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'To your tents, O Nigeria': An exegetical study of 1 Kings 12:1–16

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Solomon's exerting decrees led to Israel's prosperity, yet they took away the freedom of the common folks. His son Rehoboam had just been anointed king over the whole of Israel, but this son, being less than his father, had to make compromises towards political demands from his subjects or the kingdom would divide. The common people of the north felt marginalised and encumbered, so they had to be listened to. Rehoboam's first advisers told him to reassure the people of his magnanimity, but his contemporaries suggested he maintain his father's zest even when he was not in any way as charismatic as his father. Revolt came and the united Kingdom of Israel collapsed. Nigeria's leadership, toeing the same line of noninclusive governance, has provoked agitation leading to several calls for secession. Only a soft-pedalling and compromise on the Nigerian part can assuage the virulent and unyielding voices of discord and secession.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: By challenging the orthodox belief that a new Nigeria is possible without a radical approach to what divides, the study brought to the fore the possible situation that Nigeria could face as a result of insensitivity by the leaders and to contextually relate it to the mistakes of Rehoboam leading to the collapse of the united kingdom of Israel.

Keywords: united Kingdom of Israel; Nigeria; Biafra; Igbo; 1 Kings 12:1–16; secession.

Introduction

1 Kings 12:1–16 presents 'the Old Testament's depiction of the historical developments' (Fischer 2002:353) leading to the collapse of the united Kingdom of Israel. The narrative exposes a life situation in Israel's political landscape in antiquity. A careful reading of the pericope suggests that the crisis leading to the collapse of the kingdom was not a recent development. It was not Rehoboam's stubbornness or harshness that laid the foundation to the revolt, although his tactical diplomacy on national issues would have helped ameliorate the already soured situation. The pericope shows that the agitation which Jeroboam led was rooted in an acrimony dating beyond even the Davidic dynasty. It:

> [*H*]ad its roots in the older rivalry and antagonisms between the major power centers of the Israelite confederation. Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh in the north and Judah in the south. (Ceresko 1992:154)[1]

There seems to be a twist to this unabashed display of tribal jealousy. Citing McClain (1959:106), Brindle (1984:224) says, 'the tribes had always been jealous of their independency and rights'. That implies that the 12 tribes were and wanted to remain independent tribes instead of being fused into a kingdom with a central government. This is clearly evident in the cry of revolt made by Sheba in the days of David and remade in a modified form during the reign of Rehoboam. It has been adjudged as the primary cause of the division of the Israelite monarchy (Mercer 1979).

History has a way of repeating itself. Currently in Nigeria, a situation somewhat similar to the event in 1 Kings 12:1–16 is playing out. There is political turbulence traceable to an old rift between Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria. Jacob (2012) believes that this rift is based in ethnic conflict. In his words:

> The origin and history of ethnic conflict (societal wars and violence) can be traced from eternal (internal) state rivalry to external (physical). And its root cause is not very far from power competition and decision making over economic resources and other important human factor, like position. (p. 13)

This initial psychological warfare (using political tools to demoralise and intimidate each other) and intertribal jealousy eventually gave way to real civil war in 1967–1970. This war saw the

1.For a full discussion on the causes of the division in the united Kingdom of Israel, see Brindle (1984:223–233).

genocide of a particular region, the Eastern region of Nigeria, predominantly populated by the Igbo people, who along with other non-Igbo minority groups were generally referred to as Biafrans. What is strangely unfortunate about that war is that 'by the late 1970s, it was seldom talked about outside Nigeria', but in recent years, it has started attracting increasing scholarly interest (Heerten & Moses 2014:169; see, e.g., Daly 2020; Maiangwa 2016:39–67; Osakwe 2013:155–157). Over 50 years after the civil war was fought and done with, there are once again renewed agitations in the South for independent, sovereign states. In the South-East, there is a drive for the Biafran Republic led by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and in the South-West, by the Oduduwa Republic. These agitations became worse after the All Progressive Congress (APC)-led government took power with Muhammadu Buhari as the President. Like Rehoboam, the APC government under the leadership of Buhari has thrown caution to the wind regarding the way Southern Nigerians, especially South-Easterners, are treated. This 'devil-may-care' attitude if not checked can see to the end of a united Nigeria. Way back in 2013, Bouchat (2013:vii) warned that '[t]he pressures now weighing on Nigeria could literally fracture the state along deep fault lines if rampant corruption and partisanship continues'. This warning has generally been disregarded by the current Nigerian government.

With the tool of form and redaction criticisms, this study situates the passage of 1 Kings 12:1–16 in its historical context. The exegesis of the pericope suggests that the text reflects the mistakes which the current government in Nigeria is making in doing virtually nothing about the increasing spate of corruption, insecurity and ethnoreligious bigotry which has overwhelmed the country with unceasing agitating voices of secession. It recommends that the Nigerian government should learn from the mistakes of biblical characters.

Exegesis of 1 Kings 12:1–16

Regarding the story in 1 Kings 12:1–16, Rofé (2010:79) uses 'various tools at the disposal of philology' to produce 'a plausible picture of the historical and ideological setting [from] which this story carne into being'. Such methodological approach is replicable in this study, being exegetical in nature. Therefore, a close reading of the text is needed.

Contextual and literary analysis

The trajectories leading to Israel's division starts from the longstanding discontent between northern Israel and southern Israel. The culmination of this fallout happened during the reign of Rehoboam, who rejected the advice of sages. This rejection of advice had led to his being referred to 'as the epitome of the fool of the book of Proverbs, being the son who rejected wisdom' (Jackson 2005:1617). There is an even more penetrating historical attribution of events, one that refers to the time before Rehoboam. Ewing (1915) states that:

> Solomon's un-wisdom and the crass folly of Rehoboam in the management of the northern tribes fanned the smoldering discontent into a fierce flame. This made easy the work of the rebel Jeroboam. (p. 963)

Ewing's theology of predestination regarding this crisis agrees with a balanced reading of historical events leading to the division, which relays that Rehoboam 'inherited the judgment that God had previously prepared for the throne of Solomon' (Fleming 2004:393). However, some have argued beyond Solomon and Rehoboam, pointing instead to the time of David. Makola (2007) opines that:

> The slogan that says 'what share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son?' in 1 Kings 12:16 [*NIV*], seems to indicate that the Israelites deny that they had any such inheritance under David. In other words, it did not benefit them to be under the kingship of David. The reason could be that under David their disadvantages probably outweighed their benefits. (pp. 10–11)

It seems that Rehoboam was initially aware of this face-off right from the time of his grandfather and wanted to placate the north and Ephraim in particular by choosing to have his coronation there, 'probably as an act of concession to the Ephraimites' (Smith 1884:856). But his rash answer to Israel (populated by north), made his wariness to the current challenge dim.

A more illuminating description of the possible origin of this faceoff leading to the collapse of the united Kingdom of Israel is that which goes beyond the period of even David, right up to the time of Jacob. In his words, Brindle (1984) discovers that:

> This tribal jealousy can be traced back to Jacob's wives. Leah (the mother of Judah) and Rachel (the mother of Joseph and grandmother of Ephraim) were dreadfully jealous of each other, especially concerning the bearing of sons and receiving the love of Jacob (Gen. 29–30). The tribal jealousy between Judah and Ephraim originated with the two groups formed by Leah and Zilpah (Leah's handmaiden) and their children, on the one hand, and by Rachel and Bilhah (Rachel's handmaiden) and their children, on the other hand. (p. 225)

In order to make a justifiable application of the studied text in the Nigerian situation, an objective exegesis of the pericope is necessary.

Close reading of 1 Kings 12:1–16

A couple of very important points will be exegetically considered. These points are intended to draw out the meaning of the event in the studied pericope.

Verse 1: All Israel to Shechem

It does not look like Rehoboam moved all Israel to Shechem. What it rather looks like is that all Israel moved him to Shechem. Though Israel was not practising democracy at the time, the will of the majority prevailed. The context of the text persuades one against assuming that the appearance of 'all' in the text suggests a literal meaning. It does not sound possible that all Israel would converge in Shechem. The masculine noun, כֹּל [all], in this text is gotten from the verb כָּלַל, which

speaks more of 'perfect'. Here, the writer of this Deuteronomistic history[2] has the idea of a perfect selection of the representative of the whole of Israel. This:

> Shechem, located at the hub of a major cross road and in the hill country of Ephraim, 67 km (40 mi) north of Jerusalem … was an important cultic and political center. (Ronen 1993:1345)

However, it should be for political reasons rather than the cultic implications that led Rehoboam there for coronation. Such political reasons would include conceding the right of importance to the north because of their numerical might and the face-off that had existed between the north and south, even before the days of his grandfather.

Verse 2–4: Demand for equity

There is a common notion among Bible readers that Solomon led Israel to an 'unprecedented prosperity due to his wisdom' (Isbouts 2019). But agitations always stem from lack of satisfaction and fulfilment; this leads to unrest and revolt. 'De Tocqueville theorized that instances of unrest … are born out of the virtue of fighting against injustice and fighting for freedom' (Rabobank 2012:6). This leads to the question: did Solomon actually bring Israel to great prosperity, and was he as wise as the D writer made him to be? That the northerners demanded a lightening of their burden suggests that they had hitherto been in servitude. The choice of the masculine noun, עֹל [yoke], used figuratively in the passage, was not chosen lightly. This noun comes from a primitive verb, עָלַל, which is *to act severely upon*. There may not be any doubt that Israel prospered at the time of Solomon, but that was at the expense of the freedom of the people, especially the northern tribes. Exacting taxes and extra-time hard labour may have characterised their living conditions under Solomon. It is even possible that when the chronicler said that 'Solomon did not make slaves of the Israelites for his work (2 Chr 8:9)', it refers to men of Judah (the south):

> For instance, when Solomon formed his 12 districts for the purposes of taxation and supplying the needs of his court, he did not include Judah (1 Kings 4). Judah apparently had tax-free status. Most of the district appointees were also Judahites or pro-Judahites (1 Kings 4:11–16). In addition Solomon's building projects were concentrated in Judah (the temple, the palace, the Millo and wall of Jerusalem, Ezion-geber, the copper mines, Debir, etc.), whereas most of the taxes and forced laborers came from the northern tribes. (Brindle 1984:226)

This was obviously a clear indication of lack of equity in the distribution of responsibility, position and logistics within the vast kingdom that Solomon ruled, and to have employed such inequity in a kingdom with an already tense situation characterised by tribal sentiments was a time bomb waiting to explode.

2.Job (2003:249) writes regarding the book of Kings, 'We have concluded that there are important links with the historical Jeremiah'. However, Begg (1985:139) speaks of three puzzles in the study of D history, of which the Book of Kings is part. He mentions that the first mystery is that 'of the missing Jeremiah in Kings'. This is because 'the Deuteronomistic History … as a whole nowhere refer to the "classical prophets"'.

Verse 5–14: Wrong choice of advisers

Great kingdoms have been built or mired through the agency of advisers. David knew the power of great advice, followed at the wrong time, that led him to pray for God to foil the advice of Ahithophel (2 Sm 15:31). Rehoboam was smart to have consulted two sets of advisors, the old and the young. This is understood in light of the fact that 'seeking royal counsel involved weighing the recommendations of one advisor against those of another' (Polzin 1993:178), but he was not wise to have chosen the wrong counsel over the right. What may have infuriated the people, who were already under servitude in their own land, was his mention of whips and scorpions. Whips (שׁוֹטִים) were 'used to drive slaves and to punish them' (Jones 1984:252). Rehoboam was indirectly reminding his people of their days in slavery, their liberation from which is celebrated yearly. He was letting them know that Solomon drove them like slaves, but he will replace the instrument of slavery (שׁוֹט) with עַקְרַבִּים: [scorpions]. This quadrilateral masculine noun, עַקְרָב, does not actually mean the animal that stings with its tail. It means scourges with points or stings (cf. 2 Chr 10:11).[3] The noun comes from yet another noun, עֻקָּר [offshoot], which scourges with stings represent. In short, this was clearly an instrument 'of punishment' (Jones 1984:252).

Verse 15–16: An imminent revolt actualised

Although the D-narrated verse 15 has a strong theological embellishment (he appealed both to prophecy and predestination), the story itself is encased in the context of Israel's political development. Its approach in this study is strictly on the latter, although the theology of the pericope shall briefly be looked into. Rehoboam's harsh answer showed the men of Israel that there is nothing close to freedom that is achievable under the reign of the family of David. The militarised approach of the Davidic dynasty indicates a leadership system of strong kingship, bigotry and patrimonialism. That means that the house of David (including his offspring) considered the royal stool of Israel and indeed the whole realm as their heirloom.

Theology of 1 Kings 12:1–16

The theology of the pericope suggests a predestined situation in its intentions. This is because of the suggestion that these:

> [*T*]heological intentions imply that Rehoboam could not have corrected the wrongs of the past even if he desired to do so, because according to the Deuteronomist, it was God's will that the kingdom of Israel should be divided. (Makola 2007:5)

To have promoted the theological implications of the events which took place between Rehoboam and Israel confirms that 'biblical texts arose from politically minor and subservient powers' (Lenzi 2014:65); such powers that are not very much concerned with giving details of a biblical event insofar as they do not project God's working through

3.See https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6137.htm.

the activities of man. It should also be considered that theological interpretations of the Deuteronomist are not entirely free from anachronistic tendencies brought in to meet the ordinary events of history. Such anachronisms reflect on the writer's assumption that the political turbulence at the time of Rehoboam conveyed the situation experienced in the chronicler's own day.

Understanding the remote and immediate causes of agitations in Nigeria

To engage in a discussion on the causes of the current agitation by secessionist groups in Nigeria, we would, first of all, consider such discussion as the application of the exegetical points on 1 Kings 12:1–16 studied earlier on. Secondly, this discussion shall be a historical chronicle, in brief, starting from the amalgamation down to the present administration.

Amalgamation

It is no longer news that the problem with Nigeria started right from the day the Northern and the Southern protectorates were merged (the so-called amalgamation).[4]

Given that the British colonial government was motivated by the very self-serving and ignoble obsessive quest for maximum economic exploitation of the 'Niger area' and administrative convenience, the amalgamation was built on moral and ideological quicksand (Anele 2020).

In fact, the South was to be siphoned to make up for the deficiency of the North. A professor emeritus of Central Michigan University, in his master's thesis, admitted that one of the reasons why the Southern Niger area was merged with the Northern Niger area was to 'use the Southern Protectorate's annual budget surplus' (Riddick 1966:v). Again, there was the problem of:

> [*T*]he division of the country into three uneven sizes by Arthur Richard constitution in 1946, by making Northern region larger than the Western and Eastern region put together. As a result, it is difficult if not impossible to work together to achieve a common goal and promote national integration. (Shedrack 2020:2)

All these were wrong foundations laid by the British during the amalgamation, which has culminated to the point where daily comments on social media today show that this 'forceful marriage called amalgamation' (Princewill, Lucas & Daniel 2020:49) has left everyone in Nigeria, especially Southerners, frustrated and angry. A Nigerian who knows the history of Nigeria would understand very well why the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel were at each other's throats until the once-united kingdom was torn in two. Nigeria's case seems to be worse than that of ancient Israel in that although the warring nations in ancient Israel were not of the same mother, they shared a close paternity.[5] In Nigeria, however, there is no relationship either in genes, in culture or in geography between the locals of the once-independent city-states that were merged together or disintegrated and later redistributed according to the whims of the British, almost without the consent of these locals. This corroborates the statement that:

> More disuniting was the British policy of Balkanizing ethnic groups and placing them under different colonial native administrations. A typical example of this was the balkanization of Tiv and their placement under different British colonial administrations in Wukari, Lafia and Ogoja. This forceful merger policy of the British has remained a source of conflict between the Tiv and Jukum over the former's attempts to assert their identity and independence. This was the case all over Nigeria. (Tyungu & Koko 2018:25)

Independence

Prior to independence, the nation Nigeria showed serious signs of incompatibility within the ethnic nationalities and unwillingness to exist as one nation. Like ancient Israel, they preferred to remain distinct ethnic groups and seriously detested the idea of a common identity on account of the case of infiltration (Anderson 1967:50). Even Saul, the first king of Israel, 'retained the tribal structure that existed during the period of the Judges and made no attempt to transform this tribal structure into a centralised state' (Okwueze 2013:127). As pertaining to Nigeria:

> The three major political parties formed before independence [*were*] regionally based. For example, the Northern people's congress (NPC) for the North, the leader was Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) for the East, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was the leader, while the Action Group (AG) for the West, Chief Obafemi Awolowo was the leader as well. They had regional support and ethnic loyalty. (Shedrack 2020:2)

John Macpherson, the then appointed Governor of Nigeria, made constitutional changes which actually failed to change the Nigerian situation, namely to make Nigeria function as one entity:

> Oliver Lyttleton, the colonial secretary of state for the colonies [*had to inform*] the British House of commons on May 21, 1953 about the situation in Nigeria. [*His information was*] that the

4.A comprehensive history of the events leading to the 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates and other smaller protectorates by the British before 1914 is succinctly recorded in the research work of Ugbeda and Egwemi (2016).

5.There are modern theories which aspire to explain the origin(s) of the ancient Israelites. Livni (2017:109–110) categorises these theories into four, viz., settled Canaanite theories, theories of nomadic Canaanites, theories of immigration of nomadic tribes and multiple origin theories. While these theories try to answer where Israelites originated from, they do not explain the singular or multiple paternity of ancient Israelites. Even to argue that 'early Israel originated as a group of migrant slaves who escaped from Egypt' (Sparks 2007:587) does not answer this question, because it omits the ethnogenesis of ancient Israel. One of the most reliable, if not the most reliable, researches on the paternity of ancient Israelites (as far as I am concerned) is that conducted by Klyosov (2010:14). He states that 'the most recent common ancestor of the Jews and the Arabs of haplogroup J2a-M410* lived 4175 ± 510 years ago, and he had the "J2 Cohanim" signature in his haplotype. Again, it is rather "J2 Abraham Modal Haplotype". From him a split occurred between the Jewish and the Arabic lineages in haplogroup J2'. He collects the data from the Cohanim (Jewish High Priests) of the haplogroup instead of randomly selected Jews, probably because of his understanding that the Jews who left Egypt were severally infiltrated on the way (Anderson 1967:50), resulting in the mixed multitude situation. Such infiltration was, however, dealt with by Yahweh when he unconditionally adopted all of them as people from the same spiritual paternity, making them, of course, one by nature. This is a premodel of what Trick (2010) called 'sons of Abraham' on one hand and 'children of promise' on the other, who 'constitutes the single divine Abrahamic seed who inherits (3:29)' (p.v) as found in Galatians.

> situation on ground had shown that the three regions could not work together in a federation as was then structured. (Shedrack 2020:3)

Since this 1953 incident, Nigeria has gone through one form of restructuring or the other (Tenuche & Achegbulu 2020:1) in order to make it work as a united entity, but the efforts are to no avail.

Military rule

If Nigeria had any chance of living in unity, that chance was completely lost during the various military interventions in Nigeria. The first coup in Nigeria, which was meant to wipe out the bad eggs in politics and establish a truly united Nigeria, failed to achieve this aim:

> [*A*]fter a sudden realisation of the sectional and imbalanced composition of the coup leaders, as well as the nature of the assassination and killings of prominent politicians and military officers as a result of the coup. (Oyewo 2019)

This imbalance made the Hausa-Fulani North consider it an Igbo coup deliberately meant to wipe out prominent Northerners. A counter-coup was launched which saw to the assassination of Gen Aguiyi Ironsi, the then Head of State and commander in-chief of the armed forces (an Igbo man). There is the possibility that these military coups, in fact, led directly to the first civil war in the country. But the immediate cause of the war was a disagreement between Col. Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (Igbo) and Col. Yakubu Gowon (Middle Belt) on the implementation of the Aburi Accord. The Aburi Accord was summarily a peace talk hosted in Aburi Ghana by Lt. Gen. Joe Ankrah of Ghana to sue for peace between the Northern Nigeria and the Southern Nigeria (more precisely Eastern Nigeria).[6] The Eastern Nigeria, after seeing the unwillingness of the federal government to continue with the implementation of the Aburi Accord (an implementation which would have sued for peace and stopped the killings of the Igbos in the North), moved to pull out of the federation, declaring itself an independent state of Biafra, leading to the war (Dummar 2002:23).

After the war, there were also pockets of military intervention which threw the country into the era and re-emergence of a period 'of autocracy and absolutism under military government' (Ojo 2014:10).

Democratic rule

Nigeria achieved democracy in 1999, but unfortunately, the lack of equity and fair play amongst the various ethnic groups in Nigeria continues to deepen the agitation and calls for secession. The neglect of the South, especially the Igbo people in appointments to key positions, became a worrisome situation under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari. Just like Solomon's inequitable distribution of responsibility, position and logistics within the vast kingdom he ruled, the same scenario plays out in Nigeria currently where the federal government receives loans from China in the name of Nigeria, but uses such loans to develop rails and allied facilities essentially in the North, leaving out some parts of the South, especially the South-East. While there was a promise to start 'work on the Eastern rail flank' in June 2017 (Adamu & Agency Report 2017), it seems the administration has forgotten about it. Again, Buhari's appointments to federal offices has not been favourable to the South, especially the South-East. 'The appointments have been described as "lopsided", as reflecting insensitivity to the plurality of the Nigerian state, and as having stirred up "outrage across Nigeria"' (Eme 2015:2). Could this 'lop-sidedness' be attributed to a statement credited to Buhari while responding to Dr Pauline Baker's question in the United States, in which he says 'The constituents, for example, gave me 97% [of the vote] cannot in all honesty be treated on some issues with constituencies that gave me 5%' (Sahara Reporters 2015). Like Rehoboam's, such a comment is harsh coming from a sitting president. This is a sample of other comments which point to insensitivity to the situation in the entire country, especially to the South-East and other areas troubled by unending insecurity. These developments as a whole have led Mazi Nnamdi Kanu to revive the old call for an independent state of Biafra. Before Nnamdi Kanu, Ralph Uwazuruike's Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra led an agitation for a Biafran state, an agitation that was not as popular as that of IPOB and which became even less popular as IPOB grew stronger. Recently, Sunday Igboho joined the band of secessionists after watching the wanton destruction of lives and property by Fulani herdsmen in South-West Nigeria. But the Biafran agitation sounds quite louder than other forms of agitation in the country. This is re-echoed in the report given by Adibe (2017):

> Agitations around Biafra have drowned out other separatist agitations, giving the wrong impression that Biafra is the only separatist threat in the country. The truth is that there is separatist agitation in virtually every area in the country – underlying the fact that the foundation for Nigeria's nationhood remains on shaky ground. Among the Yoruba, for instance, echoes of separatism come in different forms – from a direct call for Oduduwa Republic to those championing a Sovereign National Conference to decide if the federating units of the country still want to continue to live together, and, if so, under what arrangements. In the north, there are intermittent demands for Arewa Republic, while some talk of the 'north' as if it is 'a country within a country'. In the Niger Delta, apart from the demand for Niger Delta Republic, shades of separatism are embedded in the demands for 'resource control' by regional activists.

Because of his agitation for the independence of Biafra from Nigeria, through the medium of a referendum, Nnamdi

6.The January 1966 coup that brought Major-General J.T. Aguiyi Ironsi in as the first military head of state was countered on July 1966 because the North felt that the coup was against them. In the counter-coup, Ironsi was killed primarily because the North believed that he was 'partisan'. The North's anger did not end in the killing of Ironsi but with mass killings of Igbo people in the North. These ethnic-based crises led to attempts to sue for peace on both sides. But since there was a case of mistrust, a neutral ground was suggested by Lieutenant-General Joseph Arthur Ankrah in Aburi Ghana. According to a report, during the meeting in Aburi, Ojukwu suggested 'a drawing apart of the regions' in order to stay together. This, he thought, was understood by all parties at the meeting, to which they drank. But when Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon later rejected the Aburi Accord, it became clear to Ojukwu that the members of the delegates to the meeting never understood him. This was the cause of the failure of the Aburi Accord and then the war (see Akinbode 2021; Oyeweso & Olawale 2021:6).

Kanu was arrested and detained. He was arrested in October 2015, 'soon after arriving in Nigeria for a visit … in his Lagos hotel' (BBC 2017). After spending a year and half in jail without trial, he was granted bail with conditions that were quite harsh. This bail granted to Kanu by the federal government, it is gathered, was on medical grounds (BBC 2017). After his bail, he 'fled the country in September 2017 [following] an invasion of his home by the military in Afara-Ukwu, near Umuahia, Abia State' (Ejekwonyilo 2021). In June 2021, he was rearrested, while the circumstances surrounding his re-arrest are shrouded in mystery (The Guardian 2021):

> [*S*]ince then, there have been controversies on whether government observed due internationally accepted process in re-arresting him; and whether the amount of public resources expended on the operation was worth it, given the seemingly more urgent need to stop massive killings and abduction of Nigerians by bandits particularly in the northern parts of the country.

However, reports have it that a group of Igbo leaders met with Muhammadu Buhari, the president of Nigeria, asking for the release of Nnamdi Kanu (Adenekan 2021). The president's spokesperson, Femi Adesina, was quoted to have said that part of the president's response to his guests was, '… [T]he demand you made is heavy. I will consider it' (Adenekan 2021). But it seems that Buhari's promise to 'consider it' did not turn out to be what the Igbo leaders expected. This is because, after the president's promise to consider the request of Igbo leaders, Sunday (2022) reported that:

> President Muhammadu has [*sic*] vowed never to release the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. In his latest interview with Channels Buhari said he would not interfere with the Judiciary. Recall that some Igbo leaders had met with Mr [*sic*] President to request for the unconditional release of Kanu. In his response, Buhari said its [*sic*] a heavy decision to take but will consider.

The Nigerian government under the leadership of Buhari (North), having refused to engage in this compromise for the sake of a part of the nation that feels marginalised, just like Rehoboam, but would rather prefer to replace their fathers' whips with scorpions in the form of incarceration of one of the most renowned Igbo voices, has repeated David, Solomon and Rehoboam's mistake of patrimonialism in pretending that Nigeria is their heirloom. The study therefore makes a concerted call on the federal government of Nigeria to revisit the request of Igbo leaders and to also address those factors leading to calls for secession and division.

Conclusion

This study was engaged to address the current agitations in Nigeria from the purview of the biblical incident leading to the collapse of the united Kingdom of Israel. If history is anything to go by, the Nigerian government is reminded not to treat rashly the gentle demands of a section of the country when indeed Nigeria practises democracy. This will prevent what is looming now, namely stronger calls for secession, leading to violent implementation of the call to secession, and eventually war.

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Authors' contributions

P.E.P. was responsible for the conceptualisation, writing of the original draft, and review and editing of the manuscript; M.I.O. and P.O.A. contributed to the design and acquisition of data, and revised the manuscript. All authors approved the final manuscript for publication.

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