

The Demoniac of Gadarenes as a Portrait of the Perilous Time (καιροὶ χαλεποί): An Eschatological Reflection on the Nigerian Church and Society

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Abstract

The primary focus of this paper is the eschatological implication of the Greek word *χαλεποί* -perilous or fierce, from its description of human society in the last days as *καιροὶ χαλεποί* -perilous time (II Timothy 3:1) and its use in describing the horrifying or fierce experiences of the maniac of Gadara (Mathew 8:28). Academic discussions on eschatology have largely been focused on cataloguing the catastrophic unfolding end time events, such as natural disasters, wars, global outbreak of diseases, Israel diplomatic relations and their prophetic timeline. The general depravity of the human society as a prophetic dimension of the end time has not received its deserved attention. This study, through qualitative research, assessed the theological, eschatological and socio-ethical implications of the end time depravities (*χαλεποί*) on the Nigerian society. There is a connection between demonic activities, as in the maniac of Gadarenes, and the identified bizarre human activities in and outside the Nigerian Church. Spiritual discernment, disengagement from corrupt personalities and discipleship of future leadership are recommended for the preservation of the end-time church.

Keywords: *καιροὶ χαλεποί*, Perilous Times, Maniac of Gadarenes, End-Time Church, Eschatological Implications, Nigerian Society.

Introduction

In the last decade, Nigeria as a country has been embattled in the calamities of increasing varied and new challenges of contemporary issues. This phenomenon broadly embraces terrorism and religious fundamentalism¹, suicide bombing and political instability. Ethno conflicts², territorial and boundary disputes and violence³ are equally of concern. The

¹ Sampson M Nwomah, "Religious Crises in Nigeria: Manifestation, Effects and the Way Forward," *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in Practice: International Perspectives*, vol. 3, no. 11 (August 2011): 94, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259042019>.

² Abubakar Abdulkadir, "A Diary of Ethno-Religious Crises in Nigeria: Causes, Effects and Solutions," *Princeton Law and Public Affairs Working Paper* (April 2012): 2-6, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2040860>.

confusion surrounding human sexuality can be seen manifesting in the gender orientation debates and homosexual agenda even in the church.⁴ In this context, sexual abuse, especially of minor, has taken the central stage in all public discussions and social platform.⁵ These cataclysmic and unethical happenings with their challenges on the Nigerian nation can well be situated in the eschatology of the New Testament. The end time predictions of Jesus Christ for an example include pestilence, wars and rumours of war, natural disasters, and deception by false prophets and strange phenomena across the globe (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Similarly, Apostle Paul, a New Testament writer as an old man imprisoned in the Roman cell, facing imminent and inevitable death, was preoccupied with last day's unprecedented evil trends already manifesting around in his time (II Timothy 3:1-5)⁶. He used the Greek word *χαλεποί* translated as 'difficult' or 'critical' to describe the time (*καιροὶ*) and what the experience of people will be (II Timothy 3:1).

However, research reports investigating the fulfilments and effects of this melancholy forecast of Apostle Paul on the Nigerian socio-spiritual scene are scanty. It is, therefore, imperative to understand the eschatological implications of *καιροὶ χαλεποί* (difficult time) with particular focus on the challenges it constitutes and poses to Christian living, and what the response of the church communities in Nigeria should be. We raised the following research questions to guide this study and to achieve its main objective: What connection, theological or otherwise, exists between *καιροὶ χαλεποί*-perilous times of last days (II Timothy 3:1) and *χαλεποί*-fiercenes or violence description of the demoniac of Gadarenes (Mathew 8:6)? In addition, what could be the reason the Scripture employs *χαλεποί* to describe last days' occurrences and how should the church relate to these end-time parameters?

Methodology

The research design was experiential cum theological hermeneutical method. This involved a hybrid of both primary and secondary sources of qualitative data. Empirical evidence for the manifestations of Pauline eschatology of *χαλεποί*-'fierce' or difficult times as they play out in contemporary Nigeria society was generated. Primary data were obtained from observation, In-Depth interviews (IDIs) and 3 sessions of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with purposive sampled populations covering Christian leaders, parishioners, traditional community leaders, Seminary students, professionals, and merchants, social and political analysts. Secondary sources of data included theological literatures, books, local journals, newspapers and social media contents relevant to the focus of this research. The qualitative data were synthesized and interpreted using thematic summary, discursive, and content analysis to marshal a logical and comprehensive discussion of the theological,

³ "Violence drives Nigeria up to no. 12 on the World Watch List," *Open Door*, November 2, 2019, <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/Nigeria>.

⁴ "Nigeria Gay Pastor Jide Macaulay Shares His Story," *Legit.ng*, December 12, 2014, <https://www.legit.ng>.

⁵ Anthony Hodges, ed., *Children's and Women's Rights in Nigeria: A Wake-up Call, Situation Assessment and Analysis* (Abuja, Nigeria: National Planning Commission and UNICEF, 2001), 12-17.

⁶ Jim Vaught, "We Are in Perilous Times", *Mtairynews*, March 1, 2019, https://www.mtairynews.com/lifestyles/we-are-in-perilous-times/article_16745526-1062-5832-af74-3d94b942f327.html.

eschatological, and socio-ethical implications of *χαλεποί*-fierce or peculiar time in Nigeria contemporary church and secular society.

Literature Review

A brief literature review on the exegetical implication of *χαλεποί*-Perilous/Fierce is attempted here. The text under consideration is from Apostle Paul apocalyptic warning and commands to the church through Timothy his spiritual son:

But understand this that in the last days there will come times of stress (II Timothy 3:1).

Τούτο δὲ γίνωσκε, ὅτι ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις ἐνστήσονται καιροὶ χαλεπο

The last phrase in the verse reads in the Greek as *ἐνστήσονται καιροὶ χαλεποί* meaning that difficult times will come. The word *ἐνστήσονται* is translated *will be upon us* and *χαλεποί* as *grievous* (R.S.V.); but not necessarily *perilous* (A.V.) to those who feel their grievousness.⁷ Difficult times probably denotes the period of stress and harrowing experiences. This will be the time when people will find things to be generally uncomfortable as opposed to what was obtainable in the past. Schaff's Philip shares same preference as above and comments that *χαλεποί* translated as '*perilous*' is better seen or rendered '*grievous*.' He clarified that the idea is that of distress rather than danger.⁸ *...ἐνστήσονται καιροὶ χαλεποί*, was rendered as *... "will ensue troublesome times, seasons of trial when it will be hard to keep the path of duty."*⁹ Bengel Johan surmises that *ἐνστήσονται* can also imply *shall come* unexpectedly, talking about the future, in respect of prophecies that had gone before". He renders *καιροὶ χαλεποὶ* as *perilous times* when it will be difficult to discover what should be done.¹⁰ With a tone of finality, Meyer Henrich concludes that *καιροὶ χαλεποί* may be rightly seen by De wette as *critical times*; but that *καιρός* is not simply the time, but the state of things at the time."¹¹

Going by the above submission from scholars evaluation, the appropriate meaning of *καιροὶ χαλεποί*, presents the contemporary understanding of *Χαλεπός* as used by Apostle Paul in describing the last days as conveying the idea of: '*distress,*' '*perilous,*' '*troublesome,*' '*difficult,*' '*critical*' and '*the state of things at the end time.*' It is central to our discussion, the scholars submission that "*Χαλεπός* only occurs again in New Testament at Matthew

⁷ William Robertson Nicol, "Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:1," *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/egt/2-timothy-3.html>, 1897.

⁸ Philip Schaff, "Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:1," *Schaff's Popular Commentary on the New Testament*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/scn/2-timothy3.html>, 1879-80.

⁹ Harold Alford, "Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:1," *Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/hac/2-timothy-3.html>, 1863.

¹⁰ Johann A. Bengel, "Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:1," *Johann Albrecht Bengel's Gnomon Commentary of the New Testament*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/jab/2-timothy-3.html>, 1897.

¹¹ Heinrich Meyer, "Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:1," *Heinrich Meyer's Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/hmc/2-timothy-3.html>, 1832.

8:28 where it was rendered as “of ‘fierce’ demoniacs.”¹² In other words the only two occasions where the word *Χαλεπός* is used in the New Testament is in its description of the demoniac of Gadarenes (or Gergesenes) in Mathew 8:28 and its employment by Apostle Paul in his prophecy of the evil that will characterize the last days making them *καιροὶ χαλεποὶ* -perilous times (II Timothy 3:1).

Textual Analysis and Implications of ‘χαλεποί’-Perilous as Prevailing Characteristic of Society in the Last Days

An analysis of the Synoptic Gospels narratives of the distinguishing characteristics of this demon possessed man of Gadarenes (or Gergesenes) throws light on what the Holy Spirit points to as end time signs for the church. First, the rendition of Mark and Luke of this narrative will have to be married together to provide detailed features of what *χαλεποὶ* or perilous times may represent for modern society. The Gospel record that: *And when he [Jesus] came to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce...* (Matthew 8:28). First, Matthew 8:28 tell us that there were *two* demon-possessed men. Whereas studying Mark and Luke account of the same story, one discovers that those authors say there was *one* demon-possessed man. This is not a conflict of Scripture. Matthew gives the more general, broader picture, while Mark (5:1-2) and Luke (8:27-29) simply deal with the one man who was the worst-possessed of the two, and whose encounter and deliverance by Jesus was their focus.

Rick Renner observes that: ‘The first thing we find is that these men were so exceedingly fierce...that no man might pass by that way’ (Matthew 8:28). The word “fierce” (*χαλεποὶ*) can also be translated from the Greek as *high risk, treacherous, destructive, and in danger of causing damage*.¹³ The Holy Spirit therefore in using *χαλεποὶ* to describe the last days implies that the society in the last days should be expected to be *exceedingly fierce* times, times of unprecedented danger and a time so perverse that virtually everybody will be in utter danger.¹⁴

Textual analysis of the distinctive features of *χαλεποὶ* description of the demoniac yields six characteristics that are pivotal to our examination of the manifestation of the end time in Nigerian society:

1. **Uncleanness:** He was under the strong influence of “unclean spirit” and was thereby a subject of all inconceivable immoral tendencies (Mark 5:2).

2. **Nudity:** He was naked day in day out with absolutely no decorum or respect for his body (Luke 8:27).

3. **Out of touch with the real world:** ‘He neither abode in any house but the tomb’ (Mathew 8:28; Luke 8:27). The tomb is an abhorred and unnatural state for living souls.

4. **Violence:** The man was not only violent or fierce in constitution, he was equally self-destructive and hazardous to others (Mark 5:3, 5: Mathew 8:28).

¹² “Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:1,” *Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/cgt/2-timothy-3.html>, 1896.

¹³ Rick Renner, “Perilous Time Shall Come,” *Renner*, August 4, 2019. <https://renner.org/devotionals/perilous-times-shall-come>.

¹⁴ Renner, “Perilous Time Shall Come.”

5. Out of control of self: Several human attempts to check him from destroying himself and causing injuries to passerby were unhelpful (Mark 5:4: Luke 8:29b).

6. Restless and driven into isolation in the mountain, wilderness and tomb (Luke 28:29c; Mark 5:2, 5; Mathew 8:28).

The above six characteristics are therefore embedded in this word *χαλεποί* (*perilous times*) as predicted by Apostle Paul (II Timothy 3:1-)

The Theological, Eschatological and Socio-Ethical Implications of *Καιροὶ Χαλεποὶ*-Perilous Times in Contemporary Nigerian Society

This section assesses the fruition of Apostle Paul's prediction of *καιροὶ χαλεποὶ* or perilous times in contemporary Nigerian Society. The above six implications of *χαλεποὶ* or 'fierce' identified in the demoniac shall guide the assessments.

Abuse of human sexuality: The manifestation of *χαλεποὶ*-'fierce' as in **perilous time in the demoniac** depicts an orientation toward lewdness, sexual uncleanness and culture of Nudity. However the adjective 'unclean' describes also the tendencies, disposition and inward perversion of this man by the demon that possessed him. Rick Renner remarks that the uncleanness about this man bordered about 'sexual uncleanness.' He comments that:

First, we see that he had "an unclean spirit" (Mark 5:2)... In fact, as you study the original Greek in these verses, there's actually an implication that something in the man's mind had been opened to something sexually unclean... So there's an indication that sexual uncleanness was how this man became demonized to begin with.¹⁵

The Luke account further describes the man that he "... had devils long time, and wore no clothes... (Luke 8:27)." Thus *χαλεποὶ* also portrays the idea of *nudity because when the maniac was delivered he was clothed*.¹⁶ Social lifestyle in contemporary Nigeria portrays a culture of sexual perversion manifesting in undue public exposure of intimate body members especially by the feminine gender style of clothing.

There is obvious loss of shame as women private part is open to public scrutiny. Even on the social media, contemporary young people exchange their nude pictures. Adebayo, a social media commentator, wonders that even couple post on the social media pictures of different postures of their bedroom sexual acts which mostly are "selfie", taken by them.¹⁷ Kehinde, a Clergyman in his assessment of the present culture of nudity in Nigerian society reminisces that in the past, full nudity and pictures of sexual acts was exclusively in the domain of the pornography industry. He notes that in Nigerian society today, undue exposure of female anatomy has become an acceptable norm in most places, the church inclusive.¹⁸ Rick Renner clarifies that in the Jewish world, at the time of this writing, public nudity was an affront. The Jews believed that public nudity wasn't just indecent — it was an

¹⁵ Renner, "Perilous Time Shall Come."

¹⁶ Renner, "Perilous Time Shall Come."

¹⁷ Adebayo Abiodun (a social commentator) in discussion with the author at Bodija, Ibadan, July 4, 2019.

¹⁸ Awoniyi Kehinde (A Clergyman with Christ Apostolic Church) in Discussion with the Author at Lagos, July 6, 2019.

absolute shame in the presence of God.¹⁹ This Judeo-cultural background from Rick parallel that of Africa-Nigerian traditional ethos as seen in its different tribes. The Nigerian three major ethnic groups, *Igbo*, *Hausa* and *Yoruba*, discountenance seductive and sensual public appearance²⁰ and have no tolerance for public flaunting of sensitive body members²¹ or display of nudity.²² These ethnic tribes hold vehement cultural aversion for the violation of bodily decorum. In traditional *Hausa* society, it is an important element of child training to teach boys and girls that 'it is lack of shame and loss of dignity for your sensitive body parts to be subjected to public scrutiny.'²³ Olufunmilayo Daniel, an *Ebira* by tribe and an aged woman laments the loss of cultural values on womanhood and public decorum. According to her, seeing young ladies today having to expose their buttock cleavage, panties, waist beads or even a larger part of their buttock by reason of their scanty dress is heartbroken.²⁴

If the uncleanness that describes this demon possessed man bothers on sexual lewdness, then we may point out the continued and unabated incidences of sexual assaults of the minor and the incursion of gay lifestyle as reported in the news and observed in the society²⁵ as evidence of such 'uncleanness' or activities of 'unclean spirits' as found in the demon possessed man. Nudity and sexual uncleanness constitute and characterize the times in contemporary Nigerian society as perilous. This aberration of human sexuality such as extreme nudity, rape, incest, premarital and extra-marital sexual activities, sex-text and online sex, are not new faces or strange occurrences in Nigeria modern society. The pervasiveness, permissiveness and preponderance of these activities is what is alarming and unprecedented. Advancement in science and technology: contraceptive pill, condom, internet, electronic gadget, mobile cell phone are culpable in succumbing the society to the hegemony and invasion of such uncleanness.²⁶ The churches or places of worship are not excluded. On an increasing spate, our TV programs, home-made videos, Nollywood actors and actresses and religious gatherings are infested with nudity. Ampitan, a New Testament Scholar, gives a vivid picture of the pattern of nudity in the society. He submits thus:

In our contemporary days, ladies must necessarily dress in such a way that will expose their body, especially the sensitive part. It is probable that they want boys

¹⁹ Rick Renner, "Equip for the Last Days." *Tonyo Cooke Ministries*, August 4, 2019. <https://www.tonycooke.org/articles-y-others-equipperd-last-days>.

²⁰ Church Hill Christopher (an *Igbo* tribe Youth) in Discussion with the Author at Berger, Lagos, July 8, 2019.

²¹ Andrew Mambula (Pastor of the *Hausa* Speaking Church, Protestant section) in Discussion with the Author at *Eleweran* Police Barrack, Abeokuta, July 16, 2019.

²² Elder Oyenekan James (A Centenarian *Yoruba* traditional thinker) in discussion with the author, at Mokola, Ibadan, July 10, 2019.

²³ Justinah Bekeh (A *Hausa* tribe young lady and a Primary School teacher) in discussion with the author at Agbofieti, Ibadan, July 27, 2019.

²⁴ Olufunmilayo Daniel (A 68-year-old businesswoman and *Ebira* traditionalist) in discussion with the author at Agbofieti, Ibadan, July 27, 2019.

²⁵ "Nigerians react as lesbian couples pose for photo in Lagos," *Linda Ikeji*, July 22, 2023, <https://lindaikejisblog.com/2020/9/Nigerians-react-as-lesbian-couples-pose-for-photo-in-lagos-2.html>

²⁶ Focus Group Discussion on "Perilous Times in Nigeria" at Christian Theological Seminary, Old -Ife Road, Ibadan, February 11, 2021.

or men to admire their bodies. Boys, too, are found most of the time sagging their trousers. These are essentially to demonstrate civilization.²⁷

Typical examples of news headline representative of the increasing sexual assaults that are now taking over the society are: 'Court remanded in prison custody a Warri-based cleric, Bishop Elijah Orhonigbe, for allegedly raping a 19-year-old girl'²⁸; 'A 70 year old man charged to court for raping a two year old girl to death in Kaduna.'²⁹ The common feature of these rape activities which makes it different from what was obtainable before is that the victims are increasingly minor and their assailants in most of the cases equally murdered their victims after sexually assaulting them.³⁰ The Holy Spirit identifies obsession with nudity and all sexual perversion as feature of the end-time.

A self-destruct tendency: This is the implication of χαλεποί –fierce manifesting as an **obsession with death in today's society as in** this demon-possessed man. The cold environment of death was this man comfortable abode or dwelling place (Mark 5:3). Rick Renner paints a gruesome picture of western culture and its obsession with death. He pontificates that:

It's very interesting how much death is on the minds of people in our culture today...It's as if the subject of death and mortality has taken over the entertainment industry. Who would have ever dreamed that vampires and other creatures associated with darkness and death would become so popular and romanticized in our culture? Yet these things are all the rage in our day.³¹

The globalization influence of western world on the Nigerian Society is overarching and especially more incursive into Nigerian social media and entertainment industries. These horrific movies of blood sucking vampire and violent movies that are centred on killing spree, murder, easy ways to commit suicide, *etc*, are now readily available or accessible as home movies for many families' pleasurable watch. Whereas in the past, most people naturally would recoil, unable to stand the cruel acts of killings, murder, blood sucking vampires and bloodletting scenes in such violent movie or 'horror film' as they are called in post-modern Nigeria. There have been a few reports of another dimension of the 'culture of death' or strange accommodation of death rearing its head in Nigerian society where some youths now appear to accord heroism to taking their own lives.

A Nigerian young fellow uploaded on Facebook his video clips where he was swallowing 'snippet,' a common household chemical for killing rodents and mosquitoes,

²⁷ J. Afolabi Ampitan (A Biblical Scholar and Associate Professor, Ajayi Crowther University (ACU), Oyo) in discussion with the author at ACU, Oyo, July 17, 2019.

²⁸ Dele Ogunyemi, "Alleged rape: Warri Bishop, Orhonigbe, granted bail," *Punchng-com.cdn*, July 30, 2020, <https://punchng.com/alleged-rape-warri-bishop-orhonigbe-granted-bail>.

²⁹ Nsikak Nseyen, "A 70-year-old man charged to court for raping a two-year-old girl to death in Kaduna," *Daily Post*, February 6, 2024, <https://dailypost.ng/2020/06/04/man-sentenced-to-death-for-raping-to-death-two-year-old-girl>.

³⁰ Focus Group Discussions on 'Sexual Assaults' at Adukanle Community Association Center, Apata, Ibadan, 3 August 2019.

³¹ Renner, "Equipped for the End Times'

which resulted into his death.³² Heroic view of suicide is an aberration and antithesis to social mores of any of the socio-cultural groups in Nigeria.³³ This nature of *χαλεποί*-perilous times is not yet a pronounced or defining characteristic of Nigerian Society end time events as predicted by Apostle Paul. Though, as noted above, its trail is already prepared.

Self-mutilation and an obsession with violence: These men were described as “exceedingly fierce,” thus making the area where they roamed very dangerous and deserted by people in order to avoid being endangered.³⁴ Prevalent self-destructive lifestyle, bloodshed, and threats to the peace and security of others are another manifestation of *χαλεποί*-perilous in our society today. The output or productions from the movie and music industries lend credence to the ease with which violence is being perpetrated today. Bitrus, a missionary, expresses disappointment that:

Our environment has continued to be unsafe and lives more endangered by hazardous elements and wicked personalities. Our parents told us stories of their lives and the safety, security, and peace that was available in their days. Today, instead, fear, anxiety, insecurity has subverted peace and security from a violent free society our parent known and enjoyed.³⁵

However, from *καιροί χαλεποί* or perilous time point of view, characteristic violence or destructive activities and behavior in present Nigerian society in the last decade are kidnapping, suicide bombing, and faith persecution. Although Faith persecution and kidnapping are not recent developments, but it has taken on a *χαλεποί* or perilous time connotations. Persecution of people of faith in Nigeria has become more fierce, violent and ferocious as never before. Buttressing the position of Bitrus above, Aina Joshua, a clergyman paints a picture of terror and pandemonium caused by violent socio-religious group:

In the last 5 years, the communities in different states in Nigeria have been terrorized by splinter violent groups that terrorize and unleash mayhem on citizens. These include the *1 million boys*; the *bados*, the religious terrorist groups *Boko Haram* and Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) that inflicts terror.³⁶

Two new dimensions are now added to make it *χαλεποί*-fierce and perilous. These new dimensions are a scale up in the frequency and the suicide bomber attack of church and public gathering; and the kidnapping of clergymen which most invariably results in their murder by their abductors.

³² Tobi Awodipe, “Artiste Task Federal Government to Expedite Action on Suicide Prevention,” *The Guardian*, February 25, 2024, <https://m.guardian.ng/Saturday-magazine/artiste-tasks-fg-to-expedite-action-on-suicide-prevention>.

³³ Adeyinka Rufus (A 71-year-old Yoruba traditionalist and Church Elder) in discussion with the author at Nalende Area, Ibadan, July 29, 2019.

³⁴ Harold Wilmington, “The Miracle of Jesus Christ: Delivering the Maniac of Gadara” (2018), *The Second Person File*, 255, March 9, 2024, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1231&content=second_person.

³⁵ Bitrus Mangai (A Secondary School Principal) in Discussion with the Author at Bocos, Jos Plateau, Northern Nigeria, June 4, 2019.

³⁶ Aina Joshua (An African Church Clergyman) in Discussion with the Author at Ikorodu, Ogun State in South-Western Nigeria, January 31, 2019.

Leah Sharibu, now 21 years old, has been in custody of *Boko Haram*, the Islamic fundamentalist and terrorist group, for seven years and they refused to release her for refusing to convert to Islam. She had been kidnapped on 27 February, 2018 alongside her colleagues from a Christian Boarder School at Dapchi, Borno State.³⁷ In the year 2019, Nnadi, one of the three Seminarians kidnapped from Good Shepherd Minor Catholic Seminary in Kaduna State, was eventually killed and the other 2 were released with severe injuries and maltreatment.³⁸ Following after, on December 26, 2019, Rev Andini, the Adamawa state branch chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), was abducted and eventually beheaded by *Boko Haram* against all efforts or negotiation by CAN.³⁹ There was no time in the history of the church in Nigeria that going to church or being at church environment has been danger-laden or violence ridden.

The violence and crime due to suicide bombers attack of social and public places is unnerving. Suicide bombers can also be described as self-destructive, driven by the same evil power that caused the demoniac to cut himself with stones every day. In the present Nigerian society, kidnapping is now taken up as a money-making venture, whereby the victim's freedom is negotiated for by paying to the kidnappers' exorbitant agreed ransom.⁴⁰ All of these are entirely different from the nature and context of violence ever known before now in the society. They are fulfilments of the appearance of *χαλεποί* -perilous times in Nigeria as well as in other climes as end time signs. The Television, internet, music, and video games are avenues that expose children to acts of murder... violence is now the hottest-selling ticket at the box office as children across the world play to "kill" at video games that realistically emulate murder. The long-term result is that actual acts of violence are increasing in every part of society.⁴¹ This connection of video games to teaching children violence should be given due consideration, because these indicted video games are not only imported but as well easily accessible online and on social media. Inadvertently children are exposed to demons of violence.

It is contextual and pertinent to also reckon with increased incidences of domestic violence in the society and this, again, is on a different dimension to qualify the times as *χαλεποί* -fierce and perilous. Incidences of domestic violence in the last 5 years have been marked with more reports of death of one of the spouses, mostly resulting from direct murderous attack on the victim.⁴² In the same vein, there have been of late, more reports of a

³⁷ "Leah Sharibu Archives," *World Watch Monitor*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org>.

³⁸ Sean Connolly, "The Death of Michael Nnadi and the Sacrifice of Seminarians," *Catholic World Report*, February 8, 2020, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/02/08-the-death-of-michael-nnadi-and-the-sacrifice-of-seminarians>.

³⁹ Mervyn Thomas, "Boko Haram Executes Chair of Christian Association of Nigeria in Adamawa State," *CWS*, January 21, 2020, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/01/21/press/4530/article.htm>

⁴⁰ J. Afolabi Ampitan and Ige Adetunji, "Ineptitudes of Nigerian Leaders: Major Causes of Under-development," *Religion: Journal of The Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions* 28, No.2 (July 2018): 18.

⁴¹ Renner "Equipped for the Last Days."

⁴² Amos Olugbenga Oyedokun, "Predictors of Attitudes toward Wife Battering among Nigerian Men: Evidence from Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2003," *Journal of Multicultural, Gender and Minority Studies* 1, no. 1 (2007): 3-5.

child losing his or her life from direct physical assaults by the parent or guardian.⁴³ In the past, black eye, mental torment, denial, verbal assaults, humiliation, *etc.* are the usual assaults directed at the victim of domestic violence but what obtains now includes acts of attempted or actualized murder of the victim. The Holy Spirit warns of a dangerous time when people would be given to violence and would be unable to control their temper.

Out of Self-Control: Rick Renner in his exegesis explains that: 'Here we find a man who was *untameable*, someone who couldn't be subdued even with chains; according to him, the phrase "...neither could any man tame him" was translated from the same Greek word used to describe a *wild-animal tamer* — someone who normally could tame the wildest of animals, but who became confronted with a *situation so completely out of control that trying to bring it under subjection was useless*.'⁴⁴ Human Society generally is having a hard time keeping their people more law abiding and respectful of constituted authority. In Nigerian society, compliance with civic regulations and social ethos by many is more challenging.

Thus, one can expect an unfolding of anarchy as human being lose self-control, becoming more untameable in tastes, thoughts, lifestyle and preferences. The chaos and anarchy that will erupt on the earth in the last days will defy human curtailments.

Restlessness and confusion in the mind due to demonic influence: Lastly, the human society in the last days will be characterized by widespread *restlessness* as demonic activities in driving or influencing man intensifies. The Gospel narratives submit that ...'he was driven of the devil into the wilderness' (Luke 8: 29) and that ...'he was in the mountains and in the tomb' (Mark 5:5). Rick Renner commentary on the above scriptures is insightful. He explains that:

Just as this demon-possessed man was "driven of the devil," society in the last days will be *driven* and will be *out of control* ... Satan will drive all those he can on a fast track *out of the will of God*, and they will not know peace... as they're driven further and further into darkness, depression, isolation, and spiritual oppression.⁴⁵

The restlessness observed in human history in contemporary times is on a global scale. There is a mad rush at nothing in the present-day Nigeria. It is perfectly healthy and scriptural to pursue and press for the actualization of worthy goals, vision or projection. However, when people are driven by, and of the devil, they have their will power wrestled out of their control, their motivation becomes twisted, their true purpose or vision for meaningful life is perverted and they eventually become out of touch with realities. These restlessness and confusions of the mind drive some people to destruction and death, isolation and depression, self-deception and false religiosity like the demoniac was driven to the tomb, wilderness and the mountain.

At no time is this demonic drive of the modern Nigerian society becomes more pronounced as during election process for political appointment to political offices. The news media becomes replete with news and reports of political aspirants, party members, and their loyalists demonstrating hitherto unparalleled unrest, untamed aspiration and loss

⁴³ Isaac Dachen "Man beats 7-year-old son to death for stealing," *Pulse*, February 25, 2024, <https://www.pulse.ng/gist/father-from-hell-man-beats-7year-old-son-to-death-for-stealing/9by27n3>.

⁴⁴ Renner, "Equip for the Last Days."

⁴⁵ Renner, "Equip for the Last Days."

of self-control as they are driven around to realize their ambition. Some resort to unethical and demonic practices not limited to public ritual bath and human sacrifice, others hired assassins to murder their opponents to create more chances of winning the election.⁴⁶ In another development, some in the space of few months change their membership of political party several times, scouting round, not really knowing where to settle their confused mind.⁴⁷ Nigerian politician, thus, do not subscribe to Akinwale argument that 'politics and ethics are to be conceived as inseparable, and that the politikos (*politikos*) that is, the statesman, must be a good man; an objectively morally good person who acknowledges the weight of the universal moral principles innate in him/her as well as in the other persons who are ruled.⁴⁸

The Manifestation of *Χαλεποί* in the Nigerian Church Praxis: An Eschatological Perspective

This section reports our findings on the manifestations of the prophesied *χαλεποί* understood as grievous, difficult or season of trial when it will be difficult to keep the path of duty, as it impinges on church liturgy and traditions. These are categorized as demonic features, activities and practices in the Nigerian churches.

Charismatic witchcraft identifiable as perversion of the true charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit has taken over the church landscape. False prophecy and the working of spirit of divination and sorceries are the stock in trade of some of these individuals who pride themselves as Prophets. These authors observe that 'prophetic ministry' is the bait that most victims of these charlatans take. These Prophets manipulate their victims and control their mind to dispossess them of their property, wives or money. They employ demonic inspired 'speaking in tongues,' 'accurate' personal prophecies from occult empowerment or third-party source and perform miracles of healing from their satanic machinations.⁴⁹ It is obvious the New Testament office of the Prophet is grossly misunderstood.

The violence and assaults meted out to their victims by the supposed church leaders who are better identified as cult leaders are further evidence of the working of *χαλεποί*-fierce or demoniac in these men who have established themselves as 'Lord over God's heritage' (I Peter 5:3). A typical case is Rev King who was exposed, convicted and jailed for his atrocities that is not limited to pressing hot iron to the back of church members, asking the women who served him to be nude to do so and inflicting injuries from whipping on

⁴⁶ Victor Osaro Edo and Julius Akinyele Oluyitan, "Ethnicity and Political Tension in Independent Nigeria, 1960-1996," *ACU Journal of Humanities* 3, no. 1 (June 2020): 43-45.

⁴⁷ Moses Adebolu Adetunbi, "Ineptitudes of Nigerian Leaders: Major Cause of Underdevelopment, 1960-2019," *Religion: Journal of The Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions* 28, no.2 (July 2018): 194-97.

⁴⁸ Adetunji Akinwale, "Religion and Politics: Philosophical Origins of Separation," *Orita, Ibadan Journal of Religious studies* 32 no. 1-2 (2000): 62.

⁴⁹ Focus Group Discussion on Experiential Evidence for "Perilous Times" in Nigeria, at Sacred College and Theological Seminary, Ashi, Bodija, Ibadan, 22 March, 2020.

members that default on tithes payment.⁵⁰ We condemn these as a violation of human free will, and as well physical and emotional abuse of their victims.

We note that a characteristic feature of these cult leaders is sexual assaults of their victims, and this now includes same sex activities. We lament the increasing clerical sexual assaults of parishioners as a gross moral failure of church leadership, an abuse of ecclesiastical privilege and power.

Also, it is not unusual for some Mega Churches and influential Pastors to invite Nollywood celebrities and popular comedians known for their antichristian lifestyles to provide entertainments which include secular music and ungodly jokes. These secular artistes desecrate God's holy altar with show of carnality, extreme nudity, vulgarity, twisting scriptures and Christian songs to the excitement of the cheering 'Christian' audience. This is a gross indictment on the church for its craving for the world and its loss of tastes for the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, certain doctrines of the devil such as 'grave soaking' are gaining grounds as promoted by some church leaders. Soaking is a word for the exchange or spiritual absorption of anointing and super ability of a dead prophet whose grave is visited for this purpose. These are subtle ways the devil gets believers open up to witchcraft, necromancy and occult practices, things forbidden of God (Leviticus 19:31; Isaiah 8:19).

Discernment, Disengagement and Discipleship: Apostle Paul Imperatives for the End -Time Church Survival

There is therefore the need to answer the question of what biblical provision exists for the church to escape this ongoing corruption and infiltration of demonic elements of the difficult and fierce (*χαλεποί*) time or season (*καιροί*) we are in. The first safety net for the church is captured in the Apostle Paul imperative *Τοῦτο δὲ γίνωσκε* (II Timothy 3: 1b), which is translated as: 'But mark this,' 'But realize this,' 'but understand this' or 'this but know.' This is a call for discernment by end time Christians to see beyond spiritual activities, denomination affinity, and hero worshipping of church leaders. The recent Africa British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Documentary tagged "DISCIPLES: The Cult of TB Joshua"⁵¹ has not only sparked global reaction, but it has also equally pitched the Nigerian Church in particular into different factions, those who choose to be silent for fear of being wrong in their judgment and those bickering at the other for accepting or rejecting the indictment of Prophet T.B. Joshua by the BBC as a false Prophet.

In a related dimension, the church community all over the world is divided over how it should react or relate to the question of LGBTQ-Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer movement. It is noteworthy that the Anglican Communion Church of Nigeria over the years has continued to take a biblical stand that homosexual lifestyle is a demonic

⁵⁰ Ikechukwu Nnochiri, "Supreme court to Decide on Rev King's Appeal against Death Sentence," *Lagos Ministry of Justice*, November 22, 2019, <https://lagosministryofjustice.org/supreme-court-to-decide-on-rev-kings-appeal-against-death-sentence-feb-26>.

⁵¹ "Disciples: The Cult of T. B. Joshua," *BBC News Africa*, February 6, 2024, https://youtube.be/4w8tnwslpxg?si=iEYUTJ_S_AsE5tAY.

perversion of human sexuality and not to be accepted as normative for the church tradition⁵² contrary to the theological disposition of the church in England and America that is more tolerant of it as an alternate sexual orientation. More recently, the Nigeria Catholic Bishops have expressed their displeasure and disapproval concerning blessings for the gay marriage in the Roman Catholic Church.⁵³

These evidence a dire need for the gift of discernment and emphatically points to the prophesied difficulty or the peril of the present time and the unprecedented corruption of men that profess the faith.

In this same context the church has the apostolic charge to ‘not associate with such’ men who are within the faith or seek to infiltrate the church with their depraved lifestyles, heretic teachings and their form of godliness that denies the power of God (II Timothy 3:5b). Precepts, in his textual analysis, concludes that instead of gently correcting them, Timothy is to turn away from them continually.⁵⁴ These individuals must not be tolerated no matter their ecclesiastical titles or ministerial profiles, charismatic endowment, piety, or potential benefits derivable from welcoming them. The local church endangers its call to God’s kingdom purpose, purity and pursuits if it is sympathetic with these fellows. The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) in Nigeria has made a public denunciation, rejection and disassociation regarding the popular self-proclaimed Prophet Muedein Kasali in Southwest Nigeria whose activities are antithetical to Scriptural truth.⁵⁵

Discipleship that prioritizes spiritual and leadership development of upcoming church workers should be given its deserved place. Apostle Paul charged Timothy to keep before him the doctrines he taught him, his daily Christian lifestyle and virtues he lived before Timothy, his endurance of the persecution for the gospel as spiritual armoury for Timothy against the perilous time with its false teachers and their perversion of truths (II Timothy 3:11). These are normative biblical values and imperatives to guide the church and position it to identify and expose Satan’s deceptive, heretical doctrines and schemes in this Last Days.⁵⁶

Jim Vaught however encourages us that the purpose of end time prophecy is not to instil fear but to remain spiritually alert and to make quality decisions.⁵⁷

⁵² Dapo Asaju, (Professor of Christian Theology and Bishop Theologian, Anglican Communion Church of Nigeria and The Vice-Chancellor, Ajayi Crowther University {ACU}) in discussion with the author at ACU, March 13, 2020.

⁵³ Adetutu Sobowale, “Nigerian Catholic Bishops Will Not Bless Same-sex Unions,” *Punchng*, December 21, 2023, <https://punchng.com/catholic-bishops-will-not-bless-same-sex-unions/>.

⁵⁴ “Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:1-2,” *Precept Austin Verse by Verse Commentary by Book*, December 5, 2019, https://www.preceptaustin.org/2_timothy_31-5.

⁵⁵ Gbenga Bankole, “CAC Akinyele Region Orders All Ministers to Desist from Inviting Prophet Kasali to Programs,” *CAC News*, accessed February 7, 2024, <https://www.cacworldnews.com/2018/12/cac-akinyele-region-orders-all.html>.

⁵⁶ David Hebert, “The Perfect and Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ: Reclaiming Eschatology in Pentecostal Proclamation of the Gospel,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology*, Vol. 4, No.1 (March 2019): 11 <https://doi.org/10.31380/2573-6345.1110>.

⁵⁷ Vaught, “We are in perilous times.”

Conclusion

This study establishes an etymological and an eschatological connection between *καιροὶ χαλεποὶ*-perilous times of last days (II Timothy 3:1) and *χαλεποὶ*-fiercenes or violence description of the demoniac of Gadarenes (Mathew 8:6). There is therefore a spiritual warfare dimension to these bizarre dispositions of humankind and end time phenomenon manifesting in Nigeria or globally. The church is thus called to spiritual discernment that inevitably leads to unapologetic disengagement with every 'forms of godliness that denies the power of God' either in praxis or personhood.

Recommendations

The remnant church in Nigeria will have to keep its eschatological edge sharpened by maintaining an active awareness of the end time events, their *χαλεποὶ*-fierce or demoniac implications and be fully armed with the above biblical strategies for survival. It is apt to re-echo Mark A. Keller submission that it is in critical times as we are now that men need hope and assurance of the future that they also need to be confronted with the good news of hope in Jesus.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Mark A. Keller, *Y2K Apocalypse or Opportunity?* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1999), 119-148.

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PERSONAL INTERVIEW/COMMUNICATION

Adebayo Abiodun (A social commentator) in discussion with the author at Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, July 4, 2019.

Adeyinka Rufus (A 71 year old Yoruba traditionalist and Church Elder) in discussion with the author at Nalende Area, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, July 29, 2019.

Ampitan, J. Afolabi (A Biblical Scholar and Associate Professor, ACU-Ajayi Crowther University) in discussion with the author at ACU, Oyo town, Oyo State, Nigeria, July 17, 2019.

Asaju Dapo. (A Professor of Christian Theology and Bishop Theologian, Anglican Communion Church of Nigeria and The Vice-Chancellor, Ajayi Crowther University {ACU}) in discussion with the author at ACU, Oyo Town, Oyo State, Nigeria, March 13, 2020.

Awoniyi Kehinde (A clergyman with Christ Apostolic Church) in discussion with the author at Lagos State, Nigeria, July 6, 2019.

Beke Justinah (A Hausa tribe young lady and a Primary School teacher) in discussion with the author at Agbofieti, Apata, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, July 27, 2019.

Church Hill Christopher (An Igbo tribe youth) in discussion with the author at Berger, Lagos State, Nigeria, July 8, 2019.

Daniel Olufunmilayo (A 68 year old business woman and Ebira traditionalist) in discussion with Joshua Aina (An African Church Clergyman) in discussion with the author at Ikorodu, Ogun State in Nigeria, January 31, 2019.

Mangai Bitrus (A Secondary School Principal) in discussion with the author at Bocos, Jos Plateau, Northern Nigeria on June 4, 2019.

Mambula Andrew (The Pastor of the Hausa speaking church, Protestant Section) in discussion with the author at the Protestant section, Eleweran Police Barrack, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria, July 16, 2019.

Oyeneke James (A 100 year old Yoruba traditional thinker) in discussion with the author at Mokola, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, July 10, 2019. the author, at Agbofieti, Apata, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria July 27, 2019.