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JUDGES 4:1-5 AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

B.A.C. Obiefuna and Mercy Nkechi Kalu

Abstract

The active role of women in Nigeria is visible in every sector of the economy. From the Pre-Colonial era, women were notably present in business, commerce, trade, society, and other spheres of the economy. Nigeria has recorded women such as Madam Efunroye Tinubu, Iyalose Egba, Queen Amina of Zazau in Zaria, Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwarara of Ibadan, Princess Moremi of Ife, Princess Inikpi of Igala and Emotan of Benin, to mention a few (Effah Attoe, 2002). These women have shown that women in Nigeria can pioneer the needed stability in our political system. This study adopted Historical-Critical Method Form. In this study, the author attempts to examine the text of Judges 4: 1- 5 from the historical point of view. The text narrates how Deborah demonstrated servant leadership in the land of Israel. Qualities found in Deborah are worthy of emulation for Nigerian women especially those in society. Nigerian women who are politicians need to learn how not to be power hungry. History of women in Nigerian society has shown that they sometimes allow power to possess them. A good example was Patricia Etteh. She rose to the post of Speaker of the House of Representative. The highest so far that Nigerian women ever held. She was removed from the post because of her excessiveness. From Deborah also, Nigerian women can emulate the attributes of being wise and available. In political environment, women can use their wisdom to climb the ladder needed to be reckoned in society. Women politicians need to be available where they are needed. There is timing for all events. Nigerian women need to be watchful and work with time. Rising up in society required proper timing and Deborah used this to her advantage. Hillary Clinton also used this to her advantage though she did not become American president but she was able to become well-known woman in the US political history. Nigerian women can reach the place also if they are ready to learn from Deborah.

Introduction

In the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria, situations have shown that the key players in the society are busy hitting each other than to focus on the business of stabilising the economy. It is the chief duty of the leaders to ensure that the rule of law prevail and there is effective representation in the country. For the past nineteen years, the Nigerian environment has experienced unrest. The environment has witnessed the emergence of gladiators who desire to hold on to power and which has led to usage of state resources to weaken opponents. The economy has plunged into recession despite the series of promises by the leaders to uplift the plight of the masses.

Historical records of actors in Nigeria clearly revealed that men have played much role than women. For instance, from the colonial era, women were rarely seen in the political arena. Omodia, Erunke, and Shuaibu (2013) citing Yetunde (2003) and Agbalajobi (2010) note that it was 1922 Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution that disenfranchised women. Till the present day, women were the most neglected in the Nigerian environment. At the moment, the number of women holding posts in one category or other stands around as specified by Dominique Weerty, Project Coordinator, European Union support to

Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU- SDGN) is not up to 5.8% of the space (News Agency of Nigeria, 2018).

One fact about this 5.8% is that women do not account for any significant portion of the political post holders in Nigeria; but this does not matter in carry out intermediary role in the country. Playing intermediary role is avenue for women to prove to Nigeria that they are capable of leading the country. In what ways can women be lifted up from playing second fiddle in society? As Eyiuche (2018) asserts there is no part of the constitution that prevents women from attaining the position of governor or president, therefore Nigerian women can effectively and actively participate in society and governance at all levels of government.

This study adopted Historical- Critical Method Form. In the words of Sailhamer (1984: 73), historical- critical method “is the pre- representation of past events for the purpose of instructions”. In this study, the author attempts to examine the text of Judges 4: 1- 5 from the historical point of view. The use of historical- critical method comes from the fact that it allows the author to investigate the course of event from the historical setting and as well understand the purpose and intention of the author in recounting the event. The text narrates how Deborah demonstrated servant leadership in the land of Israel.

This paper intends to show that Nigerian women can play intermediary role in Nigerian society and through this they may have opportunities to become the leaders Nigerian leaders at this time. This study attempts to draw lesson from the life and times of Biblical Deborah.

Literature Review

The review of the literature is divided into section- women and political participation in Nigeria; and the biblical Deborah examined.

Women and Political Participation in Nigeria

The active role of women in Nigeria is visible in every sector of the economy. From the Pre-Colonial era, women were notably present in business, commerce, trade, society, and other spheres of the economy. Nigeria has recorded women such as Madam Efunroye Tinubu, Iyalose Egba, Queen Amina of Zazau in Zaria, Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwarara of Ibadan, Princess Moremi of Ife, Princess Inikpi of Igala and Emotan of Benin, to mention a few (Effah Attoe, 2002). These women have shown that women in Nigeria can pioneer the needed stability in our political system. From Effah Attoe’s perspective, women in the Pre-Colonial era inspired men and women; and gallantly stood in the battle line with men compatriots.

In the Colonial era, women had risen up to contend against some policies that were palatable to their welfare. The first was the Aba Women Riot of 1929. According to report provided by Judith van Allen (1971); D. C. Dorward (1983); and Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (1976) and documented by Evans (2017), women rose up to revolt against the some policies of the British colonial administrators in southeastern Nigeria. Though the actions of the women were suppressed but they were able to force the colonial government to fulfill certain parts of their demands. This can be seen as the historic example of feminist and anti-colonial protest (Dagunduro & Adenugba, 2020). The British colonial authorities suspended the plan to impose tax on the market women and curbed the excessiveness of the warrant chiefs. In the struggle, nearly fifty women lost their lives and about other fifty wounded.

This riot was prompted by the fear that the supply of food and non- perishable goods available to the populace would be disrupted by the taxes the colonial authorities planned to impose.

Historical account also showed that there was Egba Women Riot in 1947; unlike the Aba Women Riot, it was peaceful. The riot was marked by a series of non- violent mass protests and resulted in the dethronement of the king of Abeokuta in 1949 (Ugwuaja & Onyinsi, 2020). According to Ugwuaja and Onyinsi (2020), the non- violent protest came as a result of taxes imposed on women and notorious price control of food items by the Abeokuta Sole Native Authority. Though the peaceful demonstration and the propaganda approach of the leader of the Abeokuta Women Union in the person of Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, the women achieved their aims; and also succeeded in becoming members of the Sole native Authority. In these two instances cited in the Colonial Era, women have played intermediary roles in achieving changes in draconian policies and created opportunities for women voice to be heard. Abiodun- Eniayekan, Uba, Awogu- Maduagwu, Onwuka and Chimuanya (2016) describe the Colonial period as the era in which women were very active in the decision making process and their contributions could be seen in the formation of kingdom.

In the Post- Colonial era, Nigeria has had women such as Dame Margaret Ekpo. Madam Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Hajia Gamboe Sawaba, Dr Sarah Jibril. Mrs Obiageli Ezekwesili, Mrs Ngozi Oknojo Iweala, Senator aisha Alhassan, Senator Esther Nenadi Usman, Hon. Uche Ekwunife, Senator Nkechi Nwaogu, Mrs Oluremi Tinubu, Mrs Toyin Saraki and Professor Viola Onwuliri who have been political appointees or elected officials (Eyiuche, 2018). In the Post – Colonial era, women participation in society can be viewed from two phases. The first phase begins from 1960 to 1987 and this era could be described as passive period in the political participation of women in society in Nigeria. During this period, there was no concrete policies in line to help women attain certain level of political opportunities. Apart from women that have emerged from Colonial period such as Margaret Ekpo and Madam Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, no notable account of women could be given. This might have come from the short- lived democratic process and the long military rule (Ojo, 2008/2009; Ojo, 2014).

The second phase started with emergence of General Ibrahim Babangida and the creation of the Office of the First Lady by his administration. The Babangida era brought a turning point in the history of women smuggle in Nigeria. In Babangida era, policies such as Better Life for Rural Women Porgramme came on board to increase women participation in economic activities (Ojo, 2008/2009; Ojo, 2014). Women became active in political scene and Nigeria witnessed the emergence of women such as Mrs. Ngozi Okonja Iweala, Mrs. Obi Ezekwesili and Prof. Dora Akunyili. These played active roles in the various political offices they were appointed into. Their excellent performance motivated both men and women; which led to further call for women in the society. A critical appraisal of this period showed that the highest political office women ever held was the governor of a state, and it was caught short. Madam Virginia Etieba rose to the governorship through some political manipulations which led to exit of the incumbent governor (Abiodun- Eniayekan, et al, 2016).

From Babangida regime to Jonathan's administration, few women have held political posts. The number of women that have held political posts stood at 313 out of the 1533 total available spaces (Abiodun- Eniayekan, et al, 2016). This is one reason there is

clamour for implementation of 35% Affirmative Action. The implementation of Affirmative Action is to allow women to have at least 35% of the political offices at the Federal level. President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo took the initial effort to introduce Visible Gender Based 'AA' in the year 2000. There was a National Policy on women and this policy was meant to cover all aspect of women's right. The affirmative action provides the avenue for disadvantaged group especially from negative or low position to move up the ladder and be socially, economically, and politically placed.

The Biblical Deborah Examined

The Bible provided account of different women that have accomplished great tasks. Notable among these women are Mariam, the sister of Moses, Esther, Ruth, Rahab and Deborah. From the biblical account, it can be seen that it is only Deborah that has fully involved in government not as a wife of the king, judge or priest but as a female leader of the people of Israel. Deborah as unusual leader that are scarcely seen in the society of her time (Jarlemyr, 2015). Few women have risen to the position of national leadership. Deborah was able to stand out as both spiritual and civil leadership. She showed her leadership role in the time of turmoil in the land of Israel. She was the only woman who ever held the position of both judge and prophetess in the land of Israel and she earned the title before Samuel who was the only male judge and prophet recorded in the Bible (Scritchfield, 2021).

According to Scritchfield (2021), Deborah became one of the most influential people in her time. She was recognised by as a genuine prophetess and judge, which earned her great respect in the land of Israel. She was trusted and people of Israel believed she actually heard from God. Wellman (2015) describes her as the most courageous judge in the land of Israel. Wellman based this courageous character of Deborah on the boldness she exhibited in summoning Barack to lead the armies of Israel. Higgs (2007) used the term biblical Deborah to distinguish the distinctive attribute of Deborah. Higgs sees Deborah as renowned prophetess, an honoured judge, and an idea role model for every woman called to lead others. In the words of the Curry (2008), Deborah became the first woman in the Bible to place in the height of political power by the common consent of the people.

A brief history of Deborah showed that her story dated around 1300 BC and her name means "honey bee" or "hornet" in Hebrew (Anymouse, 2016). She was said to be the wife of Lappidoth. When Glahn (2018) examines the root of the word used for 'wife' in Hebrew. She found out that the same word was used for 'a woman'. To Glahn, it is not easy to clarify whether Deborah was the 'wife of Lappidoth' (a person) or 'woman of Lappidoth' (a place). Glahn goes further to say that in the time of Deborah; the word 'woman' and 'wife' were not separate words. She concludes by saying that in Deborah's day, a female could be a virgin, a married woman, or widowed. This was supported by Jarlemyr (2015). Jarlemyr buttresses that the Hebrew word used might signify geographical location "woman of Lappidoth".

The fact is that Deborah was a mother to the people of Israel and she was able to exhibit the character of mother to the people of Israel. On the motherhood of Deborah to the children of Israel, Glahn notes that her motherhood to Israel came from the fact that the children of Israel looked unto Deborah for leadership as the nation's mother similarly to how the childless George Washington could be called "the father of our nation" in the USA.

Deborah was a woman that lived under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim. It was under the palm tree that Deborah judged the people of

Scratchfield (2021), Deborah emerged in the critical time in the life of the people of Israel. It was a time whereby the people of Israel were in bondage to the Canaanites. It marked the period of political and spiritual stagnation. The people of Israel were pressured by the Canaanite people who they refused to drive out when they entered the land of Canaan (Anymouse, 2016). Before Deborah came into scene, the people of Israel have had series of judges, which the lists include Ehud. It should be of note that Deborah became a leader when the nation of Israel was a theocracy (Lifecharlotte, 2016). God was ruling and this last until the people of Israel demanded for a king during the period of Samuel.

In summary, Deborah came at a time when Israel needed a leader who would them to have freedom from the hands of their oppressor, Jabin. Deborah, being a prophetess and a judge at this period made herself available having received the command from God. Deborah solicited the help of Barak to carry out this God given assignment.

Exegesis of Judges 4: 1- 5

In this section, the author intends to read the text of Judges 4: 1- 5 the way it appeared in the original language. Miller (2017) defines exegesis as what the text of the scripture says and what it means. From Miller, it can be seen that it is not possible to understand the text of the scripture without knowing what it says and what it means; which depends solely on proper reading of the text in its original language. This section is also necessary in the sense that the possibility of identifying the significance and implication of a text in the contemporary requires reading the text first in its original language (Piper, 2018). In this section therefore, both translation of Judges 4: 1- 5 in Hebrews and the researcher's translation are provided.

Researcher's Translation of the Hebrew Text

^{KJV} **Judges 4:1** And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

^{KJV} **Judges 4:2** And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles

^{KJV} **Judges 4:3** And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

^{KJV} **Judges 4:4** And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

^{KJV} **Judges 4:5** And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

Delimitation of Judges 4: 1- 12

In the words of Smith (2008), delimitation deals with the narrowing of the focus of a study to what the researcher intends to include or exclude from the issue under discussion. The delimitation also include the parameters chosen by the writer. As such, the researcher is able to indicate what will and will not be discussed and why. Delimitation can also be described as periscopes because texts in exegetical study can be divided into separate units. Dividing texts into separate units helps the researcher to single out a particular text for exegetical study. The text of this study is separated from the rest of the verses because it concerned with how God used a woman to deliver the children of Israel. The main characters in this text are Deborah, Barak and Sisera.

Context of Judges 4: 1- 12

The book of Judges provided the account of the Israel in the land of Canaan and series of events that occurred in the post- wilderness era. The children of Israel settled in the land that God has given to them; after conquering some lands in Canaan. After some period of time, they deviated from the will of God, and God allowed their enemies to conquer them. Their suffering made them to cry to God and in His mercy to them raised up a deliverer. In Judges 4, Deborah became the judges in the land and she saw the need to rise to save the children from the hands of their enemy, Sisera.

Literary Form of 2 Kings 4: 1-7

Literary form also known as 'genre' of the whole work and the particular text (Just, 2009). According to Cole (2011, p.2), a genre "consists of a type or category consisting of at least two pieces of literature, grouped together on the basis of shared characteristics". Cole further sees genre as in terms of the form or structure of piece of literature, its content, and its purposes. One advantage of genre is that it allows the author to understand the full potential of interpreting passages. Smith (2018) says literary context deals with structure and flow of thought of biblical scriptures. Smith adds that literary analysis enables interpreter to understand the meaning of the passage. The relevance of literary context to the understanding of the text can be seen in its potent to pose the following questions - Is it poetry or prose? How can you tell? If prose, is it a historical account, or a story, or a personal letter? What evidence do we have for this? What seems to be the general purpose of the text (e.g. encouragement / argument / establishing doctrine)? What evidence do we have for this? Does the text appear to be addressing a specific situation or speaking more generally? Is it establishing a new doctrine or arguing against opposing ideas? (Miller, 2017).

Literary context of the text opens the eyes of the user of the scriptures to the following - repeated words or phrases, unusual words or phrases, parallels or contrasts, quotations, chiasms, rhetorical questions, metaphors and similes, connecting words, emphasis, ideas 'stacking up', or energy/tone building up to a climax, irony and jokes (e.g. puns), words/phrases which mark structure, and allusions (Miller, 2017).

The book of Judges can be included among the narrative books of the Bible. All the entire book of Judges contained stories mainly of judges and enemies of the children of Israel.

Structure of Judges 4: 1-12

From Cole (2011) point of view, structure of a text is indicated by visual cues such as chapter divisions, headings, paragraphing, punctuation, and footnotes. Cole asserts that all these were introduced during English translations and not part of the original texts. The classical Hebrew relied mainly on oral clues. Cole concludes by saying that structure of a text should illuminate the researchers in understanding of the content of the text under investigation.

The text of Judges 4: 1- 5 can be divided into two structures (Guzik, 2018). The text of Judges 4: 1- 12 can be divided into five sections; which were the cycle begins again: apostasy, servitude and supplication (v. 1-3); and Deborah: a prophetess and a judge for Israel (v. 4- 5).

Close Reading of Judges 4:1-5

From the above structure of Judges 4:1-5 into five divisions, the author will attempt to review each of these three divisions to create room for a better understanding.

The cycle begins again: apostasy, servitude and supplication (v. 1-3)

In this division, it is clear that the children of Israel have been involving in apostasy, which resulted in them passing through period of servitude. In this time, God allowed Jabin the king of Canaan to oppress them (Gusik, 2018). Both Constable (2012) and Henry (n.d) stressed that the children of Israel comported to God's command during the lifetime of Ehud. Immediately Ehud passed away, the children of Israel returned unto their backsliding way. Deffinbaugh (2009) pointed out that the children of Israel followed repeated pattern of falling short of God's expectations. God used the technique of allowing their enemies to conquer as a means of bringing back to Himself.

Deborah: a prophetess and a judge for Israel (v. 4- 5)

In Matthew Henry's commentary about Deborah, Matthew Henry says that Deborah's name denoted 'a bee'. Constable (2012) adds that Deborah lived according to the meaning of her name, which was 'bee'. Constable says that Deborah "stung the enemy, and she brought sweet refreshment to her people. However, her name also suggests her prophetic role as she spoke to Barak, since the consonants in her name are the same as those in the Hebrew word translated "speak" and "word." (Constable, 2012, para. 6).

He gives the following about Deborah:

... she answered her name by her industry, sagacity, and great usefulness to the public, her sweetness to her friends and sharpness to her enemies. She is said to be the wife of Lapidoth; but, the termination not being commonly found in the name of a man, some make this the name of a place: she was a woman of Lapidoth. Others take it appellatively, Lapidoth signifies lamps. The Rabbins say she had employed herself in making wicks for the lamps of the tabernacle; and, having stooped to that mean office for God, she was afterwards thus preferred. Or she was a woman of illuminations, or of splendours, one that was extraordinarily knowing and wise, and so came to be very eminent and illustrious (Henry, n.d, para. 6).

Henry (n.d) brings out two main facts about the characters of Deborah, which were (i) she had intimate relationship with God; and (ii) she devoted herself to the service of the children of Israel.

These Hebrew words נְמִיאָה אִשָּׁה are used to describe Deborah, according to Kiel and Delitzsch (n.d). These Hebrew words were used because of Deborah's prophetic gift, like Miriam (Exodus 15: 20) and Hukda, the wife of Shallum (2 Kings 22: 14). In addition, the participle שֹׁפֵט is used to qualify her as acting like a judge. As such, Deborah is qualified to be the judge over Israel. In the words of Henry (n.d), "she judged, not as a princess, by an civil authority conferred upon her, but as a prophetess, and as God's mouth to them, correcting abuses and redressing grievances, especially those which related to the worship of God" (para. 9).

Qualities of Deborah deduced from the Exegesis of Judges 4: 1-5

Deborah is not Power Hungry

Carl E. Armerding, Barry I. Beltzel and Lawson Stone brought this feature out from their review of the Book of Judges as pertaining to Deborah (Life Application Study Bible, 1988). Deborah was not power hungry. Her interest was to carry out God's order and ensured that the people under her followed the bidding of God. Armerding, Beltzel and Lawson showed that Deborah always praised God anytime success came her way. She never claimed any honour for herself. She never allowed herself to be taken away by her position in the society (Life Application study Bible, 1988).

Maintaining Her Feminism

According to Jerlemyr (2015), Deborah did not allow forget her feminine mothering role. Jerlemyr asserts that this has become her source of strength. Women in authority sometimes forget that they are women. They allow the place of authority to push from being motherly in their capacity as a woman. This makes her to have the confidence to summon Barak and Barak accepted her requests. The way the armies of Israel rallied up to go into the battlefield showed that Deborah must have a real mother indeed in her role to the people of Israel.

Humble and Forceful

This is another attribute that Jerlemyr picked up from the life of Deborah. Jerlemyr describes Deborah as humble and forceful. Jerlemyr buttresses that Deborah was not complicated in her attitude as men who were leaders in her time. Male leaders in Deborah's time were noted for both success and failures. Deborah, on the other hand, was an emblem of success and she achieved this because she was humble. Her humility comes in to surrogate for forcefulness. Men that rose up to carry out her bid did not see this forcefulness as her weakness because her humility has superseded it (Jerlemyr, 2015).

Wise and Available

At the time that Deborah rose up as a judge over the people of Israel, God was looking for someone that would stand in the gap for the people of Israel. She came at the time the land of Israel was in turmoil. Her availability made God to use and she demonstrated great wisdom in the way she carried out all obligations assigned to her (Mayfield, 2009).

Proper Timing

From the way she summoned Barak, it was clearly visible that she was a woman that understand time. She was able to receive the divine direction from God as to the time the Israel would attack and had victory over their enemies (Mayfield, 2009). Mayfield notes that Deborah understood how God operates. Deborah knew that when God says 'now'. It means that God wants His people to respond immediately.

Courageous Woman

From Lardina's point of view, Deborah was a courageous woman. She was the most courageous woman in the sight of Lardina. Lardina shows that the way Deborah summoned Barak reflected an attribute of courage. Deborah's courage was also reflected when she agreed that to go into battlefield being a woman. She did not fear being killed in the war.

Implication of Deborah's Qualities on Nigerian Women Roles in Society

Qualities found in Deborah are worthy of emulation for Nigerian women especially those in society. Nigerian women who are politicians need to learn how not to be power hungry. History of women in Nigerian society has shown that they sometimes allow power to possess them. A good example was Patricia Etteh. She rose to the post of Speaker of the House Representative. The highest so far that Nigerian women ever held. She was removed from the post because of her excessiveness.

Nigerian women in addition need to know that they do not have to forget their womanhood in the context of exercising political authority. Being woman is sufficient to make them gain men respect and being acknowledged as women of substance. It is not the display of masculine attribute that make men to fear them. Women such as Mrs Ngozi Okonja Iweala, Mrs Obi Ezekwesili and Prof. Dora Akunyili have used their feminism nature to dominate in their various assignments. In addition, Nigerian women in society can be humble and forceful as Deborah. Humility will help them to gain respect from men and being forceful makes men to recognise and to push their ways into their targeted political posts.

From Deborah also, Nigerian women can emulate the attributes of being wise and available. In political environment, women can use their wisdom to climb the ladder needed to be reckoned in society. Women politicians need to be available where they are needed. There is timing for all events. Nigerian women need to be watchful and work with time. Rising up in society required proper timing and Deborah used this to her advantage. Hillary Clinton also used this to her advantage though she did not become American president but she was able to become well-known woman in the US political history. Nigerian women can reach the place also if they are ready to learn from Deborah.

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