

A Reflection on Rehoboam's Errors and Their Implications for Leaders in Nigeria

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Abstract

Everyone in every society and nation desires a peaceful life. But what pervades many countries nowadays are banditry, kidnapping, riots, strikes, murder wars, etc, and the situation in Nigeria is alarming. This shows that something has gone wrong, thus, making the system to malfunction. This in no small way has acute effects on the economy and the people. The reflection of this pathetic condition of the country is expressively seen on the faces of the youths who are the future leaders, but are demoralized and alienated. Does it mean that the nation has no leader or good leader? Why are some parts of the country advocating for division? The grave circumstances anchor on leadership just as it was during the reign of Rehoboam. In view of this disturbing problem of leadership, the intention of this paper is to reflect on Rehoboam's errors and their implications for leaders in Nigeria. The research adopted historical method. The paper discovered that just as there were revolts and clamours in Israel during the reign of Rehoboam which eventually led to the division of the United Kingdom of Israel, so there are clamours in Nigeria for separation or division of the country, among other agitations. It is recommended that leaders should take to godly advice or counsel, have a servant-leader attitude by caring for the people they are leading.

Keywords: Rehoboam's errors, Implications, Nigeria, Leaders, Godly Counsel.

Introduction

Every organization, society, state or country has someone at the helm of its affairs. Such an individual is elected or appointed to oversee the affairs and well-being of the people. Despite the presence of such ones, there are instabilities in the society as seen during the reign of Rehoboam in Israel (Kings 14:25-31). King David fought a lot of battles, conquered and secured peace for Israel before Solomon, his son, succeeded him. Solomon enjoyed relative

peace and prosperity but with the affluence, he committed errors which could have been avoided, if he had yielded to the warnings from God. He was succeeded by his son called Rehoboam, who did not take time to learn from the errors of his predecessors, but became engulfed in the errors (Kings 11:26-40). Lessons could be learned from Rehoboam's actions by leaders today. Nowadays, Nigeria is experiencing instability. Apart from the instability of the economy which is biting hard on the people, the staggering security and defence problem are glaring. Also insurgency is on the increase coupled with these is the Corona virus (COVID- 19) which has become pandemic. Lives and property are being destroyed massively and many are made homeless, widows, widowers and orphans. Farmers abandon their farm lands because of fear of being killed on the farm. The reflection of the confusing situation of the country can vividly be seen upon the faces of the youth who are the future leaders but are alienated and demoralized. These grave circumstances rest upon the issue of leadership. So the problem facing Nigeria is that of leadership ().

A leader is a person who leads a group of people, organization, country, etc. He is someone who influences others. The influence could be good or bad, depending on what controls the leader. George sees a leader as one who mobilizes, a person whose focus is influencing people: he is goal driven and has orientation in common with those who rely upon him for leadership and he has people willing to follow him (George, 2003, p.42).

A leader, therefore, is someone with functional competencies and elitism that cannot be denied (Miller, 1987.p.15). According to Bereko-Brobby (2006), leadership is not position though it can enhance leadership. Leadership is not personality, but the authority invested in a given position. Leadership is not lordship (p.10). Charles (1991) asserts that "leadership is a corporate event" (para.6). Where there is lack of positive, constructive, dynamic as well as creative leadership, there would be emanation of disorganization of the societal cohesion resulting to crises. These "reflect a flight from the fundamental virtues and values that have made nations great in the past" (Jegede, 2007, p.72). Nigeria, which is reputed to be the giant of Africa is dwindling, just as some other great nations had experienced in history. Ted (2010) observes that the decline in the power of leadership appears to be everywhere (p.4).

Since leaders are decision makers, the success or failure, as well as rise and fall of any group, organization or society, whether secular or religious,

depends on the quality of its leadership. In as much as decision making is central to leadership, it becomes expedient to leaders to understand how to recognize and make positive decisions, which will lead to the desired results, having the government at the centre of things. This also is a matter of circumstances. A right decision at the right time leads to success, but the right decision at the wrong time is unacceptable, while wrong decision made at the right time results in mistakes, a wrong decision made at the wrong time will always end in disaster. This is clearly portrayed in the Bible. The thrust of this paper is to examine the salient errors of Rehoboam, so as to assist the contemporary Nigerian leaders avoid same mistakes so that the negative aspect of the history of the past would not repeat itself in the modern society. The study is relevant considering the agitations for breaking away by some regions; for example the Igbos in the Eastern part of the Country, who are clamouring for Biafra Nation, and the Yoruba in the Western part of the country, agitating for Odududua (Yoruba) Nation. These calls for secession anchor on socio-economic hardship experienced by the masses as a result of poor leadership, just as was experienced in Israel during the reign of Rehoboam. A replicate song of "To your tents o Israel" is surfacing in Nigeria.

Political Background to Rehoboam's Succession as King

David was succeeded by his son Solomon, who was an embodiment of wisdom, an endowment he got from God. He organized system of taxation and also levied each district to be providing sustenance for the king's household each month. Thus, the family was well cared for throughout the year. He also established a scheme of forced labour through which every able-bodied Hebrew worked for the king three months in a year. Though, there were revolts against the forced labour, but the revolts were crushed and some were killed and one of the leaders of the rebels from Ephraimites, Jeroboam, escaped to Egypt and never returned till the death of Solomon (1 Kings 11:40-45). Solomon built a magnificent temple and dedicated it to God. He became wealthy and famous through the taxation, tributes from vassal states, forced labour, levies, trade and wisdom given to him by God, and God's answers to his prayers.

However, Solomon was much more interested in trade than monotheistic religion, so he signed treaties with many nations such as Tyre, Musri, Egypt, and so on. He also married the daughters of the kings of the countries he signed

trade treaties with. This eventually led to the introduction and establishment of many other gods with their temples and altars built in Israel. It later had a decline effect on his religious desire (1 Kings 11:1-5), coupled with his harem of seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines as well as “his growing interest and absorption in schemes for material advancement of his people and himself, left little time for service of Yahweh” (Joshua, 2001, p. 60). At the demise of Solomon, his son Rehoboam succeeded him as king over Israel at Shechem. But only the two tribes in the south: Judah and Benjamin accepted him. The reason was because the tribe of Judah was exempted from taxation because it was the king's tribe, and Benjamin was the place where the Garrison was situated. Trouble emanated from the other tribes in the north, which were ten tribes with Jeroboam, the Ephraimite as its leader. He was emboldened by a prophecy which he had previously received that he would become king in Israel before he ran away to Egypt during Solomon's reign (1 Kings 11:29-30). So on his return, he diplomatically and tactically led the ten tribes against Rehoboam by making request for heavy yoke lightening imposed on the people by Solomon (1 Kings 12:1-40). This was a great test to see Rehoboam's competence. Would he act wisely or unwisely? Would he avoid his predecessor's errors or embrace the same pitfall?

Rehoboam's Errors

Rehoboam's error is shown in every sphere of life in Israel. Some of these are discussed below.

Political Error

Firstly, his error was reflected in his political decision-making. As earlier stated, Solomon made some policies which later became flaws or errors on his part, to which some people revolted and it led to the death of many people in Israel. But he died without putting right the mistakes before he was succeeded by his son. Invariably, Rehoboam, his son would have been aware of the existing predicament which the people complained of and pleaded for mercy. The occasion for the request was politically coloured. Already, Rehoboam has been accepted as king by the people of Judah (Southern kingdom) and needed to be accepted too by the northern tribes. In a normal situation, Jerusalem which was the capital of Israel ought to have been the place of the coronation but

Schechem was chosen. This was “because it was central ground for the discontented tribes and because of its historical significance” (Jegede, 2007, p. 74). So Rehoboam had to travel from Jerusalem to Schechem.

The political scenario of the gathering was shown in the request made by the northern tribes if Rehoboam was to be accepted by them as their king. They wanted Solomon's taxation and the instituted labour conscription to be reduced. They wanted a change and did not want to suffer as they did during the reign of Solomon. Initially, Rehoboam too acted a little wisely on hearing the request. He told them to come back in three days for the reply to their request. He did this in order to consult the elders who used to advise his father. The elders having foreseen what was afoot advised him to hearken to the people and reduce their burden. But he was not satisfied with the advice, so he decided to seek advice from his peers. According to John L. Kachelman:

He cared not for the established wisdom but chose new wisdom! The Elders had been designated by God and used by Moses, Saul, David and Solomon to govern Israel. Their counsel would have avoided the division. But their counsel was unattractive to someone devoted to SELF. The Elders were not given serious consideration by Rehoboam. The king never saw their wisdom; he never identified as being with them (cf 2 Ths. 2:4) (John, n.d., para.3).

Joshua (2007) notes that, “the youths advised him to give a dictatorial answer by refusing to lighten the burden of the people. He was also advised by his peers not to appear weak. Rehoboam decided to follow the advice of his peers, by ignoring the cries and pains of the people” (p. 61).

Rehoboam's inability to sift the advice given by the elders and that of the youth and its consequences on him and the nation, eventually led to the division of the kingdom, as he yielded to that of the youth. The reason for the ill advice of the youth may have been prompted by selfishness and greediness, as well as youthful exuberance. Rehoboam's yielding to his contemporaries could have been to his lack of administrative experience and his over confidence in the dynastic legacies. He thought he still had control over the northern tribes, so he sent Adoniram to collect tribute from them, but Adoniram was killed. Rehoboam fled to Jerusalem, a fortified city so as to avoid being lynched by the people. The northern tribes therefore made Jeroboam king over them. Thus,

Rehoboam lost control over the ten tribes (northern kingdom) and only controlled the two tribes in the south- Judah and Benjamin. It was like re-upstaging the dramatic scenario faced by David after the death of Saul, but Rehoboam did not handle the situation wisely. According to Jegede (2007),

Politically, as a nation, Israel became a weeping country among her neighbouring nations. She became powerless in the face of oppositions and external attacks. Therefore, she could not repel the invasion of her enemies. One can even assume that Jeroboam, the rival king of Rehoboam, incited the Egyptians to make war against Judah, having discovered her military weaknesses. How great this was from the vigour and bravery of the days of David (p. 75).

Religious Error

Religiously, when Jeroboam drove away priests and Levites from the Northern kingdom, they were accepted by Rehoboam. They brought wisdom and spiritual strength to Rehoboam's kingdom (2 Chronicles 11:5-17). Nupanga (2006) notes that

for three years, Rehoboam's reign was strengthened because he was walking in the ways of David and Solomon during this time... Rehoboam's obedience to the prophet's message and especially his faithfulness to the temple brought blessing that was publicly manifested in his building projects and in the growth of his family (p. 510).

However, in the course of time, Rehoboam failed to listen to the advice and instructions of the priests and Levites as he did at the initial stage after coronation. He decided to rule based on his own personal discretion. It was noted by Upanaga (2006) that "once the kingdom was established, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the Lord" (p. 510). He gave half allegiance to Yahweh and when he was told by prophet Shemaiah of the oncoming invasion on his kingdom by Egypt as a divine punishment due to his apostasy, Rehoboam quickly showed mark of repentance but he later relapsed into idolatry. The pure worship of Yahweh with which the people were known for became diluted with Baalism to the extent that idolatry corrupted the whole nation.

Pagan cultic practices were given freedom in Judah. The presence of foreign women in important positions such as the king's mother, Naama, and the

favourite “first lady” Maacah (cf 1 Kings 14:31; 15:12; 22:13) possibly influenced the practices. Prostitution also became prominent as it was in other nations around them (1 Kings 14:22-24), and paganism became the order of the day, even more than the epoch of Solomon. Idolatry corrupted the whole nation. So everyone indulged in practices that were hateful to Yahweh (1 Kings 14:22-24). Musa (2006) notes that due to these detestable practices, “God permitted Shishak, the Pharaoh of Egypt who had previously sheltered Jeroboam, to attack Jerusalem. He seized all the treasure and the golden shields of Solomon, reducing Judah to a shadow of its former glory” (p. 435).

Economy Error

Rehoboam's error also reflected in his denying the people economic freedom which they were yearning for, and truly they were in need of freedom, liberation and a deliverer. Jegede notes that the “people suffered a heavy load of taxation and labour conscription. This, no doubt had a negative impact on the finances and social lives of the people. They were forced to live wretched lives due to economic hardship. For this reason, they demanded a change in their already deteriorated condition” (Jegede, 2007, p.75). This is entrenched in the fact that the people were taxed and worked (forced labour) without payment. Directly or indirectly, it affected their economic and social lives, thus making their standard of living to fall astronomically.

Social Relationship Error

Socially, Rehoboam's error affected the social relationship that existed between the northerners and the southerners. The cord of unity, love and brotherhood that tied the twelve tribes together was tampered with due to Rehoboam's error. His negative response to the northerners' request ignited or warranted the people's “sword-word” that broke the cord. The Bible notes that “When all Israel saw the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, what portions have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents o Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed to their tents” (1 Kings 12: 16 KJV). This is an expression of broken relationship and discord. The brokenness of this relationship eventually led Jeroboam to build another altar in the northern kingdom, so that the northerners would have nothing to do with the altar in the south. The hostility

was even expressed when a prophet (a man of God) came from the south to prophesy against the altar at Bethel. Musa notes that “Jeroboam reacted angrily and called for the arrest of the man of God. But as he stretched out his hand to point to him, his hand shrivelled and could not be pulled back. At the same time, the altar did crack and ashes poured out (13:4-5)” (Musa, 2006, p. 433) from the altar.

Implications of Rehoboam's Errors for Leaders in Nigeria

Political Implication

Nigeria as a nation has population that is over two hundred million people with over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups and dialects. The type of government which was practised in Nigeria prior to the British invasion was the Traditional System of Government. It consists of the paramount chiefs, council of elders, sectional clubs, and the army (countrymeters.info>Nigeria). Joshua (2007) notes that during that epoch, “there was proper maintenance of checks and balances, for absolute power did not rest on anyone” (p. 63). This was the system of government operated in most of the African countries.

However, when the British colonized the country, Fredrick Lugard, who was the first Governor General, introduced “Indirect Rule.” Olufemi (2006) observes that it was a system that was not applied to any other country in Africa except Nigeria (p.45). Though the system recognized the existence of Emirs, Obas, Chiefs and Obis, but the colonial masters' interest and influence were brought to bear on the natives indirectly by the Europeans officers, who dictated the necessary processes that must be obeyed. Whenever resistance occurred, European military power was used to enforce compliance to “the law that look like that of the Chief or Kings, hence we have what is termed divide and rule” (Joshua, 2007, p.63).

After the country gained independence with minimum internal cohesion, she continued as one. But the colonial masters did not put in place an adequate policy which could sustain the enormous diversities of tribes, languages, religions, and cultures that exist in the country. A federal constitution was formulated through which the colonialists hoped they would be able to achieve a viable unification of the diversities- the various territorial sub-sections and the different tribes- which they previously wedded together by force, under one

administrative umbrella (Joshua, 2007, p.64). Adewale (1981, pp.1-2) and Joshua (2007, p.63) note that this never worked and the reason been that the nationalists' activities during the struggle for independence promoted religious differences, ethnic rivalry and political tussle among the various people in the country. The nation had practiced different types of administration ranging from democracy to military rule, and back to democracy from the time of independence. The type of political system that is practised in Nigeria is known as "party-politics." It deals with policy and decision-making by groups of people who had common interest within the country. The group's name is decided by the groups and they contest for power and control the nation on winning the election. Thus, it is expedient that such people be of good moral standard having public will and should have sense of accountability.

However, due to the political/ leadership problem that the nation is facing, various party systems have been tried ranging from two-party system to multi-party system (Adedope, 1984, p. 105). In spite of these systems, the problem still persists. Leadership problem surfaces from time to time. This is indicative of the foundational problem that Rehoboam, as well as Israel as a nation faced after the demise of Solomon. Israel as a nation consists of twelve tribes with military and geographical demarcation. She has her ethnic consciousness and personal sentiments; hence there was no unified structure to enhance tribal cohesion. Coupled with this is the problem of the king emerging from two political zones in Israel (Jeroboam and Rehoboam), North and South in the united kingdom of Israel. This is also the case in Nigeria. There are instances of questionable method used in selecting leaders in Israel. For instance, the role played by Abner, the army leader of Saul who chose Ish-bosheth as king but later turned against him and finally accepted David as king based on agreement between both of them- Abner and David (cf 2 Samuel 3:1). Politics and favouritism were also noticed in the choice of Solomon which made his brother Adonijah to fiercely challenge him (cf 1 Kings 1:5-10). On the demise of the wise king Solomon, an unwise person that lacked personal will or responsibility but relied on legacies: Rehoboam, took over as king in Israel; hence "mistakes, misrule, coup, rebellions characterized installations of kings, leading to the division of the nations" (Joshua, 2007, p. 63). This trait is also seen in Nigeria whereby Nigerians too lament their experience of questionable choice of political leaders over the years. The emergences of irresponsible and

selfish leaders at local, state and federal levels were attached to questionable polls results (Adegboyega, 1981, pp.19-20). Doyin and Geoffrey note that a “gentleman's agreement” was signed in 1994 as regard the zone where the president should come from in Nigeria, and cases of pacts being signed before the emergence of the leader in 1999 (Doyin and Geoffrey, 2006, p. 16). This was a resemblance of David-Abner's agreement (cf2 Samuel 13: 12-21). Apart from military rule which most Nigerians were not comfortable with then, due to failure of unsolicited leaders from the barracks, who see the “bloody civilians” as nobody, and felt free to brutalize the citizens as well as mismanage the public funds (though same situation is seen under civilian rule). As such, some of the military rulers on retirement translated themselves into politicians and emerged as democratic leaders. These bands of politicians were noted to have wrecked Nigeria's past republics (Dele, 1986, p. 4), and federal government has started retrieving some of the money that were looted by some of them. This undoubtedly anchors on the problem of leadership on which other things hang. This has led to

The high level of crime, corruption and bribery, wanton destruction of lives and properties worth millions of naira, sectionalism, murder and assassinations, gruesome scene of ethnic groups gleefully slaughtering one another, economic degradation, social vices like lingering the problems the average citizen of the country has to grapple with (Jegede, 2007, p. 76).

According to Jegede (2007), this undoubtedly anchors on the problem of leadership on which other things hang and manifests in form of high level of crime, corruption and bribery, wanton destruction of lives and properties worth millions of naira, sectionalism, murder and assassinations, gruesome scenes of ethnic groups gleefully slaughtering one another, economic degradation, and other social vicesthe average citizen of the country has to grapple with (p. 76).

Demand for rights by the masses in Nigerian is often being expressed through protests and strikes, because it appears to be the only language the government understands. Just as Rehoboam had advisers, so are the leaders in Nigeria surrounded by Special Advisers who are experts in their respective fields. Their function is to give useful and constructive advice to the

government. Unfortunately, there are sycophants among them who like Rehoboam's exuberant advisers, give endless but selfish and ill-motivated counsel to the government (Chaiwo and Festus, 2006, p.12). This eventually led to the split of the United Kingdom of Israel. In Nigeria, advisers sometimes advise the government wrongly contrary to the interest of the public. This has brought untold hardship and also led to unrest in many forms in the country. Even in a situation where a good advice is given by elder statesman but rejected, it has a lot of implication and usually results to chaos, unrest, etc.; which signals division.

Religious Implication

From religious perspective, religion which is the relationship between the human and the supernatural or divine will give birth to peaceful, just and united society, if properly practised. But in the case of Rehoboam he failed to utilize the wisdom inherent in religion that was vested in the priests and prophets, who ran from the northern kingdom to the southern kingdom (Judah). The way Nigerian leaders are “letting down” Nigerians make one to wonder whether they really attend Churches or Mosques. Evidently, they bear religious names, dance in churches, give offerings, pray in Mosques and pay zakat, but they are not guided by their conscience in their actions. Sadly, just like in Rehoboam's case, selfishness and disobedience have taken the upper hand in the hearts of Nigerian leaders (Jegede, 2007, p. 78). With the serendipity of the thick religious atmosphere that pervades every nook and cranny in Nigeria, we expect the nation to be a better place: peaceful and free of moral evil, but contrarily, corruption has become the order of the day. This has become bedrock of the prevalent vices in Nigeria. The religion, which a leader professes, should affect his/her character and attitude, so that the type of Rehoboam's error, being witnessed in polity will not continue to manifest, so as not to lead to the division of Nigeria, just as it led to the disintegration of the nation of Israel. Rehoboam's failure to listen to religious leaders and God's words made him to deviate and this implies disassociating himself from Yahweh, the kingmaker and this had negative effects on his reign. Nigeria is blessed with some good and true men and women of God, priests, prophets/prophetesses, and so on. However, the failure of political leaders to listen to them and carry out God's directives may have contributed to the

nation's woes as experienced in Israel (pmnewsnigeria.com).

Economic Implication

The hardship which the Israelites were going through which also had claws on their economic life made them to request for lightening of their yoke from Rehoboam. They were more or less like slaves in their own land, flowing with milk and honey yet the people lived a penurious life. Even Rehoboam who ought to alleviate their suffering also promised compounding it with the use of “scorpion” and “heavy yoke” (1 Kings 12:12-14). This eventually led to a revolution and division of Israel's nation, which was once united. In Nigeria today, the standard of living of most people is very low. Masses in Nigeria cannot afford to eat balance diet, let alone eating three square meals. Poverty has become part and parcel of the daily existence of the masses. Prosperity only encircles and recycles among the upper class citizens. The era of middle class citizens had passed and it only remains upper rich and the lower poor. The lower poor's take home pay cannot even take them anywhere. Workers' salaries are not paid as at when due and minimum wage is not implemented or paid in some sectors or quarters as well as some allowances. This had often led to incessant strikes with grievous effects on people and the economy (Strike, n.d., para. 4, NLC Strike 2021, para. 6, NASU, SSANU, n.d., para. 2, ASSU Strike, n.d, para. 4). Thus, economic hardship could lead to people agitating for division or secession.

Social Implication

Just as the social relationship which existed between the hitherto knitted and united northern and southern kingdoms was marred and hostility set in due to the mistakes of Rehoboam, Good social relationship has existed among the southerners, easterners, westerners and northerners in Nigeria. Nigerian leaders should learn lessons from it so that the social relationship that exists between the various ethnic groups will not be marred and disunity and discord become the order of the day. The implication of this will be the hatred of one tribe, ethnic group or geo-political zone against another.

Conclusion

Israel suffered a great setback especially from the time of the Judges due to their failure to obey God and their rejection of God by demanding for a king, so as to be like other nations. The kings failed the people's expectations because they (the kings) failed to rule the people in accordance with God's will; rather they were pre-occupied with selfish interests. Rehoboam demonstrated complete lack of competence and interest for the welfare of the people, both economically and religiously. His failure to act wisely and take to the advice of the elders had disastrous consequences on the economic, religious, social and political life of the people. Apart from the disintegration of the nation, they became objects of ridicule to the surrounding nations. Yahwehism which Israel was known for became adulterated as a result of introduction of worship of Baal. Rehoboam deviated from Davidic covenant and it affected the whole nation of Israel. So his errors are religious, political, social, and economic. The implications of this for Leaders in Nigeria are also discussed.

Recommendations:

1. Leaders should take to good advice or counsel especially from experienced and wise elders, because the words of wise elders are words of wisdom.
2. Political advisers should advise properly or well for the good of the nation, and not towards their own selfish interest which will only enhance their personal well-being.
3. Leaders should not leave out God in their leadership. They should always seek divine guidance too.
4. Leaders in Nigeria should know that it is only when the masses are satisfied with their administration that they can rule with peace of mind. This could only be enhanced through the readiness of the leaders to solve the problems of unemployment, religious fanaticism and corruption. Leaders should seek to add to the joy and happiness of others in the society. This will make the citizens to be committed to the oneness of the country, and there will be peace in the country. But this could be enhanced when leaders do what is right in the sight of God. Therefore, what this generation needs now are people of mission (men and women) who will not betray their God in politics, people who are ready to pass

down to the coming generation what will make the future generation remember them and be proud of them for their legacies. So, if the nation will move forward and remain united, the political culture of bitterness, corruption and assassination should be stopped, so as to have a peaceful society or nation that will attract investors. Thus, the rights of the citizens should be respected and not be trodden upon by leaders, and the citizens should not be made slaves in their fathers' land because this will not only trigger revolution and agitation for secession but unrest and division.

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