

PUBLIC READING OF THE BIBLE IN DEUTERONOMY 31:9-13 AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR WORSHIP IN THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST
CONVENTION CHURCHES

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ABSTRACT

In this contemporary time, the act of public Scriptures reading is becoming history to some worshipers. It has been replaced by other acts of liturgy such as singing (psalms, worship songs and hymns of praise) and prayers. Ministers take turn to display skills and knowledge in most public worship. The study therefore, investigated Public Scripture Reading in the light of Deuteronomy 31:9-13 and its implications for Nigerian Baptist Convention churches. This project serves an instrument to awaken and equip God's people for the tremendous ministry privilege of public Bible reading. By implication, the study is an effort at ameliorating the problems associated with substituting the proclamation of God's Word in public worship. This study reviewed extensive literature across a number of divides. The sample consists of purposefully selected pastors and believers within the age range of 20-80 years in the local Baptist churches situated in Southwest Nigeria. The respondents were administered questionnaires which asked them to identify their emotional/spiritual challenges, socio-economic challenges, as well as their churches' attitudes to public Bible reading. The biblical mandate, present social conditions and the results from questionnaires dispatched, as well as interviews with pastors and deacons validated the need to assist the church in developing and implementing a strategy for effective ministering through public Bible reading. Historical survey and descriptive analysis were employed in the treatment of subjects' data. The reliability and suitability of the instrument was proved using Guttman split-half method. The data have been directly assimilated into the discussion and interpretation of the results. The findings show that the uniqueness of Bible reading depends on the level of preparation for worship. This includes levels of educational attainment, negligence or *laisser-faire* in spiritual development, personal dispositions, exposures, and communication skills, and inadequate preparation, which is termed "deficiency." The study discussed all these in reasonable percentages. The findings of the study show the implications of public Scripture reading on worship lifestyles of both the worshippers and the society at large. The study has thus expanded the frontier of knowledge on the liturgical act of public Bible reading for effective nation building through the church. It also brought to limelight the need for expounding the Bible according to biblical principles and examples. The study thus suggested that a pastor as an under shepherd, should have concerns for his ministry through private preparation and self-development. Moreover, the church should also learn the idea of creative public Bible reading in order to meet the challenge of the developing world. Likewise, the church should continually advocate personal and congregational provisions for public Bible reading.

5.2 CONCLUSION

This research affirmed that public Bible reading is a common phenomenon in the Nigerian Baptist Convention churches. Thus, the household of faith (the Church)

should care for its practice in every public gathering. Precisely, the situation in which the early church had to converge in hearing God's word is still prevalent in today's church. The neglect of which led to loss of identity and a disordered communal living among the Israelites.

The Bible is the very Word of the living God, breathed out by God and given to mankind in order to train in all that is necessary for life and godliness. It sanctifies the people of God through personal reading; hence, attention must be given to it in public worship where people gather to worship and honour God. God's people must be deeply reliant on the scripture, trusting that the Bible is the only infallible and inerrant means through which God speaks. The Scripture must be central to public worship services. It is to be read, sung and preached every Sunday. Reading the Scripture is not something to be done out of duty or obligation, but in delight, trusting that it is a means by which the Lord blesses, pursues, convicts and draws.

The New Testament church followed the general pattern of the synagogue. The synagogue grew out of the Old Testament church and developed during the intertestamental period. The early church continued the synagogue practice of weekly Bible reading. Before printing presses and the widespread availability of the Bible, church leaders and pastors served as custodians of the Scriptures. The persecutors believed that the church could be robbed of its identity if all writings were removed from the church, turned in and burnt. As a result, it attracted great persecution in the renaissance era.

Many contemporary churches have care-free attitudes toward the practice of public Bible reading. "More than a didactic exercise, the public reading of God's

Word from the pulpit is an authoritative function of the church in worship.⁸⁵ Some worshipers and pastors prefer the use of other liturgical acts such as prayers centered on human needs and songs voids of inspirations from God but with desires to move the crowd and make money out of the church. They also develop apathy towards the use of the Bible and its interpretation in worship. This has caused some Nigerian Baptist churches loss of identity thereby raising question about devotion to the Bible's authority.

To stand at the front of a church and read the Bible is to stand in the place of God and proclaim his Word. Because of the importance of the Word of God, people committed and assigned to public reading must be consecrated and dedicated. Involvement in public Scripture Reading should be a ministry of the specially trained and equipped ministers in order for the word of God to be read and read well. Public Bible reading is considered a self-teaching ministry, which means that it is a ministry reserved for all desiring to be taught by God. Thus, for effective public reading of the scripture, personal devotion and regular reading habit must be cultivated so that both the reader and the listeners can be blessed in public worship.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The ministry of Nigerian Baptist and her pastor to public Bible reading is a big task as it has been observed from the early church founders to the present era. Having exposed Deuteronomy 31:9-13, public proclamation of God's word should be handled in the church in the light of the following recommendations:

⁸⁵ Lensch K. Christopher, "The Public Reading of the Scripture" *WRS Journal* 7/1 (February 2000), 19-22

1. It assumes that both the person reading and the congregation have an unquenchable desire to hear God through public reading of the Scripture.
2. All parties involved in public worship should give support and have some time to prepare self towards reading of the Bible.
3. For impactful reading of the Bible in public worship, reverence must be given to the Word being read.
4. Churches should have assigned and committed ministers to the ministry of reading. These ministers are encouraged to give sole attention to the study and teaching of God's word. Always ready to explain the contents of the Bible according to the text and not in allegorical manner.
5. For people to understand what is being read, ministers of Nigerian Baptist Convention should personally understand and practice the reading before worship just as much time is devoted to the preparation of sermons. They should read distinctly while giving sense to the passage being read, and avoid common mistakes such as: reading too fast, soliloquizing, impatience in allowing the audience to open the passage before reading, reading without feeling, etc.
6. Despite the spiritual benefit and personal pleasure that Bible reading brings, access to personal Bible should not diminish the importance of the authoritative, public reading of God's word when the saints gathers.