


Jeremiah 17:11 and blood money rituals among youths in southern Nigeria

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This study examines blood money ritual activities among Nigerian youths in the light of Jeremiah 17:11. Existing literature has failed to provide a response through a theological lens to blood money ritual activities in southern Nigeria. This study provides a theological response to the increasing spate of money ritual activities among southern Nigerian youths. The pericope of Jeremiah 17 explains the repercussions of the man who accumulates wealth by fraud and treachery. The pericope emphasises that this form of wealth will finally be taken away from him and he may die a fool. This aphorism suits the contemporary blood money ritual activities occurring in southern Nigeria. The number of money ritual activities in southern Nigeria is mind-blowing and thought-provoking. There is hardly a week that passes without the youth's engagement in blood money rituals coming up for discussion. From the reports of newspapers and other reports, poverty, unemployment, greed and peer pressure are some of the motivating factors for youth engaging in blood money ritual activities. This study adopted the phenomenological approach through content analysis of reports from gazettes and scientific journals.

Contribution: Jeremiah 17:11 reveals that there is punishment for anyone who makes wealth through dishonest ways. This study found that greed has sustained the increasing quest for quick money among youth in Nigeria. Practical theology was implicated in this study.

Keywords: Jeremiah 17; money; root of all evil; rituals; youths; Christianity; Nigeria.

Introduction

Indeed, there is nothing wrong with being rich in order to live well and comfortably. The problem is the greed of situating money as the sole object of its own enterprise (Oyebade 2022). The Old Testament complained about the implications of being anxious to get wealth in any way. The prophet Jeremiah stated the importance of 'solid principles regarding finances, especially as they relate to contentment and personal goals for a godly life' (Zavada 2019:1). In Jeremiah 17:11, there was a warning that dishonest ways of making wealth will be severely punished and that also, within the shortest possible time, the illegally acquired wealth will fly away. The homily of the Apostle Paul to Timothy, which was initially stated by Jeremiah, is believed to speak anew to the increasing challenges of the quest for wealth through ritual activities in southern Nigeria.

The number of blood money rituals going on in southern Nigeria is mind-blowing. Consider, for instance, the case of Samuel Akpobome (18 years), who strangled his mother to death, had sex with her corpse and stayed with the corpse for two days based on the advice of a native doctor that he would become rich after rituals (Ololade 2022); in another case, one teenager and two others were allegedly caught burning the head of a girl they had killed for blood money ritual purposes in the Oke Aregba area of Abeokuta in Ogun State (Akinlotan 2022). The narratives are endless. Having observed this growing quest for insatiable wealth through ritual activities among the youth, this author feels that an Old Testament examination of these problems is of utmost importance in the bid to provide a remedy to these challenges.

Literature has looked at the blood money rituals among Christian youths in Nigeria. But literature has yet to approach the problem from the lens of Jeremiah 17:11. This study provides a theological response to the increasing spate of money ritual activities among southern Nigerian youths. This study examines blood money ritual activities among southern Nigerian youths in the light of Jeremiah 17:11. Firstly, it provides Jeremiah's homily on the dangers of acquiring wealth through inordinate methods and methodologies. Secondly, it explores money ritual activities among youth in Nigeria. Thirdly, a hermeneutical framework is established between the text and context.

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Understanding Jeremiah 17:11

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, and his book is mostly directed to the exiles in Babylon. With regard to the dating of the book, Sweeney (2010) is of the view that:

The date of the two (Greek and Hebrew) can be suggested by the fact that the Greek shows concerns typical of the early Persian period, while the Masoretic (i.e., Hebrew) shows perspectives which, although known in the Persian period, did not reach their realization until the 2nd century BCE. (p. 94)

Friedman (1987:149) elucidates that prophet Jeremiah was the author responsible for the description of the rediscovery of the 'Book of the Law' in the Jerusalem temple (2 Ki 22–23).

Jeremiah began his prophetic role during the reign of King Josiah in 626 BC and even during the period of Nebuchadnezzar capturing of Jerusalem in 586 BC. He warned against the anger of God caused by Israel's sin. The prophet:

[G]ave warning of judgment to come, not in some distant future but in the context of historical events. At the same time, they looked beyond judgment to a better future. (Thompson 1980:1)

Further, Coogan (2008) reveals that:

Authentic oracles of Jeremiah are probably to be found in the poetic sections of chapters 1–25, but the book as a whole has been heavily edited and added to by followers (including perhaps the prophet's companion, the scribe Baruch) and later generations of Deuteronomists. (p. 300)

Jeremiah challenges the religious leaders of his time for keeping mute in the midst of the increasing immorality going on among the people. Smith (1989) is of the view that:

[T]he material that constitutes the Book of Jeremiah, with its several voices bespeaking different interpretative angles and vested interests, is completely geared toward the crisis of 587 BCE and the demise of Jerusalem. (p. 5)

On a further insight, Brueggemann (2007) is of the view that the end of the Davidic dynasty, covering a period of 400 years, was the focus of the book of Jeremiah. The book also covers the narrative of the destruction of the temple of Solomon.

Theological axioms in Jeremiah 17:11

Like the partridge hatching what it did not lay,
so are all who amass wealth unjustly;
in mid-life it will leave them,
and at their end they will prove to be fools. (Jer 17:11, New Revised Standard Version)

Theological axioms in Jeremiah 17:11 can be viewed from two perspectives: firstly, what is wrong with getting another person's property and, secondly, what are the consequences of amassing wealth unjustly?

Obtaining what is not yours

The person who obtains wealth through illegal means is compared to a partridge in the Bible. A partridge is believed to hatch eggs, but it does not lay any. It steals eggs, covers them and hatches them. But when the birds are hatched, they fly away, looking for their real parents. Thus, the eggs the partridge gathered are false. Bright (2018:1) explains that '[a] person can do wrong things to gain great wealth: So the wealth that does not really belong to a person, soon will disappear'. Kirksey (2015) explains that the poor partridge never has the joy of seeing her own progeny because she impatiently takes another bird's eggs, patiently sits over the eggs for weeks in her nest and hatches, and when hatched, the birds will return to their real parents.

Consequences of amassing wealth unjustly

As a further insight, a fool is someone who amasses wealth through inordinate strategies, through exploiting others, through fraudulent and corrupt practices and ways. This is because, in the short run, the person will realise that he was only being short-sighted, foolish and unable to see beyond his nose. Lending credence, Calvin (2018:1) responds that 'a partridge sitting and not hatching, is he who gets wealth, and not by right; in the midst of his day shall he leave it, and at his end shall be a fool. The rich man, who gets his wealth through dishonest means is constrained to quitting his wealth before he derives any benefit from it'. The emphasis here is that the partridge sits on eggs it has not laid, and it is analogous to the person who obtains riches without right, and thus he shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end he shall be a fool (Darby English Version 2022).

Blood money rituals among youth in Southern Nigeria

In the context of this article, blood money ritual activities 'could be extra-logically acquired through the deft manipulation of metaphysical forces in nature, by members of the esoteric community that have been trained in the know-how' (Oyebade 2022:1). This is an ancient way of manipulating the spiritual world for the benefit of greedy men. However, things took a new turn as the youths began to show an interest in money ritual activities. There is hardly a week that passes without the youth's engagement in blood money rituals coming up for discussion. Malik et al. (2022) lamented that:

Desperate for money, the ritual killers, most of them youths, go to any length to achieve their aim and their targets don't exclude parents and siblings, friends and acquaintances most of the time, without any thought for the life of their victims, just to satisfy selfish desires. (p. 1)

Table 1 shows selected ritual activities from January 2022 to February 2022.

The causes of the increasing rate of blood money ritual activities cannot be overemphasised. Firstly, youth engagement in blood money rituals is the quest to make fast

TABLE 1: Selected cases of blood money rituals in Nigeria.

| S/N | Case | Date | Author |
|-----|---|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | One teenager and two others were allegedly caught burning the head of a girl they killed for money ritual purposes in the Oke Aregba area of Abeokuta in Ogun State. | 29 January 2022 | Akinlotan |
| 2. | Emomotimi Magbisa (15 years), Perebi Aweke (15 years) and Eke Prince (15 years), all natives of Sagbama community, allegedly accosted Endeley Comfort (13 years), hypnotised her to follow them to the apartment of Emomotimi Magbisa in Sagbama Community, cut her finger and sprinkled the blood on a mirror for ritual purposes. | 05 January 2022 | Osahon |
| 3. | Osas killed his girlfriend, Elohor Oniorosa, on Christmas Eve in Edo State. | 24 December 2021 | Adedipe |
| 4. | Four teenage secondary school girls were found in Lagos with human parts hidden in their school bags. | 22 February 2022 | Independent Newspapers Limited |
| 5. | 32-year-old Afeez Olalere confessed to the Lagos State Police Command that his mother encouraged him to kill his younger brother for money rituals. | 17 January 2022 | Vanguard |

wealth, which is greed. The current crop of youths in Nigeria do not want to suffer; all they want is an easy life, no matter what it takes to get there very fast. According to Eyoboka (2020:n.p.), 'every crime committed by man in the sphere of politics or social life generally is linked up to personal greed, avarice and the love of money. The youths of these days do not want to do hard work and that is the only productive venture'. Secondly, unemployment has also motivated the youths into joining money ritual activities. Effiong (2022) lamented that many young people, including graduates, do not have work to do, and an idle mind, they say, is the devil's workshop. Some of these youths are graduates, and after many years of searching for jobs, with no hope in sight, they resort to engaging in illegal means to make ends meet. Also, those youth with informal education have no start-up capital to run their business. Frustration then pushes them into engaging in all forms of criminality.

Thirdly, poverty has pushed so many youths into money rituals. Most youth come from poor families. According to Omokri (2022), poverty makes people more likely to commit crimes because it gives them few choices in life. Youth see the way that their parents are suffering, and they are not happy with it. Unfortunately, some of them are first children. The economic pressures and expectations from the society push them into committing these acts. Fourthly, peer pressure from friends and associates affect the youth. Youth see the way that their friends are living luxurious lives and driving in fine cars. Eze (2022:n.p.) laments that '[s]eeing ones age or school mate living a life of luxury could be tempting. Some teens are pressured to join the band wagon of trending issues to measure up'.

Fifthly, bad parenting is a serious issue in Nigeria. A parent will see the child living an expensive life and they will not question the child; instead, they will be enjoying the money. Parents feel comfortable enjoying the respect and accolades from friends and associates who come to felicitate them on the success of their children. Sixthly, the activities of faith

and hope preachers have led to the escalation of ritual activities among youths. Pastors praise people with no known source of income. A pastor worships young rich ones more than ones without money for their reasons (Ayokunmi 2022:1).

In Nigeria, church ministers have been recorded on video telling their church members that poverty is a curse and that they should do anything whatsoever to get out of it. Also, there are situations where church founders who are known to live double standard lives flaunt and live flamboyant lifestyles. This tends to send the wrong signal to the youth, who comprise a very high percentage of the church membership. Their psychology is built on the fact that they have to do whatever it takes to ensure that they become successful in life. Also, there are known cases where youth who have engaged in money ritual activities are given respect in churches. In fact, they are called out during Sunday service and given special prayers. When the other youths see this, they feel that they are failures. They measure success based on material possessions. Also, there are reports that parents push their children into blood money ritual activities. Some parents do not question the type of friends their children keep. Some parents do not question the means of their children's wealth. The display of sudden wealth does not in any way disturb parents. Oyeade (2022:1) reveals that pastors and parents receive huge amounts and luxurious gifts from members and children without verifying the source of the funds for fear of not getting a share of the money and the easy life.

Lessons from Jeremiah 17:11 for the Nigerian youth and stakeholders

The pericope has themes that are capable of solving the increasing cases of criminal activities among Nigerians.

Making evil the norm

African traditional practices have been replaced with so many practices that are inimical to societal growth and development. According to Kanu (2010), the:

[I]ndispensability of African basic values presupposes that Africa has value system that is in consonance with her environment and conditions, and any way to displace it renders the society backward. (p. 149)

Evil has now become the norm in some parts of Nigeria. Those practices, such as respect for human life that were once a much-cherished value, have been replaced by values that came with modernisation. This is the situation in Nigeria that has sustained the growing quest for money through blood money ritual activities by youths in Nigeria. Jeremiah mentions that anyone who makes evil a normal practice, reaping where he did not sow, taking life that he did not make, enjoying money he did not work for, will definitely not live to see the end of that money or dishonest gain. Henry (2008:n.p) reveals that 'the heart, the conscience of man, in his corrupt and fallen state, is deceitful above all things. It calls evil good, and good evil; and cries peace to those to whom it

does not belong. Herein the heart is desperately wicked; it is deadly, it is desperate’.

Measuring success by the amount of money

The social lives of the people of southern Nigeria is measured by the amount of wealth one possesses. The family, the church and even the elder statesmen recognise and respect people with wealth. The youths, of course, are aware of this development, and to keep up with contemporary developments, they are prepared to do anything to achieve their stated aims and objectives. Lamenting further, Lloyd-Jones (2012) states:

[T]hat the man who cheats or steals also measures success by dollars rather than by character. And so not only does he lose out on character and basic morality, but he also loses sight of what is important in life. At the end of the day, a thief trades in his morality in order to gain material goods. (p. 1)

The pressures of this life have also forced youths to seek anything that can give them fast wealth. Ogungbile (2022) lamented that:

The causal factors of this insatiable hunt for money can be phrased as the youths’ incapacity to handle the pressures of life. Yes, the pressure can be high, but nothing comes easy in life. We have to learn the right principles of how to be successful. It’s like building a house, we start with the foundation. Unfortunately most people, especially the youth fail to reach their goals because they want to do everything at once. (n.p.)

Jeremiah warns that there are repercussions for trying to be successful through odd ways. There is nothing that comes from the devil, with a long-lasting price for a short-lasting wealth. According to Bosman (2018), God’s anger will descend on those who practise deceit, wickedness and general ignorance about the requirements of the Lord.

Ending disgracefully

Jeremiah 17:11 makes it clear that people who engage in getting dishonest gain will affect the person within the shortest possible time. Jeremiah intended only to show that those who enriched themselves by unlawful means or heaped together great wealth would yet be subject to the curse of God, so that whatever they may have got through much toil and labour would vanish – for God would empty them of all they possessed (if one gets money through dishonest gain, the money will go in the right direction, whether through sickness or even death).

According to Clarke (n.d.), in Jeremiah 17:

[T]he partridge that hatcheth what it doth not lay (So is) he who getteth riches, and not according to right. And at his end shall be a fool – Shall be reputed as such. He was a fool all the way through; he lost his soul to get wealth, and this wealth he never enjoyed. (v. 11)

It is an indication of the eventual end for evildoers. This is seen in the public disgrace of those caught in ritual activities in southern Nigeria. Most of the people caught in blood money ritual activities are beaten by the community youths, publicly disgraced by the press and thereafter taken to prison.

These names appear all over the Internet as criminals. Even when they get older, they will continue to regret their activities and actions. Also, these people who engage in blood money ritual activities often die mysteriously.

Recommendations

This study recommends the following:

1. The church is the first point of contact in the bid to liberate the youth from blood money rituals. The church should openly condemn those who participate in blood money rituals. The church can go as far as erecting banners and billboards that blood money rituals are evil.
2. Southern Nigerian youths should not allow themselves to be led astray by the ill-gotten wealth of their peers. Instead, they should wait for the Lord’s blessings with patience and hard work.
3. The church, society and the government should stop giving recognition of any kind to anyone who cannot show any source of income but is suddenly wealthy. This will send wrong signals to the people.
4. There is a need for the government to provide jobs for the teeming youth population. To some extent, this will keep the youth occupied and less likely to commit crime.
5. Parents and concerned individuals should stop people from spraying money on parties, weddings and other occasions. When the younger ones see how flamboyantly money is being squandered, they are poised to make money by any means, whether dead or alive.

Conclusion

The Old Testament clearly condemns the love of money that motivates and sustains one in acts of blood money rituals. The Prophet Jeremiah emphasises that people who engage in ungodly acts to make money are just like the bird called ‘partridge’ that is good at hatching eggs but does not lay its own, and when hatched, the birds fly away to their original parents. People who engage in blood money ritual activities have directly tampered with human life, and their hands are stained with blood. Unfortunately, the money they have obtained through this means will fly away from them before they can enjoy or be alive to enjoy it. Youths in southern Nigeria should not allow themselves to be enticed into going into blood money ritual activities, because it will be their destruction. Instead, hard work, patience and diligence should be the watchwords of the youth, with the hope of God’s blessing in both the short and long run.

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F.C.U. is the sole author of this research article.

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Disclaimer

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