

A Biblical Case for Reparations Payment on Africa's Stolen Artifacts

"Anyone who steals must certainly make restitution, but if they have nothing, they must be sold to pay for their theft. If the stolen animal is found alive in their possession—whether ox or donkey or sheep—they must pay back double." Exodus 22:3b-4

As more and more museums across Europe are committing to returning Africa's stolen artifacts, concerns have been raised about the payment of reparations by the governments and museums that have held and benefitted from the artifacts over several decades. Indeed, going by the very spiritual laws upon which modern Europe and the Western world were built, museums and nations that received, harboured and benefitted from Africa's artifacts are obligated to pay reparations.

The theft of Africa's artifacts and the colonial invasion that followed or accompanied it robbed many African communities of the cultural and physical infrastructure that housed and preserved the artifacts before they were stolen by the West. As it stands, the readiness of the continent to preserve and protect returning artifacts is under question. Museums and Western governments, to ensure reparative justice, must work closely with communities, national and regional governments in Africa to ensure the safety and preservation of returned artifacts. Beyond this sound practical reasoning, the need for reparative justice is founded in Judeo-Christian principles, which Europe propagated and dispersed to the rest of the world.

Europe as a continent with strong Christian roots has historically subscribed to the principle of reparation. This

law guided decisions reached in 1919, just after the first World War ended, when The Treaty of Versailles was signed, mandating Germany to pay reparations. The victorious powers in the War blamed the War as well as the pillaging and various atrocities that were committed during the course of the crisis on Germany. The 1921 London Schedule of Payments slammed a bill of US\$33 billion (by contemporary calculations) on Germany in order to pay for the restoration of the damages caused by the war. The reparations payment lasted 92 years, the last of which was made on 3 October 2010.

The colonial invasion of Africa was a war declared on the continent. For instance, the activities of the British during the genocide against the Benin people labelled the "Benin Punitive Expedition," where much of the stealing of that nation's artifacts took place, is likened to the activities of Germany during WW1.

If Germany was made to pay reparations to Europe, Britain must likewise pay reparations to Benin, and so must other nations that stole from the continent. This is because reparations are an essential part of Western Law, which is founded on the Mosaic Law and the Gospel of Christ.

In many passages in the laws which the Most High handed to Moses, His servant, it is clearly stated that when thieves are caught, they are to be made to return what they stole plus more. According to Leviticus 6:2–5 (NLT), "Suppose one of you sins against your associate and is unfaithful to the LORD. Suppose you cheat in a deal involving a security deposit, or you steal or commit fraud, or you find lost property and lie about it, or you lie while swearing to tell the truth, or you commit any other such sin. If you have sinned in any of these ways, you are guilty. You must give back whatever you stole, or the money you took by extortion, or the security deposit, or the lost property you found, or anything obtained by swearing falsely. You must make restitution by paying the full price plus an additional 20 percent to the person you have

harmed. On the same day, you must present a guilt offering.”

Fundamental to the Mosaic Law, then, is the protection of victims of theft and extortion. The requirement of a restitutive payment by the offending party, whose amount varied between 100 to 500 percent of the loss, is necessary as compensation for the hardships the victims must have undergone as a result of the incident.

The New Testament is not silent on the demand for restitution or reparations payment from offending parties. The much-hated sinner, Zacchaeus, notorious as a tax collector who had swindled many of his brethren of their hard-earned money, was shocked when Christ offered to visit his home. At his home, Jesus relaxed, wine and dined with Zacchaeus' gang of fellow fraudsters. The teachers of the Mosaic law were stunned at someone who claimed to be the son of a holy God mingling with such company. However, having encountered the pure, non-judgmental and unadulterated love of God through Jesus, Zacchaeus stood and declared, 'Look, Lord! Here and now, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'

Notice the difference in Zacchaeus' requirement for salvation, from, say, Peter and Andrew who simply left their fishing profession to follow Jesus, or Nicodemus, the teacher of the law who was simply told to become born-again. In the case of a thief, like Zacchaeus, his conversion required the payment of restitution up to four times. Upon Zacchaeus' declaration of repentance and intent to pay reparation, Jesus responded, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Scripturally, therefore, the true test of sincere repentance in the case of theft, fraud or extortion is a confession, relinquishing of all ill-gotten wealth and the payment of

additional reparations as compensation for the inconvenience brought about by one's actions.

The mere dumping of artifacts on Africa's soils by the museums and nations that harboured and benefitted from them for decades is grossly insufficient. Governments of nations who organized the pillaging and whose citizens and museums have held on to Africa's artifacts must do the rightful thing by paying adequate compensation for them.

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