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PEACEBUILDING IN GENESIS 13: 5-12 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON IKPAYONGO COMMUNITIES OF BENUE STATE

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ABSTRACT

Conflict remains a major problem in the world today, and no group can be said to have permanently eliminated conflict from its interactions. In Nigeria, Ikpayongo community in Benue State is one of the societies bedeviled with conflicts. The conflict which was caused by claims to ownership of over 1000 plots of land has claimed many lives and properties. Since its inception in 2009, various steps have been taken by government and non-governmental organizations to resolve the conflict, which proved counter-productive. This paper examines the nature, causes and effects of conflict, the efforts made in resolving the conflict and find out the place of Genesis 13:5-12, in peacebuilding among Ikpayongo communities of Benue State. To achieve the purpose of the study, a descriptive, historical and Biblical criticism method was adopted by the researcher to carry out this study. The study reveals that peacebuilding is achievable, only when the nature, causes and effects of conflict in Ikpayongo is properly addressed using the Abraham's model of peacebuilding through dialogue and reconciliation. The researcher recommends among others that government should be encouraged to establish an agricultural industry, for the employment of Ikpayongo youths and establish an operational military base on the disputed land to restore peace permanently. Christian leaders should negotiate and reconcile the opposing parties and provide peacebuilding schemes by encouraging the people to stay apart, but stay in peace using Abraham's peaceful model in Genesis 13:5-12.

Keywords: Conflict, Peace, Peacebuilding, Ikpayongo, Genesis 13:5-12.

Introduction

The reality of conflict in the world cannot be overemphasized. In Nigeria, many societies experience conflicts in different dimension. The nature of conflicts in the North is different from the South. On the one hand, conflicts in Southern Nigeria include; the insurgency in the South East, which is a conflict between the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Nigeria

Military, with the demand for a separate government and the violent enforcement of Sit-at-Home orders (Olusakin & Sibani, 2023:2). In the South-West and South-South Nigeria, conflicts include; cultism, robbery, kidnapping and the agitation for Oduduwa Republic and Niger Delta Republic. On the other hand, conflicts in Northern Nigeria include; religious violence and extremism in the North West, the regional scourge of Boko Haram insurgence and banditry activities in North East, the annual Farmers and Fulani herdsmen conflicts which have caused massacre and killings in North Central Nigeria (Sampson, 2023:2).

Benue State is one of the states in North Central Nigeria bedeviled with conflicts. The nature of conflicts in Benue State include Fulani-herdsmen and farmers crisis, cultism, arm robbery and the invasion of unknown gun men in various parts of Benue State. Ikpayongo is a community in Gwer-East Local Government Area of Benue state bedeviled with conflict. Ikpayongo is one of the biggest agricultural and food production markets in Nigeria. It draws its marketers from the North and South of Nigeria. Ikpayongo is therefore, not only commercially strategic to Benue economy; it is crucially central in the economic calculation of Nigeria (Pine, 2023:1). It is however pathetic to know that this strategic economic base has in recent times been torn apart by conflicts. The current conflict among Ikpayongo communities (Mbasombo and Mbaviur) originally started as an inter-family dispute in 2009. From this small beginning, it has led to communal disintegration, loss of lives, properties and houses. Indigenes and non-indigenes have been affected. This has been re-echoed by (Oko and Ogbodu, 2022: 19) that African nations seems to be the worst affected as it threatens to eliminate most cherished African values, sacredness of life, communal life, brotherliness, sense of respect for authority and elders, sense of language and proverbs. The remote cause of this conflict is the argument for the ownership of over one thousand plots of land. All these have negative impact on living conditions in the society. Peoples live in fear due to the destruction of lives and properties among other things (Oko, 2020).

Various communities in the world and Ikpayongo in particular are embroiled in violent conflicts with the attendant loss of lives and property. Various bodies have attempted in resolving the conflicts. They include: First, Civil Society Groups like the Masev Development Association and Sankera Development Association. Second, the traditional institution through the TOR TIV of Benue State, Prof. James Ayatse and other traditional leaders adopted various mechanism of reconciliation in resolving the conflict with the village councils among Ikpayongo communities. Third, scholars like Uji and Pine suggest Alternative Dispute Resolution method of conflict resolution in addressing the crisis. Fourth, Yonov Youth Development Association negotiated among the warring groups. Finally, the Benue State Government has reached several peace deals in the past, which the governments have failed in the implementation of such peace deals. The efforts made by past government administration, civil society groups, and scholars and traditional leaders seem counter-productive. It is in view of the aforementioned challenges and failed solutions that the researcher attempts to find out the role Genesis 13:5-12 can play in addressing the conflict and restoring peace permanently among Ikpayongo communities using the method Abraham adopted in text.

In a recent intervention, the current Governor of Benue State, Rev Fr. Dr. Hyacinth Iormen Alia on Wednesday 14 June 2023, visited Ikpayongo communities and promised to end the conflict. Though the Governor has waded into the crisis with a view of finding a lasting

solution to it, the researcher suggests that the application of Genesis 13:5-12 can play a vital role in building peace in the area.

Genesis 13:5-12 is one of the most important texts that point out ways of resolving conflicts. In the passage, Abraham adopted diplomacy in settling the conflict with Lot. The conflict among Ikpayongo communities originally started as an inter-family dispute among brothers from Mbasombo and Mbakume kindred's, which later escalated to Mbasombo and Mbaviur conflict because of land. This implies that similarity exist between the situation in Genesis 13:5-12 and Ikpayongo communities. The pre-occupation of this study therefore, is to explore the role Genesis 13:5-12 can play in resolving the conflict among Ikpayongo communities of Benue State.

The Concept of Conflict

According to Nwachukwu (2018:23), conflict is an unavoidable, intrinsic and inevitable part of human interactions and existence. It is a reoccurring phenomenon which abounds among humans in every society. Uchendu (2010:11) opines that conflict occurs when there is fighting, struggle or quarrel. Conflict is a natural disagreement or misunderstandings that result from differences in attitudes, beliefs, values, or needs of individuals or groups. There is a conflict when quarrel between parties degenerate to fighting and struggle for selfish interest. Elom (2008:119), in line with Uchendu describe conflict as armed fighting; a war, struggle, an instrument in the hands of a group to undo an opposing group and have dominion over them. Nmah (2009:28), in line with Elom and Uchendu maintains that conflict is a process that erupts when a group sees that another group has damaged or about to destroy something that is important to them. Obiefuna (2011:143) attests that conflict is the experience of tension in incompatible goals between two or more individuals or group. Conflict is a disagreement or struggle over values to important resources, with the sole purpose of defeating or eliminating their opponents. Conflict is a situation arising from the struggle of different interest, attainments and achievements by individuals or groups. For Atanang, Ekanem and Oko, (2022) the growing violence in the country have made our country fast becoming a slaughter house where people and soldiers are merciless butchered everyday like what is happening I Northeastern part of Nigeria, Plateau, Benue State and other parts of the country.

Concept of Peace

Peace is generally defined as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence, and about peaceful coexistence. Peace can be seen as a stress-free state of security and calmness that comes when there is no fighting or war, everything coexisting in perfect harmony and freedom. Coser (1996:44) is of the opinion that, peace is a comprehensive and broad concept. At the macro parochial level, peace is the absence of conflict and war. At micro level, peace is subjective, depending on the internal state of mind, body and perceptions. Overall, peace is dependent on economic, political, religio-cultural, geographical, climate and internal systems. The above definition indicates that, peace is a state of tranquility, free from civil disturbance and a state free of unpleasant thoughts and emotions. For Victor (2018:38), peace is a temporary agreement by relevant parties involved directly or indirectly to development and reducing conflict. Hence, peace is not particularly the absence of war.

In *''Conceptualizing Peace''* Ibeanu (2006:13), asserts "Peace is a process'' and peace is not a condition. He sees peace as a situation that are directly or indirectly linked to promote

development and minimizing strife or struggle, both in specific communities or larger societies. Faleti (2007:23) opines that peace can either be negative, which is simply the absence of war or positive, which is the presence of justice. Peace is something everyone wants to have for there cannot be any sustainable development in the atmosphere of war and conflict (Atanang, Ekanem and Oko, 2022). Peace may be seen as the highest political good which tends consist in the harmonious operation of the form of social life. It remains an empty words except it rest upon that which is founded on truth built upon justice, nurture and give life by clarity and brought into functional effect under the auspices of freedom (Atanang, Ekanem and OKo, 2022).

The Concept of Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is a process that aims at resolving conflicts and disagreement in order to repair the damage caused by a dispute. For Roger (2011:64), peacebuilding is a procedure created to ensure the occurrence or resumption of violent conflict is prevented by designing a sustainable peace. What this indicates is that conflict transits from one stage to another. Peacebuilding is therefore a process that includes different actors like the civil society, government, individuals, groups and society to participate in, so that peace can occur before or after violent conflicts. It will take a process and activities that promote peaceful co-existence. According to Keating and Knight (2004:21), peacebuilding is a framework used in addressing the root cause of violence, creates societal expectations for peaceful conflict resolution and balance the society, politically and economically.

For Ifesinachi (2009:8), Peacebuilding is also perceived as attempts to conquer the structural, relational and cultural contradictions hastily causing conflict, especially in strong support of peace making and peace keeping. Inspiration of peacebuilding is drawn from developmental imperatives facing mankind and conflict resolution initiatives. Galtung (2000:43) sees peacebuilding as the process of creating self-supporting structures that removes causes of wars and offer substitutes to warring situation where war might occur.

PEACEBUILDING IN GENESIS 13:5-12

The Text of Genesis 13:5-12

The Hebrew Text of Genesis 13:5-12

וְגַם־לְלוֹטהַהֹלֵךְאֶת־אַבְרָם הָיָהצֹאן־וּבָקָרוְאֹהָלִים:
וְלֹא־נָשָׂאאֹתָם הָאָרֶץלָשֶׁבֶתיַחְדָּוכִי־הָיָהרְכוּשָׁם רָב וְלֹאיָכְלוּלָשֶׁבֶתיַחְדָּו:

וַ יְהִי־רִיב בֵּיוּרֹעֵימִקְנֵה־אַבְרָם וּבֵיוּרֹעֵימִקְנֵהלוֹטוְהַכְּנַעֲנִיוְהַפְּרִזִּיאָז יֹשֵׁבבָּאָרֶץ:

וַיֹּאמֶראַבְרָם אֶל־לוֹטאַל־נָא תְהִי מְרִיבָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָוּבֵין רֹעַי וּבֵין רֹעֶיךָכִי־אֲנָשִׁים אַחִים אֲנָחְנוּ:

הֲלֹאכָל־הָאָרֶץלְפָנֶיךָהִפָּרֶד נָאמֵעָלַיאִם־הַשְּׂמֹאלוְאֵימִנָהוְאִם־הַיָּמִיוְאַשְׂמְאִילָה:

וַיִּשָּׂא־לוֹטאֶת־עֵינָיוויַּרְאֶאת־כָּל־כִּכַּרהַיַּרְדֵּוכִי כֻלָּהמַשְׁקֶהלִפְנֵישׁחֵת יְהוָהאֶת־סְדֹם וְאֶת־עֲמֹרָהכְּגַן־יְהוָהכְּאֶרֶץמִצְרַיִם בֹּאֲכָהצֹעַר:

וַיִּבְחַר־לוֹלוֹטאֵתכָּל־כִּכַּרהַיַּרְדֵּוניִּסַּעלוֹטמִקֶּדֶם וַיִּפָּרְדוּאִישמֵעַלאָחִיו:

אַבְרָם יָשַׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן וְלוֹט יָשַׁב בְּעָרֵי הַכִּכָּר וַיֶּאֱהַל עַד־סְדֹם׃

Source (Westminster Leningrad Codex)

The English Translation of Genesis 13:5-12

5. And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tent.
6. So that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together,
7. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. At that time the Canaanites and the Perrizites dwelt in the land.
8. Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are kinsmen.
9. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left."
10. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw that the Jordan valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zo'ar; this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.
11. So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley, and Lot journeyed east; thus they separated from each other.
12. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, while Lot dwelt among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

TheTivTranslationofGenesis13:5-12

5. *LotiuaZaveaAberamimongolakpaa,luiyongomanabuakuautentikpaa.*
6. *Tarlagemayinaveuvealemaijiirimomgadiaakaaaveualmingeeyum, nahanvekerafatyouvealuimongoga.*
7. *TsombakuranilevmbalAberammanmbaLotimoughnumayolavesha ayangela,mbakanankuambaperishiukentarla.*
8. *TsoAberamkaaaLotier:ayoosoaldleuummoawega,manhenatou mbakuranilevavambaoukpaaga,gadiasembaanmgbianevje.*
9. *Tarneku,unguaianshamigaa?pavamokeratsoweazaankenimeseyo mo mezakenimese.*
10. *TsoLotikendeashe,nengegbuumaauyordanCii,luamngeremhanhamkpaa; erTerluatimsodommangomoragala,vegheruZanhensoarla,luersureuteryo,beetaruigipiti.*
11. *ManLotitsorgbuumaauyordanlaCii,tsoLotihembe,yemveghershall ityoughkitalregh,vepavayoave.*
12. *Aberamyo,temakentaruxanaan,Lotidilemakenuxegembaagara,mbaken gbuumaala,alkpromallutentinavxasosomasodom*.
    (**Source:TivBibilo)**

A Close Reading of Genesis 13: 5-12

To comprehend the literary genre of Genesis 13:5-12 and arrive at the basis of its interpretation, the researcher considers Genesis 13:5-12 as aetiology, thus referring to the establishment of a cause, origin, or reason for something. However, this provides an explanation of Israels possession of the land of Canaan. Indeed, one of the many literary genres in the Pentateuch and beyond is aetiology, a term taken from the Medieval Latin aetiologia and etymologically derived from the Greek aitiologia, aitia cause and logia study. Aetiology has been explained as a type of story with an unknown origin describing plausible

but extraordinary past events or a legend that sets out to explain to an audience the origins of a name, a custom or a rite, sometimes a feature connected with a natural element (Skinner, 1966: 56). It is therefore, called aetiological legend.

The analysis of the Hebrew text of Genesis 13:5-12 in this study is based on the genre narrative. Hepner (2005: 38) argues that the narrative we have in Genesis 13:5-12, indicates that the reason Abram asks Lot to put a distance between himself and Abram reflects his reluctance to have Lot marry into his family in the same way that he does not want his servants to become his son-in law. The prominent names in the text are Abraham and Lot as highlighted in verse 5 of the text. The Hebrew word for Abraham is הָמ(hamon) meaning "many, of many nations. The biblical patriarch Abraham was originally named Abram but God changed his name in Genesis 17:5, (Miracle 2019:4). According to Obiorah (2011:79), the text contributes to the quest for peaceful resolution of conflict. Abraham is regarded as Israel's progenitor (Exodus 2,24; 4,5; 32,13; Isaiah 29,22; Ezekiel 33,24; Micah 7,20; John 8,39.53; Romans 4,16).

For the researcher, the major reason for the conflict was because the land could not contain both of them dwelling together. The Hebrew word for land is *eretz* and means the following in Hebrew: One, ארץ , *ʼerec* ; Two אדמה , *ʼădhāmaħ* ; Three שדה , *sādheh* , "a piece of land"; Four, γῆ, gȇ, "earth"; and lastly אזרח, *ʼezraḥ.* the lack of space for both great possession led to the strife. The Hebrew word for strife is *Natsah;* a quarrel, contention, debate or argument. *Natsah* in Hebrew is הומצ וּמַצָּהֿ. Guzik (2006:54) agrees that the dispute was the reason for the separation because their flocks and herds could not contain the land. According to Ska (2001:74) the narrative in (Genesis13:5-12) has coherence and is not obstructed if we remove (verses 6, 11b and 12a.) Again, when these latter verses are read together, they reflect a slightly different version of the story. Each of the two versions contains the three parts of the narrative. Firstly, there is the reason for the quarrel stated in the longer narrative in (verse 5 and 7a.). In the shorter narrative (verse 6, 11b and 12a), it is explicitly stated that the problem was lack of space for both great companies. There was strife but the narrator is silent on its nature. For Dyke (2011:91), the conflict erupted because Abram who had great possessions was still with Lot who also had acquired as many possessions as Abraham which includes flocks and herds. The Hebrew word for flocks is: מִקְנֶה, *miqne* meaning cattle's, flocks, herds, possession and substances (Gunkel 1964:7).

In verse 6, the narrator uses a figure of speech called epiphora or antistrophe with "sentence ending". This is a literary device "in which the same word or words are repeated at the end of a successive sentence or clauses instead of at the beginning" (Bullinger 2003: 241)". The repetition of the same phrase "together" at the end of the two lines of verse 6 stresses why they cannot continue to stay together, because of the great flocks herds, cattles and possession they have acquired (verse.5). Epiphora here further underlines the reason of the quarrel and the immediate need to find and resolve the strife. In verse 7, it stated that the strife was between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot. For the researcher, herdsmen are nomadic people that tend herds, flocks and cattle. The Hebrew word for herdsmen is *hurdz´man* meaning ברקר , *boḳer* ; the King James Version, the English Revised Version "herdman"): A cowherd (Amos 7:14). A close reading of (verse 7b) points out the presence of the Canaanites and Perrizites in the land.

Verse 8 contains a synecdoche, which a part of a thing is put for a part or the name of the material for the thing made, and similar. It is a figure of speech by which one word receives something from another which is internally associated with it by the connection of two ideas (Bullinger 2003:242). According to Muraoka (2006:243), the Hebrew word for brethren is, אַחִים לְדָת brother which stands for other relations. The Hebrew Bible has about four meanings for the noun a "brother". One can be a brother to another by nature (Genesis 27, 1), by nation (Deuteronomy 15, 3), by kindred (Genesis 13:8) and by affection (Psalm 133, 1). In (verse 9) the narrator uses another figure of speech called erotesis. This is rhetoric, a figure of speech whereby a question is asked in confident expectation of a negative answer (Bullinger 2003: 243). Verse 9 contains the dialogue and suggestion for separation proper.

The general atmosphere of the passage is characterized by Abraham's humility, his emphatic statements and words brought the dispute to an end. Wald (2002:53) highlights the connective preposition and conjunction "IF'' and ''FOR", which are used twice in the passage. In (verse 8b), "for" we are kinsmen, portrays the unity of Abraham and Lot, and in (verse 9a), "if" you take the left hand, I will take the right, shows Abraham and Lot had to make decision in order to resolve the dispute. The researcher plausibly stated Abraham unselfish attitude in the context of Genesis 13:5-12, and this actions merits him the divine magnanimity as Yahweh promised his countless descendants, as immeasurable as the dust of the world. The text in Genesis 13: 5-12, which is closely studied, presents the figure of Abraham as a strong proponent of peacebuilding. This ancient text is still relevant in resolving conflict. Gordon and Douglas (1999:43) assert, that "Abram was the establishment of an Abrahamic lineage through the patriarchs and this reveals the whole universal plan of God with the separation of Abraham and Lot through a peaceful resolution".

The Message of Genesis 13:5-12 in Relation to Peacebuilding among Ikpayongo Communities

The central message of the text is reconciliation; this reconciliation is in line with the theory adopted for the study. From the passage above, the diplomacy adopted by Abraham in settling the conflict with Lot in Genesis 13:5-12 is clearly shown. The researcher adopts this strategy as Separation Method, meaning staying apart, but staying in peace. The following comparison in relation to the text and the case study is significant for this work:

First, Abraham and Lot were brothers. Similarly, Mbasombo and Mbaviur people are brothers. Abraham and Lot were using the land for pastoral farming, while Mbasombo and Mbaviur people are using the land for commercial farming. Secondly, in the epoch of Abraham and Lot dispute in Genesis 13:5-12, Abraham adopted a wise decision by separating from his brother Lot, and the conflict ended in a peaceful way in which Abraham concedes a part of the Promised Land, which belongs to him in order to resolve the dispute peacefully and this singular decision ended the conflict. Comparing the text with the land dispute in Ikpayongo communities of Mbasombo and Mbaviur, the dispute has not ended in a peaceful way, as both groups refuse to concede the contentious land, has led to the killings of people, burning of houses, displacement of people and destruction of properties.

Third, the adoption of the Separation Method by Abraham and Lot can be viewed from the perspective that either Abraham or Lot was the original owner of the land. Among the Israelites, land belongs to God. The land itself was reckoned as a fief that Yahweh bequeathed

to Israel (Lev 25:23; 2 Chron 7:20: Ps 85:1). However, the land was promised by God to Abraham's descendants. For Tushima (2016:41) among the Tivs of Benue State, land is highly valued. In traditional societies, its significance is first and foremost spiritual. In the metaphysics of the Tivs, for instance, God ranks first, land second, and then the spirits and witches (and wizards) comes third.

Fourth, Abraham and Lot had to share pastures between themselves and among their herdsmen. Similarly, Mbasombo and Mbaviur communities have stayed together for a long time, thereby sharing properties and marrying among themselves. It is worrisome that they have not been able to reach a peaceful resolution on the disputed land. Fifth, Abraham's solution to the disputed land can be termed humility, meekness, grace and godliness. His decision seems to be ethically and not economically based. The behavior and actions of Mbasombo and Mbaviur communities have not followed Abraham model of peacebuilding.

Conclusion

The need for peace in Africa especially among Ikpayongo communities in Benue State can neither by overemphasized nor should be treated with levity. For Oko and Ndubuwa (2022) its imperativeness lings on the value of human dignity, respect for sanctity of life and development of natural economy in Africa. Unfortunately, incessant killings, rape, religious and ethnic conflicts that culminate into genocide and vandalization of national property have flooded the daily Newspaper headlines recently. The paper discovered that the concept of peace is holistic encompassing spiritual, social and economic and ecological dimensions that convey the idea of wholeness, completeness, harmony, fulfillment, security, and prosperity of human and nature. Peace emanates from an individual's mindset and extends to all agent of socialization such as family, school, market, community or society at large. The paper urges the community leaders to have the fear of God as this will breeds their inner peace and tranquility that can foster peace and harmony, unity and security in Ikpanyongo and Nigeria at large through religious tolerance, dialogue and ecumenism. Societal peace is possible with maintenance of covenant with God and preservation of environment. The inevitability of conflict should not discourage Ikpanyongo communities from being deligent in adopting conflict preventive measures and peacemaking that cuts across individual inner peace, family, church and the entire ecosystem of the society.

Recommendations

1. Christian leaders should adopt dialogue as a means of resolving the conflict in Ikpayongo, and encourage the people to stay apart, but stay in peace.
2. The government should take over the disputed land and build companies to provide employment for the youths of Ikpayongo and also build an operational military base, as done in other places that experienced land dispute or a police station in the location of the disputed land to avoid future occurrences of the conflict in Ikpayongo communities.
3. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), in collaboration with other denominations should organize conferences and seminars for the people of Ikpayongo communities on the importance of peace and the value of human lives, and encourage them to desist from any form of struggle.

4. The traditional rulers on their part should encourage its citizens to refrain from every misconception of conflict and embrace peace by encouraging the warring combatants to sheath their arms and embrace amnesty.
5. Prayer for the nation as motive force for genuine peace. it is hoped that prayer will make Nigerian leaders rule or lead in fear and justice to ensure peaceful harmony (Atanang, Ekanem and Oko, 2022).

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