

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN BIBLE DAYS: A CHALLENGE TO SCHOOL

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Abstract

The bible is versatile; it is a book containing several other books which treated different subjects across human life. The bible did not only focus on spiritual matters, God, heaven and eternity but also treated man as a physical being, his environmental, socio-cultural and economic activities. The people of the bible (people of old) were involved in different entrepreneurs in their time and through these they manifested their worship of God. Again, through the various businesses, they were engaged in, they were able to develop and build up their community development. Such business also attracted foreign business partners who also contributed towards such community development. Evidences abound in the bible that the Patriarchs- Abraham and the rest were semi-nomads. They lived in tents and moved about with their flocks and he is in search of fresh pasture and water. But after the Exodus, the people of Israel settled in their promised land. And from that time on through all the political scene- shifting, the rise of kings, the division of kingdoms; the life of ordinary people followed a pattern that changed surprisingly little. The commercial life of these bible people will be considered.

Introduction

In the bible days that is during the time of the bible characters, domestic life centered on the home which was built to meet the demands of climate and the limitations of money and raw materials. For most of the year the weather was very hot and dry, this being broken by the former yearly rains of autumn and the later rains of spring. Water was scarce especially in the southern, low rainfall area. Homes were therefore built to keep out heat. The poor lived in one-room houses, built of mud-brick on a stone foundation later of limestone. According to Gower (1983), the flat roof provided storage space and somewhere to sit out. Such engaged by an internal staircase. Windows were small just a slit or a latticed or shuttered aperture which kept out intruders while allowing the free passage of air.

Inside the house, it was cool and shady. A raised platform at one end probably provided sleeping and eating quarters for the family and the remainder of the earthen floor provided storage space for jars and utensils including the hand-mill and living space for the animals-dressed stone and metal lattices to the windows. Some built their houses upwards to provide an upper room while others built outwards to include one or more courtyards, many laid out with attractive gardens.

Inside the house, the poor sat and sleep on mats illuminated by an olive-oil lamp. By comparison, the wealthy sat at the table, slept in beds and were waited on by servants who produced five-star food and music instead of the goat's milk, Olives and barely bread which was the staple diet of others. These were the features of their domestic life.

Food and clothing

The peasant family had to work in order to live. The man worked either in the fields or at a village craft, while the women and the children worked to keep the home, drawing water from the village well in a goatskin bucket early in the day before it got too hot. Derek (1997), wrote that next the corn seeds were sorted to avoid any poisonous òtaresö and while some were òpoppedö on a heated sheet of metal most were ground at the hand-mill and made into flat cakes before baking in the grass-fired leaven, but the part of a previous days dough allowed to ferment.

Clothes were conditioned by the climate. People wore long flowing robes in order to keep cool but the material and texture was decided by wealth. The peasants wore a loincloth and/or tunic and cloak. The man's tunic was white and knee-length and to work or run he tucked it up into the griddle round his waist ó an action known as ògridding up the lionsö. The woman's tunic was similar to the man's but probably more elaborate and colourful. When its wide sleeves were tied together and slipped up over her neck she was ready for work, arms bare. The outer garment of altering dark and light brown stripes, shit at the shoulders for the arms. Since most Jewish looms were only some three feet wide, two pieces of cloth were sewn together side by side to give the required length to the garment- the seamless one worn by Jesus was something of an exception.

Gower (1983), affirm that the wealthy could afford brightly dyed cloth and used a short jack over the tunic. Often the clothes indicated a man's profession- the special dress of the priests, for example or the rabbi's blue-fringed robe. Footwear, when worn at all by the poor man, consisted of a cowhide sole fastened to the ankle by a leather thong passing between the large and second toe, though his richer friend might wear leather slippers. Because the head had to be protected from the sun, a turban was known or a square of cloth held on the head by a cord. There were no such luxuries as night attire for the common man. He simply loosened his griddle and wrapped himself in his cloak.

Working Life

Most important was farming. When the former/early rains (autumn) had softened the ground, furrows were made by a simple wooden plough pulled by an ox. The seed was scattered by hand and the latter rains (spring) brought on the crop for harvesting. To reap they either pulled out the plants whole or else cut the stacks with a wooden sickle which has sharp flints set into the cutting edge.

The corn was carried to a hard level piece of ground known as the threshing floor where either the hooves of oxen or an ox pulled a wooden sledge was used to separate the straw from the grain.

During the period of evening breeze, the threshed corn was winnowed by tossing it into the air with a prolonged fork. The wind blew the light straw away from the floor where it could be picked up and tied in bundles later for firing domestic ovens. The winnowing was completed by the use of a shovel, by which means the dust was removed too. The pure grain was then measured and bagged for use or sale.

Other major crops were grapes, olives and figs. Most grapes were crushed for the juice fermented in order to keep it. Olives were crushed too for their oil- a vital commodity for cooking, lightening, cleaning and medicine.

The Fisherman

There were little fisherman in the Old Testament time but the Israelites were poor sailors. So fishing was limited to the few rivers and lakes notably the lake of Galilee. By Jesus time, there was a flourishing fishing industry in Galilee. The lake teemed with fish to such an extent that it was possible to catch them by throwing a weighed circle of net (the cast net) from the shore and them hauling it in.

The more usual procedure was to suspend a seine net with weights below and corks above between two fishing-boats and either traps the fish in a circle or net in the centre of the lake or sail for the shore to trap the fish in the shallows. Some were sold straight away but others were salted.

Unger (1984) confirmed that spear fishing and even rod and line were in use. The work was often dangerous because the lake could become stormy almost without warning. Sometimes this was caused by cold winds rushing down from the snow as a result of hot air rising from the below-sea-level lake and mixing with the cooler air coming over the hills from the Mediterranean.

The Shepherd

Houston (1986) viewed that farm from earliest times, the work of shepherding was also very important. Since the shepherd had to feed as well as protect the flock. He travelled some distance especially in the hot summer period. Gower (1983) said that each night he counted the sheep into an open fold and he lay across the opening, so becoming the door of the sheep. He had to keep a keen watch for the wild animals which came up from the tangled jungle of the Jordan valley including lions in the Old Testament times and jackals. The shepherd usually had charge of a mixed flock of sheep but he led the sheep. Wool and goat hair gave milk and both animals were a major source of meat.

Village Crafts

All kinds of village crafts were practiced even in the early days. The carpenter made and mended farm tools, ploughs and forks and threshing selds and the basic furniture fir the home. But there was little wood to use as trees were not plentiful. The Manson quarried out, the limestone which constitutes most of the bedrock of Palestine roughly shaping it for building purposes. The potter used clay to make the utensils for the home using a wheel (spun by hand at first and latter foot-powdered), and a primitive oven.

The tanner was also important but his business was normally outside the village and near running water because of the smell. Sandals, griddles and goatskin bottles for water were all made here.

Education and Justice

In the Old Testament times there was no school for ordinary menø children. They were taught everyday skills by their father and mother who also explained the law and the religious festivals to them.

By Jesus time, a girl education was still entirely in her mother's hands but everybody went to the school attached to the synagogue when he was six. The Jewish scriptures were his only textbook as he learnt the history, geography, literature and law of his people. If he was bright enough, he could be sent to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of a learned rabbi and absorb his teaching.

In addition to knowledge of the law, the Jewish boy had to learn a trade. Thus and the meaning of the festivals remained the task of his father. When a boy is thirteen, he became *Bar Mitzvah* a son of the law and for religious purposes he was counted a man. He qualified for the *Minyan*, the group of ten male adults without whom it was possible to hold a synagogue service. On the first Sabbath, he read a portion of the Hebrew scroll and received the ruler's blessing.

Religious Life

Considering what people do for living, religion cannot be separated. This is one of the sources of the major problems in Nigeria today. When people disregard God and religion in their business chosen career if not why should politicians want to win election by all means even by killing fellow human beings. Religion is a powerful instrument for controlling the activities of men and women.

The religious life of Israel centered first on the tabernacle, then on the temple and was determined by the regulations laid down in the law governing sacrifice and offering and the great annual festivals. These were administered by the priest and Levites.

The great day of the year was the day of atonement- the one occasion when the high priest entered the innermost sanctuary of the temple to atone for his sins and the sins of the people. The other great festivals were unleavened bread or Passover commemorating the escape from Egypt.

Another was Weeks (later called Pentecost), celebrating the beginning of the harvest, tabernacles (the harvest festival), trumpets and Purim commemorating Esther's deliverance of the Jews. The law required people to be present at the temple for the festivals three times a year but those for whom the distance was too great came once. These were times of solemn and of joyful celebration.

But the heart of the nation's religious life was the weekly Sabbath. A day to stop work, recollect all God's goodness and enter into the fruits of the week's labours. So important was this that the prophets took the nation's spiritual temperature so to speak by the way ordinary people value and observed the Sabbath.

The Challenge to Nigeria

Israelites knew that they were a nation in relationship with God and this became effective factor in all they were doing. They allow the fear of God to dominate their lives and control all their activities. This was made manifest in all the spheres of their lives-government/political, business, domestic life, careers and their relationship with others. Their religion taught them the righteousness of God and his justice at all times. This made them to be conscious of doing any evil of cheating or any falsehood in their business and work. They become aware that any contrariety will attract God's judgement and punishment. Therefore, to keep safe, they try as much as possible to adhere to the tenets and teachings of their religion.

According to Nickelson (2004), the Jews and the men of the bible see evil as a cankerworm and destructive therefore, they eschew it vehemently and were seriously opposes to cheating and fraudulent acts.

Anyone who attempts to get involved in any illegal business received stern rebuke and general condemnation from the people. The law and prophets became guides and custodians of the national probity and integrity.

Goodwill, honesty and uprightness was condemned and promoted. Anything on the contrary was seriously condemned and stood against by the prophets. In the story of Job, the bible commented him as :-

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was job and that man was perfect and upright and one that feared God and eschewed evil... and very great household so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east". (Job1:1-4).

This is one of many such personalities in the bible, and God was delightful with such people. The prophets were like watch-dogs to see the people on the path of honesty. The Jews esteemed God and national values.

The challenge to Nigerians is to borrow a leaf from the Israelites. Today acts among our business people. They evade tax which government uses in government and the economy of the nation through bunkering of our oil and gas vandalizing and selling of government property. Some import illegal goods and contraband materials into the country. Others will have a false declaration of what they have imported so as to avoid paying the correct import duty, while some get involved in the wrong businesses of kidnapping, human trafficking and other vices.

Nigerians are called upon to amend their ways to correct and government approved businesses with the fear of God and honesty. Dzurgba (2000) pointed out that what we need today in Nigeria are virtues (values). According to him, virtue motivates conduct. Virtues help in the swayed by every wind of mood and fancy in today's fast living world. In Nigeria today, we must go back to God in all ways. He is our creator and demands righteousness. If we do wrong in business, his judgment will definitely come upon the wicked.

There is great need for faith today. Faith in God determines to some degree the pattern of one's life, business and attitudes. In Nigeria today, among the people, there exist size less intolerance, misuse of wealth and power exploitation, violence, poverty and disease which was not found among the Jews. We must hope to change this situation and see a better Nigeria.

Our business men/women needed to exhibit love. Love for God and man, this will give this nation a strong foundation in everything he dies (including business) and ought to love his neighbor as he loves himself (Mathew 27: 37-40).

Recommendation

This paper recommends as follows:-

- i. Our businessmen/women must make sure that their businesses are what god approves and what the government sanctions.
- ii. Let all arise against evil and wickedness in this nation. Nigerians can do that by expressing and fighting against those who sabotage the government and our economy.
- iii. Let all be involved in the current effort to rebrand Nigeria. Let us carry the jingle everywhere that righteousness exalts a nation but sin a reproach to any people (Proverbs 14: 34)
- iv. Everybody must seek for righteousness in all life's endeavor. We need Goodness, uprightness and probity. This will bring healthy development. Nigerians everywhere must be seen as righteous individuals. Those who exhibit attributes of meekness, purity, mercifulness, fortitude and peace.
- v. In Nigeria of today, we need truthfulness, peace and humility.
- vi. It is important that our businessmen and women to imbibe the quality of honesty and integrity. This is manifested in trustworthiness, truthfulness, sincerity, integrity and fairness.

Conclusions

The Israelites followed god ordained patterned entrepreneurship which was of great help to them and brought development to their nation. They eschewed evil and deserved to please god and their kings.

Today in Nigeria, we need to follow their examples. We need absence of deceitfulness and untruthfulness. We must know their duties, obligations, promises and contracts. Honest persons in both little and great things and this is because he who is dishonest in a little and great things and this is because he who is dishonest in a little way is also dishonest in much (Luke 16:10).

Cheating in business, misappropriation and embezzlement are acts of dishonesty. An honest businessman/woman is found to be fruitful in taking care of what belongs to other people or the nation.

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