


‘[T]he prince and the judge ask for a bribe’ (Mi 7:3): Interpreting the Old Testament prophets on bribery in light of the encounter between motorists and law enforcement agents on Nigerian highways

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Transparency International has consistently reported a high level of corruption in sub-Saharan Africa, of which bribery is the commonest aspect. In Nigeria, bribery has been found to be an integral part of the public life of most public officials. This article related the message of the 8th-century prophets of Israel to the Nigerian context in which motorists are forced to pay bribes to law enforcement agents on the highways, and attempted to exonerate the motorists from bribery. The work employed the historical exegesis for the study of the relevant texts, and the descriptive approach for the analysis of bribery on Nigerian highways. The work found that the central context of the 8th-century prophets’ criticism of bribery was in the judicial process in which the court officials took bribes from the rich and denied justice to the poor. The message of the prophets is thus relevant to the current situation of the poor Nigerian motorists. It concluded that given the fact that the police, in particular, forcefully take money from the motorists, it is better described as extortion rather than bribery. In view of the helpless circumstances faced by the motorists, it is unlikely that the prophets would have accused them of bribery, but they certainly would have condemned the law enforcement agents for extortion. Therefore, given their situation, Nigerian motorists being extorted on the highways are not guilty of bribery.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This research involves the disciplines of the Old Testament (OT) and Christian ethics. It relates the message of the OT prophets to the Nigerian context in which motorists are forced to give bribes to the law enforcement agents. The article postulates that the motorists are absolved of bribery, given the manner by which money is extorted from them.

Keywords: bribery; Old Testament prophets; Nigerian highways; law enforcement agents; Nigerian motorists.

Introduction

The phrase ‘bribery and corruption’ is commonly used such that the two words are sometimes used synonymously – meaning that bribery cannot be discussed independent of corruption. Since 1993, Transparency International has raised worldwide awareness ‘about the devastating impact of corruption’ (Theron & Lotter 2012:97). The report of the organisation has consistently shown a high level of corruption in most of the sub-Saharan African countries (Jere 2018:2). According to the World Bank corruption is ‘the biggest challenge to socio-economic development in Africa’ (Jere 2018:2). Having studied corruption for several decades, Syed Alatas (1986) opined that ‘corruption by bribery ... is the number one problem for Third World countries’ (cited in Langston 1991:4). According to Aluko (2009:3), ‘bribery is regarded by some as the quintessential form of corruption’ (cf. Okolo & Akpokighe 2014:35; UN Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] 2019:6). In Nigeria, corruption in the form of bribery permeates ‘every aspect of public life [such that] it is extremely difficult for individuals [not] to resort to bribes’ (Aluko 2009:8).

The Penguin English Dictionary defines bribe as ‘something, especially money, given or promised to influence somebody’s judgment or conduct’ (cited in Ben-Nun 2018:10). Cobuild (1988) defined it as ‘a sum of money or something valuable that someone gives to an official in order to persuade the official to do something’ (cited in Ben-Nun 2018:10). Bribery is thus ‘the

act of taking or receiving something with the intention of influencing the recipient in some way favorable to the party providing the bribe' (Ben-Nun 2018:10).

Most writings on bribery and corruption in Nigeria usually analyse the dynamics of the subject and attempt to proffer solution. This article differs in that it does not attempt to proffer a solution to bribery. Rather, it approaches the issue from a theological perspective, postulating a similarity in the narratives of the Old Testament (OT) prophets on bribery, and bribery as it occurs on Nigerian highways amongst motorists and the law enforcement agents. It is true that there are evident dissimilarities in the ancient and modern societies in practices relating to bribery, but in contextual biblical interpretation, biblical texts are applied to modern times. This approach is an essential aspect of modern literary criticism, the purpose of which is to apply the text to the modern reader's life and circumstance. In this way, the text is made 'to speak to the present' (Mann 2011:8). In the present study, resonance is identified particularly in the socio-economic status of the victims of bribery in both contexts. In Nigeria, non-influential motorists encounter bribery on the highways but the article is particularly relevant to Christians. Because their scripture forbids bribery, many Christians have a moral burden in the context of taking and giving bribes. The aim of the article is to relate the message of the 8th-century prophets of Israel to the Nigerian context with a view to illuminating the situation of Nigerian motorists which makes them vulnerable to bribery. It is also to ascertain if the motorists who pay money to the law enforcement agents on the highways are guilty of bribery, given the circumstance in which they pay. The work employs the historical exegesis for the study of the relevant texts and the descriptive approach for the analysis of bribery prevalent on Nigerian highways. It begins by examining bribery as viewed in the OT generally, after which it identifies the victims of bribery in the 8th-century prophets. The article subsequently describes the encounter between motorists and the law enforcement agents on Nigerian roads. Finally, it attempts to ascertain if the motorists are guilty of bribery in view of their circumstances.

The Old Testament on bribery

There are only two instances of bribery (Mt 26:14–16; 28:11–15 & pars.) and an attempt of bribing (Ac 8:18–23) in the New Testament (NT). On the other hand, the word 'bribe' or 'bribery' occurs no less than 25 times in the OT. Moreover, it is in the OT that the scriptural teaching 'about bribery and what constitutes a bribe' is found (Langston 1991:19). A number of Hebrew terms are used to designate a bribe. The noun *מתנה*, a derivative of the verb *נתן* (to give), is usually rendered as 'gift', but in Proverbs 15:27 and Ecclesiastes 7:7, it refers to a bribe (Harris et al. [eds.] 1980, cited in Langston 1991:20). Similarly, *תרומה* refers to 'various offerings designated . . . for the officiating priest' (Harris et al. 1980, cited in Langston 1991:20), but it is used for bribes in Proverbs 29:4. The word *שלום* conveys the idea of peace restored by payment; however, in Micah 7:3, the term is translated as

'bribe' (Langston 1991:20). The word *כפר* is usually rendered as 'ransom' but it is translated as 'bribe' in 1 Samuel 12:3 and Amos 5:12 (Amissah 2011:129). Nonetheless, the Hebrew word primarily used for 'bribe' in the OT is *שחד*, also meaning present, gift, reward, gratuity and inducement (Hamilton 1980:914). Langston (1991:20) noted that in its verb form, *שחד* means to give a present, but is usually translated as a bribe in its noun form. Although sometimes rendered as 'gift', 'present' or 'reward' (1 Ki 15:19, 2 Ki 16:8, Pr 6:35, Is 45:13), it usually connotes the idea of bribery. In all its usages in the OT, *שחד* is either condemned or prohibited, always having 'a negative connotation except in Proverbs 17:8 which states that a bribe has the power . . . to get results without reference to it being good or bad' (Langston 1991:20).

In the OT, warning against bribery is directed towards a variety of leaders. In Micah 7:3 and Isaiah 1:23, the word *שר*, usually translated as prince or ruler, is used in reference to leaders accused of bribery. According to Cohen (1980:885), the term refers to 'royal rulers and officials . . . of sundry ranks and titles'. Princes (sing. *נשא*) are accused of extortion in Ezekiel 22:6, 7. According to Waltke (1980:601), the word is used 'to denote various leaders of Israel', and can also mean captain, chief, or ruler. Another form of leader forbidden to take bribes is the *שטר*, translated 'officers' in the plural in Deuteronomy 16:18. It is the term used in Exodus 5:6, 10 for the Hebrew officials subordinate to the Egyptian overseers of labour. Patterson (1980:918) opined that the *שטר* 'is a general term, widely used for an official in many areas of government and society'. In Micah (3:1, 9, 11), two other categories of leaders are mentioned in connection with bribes, namely *ראש* and *קצין*, both of which connote 'the idea of headship' (Langston 1991:24; cf. Adu-Gyamfi 2020:90). In the context of leadership, *ראש* is used for the notion of a chief as 'the head of a family [Ex 6:14] [or] as "chief officer" of the different divisions of Israel [Ex 18:25]' (White 1980:825). *קצין* is said to be a military term, apparently signifying a recruiting army officer. In Micah 3:1 and 9, it seems to 'denote the one at the head of an army . . . or people [i.e.] as a political ruler' (Van Groningen 1980:807). *שפט* (sing. for judges) is perhaps the category of leaders most frequently mentioned in connection with bribery (e.g. Dt 16:18, 2 Chr 19:6, 1 Sm 8:3, Mi 7:3). But unlike in modern English in which the verb to judge 'means to exercise only the judicial function of government', the root *שפט* also means to rule or to govern (Culver 1980:947), broadly designating 'the function of government in any realm and in any form' (O'Brien 1979:1296). Richards (1991) opined that the Hebrew word, *שפט* 'combined all the legislative, executive, and judicial functions of government' (cited in Ademiluka 2017:295). Thus, in Israel, the prohibition of bribery applied to all categories of leaders, that is, 'civil administration and government in the widest sense' (Langston 1991:25).

The OT teaching on bribery focuses on certain precepts. One reason why bribery is outlawed is that it 'is not in keeping with God's character of impartiality' (Langston 1991:25). It is because of his impartial nature that God does not take a bribe (Dt 10:7). In this regard, the God of Israel is different from Canaanite gods who 'could be manipulated or appeased

through offering and ritual' (Wilson 1978:14). As a matter of fact, in the ancient Near East, prohibition of bribery was unique to Israel. According to Hamilton (1980:914), in the other cultures, 'bribery was not only a common practice, but was recognized as a legal transaction'. As Noonan (1987) puts it:

In the ancient Near East the concept of the bribe did not exist. When people related to each other outside of the family or the tribe, they related to powerful strangers. If one wanted to meet a powerful stranger without a hostile reaction, one was required to bring an offering. To go empty-handed to a powerful stranger was unthinkable... [T]he break in the pattern occurred in the Hebrew Bible. (p. 742)

Closely related to the precept of God's impartiality is the principle of justice. The OT reiterates 'the dangers of bribery and its effect in destroying impartial justice' (Langston 1991:25). Bribery distorts justice (Dt 16:18); it causes perversion of justice against the innocent (Pr 17:23, Is 5:23). In denying justice to the poor and needy, bribery amounts to wickedness (Am 5:12, Is 1:23). It can even lead to 'the extreme of killing an innocent person' (Langston 1991:27; cf. Hamilton 1980:914; Dt 27:25, Ez 22:12).

One might be curious to note that '[n]othing in the Hebrew Bible condemns the [bribe] giver' (Noonan 1987:743). All the texts against bribery prohibit the taking, not the giving, of bribes. In fact, some passages apparently encourage giving bribes. For example, Proverbs 17:8 states that a bribe is a charm to its giver, making him or her successful everywhere, while in 21:14, a bribe pacifies anger (Koteskey 2012:38). Nonetheless, it would amount to a misrepresentation of the texts to conclude that the OT approves bribe giving. Foremost, it takes the presence of a giver to be able to take a bribe; if there is not one who is willing to give, there can be no taking. Hence, the laws against bribery apply automatically to both the giver and the recipient. '[T]he guilt falls on both the bribe giver and the bribe taker' (Langston 1991:40). More importantly, as will be seen in the next section, the OT teaching on bribery must have originated in the corruption of the 8th century against which the prophets preached. As noted above, the injunction against bribery was given to all the categories of Israel's leaders, which reflects the situation in which the powerful marginalised the needy, as will be discussed fully in the section below. The laws and the preaching were therefore meant for the protection of 'those who are relatively defenceless – the poor, the widows, the orphans, the weak, and the aliens' (Langston 1991:45). Therefore, the laws and the preaching are focused on the oppressors who took bribes against the defenceless. In the next section, the article examines the situation of these defenceless groups in 8th-century Israel.

The victims of bribery in the 8th-century prophets

Four prophets featured prominently in the 8th century Before the Common Era (BCE), namely Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah. According to Lundbom (2010, cited in Ademiluka

2017:302), Amos was a native of Judah but prophesied in northern Israel (Amos 7:15) during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah (783–742) and Jeroboam II (786–746) in the north. Hosea hailed from the northern kingdom and prophesied during the reigns of Joash (801–786) and Jeroboam II in Israel, and in Judah in the days of Uzziah, Jotham (742–735), Ahaz (735–715) and Hezekiah (715–687). Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries and functioned a few decades after Amos and Hosea, active in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. As popularly reported, the early 8th century was a period of significant peace and prosperity in both kingdoms, but unfortunately, a wealthy aristocratic class arose who marginalised and dispossessed the others (King 1989:4; Robinson 1979:63). As earlier discussed, these oppressors were the various categories of Israel's leaders, 'elders, judges and influential people in Israel's governance' (Amissah 2011:128). The victim groups, 'those at the receiving end of the injustice' (Ademiluka 2019:7), are given various designations by the prophets: the poor, widows, children, aliens, strangers and the needy (Ademiluka 2019:7). According to Coppes (1980:4), the needy (Heb. אֲבִיּוֹן) connotes 'one in the state of wanting, a needy or poor person'. The emphasis is really on need. From the various usages (Coppes 1980; cf. Am 2:6; 5:12; 8:4, 6):

[The אֲבִיּוֹן] is poor in a material sense... [possibly having] lost his ancestral land (Ex 23:11)... He may be without clothing (Job 31:19) or lacking food (Ps 132:15). God commands his people to loan liberally to the needy (Dt 15:7, 9, 11)... [T]he needy are those oppressed by the wicked (Pr 30:14)... [Among] the prophets... Amos especially has a major concern for the rights [of the needy]. (pp. 4–5)

Hence, Motyer (1994) stated that 'the needy' refers to the poor generally; however, in the judicial context (cf. Am 2:6), it may apply to 'those who socially have no means of redress' (cited in Ademiluka 2017:303; cf. Strydom 1995:401).

Although the texts indict the various categories of leaders of bribery against the needy, the manner in which the latter were made victims of bribery is not always very clear. Nonetheless, one can conjecture that a central context was in the judicial process through which 'the local courts received bribes from the rich and turned justice against the poor' (Strydom 1995, cited in Ademiluka 2017:301). Amos accuses Israelite leaders that 'they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes' (2:6; cf. 8:6, Revised Standard Version [RSV]). The passage is often interpreted as referring to the corrupt judicial system in which 'the judges took bribes, selling verdicts for as little as a pair of sandals' (Motyer (1994, cited in Ademiluka 2017:304). Commenting on this passage, Amissah (2011) plausibly suggested that:

[T]he judiciary connived with the party to the dispute that had higher economic status and therefore judicial influence. They [took] bribes from these elites and ... declared the innocent [i.e., the poor] guilty. (p. 115)

It is this context, then, that Isaiah (1:23; 5:23) and Micah (3:11; 7:3) must have addressed when they accuse the rulers and judges of taking bribes from the rich in order to 'deny justice to the poor' (Langston 1991:27; cf. Ademiluka 2017:304). In 5:12, Amos speaks specifically to the judicial process in his

accusation of those who afflict the just (צדיק), 'who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate' (RSV). The Mosaic law makes copious reference to the institution of the court at 'the gates of villages and towns' (Adu-Gyamfi 2020:90) where the elders presided (Dt 16:18; 21:19; 22:15) 'to administer justice and decide disputes' (Amissah 2011:128). Amos thus condemns the taking of bribes at the gates for it ran contrary to the injunction neither to pervert justice nor show partiality nor take a bribe (Dt 16:19).

Thus, the victims of bribery in the 8th-century prophets are the economically poor against whom the leaders took bribes from the rich. It is from the perspective of the socio-economic status of these victims that the prophets speak to the situation of the poor motorists on Nigerian highways, which is the focus of the following section.

The encounter between motorists and the law enforcement agents on Nigerian highways

The polarity between the rich and the poor in 8th-century Israel is discernible in the manner of law enforcement in Nigeria in that 'the power relationship between public officials and citizens typically favours the former' (UNODC 2019:9). Thus, law enforcement 'is skewed against the ordinary citizens [It is as if] belonging to law-enforcement [agencies] gives one the leverage to live above the law' (Odum 2019:25). Kasali (2012) observed that in Nigeria, 'law enforcement agents conduct themselves ... as if they desire to be feared [by] the ordinary citizens' (cited in Odum 2019:25). The law enforcement agents seem to believe that 'they are above the law, and so break laws routinely with impunity' (Odumosu 2017:115). It is their common practice to intimidate, harass, oppress and trample 'upon the rights of defenceless individuals' (Odum 2019:25). In the matter of bribery, law enforcement agents 'account for some of the largest shares of direct bribe requests ... and do so with impunity' (UNODC 2019:9).

Unlike nowadays when several of the law enforcement agencies function on the highways, in the past, only the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIOs), the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) were connected to the roads for different functions. According to Akuul (2011:19), 'the Nigeria Police is statutorily required to fight crime ... and [protect] lives and property'. Their function on the roads then is to forestall road-related crimes. The Vehicle Inspection Service is operated by the people popularly called VIOs. Statutorily, this department is 'to enforce and administer traffic laws and regulations in order to ensure the safety of lives and properties (sic) on Nigerian roads' (Raji 2016:180). The specific duties of the VIOs include, amongst others (Raji 2016):

[I]nspection and issuance of roadworthiness certificates to vehicle [owners], maintaining sanity on [the] roads and highways

with routine check of vehicles for roadworthiness ..., training and testing drivers for driver's license, ... carrying out inspection on accident vehicles, [etc.]. (p. 180)

Similar to the VIOs, the main responsibilities of the FRSC include 'preventing or minimizing accidents on the highways ... [and] the standardization of highway traffic codes' (Odum 2019:23). The NDLEA has the responsibility to tackle 'the growing, processing, manufacturing, and selling of hard drugs' (Odum 2019:24), and are therefore on the roads to tackle drug trafficking. The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) is similarly often on the roads by virtue of its 'anti-smuggling activities' (Ibrahim 2012:2). In Nigeria, one of government's approaches to the incessant insecurity 'is to create more law-enforcement outfits' (Odum 2019:21). This may explain why of recent the Nigerian Army (NA), and in some places, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) have also been drafted to function on Nigerian highways. The military may not be irrelevant on the roads because it stands for national integrity, that is, 'the symbolism of the nation's defence system ... within [and without] its boundaries' (Abdulrahman 2017:21). As the name implies, the NSCDC 'was set up with the aim of sensitizing and protecting the civil populace' (Odum 2019:23).

In the past, collection of money from motorists on Nigerian roads was characteristic only of the police, but nowadays most of the law enforcement agencies on the highways take bribes. They do this at their infamous and numerous roadblocks. While some of these roadblocks, the so-called checkpoints, are officially mounted, a good number of them are illegal. Some are just logs of woods used to block the road at both ends, with law enforcement agents manning them. Sometimes, two or three checkpoints of the different agencies are located within view of one another. At each of them, motorists are ordered to stop, ostensibly for checking of the correctness of vehicle papers, licenses and condition of vehicles. But in reality, the roadblocks serve as 'tollgates' where each motorist has to stop and give money to the agents on duty. The amount of money charged at each roadblock varies from place to place, and according to the grades of the agencies. In most places, the military and the FRSC take ₦200, while the others may take less than that. At the military checkpoints, the soldiers do not stop motorists; the latter on their own have to stop and proceed to a secluded place beside the road to drop the money. The VIOs are less frequent on the roads than the military and the FRSC, and their own bribe seems not to be fixed.

The encounter between motorists and the law enforcement agents on Nigerian highways is best illustrated in the manner by which the police demand for money at each of their ever-present roadblocks. Ibrahim (2019:3) opined that 'demanding and collecting bribes in the roadways is (sic) a regular police activity'. Hence, Nigerians, in general, believe that the NPF is the most corrupt public institution, and 'this is the image the public has of the average policeman' (Nte 2011:548). An erstwhile Inspector General of Police, Mike Okiro, once affirmed that 'corruption has come to characterise the behaviour of the average policeman' (Okiro 2007, cited in

Aborishade & Fayemi 2015:246). Commenting on the police roadblock syndrome, former President of Nigeria, Obasanjo (1999) stated that 'there is no difference between some police officers and armed robbers as ... [the manner by which] the police ... extort money from road users ... defies all sense of decency' (cited in Nte 2011:548). The UNODC (2019:48) found that in 2019, 'over one third (35.7%) of all bribes paid in Nigeria go to police officers'. Writing on the activities of the police in Awka in Anambra State, Nnadozie (2021:109) reported that 'police monetary bribery [is still] widespread and prevalent in the highways, roadblocks, [and] streets'. Originally, the checkpoints were 'put in place to combat ... crimes [but] in practice [they] have become lucrative criminal points for bribery (Human Rights Watch 2010:26). At the roadblocks, '[i]t is a common sight ... for police officers to be seen collecting money from private and commercial motorists' (Aborishade & Fayemi 2015:247). The amount paid to the police at the roadblocks, especially by commercial drivers, has graduated with time. Currently, in most places, each of them pays a fixed amount of ₦50 at each roadblock, and sometimes, there may be up to three or more within 1 km. The drivers are well familiar with the practice, and to avoid the waste of time and other likely repercussions of refusal to pay, most often they just pay and pass. As Shuaib (2015:30) puts it, 'Individuals frisked at police check points in Nigeria are likely to pay bribe in order to avoid wasting their precious time'. Commercial bus drivers, particularly, know the standing rule such that 'on sighting any police checkpoint, they slow down and hand-in the money' (Nnadozie 2021:111).

Men of the Nigeria Police employ various tactics to extract money from motorists, the most common of which is what Nnadozie (2021:113) called 'a beggarly behavior', which is depicted in their language. Whilst begging for money from motorists, policemen use terms such as 'Oga wetin you carry'; 'Anything for your boys?'; 'Find something for us'; etc. (Nnadozie 2021:113). Usually, it is when a driver fails to give them money that the police ask for his particulars. And even when the papers are valid, it does not guarantee that a motorist will be allowed to pass. As Human Rights Watch (2010:29) found out from some drivers:

If you have your documents right, they [*the police*] will use their brain and ask you something you don't know ... [*just to*] find a way to snatch money from you. (cf. Nnadozie 2021:114)

Once in a while, some drivers get frustrated and refuse to pay. When this happens, the driver may be ordered to park, and the passengers to alight until he pays.

On account of drivers failing to pay the mandatory ₦50, policemen do 'arrest, detain, torture, maim, and kill at the roadblocks' (Human Rights Watch 2010, cited in Aborishade & Fayemi 2015:252). Oyewale (2005) attested to the fact that 'Many persons who refused to comply with the bribe demanded by policemen at the roadblocks and tollgates have met their untimely death in the hands of such policemen' (cited in Inyang & Ubong 2013:277). Oyewale cited some instances of killing by policemen at the roadblocks (cited in Inyang & Ubong 2013):

On November 14, 2002 [*at Enugu, a policeman*] killed four and injured eight Christian worshippers returning from a vigil service ... [*because*] the driver refused to hand over a ₦60.00 bribe but decided to give ₦20.00 instead. [*Similarly,*] Kehinde Adeniji, a driver and Bolanle Banidele, a passenger were killed by a policeman at [*a*] roadblock ... between Ita-Odo and Aramoko [*in Ekiti State*] on June 3, 2004. [*It happened*] when they were stopped and asked to pay ₦20.00, which the driver declined. On July 8, 2005 along Acme Road, Ogba, Lagos Blessing Ighinovia, a policeman, murdered Fedelis Okoji, for interfering in a disagreement between [*him*] and a bus driver [*who*] refused to give the ₦20.00. (p. 278)

Killing by the police at the checkpoints is no more rampant as in the past, but as reported by Nnadozie (2021:114–115), it is still common for the police to 'slap and beat up' drivers who refuse to give them money. Sometimes, such drivers are detained 'until they ... negotiate payment for their release'.

Thus, the police checkpoints have not served their original purpose of crime prevention. According to Human Rights Watch (2010):

[R]ather than combating crime the police checkpoints in Nigeria are ... used primarily for the purposes of extorting money from motorists. [*They*] ... do very little to reduce crime and improve security, primarily because members of criminal gangs often pay off corrupt police officers who appear more intent on extorting money from motorists than combating crime. (p. 31)

Perhaps, in recognition of this fact, 'the police leadership has on multiple occasions ordered' the removal of the roadblocks but they have always returned and the extortion at them has got worse (Human Rights Watch 2010:31). To this end, Nigerian motorists have become complacent about police bribery on the highways, accepting it 'as an inevitable fact of everyday life, [for which reason many] ... just want to pay and go their way' (Human Rights Watch 2010:24). The complacency of the drivers may explain why police bribery on the highways is performed with the highest degree of impunity, as it is also seldom reported. '[P]aying a bribe is such a common practice in Nigeria that it is not worth reporting it' (UNODC 2019:9). The UNODC (2019) found that in 2019, only 3.6% of people who paid bribes made any report to the appropriate authorities. The low level of reportage is born out of the fact that a high percentage of the people who have reported bribery 'experienced either no follow-up, were discouraged from reporting or suffered negative consequences' (UNODC 2019:9). Many would not bother reporting bribery by the police on the highways to higher authorities in the Police Force itself because of the general impression that 'the police are in the habit of displaying their corrupt tendencies in criminal investigations' (Aborishade & Fayemi 2015:247).

Some people have adduced reasons for the prevalent police corruption, particularly taking bribes on the roads. Enemo (2020) attributed the menace to the Nigerian 'corrupt value system and mind-set' by which:

[*Bribery*] has become an acceptable way of life among many Nigerians... Accordingly, most of those bad people recruited in

the Police Force always see the job as a quick means of making money... This is the reason some [motorists] ... move around without vehicle particulars ... and if confronted by the Police, they would quickly and easily use money to appease them. (p. 383)

It is often said that the agency has been neglected by successive governments, thereby 'making their condition of service to remain poor... [I]n the area of remuneration, the police job is one of the poorest paid in the country' (Inyang & Ubong 2013:278). The underfunding of the Police Force is also said to be 'evidenced in their inadequate office and poor residential accommodation' (Akuul 2011:21; cf. Enemy 2020:382). Hence, as Akuul asserted, 'Most police officers indulge in collecting bribes because of their meagre take home' (Akuul 2011:21). While the claim of poor condition of service is true, which is not peculiar to the police (Akuul 2011:21), there are indications that police bribery on Nigerian highways has become institutionalised. According to Human Rights Watch (2012; cited in Aborishade & Fayemi 2015):

[There is a] perverse system of 'returns' instituted by some senior police officers, in which rank-and-file officers are compelled to pay up the chain of command a share of the money they extort from the public... While they are [on the roads], the officers are mandated to meet daily or weekly monetary targets for their sponsors or risk being 'punished' with transfer to a posting with lower extortion potentials. [It thus becomes] morally inappropriate for such senior officers to hold subordinates accountable for extortion. (p. 253)

This explains why the practice of bribery on the highways has continued with impunity and why many feel that it will be counter-productive to report to higher ranks in the police. Those on the roads are merely running errands for the officers of higher ranks. As Nnadozie (2021:111) puts it, 'police leadership is not just aware of the widespread police monetary bribery but they are the engineers of the crime itself'.

Given the circumstance in which Nigerian motorists are made to pay bribes to the police and other law enforcement agencies on the highways, the section below examines if the former are guilty of bribery, particularly from the biblical perspective.

Are the motorists guilty of bribery?

As seen above, the act in which motorists give money to the law enforcement agents on Nigerian roads is commonly described as bribery. But as also seen in some of the sources already cited, some prefer to call it extortion. As earlier mentioned, a bribe is 'something, especially money, given or promised to influence somebody's judgment or conduct' (*The Penguin English Dictionary*, cited in Ben-Nun 2018:10). According to Peterson (ed. 1975:452), extortion is 'The act or crime of getting another's money or property through force, under color of office, fraud, forgery, intimidation, threat, blackmail, oppression or show of right'. This means that, unlike bribery, extortion involves (Langston 1991):

[S]ome kind of pressure on [a] person [to make him] ... surrender a portion of his money or possessions to someone who has no legal right to it. The pressure may ... range from physical harassment [or] ... harm to subtle psychological pressure. (p. 16)

When the term is restricted to public officials, it involves the official using his or her 'position or office ... as a means of exerting pressure to take something of value other than what is required by law' (Langston 1991:16). As discussed in the preceding section, the law enforcement agents use their respective offices to take money from motorists. To force money out of the motorists, the police, with their guns in hand, harass and threaten them. They have killed many motorists who refused to give them money. In these circumstances, therefore, the experience of the motorists is better described as extortion rather than bribery. As also discussed in the preceding section, the motorists are defenceless in that they have no higher trustworthy authorities to which to report their experiences. Defencelessness is thus one thing that these motorists share with the victims of bribery in the 8th-century prophets. Another characteristic they share with these victims is their socio-economic status. The largely affected road users are the commercial drivers, most of whom are employees of the vehicle owners, usually on meagre salaries barely enough to maintain their families. As Odum (2019:25) rightly observed, the police in Nigeria is committed to serving 'top government functionaries and highly placed individuals within the society'. At their roadblocks, the law enforcement agents hardly stop people of this class. On recognising such people, usually, the law enforcement agents either beg them for money or simply let them pass. As discussed in the section on the 8th-century prophets on bribery, message indicates sympathy for the defenceless poor. It is because of their sympathy for the helpless and the needy that the prophets seem to be silent on bribe-givers, condemning the aristocratic class who took bribes to deny justice to the defenceless. In view of the similarity in the socio-economic status of the victims of bribery in the prophets and the Nigerian motorists being extorted by the law enforcement agents, the sympathy of the prophets is equally applicable to the motorists. In other words, the prophets would not have accused the helpless motorists of bribery. Instead, they would have condemned particularly the police for extortion, just as they did those in ancient Israel who took bribes to deny justice to the poor. From this theological perspective, therefore, given their helpless circumstance, Nigerian motorists being extorted on the highways are not guilty of bribery.

Conclusion

This article has applied a theological approach to the examination of bribery in Nigeria as it occurs on Nigerian highways between motorists and the law enforcement agents. It identified a similarity in the socio-economic status of the victims of bribery in ancient Israel and Nigerian motorists who are forced to pay money to the law enforcement agents. The work discovered that biblical teaching on bribery is found mainly in the OT, where the

teaching against bribery is directed towards the leaders of the society. Old Testament teaching on bribery focuses on God's character of impartiality and the principle of justice. The central context of the 8th-century prophets' criticism on bribery was in the judicial process in which the court officials took bribes from the rich in order to deny justice to the poor. In this regard, the article found the message of the prophets relevant to the situation of the poor Nigerian motorists from whom the law enforcement agents take bribes on daily basis. The manner by which the police, in particular, take money from the motorists involves harassment and intimidation, so much that many drivers who refused to give them money have been killed. To this end, 'extortion' describes the experience of the motorists with the law enforcement agents better than 'bribery'. Thus, like the victims of bribery as described by the 8th-century prophets, the Nigerian motorists are poor, helpless and defenceless, as there are no trustworthy authorities to which they can report their experiences. Given the helpless circumstance of the motorists, it is unlikely that the prophets would have accused them of bribery. Rather, they would have condemned the law enforcement agents for extortion, just as they did the corrupt leaders of Israel who took bribes to deny justice to the poor. Therefore, given their situation, Nigerian motorists being extorted on the highways are not guilty of bribery.

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Author's contributions

S.O.A. is the sole author of this article.

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