

AGITATIONS FOR RESTRUCTURING IN ANCIENT ISRAEL AND THE CURRENT NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The issue of ‘restructuring’ has no doubt become a recurrent one in Nigeria with agitators spanning through the entire country. According to the social movement theory by which a large number of people are mobilized to work together to deal with a social problem, calls for restructuring could be variously motivated. This study investigated the ancient Israel’s record of agitation for restructuring found in 1 Kings 12:12-16. The goal was to examine useful lessons for Nigeria’s leaders of thought in the face of the prevailing agitations for restructuring in the country. The study adopted the qualitative research method featuring historical-grammatical exegesis. Data were sourced from both primary and secondary sources, and discussed. Findings included that restructuring is innate to all political systems, and that call for restructuring arises when the rules that govern the inter-relationship between the components of a structure become broken or no longer sufficient to guarantee the expected outcome; to ensure they all work together seamlessly to achieve a common purpose or a given output that is threatened. The research also revealed that revolution can trail calls for restructuring, if there is negligence, with tragic consequences. The study therefore calls on Nigeria’s rulers to be more sensitive and proactive in handling the present agitations in the country.

Keywords: Structure, Restructuring, Federation, Social Movement Theory

Introduction

The Nigerian nation has in recent times been plagued with agitation for restructuring. In fact, the word ‘restructuring’ has become a leading word in the political setting with politicians using it as a propaganda article in the 2019 election campaigns. While agitations for

restructuring in the political sphere of the nation lasts, should biblical scholarship be silent? Or, is the Bible devoid of the issue of restructuring? “Woe is he who is at ease in Zion” Amos (6:1) would answer. Biblical scholarship should not be sitting on the fence under the pretence that all is well with the nation. The aim of this study, therefore, is to survey the reasons for agitations for restructuring in 1 Kings 12:12-16 and its implications for Nigeria today. The paper examines the steps taken by the leadership of the ancient Northern Israel in response to the call for restructuring in 1 Kings 12:12-16, and discusses the consequences of negligence of the call on the society, and its lessons for Nigeria. To achieve its objective, the research adopts a qualitative approach of historical-grammatical method of exegesis, towards a detailed investigation of the text, in consonance with the original language and the original historical situation of the author. Historical-grammatical exegesis pays close attention to the grammatical aspect of the language in which it was written, cultural context is also specified which gave rise to the text. Historical and cultural contexts were very instrumental in determining the meaning of the text, to avoid superimposition of meaning on the text, or saying what the author may not have meant. This method was applied to the text under investigation for an accurate understanding of the call for restructuring in 1 Kings 12:12-16. An accurate understanding of the text was targeted for objective interpretation.

The Concept of Restructuring

The question is: what exactly is the meaning of the word ‘restructuring? Towards the answer, it is good to start with the word ‘structure.’ According to Adedayo,¹ a structure is made up of a number of sub-systems or functional components that combine together to make up a complex and the rules that govern the inter-relationship between them to ensure they all work together seamlessly to achieve a common purpose or a given outcome. Basics to Adedayo’s description of a structure include: sub-systems, the rules that govern the inter-relations and achieving a common purpose. This fits into the Obidimma and Obidimma’s understanding of federalism, stating that a federation is born by the coming together of otherwise independent states to form a central government to which certain powers of control are given, while the states retain most of their powers². Moreno observes that the roots of the term federalism are from the Latin word *fetus*, meaning covenants or contract³. This alludes to the fact that a federation always has a history of the

relationship of governmental entities one to another. The term restructure is related to federalism as a call for reviewing the existing order.

Moreover, federalism has been viewed as a means of governing a polity that grants partial autonomy to geographically defined subdivisions of the polity.⁴Freeley and Edward argue further that a political entity that is governed by a single central government making all significant decisions cannot be described as federal except by abandoning the ordinary meaning of the term. In the view of Adedeji and Ezeabasili, federalism exists to accommodate diversity in a single entity.⁵ By implication, every state that is in a federal system is sovereign; there is no single government that is more sovereign than the other. The federating units decide where they want to distribute the power between the federal government or national government and the states or component units.⁶ Barclay illustrated further by using Samuel Chase's description of the power of the people as the light of the sun, native, original, inherent, and unlimited by human authority. On the other way round, the power of government officials was described as the reflected light of the moon, only borrowed, delegated and limited by the grant of the people.⁷Hence, the federating units are sovereign.

Central to the understanding of federalism expressed in these definitions is a desire by groups of people who are made up of diverse identities to come together in a political structure without losing their distinctiveness. It is also observable from Adedayo's definition that a common goal cannot be achieved in a federation when the rules that govern the inter-relationship among the federating units are violated or threatened.

Restructuring in Nigerian Context

On the issue of restructuring in Nigeria, Osuntokun opines that it is simply a call for the restoration of federalism – the foundational structure to which all Nigerians subscribed as encapsulated in the independence constitution of 1960. However, Nigeria lost its federalism through the military coup of 1966 and many years of military rule, resulting in the emergent subsisting unitary command culture of military dictatorship, in which the constitutionally prescribed decentralization and devolution of powers have been subverted and supplanted with centralization of power.⁸Osaghae describes restructuring as a catchall term for the continuous process of adjustments that federal systems undergo in the quest to make them work well and cope with changing demands. He observes that while restructuring is innate to all political systems, it is

arguably more characteristic of federal systems.⁹ The reason is not far-fetched since federalism is conceived as a mechanism for managing diversity. It is therefore natural that in federalism there will be a continuous system of bargain and negotiation among the substructures or groups that make up the federal structure.

Furthermore, the current clamour for restructuring falls within the trajectory of social movements. By social movement one implies a persistent and organized effort to either bring about what participants believe to be beneficial social change or in some cases resist or reverse change viewed as harmful.¹⁰ Studies have shown that social movements struggle for different goals. It can be deduced from Isable Ortiz and others' works that there are conservative movements which aim to maintain things the way they are. The reactionary movements seek to resurrect cultural elements, patterns of behavior, or institutions of the past. Reform movements call for change in patterns of behavior, culture and/or policy, but do not try to replace whole social institutions. Revolutionary movements, by contrast, aim at bringing about drastic structural change by replacing one or more major social institutions. However, in a world where social movements have been, and continue to be important drivers of political change, the need for a more thorough understanding of their political outcomes is ever more pressing.¹¹

Background to 1 Kings 12:12-17

From what used to be a tribal league, ancient Israel became a nation made up of twelve tribes under David. The nation became famous and glorious under Solomon as a result of his massive building projects, due to which heavy taxes were levied upon the people, and they were hoping for some kind of relief from the burden after Solomon died, and Rehoboam his son was slated to succeed him. Rehoboam's coronation was scheduled to hold at Shechem. The heads of the Northern tribes under the leadership of the Ephraimite sent for Jeroboam who had just returned from exile in Egypt after Solomon's death (1 Kings 11:40). They requested him to present their plea for lower taxes to Rehoboam. By agreeing to reduce the tax load and lighten the labour draft requirements on the people, King Rehoboam could have won the support of his petitioners. But he asked for three days to think about their request, during which he sought the advice of two groups of counsellors. The elders were probably about the same age as his father, Solomon, having served as the former king's official advisers; they qualified to be addressed as elders both by reason of age and their offices in the

government. This group's wise counsel was to lighten the tax and work load, as the people demanded. If taken, this advice would have resulted in peace, at least for some time. But the elders' advice did not go down well with Rehoboam. So, he turned to his contemporaries for their opinions. And the young counsellors advised thus:

Tell these people who have said to you, 'Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter'-tell them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions (1 Kings 12:10-11).

Rehoboam was at home with the youth's advice. Worthy of note is the fact that the king had time enough to decide – three days to think it over (1 Kings 12:5). Hence, it was a deliberate choice possibly based on what he believed was needed most in the nation at that time. The text therefore is a picture of the presentation of the king's decision to the agitation of Northern Israel and how it was received by the people.

The Text – 1 Kings 12:12-16

MT	Authors' Translation
<p>וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּ [(וַיָּבֹאוּ ק) יִרְבְּעָם]¹² וְכָל־הָעָם אֶל־רְחֹבָעַם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר הַמֶּלֶךְ לֵאמֹר שׁוּבוּ אֵלַי בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי</p>	<p>12 Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day according to the word of the king, saying “Come back to me on the third day.”</p>
<p>וַיַּעַן הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־הָעָם קָשָׁה¹³ וַיַּעַזֵּב אֶת־עֲצַת הַזְּקֵנִים אֲשֶׁר יַעֲצָהוּ:</p>	<p>13 And the king answered the people cruelly, and ignored the counsel which the elders gave to him,</p>
<p>וַיְדַבֵּר אֵלֵיהֶם כַּעֲצַת הַיְלָדִים¹⁴ לֵאמֹר אָבִי הַכְּבִיד אֶת־עַלְקֹתְכֶם וְאֲנִי אֶסִיף עַל־עַלְקֹתְכֶם אָבִי יֶסֶר אֶתְכֶם בַּשׁוֹטִים וְאֲנִי אֲיַסֵּר אֶתְכֶם בַּעֲקָרָבִים</p>	<p>14 and spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, “My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, I will chastise you with scorpions;”</p>
<p>וְלֹא־שָׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הָעָם כִּי־¹⁵ הִיְתָה סִבָּה מֵעַם יְהוָה לְמַעַן הַקִּים אֶת־דְּבָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה בְּיַד אַחִיָּה הַשִּׁילֹנִי אֶל־יִרְבְּעָם בְּוֶנְבַט:</p>	<p>15 and the king neglected the plea from the people, for the insurgency was from Yahweh, in order to establish His word which He had declared through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.</p>
<p>וַיֵּרָא כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי לֹא־שָׁמַע¹⁶ הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵלֵיהֶם וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הָעָם אֶת־ הַמֶּלֶךְ דֹּבַר לֵאמֹר מִה־לָּנוּ הַחֶלֶק בְּדָוִד וְלֹא־נַחֲלָה בְּבֹן־יִשְׁי לְאַהֲלֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַתָּה רְאֵה בֵיתְךָ דָּוִד וַיֵּלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאַהֲלָיו:</p>	<p>16 And all Israel seeing that the king has neglected their plea sent back word to the king, saying, what portions do we have in David? Yes, there is no inheritance in the son of Jesse; to your tents, O Israel; now see your house, O David! and Israel goes to its tents.</p>

An Appraisal of Rehoboam’s Response

It can be recalled that Solomon’s first official decision brought him the reputation for great wisdom (1 Kings 3:16-18). There is thus a sharp contrast between Solomon’s wise decision (on the issue of the two women with a dead and living son) and his son, Rehoboam’s first decision. Wisely

and to his credit too, Rehoboam asked for a delay to give him room to think and seek counsel. The people's plea shows that they were willing to serve the king if only he (Rehoboam) would serve them and make life more bearable for them. The king's a ruthless dictator. Unfortunately, he chose the latter option.

In verse 12: Perhaps the king and his counsellors thought intimidation would send the people scurrying consultations presented him with two choices – being a sympathetic and democratic leader or for cover and would drive any ideas of insurrection far from their minds. The advice from the youths was not only rash but it was unwise in itself, and could only accelerate the secession of the discontented as it were. Commenting on 1 Kings 12:13-14, Keil and Delitzsch state that it was the language of a tyrant and not of a ruler whom God had placed over His people¹². Putting verse 7 in the right perspective, it should be observed that the elders were not actually advising leniency as a permanent policy, but only as a concession designed to get the formal approval of the people. According to the tradition of the tribal league, the king was supposed to be the people's *ebed* (servant) and this is what the elders counselled him to be so that the people will be his servants permanently. However, it is difficult to ascertain the validity of the king becoming the servant of the people, without prejudicing the authority entrusted to him by God; yet, there is no doubt that if he had consented to such condescension, he would have deprived the discontented tribes of all pretext for rebellion, and not have shared in the sin of their secession. The threat to scourge them with "Scorpions" referring to a particularly cruel kind of whip used in those days, with sharp pieces of metal – a symbol for using more severe policies and actions in governance.

How Solomon Laid the Foundation for the Misfortune of His Son, Rehoboam

While not holding brief for Rehoboam, a careful observation of Solomon's administrative policies and strategies reveal that he laid the foundation for what befell his son, Rehoboam. 1 Kings 5:13 has it that apart from conscripting the subjects of the neighboring states into forced labor for his projects, Solomon also conscripted labourers from all Israel. Soggin argues that the forced labour was made up of men from the northern tribes when he writes, "Israel, and not Judah . . . was subjected to services it considered a grievous infringement of its liberties."¹³ Moreover, 1 Kings 11:28 alludes that Jeroboam was in charge of the forced labor of the "house of Joseph." There is no evidence of the

appointment of a superintendent for the southern kingdom. Another case of Solomon's discrimination against the northern tribes was his ceding of the Galilean cities to Hiram when Solomon was unable to redeem his debt (cf. 1 Kgs 9:10–14). Thus the revolution that accompanied the action of Rehoboam was necessitated by the marginalization and oppression meted out on the people of northern tribes of Israel under King Solomon.

i. Rehoboam's Response As An Act of Predestination

In verse 15: "And the king neglected the plea from the people, for the insurgency was from Yahweh, (*yahweh im cibaah*), "a turning from the Lord" is rendered metaphorically referring to the insurgence which follows the king's reply to the call by people of Israel for a restructuring (change) in the leadership style and policies as an act of God. Brueggemann remarks that politics is not an autonomous zone of life where the working of power has a life of its own.¹⁴ Thus, the unfortunate decision of Rehoboam is attributed to *cibaah* (from Yahweh), a phrase suggesting that the turn out of the event was predestined by God.¹⁵ It thus follows that it was by a divine decree that Rehoboam contributed to the fulfilment of God's will through his own folly, and brought about the accomplishment of the sentence pronounced upon Solomon.

It should be recalled that Jeroboam had been told by the Prophet Ahijah that the kingdom would be divided and that he would rule over ten tribes (1 Kings 11:31-39). But he seems to have decided to let events take their course rather than initiating an unprovoked revolution. Barne notes that human passions, anger, pride, and insolence, worked out the accomplishment of the divine designs. Without interfering with man's free will, God guides the course of events, and accomplishes His purposes.¹⁶

ii. The Consequences of Rehoboam's Response

In verse 16: The harsh words of the king supplied the discontented people with an apparently just occasion for saying, "What portions have we in David? Yes, there is no inheritance in the son of Jesse; to your tents, O Israel; now see your house, O David!" Thus, David, the tribe-father is mentioned in place of Rehoboam's family. The consequences of Rehoboam's speech were predictable: "all Israel" referring to the ten northern tribes announced their decision to leave the other two tribes and establish their own kingdom.

Agitations for Restructuring in Nigeria

There are agitations from virtually every geopolitical zone of Nigeria expressing dissatisfaction over the government and even calling for disintegration of the country. The focus of the study here is the ongoing Biafra agitation by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), led by Nnamdi Kanu. IPOB is calling for restoration of Biafra Republic – a secessionist state in Eastern Nigeria, which existed from 30th May, 1967 to January 1970, when the civil war lasted. The three-year civil-war was fought to enforce Nigeria's unity. The focus of this study on Biafra agitation was informed by the fact that it is the most threatening to Nigeria's unity, even after forty-eight years have elapsed since the war. It would seem that the Igbo nation, especially a significant portion of its leadership has not reconciled with the idea of Nigeria, and they might be justified by certain circumstances. Occasionally since then, with different degrees of severity, the demand for separation from Nigeria and restoration of Biafra Republic has been a permanent feature of Nigeria as a nation.¹⁷

While some people believe that the renewed agitation for Biafra is the manifestation of the long cemented marginalization of the region, others argue that the agitation is merely a political weapon of distraction by the opposition to the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC). Ugorji outlines the reasons for the agitation for the Biafra independence as the failure of the post war transitional justice, trans-generational trauma, and removal of history education from the school curricula in Nigeria through the policies of obliteration.¹⁸ There is also the issue of lopsided appointments by President Muhammadu Buhari which, according to OhanezeNdigbo, the pan Igbo social-cultural organisation, is an indication that the Buhari presidency has deep rooted hatred for the Igbo nation.¹⁹ Another consideration is the fact that presidential position has eluded the Igbo for too long, and still there is no firm hope of it happening. The Igbo are also demanding the creation of one additional state in the core Igbo south east zone to be at par with the other four zones with six states. The core Hausa/Fulani in the northwest zone has seven states.²⁰

There are some other considerations. Osaghae has, for instance, rightly remarked that it is when federal instrumentalities prove unsuitable or inadequate to cope with changing political terrains and demands that the need for restructuring generally arises.²¹ This implies that there are obvious reasons for the recurrent calls for the restructuring of the Nigerian federation. It has been observed in the introduction that sovereignty in a federal government resides with the federating units. Thus, the people's

aspiration is expected to shape the governmental structure and give it its meaning. That is what restructuring means. Osaghae quotes Carnell as arguing that the practical necessities of a miscellany of national circumstances, not the symmetry of academic reasoning have given federalism its content and form.²² As already noted above, federalism does not require that countries must mould their institutions to immutable principles or forms of organization. It promises instead that federal constitutions may be designed to meet the particular needs of the communities establishing them. It thus suggests that the federal government of the present Nigeria is not suitable for the federating peoples. A call for restructuring is therefore a call for a renegotiated Nigeria which will eventually give rise to a peaceful state and quell every agitation.

Lesson from the Jewish Experience

The lesson that must be learnt from Israel's experience is that unity of the Nigerian federation can only remain sacrosanct if the master-servant relationship is discarded, and the voices of the people (who own the sovereignty) are given due consideration. Omoniyi has rightly observed that in recent months, strident calls for the devolution of powers and 'restructuring' of the Nigerian State have gained traction, heightened in the midst of numerous socio-political, economic and security challenges besetting the nation, suggesting that instead of use of force as has become evidenced, the leadership of the country should rather have a meaningful dialogue on the way the federal government is currently structured, as some citizens are clamouring.²³

Secondly, exegesis of the text under consideration clearly indicates that the occasion of the division of the ancient Israelite state was an act of God. Thus, concerning the Nigerian nation, it is good to recall that there were predictions of her collapse in the year 2015. Akosile²³, for instance, remarks that although Nigeria, as earlier predicted by a foreign super-power (America), did not break up in 2015, some analysts believe that the rising poverty, insecurity, killings, increasing inequality, unending corruption and public anger are real threats to this country's continuity. Thus, while it may be a divine providence, it can be averted through negotiations - giving due consideration to the reasons for the agitations, by tailoring the governmental apparatus towards the yearnings of the people.

Another important lesson from ancient Israel's experience is that it is much easier to break up what belongs together than it is to restore what is broken. The history of Israel lacks records of the restoration of the

divided kingdoms of ancient Israel occasioned by the negligence to the cry for leniency from the people. In fact, for centuries, the Jews considered the division of the nation of ancient Israel the greatest catastrophe in their history and measured every disaster by it as can be decoded from the prophecy of Isaiah, "The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah — he will bring the king of Assyria" (Isa. 7:17).

The unity of Nigeria is gravely endangered. Oke²⁴ (2018) has rightly notes that there were signs which showed that Nigeria's unity was at risk and affecting her development, and unless there was a strong political will from the leaders to address the situation, that these issues would cause a break-up of the nation. He further opines that Nigerian leaders and stakeholders should take meaningful steps in addressing the various menaces facing the country. From Oke's presentation, one can see that clamouring for restructuring is anchored on issues of marginalization, oppression, and insecurity of life and property. It therefore behoves the leadership of this country if it sincerely cherishes her oneness as a federation to come to terms with the agitations for restructuring.

Conclusion

This study investigated the ancient Israel's record of agitation for restructuring in 1 Kings 12:12-16, side-by-side with the present clamour of certain Nigerians for restructuring. It was found that true federalism, which Nigeria is claiming, is meant to accommodate diversity in a single entity, and as such, every state in a federal constitution is sovereign. They decide where they want to distribute the power between the federal national government and the component state units. Thus, there cannot be meaningful peace and development in a federation when the rules that govern the inter-relationship among the federating units are threatened as in the case of ancient Israel and the current situation of Nigeria.

This study gathered that one of the characteristics of a federal system of government is occasional call for restructuring. Hence a call for restructuring in Nigeria should not be treated as a bad omen but should be envisaged by the leadership and handled with all diligence. The study also showed that revolutionary approaches usually trail agitation for restructuring. Yet, as noted in the course of this work, it is easier to break-up than it is to restore what is broken. As such, the paper calls for strong political will and commitment to the unity of the Nigerian federation on the part of the leadership. The leaders should be more sensitive and

proactive in their handling of the agitations in the country to avert the looming disintegration.

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