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## Biblical Solutions for the Control of Contagious Diseases for a better Healthy Environment in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Contagious diseases are contacted by contact with the affected victim and these include cholera, malaria, typhoid, measles, smallpox, chickenpox, leprosy, and HIV/AIDS. These diseases are prevalent in Nigeria. Thousand Nigerians die yearly of these diseases whose widespread nature are generally attributed to poor personal and community hygiene, poor education, economic, poverty, and poor facilities and infrastructures. There is the need to control the spread of contagious diseases. A close look at the Bible indicate that there is much the citizens can do to control the spread of contagious diseases at personal and community levels while waiting for supplementary efforts from the various sector of government. The study will utilize a contextual approach, explored selected divine commandments in the Bible that have bearing on the control of contagious diseases and their application for control of contagious diseases in Nigeria today. The study established the similarities between the life-settings of the Israelites and the contemporary Nigerian people. Therefore, there is relevance of the various divine injunctions explored to the contemporary situation in respect to the control of contagious diseases. Our findings indicate that God desires to be the central figure among his people. He desires his people to distinguish themselves through lifestyles that are in harmony with his commandments. God has identified that he is the healer of his people; he guarantees the personal communal and natural health and well-being of the Israelites, if his commandments are followed. Therefore, Nigerians could benefit by following these commandments.

**Keywords:** Solution Contagious, Environment, Divine, Commandment, Comparison

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### INTRODUCTION

Genald and John hold that contagious diseases are diseases that easily spread from person to person, especially through direct or indirect contact.<sup>1</sup> According to Abaie and Ishaya the prevalence of contagious diseases such as cholera, malaria, typhoid, measles, smallpox, chickenpox, dysentery, gastroenteritis, leprosy, and HIV/AIDS in Nigeria is well

attested to.<sup>2</sup> George says, as a result thousands of Nigerian die every year of these diseases whose widespread are generally attributed to poor personal and community hygiene, poor education, economic, poverty, and poor or non-existent facilities and infrastructures<sup>3</sup> When one considers the large human population of Nigerians who live in communal clusters and who through direct contact with one another are

exposed to severe risks of contacting contagious diseases, therefore, there is the need to control the spread of contagious diseases in our locality, state and the entire Nigeria.

According to Millennium Development Goal's aims as directed by the United Nations is to combat malaria, HIV/AIDS and other deadly diseases, such as contagious diseases.<sup>4</sup>All 192 United Nations member states, including Nigeria and some international organizations have agreed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015.<sup>5</sup> Joseph and Samuel say although it is laudable that the government of countries such as Nigeria have plans to combat these contagious diseases, the implementation of such plans face two major challenges. Firstly, the implementation of policies directed to providing basic physical and health infrastructure and facilities in Nigeria has suffered severe set-back at the government level as a result of poor governance. Secondly, the attitude and behaviour of average Nigerians to health in general and personal and community hygiene in particular is very low.<sup>6</sup> Mohammed Dahiru says Nigeria at over 50 is exposed to the risk of contagious diseases by factors such as primitive and unhygienic sewage disposal, polluted streams, wells roadsides drainages among others.<sup>7</sup>

However, the Bible is not silent in this area, because God loves his people, so he provided all kinds of

solutions to their problems. God in Exodus 15:26 say:

*If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his sight, obeying his commands and laws, then I will not make you suffer the diseases I sent on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you (Exodus 15:26).*

The above statement indicates that there is much that the citizens could do to control the spread of contagious diseases at personal and community levels while waiting for supplementary efforts from various sector of government.

This study uses contextual and comparative approaches, explores selected commandments in the Bible that have bearing on the control of contagious diseases in our contemporary Nigeria today. Divine commandments had both preventive and curative dimensions; therefore, the study establishes the similarities between the *Sitz im Leben* of the Israelites and our contemporary Nigeria people. It provides an ample basis for determining the relevance of the various divine injunctions explored to the contemporary Nigeria people in areas of the control of contagious diseases.

### **The Setting of Exodus 15:26**

According to the Bible, after the Israelites crossed the Red sea

(Exodus 14:1-15:21), they found no water to drink after three days of desert wandering, (Exodus, 15:22). When they finally found water at Marah, they could not drink it because it was bitter until God miraculously heals the water by employing a natural remedy, (Exodus, 15:23-25). After this miracle in the early formative stage of the nation of Israel, God made a profound promise to the people. God says:

*If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians, for I, the LORD, am your healer, (Exodus 15:26).*

Consequently, by identifying Himself as the healer of the, (Exodus, 15:26), God personally assumed responsibility for personal and communal and national health and well-being of the Israelites, if they strictly followed His commandments.

### **A Contextual Comparison of the Sitz Im Leben of the Israelites and Nigerian Communities**

Biblical studies indicate that at the time God made the promise in Exodus 15:26 to the Israelites, they were on transit from Egypt to Canaan through the wilderness. A

total of 603,550 adults males who were twenty years old and above set for journey in the desert after crossing the Red sea, (Num.1:40). Therefore, the whole communities may at the least, was larger than 2 million people were women and children included in the census in Number chapter one. Managing this large population in the face of hostile climatic and environmental conditions with limited life-supporting natural resources was an enormous task for Moses and the leaders of the people. With exposure to the hazards of clustering in the desert, chances were high that the people would fall sick and contract contagious diseases at an alarming rate.

One would have wondered and expected that such a large community of the Israelites wandering in the desert would have lived in a disorganized and unplanned manner as are characteristics of most Nigerian communities, especially in the rural and sub-urban areas. But the people of Israel lived together in tents as a whole community, in well organized and beautifully arranged clusters according to their families and tribes at God's instructions. Biblically speaking, three tribes camped at the East, West, North and South respectively, with the Tabernacle in the centre of the community, (Num.2:1-24). The presence of the Tabernacle in the centre of the community is very significance. It served as a constant reminder of the

presence of Yahweh among the people, a desire Yahweh earlier expressed in Exodus 15:8. This arrangement achieved four major things for the Israelites community. Firstly, it identifies God as the central figure in the community, therefore, making everyone in the community responsible to Him first and foremost, before anyone or anything else, (see also Exodus 20:3). Secondly, it fosters homogeneity in the community and facilitates easy identification of community members, strangers, and infiltrators were easily spotted out in the community, (see Number25:6-8, for example). Thirdly, it clarifies the judicial lines of seeking redress in the event of any infraction. As result, God was expected to serve as the final arbiter. Fourthly, the arrangement enhances personal and communal hygiene as would be demonstrated later in this paper.

The average Nigerian community is not different from the Israelite community described above. The average Nigerian community is characterized by high population of people who live in a usually haphazard manner. Especially in rural and sub-urban areas, houses are built in disorganized manner, without any obvious plan. The general layout of community lacks such basic level of planning that was seen among the biblical Israeli community in Numbers 2:1-24. This arrangement do not foster personal and communal hygiene<sup>9</sup>

The Nigerian community generally, the environments are usually littered with wastes and refuse dumps. Even where drainages are constructed, it is common for people to dump refuse and other solid wastes into the drainages, thereby hindering the free flow of water and sewage in the drainages. This condition further degenerates during the raining seasons. Residential areas are usually flooded areas result of over flow of water and sometimes sewage from the blocked drainages. People usually wade in flooded water in order to leave or enter their homes are common sights in most Nigerian communities.

Nigerians are religiously outwardly. Churches, mosques and traditional shrines dot every community in Nigeria. But, the daily living of the people do not exhibit the primary responsibility to God as a central Figure, as shown in the arrangement of the biblical Israelite community in the Bible. This situation is further compounded by the religious pluralism in Nigeria which often ignites various degrees of conflicts that ultimately affect the environment negatively.

The questions that may arise are: What are the solutions to such a situation? Which is the way forward? What can we do as a Nation?

**Solution of Divine Commandments for the Control of Contagious Diseases in Nigeria**

The Old Testament God did not intend to limit His promises to the Israelites in the Exodus 15:26 in their days of wilderness wandering. God designed that His promise of securing their personal, communal and national health and well-being would extend to the period of their settling in the land of Canaan. The Bible makes it clear in the thematic and linguistic links that are evident between Exodus 15:26 and Leviticus 18:1-5. Both passages clearly indicate God's desires to make a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptian ways of life and His will for his people to live in accordance with His commandments for the benefits it will bring to them. The problem of the then Egyptians were their lifestyle and attitude. Therefore, it can be deduced that the commandments God gave to the Israelites arose mostly because they had observed the way of life of the Egyptians and chances were high that they would practice what they had observed even when they settle in the promised land.

In Leviticus 18; 3 God makes it clear that He requires the Israelites to obey His commandments and statutes and enjoy the life benefits accruing from them even when they finally settle in the Promised Land. This could mean that God desires that His people at all times should be healthy and live quality lives. The Bible says:

*Do not act like the people in Egypt, where you used to live, or like*

*the people of Canaan where I am taking you. You must not imitate their way of life. You must obey all my regulations and be careful to keep my laws, for I, the Lord, am your God. If you obey my laws and regulations, you will find life through them. I am the Lord, (Lev.18:2-5).*

For everyone to claim God as a healer as expressed in the promise in Exodus 15:26, there is the need for such a person to abide by the conditions explicitly and unequivocally stated by God. No one should expect God to fulfil His promise of healing while such a person is living in wilful disobedience to God 's expressed will in the various commandments He gave in the Scriptures that have implications for the health and welfare of His people, The question is how does one contact contagious diseases?

### **How One Can Contact Contagious Diseases**

There are various ways that contagious diseases are spread. They are transmitted through physical body contact with the affected persons as well as through contact with contaminated water, animal vectors, or objects infected by pathogens from a victim.<sup>10</sup> However, there are three modes of spreading : victim to victim contact,

vector to victim contact, and victim to vector to victim contact.

### **Victim To Victim Contact**

In this mode of contact, contagious diseases are spread through direct contact between an infected person and the non-infected person. This type of spread, the pathogens are transferred directly from the suffer to a non-suffer, who becomes infected. Jopling and McDougall give leprosy as an example for this type.<sup>12</sup> Ojoma gives other examples as measles, chickenpox, smallpox, several other forms of skin diseases and a majority sexually transmitted diseases, such as gonorrhoea, syphilis and HIV/AIDS.<sup>13</sup> When a healthy person has unprotected sex intercourse with a person who is infected with HIV/AIDS, he or she will contract the disease.

### **Vector to Victim Contact**

According to Michael and David this type of contacts are effective when infected non-human, but agents such as animals and insects have direct contact with non-infected persons. It is not necessary for the vectors to suffer from the effects of the pathogens they carry. However, the germs thrive in them until non-infected persons come in contact with them, thereby becoming infected. Under this type of contact are houseflies, mosquitoes, rats, cockroaches, and corpses. The contagious diseases in this area are malaria, worm infected diarrhea and

some skin diseases transmitted through insects bites.<sup>14</sup> Larry and Sherwood said when a healthy person is exposed to repeated mosquitoes bites, the person contracts malaria, or eats improperly cooked meat or food that harbour worms or their eggs the person contracts worm infections<sup>15</sup>

### **Victim to Vector to Victim Contact**

Mandell and Bennett said in this type of spread, infected person deposits pathogens on objects which become contaminated with pathogens. The pathogens, then are transmitted to non-infected persons either when they directly contact the vectors or when the pathogens are spread to non-infected persons by animal or environmental vectors.<sup>16</sup> Cowan and Talaro hold that this mode involves a complicated, but is a real chain. The example of vectors are exposed food and drink items, cutlery, houseflies, mosquitoes, rats, cockroaches, exposed wastes and fomites.<sup>17</sup> Mandell and Bennett said examples of diseases under this category are cholera, dysentery, tuberculosis, conjunctivitis, common cold and gastroenteritis.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, a person suffering from any transmitted diseases as mentioned above, example conjunctivitis, any healthy person who touches the pathogen-infected items may contract the disease. A person suffering from cholera defecates in a nearby bush. Houseflies perch on the excreta and enter into a house near the bush. The

houseflies perch on exposed food or drink items or cutleries in the kitchen or dining area. A healthy person who eats the contaminated food, drink the contaminated drink or uses the contaminated cutleries contracts cholera. So people suffering from cholera, dysentery or gastroenteritis defecate in open and exposed places in the environment. Rain washes the excreta into the source of drinking water and contaminates the source. Healthy people who drink from the contaminated water contract cholera. Healthy people who drink from the contaminated water contract dysentery or gastroenteritis.<sup>19</sup>

With this background in-view, we will explore the implications of some selected biblical commandments for the control of contagious diseases in Nigeria to enhance development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Divine Commandments in the Bible and Their Solutions for the Control of Contagious Diseases In Nigeria**

God loves his universe and that is why he cares for it. God has provided remedies to all kinds of illnesses. The Bible which is the word of God has Divine commandments to affect all kinds of diseases in the world. We shall examine some of these Divine commandments to affect the control of contagious diseases in Nigeria. The selected commandments border on the following areas: disposal of human and related wastes, sexual promiscuity and perversion and handling of skin diseases.

### **Divine Commandment On Disposal Of Human Excrement And Related Wastes**

Regarding the disposal of human excrement and other related wastes, God gave the following instruction to his people. He says:

*Mark off an area outside the camp for your Latrine. Each of you must have a spade as part of your equipment. Whenever you relieve yourself, you must dig a hole with the spade and cover the excrement. The camp must be holy, for the LORD your God moves around your camp to protect you and to defeat your enemies or he might turn away from you, (Deut.23:12-14).*

This commandment takes into account the fact that the people live in a camp, whether in their normal residence,(Num.2:1-34) or in their military camps when they go to war, (Deut.23:9). Accordingly, the Israelites were forbidden to relieve themselves of human excrement within the vicinity of the camp. They were intentionally designates a place outside the camp for the purpose of relieving themselves of human wastes such as excrement. Even while relieving themselves outside the camp, the Israelites were expected to dig holes in the ground, relieve themselves in them and cover

the excrement and related wastes with the soil, (Deut.23:12-13).

God has two important reasons for the Israelites to follow this commandment: One, God moves around in the camp to deliver his people from their enemies. Two, the camp of God's people is holy and as such, God should not behold anything indecent among his people, (Deut.23:14). God wants to assume central here, therefore, if God is given the central place in every community, He assumes responsibility of their health, well-being and safety.

According to Mandell, Douglas and Bennett burying human excrement by digging a hole and covering it with soil makes the excrement inaccessible to animal and environmental vectors to spread whatever form of pathogens that may be harboured in such excrement. Hence, the condition reduces the chances of victim to vector to victim transmission of contagious diseases. One may think that this commandment would be significant for Nigeria communities, especially in the rural and sub-rural areas, they should try and bury human excrement and related wastes under the soil. Also, dwellers in urban areas should make effort to empty suck-away pits that are full as well as clear blocked sewage drainages so as to prevent human wastes from overflowing into living areas. These would help to control the spread of contagious diseases such as cholera, dysentery and gastroenteritis<sup>20</sup> also

Abaje Ali and Ishaya said worm infections that require animal and environmental vector such as houseflies cockroaches, rats and water and rain flood to transmit,<sup>21</sup>

### **Commandment on Prohibition of Sexual Promiscuity and Sexual Perversion**

God intended to regulate sexual activities of human-beings, so the seventh commandments in the Bible serve as a guide. Exodus 20:14 says Do not commit adultery and Deuteronomy 5:18 says "Do not commit adultery". Adultery involves sexual inter-course between persons who are not legally married to each other. Therefore, God frowns at adultery to the extent that He commanded that among the Israelites, people convicted of it should be put to death. The Bible says: If a man commits adultery with another man's wife, both the man and the woman be put to death. If a man has intercourse with his father's wife, both the man and the woman must die, for they are guilty of a capital offence, (Lev.20:10).

The Jews upheld this law and even during the time of Jesus Christ as is evidence in the story of the woman caught in the adultery (John 8:1-11). God prohibits other forms of sexual promiscuity and perversion, such as prostitution, (Lev.19:29), incest, (Lev.20:11-12, 14), same-sex sexual intercourse or homosexuality or lesbianism (Lev.18:22, 20:13) and bestiality- sexual intercourse between humans and animals



(Exo.22:19, Lev.18:23,20:15-16). Punishments for these and other forms of sexual perversion include death,(Exo.22:19,Lev.20:11-16) and curses (Deut.27:20-23).

Research has revealed that sexual promiscuity such as adulteries, fornications and sexual perversion such as prostitutions have been identified as major sources of spreading of sexually –transmitted diseases (STDs) in Nigeria such as gonorrhoea, syphilis and HIV/AIDS.

Prostitution, fornication, adultery among others is practiced in Nigeria. Therefore, if we will obey God's commandments concerning sexual activities, it would facilitate effective control of contagious diseases that are transmitted through sexual contacts.

### **Divine Commandment on Infectious Skin Diseases**

God in Numbers 5:1-3 says:

*The Lord gave these instructions to Moses. Command the people of Israel to remove anyone from the camp, who has a contagious skin disease, or a discharge, or who has been defiled by touching a dead person.. This applies to man or woman alike. Remove them, so they will not defile the camp, where I live among you, (Num.5:1-3).*

God gave this elaborate regulation on how people with skin infectious should be treated among

the Israelites in the Old Testament, see also Lev.13:1-58. These laws required that a person with any form of skin infections must go to the Priest for inspection. Example, a period of seven days after the first inspection was allowed before a second inspection was required. If the infection cleared within seven days, the infection was treated as minor and the sufferer was declared clean and fit to continue to live in the community, (Lev.13:1-6). However, if after the second examination by the priest, the skin infections persist, begins to produce pus, changes the colour of the skin, or begins to pearl off the skin, the priests were required to quarantine the victim by sending him or her to live outside the camp until the infection was healed, (Lev.13:7-45). Reference is made to this assertion, when Jesus Christ healed a leper in Mathew 8:1-4, Mark 1:39-44, and Luke 5:12-14. Jesus respected this law.

The priests were expected to seek and know the mind and will of God on every important and sensitive issue. They seek God through the use of Urim and Thummin. God communicated to them His decisions on very important and sensitive matters to the Israelites through the priests,( Exodus 28:30,Leviticus 8:7-8,Numbers 27:18-21 and 1 Samuel 28:4-7.) This affirms God's love and desires for His people to make Him the central Figure among them and absolutely and unreservedly depend on Him, so that He would assume

full responsibility for their welfare, health and safety.

Therefore, if communities in Nigeria would obey God's divine instructions by subjecting people with obvious skin infections to examination, scrutiny and quarantine, a lot of skin diseases that are easily spread from one family member to another would be controlled and treated. Such infection skin diseases include leprosy, measles, smallpox, chickenpox, scabies, eczema and ringworm.

God the Creator is holy and He desires to be the central figure among Human beings, whom He created in His image (Gen.1:26-27). God desires that His people distinguish themselves by imbibing and practicing lifestyles that are in harmony with His commandments and instructions. God told the Israelites through that:

*If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight obeying His commands and laws, then I will not make you suffer the diseases I sent on the Egyptians for I am the LORD who heals you, (Exodus 15:26).*

God made a promise to take responsibility for the health; well-being and safety of His people, if they will distinguish themselves from other people in their lifestyles and obey His commandments which

have implications for the control of contagious diseases.

The commandments in the Old Testament were given in view of the fact that people often live in clusters and communities exposing them to the possibilities of contrasting and transmitting contagious diseases. Nigerians live in clusters and communities like the Old Testament people did. So are expose to the possibilities of contrasting and transmitting contagious diseases. The conditional nature of the promise which God made to the Israelites implies that no one should to claim the blessings accruing from the promise unless the person is willing to live according to the term and conditions expressed therein. The scope and nature of the commandments given by God to His people that have implications for the control of contagious diseases indicate that God did not intend the benefits exclusively for the Israelites, but also has in mind people in every age who would obey these commandments.

God identifies Himself as a Healer of the people of Israel in Exodus 15:26, means that God personally assumes direct responsibilities for the personal, communal and national health and well-being of all His people, being it Israelites or Nigerians, if they would uprightly His commandments. Therefore, a major area where world communities need to think is the place and level of importance accorded God in every community

and God's commandments in their daily affair of the community'. There is the need for Nigerians to return to God's commandments, so that they can enjoy good health.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the Old Testament commandments that have health implications. It examined specifically Exodus 15:26 and its implications for our generation. It examined the setting of the Israelites and compared it with the Nigerian's. The paper defined the terms contagious diseases, how they are contrasted, and how to live a life pleasing to God. It further examined Divine commandments that have health implications that could help Nigerians live a life accord to God's will in order to achieve good health in our environment.

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