VIPERS OF OPPOSITION:

DEALING WITH THEM WHILE

SERVING OTHERS

NATIV UNENEH

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Endorsements

Dr. Nativ Uneneh using biblical evidences unpacks some amazing insights on how to handle trouble makers in all of human organizations. This is a must-read text for all leaders during these tumultuous times of human history.

DR. S.I AANDE, Dean of Faculty of Arts; University of Mkar, Mkar; Benue State, Nigeria.

The wisdom to live above all the evil devices of deadly critics is the one thing every leader is panting for. In this masterful, biblical, and practical book, Dr. Nativ Uneneh gives readers the wisdom to be able to do just that.

Cdre J.I Afeah Rtd, NKST Lagos- Nigeria.

Dr. Uneneh has done a meticulous showcasing of stark biblical cases of Human rebellion against the rule of God and his regates, applying such to the modern era of African ethical disequilibrium. This book equips all teachable leaders for service in this insane generation of vipers.

Rev. Philip Shaorga, Pastor of NKST Lagos Mainland.

Books By the Same Author

1. "New Perspectives on The Character of The Man Job In Nigeria Context: A Synchronic Picture."

2. "A Synthesis of The First Two Chapters of Genesis: Meaning For Christians In Nigeria."

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DEDICATION

To all leaders battling with violent opposition in their arenas of service.

FOREWORD

If you are reading this book, you might as well be thinking and asking similar questions I am trying to write about. You want to know what vipers of opposition are and why they should bother us. A good number of us already have opinions about what opposition in the establishment might be but why they should bother us at all is completely a different matter not necessitating a book. What has the society, or the church to do with this?

We might work with such presumptions until we read this book in which Dr N. Uneneh lays bare what the phenomenon he calls *vipers of opposition* are, and what has been their unfortunate task; not only against human development in general, but also in the church. In this way he employs his studious life to show in grand style how the agents of opposition have been as he walks us through biblical narratives pointing out how the biblical genres depict the agents of opposition from the redemptive historical record, God's design for saving humanity, since the fall into sin in Eden. Then we see how the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is replete with agents of opposition. This gives another angle of reading scripture that is redemptively helpful.

Its paradoxical as one expects that opposition which progresses into rebellion should happen among humans, but

as things would have it opposition rises against the very nature and person of God who creates and gives life and its sustenance. That is why rebellion has been rife among humans. Often times than not, opposition results into wanton loss of life and property just for the sake of it. The goal of opposition has always been the attempt to destroy the magnificent divine design to save the world and its fullness thereof.

The book walks us through this grand design but finally calls upon all and sundry to embrace lifestyles that eschew opposition. Several biblical characters and systems that oppose God's kingdom have been shown how they come to nothing in the end. But when rebellious opposition is not checked and curtailed, it becomes systemic and still displays its design. The example of the Israelites opposing God even while in the wilderness has been shown to express that concisely. Job implicated the whole universe into his problem with creator, and almost came closely to cursing, not exactly God, but his creation. The prophet Jonah opposes God's mission and ends up confined in the fish's belly. In the New Testament, Satan is introduced as *Diabolos* when he opposes Christ and puts Him to the test at 3 different times. So, from a biblical rendition the book shows that opposition is everywhere as it shows itself in envy, covetousness, desire for leadership, ungodliness, lust, discontentment, waywardness,

pride and impatience. The Christian leader has to work with and against opposition. In doing so he has to be conscious regarding its prevalence but that's just the beginning. The Christian leader must involve in prayer, study of the word of God, keep good company, and display godly anger against opposition, avoid intimidation and be wise for him to succeed in a world full of *vipers of opposition*. The Christian leader should also avoid intimidation, need to be highly insightful, know his followership.

Rev Dr Jonathan T. Iorkighir

Reformed Theological Seminary Mkar,

Benue State- Nigeria.

PREFACE

The Bible is one universal book containing a series of acts of opposition. There is no era in the history of mankind, which witnessed the quantity of acts of opposition and figures than that of the Bible. The Bible contains numerous acts of violence, with God and his purposes as the target of all biblical oppositions. All of his genuine delegates: the patriarchs, Prophets, judges, Priests, Kings, Jesus and his disciples, and the Evangelists - all were passionately opposed because they came to serve the purposes of God. The motive behind all biblical opposition was to thwart the purpose of God.

Besides, these acts of opposition form the topics of our news and daily subjects of our forums. Every leader in our world is screaming the effect of mischievous assaults upon their personality, fame, performance and position. The cry is astronomically high everywhere in every ministry. This volume is designed to encourage leaders to stand firm in the face of baseless criticisms and, also, equip people with practical clues on how they can overcome enemies of peace in the society.

The author, in so doing identifies some glaring cases of violent assaults from the Bible, interprets them, reveals the costs and dangers associated with fighting God's delegates on this side of the grave. Viable lessons are gleaned on how to stand in the storm and serve God and humanity, especially in our turbulent political society.

You can not necessarily kill opposition in order to succeed. Paul in our central text of Acts 28:1-10 suggests how we can handle violent aggression against us, or as well, control ourselves in the face of opposition even if we are unable to control the vipers themselves. This text contains crucial keys for unlocking the graces of God upon our efforts as we serve him under the most trying of circumstances. The experience of Paul proves that vipers' presence in your ministry or journey is not necessarily an evil development but that they attest to the continuing presence of the Lord with you in your journey as a leader.

In trying to accomplish this, the author mobilizes an eight-chapter write-up of two parts to deliver his aim and objectives. Five chapters in part one attest to the grim reality of opposition vipers in the two Testaments of the Holy writ and finally, the last three chapters in part two demonstrate that there are serious elements of violent

opposition in both our divine and political communities of the world. The same part two shows a lot about the causes of violence, types evil men, and how to contend with them. The author also employs various nuances to expound on the theme of violence in our communities.

This sublime project is possible because of the doing of the Creator God, who alone grants us the ability to do all things perfectly well. I am grateful to Him, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In producing this document, a number of academic associates and my parishioners extended to me some unwavering acts of support bringing it to its present shape.

First, I should mention my former Seminary Teacher and mentor, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Terzungwe Iorkighir for painstakingly proof reading the manuscripts and writing a foreword. Second, Mention must be made of Elder and Mrs. J.I. Afeah for their stable Parochial, and Research supports to me. I sincerely appreciate their uncountable acts of kindness to me as their pastor. To my supportive neighbors- Mr. and Mrs. Innocent Izu, for their constant show of love and kindness, Engr and Mrs. Tatyough, Mr.and Mrs. Akuhwa Gong, Col. Terngu Chukwu, Mr. and Mrs. Sunday Iorkegh, Mr. and Mrs.

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Dr. Nativ Uneneh

NKST Lagos

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INTRODUCTION

Every single leader, be it at home, in politics, business world, academic loci, the church, the forces, voluntary settings and more; confronts opposition in it's multifaceted shapes. Most of the frictions and iniquities we encounter in the society today: ranging from bad governmenance, crime and public safety problem, communal crisis, corruption, tribal excitements, greed, underdevelopment and economics hitches are caused by rancorous elements in our midst. Malicious tendencies are everywhere and are ready to wreak havoc, bring confusion and disorder in the status quo.

The Christian worker may be called to speak to the kings and do great exploits for the great Monarch of the galaxies, or like Paul; may be called to pick sticks to build a fire; a civil servant may be called to work in a great department of service, or in a simple cadre, a business personnel may be called to a little office to advertise sales or to serve as a Chief Executive Officer; all must expect to rub shoulders with vipers of opposition as they engage in

service. People who would want to make a stir and cause havoc in the system are numerous in our world.

The title of this book is derived from Acts 28 (3-6), where Paul gathered a bundle of sticks to kindle a burn fire that was built for the 276 waterlogged shipwreck victims at Malta. In the process, a deadly viper fastened its fangs onto his hand. This was probably one of Satan's last efforts to keep Paul from reaching Rome to witness for Christ. Satan always tries to frustrate the purposes of God from the inception of human history. This viper was sent to oppose Paul and frustrate his current ministry in the imperial capital in Rome. Vipers of opposition are in every office, department and ministry to keep you from your ministry of mercy.

Right from the very beginning of the Christian and the Jewish religions, highly tragic characters have been a thorn in the flesh of their respective ministries, with the purpose to frustrate, confuse, and eventually, obviate God's plan for the universe (Mat. 16:18). The purpose of this author is to highlight some glaring vipers of opposition from the scripture and link them to the contemporary opposition elements in the society and church ministry, and glean lessons for leaders. He will

sketch their characteristics, identify some causes of opposition, sources of these rancorous characters, their targets and their methods of operation, and eventually, how to handle them, subdue them and go on with one's leadership role successfully.

However, before this is achieved, several background particulars will be considered. The book is organized in a scope of eight chapters: Chapter one showcases Primeval vipers of opposition, chapter two highlights opposition extant in the book of Exodus; chapter three; rebels during the tumultuous times of the period of the monarchy, chapter four identifies opposition elements in wisdom literature of the books of Job and Jonah, chapter five surveys some agents of opposition in the New Testament, while in chapter six opposition powers in the church and society are discussed. Chapter seven shows how vipers can be tractabled, and finally, chapter eight concludes the book.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE:

PRIMEVAL VIPERS OF OPPOSITION

Opposition is an age-long act; albeit, a deed of the antiquity. It originated with Satan when he invaded Paradise and persuaded Adam and Eve into the state of guilty disobedience. Brutality per se begins in Eden. This single act set in an unfortunate chain of continuous acts of disobedience and resistance of the will of the creator by human beings.

1.1 ANTEDULIVIAN VAGABONDS

These are the earliest instances of the creatures discord with the creator. This covers from the time of creation to the flood. By vagabonds, people without a purpose, but stubbornly harmful are meant. The earliest miscreants leading unsettled, irresponsible and disreputable livelihood are in view here. Their evil deeds attest to their nature as deadly vipers. People with deadly venom. The most prominent one is:

1.1.1 The Snake

There are numerous references to the word *snake* in the Bible with almost all of them expressing negative nuances. Snakes were sent to bite the Israelites (Num.21:6), the writer of Proverbs links snakes with alcohol (23:32), said to be shrewed (Mat. 10:16). In Genesis 3, satan uses the form of the snake to tempt humans.

Satan ranks top on the list of the opposers of the divine government. Genesis 3 contains the origin of the act of opposition. Below is the drama that marks the inception of Satan's opposition of the will of God.

i. The First Speaker

After the creation of the Universe God addressed man thus:

> …..Be fruithful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth, and every tree that has fruit with seed in it… (Gen.1:28,29)

These are the first words of God to the human beings he created. There are several positive element in this darling address.

a. In these words, God vests responsibility on man.
b. The first words of God to the humans were good to hearing.
c. They evoked blessing on man
d. They indicate his worth to God and other created beings that are not human.
e. The words are meant to set the pattern for human speech

This single declaration has made man a responsible being. He is in control of the Universe. He is enjoying agricultural prosperity on the earth. He has advanced in animal and plants hybreeding and crossbreeding. Technological advancement is achieved in the areas of land, water, air and underground transportation. There are great achievements in electromagnetic technology, building, food science, soil science and health sciences have all put together improved man's living on earth. With the invention of the computers man has achieved a lot that God is sometimes scorned.

The command to "be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" has also been effective. The world's

population indices are now staggering. About 8.2 billions of people are now occupying the earth.

The word of God is efficacious. The Psalmist captures this truth very well when he says

> The voice of the Lord is powerful;
> The voice of the Lord is majestic
> The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;
> The Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon
> He makes Lebanon skips like a calf,
> Sirion like a young wild ox
> The voice of the Lord strikes
> With flashes of lightning
> The voice of the Lord shakes the deserts.
> The Lord shakes the deserts of
> Kadesh
> The voice of the Lord twists the Oaks
> and strips the forest bare.
> …..(Ps. 29:4-9)

The voice of the Lord is not empty. It achieves a lot in the creation of the Universe. It brings about reality. It shapes the structure of the universe. It shapes human lives and bahaviors. Heaven and the earth were brought into being through the efficacy of the spoken word of God. The simple declaration "Let there be" was sufficient to order all of reality into being. All that God gets said in Genesis 1:28-30 has taken a positive effect in the system of our world today.

Again God speaks in the second chapter of Genesis (vs.16-17). While the first speech of God in Genesis 1:28-30 in terms of discourse signal is a (cultural) mandate, the second speech is an explicit prohibition wherein God says

> You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.

God uses a prohibition here to communicate his message emphasizing the dangers associated with the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This particle of expression also helps man to avoid the tree and its impending consequences. The Bible presents God as a loving God. He speaks and acts for, and on behalf of his creaturely.

ii. The second speaker

A second speaker is introduced in the third chapter of Genesis while the first speaker uses explicit techniques of communication to address our progenitors, the second speaker prefaced his speech with a question (Gen. 1:1). The forefront reason for employing this type of discourse signal is that he is coming to Adam and Eve with an

illegitimate authority over them and the entire state of affair in paradise.

As innocently as the question sounds it has a touch of skepticism or atleast surprise (Wenham 73). The question also traverse God's original generous permission (2:16). The question also distorted the command of God to Adam and Eve. His very first word also illustrate the craftiness of the snake. His nomenclature of God here as simply as Elohim instead of the *Lord God,* which characterizes Genesis 2-3 is suggestive of the serpents remotness from God. All of the serpents words from Genesis 1-5 sounds like a sharp rejection of God's words. On the first reading the snakes portrays God as deceiving his creatures by issuing threats he subsequently did not fulfil. The snake presents himself as saying the truth, not God. But in reality the snake was saying half truths, like "your eyes will be opened", "like God knowing good and evil". It is clear from this episode that

i. The snake is opposing God

ii. The first time God is misrepresented and misinterpreted. This is the origin of the act of misinterpretation and misrepresentation of authotities.

iii. God is seriously challenged.

This is the first instance God is challenged on his created earth. This is also the first lie and the beginning of all lies being told on earth. The first speech of God is an absolute truth, a blessing to all mankind.

The first speech of the serpent on the earth is a big lie and indeed falsehood, a gargantuan lie designed to oppose the plan of God for the Universe and to instigate the problem of man and his expulsion from Eden his place of respite.

Several traits of opposition can be delineated from this drama:

i. People who come to oppose legitimate authority are always crafty. They come as wolves though, in sheep skin.

ii. They employ excessive use of falsehood and ambiguous expressions.

iii. Readiness to challenge any personality, even God!

iv. Destructive tendencies

v. Misinterprete and misrepresent legitimate authority

vi. Envious of happiness of others.

Definitely, the snake achieved his purpose Adam and Eve were successfully lured to sin and robbed of their happiness. God was condemned before his creatures, challenged, misinterpreted and misrepresented. This is indeed so much of havoc wreaked on God's economy by the devil, the top on the list of the antediluvian destroyers and the initiator of all evil machinations in heaven and the earth.

Before the next viper is discussed it is therefore appropriate to insert a note of warning and hack to the reaps of man as a result nof his fall:

> We are living in the world of multiple speakers. Just within Genesis 1-3 two speakers are claiming humanity's attention. Obedience to the first speaker did much good to man. The second speaker invoke hell on humanity. Among the voices claiming for our attention and that of our youth; to whom do we listen?

We live in the world of many drummers demanding for our dance to their tune: bandits, terrorist, drug addicts, criminals, spiritualists, evil politicians, bad friends, and the church are clamoring for our attention. God in his retributive arbitration prescribes sweeping punishment upon the snake (crawling and crushing of its head), man (painful toil), to the woman (pain in child bearing). The soil, the plants and all creatures were affected in the disobedience of man (Gen. 3:15-19). Man can not get away with it when he disobeys God.

1.1.2 Cain

Cain is indeed one of the most tragic personalities in the scriptures. As one of the earliest problem makers of his period, Cain made a stir in the sacrificial atmosphere of the primitive religion.

For one, Cain's birth attended exuberant joy for his mother, Eve. For an antediluvian mother to have said "I have brought forth a man" (not gaber) (Gen. 4:1) expresses an excessive joyfulness at the issue of the firstborn of the age and indeed of the whole world! As the giver of the blessing of childbirth, God is fully acknowledged. Cain is the firstborn of

Adam and Eve. Like most of the firstborn male children whose birth follows joyful merriments, Cain quickly became a disappointment to God, parents and primitive faith.

Having announced Cain's birth in Genesis 4:1a the editors quickly reported the birth of his younger brother Abel (v.2a). In a rather swift style, their employments are disclosed, Abel was a shepherd and Cain a farmer (v.2). in a rather stark economy, the episode eventually culminates into Cain's act of envy and murder against his brother, when his offering was rejected by the Lord. The narrator places Abel first in the order of engaging occupations. Abel took up his business before Cain (2b), in the order of the offertory, Cain comes first probably in support of the common illustration that "the empty symbal makes the most resounding noise."

The text tells us "the Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering but on Cain and his offering, he did not look with favor" (V. 4b,5a)

The anger of Cain over Abel is revealed in verse 5b. God's disapproval of his gross distain at God's personality is exposed in his anger against God's viewing. The anger was fully expressed in his murder of Abel. Cain was a wicked man who led his life under the influence of the flesh. He therefore,

became an enemy to the Lord. He now had a problem with the Lord, and the assembly where he worshipped. The following are observed about Cain:

i. He was a hypocrite in the external service of God
ii. Cain was a furious man
iii. Had an impure heart
iv. He was a failure in the field and at the alter
v. With lack of commitment, attitude and presence of evil proclivity in him, Cain's worship was rejected and he was banished.

Jude II warns us not to be like Cain (cf 1Jn. 3:12). We should be committed and love our brothers and sisters.

1.1.3 A Generation of Vipers (Gen. 4-11)

Genesis 4-11 are structured so that they bring out clearly the wickedness of human beings as the stage was set in chapter 3. The murder of Abel by his brother Cain which is just described in the immediate foregoing subdivision sets the tune for the continuing wickedness of the subsequent generations of mankind. This block of chapter is replete with human frictions against the rule of God and his delegates. The genealogy in chapter 5 serves to show that Man's sinfulness

and rebellion against God brings shorter livelihood and, also to provide a link between God's people and the beginning of creation (Efird 46).

In Genesis 6:1-4 we learnt that when men began to increase in number they put to birth beautiful daughters with whom the "sons of God" engaged in lustful sin producing a gaint hybrid of humans on the land. Rebellion against God is taking a different shape from Satan, Adam and Eve, and Cain. Sin of lust is introduced with this generation of men.

1.1.4 God's Resolve

With the escalation of sin among God's children, God now resolved to delete the corrupted humanity by a deluge, a great outpouring upon the earth but rescue Noah and his family in an ark and institute a new refined beginning of human kind. A generation that would obey God.

Noah is a pivotal figure in Genesis 1-11. With the Catachismic flood, God wipes out the seed of the serpent which had become utterly corrupt! By means of an ark, God spare the righteous seed of the woman through Noah and his progeny, and with the other creatures. Noah and his family

survived the punishing and purging flood and enjoyed a renewed earth that will last to the end of time. Tragically, however, Noah and his family produced yet another generation of venominous vipers who would soon contemplate usurping the position of God in heaven by erecting a tower that would supposedly overtake the skies and heavens! This is the origin of the pride of the nations; Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and others. Later, what the children of Babel could not do (erecting a tower to heaven) with bricks; Babylon did with sin "their sins piled up to heaven" (Rev. 18:5!). This is the actual origin of human pride. What Babel could not do with bricks politicians and even christians are doing with titles; their titles piled up to heaven- Hon. Dr. PhD, Amb. FQ, Jp, Rev, KUT, etc.

1.1.5 Confusion of Languages

God in his retributive poise always decides on how to control human wickedness at it's peak! In the case of "the sons of God" he loosed uncontrolled outpouring that "overcame" the world. God's approach to the pride of Babel is quite humbling and embarrassing to the architects of the Zigurat. They imagined themselves ascending to the heavens and their

god's descending down their staircase. The true God who endowed them knowledge and skills was eschewed in this pompous scheme. The scripture portrays God coming down to inspect their puny tower and confounded their language (Waltke 180). Their common language is their source of strength and mutual unity. God clearly exposes that humanity's sin in building the tower is in refusal to live within God given boundaries. This generation wanted to oppose God's designs for humans to fill the earth as wafted in Genesis 1:28-30. They rather wanted to inhabit the heaven!

Now the world countries that have bore an adverse effect of this confusion of dialects are Indonesia; with over 700 languages, while Nigeria has a total of 580 languages.

1.1.6 Pitfalls

i. The problem of sightful lust is the reason for condemnation of the "sons of God" (Gen. 6:2). They coveted the daughters' beauty and married anyone of them they chose. This suggests the sinfulness of the sons of God.

ii. The fault of "the daughters of men" lies in their consenting (compromise) to intercourse with the sons of God.

iii. The girls' fathers were also implicated in their guilt, since if there was no rape or seduction their approval to these matches would have been required. The previous chapter shows that mankind was breeding very successfully on it own.

iv. Old Testament laws generally condemns crossbreeding of species in strong terms. Mixed cropping and mixed clothing are prohibited (Lev. 19:19 cf; Dt. 22:9-11) (Waltke141). Copulating with animals is a capital offense (Lev. 20:16). Marrying non-Israelites is also out-lawed (Dt. 7:3). It therefore follows that unions between the "sons of God and human women must be atleast reprehensible. God in his infinite wisdom ordered that everything must reproduce "according to its kind" (Gen. 1:11-12, 21,24-25). (141)

v. God unleashed a universal catastrophe that engulfed all humanity except Noah and family who was not among the rebels.

vi. "Pride" as the adage prefixes "brings the fall" confussion and frustration were let loosed upon the people of Babel. God would never leave

unpunished those who oppose him. Retributive judgement must take its course against those who substitute him for themselves.

vii. Indiscriminate sexual behavior is highly risky in the scheme of thing of God. We will now zoom on the period of Abraham.

1.2 PATRIARCHAL PERIOD

The history of the patriarchs covers from Genesis 12-50, but the time span of these chapters is comparatively short. Chapters 12-50 of Genesis contain three long connected cycles of narratives. There is:

the story of Abraham 11:27-25:11

the story of Jacob 25:19-35:29

the story of Joseph 37:1-50:26

However, the current author picks interest in actors within these cycles who composed negative history, viz., Esau, Laban, Joseph's sibling and Potiphar's wife.

1.2.1 Esau, and His Problem of Charater.

The scripture portrays Esau as an impulsive personality. He was also rash and violent. By the way, Most of the patriarchs possessed a negative social track record; they were characteristically quarrelsome with brothers:

i. Abraham quarreled with Lot (Gen. 13:7)

ii. Esau with Jacob (Gen. 27:41)

iii. Siblings with Joseph (Gen. 37:4)

Esau is an unsatisfactory son, whose initial appearance in the Bible is rather, pejorative. At the age of 15 years, he relinquished his natural privilege as the firstborn for a mere bowl of stew (Gen. 25:29-34) (Wikipedian.org>wiki>Esau). Esau is in dire need of food and drink that he would easily vend his God-given status of honor as the first son within his lineage. Israel as God's firstborn receives a position of honor and privilege among the nations (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9) (Waltke 363). The first born of the womb, first fruits of the soil uniquely belong to the Lord, "it is not only the best that belongs to God, but also the first" (Tsavat qtd in Waltke). The first born has privileged status, and the right of succession and entitled to a double portion of his father's inheritance (Dt. 21:17). Accompanying the blessing of his birth right is also the responsibility to be the family protector, the leader of the family. This birthright is transferable; the youngest son can displace the eldest as in the cases of Joseph/Judah and Reuben, Ephriam/Manasseh, Moses/Aaron, David/his six

elder brothers, Solomon/Adonijah (Waltke). Since Esau sells his inheritance rights he forfeits his blessing (Heb. 12:16-17).

Esau characteristically lack faith and lives for the moment; this style of living is a very dangerous life to live. In his shortsightedness, the birthright appears meaningless. At the heart of Esau and Jacob's difference are clashing world views: immediate satisfaction versus deferred prosperity (Waltke).

The basic music of the verbs in Genesis 25, verse 34 "ate and drank and got up and left" represent Esau to be as careless, simple and thoughtless as his speech. The one who holds God's promises and blessings in contempt is a rebel, and accordingly, hated by him (Mal. 1:3; Heb. 12:16).

Not only the selling of his birthright that makes Esau God's enemy, but that Esau (and descendants) still perpetuated the old family feud. Esau's sale of his birthright implies his blessings. He and his progeny were at odd with Jacob and descendants. At Kadesh, during their match to Cannan, Moses Sook the right of passage through Edom (Num. 20:14-18) the word of the King of Edom in response to the plea provoked more opposition. Though Jacob and Esau met and settled their differences years ago (Gen. 32:33). Esau's

descendants were still perpetuating the old family feud. Years later when Jerusalem was attacked the Edomites assisted the enemy and even stopped the Jewish fugitives from escaping (Obad; Ps. 137:7)

1.2.2 Lessons Learned

i. It pays to be thoughtful and learn to do the needful

ii. Do not engage old family feuds. Always forgive and possibly, forget

iii. Do not live for your stomach, live for God and his purposes

iv. Retain your status as a goldly child

v. Resist the temptation to live for the moment think ahead. Questions like “would what I am presently doing produce good results?” “Would I rejoice if I am openly identified with all my actions?” Do not hold God’s promises and blessings in contempt use them to make a positive development of yourself.

vi. Do not perpetuate old family feuds. Settle your difference once and for all.

1.2.3 Laban's Obstructions

To obstruct is to block, baricate, or seize someone else's progress. Laban arrested Jacob's growth when he sojourned with him for 20 years. God's transformation of Jacob's character begins when he engaged service with Laban in the region of Northwestern Mesopotamia; where there was a settlement of kindred people in Paddan-Aram (Efrid 50). Jacob agrees to serve Laban for seven years in exchange of Rachael (Gen. 29:14b). In the second, after being tricked into marrying Leah, he worked yet for another seven years for Rachael (29:21-30) severe servitude characterized Jacob's exile in Haran.

In this scene, it is used seven times (29:15, 18,20,25,27 (twice), 30) always with reference to Jacob serving Laban to wed Laban's daughters. Jacob had entered a dark world of slavery at Laban's instance, a foreshadow of Israel slavery in Egypt to be treated in the following chapter. Laban outwits Jacob and reduces family to an economic arrangement (cf. 25:23,27:29,37,40); a medium of money making. Daughters became object of making money.

Laban's character is flat. He is ever the selfish schemer and a cheat.

i. Trickish and cunning. He duped Jacob but Jacob is ever developing
ii. He takes advantage over Jacob's circumstances.
iii. He is insensitive to human rights
iv. Disrespect for family.

In spite of all these frustrations, Jacob stood strong and gained several folds in his servitude to Laban:

i. Gained experience as a shepherd for 20 years; forming basis for his subsequent riches. Godly people gain from hardship and adversaries. Godly people should not look at their present hardship, but aim at what would eventually come out of their suffering.
ii. Builds his family in servitude and hardship. Four wives: Leah, Bilhah, Zilphah and Rachael. The four mothers bore 12 children; eleven sons and one daughter. It is noteworthy to highlight the fact that Laban's daughters were nagging wivies to Jacob as the phrases "Give me children" (Rachael), and "I have hired you" (Leah) illustrate. Both statements reveals a dysfunctional home without a spiritual leader (Waltke 409)

iii. He gained access of livestock and flocks of sheep.

iv. Most importantly he was transformed into a humble son that will rear and lead a noble family where priests, Judah and David and subsequently Jesus would be bore.

However, Jacob embraces the philosophy of "fight fire with fire" and when in Rome do as Romans but his success comes not from his folly but God's grace. Finally Laban made peace and pact with Jacob (31:44-45)

1.2.4 Joseph's sibling

The plot of this scene is driven by conflict. There is devastating division of Jacob's household in two segments: Joseph hated by his brothers (Gen. 37:2-11) and Joseph sold by his brother (37:12-36).

Hatred and selling into slavery characterize the motifs of the story. The first part sets the stage for the horrendous crimes in the second by relating four brief events that capture the fathers troubling favoritism towards Joseph and the terrible tension growing between Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 37:2)

Jacob made a royal robe for Joseph (37:3-4), and Joseph declares his dual dreams (37:5-11). Given these events

the tension mounts up till the escalation in the second part with the brother's cry "Here comes the dreamer! Come now lets kill him (37:19-20)". At the series peak the brothers sold Joseph to the Midian Merchants for twenty shekels of silver. This action also, pictures a weak, wounded and dysfunctional family. The firstborn's impotence, inability to rescue his brother is clear. The strange disappearance of Joseph was reported to his father who grieved uncontrollably. We can see that the keywords in this episode are: "hate" (37:4,5,8) and "Jealous" (37:11). This is a serious hatred. This is the fourth generation of Abraham uniting by flesh and circumcision but inwardly divided by carnal hatred intending to kill Joseph's god-given gift of dream.

The narrator portrays each character's weakness: Jacob loves Joseph but utterly insensitive to his siblings emotions (37:3-4). He seem to be unaware of the hatred he incites by his favoritism. He sends Joseph to the brothers who later sold him. Reuben is a failed leader. All the brothers are driven by evil (37: 2,4,8,11,20,28,31). They are thoughtless, reckless and jealous. Joseph is morally good but immature and ill-mannered. His gossiping, boasting, and robe parading inflamed his brother's hatred against him. Sternberg states

"God's future agents and mouthpiece in Egypt could hardly make a worse impression on his first appearance: spoiled brat, tellbearer, braggart" (qtd in Waltke 498). Also it was unwise for Jacob to show a respect of persons. This may have been why the sons had little respect for him (vs. 31-34)

Joseph's destiny is sealed when he tells his dreams to his brothers. They explored all efforts to kill him and his dreams. But his arrival in Egypt is the first step in his exaltation.

1.2.4,1 Observations

i. Conflicts are dangerous between brothers and siblings.
ii. Divisions are an unfortunate phenomena brothers should remain united
iii. Favoritism should be discouraged in our families.
iv. Gossiping and brattling should be discouraged among siblings
v. Moderation and maturity should be practiced in exercising our gifts, be they spiritual. Hard truths should be moderately communicated, especially in the contemporary religion and politics.
vi. Give everything to build a viable family.

vii. Firstborn should learn a sense of responsibility and accordingly, put it in practice.

viii. Hatred and jealousy should be eschewed in our families.

ix. Hatred and jealousy kick some people forward, and not backward, as in the case of Joseph.

1.2.5. Portiphar's Wife

Joseph's rise to a position of power followed a rough path. The hatred, jealousy of brothers and the exaltation in the masters house which subsequently turned sour. He was sold into slavery to an autocrat, serving in the house not in the field; winning the master's esteem; becoming the master's personal attendant; heading the entire household. This tremendous elavation is matched by yet, an escalation of conflicts.

The lustful desire of Portiphar's wife on Joseph make things extremely rough for the lad. Her desire to be in bed with him, her force accusation and finally, Joseph's imprisonment. With all these Joseph's fate wasseemingly endangered.

In all these trials God's providence was directing Joseph's life. He later rose to a higher position. There were multiple circumstances of maltreatment of Joseph of which he eventually overcome.

i. General evil (37:23)
ii. Hatred and malice (4-8)
iii. Envy and jealousy (11)
iv. Threats to his life (18-22)
v. Mockery and ridicule (19)
vi. Casting him in a pit (24)
vii. Treatment without palliation v.27; 42:21
viii. Kidnapping and selling into slavery (37:27-28)
ix. Portiphar's wife's implication (37:12ff)
x. God's intervention for Joseph (39:21-23). Though the brothers meant evil with Joseph God was for Him.

CHAPTER TWO:

OPPOSITION IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS

2.1 PHARAOH AND EGYPTIAN TYRANNY

Pharaoh is the principal character in the Egyptian maltreatment of the children of Israel in Egypt. Pharaoh's stubbornness begins when he rudely asked "who is the Lord that I shall obey him and let Israel go?" in response to the Lord's demand that Israel should go out of Egypt the house of bondage. Adding "I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go"(Ex. 5:2). This expresses the most despicable perception and response to the Hebrew God.

The people of God were in the house of bondage in Egypt for about 430 years and had experienced untold hardship of physical and mental labour. God prepared to let his people go and serve him. The new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph and his skillful services to Egypt refused to cooperate with Moses in allowing God's people go.

2.1.2 Egyptian Vipers

The biblical data presents Israel as becoming strong, fruitful, prolific and a powerful nation in the region of Goshen; the country of Ramesis (Ex. 1:7) (Rops 71). Half normadic, half settled, the children of Israel enjoyed a pleasant life. There was a miraculous multiplication of their population.

Abruptly, all was changed. The drums changed the music. “There arise a new king who did not know Joseph” (Ex. 1:8). There was no protection over them anymore. However, they multiplied in number, their persecution bagan. They were afflicted with forced labour.

The new king choose fear as his justifying motive. It is possible that the “sons of Israel” in the delta may outnumber their Egyptian overlords and use any opportunity to relocate to Palestine (10c). They were numerous enough to pose an obvious threat to the Egyptian Lords. They decided to endanger their prosperity (10a).

At first, the persecution took the moderate form of labour conscription. Large building operations were always going on in the land of the Nile, where cheap labour was in demand for Nile delta renovation (Durham 9). Apart from Israel, many foreigners were involved in this slavish service: Babylonians, Trojans, Negroes and others served the Pharaoh

as manual labourers. They were compelled to make bricks. They were exposed to the burning heat of the day, under the whips of taskmasters. They filled rush baskets with clay, mixed with this earth finelly chopped stra, filled the moulds, and finally, laid out thousands of bricks in line under the sun (72)

In all this exercise there was indeed nothing worse than human degradation and fatigue. In the decades that followed the worst happened to Israel. The Egyptians in a wave of nationalism and imperialism begin a brutish elimination of foreign elements in their land: Humiliation, forced labour, human fatigue and genocide all put together seriously endangered Israel circumstances in the diaspora.

Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill at birth all the male children of Israelites. When this attempt proved abortive, he ordered all the newborn of the hated people to be thrown into the Nile (72). The chosen race seemed to be doomed to extinction given this abhorrent treatment of humans. Yet this misery could not stem the growth of this people (Ex. 1:12)

The menance of Pharaoh took three phases

i. Plan A Workload

ii. Plan B Secretive murder of firstborns

iii. Plan C Genocide by drawning of the male infants

This practice, if practiced, would in time reduce the Hebrew workforce, but would also have ended population explosion and in due course would have exterminated the family of Jacob entirely. Plan C ironically becomes a catalyst for the arrival of the delivering Hero, Moses. (Durham 12)

Apart from the Pharaohs tyranny several other factors stand on the way of Israel as a choice nation of God a people whose wellbeing was at the heart of the creator. Mention must be made of the snakes of the Egyptian magictians that were produced to frustrate the shepherd rod of Aaron before Pharaoh and Israelites. Aaron's snake swallowed up all their snakes (Ex. 7:8-13). Yet Pharaoh would not allow God's people go. Nine plagues were afflicted on the Egyptians yet Pharaoh and his people remained hardened and stubborn that they still contended with the Lord. At the release of the 10th plague (Death of first sons) Pharaoh reluctantly allowed the people go. This is the extent to which people who choose to fight the divine cause can go! Even today our church and society still have leader who are against God and his delegates here on earth. This phenomena has a universal application. We have

multiple godless presidents in the past and current affairs of the world. Any leader that is leading outside the fear of God is opposing God. On their way the devil set loose evil to militate their match to the promised land: Hunger, thirst, seas, wild beasts and nations to stem them down, but in all instance they eventually occupied the land.

2.1.3 Philistines

The people of the promised land had numerous enemies. The Bible, indeed refers to so many that we cannot possibly mention all. Among them mention can be made of the Philistines who were established on the coast of the Mediterranean sea. About 1000 B.C there were only two rival races in Palestine-Philistines and Israelites; the Canaanites had been annihilated during the course of Israelites immigration. The Philistines were sea farers. They were pirates; people of the sea and also had a strong military tradition behind them. Morally, they were corrupt, as the story of Samson entails. Rameses III drove them back upon the southern coast of Palestine. Their ports were Ashdod, Ashkalon, and Gaza (Rops 109). They penetrated inland and

subjugated Sephela. They were heavily armed people in war. They learned the art of war from Crate and the civilization of Asia Minor. Their military experience surpassed that of Israel. They had good arms, chariots and efficient political organization. They were the inventors of printing (110). The Philistines were a threat to the peace of the children of Israel almost at all times, during the latter's match to settle down, and during their settlement, the former were a thorn in the flesh of the elect nation. Biblical narrative is replete with these encounters.

3.1.4 The Bedouin Tribes

The Israelites smelled danger from the north east and south of Canaan namely, from a group of natives collectively called the Bedouin tribes of the semitic origin, who came from the fertile lands (Rops 111). From the north the opposing tribes centered at Damascus; while in the south: the Amonites and the Moabites were in severe opposition to the Hebrews. They opposed them, with a jealous hostility. This antagonism was ever unending. In the south Edom was never willing to forgive Israel for the unwillingness to end their old family feud. These nomads severally attached Israel. Finally, in the

extreme south of the Negeb, the Amalekites, who were robbers by profession, a mixed race of unstable tribes often made numerous raids northward.

Such were the multiple enemies of Israel. All the people who splited in the times of the patriarchs the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Perizzites and the Jebusites had merged into a homogenous unit during this time. The Bible refers to them sometimes as Canaanites; sometimes as Amorites. They all opposed the chosen people of God.

3.1.5 The Golden Calf Episode

The making of the golden calf expresses gross failure and disrespect to the Lord on the part of the Israelites within a short time. When Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, the congregation gathered and requested Aaron to make gods that would lead them from Sinai to the Promised Land. They were highly impatient to Moses' prolonged absence of forty days and forty nights (Ex. 24:18) on Sinai. They needed these gods to take the place of Moses who is given credit for leading them up from Egypt. Aaron demanded for golden earings from them which they sourced from their wives ears. Out of these, Aaron fashioned a calf to replace Moses (32:4c). To this idol Aaron built an altar. They

worshipped it, offered burnt offering, peace offering and they "sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play". (v6)

This is Israel's first disobedience after the solemnization of the covenant at Mount Sinai. The people have corrupted themselves (v.7), turned aside quickly from God (v.8) made a golden image, worshipped it and sacrificed to it. The Israelites have been stiff-necked (v.9) (Dake 156). This is a very clear example of backsliding and falling off from God and grace, and having ones name erased from the book of life. This rebellion attracted several punitive measures:

The first punishment Israel received as a result of this sin was a furious one, indication of the dreadful nature of their sin. Moses burned up the calf grounded it to powder mixed it with water and made the people drank out of it (v.20).

The second punishment was the execution of 3,000 people by the Levites (25-28). Since the children of Israel were out of control they were executed in a large number.

The third punishment was that the people were plagued because they made and worshiped the calf. Their sin was critical and presumptions therefore, they were plagued.

1.6 NADAB AND ABIHU

We have just finished discussing the construction of the golden calf by Aaron in Exodus 32. The editor(s) of the Pentateuch does not pass judgment for or against him in the text. On several times, the Israelites are punished for their rebellion. In Leviticus 10:1-19 we encountered Nadab and Abihu Aaron's children who engaged a dubious officiation of sacrifice. They use an unauthorized fire before the Lord. As these priests acted contrary to the command of the Lord, the fire of the Lord consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

Their faults:

i. They offered unauthorized fire (v.1)

ii. They got drunk on duty (v.8)

iii. Contempt for holy things (v.10)

Even today people are introducing strange approaches to the worship of the Lord. The physical aspect is surpressing the spiritual aura of worship in the church today. Use of alcohol is pushing many servants of God to the edge in service. Most of the mistakes being made in the church today are caused by drunkenness. Under alcoholic duress, Nadab and Abihu introduced a strange fire. Many strange doctrines-Nudity in the church (indecent dressing) emphasis on money,

unauthorized music, inordinate emphasis on miracles, veneration of the cleric and other strange teachings. The Lord immediately punished them for their contempt.

Aaron was adversely affected by this act:

i. The act silenced Aaron (v.36)
ii. He was banned from mourning the death of his children (v.6)
iii. He was restricted movement (v.7)

Stubborn children always endanger their parents. We should teach our children responsibility in life and worship attitude. Lack of proper up-bringing in our homes is wreaking critical frictions in our homes, the church and the society.

CHAPTER THREE:
REBELS IN THE TUMULTUOS TIMES TO THE PREIOD OF THE MONARCHY.

Each epoch in the history of mankind encountered its challenges. The primeval society, the patriarchal period, and the exodus times struggled with various elements in the society that wanted to frustrate the plan of God for man's peace on earth. Now the author will survey some turbulent figures who disturbed the peace of mankind in the period of the settlement, tagged in the biblical parlance of *Tumultuous times* to the period of the *monarchy*. To the fore front of this research segment, appears Balak of Moab.

3.1 BALAK OF MOAB

The story of Balak; the king of Moab covers four chapters of the book of number (22-25). This story represents one of the fiercest opposition offered to the children of Israel to stop their advancement. Balak was afraid of Israel after seeing others so easily destroyed by them, so he schemed to get the nation cursed by Balaam hoping then, they could be defeated. He called upon the invisible powers to stop the advance of Israel.

In Padan-Aram, a land with multiple religions lived a magician by the name of Balaam (Rops 90). The story of Balaam is one of the most interesting stories in the Bible. He is a subject of controversy. Many think he was a mere soothsayer used by God temporary, but the opposite is true; that he was a genuine prophet of God until he finally betrayed Israel for reward (Dake 298). The characters in this story are Moab, Midian, Balak and Balaam. They dominate the next 4 chapters of Numbers (22:1-25:18) being mentioned 116 times (Dake) Moab was the son of Lot (Gen. 19:37), and Midian was the son of Abraham (Gen. 25:2). Balak was a Moabite (Nu. 22:4), and Balaam was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, the son of Isaac (Gen. 36:31-32). He had a reputation for making predictions that were fulfilled (22:6).

He was placated with money to curse Israel (22:7,17,37). But his prophecy was based on his contact with God, not demons and he was faithful God would tell him what to say. God forbade Balaam from cursing Israel because they are already blessed (v.12)

Balak would not give up easily. He sent more princes than before, more honorable and with greater rewards (v.15-17). Yet Balaam refused to go beyond the world of Jehovah for

any amount of reward (v.18). Later on God saw the pressure on him; his struggle and willingness to go and finally, granted him permission to go. All efforts Balak made to coerce Balaam into cursing Israel proved abortive-pressure, consistency, reward, intimidation, appeals with all these, Israel was not cursed.

In all of Baalaam's oracles he exalted Israel's power and foretold disaster for all her enemies. Later on as Israel abandoned herself to debauchery, the temple prostitutes and the daughters of Moab invited them to sacrifice to their gods (Nu.25:1) which they did and, were plagued by God, 24,000 of them were killed. Several characteristic features of our enemies stand out from this narrative:

i. Tendency to block the progress of God' people by all means is an oldest satanic ideology.
ii. Call on invisible powers to stop the pupose of the church was initiated long ago.
iii. Use of money to get their way from God's delegates.
iv. Use of the most influential associates to achieve their aim-Moab, Midian, and Balaam the famous prophet

v. They never give up easily

vi. They know their craft. Can tempt one at his weak spot.

3.2 REBELLION AGAINST MOSES (NUMBERS 16)

Rebellion has a contagious effect. Starting with the three insolent brutes, the rebellion against Moses exacerbated into a rise up of 253 Israelites that confronted Moses (Nu. 16:2). Korah, Dathan and Abiram wanted more authority in the congregation and contended that Moses and Aaron had too much, and bent on to minimize him.

All the three sought to exalt themselves and demote Moses and Aaron who held enviable positions in Israel's religious ministry. The rebellion spread from these 253 men, all famous in Israel until 14,700 died (v.49), besides the original three rebels, their families (v.29-34) and the 250 princes (v.35), They were struggling for leadership position. Korah felt he would love been on top of Elizaphan who was of the younger branch of Kohathites and not the other way round (3:27,30). Korah wanted to win the priesthood for himself and kinsmen (v.10). Being a Reubenite, they were discontented because the birthright had been taken away from them and they had not been given what they considered

their proper place among the tribes. This design was hidden under the pretext that all the people were holy and should be equal. They levelled multiple accusation against Moses and Aaron (16:3) thus:

i. Moses and Aaron exercised more authority than they have the right to (v.3)
ii. Over claim to holiness above others
iii. They have brought them out of the good land of Egypt to kill them all in the wilderness (v.13)
iv. Moses and Aaron are not faithful to their promises to the people (Dake 328)

These false accusations greatly enraged Moses who then, plainly set the test that would prove God's choice (vs.6-19). Korah accepted the challenge knowing that the congregation is behind him. He thought that God would go along with the peoples choice; the majority (v.19), but in this he was wrong. God made the choices, not the people; and he was to teach them that this must always be the case. The choice of leadership position and appointments is God's. It was the office of Aaron that Korah sought.

Upon all the noise they were making Moses was not guilty of any charge before them. He has not taken one single

ass from them and has never hurt any one of them (v.15). In the test, Moses requested them to bring a censer each and put incense in them. Altogether there were 254 if Dathan and Abiram were present (v.17), all others were commended to separate themselves from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (v.24).

This was to avoid others being consumed (v.26). The wives and the children that joined the rebellion died with the rebels, the earth opened up its mouth and swallowed them up and their houses, and the men that supported them (v.32). In addition, fire came up from heavens and consumed the 250 men that offered incense (v.35). The congregation kept murmuring against Moses and Aaron over the killing of Korah and his company of followers. The Lord decided to wipe 14,700 disobedients.

Hard Lessons learned:

i. Rebellion is contagious
ii. Avoid power tussle
iii. Those in power should not be envied
iv. Opposition most at times result to loss of lives and property. 14,953 people and property were lost into God's anger at the Israelites.

v. Old family feuds should be buried and forgotten

vi. False accusations over our leaders can make them angry

vii. Following the multitude over baseless argument is dangerous

viii. The Lord can use any natural feature to punish the sinner. One can never disobey the Lord and get away with it.

3.3 MONARCHIC NOTERIETY

This period was ushered in with the rejection of God's rule by Israel. When God was leading them under judges they demanded for a Monarch who would rule them like other nations. God through Samuel told them what it would be like if they get a new king (1Samuel 8:10-18). They insisted that God should give them a king who would lead them in wars and political affairs. God gave them Saul as their first king.

3.3.1 DERANGED KING SAUL

Saul was made king of Israel at the age of 30years and he ruled for 42 years. These years were marked by a series of acts of disobedience on the part of the king, and unprecedented political tulmoil for the entire nation, and eventually, God's anger.

His first mistake was intrusion into the priest's office and sacrificing a burnt offertory when Samuel delayed a little bit (1Sam. 13:6-10). When he had finished the function, Samuel appeared and rebuked him. If men could only learn to obey God and be patient until he sends help in times of need, it would be a great lesson learned. Saul's excuse was that the people were scattered from him and Samuel had not come as promised and their enemies (philistines) might come down to Gilgal upon him before he could make supplication (vs. 11-12). Similar excuses always come from some bad people who force themselves and their efforts in religion (or service) without being divinely called, purged and prepared for the work. Sometimes church leaders might question someone's call into a particular office but people may pressurize them into electing such a person. Majority of the problems the church faces come from the mistakes of these evil men.

Saul was clearly backslidden-cold to God, lukewarm in Zeal, impatient in spirit, self-sufficient in mind, carnal in conduct, and fearful of the future (Dake 519). The second mistake Saul made was his disobedience to the Lord's command to "attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them…put to death men and

women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys" (1Sam. 15:3). Contrary to the Lord's command Saul spared Agag the king of the Amalekites, and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat of calves and lambs and everything that was good (15:9). In the above six items Saul failed God-living the king (Agag) alive (vs. 8-9), sparing the best of sheep, and cattle, the fat of calves and lambs, and everything that was good. This was in direct disobedience of God's command which directed him to utterly destroy all that the Amalekites had, not sparing any man, woman, infant sucking cattle, sheep, camel, or ass (vs.1-3).

Saul is a selfish and covetous man. He saved the beautiful and useful things for himself. It becomes pertinent for God to change his purpose or plans concerning Saul (v.11). God always will change His plan for an individual or a race if he is faced with their refusal to obey him.

When Samuel saw him, he declared falsely that he had obeyed the commandments of God (v.13). This is the second time Saul claimed obedience (v.13,20). He lied that he obeyed the Lord and utterly destroyed the Amalekites. Man could lie but animals could not (v.14). Thrice, Saul blamed his failure on the soldier (v.15,21) and the people (v.24). Trouble makers

always lay responsibility on others. But he was judged above and not the people (vs. 11,16-19,23,25-31). Though he gave flimsy reason for taking the spoils as to sacrifice to the Lord, Samuel gave the real reason for Saul's disobedience as pride and power drunkenness (v.17) obedience in humility is the chief end of all true religion; rebellion and stubbornness are a manifestation of failure. This is what Saul did. All what Saul did result to his rejection by God as the king of Israel (v.26). This is the fate of those who rebel against God.

3.3.2 Saul's violence at David

Any painting of Saul's character would be imperfect without hacking to his relationship with David. Saul's numerous encounters with David serve a clear and complete depiction of his (Saul's) nature as a mischievously corrupt monarch. Some of the instances are revisited to show how far a wicked human being can go to frustrate the purposes of God. Lunatic frenzy, envy, anger, hatred, covetousness, animosity and bitterness characterized his approach to the one who will succeed him as the king of Israel.

3.3.2.1 The Gathian Giant

The first encounter between David and Saul was at the occasion Goliath challenged the armies of Israel (1Sam.17). He

is described as a champion of war! Nine feet tall. This giant was fully dressed as a competent warrior. Put on a bronze helmet, wore a coat of scaly armor weighing 5000 shekels. He protected his legs with heavy bronze greaves and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. (His spear was very huge and its iron point weighed 600 shekels vs. 4-7).

A pointer to Saul's incompetence as a king is indicated in his failure to respond to the giant's challenge to the ranks of Israel when "he said". This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight for forty days the Philistine was doing this twice a day (1Sam. 17:16). He did this for 80 times!

It happened that Jesse sent his last son David with supplies to visit with his brothers that were military personnel's with Israel's army: Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah. When David left the supplies with the keeper of supplies and ran to the battle lines to greet his brothers, Goliath came out as usual to shout his pollutive words at Israel in his hearing. When this happened, Saul took to hiding 3km away from the scene (v.24). David also heard what Saul promised to anyone who would kill the warrior: riches, Saul's daughter in marriage, and freedom from taxes. These were the incentives.

David took courage and assured the king that he will defeat the Philistine (v.32). After several expressions of doubt Saul eventually allowed David to fight Goliath but dressed David in his own tunic, coat of armor and a bronze helmet on his head and a sword. David was unable to move in this code (v.38, 39). But with his staff, five stones a shing and faith he defeated the giant. The following can be observed about the king

i. Ever ready to try anything now (v.31), because the Lord has left him, even a boy of David's age compliments his security.
ii. Saul is a doubtful king. Doubts David's ability to challenge the giant.
iii. Lacks faith in God. Would not believe the way God would deliver Israel and give them victory.
iv. Overwhelmed with fear, not exactly of God, but of humans and circumstances.
v. Belief in carnal weaponry.

3.3.2.2 David in a Lunatic Court and as a Fugitive.

The episode of David and Goliath serves a bridge that connects David and Saul. After that encounter, David was transported to the king's court. Since the spirit of God

departed from Saul an evil spirit possessed him afflicting him with a mysterious malady (insanity). The same spirit manifested jealous hatred against David following the women's praise of David (1Sam. 18:8). It moved him to slay David.

While David was playing the harp to sooth the king's soul, he hurled the spear at David in order to pin him to the wall (18:10-9) David escaped this javelin two times in the king's court. This is the first and second of the 21 attempts to kill David. The third attempt Saul made to kill David was the trap of giving his daughter Merab to him so that he will use his daughter to get him easily (18:17-19). The fourth attempt to kill David was the gimmick to use his daughter Michal as a snare to him (18:21). The fifth attempt was his request for Jonathan his son, and his servants to take David's life (19:1-7). Sixth time was again, in his house to pin him with his javelin (18:8-10), this time too David escaped the pinning. The seventh attempt Saul sends messengers to David's house to watch him and kill him in the morning (19:11). This time Michal saves David's life from being executed (19:12). The eighth time the king again sends messengers to produce David that he may slay him but they did not see him, they saw an

image that Michal constructed in the bed (19:15,16). The ninth, tenth and eleventh times were (1Sam. 19:17-21): Saul confronted Michal and asks her why she could send his enemy David away? (v.17). This time David escaped to Ramah and stayed with Samuel. Both of them, Samuel and David fled with their lives to Naioth (v.18). Again, their movement to Naioth was disclosed to the king who deployed soldiers to track David down for execution. The move too again, proved abortive. Saul's messangers saw the company of prophets prophesying, with Samuel leading the band, the spirit of God came upon them and they also prophesied (v.20). When Saul was told the strange incident, he detached yet another delegation of messengers and they also prophesied (v.21). The king sends messengers again the third time and they joined the same wagon prophesying (v.21c).

The king himself went to Ramah to confirm what was happening to his messengers at the vicinity of Naioth. The same spirit of God that was upon the messenger came upon Saul and he began to prophesy until when he came to Naioth, he pulled off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel lying down naked all that day and all that night (v.24). Twelve attempts are made so far to kill David. Three times by

throwing a spear at him. (18:11; 19:10), two times by making marriage arrangements with a plan for the Philistines to kill him (18:17-30), six times by sending soldiers after him, and once by Saul going after him in Ramah (19:1, 11-24). Was this not enough proof that the king was highly iniquitous? He wanted David to possibly die. This becomes crystal clear where he chides his son Jonathan thus "As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me for he must die" (20:31).

The demon that possessed Saul made him determined to kill the best man in his kingdom. Vipers destroy the best of people! Do not be surprise when at all your best and someone is still fighting you in your service. The thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth attempts are recorded in 1Sam. 20:24-54 where he organized 2 meals but David was all absent. Then he insisted Jonathan must produce David. All the attempt failed and David fled from king' Saul with the help of Jonathan, a true friend (20:42). The sixteenth time Saul seeks David's life was at Keila, where he was told David went. The king plotted to destroy the city for the sake of David, but David heard the plot and left the city (23:15). The seventeenth time was in the

wilderness of Ziph but God did not deliver David into his hands (23:13, 14). The eighteenth time was the Ziphite's betrayal telling Saul that David was hiding in their habiliments (23:19). He fled with his life to Maon (v.24). The nineteenth time was in Maon but David still escaped death (v.24-26).

Twentieth attempt: Wilderness of Engedi. David's twelve years as a fugitive from Saul had taken him to the wilderness of Engedi. Engedi was located near the salt sea, 35 mails to Jerusalem. It is a beautiful desert area with a spring from dead-sea raising up to the height of 600 feet into the desert. The stream it forms is crystal whitish. There are five beautiful waterfalls and several pools of white and pure water. The foliage in Engedi are good looking. The desert here also has multiple oasis for recreational opportunities.

It was here that David and a band of 600 men who ran from Saul to find respite in him were hiding. David and his men could not rest here. In 1 Samuel 24:1,2 Saul was told again that David is hiding in this wilderness. He took 3000 men in pursuit of David and his men. You can see the fury in Saul by choosing 3,000 men ÷ 600 the sum is 5. Five of Saul's men against 1 of David men! This alone indicates the rage that was in the king against David. Instead of concentrating on his

search for his victim we are told “Saul went in [the cave] to relieve himself” (v.3). What Saul did not know was that David and his men were already inside the cave where he went to defeacate (24:3b)!

David’s men whispered to him “This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish (24:4a)”

i. We have not seen where this was written elsewhere in the Bible.
ii. Avengers always wait for an opportunity their enemy is vulnerable to strike
iii. Your friends always encourage you to revenge your enemy, giving you good reasons you should do so.

That would not work in the case of David. Verse 4b tells us “then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.” He obeyed and took up his knife towards the cave’s entrance where Saul was defeacating. Every one of them might have adjusted their sitting position to hear the king’s last screaming! Nobody heard it. A short while David emerged with his knife without blood stains! “What have you done? How? David raised at them a corner of Saul’s robe”

Why wouldn't David kill Saul when Saul mobilized all the resources of Israel as a nation in search of David's life for 12 years? Why would David spared his life when he was vulnerable? David was afraid to kill Saul because he was the anointed of God. He was afraid of God. Respect a soldier for who he is. Respect a policeman for who he is. Respect a judge for his office as a judge, no matter their deeds. Today people wants to touch the anointed, touch the pupil of God. We treat the sacred sacrilegiously today because we reduce God to a pet! We reduce Christ to a risible redeemer, the church to a business institution at all levels. David severally spared Saul's life because he was God's anointed. Compare what he later attempted doing to Nabal. He took 400 warriors to extinguish a single household! That is taking a gun against a croach!

David discouraged his men from killing Saul (24:7). One should understand the situation of these men for insisting upon Saul's execution at Engedi.

Probably the king cut them wounds that will never be healed the rest of their lives. Learn to forgive to this level those who wronged you in marriages, and other social and official relationships. Have the heart of David. Forgive multiple times as Jesus teaches (Mt. 18:3)

Twenty-first/ last attempt of Saul to kill David. For 21 times king Saul seek to kill David all in vain. The last time the Ziphites are betraying David (cf. 1Sam. 23:19). They went to Saul and told him David is hiding in the hills of Hakilah (26:1). Again Saul detached a troop of 3000 men in pursuance of David camping at a hill. When David heard of this he could not believe for Saul promised never to follow him during their encounter at Engedi.

When he sent his spies they confirmed the truth of the matter. He himself went to the spot where they were camping and confirmed the report. The light of the moon highlighted where the king himself was resting. David risked himself to show Saul that he holds no grudge against him by going straight to where Saul was sleeping (9-12) "the Lord had put them into a deep sleep". Saul was lying inside the camp with the army encamped around him. (v.5). David's men took the Javelin and the water container of the king. David stood on the top of the hill and rebuked Abner for operating a loose security on the king. David again confessed his innocence before the king. The king accepts responsibility for his actions. King Saul in all these 21 attempts to kill David were in vain. The Lord was with David and had better plans for him and

wouldn't allow anyone to twist the plans. Nobody can change the course of your life if the Lord do not permit it. One more thing needs mention about Saul's wickedness before treatment of him comes to a close.

3.3.2.4 Saul's Brutality at Nob

After the incidence at hill of Hakilah where David spares the King's life the second time (1Sam. 26), David decided to flee with his life (27:1). He choses the land of Philistines as his refugee location. As a Bible reader, I wonder why he could choose the land of Philistines where he probably would be on the top of the most wanted people among the Philistines, the home of Goliath whom David killed. This serves to prove the level of bitterness David received from his home king. He would rather prefer to live among his normal enemies than where he deserves no maltreatment but is receiving real hell. David chose to live among the Gathians. This will provide for him a temporary respite from the king. He wanted to live a wide distance from the king.

But them, he had a big problem of road supplies. He therefore makes a good use of his senses to approach someone who would show compassion. Knowing very well that priests are good at handouts, he met Ahimelech, son of

Ahitub the high priest at Nob with a gargantuan lie to solicit supplies from him. He told the priest the king has sent him on a super-secret mission. And that the priest should give him loaves of bread and whatever he can give preferably a weapon (21:2,3,8). Ahimelech gave David consecrated bread and the sword of Goliath (vs.6,9). That very day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath (v.10). Saul heard that David has fled him to Gath with the supplies of food and weaponry by the chief priest Ahimelech. This was communicated to him by Doeg the Edomite (22:9).

Saul becomes berkerk at Ahimelek for sponsoring David's runaway. This incurred abstruse anger at the priest and the entire colony of priest at Nob: "You will surely die, Ahimelek, you and your father's whole family" (22:16). So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down, he killed 85 men who wore the linen ephod. He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep (18-19)

Should one allow the devil to use him to fight and frustrate the cause of the Lord? This is exactly how far king Saul can go. He can wreck profound havoc on the religious, political and business economy of God. One can highlight the awful traits of

king Saul from this analysis. There are multiple pointers to his errors.

i. Rebellion against God is a risk against one's life and position

ii. Contempt at the sacred incurs wrath

iii. Practice of patience is an asset

iv. It is dangerous to force your efforts into religious matters

v. Lying is a serious vice in religion

vi. Shifting of blames is a prominent feature of the disobedient.

vii. Failure in promise. They promise without fulfilling; both to God and human leaders and colleagues. Saul promise giving his daughters to David but would not fulfil in details. Even tax exemption was not fulfilled

viii. Vain glory seeking. He gave David his armor to claim glory on account of David's victory of the giant.

ix. Tendency to try anything, employ anything to wreck havoc is their prominent feature. Saul gave

out two of his daughters to get David. He could even try a teenager David to win victory.

x. In as much as they are self-confident they are still doubtful.

xi. Carnality is their attribute

xii. Blood thirstiness plagues them

xiii. They never give up until they overcome their victim

xiv. When vipers engage fight they do not care the grass; Saul used his dear son Jonathan, his daughters: Merab and Michal to destroy David.

xv. Viscious humans can sometimes be vulnerable (2Sam. 24:3). They are subject to human limitations. It is risible to notice a strong wicked king bending to the demand of nature only to be exposed to his enemies!

xvi. They are garrulous (1Sam. 26:17b, 21,25). But their words are not from the heart.

xvii. Even genuinely godly personalities sometimes flee from them (1Sam. 27:2)

3.4 ABSALOM: A WAYWARD SON

A paraphrase of the opening of one of the worship songs in NKST Church goes:

Having a rebellious son brings anxiety and hardship for the owner. Many people are suffering from wayward children and hence discouraged from bearing children anymore. This is exactly what Adam and Eve did to God (disobedience) and God regretted even making man (Zuzu).

This paraphrase precisely captures the experience king David had for having as his son, a "beautiful" and "popular" youth by the name of Absalom. He was indeed a problem not only to the immediate family but to the entire nation his father served as a Monarch. Absalom is one of the Bible characteristic youth that wanted his own way, followed his own capricious and harbored depraved inclinations.

The Bible introduces us into this youngman in a rather, nasty note. His prominence in the Holy writ commences with a hideous act of killing as prohibited in commandment six of the Hebrew code of law (Ex. 20:13). Absalom murdered his step brother for raping his sister Tamar (2Sam. 13:4; 28,29). This act took him to hiding in Geshur, his mother's kinsmen (v.38) He had been there for 3years until Joab persuaded David through the woman of Tekoah to allow him back (vs. 4-24). What then, follows this ugly incidence is a description of Absalom's elegancy in a soaring terminology. He was on top in

terms of beauty in all of Israel (14:25a), that “from the top of his head to the sole of his foot, there was no blemish in him (v.25b)”. The weight of his hair per cut was 200 shekels (v.26c). In the modern measurement: 5 pounds or 213 kilograms; that is much of a hair development. In terms of family responsibility Absalom was a father of 3 sons and a daughter (v.27).

3.4.1 Silly Acts

The following acts characterize Absalom as a foolish son. A foolish person can be described as someone who is unable to think ahead. Doing things today that you will regret tomorrow. Foolishness is the inability to think ahead. Lacking common judgement. Acts of violence are native to insolent individuals. The following is what Absalom committed as his first deed to call his father’s attention-violence.

In order to call David’s attention to himself Absalom permitted his servants to set fire on Joab’s barley farm. Following this incident he was able to see Joab, his father’s commander and seek David’s audience which was inaccessible for the past five years: three in Geshur where he was banished as a result of his banishment for killing his brother Amnon, two in Jerusalem, after he come back from Geshur. Daivd was

56 years and Absalom 24 when this happened. The absence of communication and affection between a father and son was broken and the king could kiss his son (14:33). This kiss generated into an unfortunate conspiracy, one of the worst acts that can transpire between a son-father relationship among the oriental Hebrews.

3.4.2 Absalom's Rebellion Proper (2Sam. 15)

Absalom build up a large convoy of chariots, horses and 50 men to run before him. He rose up early in the morning and stood on the city gate persuading flatteringly all that came to the king for justice that he will temper justice since there is nobody on ground to attend to the people (v. 2-4).

He presented himself as a lover of the people kissing every man who came to him with this he win many hearts of the Israelites (5-6). He convinced the king that he is on leave for Hebron to worship the Lord (7-8), and here he made his political headquarters and set spies in all Israel and instructed them to declare him king when the trumpet sounds (v.10). 200 men were chosen from Jerusalem to support his gimmick. (v.1). One of these men was Ahitophel, David's confidant and cousellor. He was also the grandfather to Bathsheba, the late Uriah's wife whom David had committed sin with. He also

became ready to turn against Daivd to avenge harm done to his son's family.

Absalom's conspiracy given this solid planning was then strong enough to trouble David and cause him untold harm (v.12). The rebels proudly matched into Jerusalem to overtake the city (16:15-19). One of his generals Ahitophel advised him to go into his father concubines so that all Israel would know that he was abhorred by his father; then all his followers would be strong behind him (16:20-21). His agenda was accepted by almost all Israel (17:11-14), who were all mobilized for him. He now becomes prepared and bold enough to pursue his father David across Jordan and camped as far as the land of Gilead (17:24-26). His campaign against David extended to Mounth Ephraim where the wayward son Absalom was killed thus ending the pride and the foolishness of Absalom (18:1-18). There are several good lessons for the youths from this scene.

3.4.3 Viable Lessons for Naughty Children

i. Wisdom; ability to think ahead is recommended for all the young one's. Do today what you will smile for in the end. Absalom's decision ended him up badly. He ended

in a shame though, for some time he seemed to be successful and seemingly smart in his actions.

ii. Do not spend your lifetime indulging in evil plans. Some viewers of this episode reason that it just took a short time for Absalom to contemplate this conspiracy, but the nature of the whole movement despises this view. This involved years but in the end it didn't pay the son. He wasted his years, influence, energy and resources for a plate of gabbage!

iii. Like it was cautioned in chapter one of this volume: Do not pay heed to all the voices that are clamoring for your attention or ready to support your negative cause. Big names in Israel are behind all this madness but their carriers as army generals, counsellors and assistants ended up with this "young man". No mention was made of Ahitophel in the list of service men in Israel (compare 2Sam. 23:8-39).

iv. Your beauty is a good gift from God but it is other than God, and therefore, should be used for his glory; and not at his detriment.

v. Young persons should control their ambitions and wait upon their ripe time, lest they go into early graves.

3.5 TAUNTING YOUTHS (2kings 2:23ff)

We are examining yet the behavior of some youths towards a man of God and their reap. The foregoing section was about the bad behavior of Absalom a young man against his father. His personal foolish ambition led him to rebel against his father and he ended up in shame.

The youths that taunted Elisha in this text are identified as the adolescents "out of the city of Bethel (2Kings 2:23). The passage does not tell us why they could do this but that as Elisha was "walking along the way some youth…..jeered at him" (NIV), suggestive of ungodly scalawags roaming the street of Bethel. Golden Calf cult was practiced at Bethel (Dake 668). These youths might have been members of this cult and not worshippers of Jehovah. The reference to "bald head" could be interpreted as "worthless fellow". It was a term of contempt (Dake) it could amount to blasphemy of God, for they were jeering at him as a man of God. They were making fun of him. That he should go up like Elijah. On this account of Elisha's curse God sent bears to tear them into minute pieces. We should believe that they were worthy of this punishment.

We noted elsewhere in our study of Saul's menance against Israel and David that while Saul lied to God in respect of his assignment over the Amalekites that he destroyed all the people and animals, animals did not lie. (1Sam. 15:14) Totemism is not being introduced in this matter but a note on God's authority over man and beast should be made here.

Throughout the biblical chronicles,while man has always been stubborn to God, animals have scarcely disobeyed the will of the Lord. The snakes at the contest between Aaron and the vipers of the Egyptian Magicians obeyed the Lord and made a prey of the Egyptian snakes (Ex. 7:10-13). Balaam's donkeys speaks to stop his master from undertaking an abnoscious assignment to curse the family of God (Nu. 22:30). Jonah's fish obeyed God and made a prey of Jonah and also vomited him (Jon. 1:17; 2:10). Early is Genesis Noah sent a raven and a dove but they all obeyed (Gen. 8:6-8). An ass submitted itself for Jesus triumphal entry (Mt. 21:1-11). The lamb takes away human sin (Rev. 5:6-10).

In the youths' encounter with Elisha, 42 she bears tore 42 of the youths. Even though as man lives a life of constant disobedience to the will of God, animals are on a daily basis carrying out his commands mocking messengers of the Lord

and misusing the prophets, was one of the crying sins of Israel (2Chron. 36:16). This sin is perpetuated by town's men of boys and girls. Instead of a warm welcome Elisa was met with their scoffs. They gathered about him and mocked him as if he were a fool. Their behavior attracts a proportionate judgment. This is how violence at a God-anointed ends. Having come to a close of Monarchic stubbornness we will briefly consider at least one case of opposing God during the exilic period.

3.6 EXILIC LUNATIC

There are multiple instances of human rebellion against God during the exilic period. We can mention a few figures here such as Nebuchadnezzar, Darius' lieutenants and Haman. However, the instance of Haman fulfils our present purpose.

3.6.1 Haman the Grand Vizier (Esth. 3-7)

The story of Haman is of exilic setting. The Jews were exiled to Babylon. Mordecai was taken to Susa while Daniel and Ezekiel remained in Babylon. In Susa, Mordecai was in the service of king Ahasuerus together with Haman who was promoted over all the other nobles in the king's cabinet. Other prominent characters in the narrative apart from Ahasuerus,

Haman, Mordecai are: Vashti, Esther, Hathac, Esther's maid and the Jews. Others are Zeresh; Haman's wife and Haman's friends.

The narrative begins with Ahasuerus' rejection of Vashti as the queen due to her disrespectful demeanor to the king (Esth.1), which was quickly followed by Eshther's elevation to the position of the queen. Esther was a Jewish girl, albeit; a cousin to Mordecai, a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, who was also a palace servant to king Ahasuerus. We do know that it was according to God's purpose to favor Esther for the preservation of the Jews in their time so that the Messiah could finally come to restore man's salvation.

A great number of Jews were in Babylon including Daniel and Ezekiel, in Susa, Mordecai and Esther were influential. There was a large population of Jews in Babylon.

3.6.2 Haman's Plot to Destroy the Jews (Esth.3)

His only reason against Mordecai was strictly personal. While all royal official at the king's gate knelt down and greeted Haman, Mordecai wouldn't (3:2c). When Haman heard of Mordecai's disrespect he incurred Haman's wrath (v.5). The step he took to express his full wrath against Mordecai was to destroy, not only Mordecai but all of the

Jewish colonies in the kingdom of Ahasuerus in the pattern his ally prophet Mohammed did to the Jewish colonies of the Nadir, Kuraiza and the Kainuka in Medina (Mbachirin).

Haman hated the Jews with a burning passion. He was honor-drunk, he forgets essential principles when seeking honor. Since Mordecai would not give him that honor, he became a thorn in Haman's life and service. Mordecai was never willing to pay honor that was meant for God to a mere human. (Ex. 17:14-16). Since Haman was of Amalekites descent Mordecai would not worship him. Haman is called an Agagite (3:1), indicative of his desent from king Agag of the Amalekites.

He reported to the king that the Jews in his kingdom are disobedient to the laws of the land and it would serve the king better if they are destroyed. Haman then sponsored a decree for the destruction of the Jews. He was ready to invest 10,000 talents of silver for the execution of the decree. The king officially authorizes Haman to carry out the decree (v.10)

The decree was communicated to all the provinces within the kingdom with the order to kill and annihilate all the Jews; young and old, women and little children on a single day (v.13). This edict was to be used as law in every province and

made known to the people of every nationality so, they would be ready to carry out the destruction of the Jews on that single day (v.14).

Upon learning of this evil plan against the Jews Mordecai persudes Esther to help the situation (v.6-8). Esther at first expresses reluctance to act (v.4:9-10). Haman pressed harder on Esther (4:14). Esther did the needful; she summoned a prayer meeting (v.15,16). Mordecai organized a national fasting service for the Jews (v.17).

After the prayer meeting Esther acted promptly taking the step the Lord shows her to attack the Jewish problem in Susa. The Tiv proverb say "one pins a snakes the way it poses" Esther knows exactly Haman's need-honor. She request the king to participate in a banquet she has prepared. Very quickly the king ordered for the presence of Haman which was again quickly effected. Esther again vouched for the next banquet (5:6-7). Haman's spirit went up very high for this honor but was troubled seeing Mordecai at the king's gate (v.9). Worst of it all was his failure again to bow down before him. He controlled himself and left for his house.

When he got home he called his friends, his wife Zeresh and boasted the fact that he is wealthy, had children and

assets, his position in the kings harem. As if all these were not enough he is the only person the queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she organized. But Haman was still troubled having the Jew Mordecai sitting in the king's gate (v.9-13).

As things would always turn on for the good of the godly. The king stumbled over the good acts of Mordecai as he was going through the record book of his reign. That Mordecai had exposed one Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's official guards who planned to execute king Ahasuerus. This act went unhonored by the king, so the king learnt from his attendants. Looking for someone who would reward Mordecai, Haman had just entered (6:1-4). The king asks Haman what should be done for the man the king delights to honor. With his current interactions with the royal family he thought the cap fits him. Haman then produced an elegant prescription of what should be done to such a person: royal robe be put on him, and he rides the king's horse across the city streets with the announcement that "this is what is to be done for the man the king delights to honor" (v.9)! "Go at once" the king commanded Haman. Get all you have prescribed and do so in details for Mordecai, the Jew. Haman

did exactly what he said for his enemy (v.11), and returned to his house.

Haman related the whole story to his wife and friends who were responding to his predicament (v.13). In the course of their response the king's Enuchs came and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.

At the banquet the king again asked Esther what is her request. She petitioned the king to spare his people the Jews-who were condemned by Haman for annihilation throughout the world (7:3,4,7). The king became berserk and in rage, went to his garden while Haman was pleading with Esther for his life. One of the eunuchs by the name of Harbuna told the king Haman has already constructed a gallow of 75 feet high to hang Mordecai, on which the king ordered him to be hung.

This story is one of the most interesting episodes of an individual seeking to wreck a great havoc just for his personal interest of honor should this evil plan succeeds-Mordecai, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and all the Jews would have perished, thereby making the grand plan of salvation for human kind impossible. Thank God for intervening through Mordecai and Esther. Thanks God for using a heathen king Ahasurus for assesting this madness.

3.6.2 Notes on Haman

We can learn so many lessons from this drama. The following are some of them:

i. He was a selfish individual
ii. Had inordinate craving for honor that is due only God
iii. Lacks self-control. Haman could control all except himself
iv. The presence of the godly threatens the peace of the wicked.
v. The wicked makes excessive use of lie and falsehood to accomplish their evil purposes.
vi. Use of public funds to advance evil
vii. Courageous in evil assignments.
viii. Honor blindfolds its perpetrators
ix. The ungodly are thoughtless. Their deeds of wickedness attracts favor to the godly.
x. Haman was revengeful and barbarous
xi. Haman made a malicious representation of the Jews as vagabonds and dangerous people
xii. Haman was a self-deceiver
xiii. Proud men look at their faces in magnifying lenses

xiv. Thorns and snakes are in the way of the stubborn people

xv. One's feet can cast him into a net

xvi. The greatest merits and the best services are often overlooked and go unrewarded among men (Eccl. 9:14-16)

xvii. Problem makers always have a prosecutor, a judge and their conscience as witness.

In Haman's case Esther was his prosecutor, the king Ahasuerus was his judge and his very own consciences bore him witness against his conspiracy to exterminate the Jews (Esth. 7:6)

xviii. Caution should be taken when dealing with self-seekers, they will easily implicate you in an act you are ignorant of. The king ignorantly signed the edict commanding for the extermination of the Jews without studying the details. When he was exposed to the full story by Esther he felt fooled by Haman.

xix. Those that are proud when in power and prosperity become poor spirited when the contrary winds comes upon them (Esth. 7:7)

xx. The righteous shall laugh in the end

xxi. The enemies of God's chosen have often been trapped in their own craftiness. In the morning Haman was preparing himself for the robes and horse riding and Mordecai for the gallows: but the tables turned round; Mordecai has the crown, Haman the cross (Prov. 11:8; 21:18). The Lord says "I will cause my fury to rest upon them (the wicked) and I will be comforted (Ezek. 5:13)"

CHAPTER FOUR:
ACTS OF OPPOSITION IN WISDOM LITERATURE AND THE MINOR PROPHETS

These corpus of biblical literature contain numerous acts of violence to the will of God. However, for the present purpose, the book of Job, and the book that bears Jonah's name are selected for examination.

4.0 A LITERARY DECONSTRUCTION OF GENESIS CHAPTER 1 AND 2 BY JOB; IN JOB 3

4.1 A TERRIFYING PSALM

Job 3 is a psalm, a stylized poem that is metered just like any other Hebraic song. It contains some degree of repetitions and symmetries strophic structures. It is designed to convey a powerful message of Job's anguish.

However, nobody uses it in worship. A worshipping congregation makes use of the Davidic and other psalms in liturgies of prayer, singing and private times but no one uses Job 3. Neither have I heard someone preach from it. It "expresses raw grief, utterly hopeless terror, pain, sorrow, fear and rage" (Overduin 6).

We have heard so much about the amazing strength of the character of Job in the midst of his pain. Everything Job had, including his health, was lost. God allowed the devil to release real pain for Job. This nearly wasted him away. His marriage suffered too. Job's wife told him to curse God and die. Job refused. But his problem kept on. At a point Job decided he must see God face to face (23:3). He searched for him in vain (cf.vs 8,9).

The present enquiry is another dimension that Job took as a response to his personal agony. The attitude displayed at this stage of Job's difficulty is simply terrifying. Job engages the whole universe here. Job becomes a committed verbal

deconstructionist of the biblical, and both of the Jewish and the Christian celebrated doctrine of creation ex-nihilo. Brutality finds its wide range expression in Job 3. What God constructed in seven days, or in wide range of geographical eras as some teach, Job undid in a speech unit. God created with the use of his word. Job also, uncreated with his word. Bits by bits, God established the world. Job, also in a systematic fashion, bits by bits extirpates it. A passage that seeks to delete the substructure of the Bible, it is quite “simply overwhelming” (Overduin). Let us see how far Job's rage could go.

4.2 GOD'S CREATION DEFABRICATED

Job is very much aware of the foundational biblical assertion that God is the creator of the universe. Of the really seven creation passages in the Old Testament, Job's passage (Job 38-41) is the longest (cf. Gen. 1, Gen.2, Psalm104, Prov. 8:22-31, Eccl. 1:2-11, 12; 1-7 and excerpts from Isaiah 40:-55) (Creation). In Job 2:9 his wife tells him to curse God and die but Job refuses. In Job 3 he comes awfully close to cursing God. Now the walls of good talk and righteousness are crumbling

down. The servant of God is no more what he used to be as we can see in the subsequent happenings.

4.3 JOB'S ATTACK ON THE LIGHT (3:4-6)

To realize how cruel Job becomes one needs to see the way Job tries to reverse the creation account in Genesis 1. Job 3 defabricates Genesis 1. This makes this chapter scaring. Job does not curse God, but he does try to waste away the whole creation and to implicate the universe into his problem with the creator. The first reality that God's word brought into being was light (Gen. 1:3). The first thing that Job exerted a verbal attack upon was the light. In his destructive exercise, he followed the creation order of God! In Job 3:4 he said, “Let there be darkness”. Light or power (electricity) is very crucial in human economy. God knew this and the first thing he created for humanity was light. Light is a substance. It dispels darkness, we prefer it from darkness. The Psalmist appreciates it very well when he says darkness brings about weeping but light brings joy (Ps. 30:5). Light illumines our planet earth. It is responsible for the ongoing of most of the life's activities including plants and animals. Note the importance of light to a photo chemical process that is

responsible for the production of plants in the presence of sunlight and chlorophyll. Without light this scientific process would not take place resulting to un-productivity in plant or even extinction of plants' life. The implication of this disruption would be impossibility of human and animal life as well. Job knows that uncreating the light is accordingly, undoing human and animal life on earth. Job wanted to frustrate God's efforts at the fullness of the universe. Because Job experienced pains he wanted to rob God of his glory.

4.4 JOB ATTACKS THE SEPARATION MOTIF (1:4).

The second thing God did was to separate the day from the night (cf Gen. 1:4). He also separates the land and the sea. At this point Job says "Let day and night jumble up in form of a terdium quid so that they become indistinctive (cf Job 3:3-9). To mix light and darkness is a very dubious chemistry. It may result to neither darkness nor light (Erickson 729). This is accordingly making a serious confusion of the divine economy. Darkness is simply the absence of light. But if it were a reality, Job's conjunction would have resulted to a crude chemical equation like this common one: H2 + O2 – two parts of gas hydrogen and one part of the gas oxygen. This results in a liquid. This indicated a mixture of light and darkness, so that it

would neither be both. This design was to contradict reality. By this proposal Job wanted to stop all human activity; those activities in which he was engaged; farming, grazing, business, ceremonies and even worship which often depends on light which is preceded by a reasonable period of darkness. Separation is a fundamental concept both to creation and to Israel's existence (Gen. 3:15; 12:1; Lev. 20:24-25; Num. 8:14). God calls them to separate from the pagan nations (Waltke 69). Job is hereby collapsing this divine social order in his chemistry.

4.5 JOB ATTACKS HIS BIRTHDAY (3-10).

Job says, “I wish I had never been born or conceived”. He wishes he were a still born child or had died quickly afterwards. In v. 3 he says “may the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!'. He says “that day – may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it. Here he even invokes in the absence of his silent God, leviatan to help him curse his birthday. He even calls upon light to help him frustrate his birthday (3:4c). From vs 3-10, Job heaps attacks upon attacks on his day of birth. Job is turning the popular “Happy birthday to me” upside down and inside out.

He is saying “Unhappy birthday to me” (Overduin 7). He even wishes his birthday be removed from the calendar (3:6).

4.6 JOB ATTACKS LIFE (3:3)

In Genesis 1:26 God says, “Let us make man” but in Job 3:3, 11, 20, 23, Job says “I wish I was not there” “Let us not make man”. Job wishes he were dead at birth. In his critical hour, Job is displaying a serious disregard for life (cf. Ex. 20:13). This sage by this wish encourages murder and abortion which were serious moral issues among the Israelites. This pronouncement contradicts the righteousness claim for Job (1:1).

To wish to die as Job does here disrupts marriage. If Job were dead as his children, his marriage would have suffered. Job goes even beyond the first creation story to Genesis 2:18. Here he damages marriage as a structure of creation. He even underscores God's purpose for marriage – companionship, sex and children. In Genesis 1:28a God commanded humanity to increase. Job turns increase upside – down and inside – out. To wish to die is to wish to decrease. This wish deconstructs the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:28. The Biblical account of creation is pivotal for Old Testament theology; there are many rich theological issues embedded in

this narrative, Job systematically deconstructs them. Job attacks the entire purpose of God at its core!

4.7 JOB'S ATTACK ON THE SABBATH (3:26)

After the creative activities, God finally said, "I am going to rest. The Sabbath has come" (Gen.2:2-3). At the end of his speech, Job attacks the Sabbath. He uses four different words to emphasize that he is not going to rest –אַנְחָתִי my sighing, שַׁאֲגֹתָי my groanings, לֹא שָׁלַוְתִּי I am not quiet, and רָגְז turmoil (vs 24-26). He concludes that "he cannot relax" (V. 26). The Sabbath of God, correctly argues Ridderbos, is to be regarded as creation climax, and this rest was expressed by mentioning the seventh day (qtd. In Young 77). But in verse 26, Job would not reach climax in his grief.

This aspect of Job's brutality over God's creation is also awful. To destroy the Sabbath is to assume a continued destructive activity, it is an open attack on an important aspect of Hebrew religious practice. This also frustrates God's worship. This is a serious darkening of God's design with words. Job who lacks knowledge of where these foundations were sunk now stands out to destroy them. Job is given the freedom to challenge the traditional notions about God. No

Israelites would dare do and say what Job did and said. Job dismantles the whole creation including the Sabbath.

Why would Job drag the whole universe into this serious mess? Why on earth would he express this degree of wickedness over God's creation? Job was in pain, but he gave the reason that by the time of his extreme pain God was missing (Job 23). When Job wanted to take God to the court of justice, God was away from all the cardinal points (23:1-9)! There were no footprints of God on the sands of Uz. The only option left for Job was to waste his life and God's world (cf. 23:11). This portrays an improper attitude towards God and creation, especially from a great hero of faith like Job. These are the harshest words Job utters against himself in the entire book. They startle us. The friends too are shocked. They fear that his faith in God has melted into distrust (cf. 4:5-6). Why would the one who refuses to curse God become so hostile to him and the creation? The contrast between the Job of the prologue and the Job of the poem could not be sharper. The former Job "did not sin or charge God with wrong" (1:22), but this Job verbalizes his bitter feelings. This is a display of human limitation and impatience. Other nuances of Job's

personality and character can be analyzed in the subsequent segments of this write-up.

4.8 POOR MANAGEMENT OF PAIN

4.8.1 Litigation and Legal Metaphors in the Book of Job

Job exhibited mixed emotions in his management of pain. Conservative biblical scholarship and popular preaching do not seem to notice this. Job is always portrayed as being patient throughout his ordeal (Hartley 339). The patience of Job and his amazing strength of character is often emphasized. Overduin, however, pointed out without mincing words that "…„Job … is far from patience" (5). He is hurting and he is so upset that he comes dangerously close to cursing God. He even invited the priests of Leviatan; ancient Near-Eastern magicians to help him curse, not exactly God, but his creation (cf 3:8), which is tantamount to cursing the creator.

The trouble is, Job thirsts for the presence of God but he gets no sense of it. He further seeks to take God to court but unfortunately for him he could not find the creator (cf 23:1-9). Job 23 contains legal metaphors. By metaphors here I simply mean words. Take notice of vs. 3 and 4 where Job says

מִֽי־יִתֵּן֮ יָדַ֪עְתִּי֫ וְאֶמְצָאֵ֥הוּ אָבֹ֑וא עַד־תְּכוּנָתֹֽו׃ אֶעֱרְכָ֣ה לְפָנָ֣יו מִשְׁפָּ֑ט וּ֝פִ֗י אֲמַלֵּ֥א תוֹכָחֹֽות

“ If only I knew where to find him (God); if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments.” This idea is heightened in v.6 and 7 where Job says he will win the case and not God. Job wanted to enter into some legal arguments with God (Hartley 339). Job is the first and only Bible character to initiate litigation with God, the Great Monarch of the galaxies. But then, he ran into a big problem. The God whose hand he sought into judgment was both his opponent and judge of the same court of justice (v. 6)! In Job 9:15-16 he refers to God as 'my judge', Job contemplated summoning God to court but then believes he would not be given “fair hearing” by the one that is both his opponent and judge. A series of legal metaphors appear in the book of Job. In 9:19 he is a God of 'justice' and in v. 20 Job talks of himself being 'innocent', but then, 'condemned', 'blameless' and being pronounced 'guilty'. The metaphors are replete down the line through the rest of the chapter; from vs.21-24 each verse bears a legal terminology. Matters of confronting God in court, seeking for someone who would arbitrate between him and God, and even speaking without fear of God are said by Job in 9:32-35. Where is this God he has believed in all of his life? Job leaves no stone unturned in his

search for God, attacking everything God has left his mark on: creation, tradition and wisdom. (Overduin). Job complained vehemently maintaining his innocence throughout the book.

4.9 CRUMBLING CONCEPT OF GOD

In his hour of anguish, true and authentic concept that Job held of the creator some of which he frequently hacks to seem to be crumbling down. There are several internal textual particulars alluding to this fact as we can see below:

4.9.1 A Missing God! (Job 23)

Some segments of this chapter of Job (23) are quite frankly, both startling and mind boggling. Especially when composed by sage Job who is known to have been nurtured in a strict tenor of religious life. Job 23 is a deliberate depreciation of the divine attribute of transcendental and immanence of God, or better still, attribute omnipresence of God. This doctrine asserts the saturative presence of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit everywhere, all the times simultaneously. To ask where is God, when was God, and how

does God are grossly inapplicable to God. Job violates this core tenet of Christian doctrine when he claimed in vs. 8,9 that

I have searched in the East, but God is not there;
I have not found him when I searched in the West.
God has been at work in the North and the South,
but still I have not seen him. GNT

To seek to locate God from the east, west, north and south, as Job does here indicates that something terribly goes wrong with Job. The one who is pretty aware that God pre-existed all of space and time and, accordingly, cannot be localized in a particular special geographical location and time boundaries. Now he comes announcing to the entire universe a missing god! This incident reminds me of a movie I once watched in the late 90s, in which a certain Nigerian community had a village problem with a class of rascally and vagabond persons. They resolved to consult a particular village god who would reveal the culprits. The offenders secretly went and stole the god who was the only hope of the community. As they arrived at the shrine the priest came back from the inner chamber reporting the god to have been missing! This is the situation of Job now but it still constitutes

the poorest concept of the Hebraic God he now deals with. Will Job get away with this notion of God?

We can make a personal application of this matter. We live in the days of iniquity when most people hold poor concepts of God. Some look at God as a heavenly policeman who stands at crossroads to harass erring individuals. Some consider him as an old fellow that can be freely manipulated, while some think they can blindfold him and get away with their iniquity. Others like Job do think he travels sometimes. In this corrupt context sometimes one's circumstances makes the divine presence dull and dim. Whatever is one's cause of this poor concept of God, man is highly responsible for his religious error and amazingly poor view and relationship to God. You cannot successfully manufacture God of your choice at your whims and caprices. Accept and relate with God as disclosed in his word to mankind.

Of still further importance to this wing of the treatment is the identity of the reason for which Job was searching for God. Verses 3 and 4 supply that reason thus: “If I only knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. Job launches a case against God, his maker and that of the

universe! Of particular interest to an orthodox critic is his proposal to argue a hopeless case with the ruler of both the macrocosm and microcosm! In the following set of verses, Job reveals his pride as he states, "…an upright man will state his case", take particular notice of the phrase upright man as applied to Job, by him, and for him. What is more interesting here is that no other character in this entire drama applies this appellation to Job. Read the comment of Eliphaz in Job 4 and you will note that self- righteousness and aggrandizement was his practice. Verses 17-19 capture this fact very well when the Temanite asks:

Can a mortal be more righteous than God?
Can a man be more pure than his Maker?
If God places no trust in his servants,
If he charges his angels with error,
How much more those who live in houses of clay,
Whose foundations are in the dust,
Who are crushed more readily than a moth! Vs 17-19 (NIV)

Job's assumption of perfection takes an unhealthy level. Eliphaz ends his speech calling Job a fool in claiming an inordinate status of moral perfection. Compare 4:21 and 5:2. Although Job receives hard facts from Eliphaz in Job 4, they are truths one can apply somewhere, sometime, even to some extent on the case in point.

4.9.2 God as an Oppressor- A Blasphemy? (Job 9:22-24)

This is another wrong notion that Job held about the God he believed in all of his life. He calls God an oppressor. This is a terrible concept of God. In v.22 Job accuses God of injustice for he is capable of carelessly smashing both the blameless (the good) and the wicked. He charges God with the sin of mockery of the innocent. That is he sends an epidemic somewhere and then laughs at the dismay of the innocent victims (v.23b), and God can even go as far as blindfolding judges of the land of Uz! (Job 9:24c). The implication is that God, for Job can also allow a land to fill with corruption. All the official bribery, patronage and the sin of nepotism by Samuel; are condoned by God. Job asserts the certainty of God's oppressor ship when he asks: “if it is not he, then who is it? (V.24c).

What a terrible risk to undertake at the hands of a blameless God! This language is a dejection of God. As already asserted in the beginning of this chapter, Job is the first and only Bible character to ascend the level of legal indictment of God. Now, Job accuses God of things mentioned nowhere else in the Bible. Many Bible characters went into terrible traumas

according to their respective capacities to bear: Joseph, Israel as a nation, David's 12 years as a fugitive, Jeremiah, Jonah, in the Old Testament, Jesus and Paul in the New Testament- all would have excessively blamed God for allowing great and prolonged evil to cave in on them. Yet there is no hint at unhealthy complaints and uncontrolled running of the mouth. In 10:3 Job prods "Does it please you to oppress me?" As rightly observed by Overduin "This is the only place in the Old Testament where the verb "to oppress" is connected to a subject referring to God"(21). God does not oppress. Oppression is a vice that cost God almost a decade of (Amos) prophetic ministry to condemn in Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and Israel. This is the ill deemed right by the proverbial righteous Job to associate with God.

4.10 POOR COLLOCATION AND VIOLATION OF HEBREW POETIC METERS

There are a lot of literary violations in the book of Job. The facts of poor grammar for most parts, and inconsistent style of presentation are literary characteristics of the book of Job, should not detain us, suffices it our present purpose to

establish that Job in his state of pain breaks some crucial patterns of poetic images.

For one, many words have a natural paternals. In the science of translation we say they collocate, they go together. You cannot make a good communication when you mismatch words that are supposed to be used in pairs. For example in Genesis, (though in a reversed arrangement) 'evening' and 'morning' are paired together to communicate the completion of the creative work of the creator for each day, (compare Genesis 1:13, 19, 23, and 31).The Psalmists often paired day and night in one sentence, for example, Psalm 92: 1-2 “it is good…to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night.” That happens repeatedly in the psalms-day and night; morning and evening; dawn and dusk; the sun rises and the sun sets. These regular pairs always belong together in biblical constructions. In 7:3 Job mocks this grammatical pattern by pairing together terms that are unnatural partners. The unfortunate and miserable Job says: “I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me.” The normal collocation of the word months is years, and that of nights is days. Again, poetic distortion is achieved in 7:8, where morning is paired with

moment instead of morning and evening. This is a deliberate violence to the poetic style of Genesis creation account as shown above. This is a strange literary innovation. Though Job could not locate the creator with his case and mouthful of arguments, he could assess God's creation and do a series of deconstructions. This is a serious involvement of the entire creation in the problem of his suffering.

4.11 LITERARY MOCKERY OF PSALM 8 !

One other literary achievement Job effected during his painful experience is the textual deconstruction of Psalm 8. In terms of what kind of literature one is reading, psalms 8 is a famous creation Psalm. Job's pain as far as one can perceive is highly allergic to divine structures. Job verbally extirpated the universal structures reported in Genesis 1 and 2, popularly tagged the creation stories. Now he faces to erase Psalm 8! The creation of God is possibly in trouble with the afflicted man of Uz. Job is highly at odds with the universe. Chapter 10 of the book of Job reveals the sin of God; the reason why Job is in conflict with God's creation, God had condemned him, and is now in a quarrel, strife, contention, prosecution, and fight against him (Job) (v.2), as understood by different versions.

Job in the words of Overduin “turns Psalm 8 upside down and inside out.” Man who is the crown of all of the creative act of God is reduced to meaninglessness by Job! “what is man,” mocks Job, “that you have made so much out of him, that you have given him so much attention, that you examine him every morning and every moment? Will you never look away from me, or leave me alone for an instant?” (7:17-19). In his anger Job portrays God's providence as if it were a nuisance.

In the same vein, Job makes mockery of the earth God built and designed for human beings. The earth becomes for Job the domain of the oppressed human beings whose life is like a hard day's work for no pay (7:1-6). The earth is a place of mysery. Job is more comfortable in sheol. It now becomes for him a place of relief for in death one is out of God's reach (7:7-10). The heaven according to Job is the place where the divine tormentor of humans lives (6:4; 7:20). The worst place to live for Job is heaven and the second worst place is the earth. The best place one can be is sheol!

4.12 PERPLEXING METRICS IN JOB 6:2

Job in his expression of grief does not only violate poetic routines, he does as well engage a terrible invention of a dubious mathematical standard, he vouches for a quantification of psychic facts! Job wishes that his anguish and misery be weighed on a scale (6:2)! Of particular importance is that most translators I noted punctuated this wish with an exclamation mark. In science, facts are always brute, crystal concrete, and therefore, can be qualified and quantified but in religion or broadly speaking, in quasi-sciences where facts are abstract, no way could one quantify them. However, in his anguish Job turns things upside- down and inside-out.

Now Job makes an impossible request that his friends weigh his pain. With what scale shall they balance his sorrow? Which scale can balance a broken heart? Ears? Eyes? Laughter? Indifference? Sympathy? Tears? Or is it a BP apparatus or stethoscope? Whichever scale, Job is only deepening his pain and asking others a question he can only answer himself. In the section that follows, we will identify opposition from the book bearing Jonah's name.

4.13 JONAH: A PROPHET OF OPPOSITION

4.13.1 Call to Niniveh

The book of Jonah is one of the most fascinating pieces of prophetic literature of the holy Bible. It exercised so many minds and pens over the years of biblical scholarship. Tradition has ascribed it to the prophet himself, Jonah son of Amithai, from Gath-Hepher; in Zebulun. Most authorities discredit the book's historicity as its evidence in the remark of Gabriel Garcia Marquez that "fiction was invented the day Jonah arrived home and told his wife that he was three days late because he was swallowed by a whale…" (Web 1). This remark notwithstanding, the internal biblical evidence attests to the historicity of the book (2kings 14:25) Jonah is the only man so named in the Old Testament. There are also multiple allusions to Jonah in the New Testament (Mat. 12:39-41; 16:4; Lk. 11:29-32).

The whole of the incidence begins with God's command to Jonah to go to Niniveh and cry against it. Niniveh was the capital of Assyria, situated on the river Tigris. The name of the city is derived from Nina, the Patron goddess of the city (Dakes 1521). Niniveh alone is the subject of two of the prophetic books of Jonah and Nahum (1:2; 3:2-7; 4:11; Nah. 1:1; 2:8; 3:7). Their sins were numerous that a prophet had to go and interpret them out of their iniquities.

The text of Jonah does not describe Niniveh's iniquities except their violence (Jonah 3:8) and evil ways (3:8,10). Nahum later fills the gap by supplying their sins as thus: Plotting evil against the Lord (Nah. 1:11), cruelty without palliation in war and plundering (Nah. 2:12-13;3:1,19), prostitution and witchcraft (Nah. 3:4), and commercial advantages (Nah. 3:16). These traits and all antecedent evils associated with Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 13:13) constituted the Lord's displeasure against Niniveh. The Lord therefore sent Jonah to go and preach his message to them turning them from their evil ways.

4.13.2 Jonah's Response

The contrasting particle 'but' in verse 3 of Jonah chapter 1 shows that the prophet quite rightly responded to the command but headed to a different direction. The NIV version says "Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish" instead of Niniveh. What a response, for a professional prophet to have been given a genuine call to go and preach to a perishing people. The reasons for his reluctance to preach to the Ninivites is supplied in Jonah 4:2 that he did not want God to show mercy to the enemies of his people. He wanted them destroyed. Jonah arose to flee from

God's presence and the place where he told him to go thinking that if he did not warn Niniveh, God would destroy the inhabitants, the enemies of his people (v.3; 4:2). The presence of God is a wonderful experience to those who love him but a terrible thing if God is an enemy.

Jonah's rebellion at God is indicated throughout the narrative. All his actions were contrary to the will of God for him and the Ninivites. Instead of going to Niviveh he headed to Tarshish. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went down into it. Take note of the governing verb of Jonah's actions thrice the word "down" is applied to show the level of the prophets' movement not "up" but down as he was running away from his creator and employer. His program was in flat opposition to the will of God. Instead of Niniveh he chose Tarshish. When he was supposed to be travelling in the desert he chose the way of the sea, he was on the wrong direction, wrong vehicle instead of the Carmel he was in a ship, wrong road, wrong company, wrong position; when he was supposed to be upright preaching o the Ninivites he was sleeping inside of the ship (v. 1:5). All his actions were in opposition to the Lord. With this

blatant disobedience the Lord wouldn't allow Jonah to get away with it.

4.13.3 Contrary Winds

Jonah's mission was to bring God's warning of the impending judgment to the pagan world he refuses. This action brings the sailors into danger. The Lord sends a great wind on the sea and the violence of the winds threatened the ship to break up (1:4). The pagan sailors did all they could to save the situation

i. They called their god's (v.5a)
ii. Threw their valuables into the sea to lighten the ship (5c)
iii. They wake up Jonah to participate in rescue efforts (v.6)
iv. They cast lots and Jonah was found out (v.7c)
v. They did their best in vain to row back to the land
vi. They finally threw Jonah overboard.

When they did this last thing the raging sea calmed down (v.15). while Jonah was in consistent apposition to the commanding will of the Lord, the wind obeyed God's command to rage at the voyagers. It was for Jonah's sake only that the storm came upon the travelers, and once thrown

overboard the tension got calmed. The presence of wicked persons can bring calamity on a community.

What follows the calming storm is a mystery that baffles Bible scholars: A great fish devours Jonah where he had been for three days and three night (v.17). Again in this verse (17) a creature; a fish obeys the Lord by swallowing up Jonah. And again the Lord commands it and its ejects him. Natural forces and animals are obeying the Lord in this episode: the wind, the sea and twice the fish! Heaven and the earths are the Lord's and are ever willing to carry out his purpose even if we human express gross disrespect at it, however, we cannot get away with it. Jonah is now engulfed in the fish. This is one of the most dreadfully hopeless places to live and Jonah lived in the fish's belly for 3 days and 3 nights. Disobedience can open us to highly dreadful possibilities of human degradation; a prophet falling prey to a whale. I once titled a presentation on the book of Jonah thus "A prophet in the fish: studies on the book of Jonah". Jonah live for six periods in the fish belly. God in his infinite mercies commanded the fish to vomit him and it does so.

3.13.4 Jonah Refuses to Pray and Becomes a Prey

From two angles we can observe the prayerlessness of Jonah:

i. The silence of biblical hint at it. From his call to fish experience, there is no hint that Jonah prayed to seek the will of the Lord over this commission. The word "fled" is his watch word.

ii. When invited into the sailors prayer meeting, Jonah did completely something other than prayer. Verse 9 contains a confession of the Hebrew God rather that a prayer.

Jonah's refusal to pray ended him up in a fish belly. Until this time Jonah comprehended the importance of prayer. If Jonah had prayed at the onset of his series of opposition he wouldn't have taken the wrong course, direction, vehicle and company. Prayer would have prevented him being a prey to a whale. Inside the fish Jonah behold the dire need to prey (cf. Jonah 2). He was not proactive and hence got into problem before praying for deliverance. Disobedient people do not always enjoy the divine atmosphere of prayer. Distance from the Lord keeps us away from enjoying divine benefits and promises.

4.13.5 Lessons Learned from Jonah's Acts of Opposition

i. God's concern should be genuinely our own. Jonah slighted God's business to go and preach to the Ninivites and thereby, paid for his act of disobedience.

ii. As divine leaders we should all avoid perpetuating national feuds
iii. Humans can never hide their ways from the Lord (Ps 139:1)
iv. We should have a strong aversion to the death of the wicked for this is our core call, interpreting the wicked out of God's wrath.
v. We should avoid making God and his children our enemies. Getting away from God brings Jonah into untold problems.
vi. Spiritual downwardness is a dangerous position to live for a child of God.
vii. One can get into trouble if he finds himself where he is not supposed to be.
viii. One can face contrary winds if he neglects God's purpose
ix. You may endanger others when you are separated from God
x. God will relent in his punitive measures only when a sinner comes back to him
xi. God is in control of all the natural forces of sea and wind.

xii. One who refuses to pray becomes a prey like Jonah.

This brings us down to the end of an analysis of the Old Testament cases of opposition vipers. To have a complete picture of cases of opposition from the Bible, New Testament evidences are appropriate.

CHAPTER FIVE:

NEW TESTAMENTS EVIDENCES OF OPPOSITION VIPERS

The New Testament contains abundant cases of some wicked element who stand in the way of the creator to oppose the cross and frustrate it's religion.

5.1 Satan

In the Old Testament division of the Bible the same Satan was introduced in the appearance of a snake (Gen. 3). Here in the New Testament he directly confronted the author of salvation Jesus Christ (Mt. 4:1-11). He is smart, calculative and consistent. In the Old Testament he appeared in Genesis 3, while in the New Testament he made his appearance in Matthew 4. He ensures he comes at the right time and early at the beginning of both covenants. This indicates his strong zeal in having his way.

While in Genesis 3 he initiates his interaction with a question in Matthew he engages Jesus with a command, and the command is founded on the conditional particle "if". He came when Jesus was hungry and said "if you are the son of God; tell these stones to become bread" (Mt. 4:3). God is always his subject of attack both in Genesis 3 and Matthew 4. Having God as your target of attack is engaging a lion in a duel. He is in the words of Paul Enenche an Agidigbascious God! An all powerful God. Jesus responded with the authority of the son of God: "it is written man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (v.4). Jesus approaches the devil on a solid platform of the active word of God which was capable of putting all reality into being. Paul say "it is power unto salvation." Jesus reminded Satan that he is sufficient without his provision or prescription. Jesus knows where he came from, where he was going, whom to listen to and what to eat. The devil recommended physical food and mere display of power to Jesus but Jesus would yield to none of the recommendations because he was content with his father's provisions. In our treatment of the compromise of the prophet who went to Bethel for an alter address in the preceding chapter we discovered that the man of God ate the

food that the old prophet gave him against the Lord's command not to eat or drink. When he ate, God's anger kindled against him and a lion tore him into minute pieces. In agreeing to eat the bread made of stones, the mission of Jesus would have ended with the breakfast of stone-bread.

Next, the devil took him to the highest point of the temple and ordered him to jump down (v. 5). Again, Jesus answered him "do not put the Lord your God to the test" (v.7) Jesus refuses to dance in accordance with drumbeats of the devil even at the second temptation.

In the third instance the devil took him to a tall mountain top and show him a panorama of the beautiful kingdoms of the world and all their glory and promised giving them to Jesus if he bows down in reverential allegiance. Jesus again refuses to worship the devil for ownership of the kingdoms. Jesus' patriarch Mordecai during the exilic time refuses bowing down to Haman that he would not misdirect the honor only due God to a mere human. Honor was the reason that ousted Satan out of the heavenly realm. He came persuading Jesus to worship him. "Away from me says Jesus, for it is written" 'worship the Lord your God, and serve him only' (v.10). Satan lured the first Adam into disobeying God for

the desire to eat the forbidden and be like God. Jesus refuses to get satisfaction from Satan's bread, refuses a showcasing of his power and also the earthly kingdoms and all their splendor. What the devil wanted to deprive Jesus of was-the metaphor of bread of life, the ownership of heaven and earth and the mighty wonder worker.

The kingdom of God would not have been realized through his ministry, death and resurrection. The purpose of God would have been thwarted.

5.2 BROOD OF VIPERS- THE PHARISEES

The Pharisees by definition are a sect of self-righteous Jews who believe in the strict observation of the law of Moses and also inordinate adherence to their own traditions regardless of whether they make violence to the word of God or not. This definition alone is sufficient indicator to their variance with Jesus Christ and his ministry. They were bitter enemies of Christ (Mat. 15:2;23). Jesus called them the name "brood of Vipers" because of their hideous acts against the gospel of salvation and its bearers. They constantly attacked the disciples of breaking their tradition (Mat. 15:2). They murdered the prophets (23:31,32). Had strong hatred for God and his word (Mk. 7:13). They laid several accusations against

Jesus himself including the fact that he was in league with Satan (Mt. 9:34; 12:2).

Apart from the brood of vipers Jesus called them blind men (Mt. 23:26). For 10 times Jesus applied this word 'blind' to them. Rejecting light results to blindness (1Jn. 1:7; 2:11). The Pharisees choose to be blind and their blindness was the worst kind because it was an eternal blindness (Mat. 8:12; 25:30). Their blindness made them a faultfinding sect (Mat. 15:2) Preference for traditions of men than God's word (v.3), use of religion for personal gain. Instead of glorifying God, they were seeking their honor (vs 6-7). Instead of minding for their inside personality, they care for the outside. They were unable to see the past, the present and also unable to see into the internity. They lived for the present and anything that threatens their present status was attacked. For the period of Jesus ministry they were always in opposition with him and his disciples. Indeed they were a major factor behind Jesus execution.

5.3 THE SADUCEES

This was a radical Jewish sect that denied some crucial of the fundamental themes of Christians doctrines of the resurrection, the existence of angel and demons. All these

their counterpart the Pharisees believed in. Apart from their denial of the celebrated Christian doctrine of the resurrection, the saducees were ignorant of the scriptures (Mk. 12:24). They held that the books of Moses were the only scriptures (cf. Ex. 3:6,16). Saducees believed in eternal annihilation at death, so Christ's answer (that the death still live and that God is not the God of dead bodies but of living souls) not only refuted the doctrine of eternal annihilation, but proved they did not know scriptures.

The Sadecees were the chief opponents of Christ and his cause particularly from the book of Acts 4. Vs.1-3 tells us their key roles in opposition that the apostles faced: they came upon Peter and John (1c), They were grieved at their preaching (2a) and they "laid hands on them" (3a). The Pharisees were behind the previous opposition of the gospel but now the Saducees are key players in the persecution gaming against the apostles. Since they have no submission to the doctrine of the resurrection, the apostolic kerygma was a threat, indeed, a thorn in the flesh to their mission. Their whole system of religion was in danger by the preaching of the apostles whose main them was the resurrection (Acts 1:22 cf 25:19-20) That resurrection was the great subject of the

apostolic ministry is shawn in 2:24, 31-32; 4:2, 10,33; 10:40; 13:30; 17:3, 18,32; 23:6; 24:15,21; 1Cor. 15; Heb. 6:2; etc).

Most of what the apostles tribulated in was ignited by the saducees to whom Christ's preaching to the dead was fabulous. These two sects, the Pharisees and the Saducees lent great violence to the ministry of Jesus and subsequently of the apostles.

3.4 JUDAS ISCARIOT

Judas was an ordinary man, the son of Simon (Jn 6:71; 12:4). He was a genuinely chosen apostles who was empowered and appointed the treasurer. The name Iscariot refers to his nativity as a "man of kerioth" a place in Judah (Josh 15:25). He was a successful preacher and healer (Mk. 6:7-13). Jesus held him in high esteem (Mk. 14:20; Jn. 13:23-33). Yet he had never displayed any high motive of service to Jesus.

Judas eventually became a thief and adversary of Jesus Christ late in his ministry. This treacherous act Jesus announced earlier (Mk. 14:21). Psalm 109 is a Psalm about the adversaries of Jesus. The players in the Psalm are Satan and his host and entire Jews who cooperated with Judas Iscariot in his dastardly deed of destroying the Holy One of God.

The story of Judas betrayal of Jesus is recorded in Matthew 26:14-16. Judas was the one who went to the adversaries of Jesus without them requesting help from him. Satan was in control of Judas (Lk. 22:3). He was a devil among the 12 disciples. Not only a devil, he was also a shame to the cause of the kingdom. We must never expect any society perfectly pure on this side of the grave. Given the way Jesus related with his disciples, they had reasons to love him and be true to him yet Judas betrayed him. No amount of love and favor can keep opposition in check. No amount of gratitude can stop those under the control of the devil from wrecking havoc in social settings! This lesson is prominent from the deed of Judas.

i. Betrayal

"What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" The Romans and the Jewish soldiers and religious bigots respectively would not have thought that one of the 12 disciples of Jesus should be ill-disposed to him.

There are elements among our followers in the society that are worse than anyone can imagine them to be if they are afforded an opportunity to show it. Judas was ever willing to

lead his master's enemies to his arrest! They expressed their inability to lay hands on Jesus until Judas promised them his services. They were afraid of the mob that they will cause a stir if Jesus is arrested at open arenas (cf. 26:4,5) societal elevation has afforded many officials opportunity to do mischief when they are under evil control.

The cause of Juda's betrayal of Jesus was money. They said *love* of money, but not *lack* of it is the root cause of all of evil we have. Jesus had not provoked Judas. Jesus knew from the onset that he had a devil of a disciple. Yet Jesus showed to Judas the love he showed to the rest of the disciples. He did not disgrace him. Had placed him on a post that pleased him-financial minister of the fold. If Jesus were a human leader like you and I he would have shown Judas his own color or given Judas his coin. Humanly we treat people as they are without mercy; Jesus kept calm with a snake in his cabinet for 3⅔ years!

To be honest, I sometimes want to give people their due very quickly in my position as a clergy. Persons who are highly annoying. Several times it created much tension. We can learn to treat vipers with calmness as Jesus did to Judas.

The love for money was the only reason that turned Judas into a highly risky traitor.

ii. Arrest of Jesus (Mat. 26:47-56)

Judas was the figure that facilitated the arrest of Jesus. The one who appeared with Jesus' enemies was the one who ate with him one or two hours ago! He came with a large army. Roman guards and servant officials of the hight priest- the Jews constituted this mob. People living with major divisive lines can unite to oppose God. They had weapons of swords and clubs. A butcher does not need a militia to take a lamb for slaughter but the lamb of God was seized using militia arms! Jesus was taken by the warrant of the Sanhedrin.

The manner Judas did his business was very effective. He used a sign that would direct them to Christ with a consummated accuracy- a kiss. Even as the disciples said to Judas' hearing that they are willing to die for Jesus, he avoided any mistaking of a disciple for Jesus. The kiss was not only intended by Judas to distinguish Jesus but also to delay him for the soldiers. The sign indicates the level of Judas wickedness when it comes to getting money. He would not be discouraged even as he came

closest and face to face with Jesus in a kiss. Peter denied Jesus but the moment Jesus turned and saw him he readily remorsed. Judas used sign of intimacy shameless boldness to betray Jesus. Judas used love to facilitate this treason. With all this wickedness Jesus still calls him "friend".

iii. Judas' Reap (Mat. 27:3-10)

Judas did not enjoy the money he obtained in the sale of the savior. He returned it to the buyers who rejected it. He throws it away and kills himself.

The reason why Judas remorsed and returned the money was because he was condemned. He was filled with grief and anguish at himself when he thought of what he has done, what a fool he is, what a wretched man, to sell his master and all his comfort and happiness in him for a small amount of money! All the abuses and insults done on him are chargeable on him. He thought that he was so foolish and ignorant. The remembrance of his master's goodness to him. All these made him bitter. More especially as he found the words of his master true. It were better for that man, had he never been born. The following are the indications of his repentance;

i. He brought back the 30 pieces of silver to the Chief Priest. That which is ill-gotten will never do any good to those who got it (Jer. 13:10; Job 20:15)

ii. He confessed: "I have sinned" (Mat. 27:4), I have betrayed innocent blood.

The Chief Priest said they have nothing to do with his restitution and confession. Judas threw the pieces of silver in the temple and thereby went ahead and hanged himself.

Judas did not seek to go to Jesus nor any of the disciples where he might obtained relief as bad as the case was, when he missed out with the Priests he resorted to despair and became his own executioner.

In this story we have an instance of the wretched end of those into whom Satan enters, and particularly those who are given into the love of money. Many are destroyed by the love of money. All the curses that were foretold about Judas in Psalms 109 find fulfilment in him.

5.5 ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Despite explosion of growth both spiritually and numerically in the early church, they had a lot of challenges; moments of weaknesses even gross sin and attacks from adversaries under this subdivision some of the challeges will be identified.

5.5.1 Ananiah and Saphira (Acts 4:36, 37; 5:1-11)

The first trace of a shade upon the bright shape of the early church was cast by Ananiah and Saphira. We can learn several things in the tragic death of this couple.

i. In the society there are two kinds of people and it is nearly impossible to distinguish them from the outside. Outside they look just like another innocent person.

ii. In Acts 4:36, 37-5:1-11 Barnabas and Ananaiahs are the member of the same group.

Both of them had farms and all agreed to sell their farms and put into a common treasury for their subsequent use. In Act 4:36,37 Barnabas sold his farm and submitted his money to the apostles. Ananiah and Saphira did the same thing; sold their farm too but deep inside them lingered a love for money and desire for people's praise. They wanted to frustrate the unity of the early church. They kept some portion of their

sales from the apostolic treasury. Barnabas who did the needful was a good Christian while Ananiah and Saphira were good Actors. Actors claim to be something else, they are not. Their outside is different from their inside. The outside of true Christian conforms with the inside. Right from the beginning of the church this element was present. True people who would defend the cause of Christ with their integrity and those who are living for their advantage and that can do anything provided it perfects their interest.

Human beings cannot hide from God. Throughout our study of opposition vipers in this work no vagabond has taken God unaware! Infact, nobody has committed with God and has gotten away with.

In Acts 5:3 Peter discovered that Ananiah has hidden a part of the money he sold his farm with the knowledge of his wife Saphira. Nothing is hidden from God. The Holy Spirit knows our thoughts as it played through a loud speaker or displayed on a screen. That is why Ananiah was fished out. There are no locked doors for the Holy Spirit. A day will come when every secret of man will be proclaimed from housetop (Mat. 10:27). Do

we believe this? Are we ready for it? Ananiah and Saphira knew this but they forgot it.

iii. The closer we are to grace the greater the offense of sin. Three ideas describe this couple: being controlled by Satan, lying to the Holy Spirit, keeping some of the money they sold their farm (5:3). Everyone that sins is doing so under the influence of Satan. As early Christians they choose to lie to the Holy Spirit and the whole of the apostolic group.

Peter rebuked him severally (v.4b) that he has not lied to men but to God. Hearing this rebuke Ananiah fell down and died (v.5). his wife too supported his sin and was struck down dead (v.10).

Some use this incidence as an opportunity to support death pronouncement on sinners. No death sentence was pronounced upon Ananaiah's and Saphira. But when he heard Peter's rebuke he fall down and die.

It is not the business of the church to pronounce death sentence on anyone. The death of Ananias was an Act of God. He could not live in the purity that marked the church that time. His death probably was as a result of heart attack it frightened him to have his sin

exposed, and knowledge of his accountability to God. None would now be frightened before God if confronted with sin like this. People would rather debate profusely with Peter.

iv. Sin is a deadly serious matter to God. If we are honest many of us find God's action in the story of Ananias offensive but that only reveals our ignorance of our sin and God's holiness we should not ask "why did they die?" instead we should wonder why do we remain alive in a perpetual sinfulness before the Lord.

5.5.2 Violence of Ephesian Silversmiths

The preaching of the apostles in Ephesus poses a major economic threat to the trade of the silversmiths that worked for Diana's temple. They complained that the gospel was drawing people off from the worship of Diana and so spoiling their trade. The leader of these craftmen was Demetrius.

The silversmiths made a lot of money for constructing silver shrines of Artemis; the supreme numen of the Ephesians, while the gospel is against the worship of other gods. It was a problem to the men. Through the preaching of th gospel a large number of Ephesians were interpreted out of the worship of Artemis. Their threat was heightened because

practically, the whole of Asia was convinced of the gospel truth. The apostles preached that man-made gods are not gods at all. The problems of the silversmiths were that, they will lose their trade, Artemis will be discredited and the goddess will be robbed of her majesty.

They became furious at the apostles and instigated an uproar. They seized Paul's companion and brought them to the theater at Macedonia. It took the intervention of a city clerk to put the tension to an end.

Mention is also made of one Alexander the coppersmith who did much evil to Paul (2Tim. 4:14). This man was also one of the strongest opposers of the gospel Paul was proclaiming. Elsewhere, Paul delivered him unto the devil to punish him for blaspheming the Lord (1Tim. 1:20)

5.5.3 Unexpected Twists and Turns in Life (Acts 28:1-11)

This passage is a record of one of the bitter experiences Paul had on his way to Rome. Paul found himself where he did not expect to be. The preceeding Chapter (Act 27:1-21) is a remarkable chapter. It contains a detailed account of a few weeks' voyage that took months- a thrilling adventure filled with raging seas, shipwreck, and narrow escape. We have seen from the Gospels and the entire book of the Acts of the

Apostles how Satan uses the Jews; Pharisees, Saducees, the elders, the Chief Priests, the heathen craftmen, the Roman government and many other agents to frustrate the gospel promulgation.

In the last two chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul was going to Rome to witness to Caesar and the capital city. Satan on multiple times tried to prevent Paul from reaching Rome. Satan knew if Paul reached Rome, he could use the imperial city as a base from which to spread the gospel into all of the then world- and Satan could not tolerate that! That is why he use every means available to prevent Paul from realizing his dream: trouble makers from Asia, Puzzled soldiers, unscrupulous Jewish leaders, determined assasins, and indecisive Roman governor. Through it all, God had been with Paul. The devil was thwarted, not Paul. In spite of Satan's best efforts, Paul was on his way to Rome.

The reason why Luke wrote Acts 27 was to demonstrate how God continued to work in the life of Paul and to show clearly that even the forces of hell could not frustrate God's purposes. Coming back to our passage Acts 28:1-11 you will find the final efforts the devil made to finish

Paul's carrier and lend a decisive frustration to Pauline evangelistic enterprise.

A look at the map of Paul's journey to Rome shows that it was not regular, they experienced unexpected twists and turns. Just draw an imaginary line from Caesarea (starting point of their journey) to Rome (their destination). Compare that line with the actual course his ship took: north, up the coast; west; close to the coast of what is now Turkey; south to the island of crete and then west to fair Havens; finally south, then west (with some north and East mixed in) as the ship was "driven to and fro" (Acts. 27:27 ASV) until it grounded on a reef off the coast of Malta only after some delay that they headed north again, toward Rome (Ropper 44). As Paul, when you find yourself where you do not want to be what should you do about it?

5.5.4 On Managing Turbulent Times

When Paul found himself in a difficult situation what did he do? Did he become an agitated bee? Complain and sulk? Ill-tempered? Remain miserable forever? Let us see how Paul responded to his turbulent experience, a deadly viper that sook his life.

What do you suppose were the thoughts of the 276 waterlogged survivors? The ship owner may have had tears in his eyes because of the loss of ship and cargo. But most, including Paul were just thankful to the Lord for being alive.

Luke wrote, "once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta" (28:1)NIV. Malta, a rugged little island eighteen miles long and eight miles wide, is fifty eight miles south of silicy, in the Mediterranean sea between Italy and North Africa (Ropper 45). The settlers there were Phoenician merchants but later it became under Roman domain. "Malta" meant "refuge" in the Canaanite language. It was named by the Phoenician sailor who had found refuge on the island (Ropper). The island provided respite for Paul and his fellow travelers.

i. When we find ourselves where we do not want to be, we need to work on our attitudes. One cannot always choose his location but can very well choose one's attitude. (Rick Atchley qtd. in Ropper).

ii. God will always provide in times of need. Luke wrote, "The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold" (v.2). It was late October or early

November. It would have been around 50°F (10°C) in that part of Mediterranean. This was cold enough for one who is soaked, exhausted and standing in a driving rain. To a people who had been on the stormy sea for two weeks, how warm that fire must have felt?

The kindness is described as "unusual" by NIV study Bible because it was common in those days for pirates to wait for shipwrecks and then prey on the victims. Kill them, robb them and sometimes enslave them. These men treated them so hospitably at Malta. The fire was big enough to warm 300 survivors.

iii. When plunged into difficulty, work harder to improve the situation

Whichevr situation you find yourself in, if you examine very well you can find some good in it.

The big fire built for them dwindled down and there was every need to kindle it, or it will burn out. "Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and,…..put it on fire" (v.3a). Paul was someone who does not sit idle, he was always doing something. McGarvey

observed, “Paul was not a preacher after the style of a modern clergyman, who is not to soil his hands with menial labor, and who expects everybody to be ready to serve him, while he preserves his dignity and looks on” (qtd. in Ropper 46). The apostle had spent a lifetime working with his hand (20:34). He was not too good to gather firewood. No work is too humble for the servant of God who has “the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:1-13)”.

iv. Remain calm

In 28:3-6 As Paul gathered firewood, a viper fastened itself on his hand. The islanders suspects him to be a murderer even as he escaped from the sea, justice is still tracking him. They expect him to swell up, or suddenly fall down dead, but nothing happened to Paul.

Because of the cold, the snake had been lying dormant in a stack of brush which Paul had picked up for the fire. The heat of the fire had revived the serpent, and it had strucked at Paul. Now it hung on his hand its fangs buried in his flesh.

When one finds himself where one does not expect to be sometimes things can get worse before they get better. The situation is becoming terrible for Paul. When the natives see the snake hanging from Paul's hand, they began saying to one another the snake incidence is God's judgment for his murderous acts.

Somehow, they had learned that Paul was a prisoner. When they saw him bitten by the viper, they concluded that he must be guilty of a heinous crime, and that the deadly snake was an instrument of the gods to make sure he did not escape unscathed. Amazingly, Paul calmly shakes the creature off into the fire (v.5a). Do not allow enemies fangs buried for too long into your flesh. There is a way to resist them, keep them off from you.

When Jesus sent out the seventy he told them "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions…..and nothing shall injure you" (Lk. 10:19). When he gave the Great Commission, he promised the apostles: "And these

sign will accompany those who believed in my name….they will pick up serpents (Mk. 16:17,18a). Paul was simply performing one of the sign of a true apostle (2Cor. 12:12a)". A genuine apostle has some kind of mmunity against the trap and the deadly machinations of the enemy.

Paul, on the account of the snake bite suffered no harm so far (v.5b), but the inhabitants are still convinced that any moment he will swell up, or suddenly fall down dead (v.6). When nothing happened to him they change their minds and even their oral music; saying, "he is a god" (v.6b). Paul remained calm whether people call him god or a murderer. How do you do when people name call you? Become berserk? Annoying? Or unfriendly?

The deadly viper was probably one of Satan's last efforts to keep Paul from reaching Rome. The "serpent of old" (Rev. 12:9) had used a snake gown previously to accomplish his purpose as observed in the first chapter of this book. In the present episode however, God used the incidence for his own purposes. He demonstrated to the sailors, co-

voyagers, and the residents of Malta that Paul was not only a heavenly directed man but also a heavenly protected man.

You can learn from Paul's approach to this situation. Whether it was snake bite, nasty words, or misrepresentation, he did not go to pieces. That is an invaluable asset when you face difficulties in your duty of service. You have much to learn about handling undesired situations from this episode.
Sooner or later you will find yourself where you do not want to be. When you do, may God help you make the best of your situation and to trust in him. The place we have talked about in Acts 28:1-11 is a place regarding which you have little or no control. When you are in difficulty, do not complain or despair keep doing what needs to be done.

The most dreadful place you can be is away from God (Isa. 59:1,2). That is a condition you should not want to be in, for if you die there, you will end in hell fire, a place you will not want to be- but it will be too late to turn to God. With God close

by, Paul survived all odds militating against his voyage to Rome.

5.5.5 Apocalyptic Vipers

The books of Daniel and Revelation contain earth-shaking violence against the kingdom of God by the rulers of darkness. Satan appears in different mysterious embodiments to combat the divine agents and possibly waste the kingdom things of God and establish his rule.

However, for this study, I will identify some of the satanic agents from the book of Revelation who appeared to make combat with God the father, the son and the Holy Spirit during the days of Roman reign. The following are some of them:

5.5.5.1 The Dragon (Rev. 12)

The purpose for which this dragon appeared was to devour the male child "who will rule over all the nations" (vs.4,5). Revelation 12 begins with the description of the woman who will give birth to the child and followed by the description of the Dragon.

According to the wondrous sign that John saw in heaven this woman clothed in the luminaries: the sun, and the moon were under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars was on

her head. This code entails the purity of the woman and the glorious nature of the child she was carrying. The woman was pregnant and cried out in pain of child birth (v.2).

Then, follows the description of the dragon: "an enormous red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his head" (v.3). The redness of the dragon supposedly portrays his rage against Christianity and God's plan for their redemption. Then, the soaring description in terms of seven heads, symbolism of universal wisdom (NIV 1939), while the seven horns depicts the authority of the beast over the universe. The crowns portrays his honor over the universe.

What an extraordinary appearance? As if these were not intimidating enough, the dragon, using his tail swept one third of the stars in the constellation orion, and flung them to the earth (v.4)! After the miracle of intimidation the dragon stood before the pregnant woman who was about to give birth that he may devour her child.

5.5.5.2 God's Way Out (vs.5,6)

The pregnant woman gave birth to a male child who will rule over the universe with his iron staff. The child was snatched from the mother up to heaven to his throne. This

symbolizes Jesus' being taken to Egypt for safety. The woman fled into the wilderness where God himself prepared a place for her refuge. The provision covered 1,260 days. Against all adversaries God protects his own. The safety of the godly as said in the preceeding treatment, is, always being near your God.

In this story God snatched the child to heaven and foresaw the need to secure a place for the mother beforehand.

In vs.7-9 the enemy himself was defeated by God and cast down to the earth with his cohorts of angels. Immediately the dragon landed the earth he started pursuing the woman who gave birth to the male child. Again God provided two eagle wings for her with which she flew yet, to another hide-out provided for her, for three and half years (v.14).

Before the woman could take off the dragon spewed a river to get her drawn. But the earth opened its mouth swallowed up the river that the dragon spewed out of his mouth. With this victory, the dragon was enraged at the woman and engages warfare against the rest of her offsprings.

5.5.6 The Beast out of the sea (Rev. 13:1-12)

The purpose of Revelation chapter 13 is to introduce two creatures: the sea beast and the land beast. Both are the

associates of the dragon who was identified in 12:9 as Satan. With fifteen out of eighteen verses focusing on the devastating power and deadly purpose of these creatures, the section seems frightening- even overwhelming. To help early Christians (and us), God inserted a note after the presentation of each beast to give his people insight and to help them keep their perspective inspite of the tribulations (13:9,10,18). As we examine the first verses of chapter 13 pay attention to discover what God wants you to learn from this scene.

5.5.6.1 Satan uses Human beings to Accomplish His Plans

Chapter 12 where the dragon was said to have engaged war with the offsprings of the woman links very well with chapter 13 which is a blue print of how he plans to wedge the war against believers- He would accomplish this through agents, people who Satan could manipulate for his purposes.

In the days of John Satan assaulted Christians through Roman officials. Today he does so through people with whom we rob shoulders, come in contact every day. When Jesus sent his disciples he did not caution them against demons and beasts, but warmed them to “beware of men” (Mat.10:17).

5.5.6.2 The Devil uses Intimidation (13:1,2)

As John watched, a fearsome beast emerged from the turbulent waters. This beast is identical with the one briefly, met in chapter 11, this one came from the pit and killed two witnesses.

This beast was understandably the Roman Empire, the persecutor of the church (Eddie Cloer qtd in Ropper 6). There are a number of reasons we can identify the beast of chapter 13 with the Roman Empire. In chapter 17, the beast is ridden by "the great harlot" (vs.3,7) and that woman is called "the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth" (v.18), which sits on "seven mountains" (v.19) in other words, the city of Rome.

Again, the description of the beast fits well with what we know of Rome, and the Romans. History atteasts that Rome was the proud mistress of the world: John says the beast had authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. John says the beast was blasphemous against Good. Emperor Domitian blasphemed God in his documents. John says the beast was allowed to make war with the saints and conquer them. History also has it that Nero initiated a series of 10 persecutions that ended with Diocletian (Albert

Baldinger qtd in Ropper). In any case, the beast was anti-Christian political power.

The devil has three principal power avenues by which he tries to destroy Christians: intimidation, deception and temptation. The first of these is fully employed by the devil in chapter 13 via Roman government.

Of course, the Roman Empire has waned long ago, its glory has faded, but that does not mean that chapter 13 has no application today. By and large, verse 9 informs us that the passage is addressed to everyone who has an ear. If you feel the side of your head and finds one ear, this chapter is for you.

Satan's use of intimidation to further his cause is not limited to his manipulation of Roman Empire. Even in Nigeria some governments use their power directly or in subtle ways to restrict religious freedom. Most of the government's privileges are denied to Christians. Religious wars are sometimes sponsored by the government. It is clear That Christians are denied leadership and economic opportunities because of their difference and limited political powers. There is a strong opposition of Christianity even in Nigeria, and even world over.

In government services there are dishonest employers who fire workers who do not go along with their deceitful business practices. Intimidation is still an important weapon of manipulation in the devils arsenal.

5.5.6.3 Use of Force

Satan tries to intimidate Christians a number of ways. One way is the use of force. His description matches this fact. “He has ten horns and seven heads” (v.1). He is later described as being “red” in color (17:3). As you and I are made in the image of God, the beast is made in the image of his maker, the devil. The red color indicates his murderous tendencies. His seven heads indicates his craftiness and cunning proclivity, his ten horns, his great power and authority. All these qualities are transferred to the beast. “And the dragon gave the beast his power and throne and great authority (v.2b)”. He was given authority over every tribe, people, tongue and nation (v.7b). What Satan offered to Jesus (Mat. 4:8,9) he bestowed upon the beast.

The beast was as swift as a leopard, as strong as the bear, as ferocious as the lion, and as vicious as any jungle beast. Its strength can be seen in his quick recovery from a

“fatal wound”. This astounded the populace (Rev. 13:3,12,14,15).

The beast seem stronger than God himself, in fact, he appeared to be able to blasphemed God without consequences. The blasphemous names on his forehead are probably the titles of deity that the Roman Emperors appropriated for themselves. Emperors were called divine. The very name *God* or *Son of God* was given to Emperors. Nero on his coin called himself the savior of the world. Some were addressed as Lord. They appropriated most of the special titles of God the father, and the son. (William Barclay qtd in Ropper 7)

To blaspheme is to speak against. The beast opened his mouth and blaspheme God and his tabernacle (13:5). He even abuse those who live in heaven! His tabernacle could be rendered “His dwelling place”. Since God dwells in his people; the Christians, the passage could refer to the lies that were spread against the church. The passage gives us the impression that the beast could do whatever he wanted without restraint (13:1-8). No puny Christians were able to wage war with him. He was permitted to make war with

Christians and overcome them (v.7a). The beast seemed invincible.

Satan continues to use force today when it tarries well with his plan. Do not be surprised if he uses human agents to compel you to conform to his will.

5.5.6.4 The Devil is limited (13:5,7)

The truths presented so far could be disheartening and discouraging-but we should never miss the internal clues of the text which let us know that God is still in control. One clue is the phrase "it was given to him" "And there was given to him a mouth" (v.5a). "And authority….was given to him" (v.5c); "And it was given to him to make war" (v.7a). The only authority possessed by anyone-even an enemy of God-is that which God has allowed him to have. Even the devil knows this truth.

Another clue is the figure "forty-two months" (v.5b). The devil is operating within a stipulated time after which his authority expires. His authority has expiry date just like chemicals do. Trials and tribulations he imposes on the elects have terminus point. There is hope for a better tomorrow for the saints. God allowed the beast to cause trouble, but in a limited manner and only for a limited time. Rome may have

been powerful, but it is God who reigns over the nations. It is God who sits on his regal throne of grace (Psalm 47:8).

5.5.6.5 The Devil will finally lose (13:9,10)

In verse 10 John's readers were told that they must be prepared to suffer at the hands of their tormentors but that in the end, those responsible would receive as they had given. The agents of the devil are surely receiving their due in the end of the combat. This is of greater comfort to the reader. That the forces of evil tormenting Christians continually cannot win as long as Christians maintain faithful.

The basic message of verse 10 is embedded in the words "this calls for patient endurance and faithfulness of the saints" This passage should encourage Christians to remain steadfast in their lives and faith. Following the beast does not require perseverance but following Christ does.

5.5.7 The Renowned Con-artist

In chapter 12 the dragon was identified as "Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (v.9). In the first chapter of this book we learnt that the devil deceived Eve (Gen.3) and he has been deceiving mankind ever since. The Bible constantly alerts Christians "Do not be deceived" (1Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; Jas. 1:16)

The preceeding unit was about Satan's agent of intimidation: the sea beast (13:1-10). The present unit is on the dragon's agent of deception: the land beast (13:11-18). Verse 14 states that this second beast "deceives those who dwell on the earth". In this text the ways in which the devil deceives us will be shown.

5.5.7.1 The Land Beast

John "saw another beast coming out of the earth" (v.11a). The idea here is that something was fighting its way to the earth's surface presumably, something strong and powerful. What kind of monster on earth, would erupt from the soil like volcanos?

When the creature whose eruption attracts earth trembling, cracks and dust in the air finally appears, he looks surprisingly harmless, even innocent. "And he had two horns like a lamb" (v.11b). Without detailed description we suppose the beast was lamb-like. The symbolic meaning of horns is strength. They were lamb-like horns, little bony feature showing through the wool.

When the beast opened his mouth, however, it was clear that his appearance was deceptive "And he spoke as a dragon" (v.11c). Jesus had earlier warned his disciples about

wolves in sheep clothing (Mat. 7:15); John now warns his readers concerning a dragon in lamb's clothing, the anti-Christian religious power (Ropper 13). The primary characteristics of the land beast is that he was not what he appears to be. This creature had the outward appearance of the lamb but in reality he was the antithesis of the lamb. There was nothing harmless about him: yet

i. He exercise all the authority of the first beast in his presence (v.12a), this was an impressive authority.
ii. This beast had authority to make "the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast whose fatal wound was healed" (v.12b)
iii. He had authority to punish anyone who refused to worship the beast and his image. Those who worshiped it were granted all economic privileges to buy or sell (v.17a), participate in the life of the society.

Those who refused to worship the image of the beast were reduced to slavery and starvation or even be killed (v.15). Three young Hebrew men were thrown into the fiery furnace because they refused to bow before the image of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan.3)

Many people can see nothing wrong with bowing before an image, but to John it was a blasphemy. It is still a feature of unbelievers. We are not required to bow down before images of the leaders of our countries. Our leaders are not gods. In Nigeria religious freedom is under oppression. Most leaders try to control religion for their purposes. We should not allow political leaders to manipulate the church for their selfish ends.

The special gift of the beast was, and is his ability to deceive and lead men into false worship. The beast reflects in the code, clergy veneration, overemphasis on finances and inordinate ostentation of the clergy. Most churches are no more preaching Christ but are emphasizing a small part of what he did-healing. Most churches are no more life-giving centers but more of miracles and healing centres. People are deceived to look for here and-now security. Preachers are more of witch-hunting than Christ-seeking. Deception is on the top of its operation now. People want to be deceived that is why our mega ministries are flourishing.

The New Testament has a lot to say about teachers of error who would arise. Jesus warned that there would come false prophets who will mislead many (Mat. 24:11). Peter also

hinted at the presence of false teachers in our midst who will introduce heresies (2Pet. 2:1). The spirit of the second beast is still in false teachers who are deceiving millions of people around the world.

Satan deceives us in guise as an agent of light and his agents also disguise themselves as servant of righteousness (2Cor. 11:14,15a).

False teachers often make good first impression. One group may call itself "Christian" but may be denying Jesus through their conduct. John warns us to "…..not believe every spirit, but test the spirit to see whether they are from God….." (1Jn. 4:1). You can test them by the word of God. We must also live by the word (Eph.4:14).

The Bereans were commended because they compared Paul's teaching with God's word (Acts 17:11). Teachers of truth are never insulted by such scrutiny. I always tell my members not to believe anything I say just because I say it. All teaching must be compared with the word.

5.5.7.2 He claims the power that he does not possess (13:13-15)

There are two specific signs that this beast made:

i. He “makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in presense of men” (v.13b). He made it appear that he can evoke fire out of heaven.

ii. “There was given to him power to give breath to the image of beast that the image of the beast might even speak” (13:15a). Breathing life into the inanimate is one of God’s prelogative specialities (Gen. 2:7). Thus the false prophet made the people believe that the image had come to life and could speak.

Jesus warned that “false Christ and false prophets would arise. They would perform great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible even the elect (Mat. 24:24).”

The false prophet was claiming a power he did not possess. There are gimmicks to make an image appear to speak and come to life. I am always surprised the way people are fooled today by claims of special power. For example, many fall prey to physics and other spiritual advisers who employ tricks to make it appear that they know intimate detail about individuals they have just met. Particularly alarming is the use of trickery in the name of Christianity. Many false teachers claim to be able to perform miracles, especially the miracle of

healing, using vague generic statements such as “I am seeing someone here with kidney trouble” and then, vaguely stating the enemy behind the sickness-“that old man in your neighborhood”. Other methods of deceit invoke passing information by means of codes or hidden electronic equipment (Ropper 18).

Display of fake miracles is at the heart of modern worship. In order to have large following, most clerics resort to miracle invention. One of my elders at Lagos told us the story of one Pastor who solicited for a quick donation of eggs from his parishioners the next Sunday service. Having gathered a large quantity of eggs, he announced presenting a spectacular wonder. Adding, the miracle will culminate into a meal. As the curious members watched on, the clergyman placed a large steel basin on a glass table and ordered members to fill the vessel with clean water. After which he made some spells which effected a perfect boiling of the eggs! The miracle worker requested each member to eat an egg which was boiled without the use of a concrete fire. What then was the purpose of this miracle? Who was he trying to please? What gospel lesson was he trying to teach the members? The answer to these questions boils down to a mere showcasing of

fake power. He was trying to claim spiritual authority over his followers. He was deceiving his members, displaying powers he does not possess.

The longer I live, the more certain I am that the masses want to be deceived. Truth does not look popular but falsehood impresses the world. Crowds of people will gather to witness fake powers. T.B Joshua a Nigerian prophet was very good at generic statement and telling clients their intimate details but was not able to tell when he was going to die.

Thousands of people are going after the image of the beast in our neighborhood and mega cities going after fake claimers. The land beast continues to dip into his bag of tricks. The masses should be watchful and reject anything and everything contrary to God's word. We may point at others and say in amazement, "How they can be easily fooled?"

If we are honest, we must admit that most of us are deceived by the devil. Most of us have fallen for his lies. Some of his lies are: one can get along fine without God, don't rush to serve God there is time ahead, it is this life that counts; don't worry about the next life, what matters are you

achievements and ranks. His worst lie is; there are other ways to God apart from Jesus (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12).

The devil claims the power to make you happy, the power to make you feel fulfilled, the power to make your life meaningful. He does not have such power. Only God does. Do not be deceived.

5.5.7.3 The Devil promises what he cannot deliver

Have anyone in your life promised you something and failed to fulfill? This is another mark of the deceivers, to promise and never deliver. Our text closes with the issue of the "mark" of the beast. The beast cause all to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead (v.16). the mark is to be located at the prominent parts of the human body-right hand and the forehead. This mark is a counterfeit of the "seal" of God that was branded on God's servants in Revelation 7. It was placed on 144,000 symbolic of all the faithful's. The mark of the beast was also inclusive of all-small and the great, the rich and the poor, freemen and slaves not a single earth dweller was missed. The seal of God indicated that the branded belonged to God and were invariably protected by him. The mark of beast indicated that those stamped of it are

the ones under his protection and assimilative of his character.

In as much as God promises and delivers, the devil invariably promises what he cannot deliver. Verse 18 begins "This calls for wisdom". This refers to information that would help those who will be wise enough to utilize it. One definition of biblical wisdom is, as far as I can infer; is the inability to think ahead (Mat. 25:3-13). Doing things in God's perspective. Revelation 13 verse 18 teaches that let him who has understanding examine the number of the beast, for the number is that of man, and his number is six hundred and sixty six. The number is the most controversial number in Revelation and, infact, of the whole of the Bible. Resolving this enigma is not the call of this book. For our purpose the number announces in clear tones that the devil promises what he cannot deliver! The false prophet may have the appearance of the lamb and may be able to mark people but in the end his mark will be ineffective. His followers will go unprotected. Do not take the devil's lies anymore. Open your eyes and your mind to detect whom you are dealing with so that you will not fall into his snares. Test every idea and concept by the word of God. Obey the Lord and you need to do it now.

5.5.8 Babylon-Her Unique Place in Devil's Plan Against the Saints.

Babylon is the third partner of Satan. The first partner was the sea beast; the second was the land beast (also called the false prophet). The beast in John's day represented one approach the devil uses: intimidation. The false prophet (in John's day, the agencies that enforced emperor worship) represented a second approach used by Stan: deception. Babylon represent the third approach: Seduction (Ropper 34). The devil tries to bend your will with intimidation. If that fails he tries to cloud you intellect with deception. If you happen to prove to be too stubborn to yield to his pressure and too sensible to believe his lies, he will try to use Babylon, the great harlot to seduce you and she succeeds more often than she fails. The aim of Babylon is to entice you to violate the laws of men and God. We will reveals some touching truths about Babylon which if one is aware of, may resist her charms.

5.5.8.1 She is Erotic (17:1-6,9,15,18)

In verse 1b an angel told John, "I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters". In verse 5 this "great prostitute" is identified as Babylon the great. The angel later interpret the "the many waters" as

“people and multitudes and nations and languages (v.15)”. The harlot has control over everyone. She rules over the masses of the world.

The term *prostitute* tells us that her business was seduction (cf. Prov. 5:7,9). Her success in her profession as a harlot is hacked at in verse Revelation 17:2 “with her the kings of the earth committed adultery (v.2a)”. The kings of the earth were influential and where they led, their subject followed: “and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries” (v.2b). Alcohol can lower resistance to temptation, the great prostitute knew every trick of her trade. When John was taken into the wilderness, he saw an amazing sight: he “saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and seven horns (v.3b)”. This beast is the beast of chapter 13 (cf. 13:1).

Chapter 17 adds supplementary material regarding this monstrous creature: He was colored like his master, the dragon (Satan) (12:3). Earlier, blasphemous names had been only on his heads; now he was filled with blasphemy. She was an experienced rider and had control of his horse.

There is a vivid description of the woman in verses 4 and 5a: “The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She had a golden cup in her filth of her adulteries”. This tittle was written on her forehead: a MYSTERY, “BABYLON THE GREAT….”

Purple and scarlet were colors worn by royalty and the elites. Gold precious stones, and pearls could be afforded only by the rich. Babylon was attired “as a queen” (18:7). She was not like a common street walker. She mingled with high class strata. She was in the class of the rich and famous.

Babylon was the Mesopotamian city, one of the best known cities of the olden days. There, urban luxury, learning, tradition, and commercial acumen attract the ancient civilized man. It was politically and religiously explosive but was morally corrupt. To the Jewish man, Babylon was synonymous with ungodliness. The Babylonians for one, destroyed Jerusalem in 586 nBC and had enslaved Israel into foreign land.

Rome was the city that was reigning at the time Revelation was written. The “great city” of Babylon is making reference to Rome. The woman being referred to here is the

city of Rome. It was a wicked city symbolic of church's persecution. It was a wicked city of idolatry and corruption, pioneering emperor worship. It stands for all of the influences and power of a God's rejecting world under its various forms down through the ages.

Mega-cities such as Lagos where I live are not only centers of civilization, arts and culture but also fountain heads of vice and corruption. Young people move in Mege-cities and soon embrace its lifestyle.

We do not have to move to Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna, Kano or Port-Harcourt to be seduced by the great prostitute. Babylon the great is everywhere that excitement, comfort and profit are the primary goals in life. Whether you live in Vandeikya or Ihugh, Zaki-Biam, Naka, Maiduguri, Sati Harga, Sati Agirigi, or Adikpo; the prostitute still calls trying to seduce you (Mat. 7:14 KJV)

Never fail to know that Babylon knows your weak spots (Jas. 1:14) and will try to exploit them. To avoid being tempted, understand that temptation is tempting, sin can be pleasurable, that the forbidden is attractive. When Babylon murmurs "stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is

pleasant" (Prov. 9:17), we will be careful, we should flee (2Tim. 2:22) as Joseph did long ago (Gen. 39:12).

5.5.8.2 She is an Emblem of Disgrace (17:1, 4-6)

To avoid the charms of this prostitute we need to understand who she really is. This woman was nothing but "the great whore" (v.1;KJV). What she has written over all her body is fornication, fornication, fornication (Michael Wilcock qtd. in Ropper 37). Fornication is a Greek word porn with the English equivalent of filthy taste. Porn stars wore headbands as a fashion in ancient Rome. Roman prostitute used bands for advertising their trade. Upon the forehead of the harlots, her name was written: "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (v.5) (She was not just a harlot; she was also a mentor of harlots). No matter how good we portray prostitution, it is still a sin. Her business was sexual prostitution. Nevertheless it extends to ugly nuances: Selling one's self to the world: Niniveh was the harlot of conquest (Nah. 3:4). Babylon being, the mistress of pleasure (Isa. 47:5). Jerusalem was guilty of religious whoredom (Isa. 1:21). When we abandon the Lord for the

gods of this world, we not only break his law, but we also break his heart.

In verse 4 and 6, we are told who this harlot really is. She is pictured as holding out a golden cup, offering it as though it contained good drink. On closer examination, the cup is seen to be "filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries" (v.4c). The harlot present fun but delivers filth.

The most revealing statement concerning her true character is found in verse 6; "And I saw the woman drank with the blood of the Saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus" (v.6a). the saints and the witnesses of Jesus had resisted her seductive devices and this made her furious. She was hihly delighted in torturing and killing those immuned to her "charms". She may have looked beautiful on the outside but her actions exposed her ugliness.

Standing on the truth in a perverse society is costly. It attract fury which eventually can cost you your life. Men and women who represent Babylon have filthy things to offer, when you are wise enough to resist them you become their target. To avoid being seduced by the temptations of the harlot, we must see them for what they really are. The harlot promises the forbidden delight but her feet go down to death

(Prov. 5:5a). A careful eye learns to distinguish between glamour and goodness, between that which is fleeting, and that which is forever. One thing seem clearly, temptation are not attractive but repulsive. The angel saw the judgment of this harlot clearly in verse 1. An old adage says "the bigger they are the harder they fall". That adage applied to Goliath. It applied also to Babylon. Let us be aware that pleasures of sin are passing (Heb. 11:25) and in the end breeds only death (Rom. 6:23). Let us not be in league with the world for if you do so the love of God is not in you (1Jn. 2:15-17). Constantly discipline your body to keep it in subjection.

This segment marks the end of our identification of biblical vipers; some of the forces that oppose the purpose of God from Genesis to Revelation. We will now turn to part two. In this section, we will look at the contemporary vipers in the society with emphasis on the social as well as the ecclesiastical setting, causes of opposition, how to know you are confronting a viper, sources of iniquity and some approaches to stubborn elements will be proposed. Finally some suggestions will be made on how we can deal with opposition vipers.

PART TWO

CHAPTER SIX:

CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY AND OPPOSITION VIPERS

6.1 VIPERS IN THE SOCIETY TODAY

Revelation 6:3-4 introduces us into a fiery red horse that appeared when the second seal was opened. It's rider was equipped with rage and a large sword; with the mission to "take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other".

This rider is presently riding in Nigeria and Benue State and elsewhere. There is no peace in the society. There is a gross scarcity of peace makers but there are abundant trouble makers in the society.

It is crystal clear that we are living in a shipwrecked society; a society that is infected with evil and evil men. There is no segment of the society that is free from the presence and the impact of trouble makers. They are in the amusement centers and recreational facilities. Evening News, the social media and numerous media platforms are full of materials of

people crying over the activities of evil elements in our midst and the cry is astronomically high. In the preceeding chapters of this book. I have identified quite a great number of people who offered great resistance to the theocratically divine government spanning from time immemorial; primeval, through intertestament period to the New Testament epochs. We have seen stubborn and unteachable men and women who have chosen to live in rebellion with his maker and neighbor. That material serves a good foundation upon which the nature of the contemporary man can be fully appreciated.

There is no leader who will tell you they have not encountered any opposition in their roles as leaders. At this point we will identify some cause of violent operations in our forums.

6.2. SOME REASONS BEHIND TENSIONS

Based on the previous studies from Genesis to Revelation, the following are some causes of friction in our world:

i. Envy: The snake was envious of the status of Adam and Eve in Paradise and decided to deprive them of

their prosperity. Cain envied Abel thereby killing him.

ii. The sheer desire to waste the best that another has. The creation of God is severally described to be good, and hence the devil wasted it away. People envy other individual's position wealth, intelligence and beauty and thereby, seek to waste all employing unnecessary criticism lies and violence. Look at the local politics in Benue State and you will establish this fact. Since I began to follow things up, there is no governor in Benue State from George Akume down the line to Hyacinth Alia that has not experience the bitterest criticism and opposition.

The moment you get to that position expect the worst from enemies of peace. Some people live their lives as trained trouble makers, those prepared to waste the best of reputations.

The devil was able to waste our parents fate in paradise through temptation but was unable to destroy the future of the second Adam at his temptations in the wilderness. While the first Adam

ate the forbidden fruit, the second Adam refused to eat the bread of stones.

iii. Covetousness

This was the reason behind the down fall of Esau, the desire for a bowl of beans. This deprived him of his birthright and he ever became a nuisance to his brother Jacob. Joseph's brothers were also covetious of his father's love on him and became highly aggressive to him the rest of his life. Saul's usurpation of the office of the priest led to his rejection by the Lord.

iv. The desire to lead was the reason Korah, Datan and Abiran rebelled against their brother and leader Moses. That Moses is not the only one person competent to lead the congregation. This desire took Absalon to an early grave.

v. Madness

This word is a synonym of the word "sin". When one allows sin to get a complete hold on him, he is appropriately described as mad. Saul's insanity was the reason he always acted contrary to the will of God his creator and kingmaker. This is exactly the

human proclivity, the tendency to always sin. When a person is constantly sinning, he can cause any havoc. He may bring any type of violence he can anywhere. Haman's problem upon the Jews can be said to have been caused by a mad official.

vi. Blatant ungodliness

Ungodly individuals such that taunted Elisha are always the problem of our leaders. Ungodly person can go at any length to make a stir in the setting. They are comfortable when chaos, crisis and anarchy set in. Doeg, the Amalekite was also ungodly when he reported the secrets and movements of David to Saul. This led to the extinction of the priestly colony at Nob and the sad execution of the Chief Priest Ahimelech, women, children, all animals were reported to have been destroyed by the mad king Saul at Nob.

vii. One sin is common with most trouble makers namely, sin of lust. This was the problem of Portiphar's wife. It was also the problem of the children's of God during the primeval history.

People do anything to cover their sin of lust. Portiphar's wife lied against Joseph to cover her vice. David murdered, Uriah in order to cover his act of adultery. Even today people go to any length using all means available to fence their lustful acts. Most trouble makers, in our social institutions can be identified with lustful acts.

viii. Discontentment

Discontented people are always wicked and at loggerhead with others over God's blessings on thems. Most opposition characters can be identified with a greedy trait. They harbor the tendency to have much, and that keeps them at hatred over people in positions they covet.

The common tool they use to get to you is criticism and verbal attacks. Our society would have been a good place to live and work if people learn contentment. Contentment is not an overnight acquisition. You build it from childhood. You cannot be a contented man without first being a contented child. One cannot be a responsible person without first being a responsible child. One cannot walk

with God as an adult when he refused to walk with him as a child.

Let us teach our children godliness while they are young so that when they grow up they cannot depart from it (Prov. 22:6)

ix. Waywardness

Most people who bring problems to the society are people with a poor upbringing. Lack of proper home upbringing can waste a person. If we care to invest good training in our children they will eventually become good assets to the society. Absalon was a wayward son. The youths that harass Elisha were also wayward.

x. Pride like that of the Pharisees, the Saducees and Haman in our assessment can lend problem to mankind.

xi. Impatience- Job, negligence- Jonah, craving for more power-sons of sceva can breed violence.

xii. Open warfare against God, the Son and Holy Spirit.

The dragon, the land beast and the sea beast described in revelation 12 and 13 were in an open warfare with God and all his purposes.

In our society today we can glean cause of unrest in our society from the above as thus:

- Ambition to get power and acquire wealth.
- Envy
- Covetiousness
- Pride
- Wickedness
- Ungodliness
- Discontentment
- Desire to oppose God

Human beings with the above tendencies are very difficult to deal with.

6.3 SOURCES OF INIQUITY

The greatest problem that man has ever faced is the problem of sin. No problem brings man more headaches than that of sin. Every tear we drop is because there of sin in the world. All our pains, disappointments and disillusionments, are because sin deprives us of that which is good.

It was sin that turned Hitler into a beast. It wastes our children. Sin fills our detension homes with victims, it overcrowds our jails but it will never fill hell (Prov. 27:20).

Sin is a religious terms with many synonyms to grapple with it's symbolism the following terms are relevant -evil, vice, crime, transgression, iniquity and error etc. However I have chosen to treat this rubric section under the heading iniquity. Iniquity means that which is wrong. What then, is the source of man's wrong behavior?

We can trace the origin of iniquity from Genesis 3. This is the source of sin and man's fall into it. This state was introduced by the serpent as discussed in chapter one of this book.

But then, what is the source of our individual corrupt nature as manifest in our actual irresponsibility.

6.3.1 The Home

The first source of terrible iniquity in our society is undisciplined homes. A good home produces responsible citizenry. Influence of homes affects one's entire career. Rascally and vagabond people, for the most part, are reared from unhappy homes. Bad home raise a generation of opposition vipers. While good home upbring disciplined people.

David's success as a religious poet, a skilled harpist and a powerful monarch was because his home furnished him

with the act of responsibility. His father taught him how to lead humans by first shepherding flocks. During his youth he was taught how to walk with God, how to worship God and he was taught how to work. Therefore David was a boy after God's heart and invariably; a man after God's heart.

6.3.2 Choice of Friends

There is an adage which say show me your friend and I will show you your character. People with whom we ally ourselves can suggest how we form our personality. Good friends are capable of furnishing you with good manners. Bad friends can imbue a person with corrupt manners.

Most at times our children keep cautioning us not to choose their associates for them. My 22 years old Sensha came back from NYSC from Abia State telling me Dad, I am sorry telling you not to assist me in choosing friends and how to dress. His responsible behavior and appearance afforded him the opportunity to stand in as the Corpers Liason Officer in his Local Government of service in 2023 batch. To have a stable society parents should be willing to teach their children responsibility and how to make good friends if we are unwilling and unable, then, we breed poisonous vipers for

three publics: the government, the church and the entire society.

6.3.3 Certain Occupation if not carefully mitigated

The second source of iniquity is that of Certain employment in the society, though good and noble, can sometimes corrupt an individual. The military for example, is a noble calling but the devil can turn some personels into beasts because of the nature of the job. Constant blood shed, vulnerability into hardship can make severe negative changes in a man's life. Constant dealing with criminality breeds contempt.

The Police work as another instance is proverbially known for its member's corruption and crooked operations. Most of my cleric colleagues in Nigeria decry permissiveness and synchronisms when police personels are involved in ecclesiastical leadership. Police are traditionally known for their ambiguity when it comes to what favors them. Most of them can permit any confussion to keep their interest. As Christians we can avoid anything that can rob us of the kingdom of God. Whatever employment we have been engaged; all should be exercised for the glory of God. We

should not compromise with criminals to frustrate the aim of our call as Christians.

Furthermore, one more occupation deserved a brief comment. Teaching for one is a noble calling but some of them, especially those at lowest level of teaching tend to appear as if they lack certain things that are important. Sincerely speaking teaching kids that cannot add any wisdom to your learning for a long time can lower one's intelligent capacity. Such persons can sometimes begin to behave in certain things like the young one's they teach. One of the colleagues in the ministry told me that some of his members who engaged some of these callings tends to appear to be unteachable.

This is not a critic of some departments but as Christians we should be willing to conform to styles that can be measured appropriately on the scale of the Bible.

6.4 TYPES OF OPPOSITION VIPERS

An acquaintance with the source and the nature of something you are facing you can handle it easier than if not. Having identified the sources of evil we encounter in the

world we now identify the types of iniquitous people we meet in our ministries.

6.4.1 Rags Claded trouble makers.

These are the mischievous people who cause trouble in ways that are subtle to apprehend. They claim that they are highly clever and operate indirectly, while they are the main engineers of the problems of the society. They are the wolves that come to you in sheep skin. It is always very difficult to pin down such opposition vipers. The beast that erupted from the earth in Revelation 13 is an example of this type of rebels. He appeared harmless and innocent but his attack upon God and the church was devastating. Ahitophel was the brain behind Absalon's rebellion against David. His counsels to Absalon hit hard on David. Whenever you have multiple snake bites in your ministry go behind the scenes to know those who are behind. With prayer you will soon discover your problem makers. They are always in cover. Satan came to Adam and Eve in a snake wear, a seemingy snake gown.

6.4.2 Princely Robes' Cladded

Our agencies also have people that would openly and directly come to attack you and oppose your purpose. As a church Pastor I always come face to face with arrogant

members who would emerge with impunity against you to frustrate the progress of the system. Do not break down at their instance. Maintain your balance with the Lord. The dragon we discussed in Revelation 12 represents the princely robes' cladded opposition vipers. He came openly waiting for the woman to deliver so that he would devour the man-child. He made darts of combat with the Lord so as to accomplish his mission. The woman gave birth but he was not afforded the opportunity to devour the child. He attempted to get hold of the woman but she was given the wings of an eagle to fly away. He again, insisted on getting hold of the woman by emitting a river to drawn her.

The earth opens its mouth and swallowed the river. This was an open engagement with the Lord. Some devilish agents can come to you in red thights to attack a leader frustrate and even destroy the whole system. Haman is an example of this type of viper. Absalon's attack upon Joab and his father was an open affair. Cain directly killed his brother Abel.

6.5 CHARATERISTICS OF OPPOSITION VIPERS

Much of what is to be treated in this rubric has been covered under causes of rebellion at the beginning of this

chapter. Some causes of opposition were identified to be envy, destructive tendency, covetiousness, ambition to rule, sinful proclivity, discontentment, waywardness, pride and open warfare against God. There is no need replicating them here. Some of these factors can be appropriated as the characteristics of evil people. We can however identify a few features.

6.5.1 Evil Unionism

Evil unions is one of the most important tools children of iniquity employ to cause confusion in our homes, cities, and institutions. There is a Tiv proverb that "one tree cannot make a forest" problem makers seek to build a large following before they can cause a stir for their personal advantage. In 1996 Isaac Adako Boro started a militia group to fight for oil control in the Niger Delta which was crushed in a 12 day's fight with the Nigeria force (Ochenu qtd in Uneneh 62). In 2001 Alh. Muhaji Asari Dokubo under the name of Ijaw youth council formed Niger Delta volunteer force for the same cause. The group was openly launched in 2016 which remains an economic threat in the oil rich region of Nigeria. Korah and his friends gathered over 200 people in protest. We have already

seen how Absalon built a large military group to overtake his father.

6.5.2 Dissatisfaction

This one trait is a prominent feature among all known acts of rebellion and rebels the world over. As mentioned above Absalom was dissatisfied with his father's leadership and vouched to offer competent leadership to Isreal. Korah, Dathan and Abiram were dissatisfied with Moses' role as a prophet and Aaron's position as the high priest and proposed for their replacement. Both of them gathered large following. In our society today, dissatisfaction is playing a leading role in politics, in the church, in our schools, in the business world. There is no place you cannot find discontented people.

People complaining, vociferating their dissatisfaction over the existing status quo. As a leader be prepared to hear people express their utmost dissatisfaction over your best approaches to steer their affairs.

6.5.3. Baseless Criticisms- Basic Tool

One of the terrible tools the devil is using to destroy our society is scrounging for faults of our leaders. When they

find none, they fabricate. Someone says “necessity is the mother of creation” Our opponents in various ministries are ever ready full of fake reasons to discredit us in our position as leaders.

In his days as a fugitive and king of Israel, David faced fierce criticism from Clans, Shimei and Ahitophel. Shimei went as far as cursing David (2Sam. 16:5-14). When David approached Bahurim, Shimei son of Gera pelted David and all his officials with nasty words and threw stones at them! He called the king ugly names; a cheat a miscreant and a villain king (v.7) when David was doing his best as king this was his reward from a member of Saul’s family (v.5). Presently leaders receive abuses as a result of family feud perpetration. Sometimes party factions, and affiliation. People can sometimes attack you because you are doing the right thing.

This is characteristic of the society in which we live. One of David’s lieutenants, Abishai son of Zeruiah opted for killing the rude Shimei but as usual David stooped him (v.9-12). How I wish our leaders should be imbued with a stable mind of David. Nigeria is in dire need of leaders who will not permit unnecessary criticism to control his focus and leadership.

Ahitophel was behind all the fiercest abuse David sustained from his son Absalon. The worst act was open sex; roof-top sexual activity Absalom had with his step mothers, this happened as a result of Ahitophel's counsel. Leaders should be watchful; their inner cycle officials can be harmful. Most secrets of leaders are leaked by our closest or cabinet friends!

6.5.4 Trouble-Makers can control everything Except Themselves.

Our opponents always assume authority over everthing. They can seek to control family, the cabinet. They have the aura to control everywhere but right within them, they have gross lack of self-control. In my experience I faced a few of the notorious characters in the church who feel without them nothing can happen and they squiz their families, employees and every other person on their way but fail to watch their character and they finally stumble and fall. They usually lack control over their appetite for sex, alcoholic drinks, anti-social behavior, selection of words and financial extravagance to mention a few. Their inability to assess their lives in the light of the Bible is their strongest weakness.

6.5.5 Fervently Persuasive

In our survey of biblical opposition vipers, we found the serpent of Genesis 3, highly persuasive of our projenitor. He uses questioning and other persuasive styles to convince our parent to partake of the forbidden tree. Absalom, in his bid to wreck confusion and eventually anarchy employed an effective psychology of persuasion, with which he gained a large number of following. This involved a lot of quality time, money, strength, intelligence, affluence to put a successful mobilization in place.

The same thing is happening in politics and church today. People use government facilities to fight government. People use church's funds to fight the church. Use of public facilities to build your personality for your own advantage is iniquity that took Absalom to a premature grave. Should officials use good time, finances affluence, intelligence and related facilities to build for the general good of the church and the government there would have been a better society.

Quite unfortunately, the society is caught up in the web of ego. People put self in view of most of the positions they vie for. When opportuned to have success they start building for themselves. Any length they can go with iniquity provided they have all it takes to get there.

I an encouraging my readers to learn to use their affluence to persuade men to Christ and his cause, and not to destructive fiends. This is a more durable legacy for both of us. The reason why our success is always fleeting and disastrously temporary is because of the way we acquire it and expend it. Honest acquisition and honest use of our resources can make those blessings more useful durable and more permanent. I have seen just a few people who gain wealth and affluence through honest means and commit them sincerely to the cause of the cross. We are in a new political dispensation now; take a look at our past leaders from Councilors-Members of the National House of Assembly Most are already in lack. Even in the church dispensation most leaders are already in abject poverty! Why? We were building on and spending for our influence. Any wealth, power and love built on questionable foundation shall not stand strong. If you would give a good evaluation of your present status re-examine how you rose up, utilized your success, and crashed.

Sometimes we even tend to forget the finger that fed us, and the ladder we used to climb to the top. Should that be the case how at all, are you coming down? You will rather crash harder without the very ladder you used to go up.

Absalom forgot all these and found himself hanging and dangling on a Terebim tree, and the mule upon which he rode left him unattended.

6.5.6 Flamboyant Self-image

This is one of the despicable social maladies characteristic of Haman; an enemy of Israel of the Babylonian captivity. Haman's top diet was honor that was due only God. He could relinquish all for honor. Some of our cabinet members and followesr always wear an inflated self-image. They overestimate themselves. They initiate ideas for development, they are key figures in a set-up without whom nothing worthwhile can happen. A member of mine once told me he had been 36 years a Christian, having served the church in various capacities. If any Pastor neglects him, such cannot be a success in the ministry. I told him quoting a colleague that, the 36 year experience represents 36 errors you can make! All the Bible character who permit pride to rule their existence ended up in a hardest crash- foe example Nebuchadnezzar and Haman, in the Old Testament and Herod in the New Testament. The Lord of the church was a humble savior that emerged from a humble parentage and city. His friends were from humble environments and vacations. His

clients, his words, his vehicles and all his deeds were of humble acsents. When he obeyed all the rules of humility he is now the most elevated personality that ever existed both in heaven and on earth. In my discussion of Haman in chapter three of this book, I alluded to his self-seeking behavior that if he were at a naming ceremony he would like to be the "child" who is the center of the event. Were he at a wedding event he would vouch to be the "bride" who is the center of the gathering. Should he be at a funeral he would seek to be the "corpse" demise of the deceased which is the center subject of the mourners. To take the place of God in your estimate is a sin punishable by God who would not share his glory with others. People use the concept of religious equality and the power of the Holy Spirit to equate themselves with the ordained personnel and even with God. The spirit is fully at work in our church with a significant frequency.

Jesus was at loggerheads with the religions teachers of his day who were overridden with pomp. They sook for chief places in the church (Mat. 23:6), taught without practicing their tenets (23:3) they gloried in titles (23:7). In doing so they robbed men of truth and life (23:13).

These are some of the characteristics one can identify in societal miscreants that always want trouble. They also intimidate, abuse, in need of material things. They are out to frustrate the church.

CHAPTER SEVEN
DEALING WITH OPPOSITION VIPERS IN YOUR MINISTRY

A careful reading of the biblical material so treated in this write-up may acquaint one with some approaches God and some victims in the Bible times handed these enemies of progress. I will definitely re-state some of those clues in the last chapter but at this point, I will use 1Samuel 17 and glean some useful clues on how David handled a giant of opposition that came out bold to erase God's choice nation for the salvation of mankind.

7.1 PRACTICAL CLUES ON HOW TO APPROACH STRONG OPPOSITION- DAVIDIC HINTS (1Sam. 17)

7.1.1 At Your Best Disposition You Must Encounter Opposition

To be prepared to live in the society and use your talents for service be fully prepared to encounter opposition. I am honestly preparing you to have this mindset that, whoever you are, wherever you came from; humble or flamboyant

background, highly educated or moderate learning, young or old, irrespective of your sex or spiritual status, provided you are called into service in formal or informal office you may face opposition. This is simply the brute fact.

The day David was to meet his most giants of all problems was just very normal. Giants come when you least expect them. Our text says….Jesse said to his son David…..hurry to….see how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them." (v. 17-18). David was sent with food supplies by his father for his brothers. Ephah of roasted grain, ten loaves of bread for his brothers, and ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. There was no textual clue David was going to face a giant in the valley of Elah. David rose up early in the morning as usual and left for the camp of his brothers. His arrival was at the time the army was going out to its battle positions. David left the supplies with the keeper of provisions and went to greet his brothers. As he was talking to them he heard Goliath the champion war of Gath defying the ranks of Israel and their God. He had been doing this for the past eighty times, now he came to do it for the eighty first time. By the time David would turn to ask his brothers what he is hearing all including king Saul had already left him 10

feet. Nobody went to fight the giant. Saul sweetened the pot: His daughter and prosperity will be given to the one who would defeat the giant. David accepted the challenge to fight the giant. Though David left the sheepfold to supply to his brothers the need to fight their problem becomes pertinent. You would not be there to fight opposition but it will appear when you least expect it.

7.1.2 People will intimidate you when you are facing opposition vipers.

Most associates will discourage you when you are facing leadership challenges. David received a quadruple discouragement. First his father trivialized him by confining him to a local nomadic life. He was attending to his father's flocks in the desert (v.15). he was deemed by his father as not qualified to be enlisted in the military as Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah who were military executives (v.13). He was reduced to a dirty, dusty and lowly occupation of a shepherd. This communicates to him, "you are not worthy to fight a sundry fight talk less of a giant!"

Second, his brother Eliab discouraged him when he heard David asking the details of the incentives for the one

who kills the giant (v.26-28). His brother counted him incompetent to fight the battle.

Third, Saul discouraged him by telling him "you are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy and he has been a fighting man from his youth" (v.33). He deemed David unworthy also by giving him his warrior dress code which David refused (v.38). Fourth, the giant himself strongly discouraged David. Our text says "He looked David over, and saw that he was only a boy……and he despised him." (v.42), adding "Am I a dog, that you will come at me with a stick?" (43a). the Philistine also "cursed David by his gods" (43b).

The devil will always ensure that he uses agents of discouragement and intimidation against you when he loose a hell of vagabonds to frustrate you and eventually take over God's purpose meant to be accomplished through you. Our society is now in a big mess. The world is highly corrupt-there is nepotism everywhere, there is misappropriation of funds and embezzlement all over our parastatas. Anybody that is raised to confront this mess must expect a series of attacks to pull him or her back from crushing this mess. Your intimate associates, your blood relations, even your opponents will

seek to have you understand that this and that cannot be done.

You are not competent at all to face these challenges, you are a trifle, you are but a trivial figure with an incompatible upbringing to tackle this problem. With the mind of David you can forge ahead to effect some vital revolutional approaches that will end the nations problems.

7.1.3 You may Rely on your Track Experience

David in order to quench the fire that almost engulfed him took courage from his past victories. To defeat the present enemy David had already prepared himself by killing small problems. Warfare is a lifetime development of your prowess. When king Saul doubted David's capability of killing Goliath, David proved to him that he had already faced similar challenges. As a shepherd boy he had already killed opposition beast-lions, bears and now the uncircumcised Philistine will go along with them. Your previous victories as a leader will give you the courage to face the present battles! The lions and the bears you have killed are a precursors to your killing of the present challenges. As a church leader I remember killing multiple beasts that stood on the way of ministry. Any agent of the devil that stood on your way frustrating your leadership

efforts was not necessarily bad, they prepared you for further challenges. When you find one blocking your way do not break into pieces compose your self relying on the Lord, He will use them to train your prowess.

7.1.4 As you Rely on your Past Victories Have strong faith in what the Lord can do Through you.

It is commonly agreed upon by biblical students and sundry readers that the battle between David and Goliath was a duel of faith, the Philistines for one were a people of a strong military tradition. They were sea farers who were sophisticated in dealing with when it came to warring. They had a notorious giants who was parading himself all over Israel. He is described to be huge, tall and scally! He was 9½ feet! 600-700 pounds! He was enlisted into army when he was young.

For a size 9½ feet tall fight a regular size 34½ youth must involve strong faith. He had an intimidating war dress a helmet, coat of bronze, spear, shield of heavy weights (v. 8-10)

David in his shepherd garb took his sling, 5 smooth stones and a stick. The giant laughed at David and his weaponry. These plus strong faith served David's purpose.

David believed that the Lord who delivered him from beasts is equally capable to deliver him from Goliath (v.37). David told the giant that he (David) "come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel" adding, "This day the Lord will hand you over to me and I will strike you down and cut off your head" (46a). This is an anthem of faith sang by David as he prepares to eliminate Goliath. David knows that the battle is of the Lord (47b). Faith is an important tool for believers when we are contesting with the devil. David teaches us not to revert to Carnal weapons we should employ prayerfulness and sufficient yearning upon the Lord of battle.

7.1.5 Avoid Procrastination when Fighting Challenges.

You are not encouraged to break down or become overwhelmed when facing challenges, but do your best to handle them promptly as they come. When you delay they over grow. David took the Gathian giant seriously. The Pharases: "moved closer" "ran quickly…..to meet him" "struck the Philistine on the head" (v.48-49) describe his swiftness against the giant. The words "he fell facedown on the ground" announced the shameful defeat of the proud champion. This does not end David's work on Goliath. Verse 51 says "David

ran and stood over him" He said let me borrow your sword and complete my work on you. He drew the giant's very own sword and cut his head.

When you kill your giant do not leave his head uncut. Cutting his head quells the pride of your opponents.

This represent a stark biblical truth on how to handle rebels in your ministry. There are various biblical approaches to handle ministerial gang of toughs ranging from Genesis to Revelation. Each opposition arises out of a perculiar setting and was handled the way it came. God enabled David to deliver Isreal from the uncircumcised using these approaches which were centralized on faith in God. Each approach to problems we have surveyed was divinely controlled so that the assembly of God would experience God's providential care during all the epochs of their interaction with God.

7.2 FUNDAMENTAL ALTERNATIVES

7.2.2 Prayer:

Prayer is the most vital tool in all of human religious expressions. It is an act through which we receive our needs as God's servants and from God. The concept has lost its pragmatic thrust overtime due to the overruling wave of religious abuse by some of our functionaries especially in our

Mega Cities, and even among the brainwashed villagers where prayer is limited to prayer *contractors.*

Among other religious tools, prayer is seriously in bad graces. There is a great deviation from the structural pattern Jesus intended for us to communicate with his father. Our prayers sometimes tend to be a way of showcasing our spirituality. Jesus was always at odds with the primitive religious leaders using prayer as a tool for promoting their hypocricy. Jesus hated the prayers that are empty, insincere coercive, manipulating and sometimes magic- like. Jesus used prayers as a respectful way of communicating to God for his spiritual and ministerial needs.

Throughout his ministry he was prayerful and his prayer life was descent and effectual. His serious prayers were in solitary and at odd times as in the midnight, when nobody was there to applause his spirituality. Today prayer meetings are held on our street for people to see.

True prayer is very important for every leader. Notwithstanding the current shape of prayer life we should face our battles with fervent prayer. Prayer as someone described it is the breath of a Christian.

When the devil wants to cripple your performance he jeopardies your prayer life. David was a praying king but prayed only once when Absalon conspired against him; the time Ahitophel advised David to mount up an open sex with his wives. Jonah ended up in a fish's berry because he refused to pray throughout his rebellion. Since he refused to *pray,* he became a *prey*. The disciples of Jesus also fall into temptation of running away from the religion of the cross because of their failure to pray.

The Jews escaped extermination in Susa because of fervent national prayer. It is important to engage prayer in our homes and teach our children this important value.

For lack of proper spiritual frame we eschew praying committing the exercise to expert with the nomenclature of "prayer warriors" serving as "prayer contractors." People willing to be successful Christians should learn how to pray from the model of Christ, the prophets, the apostles, the evangelist and godly women of the Bible. There are no prayer contractors who are there to pull the heavens down for you.

Prayer can be long, short or moderate given the nature of the item. Say prayers in the morning, noon, mid-day, evening and mid-night. All times are good for praying to God.

You can say prayers on your bed, in your car, on the way. You can say them aloud or silent. No item is too small to pray for neither too big to relate to God. You can learn to pray by praying and you can wake your prayer life by praying. if you can overcome leadership challenges learn how to pray and pray constantly your reap will be encouraging.

7.2.3 The Word of God

The Bible is a very crucial arsenal in the spiritual warfare. It is singularly a great priviledge for some of us to have studied it. It contains a vast number of secret for your success as a leader and some clues on how to handle opposition vipers.

Our vast knowledge of the scriptures is always a huge threat to Satan hence there are always intimidative remarks about destroying it. Currently a lady was announcing on a post that there is a bill filed in the American Senate to destroy the New Testament section of the Holy Writ! She was forewarning her audience to secure copies of the Bible for use when the bill is successful. The devil is also responsible for major changes done in the Bible at the request of various communities of the world to produce translations that speak to their social needs instead of the correct message from God from man's salvation.

For an example, the feminine gender based translations speaking to the specific need of the liberating theology of the ferminine gender. There is a great war against the Bible and Christianity.

All these notwithstanding, I am encouraging all of us as leaders to make the Bible our-friendly literature. Joshua encourages us to constantly meditate upon it so as to be successful in life and all we do (1:8).

Paul the apostle intimated the young Timothy that all of the scripture is highly inspired and quite a useful volume of literature from where we can learn and be prepared for every good work (2Tim. 3:16,17). It is through the Bible you can learn about God, man, creation, Jesus Christ the Church and last things. It contain vital ethical resonances for leadership, and the way life should be lived. It gives wisdom to its readers.

You can read the Bible through daily devotionals, produced by informed brothers; “Daily Bread” is a good devotional booklet, “The way of the Lord” contributions by Alusha Iorkyar and Rev. Dr. Nativ Uneneh, “Everyday with Jesus and a host of others are good to read. Most of them even propose Bible reading plan for the year.

You can start reading the Old Testament by the opening Chapter of Genesis 1-12. There are a variety of literary styles suitable for the beginning. Individual Psalms are always good to read. Psalms contain a lot of teachings for living and as well, appropriate for almost all needs of the soul. The four gospel contain the great lessons from the Messiah. They are also good to read. The importance of the epistoraries cannot be replicated here. Most of the survey we have made of the opposition vipers come from the gospels the Acts and the book of Revelation. I encourage you to even adopt random reading of the Bible. It sometimes pay a lot to page through it and locate some vital stories for your life. There is no book that is life transforming as well as enriching as the Bible. It is more comforting, encouraging, dedactive and protective than any other literature.

7.2.4 The indispensable Value of Good Friends

One of the words I like most is the word “Friend”. The word entails a person you like and enjoy being with; the same persons helps or supports you. This description is also pleading and harmonious with the nature of friendship. A friend loves you, cares for you, supports you, advices you and

most importantly, protects your person and image. This is incredible!

As a minister and a leader of a group if you do not have friends I grieve over you, I am breeding internally.

The value of good friends in times of crisis in a leader's life can never be over stated. If you do not have friends begin to make them right now for your success as a person and in tumultuous times. Invariably, if you have good friends, hail them now. Good friends always help you, stay by you and attend to you when every other enemy is conspiring against you. I have enjoyed a lot of Jonathans in my life as a minister of the word at NKST Ihugh and even here in NKST Lagos. We alluded elsewhere in this write-up to Jonathan's role in the safety of David's life at the hands of his father King Saul.

One of the most captivating statements about friendship is that between Jonathan and David "…..Jonathan became one in spirit with David and he loved him as himself (1Sam. 18:1). From here on Jonathan risked his status as a prince in order to offer security to David's life. Without the role of Jonathan the life and career of David would have terminated earlier or latest in 1Samuel 20.

David also, is a good architect of friendship. He was willing to pay good friends their due. He remembered Saul's family for the sake of Jonathan. The success of David's leadership lies in his strength as a good mobilizer of people around him. He would accept wicked people and give them love and training. When they used their talents, intelligence and prowess to win success for him he would not discard them but appreciate them. His was not the type that would use people and dump them. He appreciated the ladder which he used to climb so that while coming he will use it again. 2Samuel 23:8-39 is a list of dry names of the people that made his success possible. He published a list of thirty seven of the good friends who risked their lives to deliver him from the hand of Saul, the Philistine and other strong enemies. Through these men he expanded his empire and won many victories.

In your life as a leader make friends, cherish them, appreciate them and ever support them while in service under you. As you rely on God, know some people are always behind you. Any successful leader has won success through a band of these faithful men. You may wish to constantly call and value them through your voice.

7.2.5 Always know and Retain your Position As A Leader: Do not Allow Patients to prescribe.

As you appreciate the role of your lieutenants always keep in mind that you are a leader-with a focus. As a fugitive, severally David's men asked him to use certain opportunities which would have eventually blurred his purpose. Severally his generals persuaded him to kill King Saul, since it was not an act that will successfully contribute to fulfil his purpose he refused. Some of his friends who connived with Absalon to usurp his kingship were worth dying but he did not take the advantage to kill them. David did not allow his friends to dominate or dictate his policies. Failure of most leaders in the hands of opposition is accepting bad counsel. This led to the failure of Rehoboam son of Solomon being King over Israel. He succumbed to the ill-advice of his age-mates to add more to the burden of his subjects and this foolish decision resulted to an unfortunate sehism between Southern and Northern Kingdoms in Israel. Bad decision-making create serious problems to the polity of a people. Sieve the advice of unskilled assistants and, also, examine critically the advice of experts that can sometimes lead to greater democratic challenges, and even loss (cf Acts 27 and 28). If you want to

make the worst decision, follow the advice of experts that are more concerned with gain rather than people. To ward-off opposition one must prayerfully consider certain steps before buying some ideas for development.

7.2.6 Communication Facilitates Raport

A good leader who would overcome storms is the one that is people-oriented. I remember the story of a Bishop who was asked to produce the treasures of the church by a certain state Governor. On the date of deliverance the Bishop delivered a multitude of people, some blind, the lame, the deaf, and every sundry plus the big shots. He said the treasure of the church consists in this multitude.

We as leaders must prioritize the masses. Let them be in the know of your intentions, prospects and challenges. Use relevant forums to educate your people on the status quo. We learned in the preceeding materials that our enemies use falsehood to deceive as the snake did in Paradise of God, Laban in Midian, Joseph's brothers in the antediluvian era, Portiphar's wife in Egypt, Absalon in Israel, Haman, Ananiah and Saphira all use lie and falsehood to achieve their aims.

The spirit of lying is a mischievous tool in politics today. Black, they call white, red, they call blue! Use of lying

tongues to paint people black is trending prominently in the society, even in the church. Christian leaders and follower should shun this act (Ex. 20:16). The Bible is against lying and giving false testimonies against your neighbor. Do not engage falsehood because many of your friends are doing so. That all are doing so does not make permissible.

By way of constant communication with your group and others, will put them in the light of what is going on. There are multiple media platforms to air our views-the facebook, whatapp, direct messaging and sometimes voice calls to enlighten your people on what is going on so that they are sure of what is happening in the wave of confusions and deception.

5.2.7 Iniquity Must Be Roughly Handled

One warning I frequently remind myself of and, often waft to the hearing of my members, both in Ihugh and Lagos congregations is the danger of sin. Sin will ever remain sin. Sin is pleasurable, but it is still highly dangerous.

Look at our society and examine it's shape you will agree with me when I say you shouldn't play with sin. It is not your friend, neither that of the society in which we live, sin is the main problem of humanity and it will still continue to be if

people refuse to control themselves. It has made our family members hostile to us. It is behind all the cruelty and wickedness we are frowning at all the times. It has destroyed most of our children. It has filled many jail homes like I said elsewhere it will not fill hell!

Any household, government and group that is friendly with sin is doing so at their highest risk! Again, I resounded "Iniquity must be roughly handled"! Let us take the matter of sin seriously. I am happy this printed matter will reach to the personels in authority. This is my contribution to the well-being of our nation and states. Let us use any powers within our reach to put the rate at which sin is growing to a check.

Somewhere I used my mental ability to introduce or encourage you into a rigorous search from the word of God which is capable of building good morals in us. May we know the stand of the word of God on sin and practice such for our good. The Bible categorically tells us the reward for sin is death. See the massive cleansing of human beings in our states, waste of lives, waters, treesand the lands, roads, and interior communities are concomitants of sin! But the eternal death will be more painful and devastating.

If you have no reason as a parent to rear godly children, you must have it today. We are laying huge blames on the government and the society on why they are a failure. Yet we woefully fail in our roles as parents who are supposed to be custodians of social values and morallity. Most parents if you are honest are convicted of this failure to care for the spiritual needs, even as well as physical needs of our children at home. Look at the vast number of children roaming our cities without good care and training. There are vagabonds everywhere. We need to know what our children need and how to give them. They need the word of God given to them in laterally unconditional love. How can we build a better society with these kind of vagabonds? Our youths without training rob shoulders with us highlighting our weaknesses everyday calling us incompetent parents. Use all resources available and shape your kids when they are young, so that when they grow up they will not depart from it.

Let me roundup this segment with the story of someone who trained a lion. He was friendly with it, playing with it feeding it sufficiently. One day, when it grew up into maturity, it charged against it's master and tore him apart. This is the way sin handles us, no matter what we do to it,

nurture it, give it new and pleasant names, play with it, cover it and protect it-one day we will be its victim of prey.

7.2.7 Our Pitfalls

In our study of the biblical material of opposition vipers, we as leaders, must admit that most of our endless problems are aggravated by our errors. I sounded a warning elsewhere that leaders must exercise wisdom in deciding each line of their action in their daily dispensing of their veto authority. These nuances are indeptly treated in part one of this book. Suffices our present purpose to pinpoint certain facts inorder to delineate suggestions and offer recommendations for practical purposes.

I am introducing a multiple instances of the patriarchs' personal weaknesses that spoiled their actions and made their problems very stubborn.

In this study I will thematize these errors as follows

i. Isaac/Jacob story - Favoritism
ii. Laban/Jacob story - Economic opportunism
iii. Jacob/Joseph story - Favoritism
iv. Jesse/David story - Child Abuse

v. Saul/Michal - Economic opportunism

vi. Saul/Jonathan - Overprotection

vii. David/Absalon - Lack of love/over protection

In discussing these themes I will not follow the order in which I list them but will treat cousin rubric as they relate. No detailed Bible reference since that was done in part one.

i. Favoritism

The Genesis of Jacob's problem with Esau which eventually metamorphosed into a stubborn problem was first authored by their father's act of open favoritism. When Isaac was about to die he requested the Eldest son Esau to go out and hunt some game and prepare delicious food for him to eat and bless him before he dies. His fatherly favors were restricted to Esau. When the mother Rebekah hears of the deal, she used deceit to deviate the blessings from Esau to Jacob who was his favorite. The family is clearly a divided home. Esau is angry at his mother and at his brother Jacob who trickishly received his blessing. It is even

questionable that Jacob had portage Esau had none. Sometimes parents can cause problem in their families themselves.

Jacob later applied the same approach to his son Joseph. Among many brothers Jacob made a princely robe only for Joseph and was more caring about him. Jacob started a quarrel and enimity among these brothers as a result of an exclusive act of favor on Joseph. Joseph worsened the situation by reporting the brother's ills to his father. His dreams telling was also his problems with them. Parents should treat children equal, and siblings should check reporting their members to parents in order to gain unpopular favors. Though it turned out to be for the good of the family, Joseph suffered very bad consequences as a result of his errors. It was never easy with him under these circumstances.

ii. Economic opportunism

Uptill now, parents are using their daughters as objects of trade for worldly gain. Laban traded in Leah and Rebekah to improve his economic

opportunity. Jacob served ten years for Rebekah Laban exchanged Leah for her. He served another ten years. Severally he was cheated by Laban. Jacob complained that his wages were ten times exchanged in the end he receives Rebekah.

King Saul also uses two of his daughters Merab and Michal in order to get hold of David. As parents we should avoid turning our family members into economic commodities such would arise frictions in our families.

iii. Child Abuse

David's errors might have had their beginning from his status as an abused child. David was the youngest of the ten siblings. His three elderly brothers were employed in Israels army. We are not told of the employment of the others. But David alone, and as the younger son was given the hardest task of shepherding his fathers flocks.

Shepherding in Palestine was a hard life, a difficult task. Though a noble calling doing so in the

Palestinian setting was a dusty, dry and solitary job involving dangerous exposure to wild animals, bandits and arm robbers.

Most commentators deem it unfair to assign the young David to a hard task like that while his elder siblings would have been more suiting to it. Some readers conclude that David's words that "he was conceived in iniquity" coupled with his different skin color entails that he was abused because he was not conceived by Jess but by a Moabite biological father.

This act shows that Jesse had no genuine fatherly love for David. This same attitude David displayed at his son Absalon. For five years, three in Geshon; his mother's kinsmen, and, two years after he returned David gave Absalom nosingle audience. Absalon becomes angry and started a series of destructive acts. First, he burned Joab's field to get the commander's attention and eventually, his father's. It was shortly after he saw his father that he initiated his rebellion. As fathers we should not at any time use the psychological approach of

performance-based acceptance in approachin our kids. David was relating with Absalon based on his good performance. As I am now a father I choose to relate with my children unconditionally. Through this Absalon buy enough time to plan his rebellion uninterrupted. Conclusively David was a part of Absalon's rebellion. Parents should learn from this and always be available to observed and check excesses in their children.

iv. Finally the Sauline doctrine of over-protection. Saul overprotected his son Jonathan at the expense of David. He was seeking David's life to save his son's life and position of the next heir to the theocratic leadership of Israel. Severally, he warned Jonathan against protecting David's life (1Sam. 20:30-31).

David would later apply the sin of child over-protection to Absalon when he warned Itai and Abishai to "protect the young man Absalon for my sake" (2Sam. 18:5,12). Child over-Sprotection is tantamount to rearing a lion that would later become the problem of the society.

Let us make a proper personal application of these mistakes. To be honest most of us as parents are making serious mistakes of improper approaches to child rearing. This is the result of gross irresponsibility we have in the society, workplace, the church and on our streets.

Until we imbibe a responsible family upbringing we cannot enjoy a peaceful society; a society with less social tensions. This note marks the end of the core material on this work, leading us into the end of the exercise.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
SUMMARY, SOME VIABLE PROPOSALS AND CONCLUSION

The thrust of this chapter is to succinctly recap the main points that represent a stark portrait of the contents of this work. The author offers some crucial suggestions which if taken would lessen the annoying trend of extreme leadership crisis we experience in these days of baseless criticism and opposition.

8.1 SUMMARY

This writer explores some glaring biblical instances of both individual and collaborative conflicts against the purposes of God and his delegates on earth. Practical approaches on how to handle devilish agents of opposition in all leadership settings are gleaned. Some fingertip suggestions offered to acquaint Christians and secular heads with multiple approaches to problem makers in the society. There are a variety of cases of oppositions in the Bible as well as how God led his servants to overcome them with success.

This book chapter is divided into two parts: Part one comprises of five chapters. Chapter one is an identification of

the earliest cases of opposition from the serpent to the patriarchal tensions. Chapter two showcases human opposition of God's purposes as recorded in the book of Exodus, during the narrow escape of the Hebrews from Egypt. In the third chapter, an investigation into the acts of turbulent rebels against God in the period of the settlement to the period of the monarchy was made. Chapter four considers vipers in wisdom literature and the runaway of a rebel prophet who became prey to a whale! Chapter five beautifully wraps up some opposing viper in the gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, rounding up the treatment with the deadly vipers of Apocalyptus-the Dragon, the two Beasts and the controversial prostitute ably but dangerously represented by the mistress Babylon, the head teacher of harlots.

Part two is much more of personal and general application of the material for those of us in leadership position. It attests to the local reality of vipers operation. Chapter six introduces us into the contemporary vipers, currently operative in the world politics and the church. It identifies some causes of opposition, sources of iniquity bedeviling the society, types of agents causing opposition, characteristics of vagabond vipers and how they infest the

society. Chapter seven charts some clues on how to approach strong opposition using 1 Samuel 17. These clues equip us to overcome stubborn crisis.

8.2 SOME PRACTICAL PROPOSALS

These recommendations are drawn chiefly from the biblical materials that have been explored from chapter one through five. The author strongly believes the Bible as the sole universal document for life transforming. Most of the ethical codes are drawn from it. The approaches adopted in the part (one) by God the father, the Son, thenHolySpirit, and God's servants to solve the problem of human wickedness are still viable if applied wisely with the help of the Holy Spirit to quench the current fire of opposition is active in the society today.

i. Avoid all forms of fear and be bold before all traces of intimidation. Without this mindset you will never function successfully in this era of extreme wickedness. There is gross disrespect for consolidated authority in the society. The devil is fully awake mobilizing his agents against leaders at all levels of human strata. Once elevated to lead, trust God in the face of fear factors looming strong before

you. In most difficult tasks people discourage you that you cannot do it, and they give reasons why you cannot do it. Know that the greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do (Walter Bagehot). Face your giant in faith and boldness. Reread chapter seven on how to face stubborn problems.

ii. High insightfulness Recommended

A foolish leader cannot be successful. A blind man cannot lead with positive results. As a leader you must strive to live a step ahead of your followers. Your awareness of the presence, the past and a guess into the future are in place to make you a wise leader.

This tripathite dimensions of perceiving reality is important to you. Be aware of the current issues you are dealing with. The knowledge of the past is helpful in regulating the status quo in a way the future can be cared for. A good leader should be able to think ahead weighing the present decision.

Paul,, with the use of his past and present circumstance on the sea of Mediterranean advised the sailors not to navigate the ship any further. Paul was

the most learned voyager. Luke recorded eleven of his voyages excluding this one. He voyaged for 3,500 miles, spent 1 day and 1 night in a deep. With this experience he discouraged them putting to sail (Act 27:10). Because the Sailors were more concerned with gain than people they outvoted Paul and the result was tragic (Acts 28). If you want to see an example of poor decision making read this episode (Acts 27,28).

A leader should be insightful. He should be able to see the way, project his destiny and see his responsibility. This should keep him from wasting his time. Be a step ahead from those you are leading. Leaders need to constantly upgrade their experience in various ways in order to be obviously ahead. Lack of foresight makes one a foolish leader. This is the reason most of the problems we had in Nigeria and particularly, Benue State. Foresight can encourage us to rear responsible children and even avoid future complications such that we are facing today. We cannot deny the fact that we are now suffering because of irresponsible leadership,

leaders that were more concerned of their political and economic gains. We have a good number of self-concieted leaders even now in places.

iii. Understand those whom you are leading

One biggest problem with leadership now is that we are working with a mad generation of vipers. We should glean lessons from psychiatrists. Without patience they cannot heal their patients. David experienced working with a mad king and he used this experience exhaustively throughout his interaction with the king. David exercised great patience with this lunatic maintaining his sanity throughout his ordeal. Severally as our text shows, he was careful, steady and composed in order to do the right thing in front of the wrong person. You cannot excuse your irresponsibility because of the actions of your followers. David would not permit the sinful king Saul to control him. Some of your members seek to control your feelings and actions. Do not give them that golden room. Be yourself. When you act in bitterness or in vengeance, you are already a defeated executive.

Be fully aware that humanity is insane. I should (rightly) think I and you, are as well mentally ill. Those of us outside assylums try to hide it a little better. Most leaders demonstrate the same spirit in their approach to matters. The reason we face insecurity and lack of development in many spheres in Nigeria is because of the similar manifestation of evil. Our leader sometimes punish our madness at them. Why would they fold their hands and watch as we wallow in the sands of insecurity and economic hardships of scarcity and inflation?

Our leaders should be forgiving as David was to the lunatic King of Israel's political theocratism. Adherence to biblical principles is capable of effecting healing to our breeding nation. As a Christian leader when you loose yourself as the apostle Paul, you rather find yourself because through it you discover your true identity. Paul loose all cruel traits to please his God but then, gained much in the end.

Also, know that in your position as a leader, you have genuine followers like Barnabas who did the right thing bringing all proceeds from the sales of his

farm to the apostolic communalism. He acted righteously. You also have actors that are doing a different thing from what they profess to be. In a society you have genuine member who practice what they profess and counterfeit members who act differently from what they say they are. This mindset helps to absorb your shock when you grapple with the reality.

iv. Do not lay heavy Emphasis on your immediate Reward.

Your honest labor requires reward. This is the universal truth. However, sometimes owing to circumstances your reward either in kind and cash may not immediately follow your deeds. Sometimes your sacrificial acts of love may not even be appreciated like the cases of Jesus Christ and some of his followers. Do not be discouraged from your service. Honesty must be compensated by its author now or later.

Most of us have not been proportionately rewarded in our servitude to the Lord, yet do still hope that the Lord is not without love. He will

definitely visit his servant in good time. This should encourage you to strive for the best always. Do not change gear because your reward delays.

Learn a good lesson from Mordecai whose good deed was forgotten long ago until when the King was paging through the annals of history that he read of his role in saving his life. He was rewarded on a very crucial note and season. Do not expect to be applauded. Do not always expect to be taken notice of. Crucial foundational figures are not always prominent, considered or remembered. One cannot see the foundation upon which a building is standing. It is completely submerged in the ground. But upon it a building stands firm. I have never met a soul who has set out to satisfy the Lord and has not been satisfied himself (Watchman Nee)

v. Mistress Syndrome of Portiphar's Wife

This syndrome was invented by Portiphar's wife who exhibited inordinate sexual advances over a domestic servant (Joseph). Since that draft, our houses are suffering the indespicable morality. Multiple spouses are groaning with the anguish of this shameful act.

Households are wreaked with untold emotional havocs. Men and women in places should learn to respect themselves avoiding this scandalous invention of Portipha's wife over Joseph. But for the providence of God Joseph's career would have ended here. We are told stolen water is always sweat but can as well lead to promiscuous complications.

vi. Practical Clues

1. To better help others correct themselves examine your life first, and remove the logs of wood in your eye (Mat. 7:1ff)
2. If you want to be completely successful help other people get their needs.
3. Be a person of complete deeds. Be consistent. Some people start everything, even more, but are unable to complete anything. We have incomplete acts of love, projects, relationships etc. Ensure you are not sluggish. Our incomplete acts can sometime attract opposition.
4. Always remember those who made your success possible. This was one of Saul's mistakes with Samuel and David, instrumental

personalities behind his success in Israel. They all become his enemies at their best.

5. Let us seriously learn to respect our leaders
6. Collaboration and conspiracy against the divinely constituted leadership is always a highly punitive vice as far as the owner of the universe is concerned.
7. Consistently pursue your goals in the midst of you distractor. This was the sin that led to Moses partial loss.
8. Godly advice are indispensable.
9. Pray for your leaders instead of gossiping about them
10. Offer constructive criticism instead of gabbage on the media
11. Do not play with your life and opportunity to serve God and humanity. This is the pitfall of Saul and others.
12. Avoid time killers. Stop pursing wrong purpose and discouraged from complaining out the reasons why you are not successful.

13. Be content and thankful for what you have. You may loose what you have in efforts to fight and pull others down to gain success. Haman lost his life and position simply in efforts to pull the Jews down.

    Be grateful with what you have and you will definitely have more.

14. Allow others to participate in your blessings. This was the sin of Jonah. In his attempt to deprive the Ninivites, access to the gospel, he was confined in a shark's belly. Someone has said "to get the full value of joy, you must have someone to divide it with" (Mark Twain).

15. All successful persons should know that success is fleeting. You will be somebody today tomorrow you will be a nobody. You will be rich today and tomorrow, poor. You will be on top today tomorrow you will be at the bottom. We, have seen several foolish successful people maltreating the lowly today whom they meet on the top the next day.

16. A leader and the led should constantly update themselves with the word of God, and current issues they are experiencing in their time.
17. One cannot always control his circumstances but can control himself. One of the effective cause of tension is exchange of bitter words. God created the mouth with a natural control. The lips can be closed while ears are made opened you can shut your mouth to avoid spewing bitterness. You can listen always carefully with your ears but cannot ask at all situations to avoid extreme tension. You can even close your eyes against certain things. God gives each of us the right hand for service, the left for self-control.
18. We are not in leadership positions to preach but to perform. Plan, proceed, perform with patience. David produced a roll honor list in 2Sam. 23:8ff.
19. Practice the craft of the plant called willow. When there are heavy contrary winds, it bend

down till the wind is over it gets up again. Do not always face contrary wind. It will break you!

8.3 CONCLUSION

This author showcases the reality of opposition agents both in the biblical time and the contemporary society. Our local reality is replete with perilous opposition vipers. The biblical material is described and interpreted and sufficient lessons drawn out and viable approaches on how to handle vipers are accordingly pinned down. The recommendations offered in pregnant brevity are essential for our leaders and their followers in the Nigerian context as we struggle with the challenges in our various ministries. The biblical tips of a tripartite dimension of perception Paul employed, boldness awareness of human nature, self-examen as we lead others, spiritual prowess of contentment, love, wisdom and good management of time and opportunity among others are recommended if we can successfully deal with adversaries in the society and deliver what we offer as good leaders. The author calls upon the government leader, the church leadership, the academia and the sundry society to glean the lessons offered in this piece for a wise dealing with our challenges as leaders.

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