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Socio-Exegetical Interpretation of 1 Kings 17:13b within the Context of Nigerian Economic Vulnerability and Clerical Authority

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Abstract

Religion in Nigeria functions as both a source of empowerment and a mechanism of exploitation, particularly within the context of widespread poverty, inflation, and post-COVID socio-economic instability. With over 90 million Nigerians living below the poverty line, Christian clergy have emerged as influential figures not only in spiritual matters but also in economic and psychological spheres. This study examines the intersection of clerical authority and economic vulnerability in Nigerian Christianity through a socio-exegetical analysis of 1 Kings 17:13b, the account of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. This passage is frequently employed in Nigerian churches to promote sacrificial giving, often presented as a demonstration of faith with the promise of divine reward. However, concerns have been raised regarding the potential manipulation of impoverished or widowed congregants under such teachings. By drawing contextual parallels between the widow's plight and that of many Nigerian believers, this research explores the theological implications and ethical challenges of applying this text in contemporary preaching. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines biblical exegesis with empirical

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data collected from 274 clergy and laity respondents. The findings reveal a divide: while many interpret Elijah's request as a test of faith affirming prophetic authority, others caution against its exploitation for personal or institutional gain. Respondents also stress the importance of embodying Elijah's compassion and tangible support, not merely spiritual exhortation. The study concludes that interpretations of 1 Kings 17:13b must be grounded in pastoral ethics, particularly in economically vulnerable contexts. Churches are urged to promote accountability, encourage voluntary giving, and invest in robust welfare initiatives to fulfill their holistic mission as both spiritual leaders and agents of social support.

Keywords: Clerical Authority; Economic Vulnerability; 1 Kings 17; Socio-Exegetical Analysis; Pastoral Ethics

INTRODUCTION

Religion, national economy, and living standards in Nigeria have fostered both physical empowerment and spiritual growth but also led to exploitation of some of the religious adherents. While some see the clergy as leaders with spiritual authority, the increasing prevalence of corrupt practices and the lack of robust accountability mechanisms within some religious organizations raises concerns about the clergy's ethical leadership. With a population of over 230 million in which over 90 million people grapple with poverty, inflation, unemployment, insecurity and depression in this post-COVID-19 era (Adeniran & Olanrewaju, 2021), the role of religious leaders in Nigeria—particularly Christian clergy—has expanded beyond spiritual guidance to include socio-economic and psychological influences (Ukah, 2008). In this environment, religious authority is often exercised with profound implications, positively or negatively, on the religious adherents, irrespective of their gender or social and economic status. Many church members, desperate for divine blessings, healings and intervention, submit to clerical directives that require them to give sacrificially, sometimes to the detriment of their own socio-economic survival or that of their families (Gifford, 2016; Jegede, et al, 2023; Luka &Gofwan, 2025).

The biblical narrative of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, as recorded in 1 Kings 17, has gained particular prominence within Christian discourse in Nigeria. This is largely due to the divine promise made to Elijah that "the jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth" (1

Kings 17:14, ESV). In a world where people are less willing to give out, they are more inclined to think about their present and future needs before giving out from what they imagine is not enough. God's assurance to the widow, conveyed by Elijah, anticipated her obedience in meeting his need for food and water even during a time of famine. It was not an assurance for nothing, but a "reward" for a positive response in faith. Elijah's request was to make a small cake of bread for him and then for himself and his son, as the Lord, the God of Israel, says that the jar of flour and jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land. This text (1 Kings 17:14) is frequently cited in letters and appeals from churches and Christian individuals seeking financial support for various ecclesiastical or community-based projects. The popularity of this passage in such contexts may be justified, as it symbolically captures the socio-economic vulnerability faced by many Nigerians today—marked by persistent inflation, widespread unemployment and underemployment, insecurity, and increasing levels of poverty (Adewale, 2020; Eze, 2022).

In many ways, the widow of Zarephath represents the archetype of the common Nigerian citizen: limited resources, uncertain future, yet still called upon to act in faith. The Church, like Elijah, continues to present divine assurances to a people in crisis, encouraging sacrificial giving and trust in divine provision. However, this call must be balanced with the Church's own responsibility to respond meaningfully and compassionately to the needs of its members and wider society. Elijah's visitation to the widow was not only a test of faith but also a moment of divine intervention that preserved life in a time of drought. Similarly, the Church in Nigeria is called to be a vessel of hope and provision, not merely a recipient of support. Therefore, in the context of Nigeria Christendom, this verse (1 King 17:13b) resonates with themes of faith, generosity, and trust in God's provision. It highlights the importance of prioritizing God's needs before one's own, even in the face of scarcity. In this light, the appeal to 1 Kings 17 goes beyond a plea for help—it becomes a theological statement of trust, communal responsibility, and prophetic solidarity in times of hardship (Ogunbanwo, 2019; Okoh, 2021; Ogunlusi & Aina, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

In contemporary Nigerian Christianity, especially within Pentecostal and Anglican traditions, scriptural passages like 1 Kings 17:13b are frequently invoked by clergy to solicit financial and material support from congregants. While such appeals are often framed within a theology of faith and divine provision, there is growing concern over the ethical

implications of using religious authority to pressure economically vulnerable members—particularly widows and low-income earners—into sacrificial giving. Amid widespread poverty, inflation, and unemployment, many Christians find themselves in precarious socio-economic conditions. Yet, in their desperation for divine intervention, they are often persuaded to prioritize clerical demands over personal or familial needs. This dynamic raise critical questions about the balance between faith-based obedience and the socio-economic exploitation of vulnerable believers. Furthermore, there is insufficient scholarly engagement with how biblical texts are interpreted and applied within such contexts, and how these interpretations impact ethical pastoral practices, spiritual formation, and church-member relations. There is also a lack of data-driven analysis on how clergy and laity perceive the boundaries of clerical authority in matters of giving and economic responsibility. This study seeks to address these gaps by critically analysing the socio-theological use of 1 Kings 17:13b, investigating the ethical implications of clerical appeals, and exploring the pastoral responsibility of churches in supporting economically disadvantaged members.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the socio-exegetical meaning of 1 Kings 17:13b in the context of Nigerian Christianity, particularly its theological implications for faith, obedience, and divine provision.
2. To analyze the role of clerical authority in influencing economic decisions among church members in Nigeria, especially regarding sacrificial giving.
3. To investigate the perceptions of clergy and laity on the ethical use or misuse of biblical texts such as 1 Kings 17:13b in church teachings and appeals for donations.
4. To explore the socio-economic vulnerability of Nigerian Christians, particularly widows and low-income earners, in relation to pastoral demands for sacrificial giving.
5. To evaluate the welfare responsibilities of the Church in Nigeria and how they balance spiritual appeals with tangible support for struggling members.

Research Questions

1. How is 1 Kings 17:13b interpreted among Nigerian Christians, and what socio-theological themes are emphasized in its application?

2. In what ways do Nigerian clergy utilize their spiritual authority to influence economic giving among church members?
3. What are the perceptions of both clergy and laity on the ethical boundaries of using scriptures like 1 Kings 17:13b for soliciting offerings?
4. How does clerical appeal for sacrificial giving affect the economic well-being of vulnerable church members, especially widows and the poor?
5. To what extent do churches in Nigeria provide welfare support to economically disadvantaged members in light of their spiritual demands?

Limitations of the Study

The study focuses primarily on Nigerian Christianity, especially among Anglican and Pentecostal expressions, and may not fully capture other global or denominational nuances. Interpretation of biblical texts is contextually framed within Nigerian socio-economic conditions and may not apply universally.

Theoretical Framework

The divine right of clerical authority, often intertwined with the divine right of kings, is the belief that religious authority, particularly that of clergy in Nigeria, is derived traditionally and directly from God and not from human election or appointment. This theory suggests that clergy are God's representatives on Earth, and their teachings and directives are divinely inspired and must be obeyed. It can be seen as a justification for hierarchical structures within Christian organisations with clergy at the top and laity below, with the clergy acting as intermediaries between God and the faithful in Nigeria (Avis, 2000). The divine right theory suggests God has chosen specific individuals or groups to interpret His will and exercise His authority, as seen in biblical traditions like prophets and priests. However, this theory faces criticism in the modern era, as people question the validity of relying solely on religious authority. 1 Kings 17:13b suggests a divine right theory of leadership, with prophets in ancient Israel believed to be divinely appointed messengers (McBrien, 2008). The passage emphasizes that Elijah's authority comes from his connection to God, and obedience to his instructions results in divine blessings. This suggests that following the commands of divinely appointed leaders leads to positive outcomes and divine blessings.

According to the ontological theory of clerical authority in Nigerian Christianity, ordination gives clergy members a unique, divinely granted authority that transforms them into beings capable of carrying out particular tasks, such as administering sacraments, pardoning sins, and performing other sacraments that laypeople are unable to perform. Some theologians caution against interpretations of ontological change that could result in clericalism, the belief in the inherent superiority of clergy over laypeople, as this can be a source of injustice and division within the church. It is also believed that this theory has its roots in the divine nature of the Church and Christ's ability to empower His ministers not through human elections or social standing; in fact, some also highlighted the issue of the shared priesthood of all baptised believers, contending that the universal call to holiness and service—rather than a hierarchical structure—should be the main focus (Balog, 2024; Billingham, 2014). An ontological perspective on 1 Kings 17:13b would focus on the nature of God as revealed in the text and its implications for understanding reality. The widow's obedience and faith in God's promise are central to the story. This implies that human faith and trust in God are essential for encountering his presence and experiencing his blessings. Therefore, for the widow, her son, and Elijah, 1 Kings 17 highlights God's dunamis, providence, and capacity to act beyond human bounds.

The charismatic theory of clerical authority, according to Max Weber, posits that power and authority within religious institutions are not solely based on tradition or legal-rational systems but also on the personal qualities and perceived exceptional abilities of religious leaders in Nigeria. These leaders, often perceived as having a special connection to a divine power or possessing extraordinary insight, inspire loyalty and obedience from their followers (Joosse, 2014; Adair-Toteff, 2005; Meslec et al., 2020). In Nigeria, Pastors wield significant charismatic authority, influencing politics, public policy, and culture. This influence stems from their ability to translate religious beliefs into actionable solutions for societal problems and their often-perceived connection to spiritual power. They exert considerable power over their church members, and their impact extends beyond religious circles (Ababio, 2025). Some scholars argue that the charismatic authority of Pastors can also have negative consequences, such as reinforcing patriarchal structures and promoting a narrow interpretation of faith. However, others see them as agents of social change and empowerment, particularly for marginalised groups (Patsiaoura, 2019). In the context of 1 Kings 17:13b, Elijah demonstrates his faith and trust in God by encouraging the widow to continue using her limited resources, assuring her that the flour and oil will not run out. He

uses his words to build hope and faith in the face of adversity, showing a strong connection to God and his ability to inspire others. This act showcases his charisma, as he inspires her with a promise that goes against the odds, demonstrating his unwavering belief in God's provision.

Conceptual Framework

There are many different viewpoints on the complex philosophical relationship between clerical authority and economic vulnerability. While some contend that clerical authority can exacerbate vulnerability, others view it as a social support system and moral compass. While some philosophies believe that authority is essential to maintaining social order, others place a higher value on individual autonomy.

1. **Liberation theology:** This perspective, particularly influenced by thinkers like Gustavo Gutiérrez and others, emphasizes the need for social justice and the liberation of oppressed groups, often viewing religious institutions as having a responsibility to address economic inequality (Garrett, 2024).
2. **Utilitarianism:** Utilitarianism, which focuses on maximizing overall well-being, might argue that the actions of clerical authority should be judged by their impact on the well-being of the vulnerable (Ruona & Lynham, 2004).
3. **Social contract theory:** This theory suggests that individuals consent to be governed by a political authority, and that authority has a responsibility to protect the rights and well-being of its citizens, including those who are economically vulnerable (Stuifbergen & Van Delden, 2011; Gongqing, 2025).
4. **Critical theory:** Critical theorists might analyse how clerical authority, in its various forms, contributes to or perpetuates systems of oppression and economic exploitation.

In 1 Kings 17:13b, Elijah tells a struggling widow that God will provide, even if she shares with him. This verse, viewed sociologically, highlights the interplay of clerical authority, economic vulnerability, and communal support in a challenging context. Elijah's prophetic authority, coupled with the widow's dire situation, reveals how religious leaders can leverage their status to address social inequalities and foster solidarity, even when resources are scarce. The story implicitly highlights social stratification within the community. The widow, likely from a marginalized group, is in dire need, while Elijah represents a position of

power within the religious sphere. The encounter between the prophet and the widow serves as a religious discourse on social justice and the importance of caring for the vulnerable. Elijah's words, coupled with the miraculous provision, challenge the social order and reinforce the idea that God's grace transcends social status. This suggests that in the ancient Near Eastern context, divine favor and obedience were seen as crucial factors in securing economic stability and prosperity (Dickson & Edy-Ewoh, 2013).

A psychological analysis of 1 Kings 17:13b focused on faith, obedience, and independence, addressing topics such as anxiety, hope, and the ability of faith to conquer fear. For the widow, economic scarcity and poverty are not abstract concepts but rather existential. The widow's psychological state is characterised by desperation combined with maternal instinct, hopelessness, and emotional exhaustion, as well as fear of death ("that we may eat it—and 'die'—v.12). Therefore, Elijah's demand in 1 Kings 17:13 can be viewed as an infringement on survival anxiety based on faith; her ultimate compliance shows a complicated interaction between risk-taking motivated by a belief in supernatural results, faith in divine intervention through a cleric, and compliance brought on by desperation (a coping mechanism) (McMinn, 2011). Also, in the context of Nigerian Christianity, the biblical story emphasises the ethical use of clergy authority in economically stressed environments, particularly in Nigeria, and the need for compassion and discernment when seeking material support from economically vulnerable members, as the psychological impact on these members can be severe. Pastoral sensitivity is also crucial, as economic vulnerability can exacerbate emotional instability (Gifford, 2009; Doehring, 2015). The passage also encourages clergy to model faith and sacrifice, as seen in the example of Elijah, who shared suffering and mutual upliftment, rather than demanding sacrificial giving without personal involvement.

Medically, the symptoms of malnutrition or near starvation, which include exhaustion, weakened immunity, and stunted growth, are present in the widow and her son in 1 Kings 17; their mental health is also impacted by this anxiety, which can result in fear, despair, and depression. Giving away food may hasten death, particularly in young children who are already at risk. Even though Elijah's request is both ethically and medically speculative, it can be viewed as a test of faith based

on prophetic authority and a means of transforming fear into trust. Given that clergy can either calm or agitate people depending on the situation and tone, his words and presence might have had a placebo effect.

Exegetical Framework

According to the Bible, Jerusalem served as the capital of the northern and southern kingdoms that split off from the Kingdom of Israel around the ninth century BC. By promoting the building of regional temple altars for sacrifices and selecting priests from outside the Levite family, Omri, King of Israel, put into effect policies that redirected religious attention away from Jerusalem. Additionally, he permitted the construction of temples to the ancient Canaanite deity Baal. Through a matrimonial partnership between his son Ahab and Princess Jezebel, Omri was able to attain domestic security. The Israelite prophets, who supported a rigorous deuteronomic interpretation of religious law, were not placated by these solutions, although there was economic wealth and security in Israel (Miller & Hayes, 2006). Tensions rose throughout Ahab's reign as he constructed additional temples for Baal and imported a sizable group of prophets and priests from Asherah and Baal. Elijah, often referred to as "the Tishbite," forewarned Ahab that he and his queen would face devastating drought years because they were descended from monarchs who had "done evil in the sight of the Lord." As a “prefiguring” of the forerunner of the Messiah, according to the book of the Prophet Malachi, it was projected that God would send Elijah the prophet before the coming “day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5). John the Baptist was spoken of as the one who would go before the Messiah “in the spirit and power” of Elijah (Lk. 1:17). John would himself deny that he was a reincarnation of Elijah even though, in dressing and lifestyle, there were similarities between them (Jn. 1:21, 25). In direct relationship with the Messiah, Elijah appeared along with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus to discuss His departure (Matt. 17:4; Mk. 9:5; Lk. 9:33) (Johnson, 2025). In his prophetic ministry, he stressed the need for unconditional loyalty to God and was opposed to the accepted standards of the times, especially as it concerned the belief in many gods. He became therefore an instrument of God’s judgement upon a wayward Isreal because of the sin of Idolatry (Johnson, 2025). God commands Elijah to leave Israel after his encounter with Ahab and seek refuge by the stream Chorath, east of the Jordan, where he would be fed by ravens (1 Kings 17). God sends him to a widow in the Phoenician town of Zarephath when the spring dries up. This story can be seen as a "restive" or unsettling story for young people because it challenges their understanding of

the world and their place within it (Ogunbiyi, et al, 2025). The story exposes the powerlessness of the powerful and the unexpected strength of the vulnerable, which can be unsettling for those who are accustomed to a more predictable social order.

The story of Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath, found in 1 Kings 17:8-24, portrays a miraculous period of provision and resurrection during a famine in Israel. The story of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-24) offers insights into dealing with depression in Nigeria. While the widow experienced immense hardship, including the death of her son, the story highlights resilience, faith, and the importance of trusting in God's provision, even in the face of overwhelming challenges (Ogunbiyi, 2025). The biblical idea of God's sovereignty and compassion for strangers is consistent with God's use of a non-Israelite widow (Brueggemann, 2000). God sends Elijah to Zarephath, where he commands a widow, despite her own scarcity, to share her food with him. Elijah's faith and God's promise ensure that their flour and oil miraculously last throughout the famine, demonstrating God's care and provision. Later, tragedy strikes when the widow's son dies, but Elijah prays to God, and the boy is miraculously brought back to life (Moore, 2018). To highlight obedience and trust, God sends Elijah to Zarephath, where he will be cared for by a widow. The widow demonstrates faith-based obedience and confidence in God by sharing her scant food with Elijah, despite her own severe circumstances (1 Kings 17:10-14) (Walton, et al, 2016). Elijah reassures the widow that she will have enough wheat and oil, and God miraculously fulfils this promise (1 Kings 17:15-16). The widow's faith is tested when her son grows ill and dies (1 Kings 17:17-18), illustrating the fragility of human life. After Elijah hard prophetic intercession and prayer's posture to God, the child miraculously recovers, proving God's kindness and might (1 Kings 17:19-23) (Leithart, 2006). The widow's confession of faith "Now I Know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth" (1 Kings 17:24). The story emphasises the importance of faith and obedience, God's care for his people, and the transformative power of God's miracles. His second miracle was his encounter with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah (1kgs.18:19-40), to determine the true God. In both these encounters Yahweh the God of Israel whom Elijah served prevailed, and Elijah ordered the deaths of the false prophets. His third miracle was his declaration of the end of the drought (1Kgs.18:4) after three years. He would later outrun Ahab's chariot and the storm to arrive at Jezreel (Johnson, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive socio-exegetical understanding of 1 Kings 17:13b within the Nigerian Christian context. The qualitative component includes exegetical and theological analysis, while the quantitative aspect is based on survey data collected from selected church participants (both clergy and laity).

Population and Sample

The target population comprises Christian clergy and laity across various denominations in Nigeria, particularly those active in urban and semi-urban church settings. The study employed purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with theological training, pastoral experience, or active church involvement. Sample Size: 274 respondents

Data Collection Instruments

1. Structured Questionnaire: A standardized survey was administered, consisting of both closed and Likert-scale questions. These assessed respondents' perceptions of 1 Kings 17:13b, clerical authority, sacrificial giving, and economic vulnerability.
2. Exegetical Analysis: A theological examination of 1 Kings 17:8–24 was conducted, with particular focus on verse 13b, using historical-critical and socio-theological methods.
3. Literature Review: Secondary data were obtained from peer-reviewed journals, theological commentaries, and socio-religious studies related to clerical authority and economic justice in Nigeria.

Data Analysis

- Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage) to identify patterns in respondents' views.
- Qualitative data (biblical and theological content) were interpreted through socio-exegetical analysis, correlating scriptural interpretations with real-life applications.
- Findings from both datasets were triangulated to ensure a nuanced understanding of the topic.

RESULTS

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was pre-tested among a small group of clergy and lay leaders for clarity, relevance, and internal consistency. Expert review from biblical scholars and theologians helped ensure content validity. Reliability was reinforced through consistent data coding and cross-verification of interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

- Participation was voluntary.
- Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.
- Ethical approval was obtained through informal consent and adherence to research standards in theological education and human research ethics.

Section A: Demographic Survey

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	77	28.1%
	Female	197	71.9%
Age	20–35 years	45	16.4%
	36–50 years	61	22.3%
	51 years and above	168	61.2%
Marital Status	Single	17	6.2%
	Married	102	37.2%
	Widowed	155	56.6%
Education Level	Tertiary (Diploma/Bachelor's)	78	28.4%
	Postgraduate (Master's/PhD)	183	66.6%
	Professional Certification	13	4.7%
Occupation	Civil Servants	87	31.7%
	Private Sector Workers	67	24.4%
	Clergy/Church Workers	120	43.8%
Church role	Clergy	154	56.2%
	Laity	120	43.8%

The demographic data gathered for this study reflects a broad representation of individuals involved in Nigerian Christianity, particularly in clerical and lay contexts. Out of a total of 274 respondents, the gender distribution shows that 77 respondents are male, representing 28.1%, while 197 respondents are female, representing 71.9%. This means more females participated in the survey than males.

The age distribution shows that the majority of participants fell within the 36 to 50-year age bracket (22.3%), suggesting a mature and experienced population. Respondents aged 51 years and above constituted 61.2%, while those in the 20–35 age group made up 16.4%, highlighting a smaller representation of younger voices.

In terms of marital status, a significant proportion, 56.6%, were widowed, while 37.2% were married, and 6.2% were single. This trend may reflect the pastoral challenges and life transitions commonly experienced in ministerial vocations, especially among clergy families.

Educationally, the survey revealed a highly educated population: 66.6% held postgraduate degrees (Master's or PhD), 28.4% had tertiary-level education (Diploma or Bachelor's), and 4.7% held professional certifications. This level of academic attainment suggests that most respondents engage critically with theological and socio-economic issues.

Regarding occupational categories, church workers and clergy comprised the largest segment (43.8%), followed by civil servants (31.7%) and private sector employees (24.4%). This distribution supports the focus of the research on clerical authority and economic vulnerability.

Finally, in terms of church roles, clergy made up 56.2% of the respondents, while laity represented 43.8%. This balance offers a valuable cross-section of perspectives within church life, particularly concerning the interpretation of 1 Kings 17:13b and its implications for economic ethics and spiritual leadership in Nigeria.

Section B: Socio-Exegetical Interpretation of 1 Kings 17:13b, Clerical Authority and Member's Economic Vulnerability

Statement	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
In 1 Kings 17:13b, what Elijah requested from the widow of Zarephath should be interpreted as a test of faith.	129 47.1%	56 20.5%	19 6.9%	21 7.6%	49 17.9%
Elijah's request in 1 Kings 17:13b emphasises clerical authority	32 11.7%	199 72.6%	8 2.9%	12 4.4%	23 8.4%
The Bible presents giving and charity as integral acts of worship, demonstrating devotion to God and love for others.	171 62.4%	10 3.7%	17 6.2%	40 14.6%	36 13.1%

Statement	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Giving sacrificially yields heavenly blessing, according to the story in 1 Kings 17.	79 28.8%	160 58.4%	17 6.2%	9 3.3%	9 3.3%
1 Kings 17:10-15 emphasizes the theological themes of faith and obedience, especially in relation to the interaction between God and humans during times of crisis.	182 66.4%	49 17.9%	21 7.7%	17 6.2%	5 1.8%
Nigerian pastors have influences on their members' economic, psychological, physical, and spiritual development.	143 52.2%	111 40.5%	3 1.1%	17 6.2%	
For personal benefit and satisfaction, some pastors misapply biblical passages like 1 Kings 17:13b to demand gifts and other special offerings.	26 9.5%	185 67.5%	30 10.9%	16 5.9%	17 6.2%
Some pastors only make sporadic requests for financial contributions, preferring to concentrate on pastoral care and the socio-spiritual development of their members.	117 42.7%	79 28.8%	40 14.6%	20 7.3%	18 6.6%
Members are not compelled to give, even though pastors may urge them to do so in times of prosperity or financial hardship.	64 23.4%	72 26.3%	76 27.7%	45 16.4%	17 6.2%
In Nigeria, most of the churches provide support for struggling members through their welfare committee; some even assist in paying hospital bills for sick indigent members and school fees for indigent university students, etc.	153 55.8%	75 27.3%	25 9.1%	9 3.3%	12 4.4%

The data presented in this section evaluates how respondents understand the socio-exegetical dimensions of 1 Kings 17:13b, particularly in relation to clerical authority and economic vulnerability among church members. A majority of respondents (47.1%) strongly agree that Elijah's request from the widow of Zarephath should be interpreted as a test of faith, with an additional 20.5% agreeing. This suggests a theological understanding among most respondents that giving during a time of crisis can be an act of faith. Only a small percentage disagreed or strongly disagreed (6.9% and 7.6%, respectively), while 17.9% remained neutral.

In terms of clerical authority, 72.6% strongly agree that Elijah's request emphasizes the authority of the prophet, with 11.7% agreeing. This indicates a strong perception that

clerics have the spiritual mandate to make sacrificial demands from congregants. Only a minor fraction disagreed (2.9%) or strongly disagreed (4.4%).

Regarding the act of giving and charity, 62.4% strongly agree that the Bible presents giving as an act of worship, while 3.7% agree and 13.1% remain neutral. Notably, 6.2% disagree and 14.6% strongly disagree, showing that while the majority uphold giving as biblical worship, a significant minority may question its current application in churches.

On the idea that sacrificial giving brings heavenly blessings, 58.4% strongly agree and 28.8% agree, showing a high level of acceptance of this theological interpretation of 1 Kings 17. Only a small group disagrees (6.2%) or strongly disagrees (3.3%).

The interpretation of 1 Kings 17:10–15 as emphasizing faith and obedience is strongly supported by 66.4% of respondents, with another 17.9% in agreement. Very few disagree (7.7%) or strongly disagree (6.2%), indicating general consensus on the theological themes of the passage.

A significant majority (52.2% strongly agree, 40.5% agree) believe Nigerian pastors influence the economic, psychological, physical, and spiritual development of their members. Only 1.1% disagreed, while 6.2% were neutral, confirming the powerful social and spiritual roles pastors play in their congregants' lives.

However, 67.5% strongly agree and 9.5% agree that some pastors misapply texts like 1 Kings 17:13b for personal gain. This raises concerns about clerical manipulation, even as 10.9% disagree and 5.9% strongly disagree, suggesting the issue may not be universally acknowledged.

In contrast, 42.7% strongly agree and 28.8% agree that some pastors focus more on pastoral care than on financial contributions. Yet, 14.6% disagree and 7.3% strongly disagree, indicating diverse experiences with pastoral emphasis in different churches.

When asked whether members are compelled to give, responses were mixed. 26.3% agree and 23.4% strongly agree that giving is not compelled, while 27.7% disagree and 16.4% strongly disagree. This reveals a near-even split on whether giving in the church is voluntary or pressured.

Finally, support for struggling members through welfare activities is affirmed by 55.8% who strongly agree and 27.3% who agree. Only a small minority disagree (9.1%) or

strongly disagree (3.3%), implying that many churches in Nigeria are actively engaged in welfare outreach, such as hospital bill assistance and tuition support for indigent students.

DISCUSSION

In terms of marital status, a significant proportion, 56.6%, were widowed, while 37.2% were married, and 6.2% were single. High mortality rates, longer life expectancies for women, and cultural norms have all contributed to the rise in widows in Nigeria, including among Christians. It may be difficult to isolate the precise numbers for Christian widows, but it is evident that widowhood is a common occurrence in Nigeria, irrespective of religious affiliation. Women generally live longer than men, leading to a greater likelihood of widowhood, particularly in the later years. Widows in Nigeria face various challenges, including social stigma, economic hardship, and potential discrimination (Ogbuehi, 2017). God cares for widows in the Bible, highlighting both their vulnerability and the need to provide for them. Due to their lack of resources and support following the death of their husband, widows were frequently vulnerable in ancient societies and were thus the focus of injustice and exploitation. In addition to calling on believers to imitate God's kindness and concern, the Bible frequently highlights God's role as a widow's protector and His condemnation of those who mistreat them. In Psalm 68:5, God is referred to as the "father of the fatherless and the defender of widows." This motif emphasises God's moral nature and commitment to protecting widows and other vulnerable people. Laws from the Old Testament, such as those in Exodus 22:21–24, mandate that widows be treated fairly, prohibit exploitation, and defend their rights. 1 Timothy 5:3–16 states that the church has a duty to assist widows who are without family support, particularly those who are in extreme need (Nwankwor & Okolo, 2020).

The examination of 1 Kings 17:13b in the context of Nigerian Christianity reveals significant socio-theological, ethical and economic implications for Christian practice. In 1 Kings 17:13b, Elijah's request for the widow to make him a cake first and then for herself and her son can be seen as a test of faith. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints explains that this request was not selfish. It was a way to see if she would prioritise God's needs, represented by Elijah, over her own and her son's in a time of famine. By obeying this seemingly difficult request, she demonstrated her trust in God and in Elijah's word that her supply would not fail. This act of faith is rewarded with the miraculous provision of

flour and oil as promised. The majority of respondents (67.6%) agreed that Elijah's request to the widow of Zarephath should be interpreted as a test of faith, reflecting a widespread theological belief that sacrificial giving, especially during economic hardship, is a mark of genuine faith and obedience (Adeyemo, 2006). This suggests that many Nigerian Christians embrace a spirituality that prioritises trust in God over material sufficiency, even when mediated through clerical authority. With 14.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this interpretation, indicating a degree of ambivalence or scepticism. It was also discovered that while 1 Kings 17:13b (specifically the request to make a small cake for Elijah first) is often interpreted as a test of faith, it is not explicitly stated as such in the verse itself. Instead, it could be viewed as an act of practical obedience and a demonstration of the widow's charitable lifestyle and willingness to prioritise the prophet's needs, even in her own dire circumstances. The objections of the respondents may be rooted in concerns over how some pastors in Nigeria may misuse scriptures to justify socio-economic demands from vulnerable Church members (Ukah, 2007; Gaiya, 2002). Moreover, the fact that nearly one-fifth of respondents chose neutrality may indicate theological uncertainty or discomfort in reconciling biblical injunctions with the lived realities of economic hardship.

In terms of clerical authority, 72.6% strongly agree that Elijah's request emphasizes the authority of the prophet, with 11.7% agreeing. Prophet and religious figure, Elijah comforts a widow in 1 Kings 17:13b, urging her to have faith in God's supply. Speaking on behalf of God, he provides divine assurance and provision, which is a quality of a prophet, clerical authority, and socio-religious leader. God's authority in matters of faith and divine revelation is strengthened by the widow's faith in his provision. This indicates a strong perception that pastors have the pastoral and spiritual mandate to make sacrificial demands from congregants. Only a minor fraction disagreed (2.9%) or strongly disagreed (4.4%). In Nigerian Pentecostal and mainline traditions alike, clerical authority is frequently exercised through teaching, intercession, counselling, and spiritual directives, often drawing legitimacy from biblical exemplars like Elijah (Gaiya, 2002).

Regarding the act of giving and charity, 62.4% strongly agree that the Bible presents giving as an act of worship, while 3.7% agree and 13.1% remain neutral. Giving and charity are fundamental acts of faith and love among church members, reflecting a commitment to both God and neighbour (Proverbs 3:9 and 2 Corinthians 9). Charity involves helping those in need, whether through financial support, material aid, or personal care. The New Testament emphasizes that giving should be joyful and generous, not compelled or

reluctant. They are often seen as a natural response to God's grace and an expression of gratitude for His blessings. These acts involve contributing financially but also encompass volunteering time and talents to serve others. In some Nigerian churches, Offerings or almsgiving occupies a core place in liturgical, spiritual and communal life such as tithes, mission seed, covenant seed. This perspective is especially evident in New generational Churches and theologies, but some orthodox churches also engage in these practices recently, especially during their Church harvest services. The majority support in the data indicates that this understanding remains influential among Nigerian Christians. Notably, 6.2% disagree and 14.6% strongly disagree, showing that while the majority uphold giving as biblical worship, a significant minority may question its current application in churches. This divergence highlights a tension in Nigerian Christianity: while the biblical tradition clearly affirms giving as worship (cf. Psalm 96:8; Philippians 4:18), the modern application—especially when monetised—can distort its spiritual intent. The data underscores the need for a renewed theology of stewardship that integrates generosity with accountability, emphasising justice, compassion, and communal care over mere transactional religiosity (Wright, 2010).

A significant majority (52.2% strongly agree, 40.5% agree) believe Nigerian pastors influence the economic, psychological, physical, and spiritual development of their members. By providing spiritual direction, emotional support, and community building, pastoral ministry has a major impact on members' overall development. Congregational well-being is influenced by the behaviours, attitudes, and leadership philosophies of pastors, who promote spiritual development, individual growth, and a feeling of community within the church (Story, et al, 2017). Pastors are often seen as role models, influencing their members' faith and spiritual growth. They facilitate spiritual development through preaching, teaching, and counselling, encouraging members to engage in faith-based practices like prayer, worship, and service. Pastors also provide emotional and mental support, offering counselling and care to individuals facing life challenges. They often intervene in crises, offering guidance and support during difficult times. Authentic and transparent pastoral relationships foster trust and connection, allowing members to feel comfortable sharing their emotions. Pastors are seen as shepherds, guiding and caring for the flock. They foster a sense of belonging and community within the church, where members can connect and find support. Pastors empower members to take on leadership roles and participate in church activities, fostering ownership and responsibility. Pastoral

ministry encourages personal growth in various areas, including spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being. A positive and supportive pastoral environment can enhance members' overall well-being, foster a sense of purpose and mean in life. Pastoral ministry can have a transformative impact on individuals' lives, helping them develop into more mature and responsible members of the church and community (Alagbala & Otunla, 2024; Kilengi, 2023). Only 1.1% disagreed, while 6.2% were neutral, confirming the powerful social and spiritual roles pastors play in their congregants' lives. Scholars caution that while pastoral leadership is vital, it can also become over-centralized and prone to abuse when not regulated by accountability structures (Ukah, 2007; Obielosi, 2015). The near-unanimous agreement in the data affirms the high regard for pastors, but it also calls for intentional pastoral formation that emphasizes servant leadership, emotional intelligence, and theological depth.

Church support for struggling members through welfare activities is affirmed by 55.8% who strongly agree and 27.3% who agree. Beyond providing spiritual guidance, churches in Nigeria have an enormous welfare role that includes actively meeting the social and physical needs of their members and communities. These duties include fostering social justice and community development, as well as offering healthcare, education, and assistance to the weak (Hundu, 2024). They establish and support clinics, hospitals, and other healthcare facilities to ensure access to medical care, especially in underserved areas. They actively participate in health education programs, disease prevention campaigns, and support for individuals facing medical emergencies. Churches also provide spiritual counselling and support for individuals facing illness or disability, helping them cope with difficult times. They also contribute to the education sector by establishing and supporting schools at all levels, promoting literacy and skills development, and providing scholarships and financial aid (Uroko, 2024; (Onah & Agbo, 2021). Churches also support vulnerable populations through food distribution, clothing donations, and other forms of support. They advocate for social justice, invest in community development projects, implement poverty alleviation programs, mobilize resources and personnel for emergency responses, and engage in humanitarian efforts. Community engagement and outreach are also essential aspects of church life. Churches organize community mobilization programs, facilitate dialogues between different groups and communities, and actively seek to reach out to marginalized groups. They also promote ethical behaviour, provide spiritual guidance, and spread the gospel through evangelism and discipleship (Onuorah, 2024). Welfare

committees are responsible for identifying and addressing the needs of their members, particularly those who are struggling. These committees work to ensure that the poor and needy in the church are cared for, providing assistance and support. They also provide support to church members during times of crisis, such as illness, bereavement, or financial hardship (Adamaagashi, 2023; Onukwuba, 2022). Overall, churches in Nigeria play a multifaceted role in promoting social welfare, acting as a catalyst for development, providing essential services, and championing social justice (Ede, 2020). Only a small minority disagree (9.1%) or strongly disagree (3.3%), implying that many churches in Nigeria are actively engaged in welfare outreach, such as hospital bill assistance and tuition support for indigent students.

CONCLUSION

1. **Balanced Use of Scripture by Clergy**: Clerics should exercise caution and theological integrity when applying biblical passages like 1 Kings 17:13b, ensuring they are not used manipulatively to extract resources from economically vulnerable congregants.
2. **Promotion of Welfare Services in Churches**: Churches in Nigeria should strengthen and expand their welfare ministries to support struggling members, including widows, indigent students, and the sick, as part of their pastoral responsibilities.
3. **Theological Education and Clergy Training**: There is a need for theological institutions and church leadership bodies to emphasize ethical and socio-theological training that discourages clerical exploitation and promotes servant leadership.
4. **Encouragement of Voluntary Giving**: Churches should encourage voluntary and joyful giving rooted in faith, rather than pressuring members through spiritualized coercion or distorted interpretations of Scripture.
5. **Strengthening Accountability Structures**: Religious institutions should develop internal mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability in financial matters to reduce misuse of authority.

6. **Empowerment of the Laity**: Churches should recognize and promote the agency of lay members in decision-making processes to reduce clericalism and enhance shared responsibility in church life.
7. **Further Research and Engagement**: Scholars and church bodies should continue to explore the socio-economic dimensions of biblical texts to bridge theological interpretation with contemporary realities.

The socio-exegetical examination of 1 Kings 17:13b within the Nigerian Christian context reveals deep intersections between clerical authority, economic vulnerability, and faith-based obedience. While the biblical narrative of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath can be understood as a profound lesson in trust and divine provision, especially in the context of Nigeria's religious landscape, its contemporary appropriation must be critically assessed to prevent exploitative practices, particularly between religious leaders and their adherents. Nigerian Christians largely interpret 1 Kings 17:13b as a spiritual test of faith and obedience and a validation of clerical authority, but there is growing concern about its misuse or misinterpretation of biblical passages and stories for personal gain by some pastors recently on social media, in newspaper headlines and on national television broadcasts. The study demonstrates that the church continues to play a vital role not only spiritually but also socio-economically, particularly through welfare interventions. However, for the church to remain a true vessel of divine provision and prophetic solidarity, it must embody compassion, justice, and accountability in both message and mission. Responsible leadership, ethical teaching, and communal care must define its engagement with both Scripture and society.

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