AN EMPOWERED PEOPLE:
A LITERARY READING OF 1 KINGS 12:1–20

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Introduction

After the death of Solomon, the united monarchy fell apart into two divisions; the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). This fate is interpreted theologically as Yahweh's punishment for Solomon's crimes, which included the establishment of idolatrous worship (cf. 1 Kgs 11:31–33).[1] Organ, however, points out that a careful examination of the narrative shows that Rehoboam is responsible for the division.[2] Accordingly, many scholars believe that as the story stands, it is Rehoboam's intransigence and foolishness that led to the division of the kingdom.[3] The role played by the Israelites themselves in their secession, surprisingly, has not been acknowledged. Although the popular view blaming Rehoboam's intransigence and foolishness is to a large extent valid, it is not the complete story. An important part of the story is not told. Indeed the theological explanations in the narrative point to Yahweh as the one behind the turn of events (cf. 1 Kgs 12:15). Nonetheless, underneath these theological colorings are the actions and desires

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1. That there was a theological basis for the division of the monarchy is supported by Solomon's sin, Ahijah's prophecy about the division, and prophet Shemaiah's message that what happened was God's will. The Deuteronomist used these theological contexts to explain that what happened did not happen by chance; rather God was at work in the tragic division of the nation. See Anderson, *Living Word of the Old Testament*, 232–33.
2. See Organ, "The Man Who Would Be King."
3. Devries, *1 Kings*, 158–59.

of the human characters.[4] If the human characters and their actions are brought to the fore, it becomes clear that Rehoboam's intransigence and foolishness do not fully account for the division. Lying latently in this fated development is the role played by the Israelites and their leader Jeroboam. First Kings 12:1–20,[5] when considered carefully, provides enough evidence to support this reading.

Acknowledging the role of the Israelites in the division is important. Their actions resonate with a number of contemporary happenings. All over the world, ordinary people are discovering their voices: they stand up against their governments and other powerful institutions. The wondrous case of the Arab Spring, particularly, comes to mind. The disgruntled Arabs believe that for a long time they have been "marginalized" in political decisions as well as in social and economic decisions.[6] The ability of marginalized people to identify their problems and map out strategies to solve them is termed "empowerment." The concept of empowerment reveals an inherent human potential that can be harnessed for the good of society. This paper reads the story of Israel's secession from the united monarchy from the perspective

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4.   Even though it seems that the author of Kings tried to put the historical context of the division under the theological carpet, the northerners in their encounter with Rehoboam exposed this historical context. Nothing in their protest against Solomon's harsh policy points to a theological reason. What this means is that even when the theological reasons are relegated to the background, the division of the monarchy can still be understood.

5.   First Kings 12:1–20 is part of the Deuteronomistic History. In its final form, this text emerged from Judah. However, McEntire, *Blood of Abel*, 93 n. 2, indicates that although the Deuteronomistic History was composed in Judah, 1 Kgs 12:1–20 is sympathetic to northern concerns. DeVries, *1 Kings*, 157, also argues that a Judahite wrote the story but the author was conciliatory in tone. The narrative most probably is southern in origin, however, Rehoboam, and not the northerners, receives the blame for the secession. This suggests that the action of the northerners is legitimized by the narrator. However, the northerners have not been the main subject of study for the narrative, despite the extensive discussions on the text.

6.   Pollack, "Introduction," 2–3.

of the concept of empowerment.[7] By approaching the text from this perspective, we gain greater insight into the role played by the northern tribes in determining their fate. Not only that, we make the biblical story gain contemporary relevance, as we explore how the text and the modern experience illuminate each other.

Empowerment

The concept of empowerment is not a topic natural to the study of ancient Israel, nor has it been used for other societies prior to the twentieth century. The emergence and growth of this concept is a natural reaction to the ever-changing times in the political, social, and developmental spheres of human life. However, the principles and assumptions underlying these concepts have existed, although in an elementary form, in many pre-modern civilizations. For instance, a system of popular government can be traced among African societies, especially within the institution of chieftaincy.[8] Knight also points out the rudimentary form of the concept of human rights in ancient Israel.[9] Thus if empowerment is today an important issue, one that is central to the fate of humanity, then the pre-modern world is not to be merely eliminated from the discussion. A journey into ancient cultures to examine traces of empowerment will increase our appreciation of the development of the concept. However, before we examine how 1 Kgs 12:1–20 reflects the concept of empowerment, we need first to understand what "empowerment" is.

The term "empowerment" is difficult to pin down. As a construct, the concept of empowerment is shared by many disciplines such as community development, education, economics, psychology, and the study of social movements and organizations. It has also become a term people take for granted,

7. The text will be read synchronically, thus much attention will not be given to historical-critical matters unless they are necessary to the argument.

8. Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 110, explains that foreigners and travelers during pre-colonial and colonial times testified to the role ordinary people played in Africa's political systems.

9. Knight, "Political Rights."

comfortable and unquestioned, something that very different institutions and practices seem to be able to agree upon. For instance, it is the mantra of development practitioners and theorists—the unquestioned 'good' aspired to by such diverse institutions as the World Bank, Oxfam, and the most radical non-government organizations. Thus Rappaport notes that it is easier to define the term in absence than in practice.[10] Similarly, Zimmerman describes the concept as enigmatic.[11]

Despite this difficulty, some scholars have provided useful definitions. For example, Narayan-Parkeer defines empowerment as the "expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives."[12] Petesch, Smulovitz, and Walton hold a similar view when they define empowerment as a process through which disadvantaged communities or people make purposeful choices as a response to their poor state of living.[13] Sadan, on her part, conceptualizes empowerment as a "transition from a state of powerlessness to a state of more control over one's life, fate, and environment."[14] These definitions capture the concept as a multi-dimensional social, psychological, and political process that helps people gain control over their lives. Thus empowerment recognizes people's ability to set their own agenda to make their life worth living. To be empowered is to gain a sense of dignity, make decisions, and take responsibility associated with the decisions.

Central to empowerment is the concept of power and power relations.[15] To empower implies the ability of the empowered to exert power over or to make things happen. As an action verb, empower suggests giving the ability to change the world, to overcome opposition. It has a transformatory sound, an implicit promise of change, often for the better. Thus a deeper under-

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10. Rappaport, "Studies in Empowerment," 2.
11. Zimmerman, "Taking Aim on Empowerment Research," 169.
12. Narayan-Parkeer, *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction*, xviii.
13. Petesch et al., "Evaluating Empowerment," 40–41.
14. Sadan, *Empowerment and Community Planning*, 13.
15. Ibid., 33.

standing of power will make possible a better appreciation of states of powerlessness, and the processes by which individuals or groups struggle for control over their lives and environments.

The concept of participation is also integral to the empowerment process. Participation promotes the need for people to be in the know and be involved in issues concerning their lives. In other words, people's ability to partake in decision making is crucial to changing their lives. Clearly then, the empowerment process targets the marginalized or the powerless. It allows these groups of people greater freedom, autonomy, and control over their responsibility for decision making.

Solomon and the Northerners

According to empowerment theorists, the point of departure in the empowerment process is a state of human misery, which can be termed "powerlessness," "oppression," or "deprivation." This state is referred to as a "position."[16] The need to identify the nature of an individual's or a group's "position" is important to the empowerment process. Rappaport argues that powerlessness is an attitude that results from the incorporation of past experiences, ongoing behavior, and continued patterns of thinking that are embedded and reproduced by inequitable power relations.[17] Thus the encounter between Rehoboam and "all Israel," can be better appreciated when we look at the larger context of their encounter.[18] Also, we need to determine the "position" of "all Israel" in order to appreciate the nature of the exchanges that transpired between the two. The institution of monarchy pro-

16. Carr, "Rethinking Empowerment Theory," 13.

17. Rappaport, "Studies in Empowerment," 3–5.

18. First Kings 12:1–20 is part of the larger pericope identified as the Jeroboam Story (1 Kgs 11:26—14:20). See Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 10. However, the narrative of 1 Kgs 12:1–20 demands a much larger context if we are to understand the turn of events. This is because the slogan chanted by "all Israel" in v. 16 points to David's role, however remote, in the division. Again, the request by "all Israel" accused Solomon for the harsh policies against the north.

vides the framework for analyzing the power relations between the two sides.

An understanding of the exact political organization of the Israelites before their adoption of the institution of monarchy has been elusive to scholars.[19] However, what is known is that various tribes did have a common sense of identity through their religious tradition, although they sometimes operated independently of each other.[20] The adoption of monarchy gradually changed this pre-monarchic loose confederation into that of a state. One dominant feature of this change, which anti-monarchic elements were quick to point out, was the tension in the institution of kingship in relation to the loss of freedom and the lack of justice (cf. 1 Samuel 8). The reign of the first king, Saul, saw little of this tension. During the reign of David, the tensions began to emerge (his last years could be termed despotic).[21] It was Solomon, however, as many scholars posit, who served as the inspiration for the scathing warning against kingship in the popular anti-monarchy speech by Samuel. According to Cross, Solomon set out to establish an imperial rule. He explains further: "while David eschewed outright innovations which seriously violated traditional religious and social institutions, his son Solomon sought to transfer Israel into a full-fledged Oriental monarchy and was prepared to ignore or to flout older institutions in his determination to centralize powers and to consolidate his realm."[22]

Solomon's innovations included the division of his kingdom into districts and elaborate building projects. With his imperial intentions, Solomon had to devise ways to have the necessary funds and labor to carry out his ambitions. In 1 Kgs 4:7–19 we read about the division of the state into tax districts. Eleven of these divisions were in the northern regions while only one was

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19. See Hayes, "Period of the Judges," 307.

20. The traditions in the book of Judges show the independence of the tribes and the occasional rivalry between some tribes; see ibid., 322.

21. See Donner, "Separate States of Israel and Judah," 384.

22. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 241.

in the south.[23] This, to any cursory observation, is an obvious attempt to demand more from a particular section of the society. In 1 Kgs 9:21 it is reported that Solomon used the subjects of the neighboring states as the labor for his projects. It appears, however, that Solomon's attempt to restrict the forced labor to foreigners proved inadequate, and he had to resort to his own people to supplement labor for the tasks needed to complete his projects (1 Kgs 5:27–32). The text reads that "all Israel" was forcibly taxed, which implies that Judah would be included in this. However, as Sweeney argues, it is not out of the way to believe that the forced labor was made up of men from the northern tribes.[24] Soggin concurs with this view when he writes, "Israel, and not Judah . . . was subjected to services it considered a grievous infringement of its liberties."[25] This suggestion is supported by the reading in 1 Kgs 11:28 that says that Jeroboam[26] was in charge of the forced labor of the "house of Joseph."[27] Another case of Solomon's discrimination against the northern tribes was his ceding of the Galilean cities to Hiram when Solomon was unable to redeem his debt (cf. 1 Kgs 9:10–14).[28] Thus Finkelstein and Silberman write: "the northern tribes are depicted in 1 Kings as being treated like little more than colonial subjects by David's son Solomon."[29]

With the adoption of monarchy, ancient Israel had its balance of power shift radically in favor of the king, whose legitimacy

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23. Sweeney, "Critique of Solomon," 614–15.

24. Sweeney bases his argument on the fact that "the corvee in Lebanon would suggest that, for logistical reasons, the majority of the laborers came from the northern tribes" (ibid., 614).

25. Soggin, "Davidic-Solomonic Kingdom," 378.

26. The presence of Jeroboam is important to note at this juncture. As evident from the narrative that follows (11:26—14:20), he is a central figure in the plot, helping shape the fate of the northerners; see Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative*, 29; see also Long, *1 Kings*, 131.

27. The phrase "house of Joseph" is used to refer to the northern tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. See Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible*, 77.

28. Sweeney, "Critique of Solomon," 614–15; Halpern also details the effect of Solomon's action on the northerners ("Sectionalism and the Schism," 519–32).

29. Finkelstein and Silberman, *Bible Unearthed*, 151.

was enforced through divine sanction.[30] Solomon, therefore, had the leverage to use his subjects for his personal ambitions. However, in the particular case of Solomon and his son Rehoboam, we are not only faced with the general loss of freedom by the vast majority of the people and the limitations placed on them in terms of taxation and military or labor conscription, but the policy of singling out a particular section of the state as a target for harsh treatment. Although Solomon reigned over Israel and Judah, his actions alienated the northern tribes. It is from this background of alienation and discrimination that the northerners (all Israel), with the backing of Jeroboam, met Rehoboam at Shechem to decide his fate as their king.

It is important to note the character Jeroboam in the midst of this development. As indicated earlier, he was one of Solomon's officials, but fell out of favor (cf. 1 Kgs 11:26–40). The reason as indicated in the narrative was because he lifted his hands against the king for certain building projects Solomon carried out (vv. 26–27). As the narrative stands, it is difficult to make sense of the exact nature of the rivalry between Solomon and Jeroboam, although v. 40 suggests that the motivation for Jeroboam's revolt was Ahijah's prophecy (vv. 31–39). Whatever the case might be, it is well within possibility to posit that Jeroboam was involved in some form of public incitement. Thus Rabbinic exegesis explained Jeroboam's rebellious act as inciting the public against Solomon.[31] As an insider to Solomon's administration and policies, Jeroboam had enough information to incite trouble. Accordingly, the importance of his figure, which becomes evident as the story unfolds, was due to the leadership qualities he exuded and the hope he instilled in the Israelites. Besides, as Solomon was drawn to him because of his physique and abilities (the narrator describes Jeroboam as able and hard working, see v. 28), so would "all Israel" find inspiration in his personality.

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30. Knight, "Political Rights," 100–101.
31. Cogan, *1 Kings*, 338.

Reading 1 Kings 12:1–20

"All Israel"[32] *Meet Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:1–4)*

Freire explains that intensive reflection on oneself in relation to society, that is *conscientization,* is a necessary precursor to engaging in social or political change.[33] Similarly, Gutierrez suggests that fundamental change in a person's consciousness is a necessary impetus for engaging in empowering social action: one has to perceive oneself as a subject and not an object in order to be capable of changing the social order.[34] This initial stage of the empowerment process could be through an external factor or an internal reflection on one's relationship to the environment. Irrespective of its source, *conscientization* assumes that humans have an inherent power to initiate a positive change. This inherent human potential for change was manifested during "all Israel's" encounter with Rehoboam. After being made king in Judah, Rehoboam journeyed to Shechem. He went to Shechem because "all Israel" had gathered there to make him king. The first empowering step by "all Israel" was the choice of Shechem as the place of meeting.[35] According to Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, the choice of Shechem for this political summit meeting suggests two things. First, Rehoboam was in a weak political situation in comparison to David.[36] Second, Rehoboam demonstrated a "lack of insight and administrative finesse."[37] On the other hand, this choice, when perceived from the perspective

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32. The term "all Israel" refers not to the larger unity David forced between the tribes, but to the northern tribes alone. See Anderson, *Living Word of the Old Testament*, 234; McEntire, *Blood of Abel*, 93.

33. See Morrow and Torres, *Reading Freire and Habermas*, 103.

34. Gutierrez, "Understanding the Empowerment Process," 230.

35. Shechem was an important town, rich in historical associations (cf. Judges 9 and Joshua 24). When anything important was to happen the Israelites gathered there.

36. It will be recalled that the elders of Israel went to David in Hebron to negotiate with him separately (2 Sam 5:1–3).

37. Walton et al., *Bible Background Commentary—Old Testament*, 432.

of "all Israel," suggests not only a clever move by them, but a belief in their bargaining power.

This becomes evident in the second empowering step by "all Israel": their conviction that they had the power to choose their king. That "all Israel" gathered at Shechem to make Rehoboam king is aptly captured in the result clause of the opening statement; "for all Israel came to Shechem to make him king" (v. 1b).[38] The Hebrew expression "to make him king" (*lehamlik 'oto*) is central to the entire narrative. As a verb phrase in the hiphil, *lehamlik* has "all Israel" as its subject.[39] It is they who can cause the necessary change in Rehoboam's status. Accordingly, Rehoboam is an object: he has not the power himself to be king.

The "position" of the Israelites during the reign of Solomon was that of powerlessness; however, in their encounter with Rehoboam they are the ones to make him king. Here "all Israel" are not only conscious of their "position," but also of their ability to change their fate. Two factors account for this. The first clue is provided in vv. 2–3, with the mention of Jeroboam. Although these verses have been a subject of much debate, what is important is the placement of Jeroboam in the context of the people's negotiation with Rehoboam.[40] He is connected in one way or the other to the actions of "all Israel." Within the two verses, his name appears three times; and he assumes both an active and a passive role in the verses (he heard, and he was sent for, and he lead "all Israel" to speak to Solomon). If these pieces of infor-

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38. All translations are mine. I have tried to give a literal translation as much as possible.

39. The hiphil is a Hebrew verbal stem that expresses a causative type of action with an active voice.

40. Vv. 2–3 and v. 12 are difficult to understand in the MT text. As they stand, they contradict v. 20. I have resolved the tension by placing Jeroboam in Egypt during the confrontation between "all Israel" and Rehoboam, and it was after "all Israel" rebelled against Solomon, then they summoned him. Thus he was not directly involved in the negotiations with Rehoboam. Nonetheless, the attempt by the narrator to place him in the midst of the negotiations signals Jeroboam's interest and influence in the encounter between "all Israel" and Rehoboam.

mation are tied to 1 Kgs 11:26–40, we cannot help but see Jeroboam as an external factor, whether overt or covert, for the change we see in "all Israel."

Although the narrator is silent on the mental processes of "all Israel," implicitly we see a positive use of psychological asset, which accounts for the second factor of change. Psychological asset is the capacity for a group to envision. In other words it is the ability of an individual or a group to identify an urgent need for change in their current state of living.[41] Such a step represents a consciousness of themselves, because they begin to identify the problems in their present situation and devise ways to curb them. Through this, people get to know who they are and what they are capable of. The significance of this self realization is that individuals or groups are their own agents for positive change. For the Israelites, the first time they speak demonstrates an acknowledgement of their psychological asset. They tell Rehoboam, "Your father hardened our yoke, but now you make light the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke he put on us and we will serve you" (v. 4).

This is an intriguing statement, one that can only come from a people who are not afraid to seek their wellbeing. It also demonstrates clever negotiation skills from the people. It begins with the phrase "your father" (*'avika*), then continues with the unfair treatment of Solomon. Following immediately is a request and ending the statement is a proposal.

By beginning with "your father" (*'avika*) and repeating the phrase again in the same line, "all Israel" point out that Solomon is mainly responsible for their misery, and not Rehoboam. While Solomon made "heavy their yoke" (*hiqshah e't-'ullenu*), Rehoboam is to "make light" (*haqel*) the hard service Solomon placed on them (*natan 'alenu*). Father and son are juxtaposed to illustrate what happened in the past and what is to happen in the present or immediate future. But the present or immediate future carries more importance to the people than the past. This is discernible from the second part of the verse. The pronoun "you" (*'atah*), in the verbal clause, places more emphasis on Reho-

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41. Alsop et al., *Empowerment in Practice*, 11–12.

boam.[42] He is the key to their desired state. This concern for the future is heightened by the independent adverb "now" (*'atah*).[43] The adverb serves as a logical connection to what precedes it. Therefore, although Solomon caused their hardship, now is the time for Rehoboam to change that.

While "all Israel" are more concerned with the actions of Rehoboam in the present or immediate future, one sees the conscious effort on their part to also make Solomon their "devil." In their rhetoric, the argument that Rehoboam is not Solomon stands very tall. Solomon is the subject responsible for their suffering while Rehoboam is the subject to lessen their suffering. By this rhetoric, they distance Rehoboam from the crimes of his father. This rhetorical strategy is meant to make Rehoboam understand that he is different from his father and therefore can make his own choices. Accordingly, he should be wise to grant them their request for leniency. Despite this strategic move by "all Israel," they also anticipate that anything is possible: their request could be accepted or rejected. Therefore, they make their request a conditional one. They will serve Rehoboam only when he reduces the yoke Solomon placed heavily on them. If power is the ability to make one do something one would not have done, then, "all Israel," by this condition, try to reverse, though temporarily, the balance of power in order to change their fate. Thus through their encounter with Rehoboam, "all Israel" demonstrate that they indeed wield some form of power to determine the all-important decision of who rules them. For "all Israel," such a person should be prepared to take their interests to heart.

So far in their encounter with Rehoboam, "all Israel" demonstrate an amazing display of confidence and a strong will to seek their own wellbeing. When people resolve to achieve a goal, they are hardly stopped by a challenge. Again, for a people to be conscious of their dignity and self-respect is for them to be

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42. Gibson, *Davidson's Grammar*, 2.

43. The similarity in the transliteration of the Hebrew words "you" and "now" is because I have chosen to use the ordinary style for transliteration as prescribed by Alexander, *SBL Handbook of Style*, 28. The words are spelled differently in Hebrew.

armed. Their armor of dignity and self-respect is predicated on the premise that they are equally knowledgeable about what is good for them. By this, they put into perspective the principle of the bottom-up decision making process, which is central to the concept of participation.[44] In other words, they do not want the king (Rehoboam) and his close associates deciding for them as was done during Solomon's era. In this particular case, they (from the bottom) want to be active participants in policies that bear directly on their lives.

As a king in Judah, Rehoboam meets "all Israel" with his kingly entourage including some form of security (cf. 1 Kgs 12:18). This status of Rehoboam, however, does not intimidate "all Israel" in their present encounter. For "all Israel," their request is a legitimate one. There is, therefore, no need for fear or panic. After all, they do not call for an abolishment of the heavy yoke placed on them, neither do they oppose Rehoboam's rule. What they demand is humane treatment. By their legitimate request, "all Israel" demonstrates that they are not interested in fomenting trouble. They are ready to work, but their working conditions should uphold their dignity as humans. Though they are not there to foment trouble, they do not mince words in pointing out Solomon's harsh measures. Two words, "make hard" (*qasah*) and "heavy" (*kaved*), are used to depict the nature of the servitude Solomon placed on them. Their language is reminiscent of the slavery that the Israelites suffered in Egypt (cf. Exod 1:11–14). By putting their request forward to Rehoboam, "all Israel" exhibit their desire to participate in decisions concerning their lives. As humans who reason, they should contribute to the nature of their work. Here the actions of "all Israel" resonate with numerous labor groups all over the world that have emerged as a response to unbridled greed within the world economic system. The need to participate becomes imperative, especially when it is evident that conscious effort is made by the leadership to denigrate a section of the society for their personal gain.

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44. See Lovan et al., *Participatory Governance*.

However, for a group to successfully react to oppression in order to effect a positive change it is not by a merely spontaneous move. Rather, such a challenging step demands deep thinking aimed at exploring what one has and how it can be put into positive use. This is what "all Israel" did. Though subordinates in their encounter with Rehoboam, "all Israel" were resolved to change their situation. Solomon's death provided them the opportunity to do just that. Solomon did not enter into an agreement with Israel to rule them, but his son Rehoboam, like his grandfather, David, needed the consent of the Israelites in order to be their king (cf. 2 Sam 5:1–3). This consent became an asset belonging to "all Israel." All they had to do was to put it into use: hence the condition attached to their request to Rehoboam. To be empowered is to have a sense of dignity, to make decisions and be responsible for them. We see these positive steps in "all Israel." For the Israelites to register their displeasure is a clear case of self-respect. To bargain with Rehoboam was an important decision they took; one in which they were prepared to face the consequences.

Rehoboam Consults His Advisors (1 Kings 12:6–11)

When the narrative began, Rehoboam journeyed to Shechem to be made king. By the close of the first scene, Rehoboam had his fate hanging in the balance because the people put forward a brave request tied to a condition. Evidently, Rehoboam was dealing with a very clever people. He sensed this and retarded his response. He told them to depart and return for his answer in three days time (v. 5). "All Israel" had succeeded in delaying such an important step in the life of Rehoboam. He needed to think about the request of the people and solicit various views. The consultative process he intended to embark on would give him the opportunity to listen to different views from different people. Polzin writes that "seeking royal counsel involved weighing the recommendations of one advisor against those of

another."[45] This course of action is in line with the principles of participation. After all, one person cannot profess to know all.

In vv. 6–15 we see how Rehoboam embarked on his consultative process and how he eventually answered the people who held the key to his kingship. The narrator draws our attention to this process through the use of the words "to counsel" (*ya'ats*) and "advice" (*'etsa'*). The word *ya'ats* appears six times, twice in v. 6, twice in v. 8, once in v. 9 and v. 13. As a verb, *ya'ats* depicts Rehoboam's quest for counsel in order to have an answer for the people. In four appearances of *ya'ats*, Rehoboam is the object of the verb while he is the subject in the other two. Accordingly, he consults (*ya'ats*) and asks to be counselled (*ya'ats*) in order to get the right answer for the people (cf. v. 6, v. 8 and v. 9).

The word *'etsa'* on the other hand appears three times and is used as a noun (v. 8, v. 13 and v. 14). In all its three appearances, *'etsa'* is a *nomen regens* of a construct formation. It has the phrases "the elders" (*hazzeqenim*) and "the youth" (*hayladim*) as its genitive (cf. v. 8, v. 13 and v. 14). These words put into perspective the sources of the advice Rehoboam seeks. In v. 8 and v. 13 *'etsa'* appears in the narrator's evaluative clause "he forsook the counsel of the elders." The narrator, by this repetition, emphasizes Rehoboam's rejection of the counsel he took from the elders. In v. 14, *'etsa'* appears in the clause "and he spoke to them according to the counsel of the youth." In this case, the narrator points out Rehoboam's acceptance of the counsel of the youth.

Verse 8 serves as a turning point in this scene. First, a narrative summary begins the verse: "and he forsook the counsel of the elders." Second, we see a concentration of the words *ya'ats* and *'etsa'* in the verse. The narrative summary follows immediately after the elders give their counsel (v. 7) and precedes Rehoboam's consultation with the youth. What happens then is that after listening to the elders speak, Rehoboam immediately ignores their counsel and goes to consult (*ya'ats*) the youth. By this, the narrator depicts the hastiness in Reho-

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45. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 178.

boam's character. No moment of thought is assigned to what the elders said. It is rejected outright, almost immediately it is uttered. Again, there is the implicit juxtaposition of the elders and the youth: which will Rehoboam eventually align with?[46] The narrator does not hold this suspense for long. Half way through v. 8, we already know that Rehoboam will opt for the counsel the youth will provide. All this is to reveal Rehoboam as an unwise leader, one who does not listen to all sides before making his final decision. Indeed the way he refers to "all Israel" as "this people" (v. 6 and v. 9), when he consults the elders and the youth, reveals his detachment from the Israelites. While "all Israel" see Rehoboam as their potential king, what Rehoboam sees in "all Israel" is "this people." Rehoboam's refusal to use a word or phrase that draws a connection between him and the Israelites shows his detachment from "all Israel." Lasine therefore writes: "Rehoboam is portrayed as imitating Solomon's desires, explicitly outdoing his father in tyrannical traits such as taxation, forced labor and coercion, the very traits that are muted in the Solomon narrative itself."[47] His consultative process, which initially is commendable, is now flawed by his hastiness and lack of insight as well as his lack of respect for the people.

"All Israel's" Response to Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:12–20)

Three days pass and the people return for their answer from Rehoboam.[48] Rehoboam follows the counsel of the youth by repeating verbatim what they told him. He only decides to leave

46. Organ, "The Man Who Would Be King," 127, believes the terms *hazzeqenim* and *hayladim* are a stereotypical way of labeling the "elders" as wise and the "youth" as fools. Walsh, *1 Kings*, 162, also argues that the term *hazzeqenim* may "connote the wisdom that comes with age and experience" and in this context "it probably means both, since those people belong to the previous generation of royal advisors." The term *hayladim* however refers to those who were taken into service by Rehoboam and had no experience.

47. Lasine, *Knowing Kings*, 159.

48. Here again we meet Jeroboam; and although the narrator makes him explicit, he is the invincible hand that pushes "all Israel" on, giving them support in their quest for fair treatment.

out the clause "my little finger is thicker than the loins of my father" (v. 14). This omission could be because of its derogatory tone and the bad image he would create of his father. Surprisingly, Rehoboam seems more careful about degrading his father's image in public than lessening the plight of the Israelites. In v. 15 we are informed that Rehoboam did not "hearken" (*shama'*) to the people. This information is repeated again in the opening of v. 16. In v. 15, the information is given by the narrator as a background to the theological explanation of the turn of events. That is, Rehoboam fails to listen (*shama'*) to the people because Yahweh has intended this to happen.[49] In v. 16, however, it is the people who realize that Rehoboam has not hearkened (*shama'*) to them. The importance of the word in this scene calls for more attention.

S*hama'*, mostly translated "to hear," has a wide usage in the Hebrew Bible, with a nuanced meaning in many contexts. As part of the Israelite call to worship (the *Shema*) and used extensively by the prophets (cf. Amos 4:1; Isa 6:4–5; Ezek 18:25), s*hama'* "embraces the ideas of understanding and obeying."[50] The act of hearkening/hearing emerges as an integral aspect of Israelite society and as Crenshaw points out, "the hearing heart" in ancient Israel is so crucial that it assumes the same status as a sage in ancient Egypt.[51] Rehoboam's failure to "hearken" to the people means he fails to share in the people's plight. He lacks the ability to discern the genuine concerns of the people and their desire to be heard. He, accordingly, emerges as a fool.[52]

Again, that Rehoboam failed to "hearken" (*shama'*) to the people accentuates the poor relationship between him and the people. The first meeting between the two sides was held in an optimistic atmosphere. Rehoboam listened to the people and told

49. According to von Rad, *Problem of the Hexatuech*, 208, "Through the use of this prophecy/fulfillment schema, the Deuteronomist reaffirms the legitimacy of Jeroboam's ascent to power."

50. Carpenter and Comfort, *Holman Treasury*, vii.

51. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 33.

52. The characterization of Rehoboam as a fool is strengthened by his alignment with the "youth," which, as Organ points out, falls in line with the character of the "fool" in wisdom literature.

them to depart for an answer in three days time. "All Israel" on their part did not react negatively; they did not insist on an answer there and then. After Rehoboam embarked on his consultative process, however, the optimism gave way to suspicion and disregard on his part towards the people. For Rehoboam not to "hearken" to the people, therefore, signifies his total disregard for "all Israel," the very people who were to make him king.

His failure to "hearken" (*shama'*) to the people led the people to "return" (*shuv*) a word to him (v. 16). Ironically, when Rehoboam consulted his advisors, he was looking for a way to "return" (*shuv*) a word to the people. His "returned words" led to dissatisfaction and then he was the recipient of a "returned word" from the people. Interestingly, the ditty of the people to Rehoboam resurrected an old rebellion cry that put into sharp focus the deep hidden divisions between the northern tribes and Judah. By invoking the old rebellion cry against the house of David, "all Israel" made it clear that they severed the relationship between Judah and the northern tribes (Israel).

Rehoboam realised his loss and attempted to use force by sending Adoram (whom the narrator describes as being in charge of the forced labor) to get the people to perhaps submit to him.[53] "All Israel" replied by stoning Adoram to death. By this brave act, they unambiguously warned Rehoboam of their preparedness to assert themselves if need be in order to drum home their message that they no longer owed allegiance to him. The use of force by "all Israel" was, therefore, reactive and defensive. Force was an option for them because its absence would jeopardize their achievements so far.

The rejection of Rehoboam opened up the way for a new leader for the Israelites. We are not surprised to see Jeroboam as this new leader. Indeed, v. 20 affirms the view that the narrative of 1 Kings 1–20, although explaining the role of Rehoboam in the division, as well as highlighting the part played by the people, also intends to narrate the rise of Jeroboam in fulfillment

53. I believe the narrator intended to indicate that Rehoboam tried using force when the narrator explicated further that Adoram was in charge of the forced labor.

of Ahijah's prophecy.[54] In many respects, Jeroboam had been the shadow leader of the northerners. His return from his self-imposed exile in Egypt, especially at the moment when relations between Rehoboam and "all Israel" had turned very sour, at the very least hints at his personal interest and involvement in the whole saga. It is important to note, nonetheless, that "all Israel" still held the power to choose their leader. The structure of the verse places Jeroboam just like Rehoboam in the object position. This closure to the narrative echoes the all-important issue of reserving the power to choose leaders for the people, irrespective of the role individual figures might have played in advancing the rights of the people.

Conclusion

Empowerment is a modern concept used in development discourse to reveal the inherent potential of humans to seek their wellbeing. Development agents and groups promote these concepts with the conviction that when people are empowered and demand participation they change their societies for the better. Reading the text from the perspective of this concept has revealed, though in a rudimentary manner, the concerns of such sentiments in ancient times. More importantly, we have come to realize that "all Israel" were not passive in the split of the united monarchy. On the contrary, they were active participants in the turn of events. When the narrative began, "all Israel" met Rehoboam at Shechem to make him king. At the close of it, "all Israel" instead made Jeroboam king. The introduction and conclusion highlight "all Israel's" power of refusing to make Rehoboam king on the one hand and causing Jeroboam to be king on the other hand. As empowered people, "all Israel" demanded the right to participate in decisions that bore on their lives. Throughout the narrative, their desire to end the inhumane treatment meted out to them drove them to take calculated steps to ensure their freedom from a potentially tyrannical rule by Rehoboam.

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54. Long, *1 Kings*, 137.

However, while we acknowledge the role of "all Israel," Jeroboam's role also needs to be recognized, since he, in many ways, served as a stimulus for their brave act. Jeroboam was a source of hope and strength for the Israelites. As an industrious and successful young man, Jeroboam was promoted by Solomon to a high position of responsibility. In a clandestine encounter with a shadowy prophet, Jeroboam was proclaimed a legitimate successor of the king due to widespread corrosion of faithfulness. Political incompetence and divine intervention paved the way for him to be chosen by his people as their leader.

This portrait finds expression in many African societies, especially during their struggles for freedom. The leadership role of Mandela in South Africa and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana are just two examples. Interestingly, Jeroboam, the favored of Yahweh, ironically descended the same path as Solomon, and even became the archetypal sinner and the standard for judging the subsequent leaders of Israel.[55] This portrait also resonates with several African examples where promising leaders turned out to be despots. For instance, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and the late Muammar al Gaddafi of Libya were once celebrated icons of the struggle against oppression and dictatorship. After establishing their hold on power, they presided over some of the most repressive regimes on the continent.

The narrative of 1 Kgs 12:1–20 is pivotal in Israel's royal history. Here Israel's political landscape changed, never to return to its former state. What this paper has sought to do is to explain the role played by "all Israel," with the backing of the young and promising Jeroboam, in charting this new course. Acknowledging the contribution of "all Israel" is a step in the right direction, a step that resonates with the situations of our own times.

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55. Ibid., 132, Long points out the continuity between the materials on Solomon and Jeroboam. Here, there is an irony in the character of Jeroboam. Emerging as the choice of Yahweh to punish the house of David, he later develops into the archetypal sinner of Israel.

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