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A Biblical Approach to the Reduction of Child Trafficking in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Human trafficking constitutes a profound violation of human dignity and remains a pressing moral challenge in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State. Although the Bible does not explicitly employ the modern terminology of "human trafficking," its legal, ethical, and theological traditions strongly condemn all forms of human exploitation. This article examines biblical laws and ethical principles opposing trafficking through a theological analysis of Deuteronomy 24:17–22, Psalm 82:3–4, and Matthew 18:5–6. Drawing from the Law, the Writings, and the Gospels, the study demonstrates that Scripture consistently affirms the protection of vulnerable persons, including foreigners, orphans, widows, and children. Using a theological approach, the article highlights how biblical justice emphasises relational responsibility, preventive economic ethics, and moral accountability for leaders and communities. Deuteronomy 24 presents legal mechanisms designed to prevent exploitation by safeguarding the poor and marginalised; Psalm 82 indicts unjust leadership and demands active intervention on behalf of the oppressed; and Matthew 18 underscores the sacred worth of children and issues severe warnings against their abuse. The article argues that these texts collectively offer a coherent biblical ethical framework that directly challenges contemporary trafficking practices. It concludes that combating human trafficking is not merely a humanitarian or legal obligation but a theological mandate rooted in the biblical vision of justice, compassion, and the sanctity of human life.

Keywords: Biblical Approach, Reduction, Child Trafficking, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

Introduction.

Human trafficking refers to the illegal movement of people from one place to another or from one country to another, usually for nefarious activities such as sexual exploitation or prostitution, forced labour, and other unwholesome activities. Human trafficking is still persistent because it makes an exorbitant

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amount of money for the traffickers, and they use the money to bribe their way through. However, child trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of an individual by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion for exploitation. It is a violation of their rights, their well-being, and denies them the opportunity to reach their full potential. According to Fadeiye[3], at least 1.2 million children are trafficked annually for child labour and sexual exploitation. While recent research has yielded information on the nature of child trafficking, little is known about its magnitude.[4] To reduce vulnerabilities that make children susceptible to trafficking and child labour, Global March (GM) assists governments in strengthening laws, policies, and services, including legislative review and reforms, establishing minimum labour standards, and supporting access to education.[5]

Global March also works with communities to change norms and practices that exacerbate children's vulnerabilities to trafficking and entering into child labour right from its source in the villages at the grassroots level. However, roughly 160 million children were subjected to child labour at the beginning of 2020, with 9 million additional children at risk due to the impact of COVID-19.[6] This accounts for nearly 1 in 10 children worldwide. Almost half of them are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health and development. Children may be driven to work for various reasons. Most often, child labour occurs when families face financial challenges or uncertainty, whether due to poverty, sudden illness of a caregiver, or job loss of a primary wage earner.[7] The consequences are staggering. Child labour can result in extreme bodily and mental harm, and even death. It can lead to slavery and sexual or economic exploitation. Nearly every case, it cuts children off from schooling and health care, restricting their fundamental rights.

Cigno and Rosati assert that children who are victims of child labour cannot develop their skills,and they cannot contribute meaningfully to the growth of their nation's gross domestic product (GDP).[8] The situation of child labour and trafficking in Ado Local Government is not different from what obtains in other local governments across the country. These children participated in mild to severe forms of child labour. Others, especially ladies who were forced to engage in commercial sex, face the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases STDs or HIV and unwanted teenage pregnancy.

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[3]A. Fadeiye, ''*What is Human Trafficking*,'' 2022,https://www.en.ng- what-is-human-traffickingaccessed on 16th May,2023.
[4] F. Hannabeth et al, The Prevalence of Sex Trafficking of Children and Adolescents in the United States: A Scoping Review. Trauma Violence Abuse, volume 23, issue 1, 2020, 182-195. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020933873
[5] International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org>topics-andsection>labour-law-ref...
[6] International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org>topics-andsection>labour-law-ref
[7]. C. Anker, Trafficking and Women's Rights.*Journal of Global Ethics*, *volume* 2, issue 2, 2006, 163–170.
[8]A. Cigno, and F. Rosati, The Economic of Child Labour. *Economic Record* volume 82, issue 259, 2006, 495.

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Etymology and Causes of Human Trafficking

From time immemorial, human trafficking has been in operation all over the world. Among the traditional African societies, slavery was practiced; the peonage or pawnship (that is,*Iwofa* in the Yoruba context) also symbolisesthe slavery system. The Arabian people who traded from West Africa through the Trans-Saharan trade routes were the first set of people to export slaves from West Africa to North Africa.[9] When the Europeans discovered the New World (America) and saw that the land of America and the West Indies was suitable for the cultivation of cotton, coffee, Tobacco, etc. They came to West Africa particularly for slavery.[10] These flourished throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth Centuries. Anker opines that slavery as a trade had been abolished in the world, but a new form of trafficking people had emerged. Today, men, women, and children are affected as they are illegally taken out of their different communities to other parts of the world, such as European and Asian countries, for obscure businesses or jobs.[11]

Okpukpara and Odurukwe note that many reasons were responsible for child labour and trafficking; lust for world riches and materials, that is, the syndrome to get-rich-quick, is a very important factor, and ignorance on the part of the parents to facilitate child labour and trafficking.[12] Many parents are ignorant of the evil intention of the traffickers towards their children, believing that they would be gainfully employed in overseas countries and bring them money out of abject poverty. Many of them are willing to give their children and wards to the human traffickers, so that such children and wards will bring them hard currencies, such as pounds and dollars. An un-conducive Nigerian environment where conspicuous poverty has taken effective control of most encourages people to move out of the country illegally due to bad leadership that doesn't care about the future of children.[11]

The impatience on the part of young children who wanted to amass materials at any cost means that such children can easily be deceived and lured by human traffickers. Gross unemployment is another major factor that encourages human trafficking. For lack of securing employment, many young girls and boys are lured by human traffickers, being promised of securing employment in overseas countries, the jobs that never exist, especially in ltaly where they are compelled to engage in prostitution and hard labour. Kigbu and Hassan[13] opine that a nation with a high prevalence of child labour and trafficking cannot be

[9] R. Austen, Regional Study: trans- Saharan trade. Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 662-686. https://www.doi.org/10.1017/CB09781139059251
[10] I. Thiaw, and D. L. Mack, Atlantic Slavery and the Making of the Modern World: Experiences, Representations, and Legacies: An Introduction to Supplement 22. Current Anthropology, volume 61, issue 522, 2020, 5145-5158
[11] C. Anker, *Trafficking and Women's* Rights, *Pp.* 171—182.
[12]O. Okpukpara, and C. Odurujwe, The National Action and Plan to Combat Human Trafficking,https://www.whitehouse.gov-accessed on 7th July, 2023.
11 O. Okpukpara, and C. Odurujwe
12. S. K Kigbu, and Y. B. Hassan, Legal Framework for Combating Human Trafficking in Nigeria. The Journey so far. *Journal of Law and Globalization,* volume 38, 2015, 205—220.

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productive today and in the future. This is because the future of society can only be prepared for future challenges through education.[12]

Historical Background of Ado-Ekiti

Ado-Ekiti is an ancient city, founded in 1310 A.D. by Ewi Awamaro, the son of Biritikolu, after the defeat of Elesun of the *Ilesun* settlement. *Ewi* was not only a king; he was also the supreme military Chief of his army. *Awamaro* (the restless one) andEwi (the speaker) were said to have left Ile-Ife with their father, Ewi Apa Biritikolu, and their uncle, Oranmiyan, to both ItaOrogun and Benin, respectively, after briefly staying with *Oloba* in *Oba-Ile*, *Akure*. Both *Oranmiyan* (Oba of Benin) and *Biritikolu* first settled in Benin forests before disputes among their people led them to separate, and Biritikolu sought a new home westward at *Utamodi* (*Oke Papa*). *Ewi Biritikolu* and one of his sons reigned there.[13] It was *Ewi Awamaro* who migrated to *Ilesun* (present-day Ado-Ekiti) after staying briefly at *Udoani* (IdoAni) and *Agbado* during the long migration. When *Ewi Awamaro* left *Agbado*, some elders remained behind to rest and gave the settlement the name *Agba* Ado (Elders' Camp),*Agbado-Eki*ti, as the town is known today.

Ulesun people welcomed them warmly, and neighbouring committees came together to assist their settlement (built homesteads for them) at *Oke-Ibon* in *OdoIjigbo*. Eventually, *Ewi* and his people overthrew the existing political arrangements, conquered the *Ulesun* community, displaced its ruler, Elesun, and established a new town. *Awamaro's* spies encouraged him to attack *Elesun* with the support of *Odolofin* after he had settled down at *OkeIbon* (now OdoIjigbo), and with the conquest of *Ulesun* by *Awamaro*, the town of *Ulesun* changed its name to Ado-Ewi. The *Elesun* (the King) who ruled over the town of *Ulesun* with the satellite towns, i.e.,*Ukere* (now Ikere), *Isinla*, *Ulamoji, Agidimo, Ikewo,* had peaceful coexistence before the emergence of the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti.[14] The *Elesun* occupied the peak of a hierarchy where he had his subordinates, such as the *Odolofin (Elesun's* second in command), *Asao, Elegemo, Alamoji, Olisinla, Olulero, Olookori,* etc.

Elesun was the head of the laity in the worship of *Olota* (god), the deity in charge of the security of *Ulesun*. The *Ulesun* language was different from the Yoruba language. Examples are *Ideregbe (Ewure*or Goat), *Okeregba (Aja* or Dog), *Amomo (Alangba* or Lizard), *Usa (Ikoko* or Pot), *Ukere (Ago* or Cup), *Ogolomosi (Ibepe*or Pawpaw), *Oyeye (Epa* or Groundnut). Some of the *Elesun's* chiefs, such as *Odolofin* and *Asao,* were accepted into the *Ewi's* system of chieftaincy after *Awamaro's* conquest. The *Elegemo* retained his post as Chief Priest and custodian of *IwemoOgun*.[15]Ewi's Warrior chiefs who provided military security for palace inhabitants were the *Akogun* at *Irona, Oloja Ese*at *Oke Ese, Eleyinmi* at *Okeyinmi,* and *Egbedi* at *Orereowu*. Eventually, *Ewi* and his people overthrew the existing political arrangements after a series of conflicts, conquered *the Ulesun* community, displaced and killed its ruler *Elesun,* cut off his head, proceeded to establish a new town named *Ado*, meaning 'here we encamp*'. Ewi Awamaro* and his successors conquered villages and cottages in the neighbourhood, replaced their rulers with their own loyalists, stalwarts, and scions of the royal

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family.[1614]Ewi expanded the kingdom by force of arms, annexed territories, and gave these territories to scions of the royal families; these assumed titles which became hereditary. The expansion and growth of Ado-Ekitilasted over 400 years. The town is reputed for great attention to cleanliness. Traditions preserve numerous brave citizens of each Ado community; the best known were *Ogbigbonihanran* of *Idolofin* quarters, *Ogunmonakan* of *Okelaja*, *Fasawo*, a.k.a. *Aduloju* of *Udemo* quarters, and *Eleyinmi Orogirigbona* of *Okeyinmi* quarters. Folk traditions are replete with fond references to *Ewi's* relationship with some other Ekiti traditional rulers.

The *Ewis*who reigned at Ado from 1444 to 1552 were:

1. Ewi Ata (1444–1471)
2. Ewi Owakunrugbon (1471–1490)
3. Ewi Owamuaran (1490–1511)
4. Yeyenirewu – The regent (1511– 1552) Ewi's military exploits during the period were to subjugate and annex his immediate territories, which extended to Ikere, Igbara Odo, Ogotun, Aramoko, Erio, and Erijiyan, among others.
5. Ewi Obakunrin (1552–1574)
6. Ewi Eleyo-Okun (1574–1599)
7. Ewi AfigbogboAraSoyi (1599-1630)
8. Ewi Gberubioya (1630-1696)
9. Ewi Idagunmodo (1696-1710)
10. Ewi Okinbaloye Aritawekun (1710-1722)
11. Ewi Amono Ola (1722-1762)
12. Ewi Afunbiowo (1762-1781)
13. Ewi Akulojuorun (1781-1808)
14. Ewi Aroloye (1808-1836)
15. Ewi Ali Atewogboye (1836-1885)
16. Ewi Ajimudaoro Aladesanmi I (1886-1910)
17. Ewi Adewumi Agunloye (1910-1936)
18. Ewi Daniel Anirare Aladesanmi II (1937-1983)
19. Ewi Samuel Adeyemi George-Adelabu I (1984 – 1988)
20. Alayeluwa Ewi Rufus Adeyemo Adejugbe Aladesanmi III (the current Ewi of Ado-Ekiti).

Ado-Ewi was peaceful as war was abandoned in place of a diplomacy and mutual relations strategy. Ewi Gberubioya divided the Ewi dynasty into three ruling houses of Owaroloye (Aroloye), Atewogboye, and Arutawekun. Ewi's sons who ruled in neighbouring areas during the reign of Gberubioya included Okunbusi, who became Onigede, Adubienimu, who became Alawo; the Onijan, Opoakin (of Iwere), OluAkitipa (of Odo), Aramude, Olokun, Olurasa, Onikewo and Olotin. One of his sons, Amujoye, founded Igbemo and took the title of Oba of Igbemo from its inception; Ado-Ekiti is the state capital of Ekiti State.

A Theological and EthicalInvestigation of Deuteronomy 24:17–22, Psalm 82:3–4, and Matthew 18:5–6 on the values of children to the contemporary context of child trafficking

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Human trafficking has emerged as one of the most pervasive forms of modern exploitation, affecting millions of individuals globally and disproportionately impacting children, women, migrants, and economically marginalised populations.[15] While contemporary discourse often frames trafficking in legal, economic, or human rights terms, religious traditions, particularly Christianity, offer a deeper moral and theological critique of such practices. The biblical tradition presents a robust ethical vision that affirms human dignity and condemns systems that enable exploitation and abuse. This article explores the biblical foundations of ethical resistance to human trafficking through a focused examination of Deuteronomy 24:17–22, Psalm 82:3–4, and Matthew 18:5–6. These texts span diverse literary and theological contexts yet converge in their concern for justice, protection of the vulnerable, and accountability of individuals and institutions.

The biblical understanding of justice is grounded in the conviction that every human being possesses inherent worth derived from creation in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). This theological affirmation underlies biblical legal and ethical traditions and stands in direct opposition to practices that dehumanise persons. Human trafficking, which treats individuals as objects of profit and control, fundamentally contradicts this vision.Biblical ethics are inherently relational, emphasising responsibility toward others, particularly those who lack social power.[16] The repeated biblical concern for the poor, the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow reflects an awareness that vulnerability often arises from structural inequality. Scripture, therefore, does not merely condemn overt acts of violence but also addresses social conditions that create susceptibility to exploitation.

The Mosaic Law contains explicit safeguards designed to protect vulnerable persons, including children. InExodus **21:7–11**, laws regulating servitude strictly limit abuse and demand humane treatment, indicating that exploitation of the powerless was not tolerated. [17]Moreover, Leviticus**19:29** warns against practices that degrade family members, implicitly condemning sexual exploitation, which is a common feature of child trafficking.

Deuteronomy 24:17–22: Legal and Economic Protections for the Vulnerable

Deuteronomy 24:17–22 articulates legal provisions designed to protect marginalised members of Israelite society. The passage explicitly prohibits the perversion of justice against foreigners, orphans, and widows, while grounding

17 L. Kiss et al, Violence, abuse and exploitation among trafficked women and girls: A mixed-methods study in Nigeria and Uganda, BMC Public Health Journal, volume 22, issue 794, 2022. https://www.springer.com/article
/10./1186/s12889-022-13021-1
18 E. Dimgba et al., Unethical Religiosity and Human Trafficking in contemporary Nigeria. FAHSANU: Journal of the Arts/Humanities, volume 1, Number 1, 2018, 1-12.
19Theology of Work, Slavery or Indentured Servitude (Exodus 21:1-11).
https://w.theologyofwork.org>exodus-and-work

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this command in Israel's collective memory of slavery in Egypt.[18] This appeal to historical experience establishes empathy as a foundation for ethical responsibility.The laws concerning gleaning further demonstrate an economic ethic aimed at preventing extreme poverty. By mandating that landowners leave portions of their harvest for the poor, the text promotes a distributive model of justice that limits economic exploitation.[19] Such measures function as preventive safeguards, reducing the conditions that often lead individuals into vulnerable situations susceptible to trafficking. From a contemporary perspective, Deuteronomy 24 highlights the importance of structural justice. Human trafficking frequently flourishes where poverty, exclusion, and weak legal protections intersect. The biblical text challenges communities to address these underlying factors rather than merely responding to exploitation after it occurs.

Psalm 82:3–4: Divine Accountability and Ethical Leadership

Psalm 82 presents a striking portrayal of divine judgment against unjust rulers. The psalm condemns leaders who fail to defend the weak and commands them to "rescue the weak and the needy" from oppression. Justice here is not passive or symbolic but demands concrete action. This passage is particularly relevant to discussions of trafficking, which often involve institutional failure or complicity. Corruption, inadequate enforcement of laws, and indifference by authorities allow exploitative practices to persist. Psalm 82 asserts that such failures are subject to divine scrutiny, reinforcing the moral responsibility of leaders and institutions. The psalm also broadens ethical responsibility beyond formal governance. Any individual or organisation with the capacity to intervene bears a moral obligation to do so. In this sense, Psalm 82 offers a theological critique of apathy and silence in the face of exploitation.

Matthew 18:5–6: The Protection of Children and the Ethics of Care

In Matthew 18:5–6, Jesus places a child at the center of his teaching and identifies care for children with faithfulness to himself. In the socio-historical context of the first century, children occupied a position of limited status and dependency, rendering them particularly vulnerable to neglect and abuse. Jesus' severe warning against causing a child to stumble underscores the gravity of harm inflicted upon the vulnerable. The imagery employed conveys the seriousness with which exploitation is regarded within the kingdom of God. This teaching establishes a non-negotiable ethical boundary: harm to children constitutes a direct offense against God. Given that child trafficking remains one of the most widespread and devastating forms of exploitation, Matthew 18 provides a powerful theological foundation for child protection. It affirms that safeguarding children is not an optional charity but a core expression of discipleship.

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Biblical Approach to Child Labour and Child Trafficking

Many believed that human trafficking and child labour are modern day problem; this issue has been in existence since biblical times. The narrative of human trafficking began with the story of Joseph in the Old Testament, when his brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 39:28). This narrative continued on a national scale in Exodus when the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites for over 400 years. This history of trafficking continued throughout Biblical History and grew in regularity as cultures developed and nations formed.[1820] The expansion of the world's population allowed the trafficking of people to impact every country on this planet negatively. Slavery, which irreparably marred American history, enslaved and oppressed an entire ethnicity based on skin color, and helped propel trafficking onto the global stage. Since that time, the exploitation, abuse, and victimization of people have grown exponentially.[2119]The proliferation of modern-day slavery and sexual exploitation of people is not just a social justice issue for the government, but an affront to the bible and should be on the mind and heart of every Christian. Having ears open to the cries of the oppressed and rescuing those enslaved is a central theme throughout biblical history. When the prophet Isaiah uttered the words in Isaiah 61:1-2, he was expressing the very heart of God.

> The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the Lord's favor has come, and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies.

Throughout the Scriptures, one could see that God hears the cries of the oppressed, He remembers the covenant with His people, and He acts to rescue and deliver. He does not overlook or turn a blind eye to the oppressed; instead, He makes them the central focus of His love, provides justice and rescue for the hopeless. His commitment to redemption is so significant that He sends His own Son, Jesus, whose name means 'The Lord Saves and Rescues.' Jesus, God incarnate, is repeatedly moved with compassion upon seeing and hearing the cries of those oppressed and enslaved through the curse and acts to redeem His people and provide eternal justice.

20Theology of Work, Slavery or Indentured Servitude (Exodus 21:1-11). https://w.theologyofwork.org>exodus-and-work[18]

21Justice and Mercy International, A Christian's Fight against Human Trafficking.MoldouaNes, August 20, 2020, 3. https://.justiceand mercy.org/achristians-fight-against-human-trafficking

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Ways of Eradicating Child Labour and Child Trafficking through Biblical Guidance and Counseling

Recently, the rate of child trafficking in Ado-Ekiti has increased rapidly and gained appreciative ground despite the efforts of the former and present governments to strictly curb this hydra-headed monster. Since child labour and trafficking are seen as detrimental to the child's family and society at large, several suggestions have been made to reduce the habit into minimal level. This is done mostly through the introduction of biblical counseling services.[22]Agwe et al[2023] argues that, the strategies for controlling child labour and child trafficking in the societies include counseling services that excluded children education from participating in hazardous work, limit on the number of hour a child help his or her parents doing petty homework such as; cleaning the environment, washing plates to allow such a child going to school on times and attend to assignment without being disturbed.[24] There must be an introduction of minimum education attainments of working children, and other counseling services that promote economic growth. Adesina et al.,[25] submits that child labour and trafficking could be controlled through guidance and counseling services that involve the implementation of effective polices that take into account variables like age, income status of child labourers, households, education level of parents, as well as sector and zone.

Implications

Jesus' warning about causing a child to stumble is one of the strongest ethical statements in the New Testament. The severity of the imagery underscores God's intolerance of child abuse. Applied to child trafficking, this text rejects all justifications, such as economic hardship, cultural tradition, or parental consent that excuse exploitation. This has profound implications for churches in Ado-Ekiti. Congregations cannot remain neutral when children in their neighborhoods are trafficked. Silence becomes complicity when measured against Jesus' teaching.

Biblical ethics place primary responsibility for child protection within the family. Parents and guardians are called to resist economic desperation that sacrifices children's safety. Deuteronomy's emphasis on justice and Matthew's insistence on protection challenge families to seek communal support rather than private solutions that expose children to harm. Families must also be

22E. T. Rachel, and H. Chris, *A Christian Fight against Human Trafficking*, 2020, Retrieved from www.justiceandmercy.org/a-christian-fight-human-trafficking.accessed on 7th July, 2023.
23 P. Agwe, L. Susan, V. Okoye, Using Preventive, Protection, Prosecution and Partnership Framework to Explore the Successes and
Constraints of Social Work to Address Sex
Trafficking in Edo, Nigeria, in: *The British Journal of Social Work*, volume.89, 2023, 44–56. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad189
24 P. Agwe, L. Susan, V. Okoye
25 M. A. Adesina,et al., Child labour and Trafficking in the twenty first century Nigeria: Implications for human capital development and internal security. Journal of Political Discourse, volume 3, Issue 1, 20255, 1-14.

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educated to recognize deceptive trafficking practices disguised as "help," "training," or "opportunity."

Churches in Ado-Ekiti wield moral influence and social trust. The examined texts imply that churches must move beyond pulpit condemnation to practical engagement. This includes:

- Teaching biblical child ethics
- Establishing child-protection committees
- Supporting vulnerable families financially
- Partnering with NGOs and social services
- Offering counseling and reintegration for survivors

Biblically informed faith communities can become safe spaces rather than silent observers. Psalm 82 emphasises leadership accountability, while Deuteronomy highlights systemic justice. Together, they imply that government agencies and traditional institutions in Ado-Ekiti must enforce child-protection laws consistently. Faith-based advocacy can play a crucial role in demanding transparency, reporting abuse, and supporting policy reforms.

Conclusion

The biblical texts of Deuteronomy 24:17–22, Psalm 82:3–4, and Matthew 18:5–6 offer a powerful ethical lens for addressing child trafficking in Ado-Ekiti. They call for preventive justice, courageous leadership, and uncompromising protection of children. Contextually, these scriptures reveal that child trafficking is not only a social crime but a theological violation that contradicts God's justice and compassion.For Ado-Ekiti, the implication is clear: confronting child trafficking requires a collective moral awakening rooted in biblical ethics that places children at the center of communal responsibility and refuses to tolerate their exploitation.

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