



Research article

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**ISRAEL’S REQUEST FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES IN I KINGS 12:1-5
VIS – A- VIZ IPOB’S AGITATION FOR INDEPENDENCE IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The dynamism that has accompanied contemporary scholarship has opened up several writers’ approach in contextualizing the biblical text, in a way that makes it look relevant to the present age and useful in proffering solution to problems; both in the present and for the future. It is in view of this that the biblical text of 1 Kings 12:1-5 will be examined in this article, looking at the request of the Israelites for a redress of grievances at Shechem during the reign of Rehoboam and comparing it with the agitations of the Indigenous People of Biafra. The article also provided practicable recommendations which would be useful for the Nigerian government in tackling the challenges posed at them by the IPOB dilemma.

Keywords:

1 Kings 12, Israel,

Rehoboam, IPOB,

Agitation, Independence,

Nigeria.



Introduction

In Nigeria, the presence of multi – ethnic and multi - faith groups have often time stirred up fracas most especially between those affiliated to these groups and the federal government. When things do not go as the people expected, one of the ways chosen for showing displeasure to the government is through the staging of protests, where various agitations are expressed, so that things can be put in their rightful places.

Over the years, the agitations of the Indigenous people of Biafra, also known as IPOB have been a recurring trend between the federal government of Nigeria and that of IPOB. Despite the measures put in place by the federal government to ameliorate this challenge, the wrong implementation of such measures have often times resulted in a fiasco and hence, the misunderstanding between both parties has gone from bad to worse in recent times. This has invariably affected the nation economically, politically, psychologically and socially, thereby crippling the growth and development of the nation for years.

This article will carry out a contextualization of the Biblical text of 1 Kings 12:1-5, where Israel’s request for a redress of grievances will be critically examined vis-a-viz IPOB’s agitation for independence in Nigeria.

A Brief Appraisal of the Book of Kings and the Critical Survey of 1 Kings 12:1-5

The book of kings which is also referred to as “*Sefer Melakhim*” in transliterated Hebrew, is a single book in the Hebrew Bible and two books i.e. 1 Kings and 2 Kings, in the Christian Old Testament. These books conclude the deuteronomistic history and Biblical commentators portend that the books of Kings were written to provide the theological explanation for the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah by Babylon in c. 586 BCE and to provide a foundation for a return from Babylonian exile¹. According to Fretheim (1997)² and Grabbe (2016)³, they both submit that scholars tend to treat the first and second book of Kings as consisting of a first edition from the late 7th century BCE and of a second and final edition from the mid-6th century BCE.

As regards its authorship, several suggestions were given by several scholars, but Spieckermann (2001)⁴ asserts that the Jewish tradition held the author to be Jeremiah, who have been alive during the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. However, Noth as presented by



Perdue (2001)⁵ refuses to be drawn into given a name to the author, as he argues that the history was the work of a single individual, living in the 6th century BCE⁶.

Also, in delving into the contents of the book of Kings, the Jerusalem Bible divides the books into eight sections namely⁷; 1 Kings 1:1 – 2:46 (The Davidic Succession), 1 Kings 3:1 – 11:43 (Solomon in all his glory), 1 Kings 12:1 – 13:34 (The Political and Religious Schism), 1 Kings 14:1 – 16:34 (The Two Kingdom under Elijah), 1 Kings 17:1 – 2 Kings 1:18 (The Elijah Cycle), 2 Kings 2:1 – 13:25 (The Elisha Cycle), 2 Kings 14:1 – 17:41 (The Two Kingdoms to the Fall of Samaria) and 2 Kings 18:1 – 25:30 (The Last years of the Kingdom of Judah).

Although, the books of I and II Kings can be categorized as an historical book, it has been suggested by Nelson (1987)⁸, that readers should approach the book as a theological literature in the form of history, if one seeks to better understand the message the author seem to pass across.

For this purpose of this article, our focal point of emphasis will be situated around 1 Kings 12:1-5, which according to the division of the Jerusalem Bible, is laden with the theme of political and religious schism.

A Critical Survey of 1 Kings 12:1-5

This account of the Biblical text presents Rehoboam, who at the age of forty, found himself recognized as the natural heir to the crown and successor to the throne of Solomon⁹, his father. Clarke and Earle (1967)¹⁰ submit that Rehoboam was probably the only son of Solomon, for although Solomon had a thousand wives, he had not the blessing of numerous offspring and even Rehoboam, whom he did have, was considered a poor and an unprincipled fool, who lacked the proper training of the palace.

Conventional biblical chronology dates the start of Rehoboam's reign to the mid-10th century BC and his reign is described in 1 Kings 12, 14:12-31 and in 2 Chronicles 10-12¹¹. He was believed to have reigned for seventeen years¹² and on his inauguration of being named the king of Israel, he called a gathering at Shechem; the chief city of Ephraim, where all the tribes of Israel gathered including Jeroboam, who has initially fled to Egypt for asylum during the time of Solomon. Why Shechem was chosen for the inauguration was not clear,



but Rawlinson (1889)¹³ suggested that it is perhaps most probable, that Rehoboam designated Shechem as the place for his inauguration in a conciliatory spirit, hoping to gratify the Ephraimites and to secure their support and favor. This political move seem not to profit Rehoboam, who was met with some serious demands from the people, as he requested for their support.

The events surrounding the demands made by the Israelites before the coronation of Rehoboam can be accorded legitimate, was premised on the oppressive rule of King Solomon in his later years. Clarke and Earle (1967)¹⁴ put it pointedly when they observe that;

At first it is supposed that Solomon employed no Israelites in drudgery, but afterwards, when he forsook the God of compassion, he seems to have used them as slaves and to have revived the Egyptian bondage.

Solomon's later years were filled stringent exertions on the people, as he began to employ measures leading to heavy taxes upon the Israelites, for the finishing of his buildings, for the maintenance of his household, for the keeping of such a large number of horses and chariots including the salaries of his officers and the support of his magnificent court¹⁵. These oppressive measures embarked upon by Solomon led to a general discontent among the Israelites and immediately Solomon died, they saw it as an opportunity to voice their concerns to the next king, whom they believed will relieve them of their burdens.

Hence, in 1 Kings 12:3-4, the demands of the Israelites were the abolition of forced labor and a reduction of taxation, which would have pleased them if accepted. However, since the requested reforms would materially reduce the royal exchequer and hence, the power to continue the magnificence of Solomon's court¹⁶, in verse 5, Rehoboam also asked that the people give him three days before he could reply.

Subsequent verses showed how Rehoboam made consultation from both the older men; who were experienced on the matter of state affairs, and also his contemporaries, to whom they grew up together. The older men advised that he employs a diplomatic approach by soft-peddalling on the stringent measures of Solomon, while his contemporaries counseled him to increase the measures. Unfortunately, Rehoboam neglected the wise counsel of the elders and opted for the rash and foolish counsel¹⁷ of his contemporaries. When the people were



gathered again for the response of the king, they were surprised to hear Rehoboam give a fierce and scratching response, which painted how he will further aggravate their burdens and used them laboriously for the buildings of the state.

The aftermath of this proud and foolish response led to the division of the united monarchy and the breaking of the former tribal spirit that existed among the twelve tribes of Israel. The people exploded and resulted into an open revolt, where the tribes of Reuben, Ephraim, Manasseh, Zebulun, Gad, Dan, Issachar, Naphtali, and Asher, threw off the Davidic yoke, declared themselves independent of Judah, proclaimed the intention of placing themselves under a new king¹⁸ and then became the Northern Kingdom of Israel. However, the tribes of Judah and that of Benjamin remained in its allegiance to the house of David and became the Southern Kingdom of Judah, of which Rehoboam was their king until he died.

Moreover, it is expedient to note here, that there are several suggestions from some school of thoughts that there are other reasons leading to the division of the united monarchy under Rehoboam apart from the consequence of his foolish response. Some argued that the cracks in the kingdom can be traced even to the time of David, where there was a historical opposition¹⁹ between the north and the south²⁰. Other suggestion was the building of the temple which seem to render the various sanctuaries scattered through the land inferior and thereby leading to rancor among the people who saw it burdensome to come to Jerusalem for their worship commitments. This was coupled with the burdensome work imposed upon the people by Solomon due to his taste for luxury.

Keil and Delitzsch (1857)²¹ also evinced that the secession of the ten tribes from the royal house of David had been ordained by YHWH as a punishment for Solomon's idolatry and that the ten tribes have been promised to Jeroboam by the prophetic utterances of Prophet Ahijah (cf. 1 Kings 11:40). Hence, one can argue that it has already been divinely settled, that there will be secession even before the undiplomatic response of Rehoboam at Shechem.

Looking at it from another perspective, Rawlinson (1889)²² further commented that one should not also leave out the fact that, the crafty and unscrupulous Jeroboam incited the popular ill-will and it was probably his machinations, that on meeting the Tribes, their complaints were formulated and delegates (including Jeroboam; in 1Kings 12:3) sent to carry



them to the king and plead for a redress of grievances. All these portend that the united monarchy in Israel was a bomb waiting to explode and all it needed was a trigger.

Hence, the insensitivity of Rehoboam in given an unwise response to the people was the last straw that broke the camel's back, putting to an end to a formation of all the tribes of Israel as a single entity.

It is from this foundation that the contextualization of the way Rehoboam handled the demands of the people of Israel, will be discussed later in this article, in the light of the agitations of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Nigeria.

Indigenous People of Biafra: Origin, Activities and Agitations

The Indigenous People of Biafra which is commonly abbreviated as IPOB is known to be a separatist organization in Nigeria, agitating for the self-determination of their people²³. The major arrowhead of IPOB is to restore an independent state of Biafra in the Old Eastern region of Nigeria (comprising mainly of today's South-East and South-South regions in Nigeria and also part of the Middle Belt states of Nigeria such as Benue state, Kogi state), through an independence referendum²⁴.

Historically, studies^{25, 26} show that Biafra had previously existed as an independent multi-ethnic Republic consisting of the Igbo, Ijaw, Efik and Ibibio people to mention but a few. Also, the republic was declared by Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu from the period of 30th May, 1967 through 15th January, 1970, but the Nigerian Federal government protested against the idea of an independent state of Biafra by fighting hard against it, in order to preserve the Federal Republic of Nigeria²⁷.

It is also needful to assert that before the emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra in 2012, there were some other Pro-Biafran groups that were in existence like, The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which gained popularity in the early 2000s and the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), which rose to prominence in 2012. However, the Indigenous People of Biafra emerged later on to continue the movement that had been championed by MASSOB, after the MASSOB became weakened due to alleged state repression and disagreement within the group on the issue of leadership and succession²⁸.



Eventually, IPOB was founded in 2012 and has as its leader, a British-Nigeria Political activist named Nnamdi Kanu, who was known for his prominent advocacy for the agitation for the independence of the people of Biafra. Nnamdi Kanu created the Indigenous People of Biafra after he initially gained fame in 2009, from his broadcasts on Radio Biafra, which calls for the freedoms of Biafrans and at the same time criticizes corruption in the government of Nigeria²⁹.

The ideology of IPOB as a separatist group ranges from Biafran separation, Biafran nationalism and nativism. The major cause of its agitation has been the criticism of the Nigeria Federal Government for the poor investment, political alienation, inequitable resources distribution, ethnic manipulation, heavy military presence and ethnic judicial killings in the South Eastern, South Central and parts of North Central regions of the country³⁰. These agitations have been communicated to the government of Nigeria, but due to her inability to find a working solution to the grievances of IPOB, several fracas have unfolded between IPOB members and the Federal government of Nigeria, where many lives have been lost and is still being lost.

Although, it can be said that IPOB rose to prominence in the mid-2010s and is now the largest Biafra independence organization by membership, yet, in recent times, the group has gained significant media attention by creating numerous sites and communication channels, which has become a frequent target of political crackdowns by the Nigeria government³¹.

On the 19th of October, 2015, Nnamdi Kanu was arrested by the Nigerian Security forces on charges of “sedition, ethnic incitement and treasonable felony”³². He was later granted bail in April 2017, with limited benefits (i.e. debaring him from granting interviews, organizing and attending rallies or social function) on the ground of his health condition. However, in September 2017, Nnamdi Kanu disappeared after an alleged premeditated attack on his home village in Umuahia by the combined forces of the Air Force and Army.^{33, 34} Nevertheless, on June 29, 2021, the Nigeria government announced that Nnamdi Kanu has been rearrested, after which he was subsequently charged to court and remanded in the custody of the department of state services till the present moment.³⁵



A Contextualization of Israel's Request for a Redress of Grievances in I Kings 12:1-5 Vis – A- Viz IPOB's Agitation for Independence In Nigeria

There is no doubt that in different countries of the world, several agitations are relayed by different groups of people, who voice out their concerns over what they considered to be inhumane or oppressive treatments by their government. Prominent examples includes places like Kosovo within the Republic of Serbia³⁶, the Republic of Yugoslavia, Catalonia in Spain, Eritea, Somali land³⁷ and France³⁸ to mention but a few. These happenings further affirm that the request of the Israelites, for a redress of grievances in 1 kings 12:1-5 is not obsolete and it is relevant for contemporary research.

Even in the Nigeria, there are several agitations arising from either ethnicity, regionalism or religious views or affiliation, which normally culminates into the request of secession or independence. Apart from the agitation for independence by the Easterners, it is pertinent to state that there have been threats from the South Westerners and also from the Northerners to secede over the years. This was put pointedly by Aremu and Buhari (2017)³⁹, who asserted from a historical point of view that, secession has indeed been a powerful instruments used in political negotiation in Nigeria, particularly between the period of 1950 and 1964. All these further give credence to the fact that agitations are not something new or recent.

A cursory look into the biblical text of 1 Kings 12:1-5 evince that, indeed, the situation to which Rehoboam found himself on the day of his coronation at Shechem, looks problematic; this is because he was just coming into office and the first demand placed before him, is to see to the abolition of the major source of income or economic prowess of the kingdom which he was to rule over. How will the kingdom survive if taxes are reduced? How will the kingdom be able to pay hired laborers or workmen, if the engagements of the people in helping out in the building projects are stopped? These are some pertinent questions that flooded the heart of Rehoboam and warranted that he needed ample time to respond to the matter. It is needful to say that Rehoboam acted wisely in asking for three days and also in consulting both the elders and his contemporaries, in order to ensure that the matter is maturely weighed. However, his final decision to follow the undiplomatic counsel of his contemporaries in increasing the burdens of the people and upholding excessive taxation was



what stirred rebellion among the people and led to the irreparable division of the united monarchy.

From the foregoing, the questions that we should consider are;

- a. If Rehoboam had diplomatically responded and promised to lessen the burdens of the people along with their financial obligations, would the united nation still be together?
- b. If Rehoboam had followed the counsel of the older men, would he have been regarded weak or would he have created a means of endearing the people to his government?

All these questions demand critical answers which invariably are laden with consequences. However, there is no doubt that if Rehoboam had agreed to such condescension, he would have been respected by the people and also deprived the discontented tribes of all avenues for rebellion and probably escape the punishment of secession which had been divinely orchestrated in 1 Kings 11:40.

A careful consideration of 1 kings 12:1-5 shows that our nation, Nigeria seem to be “playing out” the biblical script that unfolded at Shechem with her handlings of the agitations of the Indigenous People of Biafra. IPOB is similar to the biblical Israelites who appeared before the Federal government to request for a redress of their grievances ranging from; political alienation, inequitable resource distribution, poor investment, heavy military presence in their region, ethnic marginalization and extra-judicial killings. These are the agitations that warranted them requesting for independence or secession.

Undoubtedly, like Celestina Chukwudi (2019)⁴⁰ et al observe, the Federal government of Nigeria has also taken concerted effort in trying to ameliorate their problems through different measures over the years. Measures like; the introduction of unity schools and federal government secondary schools in 1966, the abolition of regional structures and the creation of states in 1967, the introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1973, creating platforms for dialogue among many others have been implemented, yet, due to the poor implementations of these measures, the problems have remained worse.



To add salt to injury, rather than finding ways to use a diplomatic means of settling the misunderstanding between herself and IPOB, the Federal government tends to adopt the use of security agencies like the Police and the Nigeria Army in utilizing high level use of cohesion and repression⁴¹, as well as pronouncing the separatist group a terrorist organization in 2017⁴² under the Nigerian Terrorism Act⁴³. In recent time, the apprehension of Nnamdi Kanu, IPOB's leader has also been carried out sparking different reactions from the people in the country.

Just like Rehoboam, who refused to consider the aftermath of his decision and the cost of enforcing coercion, the government of Nigeria also is tilting towards making the same mistakes as Rehoboam did. The fact that a request for a redress of grievances was tendered should not be an offence, as there is provision for the freedom of expression under the democratic government in 1999, which gave allowance for groups such as IPOB to freely express their opinion and tender their displeasure with the government in power. History has given us a clear picture of the fact there has never been a time that coercion or force produced lasting results and it seems that our nation is sitting on a keg of gunpowder, as we are treading the same part that Rehoboam treaded in 1 Kings 12:1-5.

Just as the people reacted violently to the undiplomatic response of Rehoboam, the Indigenous People of Biafra have also produced counter reactions towards the negative response of the government. They have engaged in the blockage of major roads, leading to excessive traffic jam in the nation's popular road network, they have used court proceedings in calling the attention of the government, employ "Sit-at-Home" orders, carrying out organized protest and media agitations among many others. All these have further worsened the relationship between IPOB and the Federal government, leading to fracas which has resulted in the loss of lives, economic breakdown and the destruction of properties in the country.

This issue seem to be a wound which has refused all medical procedures, but the question that demands careful consideration is; can both parties not come to a place of compromise, where any selfish interest is laid aside so that progress and settlement can be achieved? What other workable solutions can the Federal government employ to avert an imminent doom like the one that happened during the time of Rehoboam? These shall be addressed below;



Recommendations

If the end story of the script presented in 1 Kings 12:1-5 will not be reproduced in our nation, the following recommendations should be considered;

1. The government of Nigeria must first understand and recognize the right to self-determination on the part of the agitators. The government should not try to suppress them but consider carefully the issues fanning the embers of succession.
2. There should be provision for a politically balanced avenue where every citizen including those in the East (Biafran Origin) will be considered significant rather inconsequential and then sidelining a particular region or ethnicity from the arena of governance. If this is not done, the trend of political racism and systemic injustice will find root in the nation and it will be difficult to stem that tide in the long run.
3. There should also be the provision for the true and total devolution of power. An adoption of true federalism as it is practiced in America can be employed. If the Biafrans are allowed to manage their resources and only remit a little to the center, there would not be agitation as the meagre recompense to the source as it is seen now will be bygone.
4. There is need to address properly the fallout of the 1967 to 1970 Civil Wars. The Biafrans still feel those who either perpetuated or allowed the carnage have not been brought to book, hence, they feel cheated. If this fallout is carefully addressed with all openness, it will create trust and a willingness to listen to productive ways of settlement.
5. Lastly, history must be told in a constructive and not a dysfunctional manner, so that the coming generations would not resort into a retaliatory means of relationship among regions which will invariably cause chaos and hinder peace and progress in our nation.

There is no doubt that if all these recommendations are carefully implemented, settlement will be achieved and progress made.



Conclusion

In order not to repeat the mistake of Rehoboam in 1 kings 12:1-5, there is need to ply a different decision-route contrary to the one Rehoboam did during his time. The use of coercion has not gotten us anywhere, but has rather stunted progress, this article has been able to carefully elucidate Israel's request for a redress of grievances vis-à-vis IPOB's agitation for independence in Nigeria. Several practicable recommendations are supplied as regards the federal government's approach to the agitations of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and how settlement can be reached in order to curb the loss of lives and destruction of properties that we are experiencing in recent times.

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