

USING 2KINGS 7: 1-20 AS A TEMPLATE FOR HUNGER ALLEVIATION AMONG THE ASHINGINI OF MAGAMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF NIGER STATE

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Abstract

An incredible story is told in Second Kings 6:24–30 about two Israelite mothers who decided to eat their children. Even if food is limited and Samaria is under siege, the shock of the mother's cannibalism is still quite real and speaks of the level of hunger in the land. Three basic things a human being needs for survival in life are food, water and oxygen. The absence of these substances may lead to death. The context of hunger in Samaria and the solution proffered must be properly understood in the narrative with reference to the causes, effects and the mode of proffering solution to end hunger. This paper aims to address the nature and causes of hunger in Samaria using the role of the divine in alleviating hunger among the Ashingini of Magama Local Government Area scourging hunger caused by insecurity in their society. The experience in the text under study is applicable to the experience of the Ashingini. The context of the Ashingini is somewhat different and may need a critical appraisal for objective application of the text. For a quality research, comparative method was employed for the work to compare the story of hunger and its alleviation in Samaria and the insecurity among the Ashingini of Magama Local Government Area in Niger State. It was discovered that insecurity has caused havoc that the masses are in terrible hunger and this research concluded that all the stake-holders among the Ashingini the clergy are to speak against the insurgency in the land.

Keywords: Hunger, Alleviation, Ashingini, Poverty, Magama, Niger State

Introduction

Three basic things a normal human being needs for survival in life are food, water and oxygen. The absence of these substances may lead to death. Famine or hunger is one of the most dangerous enemies of life apart of illness and disease. Food, water and oxygen are the commodities most needed for man to live and survive. Borghini considered hunger to be a state of food deprivation connected to famine, war, and economic poverty. Hunger delays development on the cognitive, social

and emotional level (4). This includes reading, language, attention, memory and problem-solving capabilities. Hunger affects the efficiency of man's thinking faculty and invariably devalues his dignity.

Samaria was in a great distress so that the people were reduced to eating unclean food, such as donkey's head and dove's droppings, people paid exorbitant prices of two pounds of silver for the head of a donkey and two ounces of silver for the dung, but even worse, people were reduced to cannibalism eating their own children for survival (2Kings 6:24-33). It was at this critical state of the nation an intervention came through the divine and people were relieved from starvation.

Famine in Samaria in 2Kings 6:24-7:1-20

Howard describes the Aramean people to be located in the present day Syria, northeast of Israel, made their first appearance on the Ancient Near Eastern stage during the Late Bronze Age ca. 1100BC. Their language, Aramaic was closely related to Hebrew and was used for international communication (239). The Arameans ancestry is traced back to one "Aram" a descendant of Shem Gen. 10:22-23 set a siege against Samaria in Israel. Matthew Henry asserts, the siege which the king of Syria laid to Samaria and the great distress which the city was reduced to thereby. The Syrians had soon forgotten the kindnesses they had lately received in Samaria, and very ungratefully, for aught that appears without any provocation, sought the destruction of the city v.24. Brent points out that this was a common form of attack to surround the city and cut off the supply lines, and make the city starve before you mount your attack. This is what Syria does, creating a famine in the city of Samaria. As a result Victor Matthew's comments, naturally many people from surrounding villages came to Samaria to escape the invading army, which added the overcrowding, and the city's food supply was quickly exhausted (5). This is common in a city that is surrounded by communities experiencing war and especially when invaded by their enemy, these neighbouring villages and towns overcrowd the city for safety and humanitarian supply such as food, water, medication, shelter among others in the city and will always make the prices for basic commodities precipitously rise. It was as a result of the situation in the city of Samaria, the king came out to give orders for the mounting of the guard, the posting of the archers, the repair of the breaches, and the like, when a woman of the city cried to him, *Help, my lord, O king!*. 26. Greenfield describes him as the nameless king of Samaria who walks the walls as he considers the desperate situation with which he and his people are confronted (6:24-26). Like any other political leader faced with a difficult situation it is probable that as he tours his battlements he is calculating the advantages and disadvantages of taking risks on behalf of his city and his role as king (124).

Matthews asserts, the testimony of a complainant reveals that the siege of the city, the growing shortage of food, and the desire for survival have contributed to a grisly pact (7). The sad story was that the two starved mothers have negotiated a covenant to kill and eat their children first one, and then the other. After they have

killed and eaten one child, the mother of the surviving child breaks their covenant and hides her child in order to preserve its life (2 Kgs 6:28–30).

However, the overcrowded and starved city of Samaria no longer functions according to established social principles. With the potential for civil unrest growing, the normal mechanisms of social control like shaming are in danger of being disrupted (Matthews & Benjamin: 142–54). The question then arises, what happens when the court is out and all of the usual mechanisms associated with social control are no longer functioning? When a society is coming apart at the seams, can the normal patterns of behavior that include protection of the weak be maintained, or are they more likely to be disrupted or destroyed? Is it not more likely that disasters such as the long-term siege of a city would contribute to various forms of social adjustment and the rearrangement of everyday behaviour. Matthews observes, war, especially when it is perennial or long-term, has always been one of these major social disruptors since it contributes to a general acceptance of heightened levels of violence against persons and property and civil disorder (8). (Matthews and Don 127) discover that during the course of the nearly constant hostilities that characterized the history of the Ancient Near East, military activities (including raids on local villages as well as the besieging of cities) disrupted normal business activities, all types of travel, and typical processes like daily business, educational sector, marriages and burials among others. The degree to which negative disruptions occur and continue to escalate has a significant effect on group stability and social dynamics. Milgrom investigates and discovers that cannibalism in the Ancient Near East was likely only when there was a shortage of food to eat in the society as a result of siege (2315).

Divine Intervention in a Severe Famine

The narrator focus on a woman and her circumstances to further dramatize the problem. The crisis of cannibalism was compounded with further problem. They have boiled and eaten this woman's child the day before, but the other woman refused to release her child. Now the crisis of the nation has created an issue for these two individual citizens (59). Why should an entire city be starving, and mothers eating their own children, while four dying men are selfishly enjoying the resources in the abandoned camp? The four lepers found their way back to the city and approached the guard at the gate. Since these four men lived just outside the gate, the guard must have known them. (Warren) They gave the good news to the guards, who took the message to the king. It was indeed a day of good news as the people found food to eat and to sell back in the city, not to speak of valuable material goods that could be converted into cash. God rescued His people when they didn't deserve it, but that God fulfilled the promise He gave through His prophet Elisha, for the famine in Samaria caused by the siege, was punishments from the LORD for Israel's apostasy (cf. Lev. 26:27-29; Deut. 28:52-53, 57; Ezek. 5:10). (Constable 29) asserts that Josephus believed that the famine was a result of Jehoram's confidence in the strength of Samaria's walls, rather than in the LORD.

It was impossible for the prices to fall that low in one day and for fine flour and barley to be available so quickly. (Daniel Walter) God has delivered his people once again in an unprecedented way. Awojobi wrongly identified Elisha as “the prophet who was used by God to perform remarkable miracle... starvation and provision of food in Samaria”(106). In the context of 2Kings 6:14-7:20, Elisha did not perform any miracle. He simply announced God’s divine provision to the Samaritans. Constable rightly stated that God dispersed the besieging Aramean army supernaturally (v. 6; cf. 2:11; 6:17) and God accomplished this deliverance through no work of those whom He saved (30).

Again, Awojobi wrongly portrayed Elisha as a prophet who was in good terms with kings. “In fact kings of his day addressed him as ‘Father’” (107) but in this situation when the people were in a severe starvation of hunger the nameless king sought to kill the prophet Elisha as his father Ahab had murdered Naboth(v. 32; cf. 1 Kings 21:1-16). Note that the author portrays the king with a measure of ambiguity. While he blames God for causing the “disaster,” (6:33), he also identifies God as the only possible source of help (6:27). The dramatic reversal of the famine will come unexpectedly, by means unparalleled in biblical literature. The encounter between Elisha and the king’s adjutant who expresses doubt that Elisha’s prophecy of a restoration of normal food prices would come true even if the “windows” of heaven were to open miraculously (7:2). The four lepers played a key role in the prophecy’s fulfilment. They decided to leave the city gate and approach the enemy camp at twilight (7:5), which is precisely the time the Arameans decided to flee (7:7). Daniel Walter asserts that the outcast lepers feast on the spoils of the army camp while everyone in the city starves, the news of military victory comes from those who are disqualified for military service, and the accuracy of Elisha’s prophecy being fulfilled in 24 hours hinges on the decision of four lepers (5). (Warren W. Wiersbe 691) asserts, the very people the officer thought would die of starvation due to his unbelief came rushing out of the gate. They knocked him down, trod on his helpless body, and he died. God is always working to bring about the deliverance of his people, but the avenue of his deliverance cannot be predicted.

Hunger and Famine in a Crisis Society

Lena comments, the Ancient Near East history of insecurity of Emar in the last period of its existence, under the reigns of Pilsu-Dagan and Elli, a Syrian city situated on middle Euphrates, a vassal of the Hittite empire, subjugated to the vice-roy of Karkemish (29). Lena argued, the city of Emar went through at least one period of war and resulted to consequence, of severe famine (383). As a result, her inhabitants were unable to feed themselves and their families. In that situation, the most obvious way of conduct was to sell or borrow money from a rich fellow citizen. For example, Lena explained further, on this sale-adoption, a desperate woman sold her eldest daughter in order to feed her family (388). On this situation, the money

helped other members of the household to feed themselves and survive the severe famine.

At the height of the Soviet famine of 1920-22 cases of cannibalism were well documented; indeed, an officially sanctioned exhibition close to the Kremlin highlighted the urgency of the situation with gruesome images of cannibalism. Communist Party newspapers carried reports of it for their shock value, and a poster on display in Moscow read 'these people who eat their dead because they are hungry are not cannibals; the cannibals are those who do not give their surplus to the hungry' (14).

History indicates that during the World War II evidence of cannibalism was mentioned during the blockade-famine of Leningrad. At the height of the crisis, between early December 1941 and mid-February 1942, nearly nine hundred people were arrested for crimes relating to cannibalism (223-24).

The 1946-1947 Moldovan famine. There were stories of a peasant woman from the village of Tambula, who 'killed two of her four children, a girl of six and a boy of five, with a view to eating them', and 'another peasant from the village of Cajba' who 'killed his 12-year-old grandson. The cases cannibalism reported above were on the course of famine in those communities due to the shortage of food.

Hunger in Nigeria

Starvation in Nigeria increases year after year. In the 2022 Global Hunger Index, Nigeria ranks **103** out of the 121 countries with sufficient data to calculate 2022 GHI scores. With a score of **27.3**, Nigeria has a level of hunger that is **serious** (<https://www.globalhungerindex.org/nigeria.html>). In fact, the analysis in Premium Times shows that 12.7 per cent of Nigeria's population is undernourished. It also shows that 6.5 per cent of under-five children in the country are wasted while 31.5 per cent of children under five are stunted. It also indicates that 11.4 per cent of children in Nigeria die before their fifth birthday.

The Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970 experience, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/nigerian-civil-war-1967-1970/2023>. An estimate of 1 to 3 million Biafrans died from famine, mainly, but also violence of the 13 million Biafranians, an estimated two million died. After the capital of Biafra, Enugu fell, many Biafranians fled into the fields and forests. The Nigerian government only allowed the Red Cross to bring medicine to Biafra and no food, and as a result, a famine broke out. The Nigerian army deliberately bombarded markets, hospitals, and other civilian targets and the famine proved far too strong for the masses used as weapon to end the war in January 13, 1970.

The dearth which had of late been in the land was probably the occasion of the emptiness of their stores, or the siege was so sudden that they had not time to lay in provisions; so that, while the sword devoured without, the famine within was more grievous (Lam. 4:9) for, it should seem, the Syrians designed not to storm the city, but to starve it. So great was the scarcity that an ass's head, that has but little flesh

on it and that unsavoury, unwholesome, and ceremonially unclean, was sold for five pounds, and a small quantity of fitches, or lentils, or some such coarse corn, then called *dove's dung*, no more of it than the quantity of six eggs, for five pieces of silver, about twelve or fifteen shillings.

The Ashingini People

The word Kambari is a derogative name given to a group of people known as Âshingini and Keshingini. The word or the name Kambari according to the oral tradition is said to be given by the Hausa Fulani to identify or describe this group of people during the jihad (holy war) in the 1800s A.D by Nagwamaste a grandson of Danfodio. Investigation has shown the name Kambari is from the word (verb) *kambayi* meaning comeback. The story has been told that the Hausa Fulani jihadist invaded Âshingini communities by laying ambush around the villagers at the gate of entrance and when the people were to run for escape, in the interview with Bawa said, the invaders will come out to attack and the people will alert each other *kambayi* “come back (second person plural) don’t go out” telling each other that the enemies were around where they were heading towards. These groups of people, who speak various similar dialects, use the word *kambâ* “comeback” though it may vary in turnation but the meaning is the same, as a result the invaders who did not know the name Âshingini and did not understand the their language decided to call them kambari instead of Âshingini because of the repeated word *kambayi* they heard the people shouting and which they did not understand. In the same vein, according to research, it was the same experience Lelna people of Zuru in Kebbi State were given a derogative by this Hausa Fulani Jihadist, who changed their name from Lelna and called them Dakarkari as a generic mane. The name *Dakkarawa* from the word *Dakare* or *Dakaru* is infantry-foot soldiers instead of Lelna a name known among them (Bawa40). The Gbagi in Niger State the Hausa Fulani name them Gwari, and Igbo in the Eastern part of Nigeria the Hausa people name them Inyamiri.

The dialects spoken among Âshingini are as follows; Kâshingini known as the Awunci (the Kambari of Ngaski and Agwara Districts), Avadi (in Ibeto and some parts of Kontagora District), Âshingini(Salka District), Akimba (Wara and its environs), Âshigini or Âgaushi (Auna District) Âshe (the Kambari of Bussa District), the generic name known to identify themselves is Shingini for a person and Ashingini referring to their communities. It is similar to the Yoruba for example, the name Yoruba is a generic name given to them as an ethnic group but there are several dialects among them; the Oyo Yoruba, the Okun of Kogi, the Ekiti, the Ijesa, the Ijebu and among others. Therefore, the word Kambari is a derogative name given to the people whose dialects are related to one another.

The Âshingini people live in the western section of Nigeria’s Middle Belt, surrounding Lake Kainji (Stark J. 30). Historically they lived in walled cities, the walls of which are still visible from the air. They fled from these cities at the time of the Hausa-Fulani jihads, and were found mostly in villages of small groups

before the advent of Christianity in the early 19 century. The Kambari people has no central leader as it is found among the neighbouring tribes, for example the Lelna known as *Dakarkari* have their central leader or the Emir known as *SarkinZuru*. The Nupe people have their central leader known as *EtsuNupe* with his palace in Bida township of Niger State. In the case of the Kambari people each settlement operates under the village head or the District head. The Emir in the emirate is not ethnically Kambari, but he has some maternal connections. The Kambari cluster comprises of seven to ten languages. Barbar cited Crozier, as giving the Kambari cluster the following language family classification: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Kainji, Western, and Kambari (233). Stark being a linguist in her work titled, *Kambari Orthography Design*, says it is usually assumed that speakers of different dialects belong to the same ethnic group, and speakers of different languages belong to different ethnic groups but her investigation on the Kambari cluster has discovered this generalization does not hold (3). Mahadi and Mansur in their joint article have this to say, the Kambari groups are related to each other linguistically, in other words they have some similar words with small variations, and they also have many of the same ideas expressed by different words (44). It is observed in their investigation that, among the Kambari some do not understand one another but whenever they live together even for a short time they easily learn to understand the dialect of one another than someone who is linguistically not in their group (44).

The occupation in that region is mainly farming and few are hunters and blacksmith and some few are palm wine tappers. Among the women, some make *burukutu* local beer and do farm work with domestic activities. The Ashingini man before the Islamic and Christian era took little or no interest in formal education, carpentry or trading. But they later had interest in business and trading as they came in contact with other ethnic groups of various occupations like Hausas, Yorubas and Igbos of Nigeria. More importantly today some of the Ashingini people are literate and among them are traders, business men and women, teachers, engineers, lawyers, pastors, government workers at the Local Government, State and Federal level. Therefore, today the Ashingini people are involved in different occupations. They also rear cattle and livestock such as goats, chickens and so on.

Hunger in the Ashingini Region

The major occupation of this ethnic group is farming with emphasis on crop farming, such as maize, rice, groundnut, guinea corn, yam, pepper, sweet potato among others with little attention to animal farming. The region have the availability of good land for farming and regular rain fall annually and there is relatively good road network to transport their goods to town for either for consumption or to sell in the market. The major challenge in this region currently is insecurity and poor government policies. For example, towards the end of 2022 was cashless policy of which people in villages where there were no provision for such structure. Business transactions were halted so that those who had farm produce could not find buyers and

any buyer available bought the goods at a very terrible price because the seller is desperate to get fund to cater for other things. Farmers could not cultivate on a large scale because of insecurity. Hence, the demand is higher than the available goods in the market. As a result masses are faced with starvation of hunger. Famine or hunger is one of the most dangerous enemies of life apart of illness and disease. Experience of hunger is in a nation or society experience war, drought, epidemic or a pandemic and among others, leads to starvation and starvation leads to human body's many systems begin to deteriorate and when the situation is not salvaged, it would lead to death.

The attacks of the herdsmen, kidnappers and armed robbery has been one of the major factors of setback among the farmers. For example, some have abandoned their farm land due to the fair of bandits and kidnappers in their areas. In the last month of October this year 2023 two brothers were kidnapped in Auna District of the Niger State and the family and relatives has to contribute pay a ransom of ten million naira (10.000.000) for each of them before they were released. James Isah an indigene of TunganKade, of Salka District in the Local Government expressed his fear over the situation when the residents of that region were running for their lives for it was reported that the bandits have come into the area of Ibeto District in the same Local Government Area of the State. According to Isah, residents with live stock were running away with their flocks in the night for safety.

Another factor for hunger in the region is the poor government support for the farmers. Even though there is a policy on agriculture, it is not properly managed. For example, farmers buy the agro chemical at a very high price and the acclaimed government support for the farmers only get into the hands of certain individuals who sell agro chemicals at exorbitant price to peasant farmers. Many of the farmers who could not afford to buy the chemical experience a poor harvest. And those who were able to afford to buy the little get to sell the farm produce at a very ridiculous price because of poor liquidity of fund generally, leaving the farmer with little or no profit. For example, Bisi Abidoye reported the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) scandal, Jim Obazee, has discovered 593 bank accounts located in the United States, United Kingdom and China in which the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), under Godwin Emefiele, kept Nigerian funds without authorisation by the Board and Investment Committee of the bank. Therefore, causes of hunger in the country as a result of economic crisis. This has great effects on the economic life of the people irrespective of their occupation.

A Comparative Analysis of the Cases of Hunger

The Samarian experience of starvation of hunger that lead to cannibalism among the citizens was as a result of the sin committed against God and so He used the Assyrians as an object to punish them for sin committed. God warned that He would punish His people if they failed to live up to the terms of His covenant. Among the punishments He meted on them were military defeat (Lev. 26:17, 25, 33, 36–

39; Deut. 28:25–26, 49–52) and famine (Lev. 26:26, 29; Deut. 28:17, 48), and Israel experienced both. Had King Joram called his people to repentance and prayer, the situation would have changed (2 Chron. 7:14). People were reduced to eating unclean food, such as a donkey's head and dove's droppings, and for these they paid exorbitant prices two pounds of silver for the head and two ounces of silver for the dung. God used His divine power to rescue them by making a divine provision and used his prophet to announce the miraculous provision of food in a very lower price to the masses. God rescued His people when they didn't deserve it, but that God fulfilled the promise He gave through His prophet Elisha.

Considering the experience of the Samaritans hunger, God's intervention and the involvement of the Prophet, it is clear that each of the figures played a role that lead to the result that was encountered. More importantly, as is the concern of this paper is relating the experience in the passage to the context of the Ashingini. The reality of hunger is not debatable and its causes are not without the contribution of the people and government. What we may regard as divine intervention in the context of this paper is that the clergy or church should play the role of a prophet in the land, speaking to the people through organized seminar, preaching etc to address behaviours that cause poverty and hunger and how to alleviate hunger. Encourage the people to live in mutual love come what may as Ige have rightly noted, the important of the Yoruba culture and religion, it is mandatory to take care of the poor and destitute (582). Beyond the scope of the community under study, the Church should serve as a prophet to the government with the mind to address issues around hunger in the land. On this ground, the church is seen as the representative of God to the people conveying the mind of God to the people and government. Prophecies and prayers that there will be divine intervention as experienced in the text appraised in this paper may be futile if the context of hunger in the contemporary society is not taken into consideration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the above discussion reveals that the Samaritans experience of hunger that led to two women engaging in cannibalism as a result of a siege by the Armenian is a reflection of the economic crisis, but in a divine way it was alleviated and the Samaritan community returned to her normal activities. Meanwhile hunger among Ashingini people is as a result of economic crisis in the Nigerian nation. The Ashingini people of Magama Local Government Area of Niger State are experiencing similar challenge of insecurity and hunger. This has great effects on the economic life of the people irrespective of their occupation. To alleviate hunger in Ashingini land, it is pertinent to note that the rich and the poor, the elites and the illiterates, the Christians and the Muslims in Magama Local Government Area have roles to play. The Church especially has to play the role of a prophet in the land, speaking to the people through organized seminar, preaching etc to address behaviours that cause poverty and hunger and enlighten the members of the community on the modes to

alleviate hunger. The whole of Ashigini community would have to bear the burden together, to fight against insurgency which is one of the major causes of the economic crisis in Nigeria.

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