

## The Socio-Economic Impact of Israel's Waywardness in 1 Kings 17: Implications for the Nigerian Society

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### Abstract

Upon entrance into Canaan, ancient Israel faced the challenge of divided loyalty. This was heightened by the dominant influence of Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility, who was believed to have power over bountiful crops and multiplying flocks. Baalism later became a practical religion for farmers in their quest for plenty harvest having been recognized as lord of the earth, owner of the land, giver of rain, source of grain, wine, and oil. Against covenantal stipulations which bar ancient Israelites from paying allegiance to foreign God's, Ahab, his associates and their loyalists compromised through Baal worship. Obsessed by such moral decadence, Elijah, in 1 Kings 17, declared a three and half years of no rain and dew. Given the Israelite context as an agricultural society, which survives at the mercy of the vagaries of rainfall, the study used the Historical-Grammatical and Contextual Biblical Hermeneutical Approaches. The former examined the historical background and language in relation to the meaning of the text, while the latter engaged the Nigerian social, political, and economic context relative to the socio-economic impact of Israel's waywardness. Evidently, the absence of rain for three and half years impacted the socio-economic landscape adversely. Vegetation withered destroying food and cash crops giving way to serious hunger and starvation. Sheep and goats which survived on vegetation provided little or no milk for both domestic and commercial purposes. A critical look at the Nigerian socio-economic milieu suggests that although the country is blessed with rich natural resources, poor governance combined with corruption has created among others a weak economy, with a high level unemployment, double digit inflation, ethno-religious and sectarian conflict, corruption and dilapidated infrastructure, high and increasing level of poverty, rising crime rate, and dwindling educational standards. To avoid an outright declaration of God's judgment and a full-blown drought, Nigerian leaders should take seriously their oath and commitment to deliver the best to the populace. The citizens should also do their part in safeguarding the dividends of democracy.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic, waywardness, drought, famine, rain, corruption

### 1. Introduction

Biblical narratives suggest that agriculture was the foundation of most economies of antiquity. O. Palmer Robertson (1996) affirms that ancient Israel, which was located principally in the hilly regions of the Mediterranean climatic floral zone, was an agrarian society. In contrast to the peoples who lived in the Negev and Sinai, the Israelites used little irrigation for farming because precipitation was sufficiently high for them to do natural farming. This was in fulfillment of God's promise through Moses: "But the land into which you are about to cross to possess it, a land of hills and valleys, drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the Lord your God cares" (Duet. 11:11 – 12). This land will be rich in agricultural products because it is "a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive and honey" (Duet. 8:7 – 8).

Michael Coogan (2006) observes that although the land was relatively small (about 9,000 mi<sup>2</sup> that is 23,000km<sup>2</sup>), it has dramatically distinct geographical regions. From the coastal plain in the west to the Shephelah 'rolling hills', the central mountains, the Jordan rift, down to the Transjordan plateau in the east, there are climatic variations that most times divide the land into two. With the central mountains serving as dividing lines, the west had an abundance of rainfall, while rainfall diminishes to the east (Coogan, 2006). However, he notes that as in much of the Mediterranean basin, there are essentially two seasons, a rainy one, extending from late fall to early spring, and a dry one, from late spring to early fall. And like many of the lands that border the Mediterranean, ancient Israel had a fairly rugged terrain, but its soil was eminently suitable for growing grain, olives, and grapes and for raising sheep and goats. So, Israel was both agrarians and pastoral (1 Sam 16:11).

Norman Gottwald (1996) affirms that agricultural surpluses of the peasants were basic resources during the Solomonic era. Schultz and Smith (2001) add that one day's supply for the king and his court of army and building personnel consisted of over 300 bushels of flour, almost 700 bushels of meal, 10 fattened cattle, 20 pasture-fed cattle, 100 sheep, plus other animals and fowl (1 Kings 4:22, 23). At many periods in its history, Israel not only grew enough food for its own population, but also exported commodities to other regions, notably wine and olive oil to Egypt. Ezekiel 27:17 lists wheat, honey, oil and balm as products exported by Judah and Israel. These periods of plenty however depended not so much on the topography of the land, Israel's

agricultural ingenuity, or loyalty to any other god. Instead, as Raymond Dillard (1999) noted, prosperity – the full barns, bounteous crops, livestock, and ample food that the people desired – was tied to following God’s commands (Duet 28:1 – 6). Disobedience would bring hunger to the nation, the failure of crops and rain (Duet 28:23 – 24).

In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah made an unusual entrance into Ahab’s presence to declare disastrous three and half years of neither dew nor rain. Such pronouncement begs the question: Who was Elijah? What factors led to such devastating pronouncement? What were the socio-economic implications of such decree in an agrarian and pastoral community? Are some of the root causes of such decree present in Nigeria? If yes, what possible implications and remedies can we draw from the Israelite experience?

The study uses the Historical-Grammatical and Contextual Biblical Hermeneutical Approaches, contextual methods of biblical interpretation. The Historical-Grammatical method examines historical background and language in relation to the meaning of the text (Hasel, 1985), while the Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics makes the Nigerian social, cultural, political, and economic context a subject of interpretation (Dada, 2007). The above tools are used to examine the background to Israel’s waywardness, drought and famine in ancient Israel, socio-historical context of 1 Kings 17, Elijah’s declaration of drought, and the socio-economic impact of the drought on Israel. Further, it considers the implications of Israel’s waywardness for the Nigerian society. This is followed by conclusion and recommendations.

## **2. Background to Israel’s Waywardness**

Anderson and others (2007) opine that having won a foothold on Canaanite soil, Israel faced the problem of adjusting to agricultural ways and taking its place among the nations. The Tribal Confederacy, straining under conflict with forces both inside and outside, was severely tested. On the one hand, they had the divine obligation to utterly destroy the Canaanite idols having nothing to do with them (Judges 2:1 – 2). On the other hand, there was the struggle for physical survival. Regrettably, in the years that followed the conquest, the people combined a variety of stratagem thus: they waged their offensive by means of war, treaty, and gradual absorption of the Canaanites into the Israelite alliance.

From biblical insights, the Canaanite city states worshipped Baals and Astartes (Judges 2:13, 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:4, 12:10). Nelson (2006) submits that Baal started out as an average false god believed to have power over bountiful crops and multiplying flocks. Later, he evolved into “Master of the Universe” and was thought to rule over all the other Canaanite gods. There was also the Babylonia god Tammuz and the goddess Ishtar. In Egypt, the Isis-cult was based on worship of the god Osiris (Horus) and his female counterpart Isis (Hathor). There was also the Moabites’ Chemosh and the Ammonites’ Moloch who later accepted child sacrifices. The similarities between these religions encouraged borrowing back and forth, for they shared a common concern about the relation of human beings to their natural and cosmic environment.

Since the land was believed to be the sphere of divine powers, and Baal was believed to be in control of fertility, it followed that when the rains came, the mysterious powers of fertility is stirred, and new life was resurrected from the barrenness of winter. Anderson and others (2007:171 - 175) submit that Baalism therefore became a practical religion for farmers in their quest for plenty harvest since it is recognized as lord of the earth, owner of the land, giver of rain, source of grain, wine, and oil. To ignore the Baal rites in those days would have seemed impractical and even reckless, as if a farmer today were to ignore current agricultural science in the cultivation of the land. Given these conditions, many Israelites turned to the gods of the land. These people probably did not intend to turn away from Yahweh, the God of the Exodus and the Sinai covenant. Rather they meant to serve YHWH and Baal side by side or to identify YHWH with Baal, like people for whom “God” symbolizes the values of civil religion. The two religions were not seen as contradictory or mutually exclusive, but rather coalesce of two faiths for survival. Not too long, parents began naming their children after Baal, apparently with no thought of abandoning God. One of the judges, Gideon was named Jerubaal (“let Baal contend” or perhaps “may Baal multiply”).

During the united Monarchy, Saul and David, both ardent devotees of God, gave Baal names to their children. The divided Monarchy witnessed serious moral and spiritual lapses in Israel’s commitment to their covenant relationship with Yahweh. This was prevalent in the northern kingdom (1Kings 12:25 – 33; 16:29 – 34), but Judah also shared in it (2Kings 21). William Dever (2001) observes that a closer look at Israel’s life in Canaan suggests that idolatry (and Baalism in particular) was not just intermittent but rather gradually became a way of life. This seems to be the concern of Prophet Jeremiah when he laments: “The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the Queen of Heaven” (Jeremiah 7:18). Ezekiel 18 also suggests that Baal worship became so prominent that the priests, elders, and those who minister in the temple substituted it for Yahwism. It involved prostitution (1Kings 14:24), human sacrifice (Jer. 19:5), and self-torture, screaming, and shouting (1Kings 18). Supplicants also would kiss the idol itself (1Kings 19:18; Hosea 13:2).

### 3. Drought and Famine in Ancient Israel

The word translated 'hunger' or 'famine' in the Old Testament is *ra'abh*. It occurs 134 times in the OT in 17 forms. Its major occurrences are in Genesis 41 – 47 where it is used in describing the famines in Canaan and Egypt respectively during the time of Joseph. The Hebrew synonyms include *re'abhon* (Gen 42:19, 33; Ps 37:19), and *kaphan* (Job 5:22; 30:3), all meaning "hunger" and "famine." In the New Testament the word is Greek *limos*, meaning primarily "failure," "want of food." If the number of occurrences counts, then we might infer that *ra'abh* is the standard word for hunger and famine in the OT (Harris, 1980). In many passages it is made clear that abundance and famine are both under the providence of God (Ps 33:19), "That he may deliver their soul from death, and keep them alive in famine." In ancient days, with food distribution and food preservation very limited, famine meant severe hardship or starvation for many. It is therefore repeatedly classed by Jeremiah with sword and pestilence as one of the three great judgments of God (e.g. Jer 29:17). Ezekiel sometimes adds a fourth, fierce beasts (Ezek 14:21).

Walker (2007) submits that the most famous famine in Israel was that caused by the three seasons without rain in Elijah's day. Not until the famine was severe did the nation admit that it was the judgment of God rather than "very unusual weather." Figuratively, *ra'abh* is used by Amos to indicate the absence of Divine communications as a punishment that should come on the people, a "famine .... of hearing the words of Yahweh" (8:11; compare 1 Sam 3:1; 28:6; 2 Chron 15:3; Ezek 7:26; Micah 3:6); and by Zephaniah of the destruction of heathen deities (2:11). Amos (8:11) sees such famine as the greatest (Harris, 1980).

In early times, especially in lands dependent on their own productions, famines were not infrequent. They were generally caused by local irregularities of the rainfall, by destructive hail storms (Exod 9:23, 11, 32), by ravages of insects (Ex 10:15; Joel 1:4) and by enemies (Deut 28:51); in a city a famine might be caused by a siege (2 Kings 6:25); pestilence often followed in its wake, and the suffering was great. Yet, famines are frequently said to be sent as punishments sometimes threatened as such (Lev 26:19f; Deut 28:49- 51; 2 Kings 8:1; Ps 105:16; Isa 14:30; 51:19; Jer 14:12, 15; 18:21, etc.; Ezek 5:16, etc.; Amos 8:11; 2 Esdras 15:5, 49; 16:19; Tobit 4:13; Ecclesiasticus 39:29; 40:9). Such punishments will result from the Israelites infringement of the covenant stipulations. In this context, God uses a variety of means as seen above to bring the people back to their senses. Little wonder the righteous or godly are preserved by God in time of famine (Job 5:20; Ps 33:19; 37:19). This was a special mark of the Divine favor and power (Walker, 2007).

A cursory look at the biblical and extra biblical records show that ancient Israel experienced famine at different times. During the patriarchal era, there were famines in the time of Abraham (Gen 12:10, etc.), of Isaac (Gen 26:1), and of Jacob, when Joseph was in Egypt--seven years of famine even in Egypt after seven of plenty (Gen 41:54), which also affected Canaan (Gen 42:1), and, indeed, "was over all the face of the earth" (Gen 41:56). A closer look at most, if not all of these famines suggest they are products of natural occurrences. Canaan is described as a land "overflowing with milk and honey." Nevertheless, the people also experienced famine. In the time of the Judges, it was severe to the point that Elimelech took his household to Moab against God's initial instructions (Deut 23:3 – 6 cf. Ruth 1:1) (Walker, 2007). Against the patriarchal era where famines seem to result from natural occurrences, later occurrences appear basically as a result of disobedience (Deut 28:11 – 13, 24).

During the Monarchy, several famines occurred as evident in the time of David (2 Sam 21:1), of Ahab and Elijah (1 Kings 17:1; 18:2; Ecclesiasticus 48:2, 3), of Elisha (2 Kings 4:38), during the siege of Samaria (2 Kings 6:25), and the seven years foretold by Elisha (2 Kings 8:1). Prior to the captivity, in the reign of Zedekiah in Jerusalem when besieged by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:3; Jer 52:6; compare 14:1), there was famine. The severity of the latter is echoed by the author of Lamentations (Lam 5:10 cf. Baruch 2:25). Walker provides further evidences of "dearth" after the return from Captivity (Neh 5:3); when the city was besieged by Antiochus Eupator (1 Macc 6:54), after the death of Judas (1 Macc 9:24), when Jerusalem was besieged by Simon (1 Macc 13:49), in the time of Claudius (Acts 11:28, in his reign there were frequent famines, one of which in 45 AD severely affected Palestine; Josephus, Ant, XX, v); Christ predicted "famines ... in divers places" as characterizing the end of the age (Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11); in the siege of Jerusalem by Titus a terrible famine raged, the consequences of which to the people have never been surpassed.

### 4. Socio-Historical Context of 1 Kings 17

Raymond Dillard (1999) notes that the book of Kings is often called "Deuteronomistic history" probably because the writer chose a set of laws unique to provide perspective from which he evaluated Israel's history. Deuteronomy warns Israel about the seductive threat of the foreign religions and foreign gods insisting YHWH alone should be worship (12:1 – 3, 29 – 30), otherwise the result will be crises unabated (Deut 28). 1 Kings 16:29-34 provides the background for understanding Elijah's confrontation with King Ahab that led to the declaration of drought in 1 Kings 17:1. It reads:

29 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in

Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. 30 Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. 31 He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. 32 He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. 33 Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him. 34 In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua son of Nun. (NIV)

We first hear of Elijah during the reign of Ahab. We do not have much information on his call and previous prophetic ministry except that 1 Kings 17:1 identified him as “Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead”. His ministry flourished during the reign of Ahab in the north and Asa in the south. Dillard (1999) notes that Ahab ruled in the northern kingdom between 874 – 853 B.C. and is the seventh king to reign over the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In order to strengthen his reign, Ahab married Queen Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, daughter of King Ethbaal of Tyre. Jezebel brought her foreign gods and goddesses -- especially Baal and his consort Asherah (Canaanite Astarte, often translated in the Bible as 'sacred post') -- with her.

Thomas Dynamo (2009) argues that Jezebel does not accept Ahab's God, Yahweh. Rather, she leads Ahab to tolerate Baal. We are told that Ahab builds a sanctuary for Baal in the very heart of Israel, within his capital city of Samaria (1 Kings 16:31-33). Jezebel's desire is not merely confined to achieving ethnic or religious parity. Anderson and others (2007) hint that her aggressiveness gave her advantage over the Israelites' easygoing tolerance and religious syncretism. And she determined to liquidate every vestige of Israel's traditional faith. The altars of God were torn down, the prophets were killed, and the remaining loyal adherents were driven underground (1 Kings 18:4). Elijah's slaughter of 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah at Mount Carmel provides insight to the extent at which she succeeded in her effort to enshrine Baal worship in Israel. These Baal prophets either imported from Phoenicia or recruited from Israel were supported of the public treasury (1 Kings 18:19). It was at this time of crisis that Elijah appeared in Israel to declare the drought.

### **5. Elijah's Declaration of Drought**

With our previous understanding the Baal worshipers believed that their god made rain, which is a quite important detail in an agricultural community, Bob Deffinbaugh (2009) asserts that Elijah apparently prays for a drought to prove that Yahweh, not Baal, is in charge of crop-enriching rains. Elijah determines to attack Baalism at its theological center. Baal worshipers believed that their storm god made rain, unless, of course, it was the dry season and he needed to be brought back from the dead. To refute this belief Elijah puts theology, faith, fertility, national economy, and the source of Israelite survival to question. As the LORD lives, there shall be neither rain nor dew for three and half years. So, if Baal is indeed the source and giver of rain, let him and his numerous prophets respond that Israel might know. On the other hand, the challenge puts Elijah's authority and credibility on the line. Before Elijah can call for repentance, he must first demonstrate that Yahweh is “in charge” and that he is His prophet.

Having declared the drought, Elijah moved to the Brook of Cherith, which flows into the Jordan and there God fed him miraculously. However 1 Kings 17:7 records that after a while, the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. In other words, Baal and his prophets could not counteract Elijah's declaration. This sets the stage for imminent social and economic challenges in Israel.

### **6. Socio-economic Impact of the Drought on Israel**

To adequately understand the socio-economic impact of Elijah's declaration on an agrarian and pastoral environment, we need to define drought. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) (2010) notes that the definition of drought could be a complex issue. R.A. Warwick (1975:199) defines it as a condition of moisture deficit sufficient to have an adverse effect on vegetation, animals, and man over a sizeable area. There are at least three aspects of drought. It could be meteorological, agricultural, or hydrologic. R.E. Huschke (1959) defines meteorological drought as “a period of abnormally dry weather sufficiently prolonged for the lack of water to cause serious hydrologic imbalance in the affected area.” N.J. Rosenberg (1979) sees agricultural drought as “a climatic excursion involving a shortage of precipitation sufficient to adversely affect crop production or range production.” Yevjevich Vujica, et. al (1977) sees hydrologic drought as “a period of below average water content in streams, reservoirs, Groundwater aquifers, lakes and soils.” Furthermore, Fiona Harvey (2012) also sees the possibility of an economic drought. She submits that in future, we may hear more of the various gradations of water shortage – from water stress to groundwater deficit, to severe water shortages. Put together, the above definitions suggest a climatic condition where crop and animal production, and survival are heavily threatened. Human well-being and survival could also be in danger here.

King and Stager (2001) affirm that in an agricultural society at the mercy of the vagaries of rainfall, the

timing of the rain is as significant as the amount. And indicative of the vital importance of rainfall for agriculture is the fact that Hebrew has several words for rain. *matar* denotes rain in general. *yôreb* and *malqôs* bracket the beginning and end of the rainy season. Dew, Hebrew *ṭal*, the condensation of atmospheric moisture, provides a valuable supplement to rainfall, especially where there is no rain or where rainfall is inadequate. Biblical texts and scientific experiments conducted in the Negev attest that plants benefit from dew. Much of the Elijah narrative is set in the region around the plain of Jezreel. And Dillard (1999) observes that each morning from fall to spring in this valley, the coating of dew is so heavy that even if it did not rain, agriculture would still be possible. This is the area where Gideon had laid his fleece, alternatively that it be wet and dry (Judges 6:36 – 40). This helps us to understand why Elijah announced that God would withhold not only the rain, but also the dew. In other words, Israel God shut down every means of agricultural fertility on the land.

With the stage set, Dillard (1999) observes that those who believed that unless Baal is worshipped, rain would not fall were in a fix. Without rain, there will be no crops. And without crops, there would be no life. Elijah and his God also made matters worse by restricting not only rain but also the dew. A better understanding of the agricultural season would clarify. Dillard (1999) asserts that in ancient Israel, the agricultural season was during the winter months. After the heat and dry season during the summer, the early rains came in the autumn to soften the parched and cracked ground. If these rains did not come, the ground was indeed like iron and could not be plowed. Springs and wells would not be refreshed. The latter rains fell in the springs, and these gave the crops the moisture needed to develop and flourish. If these rains did not come, the harvest was destroyed.

Ellen White (2000) elucidates the devastating effects of the drought thus: The prophet's words went into immediate effect. Those who were at first inclined to scoff at the thought of calamity, soon had occasion for serious reflection; for after a few months the earth, unrefreshed by dew or rain, became dry, and vegetation withered. As time passed, streams that had never been known to fail began to decrease, and brooks began to dry up. Yet the people were urged by their leaders to have confidence in the power of Baal and to set aside as idle words the prophecy of Elijah. The priests still insisted that it was through the power of Baal that the showers of rain fell.

This was just the beginning of great calamity because amidst the deception of Baal prophets, no clouds appear in the heavens by day to hide the burning rays of the sun. No dew or rain refreshes the thirsty earth (Dt. 11:13-32). White (2000) notes that a year passes, and yet there is no rain. The earth is parched as if with fire. The scorching heat of the sun destroys what little vegetation has survived. Streams dry up, and lowing herds and bleating flocks wander here and there in distress. Once-flourishing fields have become like burning desert sands, a desolate waste. The groves dedicated to idol worship are leafless; the forest trees, gaunt skeletons of nature, afford no shade. The air became dry and suffocating; dust storms blind the eyes and nearly stop the breath. Once-prosperous cities and villages became places of mourning. Hunger and thirst took their toll on men and women and animals with fearful mortality. Famine, with all its horror, comes closer and still closer.

White (2000) further observes that the second year of famine passed, and still the pitiless heavens gave no sign of rain. Drought and famine continued their devastation throughout the kingdom. Fathers and mothers, powerless to relieve the sufferings of their children were forced to see them die. Yet still apostate Israel refused to humble their hearts before God and continued to murmur against the man by whose word these terrible judgments had been brought upon them. They seemed unable to discern in their suffering and distress a call to repentance, a divine interposition to save them from taking the fatal step beyond the boundary of Heaven's forgiveness. Probably to prove His supremacy over the powers of Baal, God allowed the drought to extend to Phoenicia. 1 Kings 17:8 – 24 reveals that the widow of Zarephath had her last meal with the son. But through the long years of drought and famine, God provided food for her household through the prophet.

The foregone effects of the drought no doubt inhibited Israel's economy. Nelson (2006) opines that if rain did not come, the fields withered and the harvests failed. He opines that drought could destroy all of a farmer's hard work, and leave his family hungry. Cash crops like olive, which was a major industry accounting for much of the economic prosperity of the region (Hosea 12:2), could no longer yield. With vegetation withered, aloes which were sources of moisturizers, great for dry skin and sunburn, and broom trees which provided little relief from the heat of the sun in the open places of the wilderness were affected. Beans, cucumbers, gourds, lentils, onions which were part of regular household food or cooking ingredients were not left out. Packer and Tenney (1980) observe that the grain was used for export, for food, and for sacrificial offerings (Gen 4:3; Lev 2:1) and served as a symbol of plenty and prosperity could no longer yield (Deut 11:14; 28:51). However, the absence of rain for three and half years threatened the production of this multi-purpose plant.

Further, sheep and goats which survived on vegetation provided little or no milk for both domestic and commercial purposes. And when these sheep cannot feed very well, wool production which was a valuable commodity in commerce went down or ceased. This also would affect weaving and dyeing which went hand in hand with wool production. The famine appears so devastating that Ahab himself was involved in the search for food to keep his livestock from dying or and the risk of using some of the animals as food for others (1 Kings

18:5). Consequently, although not specifically used in 1 Kings 17:1, the Hebrew *ra'abh* seems to capture the prevailing situation in Israel. This total devastation of the ecosystem was not one of the natural occurrences, but rather God's judgment of Israel's romance with Baalism.

### **7. Implications of Israel's Waywardness for the Nigerian Society**

Without doubt, the culture and circumstances of 1 Kings 17 differs from that of the present Nigerian State. Nevertheless, the study has shown that the famine in 1 Kings 17 was a divine punishment for Israel's departure from their covenantal agreement with YHWH. Suffice it to say that the drought which took a toll on the socio-economic life of ancient Israel at the time of Elijah was due to moral failure on the part of Ahab, his household, associates and loyalists. Yet, its effect impacted not only the leaders and their accomplice but also the populace. A critical look at the socio-economic trend in the country suggests major setbacks on the part of government and its institutions in providing the necessary goods and services to the people. Upon resumption into office, leaders take oath of office. Keskel (2002) defines oath as a solemn appeal to God to witness the truth of a statement or the sincerity of a promise, coupled with an imprecation of divine judgment in the event of falsehood or breach of obligation. By implication, every leader at all levels is under divine obligation to deliver the best to the people whom he or she is called to lead. The populace though not under oath has a part to play in the entire process. In evaluating the implications of such moral failure on the Nigerian society, it is germane to note that socioeconomic status (SES) is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation (Wikipedia, 2010). Socioeconomic status (SES) is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. It is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. When viewed through a social class lens, privilege, power, and control are emphasized. Socioeconomic factors are major determinants of health and well-being. People with a more favorable socioeconomic position have better health compared to those who are less well off (Health Status Report, 2005). The basic determinant of socioeconomic status include among others - level of education, religious atmosphere, level of income per capital, access to infrastructural facilities, among others.

Nigeria as a country has all it takes to become the strongest economy in Africa—and one of the leading economies in the world in the long run. Both human and material resources are in abundance; but sad to say that the country remains one of the poorest in the world with a large percentage of its population still wallowing in abject poverty. Despite great natural wealth, Nigeria is poor and social development is near absent. Despite her obvious wealth, the country has undergone dramatic economic deterioration, especially under military rule, which has been dominant in the country since after independence. The introduction of democracy no doubt opened so much hope and expectations for Nigerians, based on the assumption that under democracy, people are free to choose leaders and representatives who they can hold accountable for the purpose of promoting growth and development within the society. These expectations in the Nigerian are far from being met as poor governance combined with corruption has created among others a weak economy, with a high level unemployment, double digit inflation, ethno-religious and sectarian conflict, corruption and dilapidated infrastructure, high and increasing level of poverty, rising crime rate, and dwindling educational standards.

The downturn in Nigeria's economy over the last two decades, associated with increased unemployment, retrenchment of workers and reduction in family income, has adversely affected living standards, as parental resources have become inadequate to meet the various needs of household members, especially those of adolescents and young people. As a result, many families had to withdraw children from schools, giving rise to early entry into the informal labour force and increased contribution by children to family income through various means – prostitution inclusive (Isiugo-Abanihe & Oyediran, n.d.).

Many have blamed external factors as being responsible for the poor socioeconomic status in the country while others consider poor governance and corruption as the main culprits. Eichengreen (2004) for instance noted that inconsistency and unsustainable policies and macroeconomic imbalance are part of the causes of poor socio-economic situation in Nigeria. Even though many attempts have been made to tackle the poor socioeconomic conditions in the country, these challenges still remain and are evidence of failed attempts. For instance, the country lacks effective institutions and leadership for successful reforms and for sustainable economic growth and development (Dike, 2007). Beyond this, Dike further notes that the country lacks the leadership and a government that is ready, willing, and politically motivated to address the ills in the country. Rose-Ackerman (2004) alluded to corruption as being a major contributor to poor governance and lack of growth in Nigeria. Every leader with access to public funds converts it into personal use. Nigeria's legacy of mismanagement and corrupt governance has encouraged many people to seek ways of sharing the national cake instead of helping bake it. As a result, basic necessities and infrastructures which should keep the citizens healthy and productive are either not provided or in a state of decay. Hospitals are ill-equipped and fake drugs still flood the Nigerian markets. The country suffers from food scarcity, erratic power supply in the midst of a

high level of poverty. There is no gainsaying that the challenge of corruption remains one of the most debilitating issues facing Nigeria. It has been one of the impediments to the country's development efforts (Egwemi, 2012).

The country's educational sector is in a pitiable state. Inadequate funding, incessant strikes, lack of planning and management, infrastructural decay, inadequate teaching material and lack of properly trained and morally upright manpower, coupled with poor maintenance culture has left the sector in a sorry state. The advent of private universities has brought no remedy to the situation since their tuition is rather prohibitive. Many who desire formal education are naturally exempted because they are too poor to pay the required tuition. All of these contribute in creating a system that is grossly below standard in terms of its ability to train and produce sound minds that will adequately manage the economy in the future. Suffice it to say that formal education is still seen as a status symbol in Nigeria rather than as a tool for economic advancement. As a result corrupt parents will pay their children's way through school with these ones learning very little or nothing thus lending a hand to mediocrity in service delivery.

High level of unemployment is another social miscreant that worsens the socio-economic condition in the country. As at May 2013, the level of unemployment was placed at 23.9% in Nigeria (NBS, 2013). Many graduates in the country roam the streets in search for jobs and many end-up with jobs below their level of education or involved in one form of social ill or the other. Overdependence on oil and traditional sectors, such as agriculture and services, is partly due to the hostile business environment. Businesses wishing to operate in Nigeria face many constraints, including poor infrastructure, particularly road networks and electricity supply; inadequate physical security; corruption; weak enforcement of contracts, and the high cost of finance. These factors make firms to relocate thus worsening the unemployment situation in the country.

Mankiw (2009) noted that the living standard of a people is dependent on their level of productivity - the amount of goods and services produced from each unit of labor input. In nations where workers can produce a large quantity of goods and services per unit of time, most people enjoy a high standard of living; in nations where workers are less productive, most people endure a more meager existence. Similarly, the growth rate of a nation's productivity determines the growth rate of its average income. Productivity on its own is dependent on by factors such as physical capital, natural resources, human capital, technological advancement, etc. One does not need to look far to understand the reason behind the high level of poverty in the country and poor living standards. Nigeria has not been able to invest adequately in these determinants of productivity and this has greatly hindered the level of productivity in within the country.

Nigeria is faced by various devastating political and socio-economic conditions, with about 250 multicultural ethnic nationalities; Nigeria is plagued by religious, ethnic, communal and resource conflict (Iduh, 2011). Nigeria faces serious social and economic challenges. Although Nigeria's oil and natural gas revenues are estimated at over \$40 billion per year, its human development indicators are among the worlds lowest, and a majority of the population suffers from extreme poverty, while unemployment and starvation still pervade the nook and cranny of the country (Ploch, 2008). Ethno-religious and sectarian conflicts appear to have taken over the peace of the country as noted by Julius-Adeoye (2011). Boko Haram instills fear in people and makes the country inhabitable for both foreigners and indigenes alike.

To avoid an outright declaration of God's judgment and a full-blown drought, Nigerian leaders should take seriously their oath and commitment to deliver the best to the populace. The citizens should also do their part in safeguarding the dividends of democracy. This is more or less a call for social justice as exemplified in Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" (NKJ). Micah's tripartite solution to social injustice are interwoven and inseparably. On the one hand, the call to do justice goes beyond what one thinks is right but rather that which is tied to eternal justice of the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you wish they do to you" (Matt. 7:12). Most of the challenges facing Nigeria as a nation, especially among those in authority result from blind rules which most times end in policy somersault; create unfriendly business environments which culminate in multiple crimes among the citizens who try to maneuver for survival. Iyanda (2007:195) observes that many efforts toward cubing corruption in Nigeria have failed because those who administrate these policies or agencies are corrupt themselves. Therefore, in the Niger Delta and other parts of the country, people cry for justice and they cannot find it. But if the Golden Rule is applied with the understanding that justice for one is justice for all, and with a formidable legal framework, justice will prevail. The former is tied to the second: "to love mercy". Except justice is accompanied with mercy, it will certainly be an end in itself. A sane government with the feelings of the masses at heart will stop at nothing to deliver the best good for the people. The reason government funds are diverted for private benefit is because the rich do not care how the poor feel. This is the bane of grassroots development in Nigeria. When those who sit and sleep in the glass houses do not share the pain and travails of the downtrodden, capitalism will thrive. But as God is showing mercy, pity, and loving-kindness to human being, we are supposed to replicate the same toward our fellow human beings.

As justice is incomplete without mercy, so also is mercy – the human-ward virtue, impossible without the fear of God – the God-ward virtue. Those who take oath of office with either the Bible or Koran must understand that God will hold them responsible for what they did with the power and public goods put in their care. In providing effective solution for corruption in Nigeria, Iyanda (2007) captures the place of total spiritual transformation which impacts ethical and behavioral as kernel.

## 8. Conclusion

Against covenantal stipulations which bar ancient Israelites from paying allegiance to foreign God's, Ahab, his associates and their loyalists compromised through Baal worship. Baal started which out as an average false god believed to have power over bountiful crops and multiplying flocks, later became a practical religion for farmers in their quest for plenty harvest since it is recognized as lord of the earth, owner of the land, giver of rain, source of grain, wine, and oil. To ignore the Baal rites in those days would have seemed impractical and even reckless, as if a farmer today were to ignore current agricultural science in the cultivation of the land. Given these conditions, many Israelites turned to the gods of the land.

Such compromise heightened in 1 Kings 17 prompting Elijah to declare famine for three and half years. In an agricultural society at the mercy of the vagaries of rainfall, the timing of the rain is as significant as the amount. And indicative of the vital importance of rainfall for agriculture is the fact that Hebrew has several words for rain. In other words, God shut down every means of agricultural fertility on the land. Although famines were generally caused by local irregularities of the rainfall, they are frequently sent as divine punishments for moral deviation. This was the case in 1 Kings 17. This impacted the socio-economic landscape adversely. Vegetation withered destroying food and cash crops giving way to serious hunger and starvation. Sheep and goats which survived on vegetation provided little or no milk for both domestic and commercial purposes. The air became dry and suffocating; dust storms blind the eyes and nearly stop the breath. Once-prosperous cities and villages became places of mourning. Hunger and thirst took their toll on men and women and animals with fearful mortality. Famine, with all its horror, comes closer and still closer. Fathers and mothers, powerless to relieve the sufferings of their children were forced to see them die.

A critical look at the Nigerian socio-economic milieu suggests that although the country is blessed with rich natural resources, poor governance combined with corruption has created among others a weak economy, with a high level unemployment, double digit inflation, ethno-religious and sectarian conflict, corruption and dilapidated infrastructure, high and increasing level of poverty, rising crime rate, and dwindling educational standards. To avoid an outright declaration of God's judgment and a full-blown drought, Nigerian leaders should take seriously their oath and commitment to deliver the best to the populace. The citizens should also do their part in safeguarding the dividends of democracy.

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