




Examining Divine Healing Through Nature and Human Agents in Exodus 15:22-27

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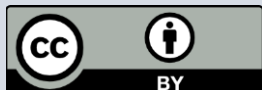
This article presents a theological and rhetorical analysis of Exodus 15:22–27, arguing that while God is the ultimate healer, divine healing is often mediated through natural elements and human agents such as Moses and the piece of wood, with particular attention to African socio-religious perspectives and the implications for contemporary understandings of health, illness, and divine agency.

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Abstract

The Hebrew participial expression kî 'ānî 'ādōnāi rōphē'kā (for I am the Lord who heals you), introduces God as a healer, in Exodus 15:22-27. This paper historically, rhetorically examines this narrative and theologically addresses the questions: What is Healing and who heals in this story and by what means? Does God's healing of Israel from Egyptian bondage, and desert experiences exclude other healers and agents: Moses, water and the piece of the wood (v.25)? It concludes that although God is the ultimate healer, he heals human beings, Africans and non-Africans, through varied scientific means, skills and talents he has given to human agents.

Keywords: *sickness; divine healing; nature; human agents; science*

INTRODUCTION

In every culture, land, people and race, health and the source of health are significant components of life, as expressed in Exodus 15:22-27. In fact, most people, in the Old and New Testament times, as well as people in the modern and contemporary societies, want to eat, exercise, pray and stay healthy. Unlike, modern scientific secularization of health and healing, the biblical people who read and listened to the narrative in Exodus 15:22-27, were convinced that God was not only the source of health but, creator of life, orderliness, perfect environment and general well-being and peace. This is evident in Genesis account of creation (Gen 1–2), orderliness and life (Hasel, 1983). This account, of course, is antithetical to the world which existed after the fall of man, in Genesis 3. In this story we are told sin caused degenerative processes and sapped "the life forces until death comes about" (Hasel, 1983, p. 191). Thus, in biblical tradition, sources of health and wellness are attributed to God, while illness and other forms of sufferings are not in the original design of God. In other words, and significantly, in spite human agents and modern scientific discoveries, with proliferation of churches and healing centers, the God of Exodus

15, examined in this paper is a “healer, as well as the one who liberates, redeems, ransoms, and restores to the true intention of creation” (Brueggemann, 2025, p. 381). This is affirmed in the Hebrew participial phrase *kî ’ānî ’ādōnāi rōphē’kā*, (I am your healing one). This phrase can also be translated as “I am the Lord who heals you,” or “I am the Lord your physician (*Ich bin der HERR, dein Arzt*), as Martin Luther did.

As evident through out the study, God’s self-introduction in this story (Exod. 15:22-27) is connected with the healing of the bitter water with a “piece of wood.” It is also related to the people’s bitterness, their thirstiness and complaints, as well as, to Moses’s roles as a prophet, leader and agent of healing (vv. 23-25). Like people everywhere, Africans are skeptical, and daily drawn away to believe exclusively, in other healers, rather than God. They do this often in moment of illnesses, disappointments, sicknesses, plagues, diseases, sufferings and general misfortunes. Such skepticism are addressed in this article which primary objective aims at reminding readers of diverse faith communities in the world of God’s healing grace and roles in their lives.

METHOD

The subject of God as a healer in the Old Testament, especially as addressed in Exodus 15, has been in the past, an inexhaustible delight of many scholars (Adamo, 2021; Gaiser, 2010; Hasel, 1983; Kasher, 2001; Udoekpo, 2024). Using historical and contextual approaches, that pays attention to African stories, values and experiences, this paper, historically and rhetorically analysis the text and verses of this exodus narrative. It theologically addresses questions such as; What is healing and who heals in this story and by what means? Does God’s healing of Israel from Egyptian bondage, slavery, hunger, thirstiness and bitterness, to restoration, sweetness, and healthy existence, exclude other healers and agents such as Moses, water and the piece of the wood narrated in this story (v.25)? It is argued consistently throughout this work, that, although God is the ultimate healer, and the sovereign of all creation, he can heal human beings, Africans and non-Africans, through varied created means, skills and talents, which he has given to human and rational agents. These gifts, materials and talents must not be abused.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Health and Healing in Different Contexts

The understanding of health and healing varies across social and cultural contexts. From a secular perspective, healing is generally conceived as a condition involving the functional restoration—and at times the actual regeneration—of a part of the body or mind that has been diseased or damaged” (Hasel, 1983, p. 197). In contrast, the Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (Organization, 2024). WHO further articulates three core values: (a) the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right of every human being regardless of race, religion,

political belief, or socioeconomic status; (b) the health of all peoples is essential to the attainment of peace and security and depends on the fullest cooperation of individuals and states; and (c) the advancement of health in any one nation contributes to the well-being of all (Organization, 2024).

Distinct from this biomedical and institutional view, the African conception of health encompasses a holistic state of physical, mental, economic, and social well-being arising from harmonious relationships with nature, divinities, spirits, and fellow human beings (Sillis, 1972). The African anthropologist Paddy Musana asserts that an individual's good health is rooted in their relational harmony with others, arguing that the African concept of personhood is embodied in communal thought and action that values life, nurtures solidarity, and fosters transformative efforts toward building humane societies irrespective of gender, race, or religion (Musana, 2018, p. 22). Earlier, John S. Mbiti, in *African Religions and Philosophy*—as cited by Musana—emphasized that self-awareness and social responsibility among Africans are realized only through relationships with others: when one suffers, the community suffers with them; when one rejoices, the community rejoices together, including with ancestors both living and departed (Musana, 2018, pp. 22–23).

This interdependence between human beings and communal well-being is encapsulated in the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, expressed in the aphorism, “I am because you are,” or “a person is a person through other persons” (Ngamane, 2020, p. 14). Expanded anthropological and theological discussions on the relationship between health, illness, fortune, misfortune, and communal life in African thought are provided by scholars such as Bujo, Ela, Kamalu, Magesa, Mveng, Ngolele, and Tutu (Bujo, 2009, p. 281; Ela, 2009, p. 43; Kamalu, 1998, p. 31; Magesa, 2013, p. 106; Mveng, 1979, p. 141; Ngolele, 2019, pp. 5–19; Tutu, 1999, p. 196).

Within traditional African cosmology, God is regarded as the ultimate source of both sickness and health, while divinities and ancestors serve as mediators of healing (Adamo, 2021; Gotom, 2006, p. 447). Mbiti describes this worldview by asserting that God sustains creation through providence, providing life, sunlight, rain, water, fertility, food, and protection. Consequently, God is venerated as “the Giver of Things,” “Water Giver,” “Healer,” “Helper,” “Protector,” and “Source” (Mbiti, 1975, p. 52). According to Adamo, sickness arises from disharmony between the physical and spiritual realms, and the healer's task is to restore this balance through practices such as divination, counseling, rituals, dance, prayer, and confession (Adamo, 2021; Mbiti, 1975, pp. 61–63).

From a modern socio-political standpoint—particularly in Nigeria—physical and social disharmony that disrupts peace and wholeness may result from undemocratic governance, corruption, religious violence, and ethnic polarization (Udoekpo, 2017, p. 23). Other contributing factors include inadequate economic opportunities, poor infrastructure, and deficiencies in education, healthcare, and security services (Udoekpo, 1994, 2020). The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CABAN), in its 2022 Plenary Communiqué, lamented these societal ills, citing inequitable distribution of social amenities, the absence of a stable and quality education system, prolonged strikes leading to school closures, widespread

unemployment, gender inequality, moral decay, and the lack of transparency and accountability among both leaders and citizens (Secretariate, 2022; Udoekpo, 2023, p. 120).

Biblically, the Old Testament notion of “healing,” as reflected in Exodus 15, pertains to a holistic state of well-being and harmonious relationships among individuals, God, and the environment (Hasel, 1983, p. 197). David T. Adamo observes that Old Testament terms such as peace, righteousness, obedience, strength, fertility, and longevity are conceptually linked to healing (Adamo, 2021, pp. 2–4). Thus, health in the biblical sense is multidimensional, encompassing human flourishing, freedom, peace, and completeness in relation to God. For the Israelites in Exodus 15, healing signified liberation, wholeness, and divine restoration. Regardless of the medium—whether through words, water, earth, herbs, wood, or the intercessory prayer of Moses—God is portrayed as the ultimate healer (Von Balthasar, 1986, pp. 3–5), as vividly illustrated in Exodus 15:22–27.

The Text of Exodus 15:22-27 and Story Content

Table 1. The healing content and narrative of Exodus 15:22-27 rhetorically says

vv.	MT	Working Translation/NRSV
22	(a) <i>Wayyassa’Mōšeh ’th-yîsrā’ēl miyyam -sûph wayyēšə’û ’el-midəbbar-šûr. (b) wayyakhû šəlōšeth-yāmîm bammidbbar wəlō’-māšə’û māyîm</i>	(a) And Moses ordered/commanded the Israelites to set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. (b) they went three days into the wilderness and did not find water.
23	(a) <i>wayyābō’û mārātā wəlō’ yākalû lišəttōth mayyim mimmārā, kî mārîm hēm. (b) ’al-kēn qārā’-šəməh mārā.</i>	(a) When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. (b) that is why it was called Marah.
24	<i>wayyillōnū hā’am ’al-Mōšeh lē’mōr mah-nîštteh</i>	and the people complained against Moses, saying, “what shall we drink,”
25	(a) <i>wayyîša’aq ’el-ādōnai wayyôrēhû ’ēs, wayyašlēk ’el-hamayîm wayyîmttaqû hammāyîm. (b) šām šām lô hōq ûmišppāt wəšām nissāhû</i>	(a) He cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood, he threw it in to the water and the water became sweet. (b) There the Lord made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test.
26	(a) <i>wayyō’mer ’im-šāmōa’ tišma’ ləqōl ādōnai ’ēlohēkhā, wəhayyāšār bə’ēnāw ta’āšeh, wəhā’āzanattā ləmišōtāw wəšāmartā kōl-ḥuqqāw, kōl-hammāḥlā ’āšer-šamattî bəmišrayim lō’-’āsîm ’alēkā (b) kî ’ānî ādōnai rōphə’ekā</i>	(a) He said, “If you will listen carefully, to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; (b) for I am the Lord who heals you.”
27	<i>wayyābō’û ’ēlîmā wəšām šəttēm ’esārēh ’ēnōt mayîm, wəšibā’im tamārîm, wayyahānū-šām ’al-hammāyîm</i>	Then, they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there by the water.

There are few minor issues in this text. For instance, in v. 22 the Samaritan Hebrew Bible, points the MT attestation, *wayyēšā'û* (and they went), slightly different, using full *holem*, *hey* and *sere*, as *wayyôš'ēhû* (they set out). This pointing reflects the LXX's *ēgagen autous* (lead them). In v. 23b, the expression, *'al-kēn qārā'-šāmāh mārā* (that is why it was called Marah), is attested in the LXX, Peshitta and Vulgate as *to onoma tou topou ekeinou pikria* (the name of the place was called bitterness). As noted by Brueggemann (2015), verse 22 is fully attested in the LXX as *ēlthon de eis Merra ka ouk ēdunanto piein ek Merras pikron gar ēn dia touta epōnomasthē to onoma tou topou ekenou pikria* (when they came into Marra and they were not able to drink there from Marra, for it was bitter, and the place).

Again, the MT reads, *wayyillōnû* (and they murmured), in v. 24, while *wayyēr'ēhû* (complaining aloud), is attested in the Samaritan Hebrew Bible, LXX, Peshitta, Targum and in the Vulgate. Similarly, where we have *laqôl ādōnai 'ēlōhēkhā* (to the voice of the Lord your God) in the MT, *baqôl ādōnai 'ēlōhēkhā* (in the voice of the Lord your God) is attested in the Targums. Finally, in v. 27 while the MT reads *wāšām*, referring to Elim, *ûbā'ēlīm* (and in Elim), is attested in the Samaritan Hebrew Bible and in the LXX. These minor variations and attestation were done for various reasons. Dwelling on them is beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, as suggested by Gaiser (Gaiser, 2010, p. 241), they do not really affect the meaning of the text, and our primary focus, which is the notion of a sovereign God who heals through various agents (vv.22-27).

First of all, it is important to point out that Exodus 15: 22-27, is located within the proximate context of "wilderness sojourn," which forms part of the larger context of the Book of Exodus. Exodus is usually and literally divided by scholars (Hill & Walton, 2009, p. 102), into three major units: (1) Israel in Egypt (Exod 1–12:36), (2) the Journey from Egypt to Sinai (12:37–18) and (3) covenant and Law at Sinai (19–40). The second unit, discusses Israel's journey from Egypt to Sinai, with six sub- themes: (a) the Exodus from Egypt (12:37–14:31), (b) the Song of Moses (15:1-21), (c) the Wilderness of Shur (15:22-27), (d) the Wilderness of Sin (Exod16), (e) the Rock at Rephidim (Exod 17), (f) Jethro and Moses (Exod 18). Brueggemann affirms that, the immediate context and literary unit of Exodus 15:22-27 is from the second major unit (Exod 12:37–18), which describes Israel's journey from Egypt. The setting of this journey is clearly, "the wilderness", the territory not under Pharaoh's control anymore. But also, a territory where there is no water, or ordered reliable life and health support systems (Brueggemann, 2000, p. 379).

Structurally, vv.22-27, must be read within the immediate context of Israel's journeys away from bondage and diseases. It is a journey to well-being, wholeness and to a new land (Exod 12–18). Noticeable, this brief unit forms a chiasm. It looks back at the water imagery of Exodus 14 where the Israelites were overtaken by Pharaoh's military, while they camped by the sea (Exod 14:9) and later delivered (Exod 14:10-31). It also features Israel at two watering holes or oases, both at *Marah* (Exod 15:22-26) and *Elim* (v.27). In other words, for Brueggemann here is a clear movement from "no drinkable, water" (v.22) to "drinkable and water" (v.27) by way of God's healing words and touches (v.26).

Advancing The Analysis (vv.22-27)

Health in the Wilderness (v.22)

In verse 22, where the Israelites journeyed three days in the desert (*midbār*) of Shur, without water. The noun, *midbār*, desert “wilderness”, “steppe”, “pasture”, (*midbār*) which occurs about 269 times in the OT, is a place or location that lacks water (Ezek 19:13; Hos 13:5). Desert areas could be dangerous to health and life. It is a dry and thirsty land, uninhabited (Job 38:26), uncultivated, unfruitful (Jer 2:2; 4:26), but some may have enough vegetation (1 Sam 17:28), for pasturing flocks (Koehler & Baumgartner, 1995, p. 547; McKenzie, 1995, pp. 194–196; Mounce, 2006, pp. 170–171).

Desert (*midbār*), as Mounce (2006) rightly observe, “is a place of thick darkness and danger (Jer 2:31), and is not usually portrayed in a positive light (Song 3:6 is an exception).” Jeremiah, a pre-exilic prophet describes the dangers associated with desert and the horror and the unhealthiness of the desert that the Israelites went through after fleeing from Pharaoh, saying; “they did not say, “where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives” (Jer 6:2). In fact, according to Mounce (2006), natural inhabitants of *midbār* usually, are wild animals, such as jackals (Mal 1:3), ostriches (Lam 4:3) and donkeys (Job 24:5).

Ironically, *midbār* is also a place where God shows his faithfulness and love for his people (Deut 32:10; Neh 9:21; Hos 2:14). God, we are told also used *midbār* as training ground for Elijah (1 Kings 4ff), and the Israelites in preparation for their forty years of “wilderness” sojourning (Deut 8:2). Throughout the OT, according to Mounce, these forty years “is considered one of the most important periods in Israel’s history (Ps. 78:52; 136:16; Ezek. 20:10–26)” (Mounce, 2006, p. 171). further observes that, “significantly, it was also in the desert region around the Jordan River that John the Baptist took up his ministry of preparation, in fulfillment of the prophesy in Isaiah. 40:3, that says, “a voice is calling” “in the desert, clear the way of the Lord (Mat. 3:3).” Above all, it is a place where the Israelites encountered bitterness (vv.23-26) and subsequent healing and sweetness (Mounce, 2006).

Bitterness (Mārâ) in the Wilderness (vv.23-24)

Moses, God’s agent led the Israelites through the desert. They arrived thirsty at a place called Marah (*‘al-kēn qārā’-šāmāh mārâ*). Obviously, they were unable to drink the water there, since it was bitter. They were very upset, angry, and awfully thirsty. They complained bitterly, saying (*lē’mōr*), “what shall we drink” (*mah-ništeḥ*), challenging Moses leadership (v.24). Gaiser, suggests that, “their own bitterness matches that of the water they cannot drink” (Gaiser, 2010, p. 22). In Brueggemann’s view, “It is commonly thought by scholars that the tale is told to explain how the oasis got its name, “bitter” (Longmann III, 2009, pp. 114–115). That is to say, “when they found water, they discovered that it was undrinkable (thus giving the place its name, *Marah*, or “Bitter”). What may have been such a name tale (etymological saga) is, however, transposed by the tradition into a serious theological crisis” (Brueggemann, 2025). The people of Israel in their frustration would now question God’s

leadership through Moses. In other words, “the play on the term “bitterness” is central to the literary meaning of the story as it stands in verse 23” (Gaiser, 2010, p. 22). Yet, the rhetorical or figurative meaning of the term “*mārâ* or *mrh*” is equally important bearing in mind the anger and complain of the people (*mah-nîštteh*), in verse 24.

This is true in later biblical traditions, where the root word, *mārâ* or *mrh*, is not restricted to “bitterness” but to “rebellion” and “disobedience.” A typical example is in Deuteronomy 9:7, where Moses exhorts the Israelites; “Remember and do not forget how you provoke (*qāšaph*) the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness, you have been rebellious (*mārâ /mrh /mamārîm*) against the Lord from the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place.” Similar messages of rebellion and bitterness are heard in Psalms 78:17; 106:7 and in Ezekiel 20:13 (Gaiser, 2010, p. 22). In Deuteronomy 21:18-21 a rebellious, bitter and obedient child is to be brought outside to the gate and stone to death for others to learn a lesson. Significantly, similar act of rebellion in *mārâ /mrh* is treated with forgiveness and healing of both the bitter water and the bitterness, or complaint of the people, through the healing intercession of Moses (v.25).

Is God the Healer, or Moses or, the Wood (v.25a)?

In verse 25, Moses called to the Lord for help (*wayyîš’aq ’el-ădōnai*), with kindness, without rebellion, like the suffering servant of God in Isaiah 50:5. As a result, the Lord showed him a piece of wood (*’ēš*). He threw it into the water, like salt once scattered over the water by the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 2:20-21), and the water became sweet (*wayyîmttaqû hammāyîm*). The “healing” of the water comes through the instrumentality of a piece of wood and the prophetic person of Moses. In this instant, who is the healer, or the physician, Moses, the piece of wood or God? These questions seem to have been addressed during the time of Ben Sirah in the second century BCE (around 180 BCE), in the following words:

Honor physicians for their services, for the Lord created them; for their gifts of healing comes through the Most High, and they are rewarded by the King. The skills of the physicians make them distinguished, and in the presence of the great they are admired. The Lord created medicines out of the earth, and the sensible will not despise them. Was not water made sweet with a tree in order that its power might be known? And he gave skills to human beings that he might be glorified in his marvelous works. By them the physician heals and takes away pain; the pharmacist makes a mixture from them. God’s works will never be finished; and from him health spreads over all the earth (Sir 38:1-6 NRSV).

In this text, Ben Sira, upheld the traditional view that illness results from sin (Deut 28:21-22,27-28; Prov: 3:7-8), and God is the ultimate source of healing. As note by Udoekpo, Only after prayers and sacrifices (Lev 2:1-3), therefore, should the ill person give the human physician his or her place (2 Chr 16:12), as was the case with Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1-11; 2 Chro 32:24-26; Isa 38:1-22) (Udoekpo, 2024). What is clear in Exodus 15:25, I would agree with Gaiser, “is that God acts, and God acts through Moses and through the piece of wood. The narrator is concerned with proclaiming Yahweh as healer, not primarily to delimit the means of Yahweh’s healing” (Gaiser, 2010, p. 23). This healing, of course, comes with conditions.

Conditions for God's Healing (vv. 25b-26a)

In verses. 25b-26a Israel's God displays his sovereignty once again by setting his conditions for healing. These conditions have to do with divine "statutes and ordinances or decrees," using a conditional "if" with verbs of command, such as, do, give heed, hear and keep. That is to say, (1) if Israel would listen carefully to the voice of God, (2) do what is right in his sight, (3) and give heed to God's commandments and (4) keep all his statutes, then, God will not bring upon them all the diseases he brought upon the Egyptians. In Brueggemann's words, "this verse (of "ordinances and statutes") presents Yahweh as the God who commands, and it anticipates the larger tradition of command in the Sinai meeting to come" (Brueggemann, 2000, p. 375). In Gaiser's view "the reference to statutes and ordinances is common to both the Priestly and Deuteronomic legal codes. The condition that keeping Yahweh's statutes and ordinances produces life, while disregarding them leads to death, is prevalent especially in the so-called Levitical Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26), Deuteronomy and Ezekiel" (Gaiser, 2010, p. 24).

Other specific examples include Leviticus 26:3-46, Deuteronomy 30:15-20 and Ezekiel 18:5-21. In these texts emphases are on accountability, personal responsibility as well as, on "act-consequence relationship" (Gaiser, 2010, p. 24). It also includes matters of God's blessings and good health (Deut 7:15; Deut 28:27). These conditions could also be likening to ordinary life, where good nutrition and proper exercises give life and good health, while improper nutrition and lack of exercises bring the opposite. In all these, according to Gaiser, "Israel is called not merely to act in certain prescribed ways, but also to listen to the life-giving word of God and to respond to it in faithful obedience (Gaiser, 2010). That is to say, our lifestyles, health and diseases, life and death within and outside Africa, must be trustingly lived under the umbrella of the sovereignty of God, whose true definition and identity we hear in verse 26b, as the one who heals you (*kî 'ānî ādōnai rōphā'ekā*).

The Lord Who Heals - kî 'ānî ādōnai rōphā'ekā (v.26b)

In verse 26b we embrace those conditions for healing and for retaining good health and wholeness. These conditions culminate in God's self-identity and magisterial statements, "I am the Lord who heals you" (*'ānî ādōnai rōphā'ekā*), with which we started this study. This also remind us that, there are many "I am statements" connected with the divine name "Yhwh" (*ādōnai*) in the Hebrew Bible. This proper noun "*yāh*" or the *tetragrammaton*, "Yhwh" which we translate in English as "Lord," occurs about 7000 times in the Hebrew Bible, everywhere, except in the Song of Songs, and Esther. The short form "*yāh*" is found about 50 times and about 43 times in the Book of Psalms (43 times), and links with the expression "*hallelu-yah*", meaning "praise the Lord" (Mounce, 2006, p. 421).

Of course, there are other texts outside our pericope of study, within the broader context of Exodus that help us appreciate the origin and significance of this divine name (Exod 3:3-15; 6:2-8, 20:1-2 and 43:5-7). In Exodus 3, for instance, the divine name is spelt out in the context of Israel's imminent deliverance from Pharaoh. God revealed himself as "I am who I am" (v.14) after which Moses is commanded to tell the Israelites that "I am has sent me", the

God of our ancestors (vv.14-15). In Exodus 20:1-2, we also read, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (Mounce, 2006, pp. 421–423). In many of these other occasions and texts, the self-identifying statement “*kî ’ānî ādōnai rōphā’ekā*” (I am the Lord who heals you), serves, among other things, a motivational function, and indicates why, or to what extends we must imitate those faithful Israelites and hope and trust in the Lord, especially in moment of suffering, thirstiness, hunger, leadership crisis, bitterness, complaints, and other forms of socio-political “desert experiences.”

Gaiser's summary at his point is worth our meditation. He says, “perhaps we can understand the significance of the claim that God is Israel’s healer (*rōphē*) by recognizing the general exclusivity of the “I am” statements. No one other than Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt. No one other than Yahweh is the first and the last (Isa 48:12); indeed, “beside me there is no god” (Isa 44:6) (Gaiser, 2010, p. 25). Understood within the overall Exodus tradition, where God heals those bitten by the snake, deliverance by paving way for them through the sea, a literary healing inclusion especially between Exodus 14 and 15 makes it obvious here. God is truly the healer of his people in a holistic sense of the OT meaning of healing (v.26), irrespective of Moses and the tree or piece of wood becoming the agents for sweetening the water (v.25). So also, were the agencies of Isaiah and the pig plaster in healing Hezekiah as presented in 2 Kings 20:1-22 (Udoekpo, 2024). This might be very instructive to religious communities both within and outside Africa where abuses in prayer houses, healing centers, for money, power, control and other material gratification, have not only become the order of the day, but have attracted numerous cautions, guidelines and instructions from Church authorities and scholars (Akpanonu, 2023; CBCN, 1997; Hampsch, 1999; Sanford, 1966, 1970).

From the Sea, to the Waters of Marah to Elim (v.27)

Lastly, I would rather disagree with some scholars, including Walter Brueggemann (2006, 381), who claims that “the final verse of this unit (v.27), perhaps, has no integral relation to the preceding (vv.22-26).” It does, as rightly argued by Gaiser, that, “the water imagery, developed in the account of the crossing of the sea and in our story of Marah continues into the following verse” (Gaiser, 2010, p. 34). Verse 27, finally, says, “Then, they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there by the water” (*wayyābō’ū ’ēlīmā wāšām šattēm ’eśarēh ’ēnōt mayîm, wāšibā’îm tāmārîm, wayyaḥānû-šām ’al-hammāyîm*). In verse 27, Gaiser, observes a possible *inclusio*, or a chiasm between narrative of the early experiences in the wilderness and camping by the sea and deliverance (14:9), with the later deliverance, sweetening of the bitter water and camping in Elim that has plenty of springs of water and palm trees (Gaiser, 2010, pp. 34–35).

In this final verse, God’s saving blessings are intensified and multiplied. This is “represented by the abundance they find at Elim: twelve springs and seventy palm trees in verse 27” (Ndjerareou, 2006, p. 106). The numbers twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, Gaiser suggests, are not accidental. but are claims of fulness, that “God has overcome not only the deadly waters of the sea and the deadly force of Egypt, but also the bitter waters of Marah, and the potentially bitterness of Israel, and God has brought Israel to full safety and

abundant water” (Gaiser, 2010, p. 35). God has also proven that he is the ultimate physician, doctor and healer (*rōphē'*) of his people of all cultures.

CONCLUSION

In what precedes we have examined Exodus 15:22-27 in detail and attempted answers to the questions raised in the beginning. In it we discovered God as the overall healer, as particularly expressed, in Exodus 15:26, *kī 'ānī ādōnai rōphā'ekā* (I am the Lord who heals you). The studied narrative was colored with the healing of the bitter water with a “piece of wood,” and related to the bitterness, thirstiness of the people and Moses' role as a leader and agent of God's healing (vv. 23-25). Like the Israelites, many Africans who read this story, especially, in the midst of their sickness, and other discussed socio-political, cultural, religious, and economic challenges, and world-views, are often skeptical about sources and instruments of healing therein. In the case of the Israelites, many of them were tempted and drawn to other gods, during their thirstiness and difficult journeys in the wilderness. Some, as we saw rebelled, complained, disobeyed, raised questions and even cursed Moses, their leader and God's agent. So also, are the Africans today, when confronted with issues that negatively affect their general well-being. In light of this, basic and guiding questions raised throughout the study were: What is healing and who heals in this story and by what means? Does God's healing of Israel from Egyptian bondage, slavery, hunger, thirstiness and bitterness, to restoration, sweetness, and wholeness, exclude other agents of healing such as Moses, water and the piece of the wood (v.25)?

As observed in the study, in verses 25-26a, the Israelites knew that their God of the covenant, statutes and ordinances (vv.25-26a) meant well, in spite of their challenges. Therefore prayers, intercession and their desires for well-being, acquisition of drinkable water and good health, could be hopefully expressed even within the world, where like ours, pain and sufferings and loss of loved ones, were daily experienced. Just like in the case of Moses who cried out on behalf of Israel (v.25), those who are sick today, could faithfully and obediently ask the Lord in prayer for healing, with the expectation that the Lord of the covenant would heal them.

Although, this God of the covenant was the ultimate healer, as we saw throughout the work, he did not prohibit Israel's use of everyday healing methods and practices. Under God all things including the piece of wood (*'ēš*) used by Moses to sweeten the water in Marah (v.25), the fig poultice used by Isaiah to cure Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1-11), and the salt scattered over the water by the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 2:20-21), are God's healing agents. God can heal through the use of various elements he created, including the gifts, talents and skills he has given to human beings. These gifts must not be abused in our churches, and healing homes, both within and outside Africa.

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