

A Time to Weep

THIS TEAM OF 12 NIGERIAN INTERCESSORS HAD BEEN PREPARING THEIR MESSAGE FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS.

A group of women from Nigeria known as the Wailing Women traveled to the United States to share one word—a compilation of a series of prophetic messages they say the Lord had given them—with as many Christians as possible. The spokesperson for the women, Gloria Madugba, admits the message isn't pleasant.

She begins to read: "My daughters in America are crying profusely and asking, 'Where is the God of America?' It is not because I have not heard their cry; I have heard and I am touched by it. I am touched by the things that touch them, but I want America to realize that I am God.

"They should not trust in their chariots and horses. They should not depend on their power and strength. I want them to bow before Me and know that I am their Maker and Creator.

"I have the whole world in My hand. I want men and women in America to know this. They have thought that they have arrived and know all things.

"They are proud and sophisticated. I want them to know that they are not above destruction and cannot lift up their idols before Me."

As she reads on, there are calls for repentance and for a recommitment to biblical truth and prayer. "I love America, and I want them to come back to their first love," she reads. "America, the battle is not yet over, but your victory lies in whom you identify will make a way of escape for those who know Me and call Me with a pure and true heart."

Madugba and the rest of the Wailing Women know their message

is bitter, but they believe it will resonate with the intended audience. God has a special plan for the United States, they say, one that requires Him to unleash a very special weapon. They've come here to seek out and mobilize a specific group of people— women who are willing to wail.

TEARS LIKE JEREMIAH'S God is calling for wailing women to carry His burden as the "weeping prophet" Jeremiah did, the Nigerian intercessors say. Made up of doctors, lawyers, teachers and ministers, the Wailing Women say their group formed in answer to a modern version of the prophet's cry in Jeremiah 9:17.

In 1998, various women in the city of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, began to sense a call to prayer. And like a chain reaction, they say, their numbers began to grow. The leadership team was whittled down to 12. Dr. Laide Okafor, the designated leader, says the Lord began to speak to them about the church and their nation in general.

This is Nigeria, where German evangelist Reinhard Bonnke had been holding massive crusades that drew hundreds of thousands, where the largest church facility in the world is located, and where Christians were beginning to outnumber Muslims for the first time in its history. Church-growth experts were marveling at the size of congregations in Africa's most populous nation, but this small group of women sensed that God was upset by the abomination in the church and the nation.

"He said if we don't make a cry of lamentation, terrible things will start happening in the church," Okafor told SpiritLed Woman. "He told us to call women together in our city to begin to pray."

More than 300 women convened for three days of fasting and prayer. "We started to wail and cry unto the Lord, and the Lord started speaking to us about the church," Okafor added.

They began to repent of the sins they say God revealed, then

later went around to the churches in the city telling them what God had spoken and urging them to repent too.

"Some received us, some didn't. Some really didn't want to hear what we had to say because they were not pleasant things at all. But we did obey God, and we went around to the churches," Okafor said.

"In fact, we went around the city. We had this van with a loud speaker, and we'd go around early in the morning and shout, 'Repent.' Then late in the evening the Lord said go around too, and we did this for about a week."

The women are reticent to say their prayers caused the ensuing series of events, but within a month, the president of Nigeria, a military dictator who had a reputation for corruption and cruelty, died suddenly of a heart attack. The man expected to take his post, a devout Muslim who had been languishing in prison since he lost the bid for the presidency during the previous election, died a month after that.

The following year, a Christian named Olusegun Obasanjo became Nigeria's first democratically elected president after 14 years of military rule. The mosque at the presidential compound was replaced with a chapel, corrupt government officials were exposed, and Christians have been assuming key positions of leadership.

"When that chapel was dedicated, [the Lord] said: 'Now you have given Me a place in this nation where I can stand and look into the affairs of this nation. Now I have taken over the throne of Nigeria,'" Madugba said. "So from that altar, God has been doing a lot in the nation. The Muslims, they can't believe the president would finish four years and be re-elected again."

But in April 2003, Obasanjo launched a second term. The nation is no utopia, but the women say the spiritual atmosphere has changed. There is peace instead of strife. Okafor said, "We're

not there yet, but we're better off."

SENT OUT The prayer movement began to grow and spread into all 36 states in Nigeria. Then the women sensed God speaking to them about visiting other nations to raise up wailing women. They traveled across Africa—to Kenya in the east and to South Africa and Ghana on the west coast—and have since journeyed to more than 20 countries, including Brazil, Australia, Argentina, Uruguay, Japan, Holland and Norway.

"Usually when we go, there are people who are wailing women, they haven't come together," said Esther Ephraim, a lawyer and a member of the leadership team.

"Wailing women from America will intercede for America," added Atim Ogan, "to cry for the sin of America, to pray for the leaders. Usually God will give messages."

One message she believes God is speaking is that the nations of the world will be divided as "sheep" and "goat" nations. The sheep nations are the ones that stand with Israel, Ogan said.

"Women need to pray," she added. "If we are goat nations, we are lining ourselves up to confront Christ, and that won't be good at all."

The Wailing Women in Nigeria gather for prayer retreats throughout the year, but in 2001 they began an international conference to convene the wailing women from other nations, which is held annually in Port Harcourt.

"We believe God is turning His attention to women in this season," Madugba said. "A lot of women do not know it yet. God used the woman to pose a threat to the devil in Genesis 3.

"The woman is [the] embodiment of [a] solution. She was created to solve a problem. The devil knows the day women know who they are in God, [there will be trouble]."

She urges women not to fight for liberation in the flesh, but to let God set women free. Though the women say many men have come alongside them, offering leadership and support, they believe women have unique gifts the Lord wants to use.

Women know what it means to travail and bring forth children, Ogun said. "The depth of lamentation comes from your womb. God wants women to surrender to Him so when the travail gets on you, you travail to bring forth a child."

Whenever God has an agenda, she says, "He always locates the number of women who are dumb enough to listen to Him. They won't argue with Him. They won't try to analyze anything. They just believe like begin to obey."

She says America is a port from which God sends things. "When we return the nation to the original foundation, it will affect the world," Ogun said.

"I guess God is actually depending on American women," she said, "[to] just foolishly obey and begin to cry."

Adrienne S. Gaines is news editor for Charisma magazine. She interviewed the Wailing Women when they visited Lake Mary, Florida.