situation of the pre-exilic Israel that apparently engaged in religious exuberant without sincerely worshipping God. Lamenting against this situation, Ekwunife (1995, p. 66) asks "why is it that in spite of the proliferation of healing and prayer center all over the county, why is it that despite solutions at the theoretical and practical levels offered by theologians and organizers of these places, fraud, and corruption abound in Nigeria?." Speaking sorrowfully, Chuta (2004, p.63) remarked rightly that "a majority of Nigerians, both high and low troop to churches and mosques without really worshipping God but merely to fulfill areligious formality." This analogically was the moral



status of the pre-exilic Israelites' society that engaged in religious pleasing exercise without really worshipping God.

**Political Situation of Nigeria Society:** Politically, many Nigeria Christians who dabble into politics stain the image of Christianity. Gaiya (2008) regretted that many Christians are collaborators in perpetuating the moral decay in our society. It is nauseating that many Christians participate and stimulate the flames of corrupt practices that are bedeviling our society. Odo (2010, p.4) exclaimed that "the apparent embrace and participation of Christians in the spread of moral degradation is undoubtedly a disservice to the teaching of Christianity." To reflect on the political situation of the Nigeria society during the military Junta is to reopen a wound. Yet, a cursory look at the present political dispensation does not seem to make a disparity. There is an incessant increase in corruption, embezzlement of public funds, kidnapping, rigging of elections and assassination of political opponents in the country. Acceptably, a survey of the background of Psalm 137 exposes that the ancient Israelites' society like some of the Nigeria Christians were morally corrupted. Obasanjo (2002, pp 50 - 51) discloses thus: "we fight, and sometimes shed blood to achieve and retain political power because for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for too long been the gateway to the economic kingdom." The above view of Obasanjo speaks of the gloomy political scenario of the nation. Exposing the gloomy situation of Nigeria society, Ochulor (2008) lamented that the economy of Nigeria society has been paralyzed because of atrocities nature of acquiring wealth in the country. He maintained that money making for most Nigerians, has become an end in itself and thus can be pursued in whichever way, disregarding unsavoury that may be. Maintaining this line of thought, Udulgwomen cited by Ochulor and Leo (2011) remarked aptly that it would be merely overstressing the obvious to mention that Nigeria is corrupt. Putting the point vividly he revealed that Nigeria is a country with a dirty record of unmitigated incidents of bribery, nepotism, naira trafficking, smuggling, avarice, graft, sexual promiscuity, embezzlement of public funds, electoral malpractices etc.

**Socio-economic state of Nigeria society:** It is doubtless that Nigeria is endowed with enough natural resources. Yet, majority of her citizens live below the poverty line as a result of embezzlement of the public funds and inappropriate distribution of resources. Ehusani (1996) lamented that the economic status of majority of the populace are below the poverty line. This is because of the fact that her economy is bastardized, wantonly mismanaged and inequitably distributed. Undeniably, corrupt practices and disparities in class between the rich and the poor constitute to the injustice and exploitative game being witnessed in the society. Corruption and escalation of social vices abound in the country, yet, she claims to be religious like the pre-exilic Israelites' populace that was surging in legions of social vices amidst the demonstration of religious tendency. The incessant upsurge of moral laxity, injustice, exploitation and other corrupt behaviour of the people culminated to the catastrophe that befell the exiles as they exclaimed their ordeal in Psalm 137. It seems that the punctilious and symbolic practice of Christianity in Nigeria is only but pretence. Ezeme (2008) disclosed that embezzlement of public funds is an old story in Nigeria. He exposes that most government officials including state governors stash abroad funds meant for the development of the state. Speaking further, he averred that some Local Government Chairmen and others in positions of authority at local level covert public funds to their personal use which often lead to non-payment of staff salaries and execution of public project. Lamenting bitterly, he elucidated that such criminal financial acts are discovered periodically but the perpetrators are not deterred because the country is rotten. Of what relevance is the numeric Christians' strength of the nation that is bereft of sound ethical behaviour and fear of God? Honestly, a continuous proliferation of churches and increase in the number of Christians without a corresponding moral behaviour is a charade to what ministerial work entails. Thus, repentance and retracing



of steps have a special meaning and urgency in Nigerian society for such would help to circumvent the present society to experience the wrath of God.

In the context of the discussions above, the following are some implications of the message of Psalm 137 to present Christian practice in Nigeria:

- i) Psalm 137 is a call to Nigerian Christians who are enmeshed in any ungodly act to repent and attract God's forgiveness.
- ii) Nigerian Christians are called by the message of Psalm 137 to always strive to do God's commandments.
- iii) Psalm 137 teaches Nigerian Christians about the connection between repentance and God's forgiveness of sins.
- iv) The message of Psalm 137 teaches Nigerian Christians about the non-bargainable place of Christian morality in the practice of Christianity.

### **Recommendations**

A critical study of Psalm 137 has revealed that the incessant escalation of moral decadence and violation of God's commandments triggered the divine wrath that befell the ancient Israelites society. It is against this background that this research work presents the following recommendations to the Nigerian Christians which if followed will help them to retrace steps and thus prevent attracting divine wrath on them.

1. Christian political and religious leaders should preach and fight against social vices in Nigeria. This recommendation is anchored on the fact that during the course of this research, it is shown that some Christians indulge in social vices like kidnapping, embezzlement of public funds, election mal-practices, exploitation and other corrupt acts.
2. It is seen from the exegetical analysis of the pericope of Psalm 137, that repentance is important in Christianity. Hence it is recommended here that Nigeria Christians who are still living immoral life styles should repent
3. Christians in Nigeria should not always understand Christianity from a materialistic perspective. The above said, no doubt, has contributed to the multiplication of churches in the country and also the moral decadence seen among many Christian church leaders in Nigeria. If this materialistic view of Christianity in Nigeria is curtailed, then both the multiplication of churches and moral decadence among Christians will be at a large extent reduced.
4. The research work recommends that Christians in Nigeria should strive to keep God's commandments. This means, not only being hearers but doers of God's commandments. In other words, the research work recommends that Nigeria Christians should make effort to balance up their morality with their religious exuberant. This no doubt will perhaps, help them to attract God's blessings and not divine wrath.
5. A survey of the life of the true prophets of God in the pre-exilic Israelites society reveals that they were consistence and dedicated in carrying out the work of God to his people. The adamancy and stubbornness nature of the people did not discourage them in continuing admonishing the people to retrace their steps. Their continuous deviation from the covenantal code exposed them to the catastrophe that enveloped them. In consonance with the demonstration of this unflinching courage of the pre-exilic Prophets of God, the research work therefore, recommends that the contemporary ministers of God should continue speaking the word of God to his people and never to get tired..



## Conclusion

The catastrophe that broke out upon ancient Israel had an interface with her violation of God's commandments. She was unfaithful in observing her covenantal responsibility which she had with God at Sinai. God spoke severally to the people of Israel through his prophets admonishing them to repent and come back to him. But they disregarded him and violated his laws. At the zenith of Israel's disobedience and breaking of God's commandment came the divine wrath that enveloped her as God employed the Babylonian empire as his *weapon to chastise the ancient Israel*. The bitter experience of the shameful captivity exposed Israel to sober -reflection which in turn forced Israel to repentance and re-commitment to Yahweh. It is really impressive to note that the subjugation of the Jews by the Babylonian empire culminated to the repentance of the people of Israel. It is on record that the people of Israel became repented and recommitted to Yahweh during the exile in Babylon. Hence they sat down besides the rivers side of Babylon and wept longing for Zion. Israel became tremendously incensed when her tormentors requested her for a Zion song. In other words, the exiles' upwelling of annoyance was aroused by the Babylonians' demand of a Zion song. It was during this period of sober-reflection and recommitment to God that this fascinating Psalm of lament was composed.

Analogically, a critical assessment of Nigerian Christianity suggests that it is toeing the steps of the pre-exilic Israelite populace as it is guilty of violation of God's commandments and not heeding to the voices of the 21st century messengers of God. A study of socio-economic, religious and political situations of the present Nigerian society explains that some of Nigerian Christians are morally decayed. It is quite paradoxical and touching that in spite of the proliferations of churches and the increases in the number of Nigeria Christians that legions of social vices keep on escalating. Nevertheless, the research is highly optimistic that the hermeneutical significance of the pericope of Psalm 137 will stimulate Nigeria Christians to turn a new leaf.

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