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Solomon's Administrative Misadventures in Israel: A Cautionary Anecdote for Nigerian Political Leaders

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Abstract

The research compares the experiences of King Solomon's leadership with what is wrong with leadership in Nigeria nowadays, citing the fact that Solomon's failure to rule, characterised by power over-centralisation, oppressive taxation, forced labour, and haughtiness towards criticism, caused the collapse of his kingdom shortly after his rule. Similar to Nigeria, its nation also has issues of leadership traced back to corruption, complacency among elites, and power centralisation by its leaders. The study employs qualitative research based on biblical history, political science, and Nigerian history to study the leadership style of Solomon and its implications on current Nigerian political culture. It employs secondary sources like religious texts, political speeches, and research papers. The research points out that Solomon's shortcomings and Nigeria's current leadership challenges derive from an over-centralisation of power, economic imbalance, lack of consideration for the people's concerns, as well as a focus on pomp and ceremony at the expense of real development. All these lead to political instability and public disillusionment in Nigeria, just like the division of Israel during Solomon's time. The findings advocate a governance framework that encourages decentralisation, people-oriented approaches, and service- and justice-oriented ethical leadership. From lessons on Solomon's errors, Nigerian policy makers are called to embrace policies of the people's inclusion and thus cater for their needs with a view to nurturing national integration and sustainable development.

Keywords: Administrative, misadventures, cautionary anecdote, political leaders, Old Testament

Introduction

Leadership has always been a deciding factor for the rise or fall of countries. The performance, agenda, and integrity of the rulers decide the course of governance and the collective happiness of their people (Solomon et al., 2023a:305-307). History is replete with leaders who have lived by the best and worst of bureaucratic decisions, with legacies inspiring development or cautioning against catastrophic rule. King Solomon of biblical Israel is such a leader. King Solomon, son of David, is widely praised for his never-before-seen wisdom, never-before-seen riches, and expensive infrastructural projects, such as the construction of the grand Temple in Jerusalem (Solomon et al., 2023b:415–417). He is widely quoted throughout biblical literature as the embodiment of God's wisdom and prosperity. But closer analysis of his reign reveals glaring administrative errors that ultimately led to the balkanization of the United Kingdom of Israel shortly after his death (Aniche & Falola, 2021:44). His leadership flaws, characterised by overcentralisation of authority, oppressive taxation, conscription, and disregard for public protest, betray a disconnect between government ideals and administrative practice (Adekunle & Benjamin, 2021:126). These happenings of the past are not mere survivals of biblical obscurity; rather, they are a mirror in which we can look and judge today's political landscape, most especially that of Nigeria. Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has been beset with a pattern of poor governance, characterised by recurring cycles: federal over-concentration of power, systemic corruption, disconnection of the elite from the masses, and policies that prioritise prestige over public interest (Divine, 2024). All one has to do is consider how Nigeria's federalism has become increasingly unitary in reality, with far too much authority concentrated at the national level in the executive. In Solomon's day, as in ours, Jerusalem became the centre of excesses while peripheral tribes bore the tax loads and drudgery (Aniche & Falola, 2021:126). Contemporary Nigeria shows alarming disparities in the distribution of resources, opportunities for economic gain, and political participation. The persistent calls for reorganisation, the separatist conflicts in the South and West, and the blanket mistrust of government institutions are all pointers to a system that, like Solomon's, has alienated significant parts of its citizens (Ubong, 2021:5).

Besides, Solomon's autocratic nature, i.e., the imposition of forced labour on his people for construction activities, is representative, to some degree, of the coercive policies and indifference to human rights that consistently typify Nigeria's politics. For example, as part of successive Nigerian administrations' infrastructure expansion, people have been moved en bloc without adequate compensation, and citizens are seldom involved in participatory decision-making (Afegbua, 2012:1-14). Moreover, Solomon's refusal to hear criticism augured his downfall in the sense that he ignored voices in dissent, those warning against abusive tactics. Nigeria is faced with this issue as well. Whistle-blowers, journalists, and opposition voices are consistently silenced, coerced, or discredited by state machinery. Political hubris like this dissolves accountability and advocates for a culture of leadership premised on pompoms of individualism rather than public service (Afegbua, 2012:1-14). This study is thus called for by the need to explore the parallels that can be drawn between Solomon's leadership mistakes and Nigeria's present-day leadership debacle. It strives to explore how lessons from Solomon's reign can be used as cautionary principles by Nigerian politicians responsible for

guiding a divided, ethnically, economically polarised, and weak nation towards unity and sustainable progress.

The Leadership of King Solomon

Solomon, son of David and Bathsheba, was one of the most central and complex figures in biblical history. His kingdom, documented in detail in the books of the First Kings, the two kings, the Proverbs, and the Ecclesiastes, has a detailed description of the peaks and valleys of monarchy. Solomon's kingdom was characterized by a combination of divine wisdom, economic prosperity, architectural magnificence, and ultimately administrative shame and moral insecurity (Friedman & Friedman, 2019). His reign began in God's favour and public optimism, but ended in division, dissatisfaction, and religious decline. Solomon ascended to the throne of Israel during a period of relative peace and national unity (McGlynn, 2010:61-81). One of his first and most admirable acts as king was his famous prayer of wisdom. God appeared in a dream in 1 Kings 3:5-12 and offered Solomon everything he wanted. Solomon, in modesty, asked not for wealth or longevity, but for an "understanding heart to judge his people, that I may discern between good and bad" (McGlynn, 2010:61-81). With this request, God was satisfied, not only to give Solomon unparalleled wisdom but also wealth and honour (Solomon et al., 2023a: 305-307). His wisdom was the subject of legend, attracting guests from all over the world.

The visit of the Queen of Sheba is recorded in 1 Kings 10:1-13 and illustrates the great popularity of Solomon internationally. She was so impressed by his court elegance, his kingdom regulation, and the depth of his intellect that she said, "the half has not been told me". Solomon also demonstrated government talent in solving disputes, most notably in the case of two women who opposed the birth of a single child (1 Kings 3:16-28). His decision to split the child to determine the true mother revealed the true maternal instinct and showed his judicial sense (Hogeterp, 2012:143-163). Solomon's government was also marked by large-scale state projects. His most remarkable achievements include the construction of the Temple at Jerusalem, as described in 1 Kings 6 and 2 Chronicles 34. The temple became the centre of Israel's worship and a symbol of pride. In addition to the temple, Solomon built his palaces, walls and commercial centres, indicating his ambitions to industrialise and expand the kingdom's infrastructure (Divine, 2024). But this ambitious administrative system is expensive (Wozniuk, 1997:657-680). Solomon's reign began to show signs of authoritarianism and exploitative economic practices. In order to finance his large projects and support his opulent court, he imposed high taxes on citizens and conscripted forced labour. 1 Kings 5:13-14 shows that Solomon appointed 30,000 Israelites to work in Lebanon. This system of forced labour and taxes planted seeds of instability, particularly among the northern tribes. The centralisation of power in Jerusalem resulted in a disconnect between the capital and other parts of the kingdom (Giszczak, 2021:62-70). Solomon's administration concentrated wealth and influence around the royal court, and peripheral tribes were economically burdened and politically marginalised. This difference was one of the underlying causes of the rebellion that followed Solomon's death. When his son Rehoboam succeeded him and refused to relieve the burden of the people, the ten tribes of the north rebelled under Jeroboam and founded the kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12). This division marked the end of the unified monarchy and is directly linked to Solomon's centralised and unfriendly governance (Steiner, 2018:288).

In addition, Solomon's religious and ethical shortcomings further undermined his leadership. His reign began with sincere devotion to God, but he gradually fell into idolatry. 1 Kings 11:18 reveals that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 companions, many of whom were foreign princesses with their divinities and rituals. To relieve them, Solomon built high places for Chemosh, Molech and other pagan gods. This was an obvious violation of the Israeli covenant law. His heart, once completely dedicated to God, was "returned" (1 Kings 11:4) (Kalimi, 2013:7-44). This apostasy angered God, who ordered the kingdom to be divided, leaving only a remnant for the heir of Solomon. Solomon's refusal to listen to prophetic warnings further contributed to his downfall. God sent Ahijah, the Shilonite, to inform Jeroboam that ten tribes would be destroyed by Solomon's idolatry (1 Kings 11:29–39). Instead of repenting, Solomon attempted to kill Jeroboam, a desperate act that reflects the rise of despotism and political paranoia (1 Kings 11:40). His legacy is therefore paradoxical. On the one hand, Solomon brought Israel to the peak of wisdom, prosperity, and global fame. On the other hand, its bureaucratic excesses, religious compromises, and disregard for public sentiment have triggered a national fracture. He is remembered as the wisest king and the architect of the disintegration of his kingdom. His regime is a powerful biblical case study of the dangers of unlimited power, moral compromise, central government, and abandonment of inclusive, people-oriented leadership.

Leadership in Contemporary Nigeria

Leadership in contemporary Nigeria is a subject that requires serious questions and reflection, especially given the crucial role it has played in the formation of the nation's future since independence. Nigeria's development, although blessed with very abundant human and natural resources, has been hampered in no small way by the poor leadership of successive governments. This chronic failure in leadership takes the form of institutionalised corruption, authoritarian tendencies in governance, poor institutions, ethnic politics and the marginalisation of youth (Ejimabo, 2013:215). The colonial heritage of the centralised autocratic government laid the foundations for a leadership culture of superiority and submission to the centre at the expense of the participation of the people. British colonial rulers often ruled indirectly through appointed traditional authorities, thereby separating people from meaningful democratic participation. This model continued even after independence in 1960, when political elites held power without serious responsibility towards the people. The Nigerian state inherited a model of leadership that lacked democratic depth and transparency (Akpa et al., 2021:46-53). Military dictatorship strengthened authoritarianism in Nigeria's political heritage. Between 1966 and 1999, Nigeria was sometimes ruled by military dictatorships, with decrees replacing discussions and substituting consensus. The militarisation of politics suppressed political institutions, civil society, and the culture of accountability. Even within the current democratic regime, former military dictators still exercise influence, and their command-style mentality continues to dominate public administration. Corruption remains perhaps the most significant feature of Nigeria's leadership failure. Public office is too often seen as a passport to self-enrichment rather than a vocation for public service (Kure, 2020:451). Public looting, embezzlement, overinflated contracts, and mismanagement of oil wealth have unfortunately become the norm. Nigeria consistently ranks low on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, highlighting a deep accountability crisis (Divine, 2024). High-level efforts to combat

corruption yield few convictions and further undermine public trust in institutions and leadership (Udofia, 2020:69-81). In addition, Nigeria's federal structure is becoming increasingly unitary in practice. Though constitutionally a federation, fiscal and administrative power is heavily concentrated at the federal level. This centralisation has limited innovation and accountability in state and local governments. State governors often act as federal proxies rather than independent developmental agents. Local government inefficiency has widened the gap between citizens and their supposed representatives (Okolie & Igbini, 2020:254-271).

Ethno-religious politics has also distorted the leadership terrain. Nigerian political leaders, instead of promoting merit-based governance, often exploit ethnic and religious sentiments to gain or retain power. This manipulation of identity fuels division, marginalisation, and fragmentation. Rather than fostering national unity, most leaders exacerbate pre-existing rifts for political advantage. Consequently, secessionist agitations, communal clashes, and mutual suspicions have escalated in a context still assumed to be one unified Nigeria (Afegbua, 2012:1-14). Youth exclusion is another major leadership failure. Over 60% of Nigerians are under 30, yet political power remains concentrated in the hands of an entrenched elite. Structural barriers such as godfatherism, exorbitant campaign costs, and exclusive party systems discourage youth participation. Although the "Not Too Young to Run" law lowered the age for candidacy, youth representation remains negligible (Mensah et al., 2022:63-84). The 2020 #EndSARS protests highlighted not only youth frustration but also their capacity for mobilisation. Yet, the political response was repressive rather than dialogical (McGlynn, 2010:61-81). Economic mismanagement is another hallmark of leadership failure. Despite earning over \$400 billion in oil revenue from 1999 to 2019, Nigeria still struggles with poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment. Successive administrations have failed to meaningfully diversify the economy or invest adequately in health, education, and infrastructure. Wasteful spending, incoherent policies, and corruption have hampered national development. Leadership continues to prioritise prestige projects over people-centred development (Mensah et al., 2022:63-84).

Nevertheless, there are examples of good governance at the subnational level. The infrastructural development in Lagos under Babatunde Fashola and the fiscal discipline of Peter Obi in Anambra State illustrate the possibilities of ethical and strategic leadership. However, these remain isolated exceptions and are insufficient to shift the national trajectory (Afegbua, 2012:1-14). Nigerian leaders are also frequently criticised for lacking moral direction. In a highly religious society, public officials often make moral claims without ethical consistency. Many attend religious services but practise unethical leadership, revealing a gap between religious rhetoric and governance behaviour. This hypocrisy undermines moral authority and fosters societal cynicism (Akpa et al., 2021:46-53). In essence, Nigeria's leadership crisis is a crisis of vision, ethics, and responsibility. Though deeply rooted, it is not insurmountable. Moving forward requires a leadership model anchored in service, transparency, inclusion, and justice. Nigeria needs competent and ethical leaders who prioritise national welfare above personal, ethnic, or religious gain. Until such leadership becomes the norm rather than the exception, Nigeria's full potential will remain unrealised.

Comparative Analysis: Solomon and Nigerian Leadership

The lessons of King Solomon's leadership and leadership in contemporary Nigeria, although a thousand years apart in time, are

remarkably similar in leadership style, administrative errors, and socio-political implications. A comparative study revealed common patterns of centralised power, economic disparity, moral compromise, and a disregard for accountability factors essential to instability and national disintegration (Solomon et al., 2023a:305-307). Solomon began his reign with outstanding prudence, famously asking God for a discerning mind to govern his people (1 Kings 3:9; Solomon et al., 2023b:415-417). His early leadership was characterised by justice, good governance, and popular support. However, his later years were marked by excessive centralisation, concentrating wealth and power in Jerusalem to the detriment of outlying tribes. Likewise, Nigeria's post-independence government followed a similar pattern, concentrating excessive power in the federal government, particularly within the executive branch. This governance style excludes regional governments and promotes marginalisation of minority groups (Asamoah, 2024:76-79). In terms of economic policy, Solomon initiated monumental infrastructure projects such as the Temple of Jerusalem and his palace, funded through excessive taxation and forced conscription (1 Kings 5:13-14). These projects, though prestigious, came at great human and financial costs. Similarly, Nigerian administrations have often pursued large-scale infrastructure projects with inflated budgets and minimal economic return, sometimes bypassing stakeholder consultation (Maxwell, 2007:27).

This disconnection between leadership and citizens also plagues Nigerian politics. Solomon ignored public complaints, opting for increasingly elitist and bureaucratic rule. In the same vein, Nigerian politicians often craft policies in isolation, rarely consulting the public, resulting in widespread policy discontent and declining trust in government institutions (Adelaja, 2020:22). The religious and moral dimensions further underscore both leadership failures. Solomon's apostasy, led by his foreign wives and their gods, marked a spiritual decline in his reign (1 Kings 11:1-10; Alter, 2010). In Nigeria, where religious affiliation is prominent in public life, leaders often profess faith yet engage in unethical practices. This dissonance erodes public trust and moral credibility (Akpa et al., 2021:46-53). Opposition suppression is another shared characteristic. Solomon attempted to kill Jeroboam after a prophecy favoured his succession (1 Kings 11:40), a move reflecting increasing despotism. In Nigeria, dissenters, including journalists and activists, are frequently harassed, silenced, or arrested, creating a climate of impunity and stalled reform (Adeyemo, 2005:45-53). The result in both contexts is fragmentation. Solomon's death ushered in the split of Israel's kingdom a direct consequence of years of centralised, insensitive rule. Nigeria remains territorially united but is beset by ethnic, religious, and regional tensions. Secessionist movements, violent conflicts, and growing calls for national restructuring mirror Israel's division under Rehoboam (Adeyemo, 2005:45-53). This comparative analysis highlights that unchecked power, policy disconnected from the public, moral decline, and disregard for inclusive governance are recurring pitfalls in both ancient and modern political leadership. The study thus frames Solomon's failures as a timeless warning and a blueprint for transformational leadership in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study has drawn wide-ranging comparisons between the leadership of King Solomon in ancient Israel and the current political leadership of Nigeria. Despite the long period of time, geography and culture, both contexts show strange similarities in

leadership trends and results. Solomon's leadership began with great wisdom, administrative ability, and divine favour, but in the absence of a kingdom affected by excessive centralization, economic oppression, forced labour, moral compromises, and intolerance to criticism. These dynamics ultimately led to the division of his kingdom shortly after his death, a historical twist in fate that is an important warning story. The same trend can be observed in Nigeria. Since independence, leaders have tended to guide styles that prioritize central control, the elite agenda, and symbolic prestige projects rather than broad development. Like Solomon, Nigerian leaders have shown insufficient concern for the grassroots agenda, transparency and long-term unity. Power is concentrated too much at the federal level, corruption is rooted, and national resources are unfairly distributed. As a result, widespread disillusionment, social tensions, ethno-religious divisions and repeated calls for restructuring or immediate separation have emerged. What gives this analogy its deep resonance is common contempt for human-oriented leadership. Both Solomon and the later leaders of Nigeria have ruled at decisive moments in a way that is not related to the existential realities of their people. The inability to listen, to decentralize power, to lead ethically and to serve rather than overpower the Lord has always undermined stability and unity. Just as Solomon's kingdom is divided, Nigeria plays with deep fragmentation, not yet territorial, but institutional, social and moral. This book shows that leadership, if carried out without accountability, fairness and moral foundations, always ends in failure, whether in ancient Israel or in modern Nigeria.

Recommendations

- i. Nigeria needs to reform and revitalise its federal system by delegating more fiscal, political and administrative powers to state and local governments. Just as Solomon's centralisation caused resentment and rebellion, so too much centralisation in Nigeria nurtures marginalisation and conflict. A more balanced federation would make the government more responsive at the local level and would strengthen national unity.
- ii. Like Solomon's uncontrolled power to take capricious decisions, Nigeria must create and empower independent institutions such as the judiciary, the legislature, anti-graft agencies and electoral commissions. Strong institutions provide checks and balances that prevent abuse of power and ensure continuity in government beyond individuals. Solomon's moral failure was an important reason for his fall.
- iii. Nigerian leaders must adopt and demonstrate a service leadership ethic based on humility, integrity, justice and public interest. Religious institutions and civil society should actively participate in demanding and developing ethical political leadership.
- iv. Nigeria's young people and marginalised groups should be integrated into governance. Internal democracy and the selection of candidates based on merit by political parties will enable qualified young leaders to take their posts. During the period when education and poverty are underfunded, deliberate efforts to include all ethnic and religious groups in national decision-making promote unity and stability.
- v. Solomon's preference for prestige and ceremony over social welfare is repeated in Nigeria's repeated investment in non-priority infrastructure. Development

policies must move from vanity projects to education, health care, social welfare, employment creation and rural development.

- vi. Solomon's attempts to suppress opposition by force (as in the case of Jeroboam) have a parallel with Nigeria's suppression of opposition voices and civil society movements. The democratic governance must be ready to accommodate opposition criticism in good faith for improvement. That is, inculcating other peoples' ideology that can better governance without prejudice.

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