



# Deploying the theology of maggots on the excess manna (Ex 16:20) in the fight against corruption in Nigeria

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**Dates:**

Received: 03 Mar. 2022

Accepted: 11 Aug. 2022

Published: 22 Sept. 2022

**How to cite this article:**

Ugwu, C.I. & Eze, U.V., 2022, 'Deploying the theology of maggots on the excess manna (Ex 16:20) in the fight against corruption in Nigeria', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43(1), a2524. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2524>

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Corruption has undoubtedly become a familiar concept that has almost paralysed the whole gamut of our private and cooperative lives. The rate at which it occurs is described as unprecedented. There is no gainsaying that corruption is one of the severest social threats to society, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. In this article, the authors appreciate the efforts of the Nigerian government in curbing corruption but note the prevalence of this menace despite all efforts. The authors wish to provide a model with which the trend of corruption can be reduced to the barest minimum, if not entirely eradicated. This model was styled out of the theology of maggots on the excess manna amassed by some misguided Israelites during their wilderness journey into the promised land in Exodus 16:20. The method adopted was a secondary method of data collection, which was a library source. Also, as this was a biblical study, hermeneutical tools were employed to interpret the concepts and analyse the text properly. It was discovered that corrupt people are not people in need; rather, they are driven by greed. In addition, the authors discovered that when this model was employed, corruption was reduced drastically, at least within the period of the wilderness journey of the Israelites. This model comes from a biblical background and will go a long way in redirecting the Nigerian populace towards shunning corruption and the people perpetrating it. This is because a great percentage of the Nigerian population adheres to this biblical faith or religion.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** The article contributes to theology and ethics. It investigates the pericope found in Exodus 16:20 and directly deploys its approach in solving the menace of corruption bedevilling Nigerian society. The article is apt because the pericope of Exodus 16:20 provides a lucid response to the problem of corruption.

**Keywords:** maggots; Exodus 16:20; corruption; Nigeria; excess manna.

## Introduction

Corruption is one of the devils that stare humanity in the face. It is a global problem with certain destructive tendencies in developing countries like Nigeria. Corruption in Nigeria is like a cankerworm which has not only eaten deep into the fabrics of our nationhood but has also soiled the character and personality of almost every Nigerian. Corruption is a clog in the wheel of progress in Nigeria and has incessantly frustrated the realisation of noble national goals, despite the presence of enormous natural and human resources in Nigeria (Ijewereme 2015:1). However we may choose to define corruption, what is evident is that the direct impacts of corruption on economic and social development are as old as the Nigerian state. Everywhere one goes, corruption seems to have become the lord of the manor. It has reached an abysmal and disturbing stage. Hence, in recent times it underscores why Nigeria was ranked the second-most corrupt nation within the West African subregion in the recently released corruption index ranking by Transparency International (TI).

The rate of corruption in Nigeria is so alarming that one must ask if there is anything wrong with Nigerians that makes them so corrupt. Corruption is devastating because it results in the diversion to private pockets of scarce resources that otherwise would have been used to provide infrastructure. It corrodes public confidence in government, particularly its ability to deliver essential services to the people. In addition, it discourages transparency, honesty and accountability in public office and the spirit of hard work and selfless services. Indeed, things have become so bad that Bagudu (2004:1) observes that 'if a public office holder preaches against corruption or

**Note:** Special Collection: African Hermeneutics.

insists on honesty and excellence, he is demonized and scorned’.

Greed, patronage and avarice have characterised our polity, hence producing a political system that is so corrupt. The yearly report of the TI is not encouraging at all. This is more worrisome considering the whole ‘noise’ by the government in their fight against corruption. According to Achebe (1983:47–48), ‘Nigeria has passed an alarming stage and has entered the fatal phase. Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that he is only slightly indisposed’. Even when a school of thought may argue that corruption is inherent in Nigerians, it is not totally correct. This is because it is not inborn in Nigerians to be corrupt; otherwise, one would be going a step further to argue that Nigerians are exceptional from the rest of humanity. Nigerians cannot be unusual because they are not naturally different from other human beings. Referring to the line of thought above, Odey (2001) notes that:

[I]t is false to suggest that as we often do. Nigerians are corrupt because the system under which they live makes Corruption easy and profitable, they will cease to be corrupt when Corruption is made difficult and inconvenient. (p. 39)

This agrees with the event of the maggots of the growing on the excess manna. Because of this challenging and inconvenient experience of the excess or the loot being infested with maggots, such nefarious activity never occurred again in the wilderness journey of the Israelites. Hence the title of this article, ‘Deploying the theology of maggots on the excess manna (Ex 16:20) in the fight against corruption in Nigeria.’

The task before the authors is to bring out a model in the text of their study, which controlled corrupt practice at the time, and apply it to modern Nigerian experience and society, which is already stricken by corruption. The Old Testament is a sacred book which houses many holy stories and events that might serve as a reference material to generations, especially in Nigerian matters. Again, this is a religious structure that deals with a cancerous malaise like corruption. The choice of this structure is not without any sentiments at all or without any religious bias; after all, the Nigerian population has a reasonable percentage of Christians.

In the manna experience, the Israelites were provided with an unknown substance as food when they needed it desperately. However, the provision was with one established instruction, namely that no one should collect more than one required for a day, except on the eve of the Sabbath. This instruction was defied by some people, who went ahead and gathered more than the measure of what they needed for the day. That was the first known corruption found in the life of Israelites. This ‘cancer’ was not allowed to fester; instead, it was dealt with decisively. Maggots infested the leftover manna. The product of the corruption was instantly dealt with. That is the model that is being recommended for the Nigerian nation.

It is widely and formally decided that everybody in all levels of either public or civil service jobs or offices has a range of ‘manna’ to be taken home at the end of an agreed period, sometimes monthly, weekly or even daily, as the case may be. But many are going all out to gather more than what has been prescribed for them, simply to satisfy their selfish desire to the detriment of others, sometimes the weaker ones. Therefore, this work is poised to look inwardly and critically to discover what situation or condition would render this ‘excess manna’ useless for human consumption, as we find in Exodus 16:20. As a result, corruption is not lucrative.

For clarity, an attempt is made at explaining some words employed in this article:

1. **Maggot:** This is a legless organism which is the larva of the housefly and blowfly, commonly found in decaying organic matter. When they come upon any organic matter, they usually make the substance produce a foul and repugnant odour. This therefore renders the entire substance unfit for human consumption. According to Smith (2005:326), insects’ larvae (rather than the earthworm) feed on putrefying animal matter. It denotes the caterpillar of the clothes moth. But the Hebrew *tolah* is generally used for the maggots or caterpillars of insects rather than earthworms. For Douglas (1977:1340), the word maggot is technically confined to several classes of invertebrate animals, but it is widely used in popular language. However, the word translated as maggot was ‘ant’, but this ant could be called worms. The Bible has a particular word for ant, *nemala*, but in this place, it uses the general term for worms, *tolah*.  
In the context in which the authors are applying it, maggot was that organism which infested the excess manna that some unscrupulous elements among the Israelite population gathered overnight. For this article, it becomes any actions that would change the face of the ill-gotten wealth and make it uncelebrated. A maggot in this sense is that action, idea or event that would make the greedy men and women look stupid for amassing wealth above measure.
2. **Excess:** Ordinarily, one would have thought that the word excess should not need to be defined. But for the sake of clarity within the context of this article, excess means ‘something in a larger amount or quantity than is necessary or normal’ (Sinclair 1992:393). It comes from the Hebrew word *Sabaro*, meaning overflow, excess, abundance, in excess. Excess denotes going out of this measure simply on the grounds of greed and not need.
3. **Manna:** Manna was like tiny spherical seeds which fell so quietly that the Israelites were not even aware of it. It was assumed to be an exudation of a plant, perhaps after perforation by an insect, but according to Hoffmeier (2005:172), it is an excretion of specific plant lice. According to Hobbs (1995:48), the biblical manna may have been a natural resource of the Sinai.

However, according to the J tradition, the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew 'man *hū*' is manna, meaning 'what is it?' (Laymon 1983:134). 'Man' is late Aramaic for 'what?' Meanwhile, Gerstenfeld (1998:190) sees 'man *hū*' as some expression that can be translated 'it is ma' or 'it is manna'. The word 'man' here, according to him, is taken to be a form of 'mah' meaning 'what'. According to Ibn-Ezra in Gerstenfeld (1998:191), the term 'man' here means food, possibly taken from the Egyptian language. The verse would then be translated, 'they did not know what it was, but when Moses said ... they said, "it is food!"' According to Ibn-Ezra in Gerstenfeld (1998:191), 'man' can also mean a gift, something coming from the sky or something coming every day.

4. **Corruption:** Several times, the word corruption is used in almost all the discussions which seek to decry social vices. There are many definitions to the concept of corruption. In the Old Testament, the substantive rendered 'corruption' is principally *mishat*, *moshat* and *mahit* – all the three signifying physical degeneration and decay (Harrison 1960:374). The New Testament, however, does not see corruption the way the Old Testament sees it. The word translated as corruption in 1 Corinthians 15:33 is *phthoro* in Greek, which signifies the effect of evil company upon the manners of believers and so also the effect of association with those who deny the truth and hold false doctrine (Vine 1996:224).

Beyond the biblical attempts to define corruption, the definition varies depending on the inclination of the scholars and perception of the concept. Andrig and Fjelstad, cited in Mohammed (2013:120), believe that corruption is a 'complex and multifaceted phenomenon with multiple causes and effects, as it takes on various forms and contexts'. Similarly, according to Chuta (2004):

The word corruption presupposes, on the one hand, a given system, a standard or blueprint of behaviour expected of persons who operate within that system. In every business or profession, institution or social system, there are rules or an agreed code of conduct which members are meant to conform to for the healthy running of the system. These guiding principles are constructed around absolute universal and eternal values such as honesty, uprightness, decency and modesty. (p. 2)

Corruption has a plethora of definitions. However, for this article, the definition of corruption by Onuoha (2006:2) which sees corruption as 'the deliberate violations for gainful ends of standard of conduct legally, professionally, even ethically, established in private and public affairs' has been adopted as the contextual definition of corruption.

## Contextual causes of corruption and the Nigerian experience

Corruption ordinarily is not a new phenomenon or concept in the world history. It is instead a worrisome incidence, judging from its prevalence within a particular entity. Dealing with corruption is equally a theory issue, especially to account for its persistence in societies. According to Chuta (2004:53), corruption is certainly not Nigerian, African or

Asian but a global phenomenon. On this global impression about corruption, Myoung-Soo (1991:1), 'likened Corruption to a disease, and just as there is no perfectly healthy society free from infection, one cannot expect to be utterly free of irregularities and Corruption.' Instead one can only talk about the degree of its practice among people of different nations of the world.

It must be noted at the onset that specific incidents of corruption do not require many causes. In any corruption case, there may be only one cause or a combination of factors. Even in the latter case, one reason may exert more significant influence than others in contributing to corrupt behaviour. Considering the authors' study text, they found two striking causes of corruption, which are also prevalent in the Nigerian corruption experience.

### Greed

According to Gafhinger (1996:1), 'greed is an extreme or excessive desire for resources, especially for property such as money, real estate, or other symbols of wealth'. Greed does not accomplish 'wonderful things'. According to Westermann (2004:2), it is malevolent because it obtains unneeded wealth for one's self at the expense of another. This is the bane of most Nigerian politicians and leaders. According to Aquinas, as was cited by Westermann (2004:2), 'greed is a sin directly against one's neighbour since one man cannot over-abound in external riches without man lacking them'. For Edney, as was cited by Westermann (2004:2), greed is the acquisition of a desirable good beyond one's need, resulting in unequal distribution to the point that others are deprived. Greed is an excessive desire to acquire or possess more than one needs or deserves, especially regarding material wealth. A robust, vital cause of corruption, according to Myoung-Soo (1991), is 'man's vulnerability to greed'.

From the views expressed above, it becomes apparent that greed does not surface when one is lacking. Instead, it comes up as a consuming desire and deep craving by the average person to always have an unfair advantage over his or her neighbour to ensure and emphasise the exclusive nature of whatever he or she possesses, in order to ultimately become the envy of others. In the end, if not checked, greed erodes freedom, undermines the social fabric and acts as an undemocratic force. According to Schumaker (2004), greed is beginning to overwhelm conscience, reason, compassion, love, family bonds and community.

The Israelites had grumbled bitterly against Moses over the austere life they were experiencing, especially regarding hunger. God therefore provided them with manna and instructed them as to how much quantity one could gather. The amount was an *omer*. According to Miller (1994:3), 'in Hebrew measurement, an *omer* is the equivalent of two *cabs* or about one tenth of an *ephah*, about the size of a good-sized cereal bowl'. Meanwhile, it was reported that some misguided Israelites went out to gather in excess, not because they were hungry and were wallowing in want but out of greed.

In this regard, it becomes clearer that greed goes with the idea of not being contented with the much or little one has. Even Jesus Christ, teaching his disciples how to pray, did not mince words when he taught them to pray that God would give them bread for each day, hence the proverbial 'our daily bread'. Bread here does not signify just baked flour for food but all the things necessary for our existence and survival. It is the same instruction given to the Israelites on how to gather the manna that was replicated to the disciples of Jesus concerning their quest and acquisition of wealth in the modern world.

### Lack of trust in Yahweh

In response to the complaints that Moses had brought them into the wilderness to die of hunger, God promised that food would be provided. There was only one stipulation related to the gift: they were to gather only enough for the needs of each day, except for the eve of the Sabbath. That sounds simple, but not everybody was content to live within the parameters that God had provided; hence, some left no sooner than the instruction was given to gather the manna in excess, therefore violating the order. The amenities were not spared either, and in the morning, they bred maggots.

The people who gathered more than necessary were trying to secure their future by not trusting God again. It is a mere expression of doubt in divine providence by God towards further nourishment to the people he loved so much. A weak apology could come here as to why the dissidents did what they did. Judging from the long journey they had embarked on without food, and how God seemed to have waited for their grumbling before he provided them with manna, those who had excess could be vindicated for being clever or wise. But in the account under examination, what they did should be taken as a mark or expression of faithlessness, and they should be taken as unintelligent people who lack confidence in God.

The instruction to avoid hoarding was intended to grow the people's trust in God and to prevent the Israelites from hoarding the gift of God. The desire to hoard comes from a lack of faith and fear that God who provided today will not be present to provide for tomorrow. Brueggman (1994) describes this as:

The desire to develop a 'zone of self-sufficiency', the people in wilderness immediately tried to replicate the ways of Egypt by storing up and hoarding out of anxiety and greed. With plenty of reserve in the banks, hoarders do not have to trust God daily. (p. 814)

However, care must be taken here to avoid misunderstanding the above-mentioned idea. Joseph's prudent preparation and future planning saved Egypt from famine and provided sustenance for his family. The issue is faith and our dependence on God versus a 'zone of self-sufficiency' where we try to live without God.

It is apparent today in our society that most corrupt individuals are driven by the propensity of not being sure of tomorrow. Therefore, they do not trust in God and take him as the great Provider, hence the massive looting and money laundering we witness in Nigeria today.

### The theology of the maggots

This section is intended to look at the implication of the maggots on the excess manna in Exodus 16:20. The Israelites had nothing to eat, hence their grumbling. Therefore, God subjected them to such an experience to allow them to enjoy whatever condition he provided. This was fulfilled when he rained down manna from heaven. It was surplus, yet there was an instruction on how much one should collect for one's household. The education therefore prescribed a routine that one should rise before the rising sun to go to the field every morning to gather the miraculous food.

Among other reasons, God intended that the Israelites would come out in the field every morning to appreciate him and his provision by gathering this manna. It was crucial because doing that suggests honouring God and showing dependence on him for our daily survival and sustainability. Otherwise, if some Israelites had succeeded in hoarding the excess manna, thereby having a quantity that could take them for two or more days without going to the field every morning, the tendency of having little or no thought for Yahweh and his sovereignty would have been pre-eminent.

Notwithstanding these noble ideas, some of their features were disrupted or disregarded by the Israelites. They gathered the excess substance to be used on the day they were not permitted to go out and meet God in the field. Unfortunately, all their efforts and extra energy expended in accumulating the surplus were rubbished. The excess manna bred maggots and messed up the whole place. In addition, they had to start cleaning and tidying up their tents. It disgraced them.

The Nigerian situation is similar to what happened among the Israelites in the wilderness. We grumbled over colonialism that held us down earlier in our nation's history. We struggled over hunger and poverty and survived with agriculture. However, in the course of history, exploration took place and a rich deposit of oil was found in the Niger Delta area of the country. This, of course, would have placed Nigeria among the world powers and made it one of the wealthiest countries.

Unfortunately, the history of some Israelites gathering excess manna has repeated in Nigeria, and it is still repeating itself. There is a situation where many people, especially our political leaders and office holders, have gained access to the field of Nigerian manna and are gathering what could be better explained as excess.

From the ongoing, it becomes clear that what the maggots stand for here is no more the actual natural living organism. It

is metaphorically seen as events or actions that could make the persons who had acquired ill-gotten or excess wealth lose it in a manner that would make them regret ever engaging in that kind of deal. More so, it would make others learn their lessons from them, trust God and be contented with what they have. This is not to run down hard work but to abate corruption and cutting corners. Some of these events or actions are seen as follows.

### **Maggots of recovery of loot**

The excess manna we have today is the illegal or the extra property or cash acquired by the political leaders who engage in exploiting and extracting the nation's wealth through fraudulent means. When they leave office, they go all out to enjoy the loot and their excesses alongside their children and cronies. This has been the bane of Nigeria from independence. Affirming this point, Okafor (2000) quoted Jack Blum saying, 'Since independence to the present time, past leaders in Nigeria have either stolen or misappropriated state funds estimated at 400 billion dollars (\$400 000 000 000)'. Furthermore, Olusegun Obasanjo during his tenure claimed to have recovered, within the first year of his probe of past misdeeds of leaders, a total of N100 bn (Okafor 2000).

Against this backdrop, one understands that corruption and looting of the public treasury are still trending and fashionable today in Nigeria because there has not been any 'maggot' invasion of the loot. Regularly, they should be stripped of all that they have gathered illegally against the standard prescription. Arresting and prosecuting corrupt politicians, even sentencing them to jail, is outstanding and excellent, but it should not be the end. The reason is that many of them, after a media trial (which has become the order of the day in Nigerian society) and suffering humiliation either at the hands of the police or in jail, come out finally to enjoy their loot. The recoveries of the late Abacha's loot and that of the one-time Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun, would always remain monumental and resourceful in fight against corruption.

### **Maggots of shame**

Shame is a psychological condition and a form of religious, judicial and social control of ideas, emotional states, physiological states and a set of behaviours, induced by the consciousness or awareness of dishonour, disgrace or condemnation.<sup>1</sup> To shame, according to this source, is to cause shame in others by attacking or destroying the personal dignity of a corrupt person. It is common to see people everybody knows as having defrauded Nigeria of billions of naira parading themselves and raising their heads high. As if that is not enough, these men are also celebrated as godfathers by many shameless politicians. This contributes to Nigeria's ever-increasing profile of corruption.

Given the preceding, there is need for the urgent introduction of the maggot of shame on the people found guilty of corruption. According to Braithwaite (1989:126), who developed what he called the 'theory of reiterative shaming',

societies with low crime and corruption rates are societies in which criminals' behaviour is shamed effectively. Social effective shaming is what Braithwaite calls reiterative shaming. Corroborating this view, Ton De Lange (1999:27) opines that 'shaming of a suspect is used as a means of deterring others'. The maggots that invaded the excess left the culprits with shame. As soon as they are convicted and sentenced with shaming, they stand to ruin their reputation and that of their families, and the guilt would also be on them and members of their families for generations to come, preventing them from ever again aspiring to hold public office. It will also act as an effective deterrent to others.

All other legal battles notwithstanding, the theological imperative of the maggot in the excess manna can serve a better deterrent to the abating of corruption in Nigeria. This would make the system very tough, letting nobody off the hook when caught in any corrupt act.

## **Forms of shaming**

For this discussion, the authors propose two forms of shaming. They include the following.

### **Immortalising the names of corrupt public officials**

This could be achieved by using the funds they recovered to put up a project. For instance, when they are prosecuted and convicted, the money recovered should be used to build roads, hospitals, schools and boreholes, depending on the amount recovered. During the inauguration or commissioning the project, a bold signboard with the person's photograph would be erected there with inscriptions to the effect that the project being commissioned today was funded with stolen funds recovered from the person in question. As part of making the idea very strong, a bill would have been passed by the State House of Assembly or National Assembly, as the case may be, making it severely punishable for one to tamper with any of such signboards, which would be regularly maintained.

Where the money recovered is small enough that it cannot complete any serious projects, it would be used to procure textbooks or exercise books to be distributed among primary and secondary students, with the front cover bearing the photograph of the convicted corrupt person with an inscription stating the corruption charge the person was convicted of. That way, at a very early age, the children would know that corruption is evil.

### **Dishonouring the corrupt public officials**

A number of these corrupt public officials were honoured with the National Merit Awards. As soon as such revered and honoured men and women engage in such dishonourable acts of corruption and are found guilty by a competent Court of Jurisdiction, they should be dishonoured in an elaborate ceremony with all overwhelming media coverage.

## Recommendations

Considering the concomitant effects of corruption in Nigeria and the cause of corruption, as can be seen from the text of study, the authors as a result recommend that:

1. Those convicted of corrupt charges should not be allowed to only serve their sentences but must also surrender all the loot. No plea bargain should be instituted.
2. The fight against corruption should not be selective.
3. The Christian doctrine of postponement of judgement and punishment until the last day should be reconsidered to reflect the theology of the maggots. Hence, Church leaders should preach imminent punishment for offenders such as the corrupt people.
4. Family members, communities and religious institutions should not over-expect from public office holders while in office. Such over-expectation makes them overburdened; hence, some would begin to pilfer to meet such expectations.

## Conclusion

The experience of the Israelites in the wilderness is better imagined than encountered. There were cases of uncertainties, shortages and lack of necessary amenities for human existence, not even for comfort but everyday living. Arising from this situation, God provided them with abundant food. However, some misguided elements among them abused the provision of manna by Yahweh, abandoning the laws and regulations guiding the food and its gathering. The abuse was orchestrated by greed and lack of trust on Yahweh. God dealt with them by making that excess manna worthless and useless to them by allowing maggots to breed on it. No mention of such a corrupt act was heard of again throughout their wilderness journey.

In Nigeria, it is also evident that corruption among the political or public officials is driven by greed and lack of contentment. They go after what is meant for the masses and convert it for themselves. To them, their position may be a lifetime position. Over the years, legislation prescribing punishment to the culprits without tampering with the excesses acquired while in office instead has made corruption more lucrative.

Therefore, making them give the loot back to the government would make entry into the train of corruption and looting of public funds and resources difficult, because it is clear that whatever one acquires illegally would be stripped away and one would still be jailed. Deploying the theology of maggots is a serious restraint and deterrent to corruption.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Authors' contributions

Both authors contributed equally to the writing of the article.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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