

**COVID-19 and the Nearness of Armageddon: Sense-making the Fear and Hope
through Biblical Historiography**

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Abstract

Armageddon is the Biblical war of the Great Day of God to end all unrighteousness. It is doomsday for peoples and nations in opposition to Jehovah. This paper examines COVID-19 as one of the composite signs that Armageddon is near. It finds that the outbreak of Coronavirus heightened fear and hope globally. For some, the pandemic was a dreaded sign that the end of the world is near; and in others it increased optimism that deliverance is near. Using the historical research methodology, this paper makes sense of this fear and hope drawing lessons from Biblical antecedents. It will demonstrate the COVID-19-induced life changing spiritual lessons Nigerians must learn before Armageddon strikes. Nigeria is a secular State with a highly religious population. But most Nigerians are ironically irreligious in deeds. The high incidences of corruption and human factor decay in Nigeria belie the people's acclaimed piety. Nigerians worship God fervently; but their fear of death and Armageddon reveals the spiritual pandemic plaguing Nigeria. Therefore, while virologists and epidemiologists battle to protect the physical health of humanity from COVID-19; the Humanities must engage its spiritual health imperatives. Hence, the paper concludes that post-COVID-19 new normal must go beyond wearing facemasks, regular hand-washing and sanitising. It must include personality change and spiritual restitution. These are critical for turning the fear of Armageddon to hope of salvation in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: COVID-19, Armageddon, Spirituality, Restitution, Humanities

Introduction

The Bible is more than a religious text for Christians; it is a book of history valid for teaching, reproving humanity and setting things straight. It was written aforesaid and preserved for the benefit of societies over time and space. The writing and study of the writings in the Bible is what is referred to as Biblical historiography. It was authored by God through some forty (40) different men inspired by the Holy Spirit. The writing covered a period of 1,600 years from 1513 B.C.E., when the writing of the first Bible book was completed, to c. 96 C.E. when the writing of the last Bible book was completed. The inspired non-professional historians produced a historiographical work that is historically accurate. The chronological order of events evident in the periodisation of accounts and the accurate use of names and dates to trace genealogy make the Bible a book of history. In our day, the Bible¹ is available in more than 2,600 languages; and this had made it possible for Biblical historiography to satisfy spiritual need and solve problems across the globe.

Under the Covid-19 pandemic, the utilitarian value of Biblical historiography came to the fore in a way that cannot be overemphasised. The warning examples and the prophetic statements it contained served as crucial framework for making sense out of the fear and hope the outbreak of the Coronavirus disease induced in Nigeria and elsewhere. Studies in Biblical historiography were seen to be a critical means of preparing humanity to deal with the current Covid-19 pandemic and other unforeseen future challenges. Its utility as a complement of medical science in walking humanity safely through the pandemic and safeguarding mankind's future was also demonstrated. Since December 2019, when the Coronavirus was first reported in Wuhan, China, the humanities had been keenly wary and interested in its non-scientific and human sociology angles. From the perspective of the humanities, Biblical historiography had been evoked as an alternate non-Science framework for explaining the outbreak of Covid-19. It is also valid for understanding the subconscious rationale behind people's positive and negative attitudinal response to Covid-19. Biblical historiography achieves this by helping to contextualise the linkage between the Coronavirus disease and the highly anticipated end time. It maintained that the linkage between the ten (10) plagues that befell ancient Egypt and its doom is warning lesson deeply ingrained in the subconsciousness of religious people. This is used to put into perspective the concerns over doomsday that the outbreak of Covid-19 generated.

Biblical historiography show that since 1513 B.C.E., when the ancient nation of Israel entered into a Covenant relationship with Jehovah, epidemics and pandemics have been issues worshippers of God are constantly wary of. At times, God used epidemics to directly punish people in opposition to his will. This made the management of epidemics major themes covered in the Mosaic Law. For example, Scripture says,

If a man develops on his skin a swelling, it could become the disease of leprosy on his skin. He must be brought to Aaron, the Priest or to one of his sons, the Priests. The Priest will examine the infection on his skin... and declare him unclean. If the blotch on his skin is white and its appearance is not deeper than the skin; and the hair has turned white, the Priest will then quarantine the infected person for seven days... And if it has spread on the skin, the Priest will then declare him unclean. It is a disease.²

In modern societies, concerns over epidemics and pandemics are far from over. They invoke worries of divine retribution because of the sins of man; and fear that the end of humanity is imminent. This was absolutely the case in Nigeria under the Coronavirus pandemic. Biblical historiography had been deployed in this work to explain the attitudinal response of Nigerians to the outbreak of Covid-19. The paper conceptualises Covid-19 as one of the composite signs of the last days signaling the nearness of Armageddon. This position is rooted in Biblical historiography thus: “There will be Great Tribulation such as has not occurred since the world’s beginning until now, nor will occur again. In fact, unless those days are cut short no flesh will be saved...”³

In response to this development, Biblical historiography revealed that humanity would become faint out of fear and expectation of the things coming upon the inhabited earth...⁴ In another dimension, Biblical historiography revealed the high optimism that would paradoxically define the attitudinal response of some people to the changing world conditions. These are the people it describes as the “Chosen Ones”.⁵ Filled with hope and

confidence as the world's condition worsens, these people figuratively stand up straight with heads raised up because their deliverance is near.⁶ This paper makes sense of this optimism induced by Covid-19 in Nigeria. It would interrogate the humanities and Covid-19 in the context of their spiritual health implication. It maintained that, while infectious disease experts, as frontline workers, battle to save the physical health of humanity; professionals in the humanities under the pandemic must complement their effort by battling to safe the spiritual health of humanity. The paper insists that in the post-Covid-19 world order, religious restitution of humanity must be embraced as a new normal vital for preserving life and turning the fear of Armageddon into the hope of good things to come.

Nigeria at a Religious Crossroads: Spiritual Background to COVID-19

Nigeria is a West African country. The nation occupies a total territoriality of 923,769 (sq. km); and is bordered to the north by Niger, to the east by Chad and Cameroon, to the south by the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean, and to the west by Benin Republic.⁷ Nigeria is a Federation made up of 36 states, with Abuja as the Federal Capital Territory. Nigeria is composed of over 250 ethnic identities, politically organised under 774 Local Government Areas. The Nigerian state is a secular state with a highly religious population. In the twenty-first century, the nation can be arguably said to be at a religious crossroad. Despite the strong religious affiliations and spirituality claim of Nigerians, in deeds the people are irreligious. It is in this context, it can be argued that Nigeria was weighed down by a spiritual pandemic before the Covid-19 pandemic. Nigeria's spiritual pandemic was responsible for subverting state building efforts, economic development and human capacity and character building in the country. Nigeria at a religious crossroads has nothing to do with scarcity of religions because Christianity, Islam and the African traditional religion are well established in the nation. They are the pivot around which the spirituality of Nigerians revolves.

Although there are three distinct religions practised in Nigeria, the search for solution to problems has made the members of these religions seamlessly crisscross from one to another. This trend had made inter-faith and inter-denominational worship the common religious norm in Nigeria. However, Christianity it must be said is the most popular and dominant form of organised religion in the country. In 1972, Christianity gained increased popularity in Nigeria with the rise of Pentecostalism. Benson Idahosa's establishment of the Church of God Mission in Benin City, Edo State paved the way for the explosion of Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria. The theology of prosperity and immediate divine healing on

which Pentecostalism was anchored in Nigeria made the new brand of Christianity the most sought after.⁸ In Southern Nigeria, Pentecostal Churches have eclipsed the mainstream Churches of Christendom such as Catholicism, Anglican, Methodist and Baptist among others. In terms of membership and patronage, Pentecostal Churches have the clear advantage over the mainstream Churches. However, in Northern Nigeria Islam remained the dominant religion. Besides the mainstream Islamic religious groups such as *Sunnism* and *Shiism*, who are in the minority; other Islamic groups such as *Nasiriyya*, *Ahmadis*, *Qur'aniyyun*, *Qadiriyya*, *Tijaniyya* and other smaller heterodox Muslim sects such as *Salaf*⁹ have continued to thrive. In the region, participation in Jumat services and observance of the seven pillars of Islam are the cornerstone of daily living.

In between Christianity and Islam, the practitioners of the various African traditional religions thrive autonomously. Hence, out of regard for Nigeria's religious diversity the *Nigerian Constitution* in section 10 states that: "The government of the Federation or of a State within Nigeria shall not adopt any religion as state religion."¹⁰ Therefore, the Nigerian Law acknowledged religious freedom as a fundamental human right of Nigerians. But the freedom to practise religion in Nigeria has not translated into morality, human character and state building. The menace of corruption in Nigeria demonstrates that religious faith among Nigerians is not backed by works. Across the length and breadth of Nigeria, the people are observably religious in words but irreligious in deeds. Embezzlement, looting, misappropriation of public funds, ritual killing, internet fraud, armed robbery and kidnapping among others preponderant in Nigeria are evidence of this fact. Therefore, it was the growing conflict between religious teachings, devotion, beliefs, and real life practices in Nigeria that placed the country at a religious crossroads. This development was arguably caused by the commercialisation of religion. Religious institutions in Nigeria observably have prioritised seed sowing and tithing over deeds of righteousness. Erring members are quickly declared forgiven and reconciled with God upon making monetary payments and cash donations to religious institutions.

Thus, it is safe to maintain that the commercialisation of religion was a major catalyst that plunged Nigeria into a spiritual pandemic. It had prevented religion in Nigeria from serving as a spiritual clinic and a character-reforming institution. The spiritual collapse of Nigerians in an otherwise highly religious environment is paradoxical. Nigeria at the religious crossroads is directly responsible for the dominant view in the country that: "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die." The spiritual and moral decay

of Nigerians heighten their fear of death and anything that brings to their consciousness the nearness of the end time. It was under this low spiritual and moral climate that the Covid-19 pandemic broke out in Nigeria. Hardly were the people spiritually ready to deal with the anxieties and uncertainties the Coronavirus brought along with it. The first index case of Covid-19 was reported in Nigeria on February 27, 2020. This turn of events accelerated religious concerns that Armageddon was near. But in the interim, this paper will now engage a conceptual clarification of Covid-19 and Armageddon.

COVID-19 and Armageddon: A Conceptual Understanding

The novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) is an airborne infectious disease. It generally comes with a Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The SARS-Cov-2 as it is scientifically called is caused by the Betacoronavirus. It belongs to the Coronaviridae family.¹¹ Coronavirus disease infection is contracted in two forms. These include the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-Cov)²⁻⁴ or as a Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-Cov)^{5,6}. They are both viruses with a mortality rate of 10% and 37% respectively.¹² Therefore, Covid-19 is by far less deadly than other existing diseases. It only increases the fatality rate of the elderly and people with pre-existing medical conditions. The first human case of Covid-19 was discovered in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Its existence was announced to the world by Dr. Li Wenliang. Since the outbreak of Covid-19 became public knowledge globally, there have been several misconceptions about it that make this conceptual clarification pertinent. There is the conspiracy theory that Covid-19 was deliberately developed in Chinese laboratories as part of China's grand plan to take over the world. The former President of the United States, Donald Trump, even stereotyped Covid-19 as the "China Virus". There were also claims that the Coronavirus was caused by the 5G Technology Network. To reposition global views and conceptualisation of Covid-19, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that,

All available evidence to date suggest that Coronavirus has a natural animal origin and is not a manipulated or constructed virus... The genomic features of SARS-Cov-2 does not support claim that Coronavirus is a laboratory construct. If it were a constructed virus, its genomic sequence would show a mix of known elements.¹³

Furthermore, the fact that Covid-19 has a zoonotic source (animal origin) as revealed in the WHO report debunked claims that it was caused by the 5G network. There was also the religious misconception of Covid-19. Some religious faithful conceptualise the outbreak of Coronavirus as punishment from God. They see it as divine retribution for the sin of humanity. But Biblical historiography does not support this view. Rather than conceptualising Covid-19 as divine punishment for sin, Biblical historiography conceptualises Covid-19 as one of the composite signs of the last days that proved that Armageddon is near. It captures it this way,

...When you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified. For these things must take place first, but the end will not occur immediately... There will be great earthquakes, and in one place after another food shortages and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and from heaven great signs.¹⁴

Apart from its end-time symbolism, Biblical historiography also prophetically supports the conceptualisation of Covid-19 as a zoonotic disease. It used an animal or the symbolic “pale horse” that will cause humanity pain and death to symbolise its outbreak. This was expressed thus,

...I saw and look a pale horse, and the one seated on it had the name death. And the grave was closely following him. And authority was given them over the fourth part of the earth to kill with deadly plague and by the wild beast of the earth.¹⁵

This paper adopts the Biblical conceptualisation of pestilences as one of the composite signs that the last days that will lead to the Great Tribulation and climax at Armageddon¹⁶ is here. This makes the need for the conceptual clarification of Armageddon crucial at this juncture. Armageddon or *Harmagedon*, in Hebrew, is a Biblical concept that literally means Mountain of Megiddo.¹⁷ It is one of the borrowed terms from Biblical historiography that is most used in modern military and strategic discourses. In the Nuclear Age¹⁸, Armageddon is generally used to signify total destruction of humanity with the use of Atomic Bomb. It was also conceptualised as Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War. Nuclear Armageddon¹⁹ beyond the

Cold War politics is the projected doomsday triggered by all-out Nuclear War among the Nuclear powers. Alan Parrington, a retired U.S. Airforce officer, explained Nuclear Armageddon as a dominant U.S. strategic concept thus,

MAD is a product of the 1950s US doctrine of massive retaliation. Despite attempts to redefine it in contemporary terms like flexible response and nuclear deterrence, it has remained the central theme of American defense planning for well over three decades.²⁰

Furthermore, Andrew Krepinevich and Jacob Cohn explained that,

For much of the forty year Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union many of the West's most gifted strategists focused on how to prevent the nuclear powers from engaging in a war that could destroy them both as functioning societies, and perhaps the human race along with them.²¹

However, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the dousing of the fear of Nuclear Armageddon. But the proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology in the post-Cold War world order had reignited global anxiety over Nuclear Armageddon. In states such as China, Britain, France, India, Pakistan, Iran and North Korea, the development of nuclear weapons is a feat accelerating fear of Nuclear Armageddon.²² Hence, George Michael observed that: "Today, there is much consternation over the increasing availability of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).²³ Nuclear Armageddon is now a measure of last resort. In his "Fire and Fury" policy, Donald Trump evoked Nuclear Armageddon to counter North Korea's nuclear threats in 2019. However, in line with the objective this paper, it would be anchored on the Biblical conceptualisation of Armageddon. Armageddon in this context is not a nuclear doomsday, but as a Divine War to end wickedness. *Insight on the Scriptures* defines Armageddon as the war of the Great Day of God the Almighty.²⁴ It is a futuristic war against unrighteous mankind alienated from God. Zephaniah 1: 14-15 describes Armageddon as day of fire and fury thus:

The great day of Jehovah is near. It is near and approaching very quickly. That day is a day of fury, a day of distress and anguish; a day of storm and desolation; a

day of darkness and gloom; a day of cloud and thick gloom.

And Isaiah 13: 9 states the objective of Armageddon thus: “The great day of Jehovah is coming, cruel both with fury and burning anger. To make the land an object of horror; and to annihilate the land’s sinners from it.” Therefore, as used in Biblical historiography Armageddon is a just war that will bring God’s tolerance of unrighteousness to its finality. It will bring this system of things to its end. Understandably, it makes sense that any event such as the Covid-19 pandemic that serves as a reminder that Armageddon is near would naturally inspire fear among people disconnected from God. To the irreligious in deeds, disturbing events beyond their comprehension portend that their time is almost up.

COVID-19 and Armageddon in Nigeria: The Fear

In 2010, the Pew Research Centre Survey found that 87% of Nigerians, both Christians and Muslims, viewed religion as an indispensable part of their lives.²⁵ Similarly, the BBC World Service Survey found that Nigeria is the most religious country on earth with more than 90% of her citizenry possessing strong belief in God, prayer and poised to die for their religious beliefs.²⁶ As a religiously inclined people, Nigerians generally go spiritual when confronted with problems that baffle their physical senses. Some Nigerians are quick to invoke fatalism to explain issues that require mere critical thinking.²⁷ In 2020, this was evident in the religiously motivated attitudinal response of some Nigerians to the outbreak of Covid-19. According to the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC),

Nigeria’s first case of Covid-19 was an Italian who works in the country. He returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on the 25th of February, 2020. He was confirmed by the Virology laboratory of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, a part of the laboratory networks of the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control.²⁸

Shortly after Nigeria reported her index case of Covid-19, the World Health Organisation on March 11, 2020, declared the disease a global pandemic.²⁹ This opened the way for more religious perspectives to colour the narratives of the pandemic in Nigeria, most especially, as Nigeria’s Covid-19 profile began to grow slowly but steadily. On January 29, 2021, Nigeria experienced one of the biggest increase in her Covid-19 profile with the discovery of 1,114 confirmed cases in one day. This brought Nigeria’s total of confirmed Covid-19 to 128,274.

The rise in figures in Nigeria triggered observable fear among some Nigerians as they became faint hearted out of their expectation of the things to come.³⁰

Biblical historiography is central to making sense of this fear. Its “End Time” narrative informed the fear of imminent doom associated with outbreak of Covid-19. In Nigeria, the increased anxiety and trepidation about the world coming to an end among some Nigerians was symptomatic of this. Fear³¹ as a strong unpleasant emotional response to actual or perceived threat (Armageddon in this case) is an indication of lack of spirituality. The pertinent question at this juncture is: apart from religion and spirituality can fear be measured by other means in humans? Jong-Suk Choi et al. maintained that fear is an emotional and psychological state of mind that can be measured using nonintrusive parameters such as facial expression, rate of eye blinking and subjective evaluation.³² Therefore, through subjective evaluations such as speeches and actions under the Covid-19 pandemic, this paper would interrogate how they translate into poor spiritual readiness for the end time. The efforts of some Nigerians to reconnect with God and revive by spirituality through Bible study, church attendance and piety buttress this argument.

These steps were arguably taken as last-minute measures to make peace with God and probably survive the dreaded Armageddon they fear was imminent. Biblical historiography providing insight into the motivation of some Nigerians to reconnect with God under the Covid-19 pandemic states that: “Godly devotion is beneficial for all things, as it holds promise of life now and the life that is to come.”³³ In a highly religious society like Nigeria, the knowledge of the destruction of the unrighteous in Sodom and Gomorrah and the global deluge of Noah’s day are deeply ingrained Biblical warnings stored in the subconscious of many. Therefore, any event that brings the consciousness of people, especially those whose ways are not right with God, the nearness of another global destruction automatically triggers fear. Hence, in Nigeria under the pandemic daily informal conversations quickly snowballed into worries about the end time. The message and speech street of preachers during the period illuminated the general concerns of some Nigerians. In their sermons, they urged sinners to become “Born Again” and “Give their Life to Christ”.³⁴ These steps were portrayed as lifesaving measures needed to survive the end time, and perhaps Armageddon.

Besides the call for Nigerians to reconnect with God under the pandemic as a survivalist precautionary end-time measure; religious leaders also promoted spirituality as protection against contracting Covid-19. To this end, the National Economic Council’s

recommendation that religious institutions be closed down as a way of flattening the curve of Covid-19 came under serious attack. Lockdown of religious facilities was condemned by some who argued that the safest protocol under a pandemic was for people to draw close to God.³⁵ For example, Pastor E.A. Adeboye averred that, for members who were abiding in the secret place of the Most High no virus can come near their dwelling place. In the same vein, Abubakr Iman Aliagan, an Islamic scholar, condemned the lockdown of Mosques in Nigeria on the grounds that Muslims have natural and God-given immunity against Covid-19.³⁶ Therefore, this paper argued that under the Covid-19 pandemic, some religious statements were at best nothing but religious palliatives meant to alleviate fear.

In Benin City, it was observed that to cushion fear and find soft landing in the event of the world coming to an end, some residents made frantic efforts to reconnect with God through Bible Studies. These individuals were people who before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic were participants in the worldwide Bible Educational Programme of Jehovah's Witnesses, but had abandoned their Bible study.³⁷ Ngozi Akhoehule reported being contacted by some former Bible students who pleaded that their home Bible study programme should be reactivated under the pandemic. These requests to the disappointment of some these interested people were turned down on the grounds that Jehovah's Witnesses because of the pandemic had stopped the face-to-face Bible study arrangement.³⁸ Subjective evaluation of these efforts to reconnect with God revealed that they were not driven by true love for God and righteousness; but by the fear that Armageddon or the end time was near. Covid-19 was feared as a harbinger of Armageddon not only in Nigeria. Tunji Olaopa explained it this way: "The world is tragically under siege, held ransom by a virus that is not a living organism, but has killed thousands of people and instilled abject fear in the lives of the entire world."³⁹

In *Gwarinpa* Estate, Abuja, it was reported that the outbreak of Covid-19 triggered anxieties and fear of imminent end of humanity. This fear as contained in writings and posters dominated some of the billboards in the urban settlement. These mass media were reported to feature content that heightened the fear of Armageddon or the end time. Covid-19 was portrayed through these media as a direct punishment from God. It was claimed that it was unleashed upon the earth to purge it of all sinners.⁴⁰ Such thoughts were anchored on the Biblical historiographical injunction that the wages sin pays is death.⁴¹ The incidences of fear induced by the outbreak of the Covid-19 in Nigeria were widespread attitudinal response not restricted to Edo and Abuja. Covid-19 and the anxieties and fear over the nearness of the end of humanity were an observable phenomenon across Nigeria's thirty-six (36) states. But the

few selected examples cited in this paper were used as random samples of fear within a microcosm of a macrocosm. But as some Nigerians were uneasy about Covid-19 and lived in fear of the end time, so also there were others who had their hope for a better new world strengthened by Covid-19.

COVID-19 and Armageddon in Nigeria: The Hope

Biblical historiography contained prophetic statements that inspired hope in spiritually minded Nigerians under the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper would examine the attitudinal response of Jehovah's Witnesses in Nigeria to the outbreak of Covid-19 to demonstrate this point. Among the Witnesses, it was observed that the pandemic heightened expectations that Paradise was near. As an organised religious group, Jehovah's Witnesses in Nigeria and elsewhere conceptualise Armageddon as a war that will usher in God's Kingdom and pave the way for the transformation of the earth into a global paradise. Second Peter verse 3: 13 provided the Biblical historiographical basis for their optimism. It states that there is a promised new heavens and a new earth that Christians are awaiting in which righteousness would dwell. In Nigeria, the origin of Jehovah's Witnesses can be traced to 1931 when an office of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society was established in Lagos. During the period, W. R. Brown (popularly known as Bible Brown) a Jehovah Witnesses Missionary from Trinidad, played a significant role in sowing the seed of the religion in Nigeria. Today, the seed had germinated into the largest concentration of Jehovah's Witnesses in Africa. Out of the 8, 695, 808 worldwide membership of Jehovah's Witnesses across 240 lands; Nigerians as at January, 2021 make up 374, 228 of its publishers.⁴² These publishers of the good news in Nigeria are divided into 6,571 congregations.⁴³

Under the Covid-19 pandemic, Jehovah's Witnesses in Nigeria like their counterparts the world over exuded high level of hope. However, this does not in any way presupposes that the Witnesses were not personally affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Spirituality did not make them immune to the virus nor did it exempt them from the harsh socio-economic realities Covid-19 induced the world over. As a group, Jehovah's Witnesses lost 7,500 of their members to the Coronavirus disease. In Nigeria, the Witnesses like other Nigerians were affected by the economic lockdown, closure of schools and religious institutions that Covid-19 induced. In fact, their Kingdom Halls across the country have remained shut and their house-to-house preaching work and other public ministry halted. Their members also experienced the anxieties other Nigerians faced as a result of loss of employment and rising

cost of living under the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite all these, they remained optimistic and looked to the future with a great deal of confidence. Providing insight into the positive spirit of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide amid the distress they experience, Stephen Lett observed that,

The spread of the coronavirus is distressing to be sure; but Jehovah's Witnesses are not surprised. Because the global pandemic is evidence that mankind has entered the final part of the final part of the last days. Shortly before the last of the last days.⁴⁴

Therefore, despite the menace of the Covid-19 pandemic and its disruption of the personal lives of Jehovah's Witnesses in Nigeria, they generally rejoice in the fact that the disease is an indication that Armageddon which will bring their salvation is near. Providing insight into the causation of the Witnesses' high level of confidence in Armageddon, Biblical historiography explains that,

...It is unthinkable for the true God to act wickedly, for the Almighty to do wrong. For He will reward a man according to what he does; and bring upon him the consequences of his ways... God does not act wickedly and the Almighty does not pervert justice.⁴⁵

Therefore, spiritually minded and upright people everywhere are convinced that Armageddon, the Great War of Jehovah to end all wickedness, will not be a War of Mass Destruction (WMD). The preservation of Lot, Noah and their families in Bible times furnishes humanity with the guarantee that Armageddon would be a total war against unrighteousness; but with controlled and guided use of destructive force. Hence, religious people in words and deeds know that they have nothing to fear. They are convinced that Armageddon would be a just war geared towards bringing relief, freedom from want, pain and injustice to the faithful. It will usher in paradise, a new earth⁴⁶ where everything will be made new. Biblical historiography explained the post-Armageddon conditions of humanity thus,

They will build houses and live them. And they will plant vineyards and eat their fruitage. They will not build for someone else to inhabit; nor will they plant for others to

eat... They will not toil for nothing, nor will they bear
children for distress...⁴⁷

Implicit in this understanding is the fact there will be food and job security and security of lives and properties in the post-Armageddon world order. Furthermore, the disruptive effect of epidemics and pandemics would be no more. Biblical historiography explains the future global improvement in public health this way: “No resident will say I am sick...”⁴⁸ Furthermore, it expands humanity’s cause for joy in the post-Armageddon world order by revealing that God:

...Will swallow up death forever, and the Sovereign Lord
Jehovah will wipe away the tears from all faces. The
reproach of his people, He will take away from all the
earth...⁴⁹

Understandably, since February 27, 2020 when the first index case of Covid-19 was recorded in Nigeria, Jehovah’s Witnesses in the country have been observably hopeful. They conceived the Covid-19 pandemic as indication that Armageddon is near and that good things are soon to come. Under the pandemic, the Witnesses enthusiastically comforted their neighbours with this hope through telephone evangelism, letter writing, emails and text messaging. It is true that Jehovah’s Witnesses are not saints; they are ordinary and imperfect people who make mistakes daily. Yet, they make it their goal to practise righteousness and their international brotherhood has zero tolerance for gross misconducts. In their daily lives, they endeavoured to be guided by Bible principles in their words and deeds. They also strive to bridge the gap between hearing God’s word and doing God’s word. Above all, the Witnesses make earnest effort to practise what they preach in their community, school and place of employment.

Implicit in this understanding is the fact that, Jehovah’s Witnesses make godly devotion the foremost thing in their lives. Therefore, unrepentant members of Jehovah’s Witnesses who commit gross sins such as stealing, fraud, sexual immorality, rape, drug abuse and other brazen conducts are quickly dis-fellowshipped from among their fold. Disfellowshipping discourages anomie, keeps the congregation spiritually clean and serves as a measure of last resort to help the erring members regain their relationship with God. It is therefore without doubt that it is the stringent efforts of the Christian congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses to help its members lead morally chaste lives daily that was partly

responsible for their increased hope under the pandemic. In Nigeria, just as all law-abiding citizens have no reason to be afraid of the police, so too have Jehovah's Witnesses demonstrated under the Covid-19 pandemic that people whose ways are right with God have no reason to be afraid of Armageddon or death. It is along this line that this paper will demonstrate the lessons in spiritual health and spiritual restitution humanity must learn from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Humanities: Towards Post-COVID Spiritual Restitution of Humanity

Across the globe, there is a growing hope that things would return to normal soon as Covid-19 vaccines started rolling out.⁵⁰ Vaccines rollout and vaccination have increased the possibility of the Covid-19 pandemic ending soon despite the discovery of new variants of the Coronavirus. Hence, infectious disease experts have continued to sound the need for peoples to observe the universally accepted non-pharmaceutical safety protocols valid for containing the spread of Covid-19. This, they maintain, is central to enabling humanity return to normal lives faster than vaccination. Therefore, regular hygiene and hand sanitisation, wearing of facemasks and maintenance of physical distancing are regarded as the new normal post-Covid-19 humanity must observe. However, the goal of this paper here is to demonstrate that the survival of humanity in the post-Covid-19 era depends on more than this non-pharmaceutical safety measures. It will interrogate the role of the humanities in harvesting and preserving the spiritual health lessons humanity must learn from the Covid-19 pandemic. The spiritual restitution of humanity it maintained would be one of the core mandates of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in the post-Covid-19 world order. The Humanities in higher institution of learning is composed of departments geared towards enhancing and preserving the historical, philosophical, linguistic and spirituality of humanity. The American Academy of Arts and Social Sciences observes that the Humanities is made up of disciplines of memory and imagination that help us to know where we have been; and helping us to envision where we going.⁵¹ These disciplines deal with what it means to be humans and to understand the unique ways humans experience the world.⁵²

Therefore, under the Covid-19 pandemic, professionals in the Humanities played a crucial role in the fight to safe humanity not as frontline workers in the fight against Covid-19, but as a forensic pathologists and fishers of men of some sort. This implies that professionals in the Humanities under the Covid-19 pandemic were wary and poised to help humanity deal with the metaphysical aftermaths of Covid-19. Therefore, Virologist and

Epidemiologists were not the only ones who had their work cut out for them when under the pandemic. Historians, Philosopher, Linguists and Religionists among others in the Humanities maintained high vigilance under the pandemic. From the human angle, they observed the Covid-19 rhetoric, philosophical strategy for coping under the pandemic and its spiritual health imperatives. It is against this backdrop that this sense-making effort of the fear and hope of Covid-19 in Nigeria through the lens of Biblical historiography is pertinent. Through this effort, the Covid-19 post mortem contribution of the Humanities to the preservation of humanity would be illuminated. Going forward, this paper insists that human morality, character development, happiness, and readiness to survive Armageddon depend squarely on spiritual restitution.

Spiritual restitution is evident in genuine religious piety and godly devotion in words and deeds. It is the metaphysical and spiritual change in humanity's dominant orientation towards deeds of righteousness. Spiritual restitution, this paper argued, is germane for state building and for securing the future of humanity. This Biblical historiography of the fear and hope under the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria had shown why spiritual restitution is germane in the country and beyond in the post-Covid-19 era. It argues that the anxieties and fears that traumatised some Nigerians under the pandemic were needless. The paper finds that, they were the avoidable consequences of the absence of genuine godly devotion in an otherwise very religious environment. Therefore, the paper maintains that the irreligious lifestyles of some Nigerians undermine their spirituality claim. Hence, spiritual restitution in Nigeria is the antidote to the widespread corruption hindering her economic growth and development. It also the panacea to the fear of death and the end time in the country. In the final analysis, the humanistic sense we make out of this Biblical historiographical study are that:

1. In post-Covid-19 Nigeria, faith and belief in God must be backed with commensurable good deeds;
2. The spiritual health and future of Nigerians are best secured through righteousness and not by mere seed sowing and tithing;
3. Good name, character development, morality and spirituality are central to state building;
4. Irreligiousness breeds corruption, derails development and heightens the fear of death, the unknown and Armageddon; and
5. The practice of true religion and genuine spirituality builds hope and confidence under a pandemic and beyond.

Conclusion

This paper examined Covid-19 and nearness of Armageddon through the lens of Biblical historiography. It focused on the fear and hope that surrounded the outbreak of the Coronavirus in Nigeria as a signal that Armageddon was near. It finds that the increased anxiety and trepidation that characterised the attitudinal response of some Nigerians to Covid-19 was symptomatic of the spiritual pandemic plaguing the nation. Nigeria is the most religious country in the world in terms of devotion to religious institutions; but the population is one of the most morally bankrupt and irreligious in deeds. The paper finds that corruption and criminalities as bane of state building in Nigeria testify to the poor spiritual health of some Nigerians. Spiritual pandemic in the country the paper finds is directly responsible for the fear of Armageddon. The paper also finds that there is hope among Jehovah's Witnesses in Nigeria that Covid-19 was an indication that their deliverance is near. Through Biblical historiography the paper finds that religious faith backed with deeds of righteousness and genuine spirituality build hope and confidence under a pandemic. They doused end-time doomsday fears and convert them into optimistic expectation of good things to come. Therefore, this paper concludes that the spiritual restitution of humanity is one of the Covid-19 lessons the Humanities must engender in the post-Covid-19 world order.

Endnotes

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