

Job the Pious? The Theological-Ethical Potential of Job 31 in Contemporary Africa

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Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Theology
(M. Th.) in Old Testament at the University of Stellenbosch



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F gego dgt"2014

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it to any University for any degree.

Signature: Hassan Musa

Date: 20 November 2014

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the glory of God for the 10th memorial of Rev. (Dr) Gayus Dogo (1929-13 August 2014) for his enormous contribution to the teaching of the word of God in North-Eastern Nigeria for over 40 years. His services to the Church and the then ECWA Bible Training School Bayara will always be remembered with gratitude.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the following persons for their great contributions during the course of this study;

- ❖ I am thankful to God (Yahweh) for bringing me to Stellenbosch University and granting me insight and grace in the studying of his word.
- ❖ I am thankful to my tireless supervisor, Professor Hendrik L. Bosman, for his great effort in guiding me and supervising this thesis from the beginning to end. His deep sense of love and care to me and other students around him is sincerely appreciated. I am seriously indebted to him for how he exposed me to deep thoughts and Old Testament scholarly engagements.
- ❖ I am thankful to my parents for their financial and moral support throughout this journey.
- ❖ I am also grateful to ECWA sons and daughters for their spiritual and financial supports.
- ❖ I am thankful to other scholars and friends at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University for their encouragement, scholarly engagements and contributions in many ways.
- ❖ I also appreciate the effort of Rev. Dr. Nathan Chiroma and Dr. Matthew Michael for their spiritual and moral support.
- ❖ I am grateful for insightful discussions I had with friends like Rev. Friday S. Kassa, and Pastors Kurginam Samaila, Zachariah Bulus Takore, and Ephraim Yoms at different times and places during this study.
- ❖ I am also thankful to Mev. Manitza Kotzé for taking her time to edit this thesis.
- ❖ I am grateful also for the contributions of different scholars in history whose works I have used in many ways to make this thesis a success.
- ❖ I am grateful to Stellenbosch University for being a place where cultures meet and academics thrive. Thank you so much also for funding my study with the Hope bursary, I am grateful.

Abstract

This thesis concerns itself with the discussion of the piety of Job in the biblical book that bears his name in order to closely examine the motivation and potential of his piety in light of his oath of innocence in Job 31, so that we might respond to some crucial issues of life, primarily in African contexts.

The background to this study in chapter one takes into consideration the lack of interest in studying Wisdom Literature in Africa, especially the Book of Job, except on an occasional basis that calls for discussions on suffering. We discovered that only a few African scholars have tried to explore some aspects of wisdom literature, which poses the challenge of providing other materials from the area of study to further enrich Old Testament biblical studies in Africa and beyond.

Moreover, we also observed the separation of faith and ethics in African contexts, which further invites us to examine the life of Job in terms of what he believed and how that constituted his piety and related to his ethical life. This attempt also has as a point of interest the on-going quest of scholarship in the contemporary contexts in which theological-ethical questions with regard to wisdom theology, human dignity, gender equality, and prosperity theology, amongst other concerns seek decisive responses. Thus, the second chapter of this thesis explores some contributions in wisdom literature in order to see how scholars have contributed to the study of the wisdom concerns, especially regarding the theological-ethical possibilities. In doing this we also highlighted some ancient texts that carry the theme of ‘the innocent sufferer’ like the Book of Job. Accordingly, we also note how the question of Job’s piety in his declaration of innocence has almost been neglected by different scholars, which poses us the challenge of considering it as the golden thread of this thesis.

In chapter three we provide a close reading of Job 31 in order to closely examine its textual details and interpretation that set the stage for the theological-ethical study of the same passage in chapter four, in which Job’s piety is used to respond to the issues we raised in chapter one and also pose some challenges that call for a reconsideration of faith and ethics in terms of practical

reality and profitability which if done well, as reflected on in chapter five, would greatly improve our lives from personal to external and social dimensions.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis handel oor die bespreking van die vroomheid van Job in die Bybelse boek wat sy naam dra, om die motivering en potensiaal van sy vroomheid in die lig van sy eed van onskuld in Job 31 te ondersoek en hoofsaaklik te reageer op 'n paar belangrike kwessies van lewe in Afrika kontekste.

Die agtergrond van hierdie studie in hoofstuk een, neem die gebrekkige belangstelling in die bestudering van Wysheidsliteratuur in Afrika, veral die Boek van Job, met die uitsondering van gesprekke aangaande lyding, in ag. Ons het ontdek dat slegs 'n paar Afrika vakkundiges al probeer het om van die aspekte van wysheidsliteratuur te ondersoek wat die uitdaging bied om materiaal te vind binne hierdie studieveld om Ou-Testamentiese Bybelse studies in Afrika en verder te bevoor.

Verder het ons ook die skeiding van geloof en etiek in die Afrika-konteks waargeneem, wat ons ook uitnoui om die lewe van Job in terme van wat hy geglo en hoe dit sy vroomheid gevorm het te ondersoek en in verband te bring met sy etiese lewe. Hierdie poging het ook as punt van belang om die voortgaande soektog na kundigheid in die hedendaagse konteks waarin teologies-etiese vrae onder andere in verband met wysheidsteologie, menswaardigheid, geslagsgelykheid, en voorspoedsteologie, vra na beslissende antwoorde. Dus ondersoek die tweede hoofstuk van hierdie tesis party bydraes tot die wysheidsliteratuur om te sien hoe vakkundiges bygedra het tot die wysheidsvrae, veral in verband met die teologies-etiese moontlikhede. Sodoende lig ons ook party antieke tekste uit wat die tema van 'die onskuldige Iyer' dra, soos die Boek van Job. So let ons ook op hoe die kwessie van Job se vroomheid in sy verklaring van onskuld verwaarloos is deur verskillende geleerdes, wat die uitdaging aan ons bied om dit te oorweeg as die goue draad van hierdie tesis.

In hoofstuk drie bied ons 'n noukeurige lees van Job 31 om die tekstuele besonderhede en interpretasie noukeurig te ondersoek. Hierdie besonderhede baan die weg vir die teologies-etiese studie van dieselfde gedeelte in hoofstuk vier waarin Job se vroomheid gebruik word om te reageer op die kwessies wat ons reeds in hoofstuk een vind en ook ander uitdagings wat vra vir 'n heroorweging van geloof en etiek in terme van die praktiese werklikheid en nuttigheid wat, as dit

goed gedoen word, soos in hoofstuk vyf weerspieël word, 'n groot verbetering inhou vir baie van ons lewens, van persoonlike na eksterne en sosiale dimensies.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Background

The Book of Job is one of the Old Testament texts that have attracted the attention of many scholars over the years, especially in order to account for its historicity in terms of authorship, veracity and the hermeneutic relevance to its readers. It is an interesting and unique book, particularly also in terms of its composition and literary genres. Even from just a cursory survey of the entire work, it is a complex book (McKenzie 2005:103), as it is composed of two major literary genres, namely prose and poetry. This fact has divided many scholars on the issue of its composition, regarding which some suggest there must be a theologically informed redactor behind it. In his commentary on the Book of Job, African scholar Tewoldemedhin Habtu (2006:569) sees the book as one of the backbones of the biblical literary corpus called “The Wisdom Literature”. Looking at its literary genre and placement in the canon, he concludes that: “It is in a class by itself both for the depth of its message and the complexity of its literary forms” (2006:571). According to Hartley (1988:5), Job may be understood as an example of the ancient Edomite wisdom tradition, despite the absence of significant literary proof from that region. Hartley’s conclusion may be based on the place of origin of Job as stated clearly in Job 1:1, namely ‘Uz’, which is an ancient city in Mesopotamia. With regard to the book’s context, Perdue (2007:77f) sees the Book of Job as one emanating from the exilic milieu in Babylon, which provides background for studying the formative context of the book, both as part of an oral tradition and as Wisdom Literature¹.

With regard to the nature of the Book of Job, well-known Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann (1997: 489) sees Job as a helpful, self-conscious reflection on being human in the Old Testament.

¹ The concept “Wisdom Literature” amongst others will be given special, though brief explanation in section 1.6 in this chapter in order to provide a working knowledge of the main concepts that would be used in the on-going discussions of this thesis.

Keeping the multifaceted nature of the Book of Job in mind (e.g. its authorship, characterization, genre, reception, etc.) , this research will concentrate particularly on Job’s final response in light of his suffering, which is recorded in chapter 31. As Job was not satisfied with the assessments of his friends on the reason for his suffering, he was determined to hear from God; thus, in his quest to achieve this, he confronted God as a last resort with his (Job’s) “oaths of innocence”. If one reflects on the preceding chapters, namely 29 and 30, one would agree that Job had a painful experience in his quest for justice and fairness. His confessions may therefore be understood as a justified outburst, as a last resort, yet his confessions remain a challenge to any reader who is not aware of Job’s context in terms of time, geography and religion.

With regard to contemporary use and understanding of the Book of Job, it is often viewed and used with reference to the nexus between faith and ethics (i.e. the connection between what one believes and how one acts). For example, Habtu (2006:592) sees Job as one who upholds his integrity publicly before both God and his contemporaries. Kroeger and Evans (2002:284) see Job as one who “pledges his past life and deeds as surety of his innocence and integrity”, thus affirming Mays’ (2000:388) observation that: “The ethical system [in Job] involves not only external action, but also inner attitude and principle of ethical thinking”². With regard to the society in which Job found himself, Hamilton’s comment is noteworthy: “The author of Job envisions a society of hierarchies of status, but also of reciprocal obligation” (2007:74). As Hamilton also observes regarding Job 31: “This part of the book also portrays the nobleman Job as one worthy of YHWH’s attention, and thus as a potential model for the restoration of Israel itself” (2007:69). This, by implication, shows how God takes notice of people’s piety³ and rewards it according to God’s will and wisdom.

From the foregoing thoughts, the results of this research may be used to issue a challenge to African readers as to the understanding of who a “good person” or a “man/woman of God” is,

² “Ethics” in this discussion could refer basically to “Wisdom ethics”, which will be further discussed later in this dissertation as a way of life that concerns itself more on emphasizing and following the God-given natural order of life and morality that appeals to the will and emotion in light of piety, justice and social order. Thus, it is the order and lifestyle of people from a general wisdom perspective as a daily life experience. See Birch et al (1999:374-76).

³ Piety will also be discussed later in this work as one’s inner/outward religious inclination. It shows how serious one is in terms of religious understanding and how that reflects and influences one’s practical life in terms of active reverence and obedience to God. In this thesis Job’s piety will be considered as a case study (See Vanzant 2009:524). This will also be discussed further as the thesis progresses.

both in words and deeds, in thoughts and actions, in private and public, as Job did by not concealing his inner life but rather displaying it before the people around him. In this manner they could see, learn and benefit from it, as noted by Kroeger and Evans above.

Considering my personal background as a Nigerian, I am aware of issues of piety and responsibility⁴, as well as how piety and wealth have been difficult issues facing many people. This is based on my personal observation and experience in ministry, in that people are often considered “good” in their community if they can perform one or two external benevolent actions. This points us to the dichotomy between ethics and piety, which has to do with inner purity as observed in the contemporary African⁵ context by Yusufu Turaki (2012:178) when he says: “Ethics is a matter of outward acts and not inner purity, motives or disposition”. He further explains moral integrity, which is an aspect of piety and ethics, in light of social failures (or sins) in modern Africa, saying: “Those Africans who are people of integrity, honesty, faithful and sincere, are usually scolded for refusing to do the needful thing for the tribe. In fact good people are usually rejected in politics for they are useless when it comes to amassing political and economic loot for their people. What counts in politics and economics is not moral integrity but influence and power” (2012:178-179).

On the other hand, there has also been a grave misunderstanding of the connection between actions and consequence in terms of wealth and piety. One example of this is the contemporary Nigerian charismatic church movements that are adhering to the so-called prosperity gospel,⁶

⁴ As a person from the northern part of Nigeria, I grew up within a society and culture that has a very strong cultural and traditional religious understanding of ‘piety’ and ‘responsibility’. There is a concept of a god of piety; *Bagiro* is traditionally known among the Hausa people (especially those known and/or called *Maguzawa*) as a god of responsibility and piety. He is known to know the secrets of all people in the community, so he is believed to see and expose any impious act like theft, sexual immorality. Thus, people grow up with the serious fear of doing what is wrong in order to avoid his wrath, shame and dishonor in the community. As the Hausa culture also demands, everybody is expected to be responsible in terms of discharging their duties with honesty, fairness, truth, justice and compassion. I grew up to learn to show my piety and responsibility outwardly as a sign of honor and truth, such as when my grandfather asks me to stoop down to greet properly and open my mouth well when I greet or answer a question. These, amongst others, are ways and activities that influence and shape my sense of piety and responsibility.

⁵ Contemporary Africa describes the present 21st century African context, which is different from traditional Africa. The concept of Africa as it will be used in this thesis will be explained further under the heading of “Conceptualization” (1.6.11 below).

⁶ For an example of such views, see: http://www.greatbiblestudy.com/prosperity_gospel_biblical.php (accessed on 7 October 2013). Much better examples of prosperity will be discussed later (1.6.10). For more on such teachings, see

expecting anyone in a right relationship with God to remain healthy and wealthy, especially materially.

With these thoughts in mind, this research may challenge contemporary African Christians (in Nigeria and beyond) by showing, for example, that an ironical interpretation of Job 31 has possible significance for any type of “prosperity theology”⁷.

In light of the fact that scholars such as Osborne (1991:191) and Perdue (2007:1,2) suggest that in the past Wisdom Literature has often been neglected by scholars (especially in terms of its social history) and in sermons⁸, leading to a frequent misuse of such literature, this research hopes to take up the challenge and encourage the furtherance of this biblical scholarship by examining the theological-ethical dimensions of Job’s piety in light of Job 31, with the aim of seeing how it may relate to human dignity⁹, gender equality and social justice. This study is the continuation of my proposed approach on biblical interpretation as discussed in my Post Graduate Diploma assignment (see section 4 below). In this way it will provide another option in terms of the kind of attitude with which to approach the interpretation of Scripture in contemporary Africa.¹⁰

J. C. Thomas, 2012. “Prosperity Preaching: West African Traditional Belief or a Foreign Import” in *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology Vol. XVII (1):163-172*. Lovemore Togarasei, 2011. “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity in African Contexts of Poverty: An Appraisal” in *Exchange 40*, 336-350.

⁷ “Prosperity Theology” is a trend of theology that emphasizes deeds and consequences of one’s relationship with God. They often assert that if one is righteous, that person would definitely find and enjoy the favor and blessings of God in terms of material wealth according to the wishes and claims of the person. On the other hand, if a person is wicked (a sinner), that person will not prosper but rather receive curses from God. This theological emphasis is paramount in independent charismatic churches in Africa and the world at large. We shall see how some scholars respond in favor of or against this trend from the biblical-theological perspectives.

⁸ Probably as a result of insufficient materials that would raise their interest in such biblical passages and present them simply to their understanding and usage or the lack of interest of scholars and teachers to dive into them as areas of necessary concern and practical teaching.

⁹ Human dignity refers here to the God-given quality and worth of life of all human beings that should be recognized and respected by all. This applies to all humanity because of their creation in the image of God, regardless of gender or any other status. This concept will be further discussed in section 1.6 on conceptualization.

¹⁰ Thus, this research will enter into dialogue with material from the recent past produced in Africa to show how the continent’s readers understand the theology of the Book of Job. Two major trends will be considered, namely Habtu’s interpretation as an example of an evangelical-theological perspective and prosperity theological proponents from Nigeria.

1.2. Primary and Secondary Research Questions

The primary research question that this research intends to answer is: “What is the theological-ethical relevance for contemporary African interpreters of the piety of Job according to Job 31?”

In order to answer this primary research question, the following secondary research questions will be investigated:

- What are the literary and historical contexts of Job 31 within the context of the whole of the Book of Job and similar Ancient Near Eastern texts?
- What is the main theological-ethical function of chapter 31 in the Book of Job?
- What are the presuppositions on which Job as a possible model for piety is based?
- How can the theological-ethical interpretation of Job 31 challenge African readers towards true piety, human dignity and gender equality?

1.3. Research Hypotheses

In close connection with the research questions formulated above, the following working hypotheses are suggested:

1. That Job 31 can be interpreted as one of the foremost examples of Old Testament ethics and piety and as such, offers a remarkable description of what constitutes a “good / righteous person”.
2. That the above-mentioned ethical example in Job 31 is relativized in an ironical manner by the lack of response to it in the subsequent chapters of Job – especially in the YHWH¹¹ speeches in Job 38 ff.
3. That an ironical interpretation of Job 31 is a great challenge for African readers who adhere to a type of “prosperity gospel”.

¹¹ This is how the covenant name of the God of Israel, which is translated as “LORD” would be represented throughout this thesis, alongside other names like God or the Lord, as the case may be.

4. That the reflection on the presuppositions of Job as a model for piety in chapter 31 can function as an important hermeneutical sounding board for the contemporary reflection on human dignity and gender equality.¹²

1.4. Research Methodology

This research is an attempted application of the interpretative approach that I proposed in my Post Graduate Diploma research, when surveying Habtu's (2006) interpretation of the Job narratives. This approach, called a multi-dimensional approach, aims at giving an informed reading of the text (in this study, of Job 31) for better contextual application by readers – in the case of this study, contemporary African readers – and with the specific view of assisting them in fostering a constructive religious and ethical life. Thus, this research will carry the conversation towards such an interpretive approach further, as well as apply it.

According to Jonker and Lawrie (2005:235): “Multidimensional interpretation is neither a new method that replaces previous ones, nor a super method that attempts to integrate all the good points of other methods. It is, rather, an alternative attitude to exegesis.” This seeks to achieve a particular emphasis by way of interpreting a given text, as seen in the scholars' addition that “[t]he emphasis then falls on the attitude with which the interpreter regards texts and the process of interpretation, on the communal human practice of gaining meaning from texts” (Jonker & Lawrie 2005:235).

The following are Jonker and Lawrie's (2005) succinct summary of the approach in terms of its structure with regard to biblical interpretation and exegesis:

A multidimensional approach does not render existing exegetical methods superfluous, but requires a specific perspective on the variety of methods. As here summarized; Methods are not seen as indispensable keys without which texts would remain meaningless to us. Instead, they are seen as more or less useful formalizations of techniques we all apply in our daily practice. This does not mean that we can dispense

¹² These forms of general theological implication are mentioned within the work without an attempt to be conclusive on the issues in question, but rather to see how we can reflect on them and open more possibilities for further considerations.

with specialized methods. Some texts, biblical texts for instance, are so complex that we need an array of methods, sometimes highly specialized ones, if we wish to do justice to them (2005:235, 236).

A multidimensional hermeneutical approach is therefore a technique of interpretation in which a particular text is read using different methods and in dialogue with different authors towards achieving an informed understanding of a given text. It is suggested that the complexity of Job 31 requires a multi-dimensional approach, according to which theological-ethical aspects can be investigated from different perspectives such as the literary, historical, and the theological-ethical. The text of Job 31 will also be approached in an interactive way called a “close reading”¹³ of the text. A close reading is a decisive engagement with the text in regard to its form and content in order to carefully understand and articulate its possible meaning. As shown in the title of this research, the piety of Job will be carefully investigated to serve as a point of departure for the theological-ethical emphasis that may be made in the work. This would expose the possible themes that lie in the passage for practical application in contemporary African contexts. The choice of this approach is motivated as a suitable attempt in order to reasonably respond to the research problem and question, as well as the working hypotheses described above.¹⁴ The literary, historical and theological-ethical dimensions of the Book of Job will be explored during the research, which would provide a multi-dimensional possibility of examining various scholars’ areas of interest and contributions on the book, as well as to set the stage for an interactive discussion of our selected passage.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Taking the scholarship on biblical studies in the African context and from an African perspective into account, one is bound to find that a very scant amount of written materials exist on Wisdom Literature, especially on the Book of Job. It may be that not many pastors and Bible school teachers preach and teach from it, exactly because of the existence of inadequate materials. This

¹³ The idea of “close reading” shall be explained in more details below under the heading of ‘Conceptualization’ (1.6.8).

¹⁴In sections 1.2 and 1.3 of this Chapter.

research would thus add to the few literary works on the Book of Job in African biblical scholarship.

A study such as this may also help students and teachers of the Bible to develop an interest in Wisdom Literature. By way of the multi-dimensional interpretive perspective it wishes to employ, it may furthermore widen students' and teachers' perspectives on the Book of Job and assist them in making the book's various themes relevant and applicable to African contexts. The focus of the research on ethics and the relationship between belief and ethics/believing and acting with reference to Job 31, may help to provide important points of view on the relationship between deeds and consequences as a challenge to 'prosperity theology' and also by emphasizing principles such as justice, fairness, and piety, which are indispensable for creating better interpersonal relationships and thus, for promoting human dignity, gender equality and piety in African contexts¹⁵.

1.6. Conceptualization

This section intends to briefly explain some of the main concepts that will be used in order to discuss the main question of this research. These conceptual representations may not be exhaustive on any of the concepts in question, but would provide the readers with the working knowledge of the issues that may not be conventionally understood in a normal or general discourse or have different meanings or emphases in other texts and/or contexts. Therefore, the following could be accepted as the writer's usage of the following concepts in this thesis:

1.6.1. Wisdom

Wisdom is an internal quality of life that has to do with the acquisition and use of practical knowledge. This suggests that wisdom is an internal state of mind in terms of its clarity and ability to grasp meaningful information and yield to meaningful, profitable action.

¹⁵ See my 3rd and 4th hypotheses above.

Recently, scholars¹⁶ like J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney in their *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (2009:1529) have explained the concept of wisdom in the context of ancient literature when they also discussed wisdom from the Hebrew root word *hokmâ*¹⁷, which means skill, experience, shrewdness, prudence, and wisdom.

Considering the multidimensional practicality of wisdom, we would agree that “[i]n human beings wisdom is an eminently practical attribute, including technical skill (Exod. 28:3), military prowess (Isa. 10:13), and even shrewdness for questionable ends (1 Ki. 2:6). Wisdom is shown in getting desired ends by effective means” (Douglas & Tenney 2009:1529).

Brueggemann provides us with a vivid and helpful understanding of wisdom from the biblical perspective, described in the following words: “Wisdom in the Old Testament refers to a body of accumulated teaching based on discernment and reflection about the character and mystery of life” (2002:232). Concerning wisdom teaching, he says:

The teaching is theological-ethical reflection from below, grounded in experience that, as such, constitutes a tradition alternative to the better known traditions of salvation history rooted in God’s miracles and expressed as covenant... The teaching is rooted in common sense and has a high degree of prudential concern (Brueggemann 2002:232).

Thus, from a wisdom perspective, we can see that “the truth of life is hard work that requires ongoing discernment, fresh imaginative articulation and receptivity to matters that may challenge and veto old settlements” (Brueggemann 2002:235).

With the foregoing thoughts in mind, we can see “wisdom” as that which entails the acquiring and dispensing of viable skills of life in relation to different situations and contexts, which passes from one person to another through various means of communication and experience. It is

¹⁶ For older explanations of wisdom as a display of experiential knowledge in the whole of life, see Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966:3; Gerhard Von Rad *Old Testament Theology, Volume I*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1970:428.; *Wisdom in Israel*. London: SCM Press, 1975:97; Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos and John Rea, *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia. Volume 2 K-Z*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976:1815; Walter Kaiser Jr; *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991:179.

¹⁷This is often translated as *Sophia* in Greek.

usually communicated from the aged to the younger ones either through oral, vicarious or written traditions. Thus, wisdom as special knowledge in action has practical dimensions for both religious and general life¹⁸. In this light I will examine the character of Job, especially in chapter 31 of the book that bears his name, to see the interface of wisdom in his life.

1.6.2. Wisdom Literature

Wisdom Literature refers to a group of literature containing wisdom thoughts that could come from various sources and settings. Thus, we can say with Pfeiffer and others that: “Wisdom Literature is a wide category of writing in the ancient Near East” (Pfeiffer et al 1976:1815).¹⁹ Concerning its scope, it can be added that: “Wisdom Literature in the OT consists of the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, but it is also found in shorter passages, such as Ps.19. In the OT Apocrypha, the books of Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom of Solomon belong in the same category” (Douglas & Tenney 2009:1529).

Anthony Ceresko (1999:8) sees wisdom as an essential cultural phenomenon and an aspect of spirituality for liberation. He portrays wisdom writers and their characters as people who understand the interconnection of the divine-human life, in that wisdom life does not see spirituality as an end in itself without any connection to the practical aspect of everyday “ordinary human life” (Ceresko 1999:3). He also points out that wisdom writers portray a critical way of life in that one’s life and attitudes are critically assessed in wisdom, either for approval or condemnation (Ceresko 1999:3). Thus, he suggests that: “Discerning the values and beliefs that inform and guide the sage’s counsel will enable us to understand something of what wisdom spirituality is all about” (Ceresko 1999:3). His proposal in the foregoing quotation is one of the salient motivations of this research in an effort to closely examine Job’s piety (or spiritual life in terms of belief and action) in relation to his daily life and memory.

¹⁸ Von Rad shifts from his tradition-historical discourse to a theological-ethical analysis of wisdom, unlike many other scholars who mainly think of wisdom as being more secular and having less or nothing to do with religious discourse. Thus, in his view wisdom is less secular and deeply religious. See J. L. Crenshaw, *Gerhard Von Rad*. Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1978; G. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (1975).

¹⁹ There are similar documents on ancient Wisdom found in ancient Babylon and Egypt, which we shall pry into briefly in the next chapter to see how they relate to the biblical version of Wisdom texts, especially the book of Job, which is the main focus of this research.

In J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu (2008), Katharine J. Dell gives an observation that points out the confrontation to the traditional understanding of wisdom in the book of Job, especially on Job's requests and/or confrontational remarks toward God and his friends and God's final "response" to Job's words, not Job's concerns: "This then poses radical challenge to the wisdom world-view of finding orders and patterns in human experience of the world that provides certainty" (2008:414-15).

We can summarize the above thought by saying that Wisdom Literature is a collection of ancient literature contained in the Bible, although there could be variance in terms of their reception and interpretations in various canons, yet they essentially contain pithy sayings or descriptive instructions in a romantic dialectic between the world and life of the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked of all gender and intellectual persuasions under God, along with others.

1.6.3. Wisdom Ethics

As previously explained in the meaning of the concept of wisdom²⁰, wisdom ethics is a set of practical rules of life from experiential knowledge towards a right and acceptable disposition of life in terms of one's conduct with and among others. From the biblical perspective we can see the book of Proverbs as an example of wisdom ethics. It contains rules and regulations guiding the practical knowledge of people in the fear of God and righteousness.²¹ Vincent P. Branick (2006) considers the positive effect of biblical wisdom literature in providing moral-ethical education on how to live within an acceptable and profitable attitude in a business enterprise as an example of daily life engagement²². Thus, it helps to provide optimism in facing the future in a meaningful and profitable way and manner (Branick 2006:73). He sees Job's three friends as representing optimistic wisdom as they counselled Job through the book to take steps towards a penitential resolve with God for a better future (Branick 2006:77). Yet, Job did not yield to such

²⁰See section 1.6.1 in this chapter.

²¹We also need to note that there are differences between ancient wisdom in Israel and wisdom in Judaism, which could be seen as older and younger versions/stages of wisdom discourses. Such discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, therefore we would suggest it as part of a potential area for further study. For more detail, see Von Rad *Wisdom in Israel* (1975) and JL Crenshaw *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.

²²For a discussion of wisdom and ethics as practical doctrinal concern in pointing readers to the Christian way of life, see James A. Fischer, "Ethics and Wisdom" in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, (1978)40:293-310.

calls but remained focused in an attempt to keep his integrity and harmony with God; although pessimistic in words, he was still optimistic about his righteousness, which became his vindication at the end (Branick 2006:83). Thus, wisdom ethics could be used in this work as the principles, ideas or rules and regulations of life that have to do with one's conduct in daily life experience within very important choices and consciousness of what is right and wrong before God and fellow human beings.

1.6.4. Wisdom Theology

Wisdom theology would be seen as the sum total of wisdom and wisdom ethics as aspects of divine sovereignty and control of life and the world at large. It is a display of practical experiential knowledge in the fear or reverence of God and according to God's revealed order of life. This kind of theology is relevant in shaping the life of an individual, as well as the community of faith (the church) as a whole, in order to live in righteousness and the fear of God²³.

Bruce Birch and other scholars observe that: "Wisdom theology is indeed 'faith seeking understanding' trying to determine what it is about God's power and purpose that limits and permits, that authorities and engages human meaningfulness in day-to-day interactions" (Birch et al 1999:414).

This kind of theology could come from the teachings, sayings and lives of wise people of God, showing the younger ones who God is, how people should relate to God in fear and respect, as well as the understanding of oneself within the mighty deeds of God. This kind of theology prepares the human mind for a meaningful engagement with life in terms of order and chaos, cause and effect and sometimes life in mystery (see Von Rad 1975).

1.6.5. Sage

The sages are also people of great reputation and invaluable impact to human life in terms of knowledge and information, tradition and behaviour. Brueggemann discusses the sages as

²³ For the use of Wisdom theology in the Church as a the community of faith, see Leopoldo Cervantes-Orti "Reading the Bible and Reading Life: Everyday Life Approaches to Wisdom Literature from Latin America", *Calvin Theological Journal*/46, 2011: 278-288, 278.

mediators of Yahweh and points to the fact that the term “sage” is increasingly used as an umbrella term for wisdom teachers and scribes (2007:680). Nevertheless, it is worth noting here that: “Wise men (*sic*) or Sages, unlike prophets, claimed no special inspiration. They exercise no priestly functions and were not, like the scribes, devoted exclusively to the study of the sacred writings” (Douglas & Tenney 2009:1529).

Carole R. Fontaine in Sakenfeld (2009:37) explains that the words that are translated as ‘sage’ appear frequently in the Bible to describe people possessing the traits of wisdom, or as a description of informed, intellectual, reasoned approaches to life or behaviour. It is also noteworthy from the above quoted scholar that the word ‘sage’, as a gender neutral form, is preferred by many modern translations, given that it can encompass both male and female activities (Gen 41; Matt. 2:1,7, 16; Judg. 5:29; 2 Sam. 14; 20; Jer. 9:17-21). See also references to feminine personification of “wisdom”.

In order to see the link between the ‘sages’ and the ‘scribes’, it should be noted here that sages and scribes have similar vocations of providing guidance and teaching to the people. Another commonality between them is the fact of their having wisdom to carry out their duties. Nevertheless, they differ professionally in that the primary work of the scribe is reading and copying the Scriptures, while the sage does more in teaching the wisdom of God as the wisdom of life, rather than writing, although we still need to bear in mind that their work may overlap rather than being totally different. Von Rad (Crenshaw 2007:843-48) and Brueggemann (2007:680) see the term ‘sage’ as an all-encompassing term to describe the transmitters of traditions in Israel (see also Perdue 1990:720-21; Marshall et al 1996:1068-69; Crenshaw 1978:97-103).

1.6.6. Piety

This is an inner quality of life with outward impact. J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney discuss the term ‘piety’ alongside godliness, which in essence constitutes the proper conduct that springs from a right relationship with God: “It is not belief in itself but the devotion toward God and love

to others that result from that belief” (Douglas & Tenney 2009:536-7)²⁴. In terms of religious faith, piety/godliness is an essential character without which the religious faith stands empty (Douglas & Tenney 2009:537).

Michael G. Vanzant in Sakenfeld (2009:524) explains piety from both Hebrew and Greek root words, in that piety in Hebrew is (יִרְאַה) *yîr'âh* and in Greek it is *dikaiosynē*. He further explains that:

Piety is devout reverence for God portrayed through righteousness. The OT view of piety is ‘fear of the Lord’ understood as active obedience to God (Gen 20:11; 2 Sam. 23:3; Prov. 1:7; 8:13; Isa. 11:2-3; 33:6 compare Job 22:4). Piety in the NT includes appropriate, well-intentioned, outward religious activity. Jesus declared that overt ‘piety’ for popularity will go unrewarded (Matt. 6:1-18).²⁵

It is noteworthy, as we shall see from the study of the Book of Job, that piety is not immunity to suffering in life. Kenneth Ngwa (2009:367) also agrees that “Job's piety and suffering are not unrelated to issues of economics, power and above all to the governance of human communities and ultimately of the universe”. It was an inner reality with outward evidence, yet not for Job’s own sake but for God’s. Piety in this work should be understood from a diversified point of view as having different ramifications of understanding, expectations and application.

1.6.7. Irony

This is a literary term that often requires a double audience or a double understanding for effect. It is a two sided coin, which requires the listener or reader to always look at the other side in order to make good sense of its nature and effect. It could appear as a literary feature for the effect of humour between opposites or the running of ideas from the expected to the unexpected in a given text.

²⁴ In other words, it is evidence of a belief within reasonable motivations.

²⁵ Thus, piety must be a cautious activity in terms of religion. It must be sincere and for the glory of God, not the human person.

Yvonne Sherwood (2008:69) also explains the interface of irony in the books of Jonah and Job as textual characters or characterization to a cosmic drama, saying: “The books of Jonah and Job employ the branch of irony²⁶ known as ‘tragic’ or ‘dramatic irony’ where the character knows far less than the audience (and God)²⁷ about his/her situation and fate. God’s speech from the whirlwind in Job 38-40 is an example of ‘cosmic irony’ quite literally” (2008:69). She goes further to expatiate the meaning of cosmic irony in the following words: “Cosmic irony is a branch of irony that explains the incongruity between the expected outcome and what actually happens. In Job cosmic irony is applied to the structure of the cosmos/the universe itself” (Sakenfeld 2008:69). David R. Jackson (2010) turns us to the rhetorical side of irony in God’s confrontational and humbling reply or response to Job.

1.6.8. Close Reading

This is an intentional meticulous reading of the text in order to see its force from its own details. Brueggemann (1997:55) explains such a scholarly activity in connection to people like James Muilenburg . According to Brueggemann (1997:55): “Muilenburg almost single-handedly made credible the practice of close reading, whereby one notices the detail of the text, such as word patterns and arrangements, the use of key words in repetition, the careful placement of prepositions and conjunctions, and the reiteration of sounds of certain consonants”.

Jonker and Lawrie (2005:74-75) explain that: “The only way to get to grips with the uniqueness of the text is through a close reading of the text itself.” In this process of engaging with the text, “close reading requires a sharp eye for every detail and the ability to relate various details to one another.” Thus one must learn to see the text as a whole and in relation to each of its given details because “[m]eaning does not lie in isolated elements, but in the way in which the elements are combined in the text.” Therefore, “one cannot regard the content of a text (what is said) and its form (how it is said) as separate.”

²⁶ There could be many branches of irony depending on the literature, texts and grammatical constructions and functions. It is beyond the scope of this study to go into detailed research or analysis of those. Nevertheless, the few examples in this present work may suffice to catch a glimpse of it.

²⁷ This is not accepted from the fundamental understanding of the transcendence and omniscience of God. Yet, as a narrative display or suspension of what lies ahead or in between the interplay, God may decide to be hidden until a later time or stage in the flow of the narrative.

This approach helps the readers to answer the question of the meaning of the text, in the text and from the text. By the utilization of a close reading, the reader sees and articulates the meaning of the text. The “meaning” sought for here is, in John Barton’s (2007:112) words, the “plain sense” of the text, in which “an exegete was not someone who drew out the meanings of texts²⁸, but a guide to a sacred place, who led the visitor out to see it and explain it, a kind of a tour guide”²⁹. In this way the exegete and the “reader” are both reading the text from a careful and searching manner by trying to allow the details of the text to be the determining elements of the sense of the text. Thus, the approach, especially as envisaged and applied in this research will be within a multidimensional discourse in which the details of the selected text are described and discussed, not away from but alongside other erudite scholars on the Book of Job, as well as other related works in the ancient Near East where necessary.

1.6.9. Human Dignity

This section does not intend to go into an in-depth discussion of the rhetoric of humanity and dignity, but we shall rather highlight what humanity entails, especially from the biblical perspective, and see how the question of dignity also ties together with the biblical understanding of what a human being is and how dignity should be ascribed to human beings. Thus, I wish to examine the “givenness” of humanity and dignity in light of “the image of God” humanity was created in right from the beginning (Gen 1:26-27), which constitutes human worth that deserves recognition, and respect. It is noteworthy here that the concept of human dignity is understood and explained in different manners by different scholars; for example, Job Y. Jindo (2011) views human dignity from God’s revealed perspective, in that he sees it as a necessary virtue of human understanding that is constituted by the notion of the “fear of God”³⁰. “Fear of God is thereby identified as a particular state of mind that directs one’s perception of the world and the self and qualifies, essentially, one’s existence as human” (Jindo 2011:433). From a more in-depth biblical critical analysis, Hendrik Bosman (2013) explores the concept of the *Imago Dei* from the Old

²⁸ From one’s personal imaginations or even given conventions away from the text itself.

²⁹ For more on the “plain sense” of a text, see Barton (2007:101-116).

³⁰ He explains the “fear of God” as the understanding of the transcendent nature of God beyond oneself (see Jindo 2011:449).

Testament perspective in order to explain the possible meaning and significance of the essence of “humankind” and how their interrelatedness with each other and even God brings about the need and possibility of dignity. He agrees that “humankind seems to be defined in terms of different-even contradicting- personal and social relationship” in that he discovers the following various points of concern in understanding humankind, which comprise³¹ (2013:51):

- ❖ The fact that all people are created from the dust and are therefore connected to the ground and mortal.
- ❖ The creation of woman from the rib of the man, which created a strong connectivity between them.
- ❖ As the image of God, the whole of humankind is related to God and connected to creation.
- ❖ Humankind can relate personally to God beyond the notion of idolatry.
- ❖ The Lord provides for humankind and does not demand slave labour as in the rest of the ancient Near East.

Bosman (2013:52) concludes his discourse by saying, “The ‘image of God’ positions humankind in the liminal space between fragility and greatness, rooted in the potential to reflect his image and to resemble his likeness”.

On the other hand, Frits de Lange (2013) engages with the discourse on dignity in a way that emphasizes the meaning and place of dignity in humanity, in which he points out that: “Dignity is not a ‘value’, understood as an abstract ideal, but the moral qualification of concrete practices of social recognition” (2013:9). Thus, it has to be manifested in practical terms to another human being as ‘the other’. Looking at the interconnectedness of being and action, De Lange further adds that: “Whoever speaks of dignity, acts morally” (2013:10)³². This helps us to come to terms with the fact that: “Dignity is awarded ontological status; it becomes rooted in the greater scheme of things. Though dignity can be violated, it can never be lost” (De Lange 2013:11).

³¹ The following are paraphrased points that Bosman gathered both from Priestly and non-Priestly traditions in the Old Testament.

³² It is noteworthy here that: “Dignity exists solely as dignity-to-be-acknowledged and it reveals itself *sub contrario* when it is infringed upon by violence, humiliation, neglect, indifference” (De Lange 2013:16).

Beverly Eileen Mitchell (2013:67) also agrees that: “Insofar as this dignity comes from God alone, it cannot be taken away by other human beings”. Thus, “...dignity belongs to the definition of being human” (Mitchell 2013:14).

Juliana Claassens (2012) describes the confrontation, threat, violation and potential violation of human dignity from the patriarchal perspective in light of the biblical stories of Ruth, Naomi and Tamar. Nevertheless, being human shows itself in one’s resistance of any form of dehumanization (Claassens 2012:665), as well as the quest to be seen and respected by the “other” (Claassens 2012:668). Thus, she calls for constructive human resilience, even when one is dehumanized for a vital self-reconstruction and becoming human once again (2012:674).

Friday S. Kassa also describes human dignity as “an intrinsic quality that cannot be separated from other essential aspects of the human person. This dignity is not based on any human quality, legal mandate or individual merit or accomplishment” (2014:12). He goes further to show its resonance with natural law in natural and moral ethics (Kassa 2014:88f).

Nico Koopman discusses the meaning of human dignity as an opportunity of being human in terms of the wholeness of life, respect, freedom, holiness and justice³³. The violation of these rights shows dehumanization and “[w]e need not accept inhumanity as normal pattern of interaction on the African continent” (see Hansen et al 2011:505). Human dignity, thus, is a necessary discourse for the reconstruction and transformation of lives in Africa, seeing the pathetic presence and effects of dehumanization on the African content, as briefly highlighted by Piet J. Naude (2011:500) when he says: “Africa has become a continent suffering under dehumanization. Some of the factors behind this are historical. Their impact and effect are still evident, but the fact of their existence cannot be denied or altered”. He thus addresses the possible development of dehumanization in Africa by the misuse of language, the loss of *Ubuntu* and the marginalization of the poor (Naude 2011:502). He concludes by making an appeal for

³³ For more on Koopman’s perspective on being human, in terms of holiness, wholeness, and justice emanating from the Triune God and the doctrine of reconciliation in dignity and as a dignifying unity, see Nico Koopman, “Holiness and the Public Life in South Africa: The Quest for Wholeness, Embrace and Justice” in *Colloquium* 40/2 2008:166-181; and “Belhar: A Transforming and Dignifying Tradition” in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 139, 2011:32-41.

piety (in terms of the knowledge and submission to God) as the key element to restoring true humanity, order, righteousness and Justice in Africa (Naude 2011:505-509).

From the foregoing thoughts we can see that human dignity is a God-given life quality of being human, which is derived from God's own nature in terms of God's image and likeness (Gen.1:26,27) of God's communicable attributes that constitute our wholeness, from God toward one another, with one another in God's presence. Thus, it is the intrinsic nature of being human for an effective life in true freedom to life, wholeness, justice and equality with a space from the "other" and for the "other". Human dignity is a multifaceted term that cannot be exhausted in a simple definition in this work; nevertheless, we often get a better grasp of what it entails whenever it is denied, confronted or even trampled upon, as seen in the previous considerations from Claassens and Naude's points of view. Our reading of Job 31 will help us to have a glimpse of Job's personal and public life and see how he treated others in light of their being human and the space and response they need from Job as the "other" in many situations of life. Thus, to see how that could be our own point of departure toward a constructive and meaningful engagement within the required spaces³⁴.

1.6.10. Gender Concerns

This term embodies the concerns, needs and calls for justice and equality wherever and whenever they are lacking for a meaningful participatory life of peaceful co-existence with the "other". The following gender examples would focus more on the on-going discourse of women from a religio-academic perspective for a realization of a meaningful space in participatory life³⁵.

Nambalirwa Helen Nkabala (2013:384-400) presents a critical examination of the existing literature and some interpretive hermeneutical theories on the on-going study of women in order

³⁴ For more on human dignity, see Linda Woodhead & R. Soulen, *God and Human Dignity*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006; David G. Kirchhoffer, *Human Dignity in Contemporary Ethics*. Amherst, New York: Teneo Press, 2013.

³⁵ For more on gender concerns, see also Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, Linda Day and Carolyn Presser (eds), *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World; An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006; Jurgens H. Hendriks, Elna Mouton, Len Hansen, and Elisabet Le Roux, *Men in the Pulpit Women in the Pew? Addressing Gender Inequality in Africa*. Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2012; L. Juliana Claassens and Stella Viljoen (eds) *Sacred Selves : Essays on Gender, Religion and Popular Culture*. Cape Town : Griffel Media 2012.

to restore and revitalize their sense of being, belonging, hope and dignity. Her contribution is a practical application of the *Talitha Cum*³⁶ hermeneutic of human (women) restoration as seen from an Ugandan perspective and as a pointer to the viability of the new *Talitha Cum* hermeneutic paradigm.

Chammah J. Kaunda (2012:142) shows the contribution of women's theology on the gender sensitive issues of alienation and injustices, which in many ways has been an on-going conversation both from cultural and academic milieus³⁷. Nevertheless, "gender injustice remains a serious issue in theological education in Africa" and therefore she calls for a conscious examination and theological address of the problem by "reconstructing an African moral-ethical imperative"³⁸ (Kaunda 2012:148) that would provide headway to the possibility of a just-peace.

Shan Simmonds takes adolescent girls' concern in contemporary interactions into account and discusses the "potential intersectionality to be a valuable conceptual tool to make meaning of gender, religion and culture." (2012:109).³⁹ She continues by saying: "The presence of gender in educational, political, social and economic discourses highlights its prominence as a field of study because of the way people live their lives and interact in society" (Simmonds 2012:109).

Olga Yurkivska (2013:5) makes an effort to address identity questions in Africa in light of gender discussions. This contribution provides a critical examination of an African-centred approach to gendered identities and how they impact the formation of the concept of womanhood.

³⁶*Talitha Cum* is a kind of gender-sensitive ethical reading of the OT texts (Nkabala 2013:385). Nkabala further explains it in the following words, saying: "*Talitha Cum* hermeneutic empowers African women to read the OT text in ways that promote dignity for women and the entire humanity" (2013:397).

³⁷ For example, see the discussion of Juliana L. Claassens, "A True Disgrace? The Representation of Violence Against Women in the Book of Lamentations and in J.M. Coetzee's Novel *Disgrace*" in Claassens and Spronk 2013:73-90.

³⁸ For example, she calls for the understanding and application of the concept of the biblical *Koinonia* in terms of teaching and practice in the move towards the achievement of the set goal, namely the communal just-peace as a moral-ethical imperative (Kaunda 2012:147-150).

³⁹ Nevertheless, she is not oblivious to the diversity in culture and religious persuasions in South Africa, which provides her geographical context of discussion. Thus "[t]he girls' narratives highlighted the elusive and complex nature of gender within the context of religion and culture" (Simmonds 2012:123). However, she remains an advocate for a space for religious educational contribution in curriculum constructions.

1.6.11. Prosperity Theology

Prosperity theology is the understanding that came from and with the materialistic emphasis of biblical interpretation. This theology came up and is still flourishing among the charismatic Church movements around the world. J. C. Thomas (2012:163-172) inquires regarding its place in Africa and asks whether it is coming from African traditional beliefs or not. Wherever its origin, its impact is still telling of the biblical understanding of Scripture and the practices of the general Christian life in regard to the questions of wealth, health, poverty and suffering. C. B. Peter (2009:137-147) and Lovemore Togarasei (2011:336-350) consider its use in addressing the poverty plight of sub-Saharan Africa.

Nevertheless, evangelical scholars would not be favourably disposed to its positivity, even when it addresses very serious practical issues with a positive result, because of the motive and doctrine behind it. They rather call for an honest understanding and utilization of the biblical material for a practical godly life, whether in poverty or in affluence.

The editorial note of *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (2001) describes the pitfalls of prosperity theology with the hope of raising theological interest and consciousness for possible alternatives. Among other things, the erroneous interpretation and application of the Scripture by many of the proponents of the prosperity gospel/theology stands out in that: “Though the advocates of the Prosperity Gospel may quote Scripture, they never⁴⁰ balance these isolated scripture references with the full teaching of Scripture on poverty and wealth.”⁴¹ The study continues to unveil four observable errors of prosperity theology, namely (a) wrong teaching on giving, (b) a wrong view on the biblical view of prosperity, (c) the victimization of the poor⁴², and (d) the distortion of God’s providential plan for his (*sic*) children.⁴³

Despite the above wrong use of the Scripture by the prosperity preachers, Samuel Waje Kunhiyop (2001:3) sees the Christian Church in Africa as Africa’s hope in addressing the plights

⁴⁰ Instead of ‘never’ it could be “often not balance...”

⁴¹ See the Editor’s note in *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* (2001:1).

⁴² The ‘poor’ here refers to those who do not have material wealth; thus, poverty is seen in this study from the socio-economic perspective.

⁴³ See *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 20/1 (2001:1-2).

of the poor in Africa when he says: “We need to develop a theology of poverty⁴⁴ and riches, a theology that teaches God’s will for his (*sic*) people in societies where poverty is all pervasive”.

Gwamna Je’Adayiba (2001:29) also supports Kunhiyop’s suggestion and optimism cited above, by saying that the Christian Church needs to develop a theology of riches, just as much as a theology of poverty. He also responds to the on-going misunderstanding of material possessions by studying Jesus’ teaching on the meaning and place of riches in human life, thus serving as a “corrective to the prosperity gospel promulgated in various circles”⁴⁵.

Emiola Nihinlola (2006:29-41) further calls for a careful understanding and interpretation of prosperity and spirituality, in order that people would avoid mixing up the two unnecessarily or seeing one as the determinant of the other.

From the perspective of this present study, there is hope that in studying Job 31 to see how Job’s piety was motivated and displayed, it could serve as a challenge, as well as the “correction” in a sense of the misguided understanding of the relationship between human suffering and sin within the nexus of material wealth and poverty.

1.6.12. African Contexts

African contexts will be described in plural form throughout this work except otherwise indicated. In many ways, this concept refers to different contexts on the African continent. There are many contexts in Africa, such as the social, economic, political, historical, geographical, cultural/traditional and modern contexts, which we cannot explore in this thesis⁴⁶. Therefore, this study will be more concerned with the contemporary or modern contexts, considering the religious and social contexts specifically in terms of practical appeal, application or reference.

⁴⁴ Socio-economic ‘poverty’ i.e. not having enough material wealth and opportunities.

⁴⁵ “Various circles” here are understood even internationally in this study.

⁴⁶ For more on African contexts, see Keith Ferdinando, “Christian Identity in the African Context: Reflections on Kwame Bediako’s Theology and Identity” *JETS* 50/1 (March 2007) 121-43; Yusufu Turaki, *Christianity and African Gods : a method in theology*. Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit, 1999; *The Trinity of Sin*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012; Olubayo O. Obijole “The Church and the Gospel Message in the African Cultural Context.” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* Vol. XVII (1) 2012:99-116)

This study will not limit the application to any specific context in Africa, seeing that it is an engagement with general phenomena that could be traceable or observable from different African contexts; yet there will be specific references to northern Nigeria where possible, this being the most well-known country and regional context of the author. By way of the exploration and engagement of existing scholarship, however, there will not be restrictions to the Nigerian context alone. Rather all relevant material that was obtained was appropriately utilized. ‘Africa’ in this thesis encompasses all of the given parts of the continent, namely North, South, East and West of Africa. The continent in its entirety provides the African contexts in view.

1.7. Summary

In the previous discussion we have given the background to this thesis, which is a theological-ethical burden on how people, although often in different places and times, live their lives. The contemporary pattern of differentiating the spiritual or religious aspect of life from the ethical has been the main case in point that this research wishes to address from the perspective and example of the life and thoughts of Job. This will be done as displayed in the hypotheses with serious consciousness of the place and time of the Book of Job and its timeless effect as a wisdom text. This will further be done with the interest and awareness of vital, general points of theological-ethical concerns, as seen in the section on “conceptualization” explained above.

In order to see more critical dimensions on the Book of Job from its nature as ancient wisdom literature with timeless effect, the next chapter provides a critical survey of the existing literature on the Book of Job in relation to its ancient nature and context, as well as its hermeneutical reception into the religio-scholarly arena of wisdom literature from the mid-20th century.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ This thesis will focus more on the mid-20th century in the critical survey of scholarly contributions on the book and theology of Job. This choice is made from the awareness that the chosen period marks the actual beginning of particular interest and concentration on biblical studies with specific theological-ethical emphasis. Nevertheless, when there is need for reflections before that period, this will be clearly explained, or indicated in a footnote throughout the study.

Chapter 2 A Survey of Job Research⁴⁸

2.1. Introduction

The Book of Job does not stand alone in the ancient Near Eastern context regarding its composition and reception. There are other writings that also contain similar theme(s) as the biblical story of Job, although we cannot be absolutely certain of their relationships. However, we can see their similarities in the plot or central emphases. Therefore, the first main section of this chapter will provide an exploration of various existing texts that relate to the Book of Job from various ancient Near Eastern contexts. It is not the intention to discuss any of these stories in detail; because of space constraints, we only aim at pointing the reader to other similar texts from the ancient Near East that are thematically similar to the story of Job as found in the biblical text. The second half of this chapter will also explore various views or dimensions of reading the Book of Job, namely the historical, literary and theological-ethical views in which we can see the interaction of various readers and writings on the book with various points of view in order to provide meaningful suggestions on how to understand the book. The third section will narrow down the literary structure of the Book of Job, which provides the larger context in which Job 31 is found. This could help to give the general flow of the discourse in Job and how the quest of Job 31 becomes a climactic point of concern, both to Job and his readers.

2.2. The Theme of the ‘Innocent Sufferer’ in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

Before we go further on the Book of Job, there are some preliminary thoughts concerning this section that are worth noting. In trying to understand the Book of Job as a biblical text, Marvin Pope discovers that, “[t]he Bible cannot be properly studied or understood apart from its

⁴⁸ The survey will focus on recent Job research, which began mainly from the mid-20th century in the rise of Biblical studies during this period. For this period, among other things, provides “[t]he high period of biblical theology” when the influences of Walther Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad became available to English readers and provided good models for decisive biblical theology (Brueggemann 1997:38). For example, Von Rad stimulated many scholars who followed after him with his interest in the study of the Old Testament. His contributions to the interpretation of the Old Testament and Wisdom Literature, such as *Wisdom in Israel* (1972) and *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (1978) have set the pace that invited many other scholars into the discussion. When there is need to refer to older materials that this period, it will be explained as the thesis progresses.

background and environment which comprises the whole ancient Near East” (1973: lvi). Merrill C. Tenney (1975:600) also observes that: “Numerous documents from the ancient Biblical world touch upon these matters⁴⁹ but none so eloquently and so fully as Job”. Tenney further shows the need for considering the existing comparisons to the Book of Job and other similar texts in the ancient Near East when he says: “The famous Moabite Stone which throws little light on Job, being prose, does show how the eastern phase, of NW Sem. Languages was closely related to Heb.” (Tenney 1975:601).

Douglas and Tenney (2009) see the comparisons of the ancient texts as revealing thoughts beyond the similarity scope, saying:

Stylistic comparison of other ancient wisdom writings with Job reveals similarities, but also Job’s uniqueness. The dialogue form of the book is paralleled to an extent in Egyptian and Babylonian wisdom poetry and the various individual literary forms employed in Job (psalms of lament and thanksgiving, proverbs, covenant oath, etc.) are not novelties. Nevertheless, as a masterly blend of a remarkably rich variety of forms, within a historical frame work, with exquisite lyric and dramatic qualities, all devoted to didactic purpose, the book of Job creates its own literary species (2009:743-744).

With these thoughts in mind, we shall briefly explore other existing ancient versions of what we find in the biblical writings as the Book of Job. This may also awaken our thoughts on the reality of the book, as well as the concerns of human beings from ancient times.

2.2.1. Egyptian Texts

We will start by considering that: “The Egyptian ‘Tale of the Eloquent Peasant’ dating from the early second millennium B.C. has certain affinities with the Book of Job. The text is introduced by a prose prologue and epilogue and the central portion of the text is composed of nine semi-poetic appeals for justice on the part of the eloquent peasant” (Pope 1973:lviii). Pope continues to show the differences between the Egyptian peasant’s story with that of Job in their internal emphasis, saying: “[a]lthough the issue of this Egyptian story is social justice and no complaint

⁴⁹ These matters are ‘human suffering and theodicy’.

is made against the gods, still the attitude of the peasant is similar to that of Job. He prefers death rather than submission to injustice” (1973:Lviii).

Another example of an ancient text similar to biblical Job is “Dispute Over Suicide”, in which:

[A] man of Egypt debates⁵⁰ with his KA (soul?) over suicide because times are bad (between Old and Middle Kingdoms) and there is no justice or love anymore. He finally decides death is better because men (*sic*) became like gods in the nether world. As Job longed for an advocate (9:33; 16:19, 21; 19:25-27) so this man pleads for the advocacy of the gods and feels he is presenting his case before a divine tribunal ... A somewhat superficial but striking likeness to the Book of Job is the A-B-A literary format in this document which begins, as does Job, with a short prose prologue, then follows a long poetic section and finally an epilogue in prose (Tenney 1975:601).

Pope adds that “[t]he man proposes to seek death by fire, but his soul refuses to condone this form of escape” (1973:lvi). He continues that “[t]he man’s soul oppose the various arguments in favor of self-destruction, but is finally won over by the contention that life is not worth living since there is no justice or love in the world” (Pope 1973: lvi). Thus, “[t]he weary sufferer looks on death as release from the miseries of life, as recovery from an illness, as escape from bondage” (Pope 1973:lvii).

Hartley (1988:7) also points out that: “The book of Job may also be compared with ‘The Admonitions of Ipu-wer’. The sage Ipu-wer protests the upheaval in society and is distressed at the decline of morality. The desire of this Egyptian sage, though, is more for a stable social order than for moral justice”.

2.2.2. Sumerian Texts

In order to highlight another example of a story similar to Job’s in the Bible, Pope mentions the fact that: “The problem of suffering receives a good deal of attention in Mesopotamian Literature” (1973: lviii). Within this context we also find a Sumerian poem about which Pope

⁵⁰ “who debates..”

mentions that there are marked similarities, as well as differences between the Sumerian poem and the Book of Job. It is important to note that both end on the same note of humble acquiescence before the inscrutable divine will (Pope 1973:lx). Thus, the Mesopotamian view of evil being an integral part of the cosmic order is well illustrated by the Sumerian poem (Pope 1973:lx). In the Book of Job, suffering, evil, or misfortune is part of the cosmic realities that human beings have to undergo at one time or another. It might not be pleasant, as seen in the Book of Job, yet it is beyond human understanding or control when it becomes a necessary experience.

2.2.3. Babylonian⁵¹ Texts

The story “I will Praise the Lord of Wisdom” with the Akkadian title *ludlul bēl nēmeqi* also has other names, such as “The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer” or “The Babylonian Job” (Pope 1973:lx)⁵². Another title has also been suggested, namely: “The Babylonian Pilgrim’s Progress” (Pope 1973: lxi). It is a thanksgiving hymn for deliverance from distress. It is noteworthy here that this story stands in contrast to Job in that his good spirit or protecting angel or spirit has forsaken him (Pope 1973:lx), while Job did not lose the presence of the divine.

Commenting on ‘The Babylonian Job’, Merrill C. Tenney (1975:601) said that the sufferer understood his suffering as coming from or assigned by Marduk, his god, and he believes that he could obtain mercy from his ritual piety. Tenney (1975) adds that:

The only document dealing with the subject of theodicy which is so much a part of the Biblical book is “A Dialogue on Human Misery” (ANET p. 438)⁵³. This is more like Job, being a dialogue involving a friend who accesses the sufferer of imbecility and evil thoughts and suggests he puts aside such thoughts and seek the gracious favor of a god. The sufferer complains that animals do not have to make offerings, and even men (*sic*) who get rich quickly do so without paying attention to the gods while he who has done all

⁵¹ This refers to old Babylonia.

⁵² Samuel Balentine explains that ‘The Babylonian Job’ comprises four tablets from Ashurbanipal’s library in Nineveh dating to the 7th century but they are likely copies of texts composed in the second millennium (Balentine 2006:6).

⁵³ “The text comes from not earlier than about 1000 B.C.” (Tenney 1975:601).

this from his youth suffers. The friend warns him that ‘The mind of the god, like the center of the heavens, is remote; his knowledge is difficult, men (*sic*) cannot understand it’ (lines 256, 257). The friends’ view seems to be that the gods have made men (*sic*) perverse and there is nothing that can be done about it. ‘Falsehood and untruth, they (the gods) conferred upon them forever’ (line 280). The sufferer finally appeals to the gods for mercy and here the dialogue ends on a fatalistic note (Tenney 1975:601).

Pfeiffer and other scholars point out that the Babylonian work “I will Praise the Lord of Wisdom” is sometimes also called the Babylonian Job” (1976:1815), most probably because of the similarities they share.

Hartley also refers to another Akkadian text that is similar to Job and dated to the 16th century B.C. called “The Babylonian Ecclesiastes” (Hartley 1988:9). He (1988) writes that:

It opens with a friend supporting the laments of a sufferer by imploring his god. The sufferer then asserts that he has served his god faithfully despite his suffering. He contrasts his past glory to his present sorrow (cf Job 29-30), and his friend continues to support him. His god acknowledges the sufferer’s lament and declares that his heart is innocent. The god also commends him for bearing his heavy burden, tells him that his future will be bright, and exhorts him not to forget his god. In this text the god declares that the sufferer’s heart is innocent (cf. Job 42:7). Unlike Job’s friends (e.g. 6:14-24) this sufferer’s friend supports him through his lamenting (Hartley 1988:10).

2.2.4. Aramaic Texts

There are Aramaic manuscripts from Elephantine that tell the story of Ahiqar⁵⁴. Ahiqar was “[a] wise and learned official in the court of Assyrian kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, according to surviving traditions preserved in many languages” (Mills 1990:17).

⁵⁴ “Ahiqar is mentioned in the book of Tobit (1:21-22), where he is identified as Tobit’s nephew, and therefore from the tribe of Naphtali. But the narrative and sayings of Ahiqar may not be Jewish in origin. The narrative may have originated from the court of the Assyrian kings, while the sayings or proverbs may have their origin in northern Syria” (Mills 1990:17).

Ahiqar was a court officer who had no children, but raised Nadan (Nadin), his nephew, who according to his wish later succeeded him as a court adviser to King Esarhaddon, although Nadan later plotted against him and betrayed him by treachery before the king. Ahiqar was lucky enough not to be killed as Esarhaddon had ordered because of his nephew's treachery. When the king had a serious problem that needs a wise adviser, "[h]e lamented the loss of his great adviser Ahiqar. Then he was told that Ahiqar had not in fact been put to death, but was safe. Ahiqar was brought quickly before the king, restored to honor, and given the task of responding to the king of Egypt⁵⁵". When Ahiqar returned to the court and his position, he had Nadan arrested, beaten and chained, which later led to his death.

Mills (1990:18) also reports that: "Ahiqar's experiences with his nephew offer another fine example of how greed and ambition can tempt one to turn against one's faith and family teaching. Ahiqar's restoration also discloses that a righteous life eventually brings reward to the faithful, even though the reward may come only after great trials and perils". Ahiqar was a wise man who had many wise sayings, which are preserved in Aramaic manuscripts from Elephantine (see also Pfeiffer 1976:1815).

2.2.5. Greek Texts

There is also a Greek version of a story that we can see addressing or portraying the reality of human suffering. Pope (1973:Lxix) makes us aware that "[t]he mystery of suffering is a major theme of Greek Literature". He thus continues to unfold what we would see as a similar version to Job's story when he says:

While the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripedes have much in common with Job's mood in the Dialogue, it is commonly conceded that Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* has greater affinities with Job than has any other of the classical tragedies ... The similarities between Job and Prometheus are notable, but so too the differences. There is no mystery in Prometheus' pains. He knows the reason for his unjust torture. He knows and hates Zeus' character, and expects from him no mercy, although at times, he expresses a wistful

⁵⁵ The reason for the response was that the king of Egypt wanted to embark on a building project between heaven and earth and needed counsel and help from the king of Assyria.

longing for justice very much like Job's. the Promethean spirit of defiance and refusal to bow to wrong, in spite of every terror, is also Job's ... In spite of the parallels between Job and Prometheus and other Greek tragedies, there is no compelling evidence of direct interdependence (Pope 1973:Lxx-lxxi).

2.2.6. Works referring to the Book of Job after canonization

Apart from the previously mentioned stories that are similar to Job's story, there are also other works in other places in the ancient and modern world that are either written as a result of the influence of Job's story on the writers at one time or another or as coincidental stories to the ancient, 'popular' story⁵⁶.

Harley points his readers to the impact of Job's story on other writers through the centuries for example when he says: "Throughout the centuries the book of Job has had a great impact on the Western mind, including the great authors. Three examples, Milton's *Samson*, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Kafka's *The Trial*, testify to its impact on thinkers from widely differing perspectives, times, and cultures ... Thus the book of Job continues to speak to the issues of human suffering and theodicy" (Hartley 1988:11). In agreement with Hartley's assertions quoted above on the impact of Job's story on other writers around the world, John Collins (2004:505) also mentions that Job's story continues to inspire people like Robert Frost, Archibald Macleish, Elie Wiesel and others.

2.3. Summary

Having seen the above examples of parallel stories that are comparable to the story of Job in the biblical writings we could agree with Hartley's assertion when he says that "Israelite Wisdom Literature has many parallels to other ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature" (Hartley 1988:6). This is true because of its international and multicultural origins in terms of the original event, vocabulary or rhetorical evolution, composition and collation, which are later received or accepted as wise and profitable literature of wisdom in the Hebrew Bible (=Old Testament).

⁵⁶ Other religions and cultures also have texts (and/or stories) similar to Job, for example, the people of India (see Hartley 1988:10).

The reality of the above parallels does not authenticate sameness in any tenable way; thus, Pfeiffer and other scholars observe that: “Parallels of the biblical Wisdom Literature to other wisdom literature of the Orient are not impressive” (1976:1815). In sum, Balentine (2006) stands on the uniqueness of Job as compared to other ancient texts (versions) when he says:

The textual evidence from Sumaria, Mesopotamia and Egypt⁵⁷ does not prove that the biblical authors of Job knew or was directly influenced by these prototypes. It does not confirm, however, that the problem of righteous suffering did not emerge for the first time in Israelite thought. Whatever safeguards any society’s institutions-religious, political, or academical-may use to mute its threat to stability, no civilization can avoid addressing the Jobs in its midst (Balentine 2006:12).

2.4. Trends in Job Research⁵⁸

Having seen the possible reality of the book of Job as a known story, if not event in the ancient Near East, the next section of this chapter will examine how various scholars view the Book of Job from different points of scholarship, which may be intertwined in every academic discussion of the book or any given text or pericope. Nevertheless, the following section will try to highlight the taste of the book by different scholars, especially their attention to the selected passage for this research or the leading thought or concept of Job’s piety in terms of its motivation and influence.

Three categories of examination will be primarily considered in the following sections as mentioned above, namely the historical, literary and theological-ethical points of view of the

⁵⁷ Among others.

⁵⁸ This sub-section may be seen as a duplication of the preview and major heading of the chapter, but it should be understood from the introduction of the previous chapter, where it is explained that the chapter would be divided into two major categories in which each would concentrate on a certain sub-section. The previous review concentrated on the “story” of Job, not necessarily scholars’ view on it; therefore, this second major section would investigate how scholars, mainly from the mid-20th century, have discussed the Book of Job within layers of interpretation, namely the historical, literary and theological-ethical, which are described as “perspectives” on the Book of Job by different scholars. This would help us to see how the Book of Job invites various levels of interpretation, which altogether describe the proposed multidimensional methodology of this thesis. Thus, in chapter four there will be other possible layers of this multidimensional attitude of interpretation in that various, but important voices come into play in order to give their meaningful contributions towards a better interpretation and understanding of the book, as well as the selected passage for this thesis as of first importance.

Book of Job and possibly Job 31. Other possible multidimensional perspectives will be integrated in the discussion as the study progresses.

2.4.1. Historical Perspective

In this section we will start by considering the possible historical background of the Book of Job, which will lead us to discussing how different scholars view it and how they conclude on the subject of the book's historicity. Thus, the following discourse concerns issues on the authorship and period⁵⁹ of the Book of Job.

We may often like to ask the question: "Who wrote the book of Job and when?" This question is necessary in every text critical reading, especially with regard to reflections on the actual context of any given text. It is not an easy question to answer, however, especially in the light of the nature and texture of the book of Job. "The very fact that the author locates the characters in a distant world and avoid direct allusions to the later historical and prophetic traditions of Israel makes the task of determining an appropriate date rather difficult" (Habel 1985:40). Dillard and Longman III (1994:200) also agree that: "The predominantly scholarly opinion is that the book of Job is the result of a long period"⁶⁰. Nevertheless, we still have different reflections from both ancient and modern critical views on the book, which significantly try to make sense of the historicity of the book in question.

In his reflection on the authorship and possible date of the book of Job, Pope (1973:xl-xli) agrees with the general observation of a historical-critical reading or approach to any given book that shows the necessity of posing the question of historicity. Nevertheless, he points out that: "It is scarcely possible to speak of the author of any biblical book in the modern sense of the word, for

⁵⁹ It is impossible to discuss a certain date of Job's story or the composition of the book that bears his name; therefore, the word "date" would be out of the question here but the "period" could make more sense in that we may try to see whether the book fits well as being a pre-exilic, exilic, or post-exilic work, especially with regard to its being in the canon of Israel and the Christian Bible.

⁶⁰ Among others, R.K. Harrison briefly explores the background of the Book of Job in terms of its composition within ancient literary context, which has enormous impact on other readers and writers both within and outside his context. He also shows the book's historical reception and placement in the Old Testament canon, namely the Hebrew Bible (Harrison 1969:1022).

virtually all biblical books are composite in some degree, as were most literary productions in the ancient Near East”.

This is also the case when it comes to the Book of Job; it is doubtful that we will ever be able to find a lasting solution of the elusive authorship of Job, yet: “There can be no question that we are confronted with a poet of genius, for his work has been acclaimed as one of the great masterpieces of world literature. He must have been a profoundly religious person, sensitive to the tragic predicament of humanity especially to individual suffering” (Pope 1973:xli).

Another very important point to note regarding the writer of the Book of Job is the possibility of his being an outsider to the nation of Israel so that his work in the first place thus looks at the inner evidence of the book, as it has been noted that: “There is no certainty that the author is an Israelite. Some parts of the book may suggest familiarity with prophetic, and didactic writings of the Old Testament, but there is nothing very specific or definite” (Pope 1973:xli).

Pope (1973:xxxii) continues by saying that: “Rabbinic opinions as to the date of the Book of Job range from the era of the patriarchs (ca. 2100-1550 B.C.) down to the Persian period”.

From a receptionist’s critical observation on the same issue, it is stated that “[i]n the apocryphal appendix to the LXX, Job is identified with the Jobab the king of Edom, grandson of Esau (Gen xxxvi 33) and great-great-grandson of Abraham” (Pope 1973:xxxii). This gives the story an ancient, early setting, as could be agreed to on the basis of this material. “That there was an ancient Job legend, and perhaps a Job epic, which served as the basis of the biblical narrative, is suggested by the allusion to Job in Ezek xiv 14,20 where he is associated with the ancient worthies Noah and Danel” (Pope 1973:xxxiii).

The question of the authorship of Job has posed a serious academic concern in terms of the history of its reception in the canon of the Hebrew Bible, yet the popular Jewish opinion was not neglected in that: “Among early Christian savants, Eusebius suggested a pre-Mosaic date and Gregory of Nazianzus assigned the book to the time of Solomon. Few modern scholars have concurred with such early dates. In the last century a number of critics, mostly German, have inclined towards the seventh century. In more recent decades a date between the sixth and the

fourth centuries has been favored” (Pope 1973:xxxiv). Otto Eissfeldt (1974:470) also discusses the reality of the unknown author of Job as a person who might have come from an Edomite-Aramaic wisdom tradition, although there are also issues that could suggest the author’s link with Egypt⁶¹. Nevertheless, he suggests that the book was post-exilic material (Eissfeldt 1974:470). He also describes the book as a representation of a contextual philosophy in distress, like the Book of Ecclesiastes (Eissfeldt 1974:466).

Alongside the questions of authorship and date is the question of possible recipients and purpose of the book. These following concerns are also not easy to respond to with direct certainty in light of the Book of Job. According to Habel (1985:41): “The difficulty here is that the polarities and theological conflicts of the book are so diverse and the resolutions considered so paradoxical, that the identification of a popular audience is almost impossible”.

It is easy and more plausible to say that it is an ancient wisdom dramatic text that deals with human suffering. Thus, in agreement with Habel (1985:42), we could say that: “Consistent with the orientation of traditional wisdom thinking, the author of Job has created an artistic work with universal dimensions rather than a text directed at a particular historical situation or theological issue alive in Israel at a specific time”. When we consider its reception into the Israelite canon, however, it still stands mysteriously, allowing us time and space to think and reflect although there are no clues towards a certain closure of the arguments around these concerns.

Its reception into the canon of Israel could be surmised from the exilic experience of the Israelites in Babylon, which might have provided the context of finding the oral and perhaps written parts of the Job legend that might have been useful to address the exilic dilemma of many of the righteous people of God. Pope (1973:xxxvi) doubts the purpose of the book in relation to the Babylonian exile of Judah, seeing the negative role of the Edomites in taunting and helping to destroy the Israelites. Therefore, “the choice of an Edomite hero as the hero of the story would have been an affront to nationalist sentiments for it was the Edomites in particular who rejoiced in the humiliation of Judah and took full advantage of their brothers’ misfortunes, thus intensifying the enmity and hatred that had long existed between the two related peoples”. In

⁶¹ On Edom-Egypt influences, see Beebe (1970:419).

regard to Pope's argument above, we could still hold to the exilic context for the oral and written reception of the Book of Job given that God can and has used heathen people as heroes and even referred to people like Cyrus in marvelous way of being an agent of achieving Yahweh's purposes (Isa. 45:1f)

Nevertheless, Cate points towards the possibility of why some people date the book even during Solomon's era because of the rise and focus on practical wisdom traditions (1987:469)⁶². "Those who date it as exilic point to the fact that its concerns and its teachings fit in better with that time than any other in Hebrew history" (Cate 1987:469). Thus, "the use of some Aramaic terms and much late Hebrew would seem to support this conclusion" (Cate 1987:469).

On the exact historicity of the book, J. J. Collins (2004:507), like many other scholars, could only suggest in that: "The book provides no clear evidence of its date". The estimation has been between the sixth or seventh centuries B.C. Yet, "[a]n Aramaic paraphrase, the Targum of Job, from Qumran dates to the third or second century B.C.E. So the biblical book must be older than that. Most scholars date it to the sixth or fifth century. There is no obvious analogy between the experience of Job and that of the Judeans who lived through the destruction of Jerusalem, but Job contains no trace of an allusion to the national disaster. Like the wisdom of Proverbs, Job has a timeless quality that has enabled it to speak directly to people of different eras" (Collins 2004:507-8). Michael D. Coogan (2006:480-1) also discusses the historicity of the book of Job, in which he observes that although according to the rabbinic tradition it is attributed to Moses, there are no clear allusions to support this, seeing that "the book of Job contains no reference to specific historical events or persons that would help date it. As a result, it is no surprise that scholars disagree on when it was written, proposed dates range from the tenth to the third, second centuries BCE. With many preferring a date sometime in the exilic period perhaps early as the sixth century. Amongst other things the book raises questions on the historic events of the exilic experience of Israel in Babylon in 586/7 BCE" (Coogan 2006:481).

Coogan (2006:479) acknowledges that the Book of Job is one of the "most difficult and challenging books in the entire Bible", given its interest in theodicy on the matters of justice and

⁶² See Gordis *The Book of God and Man* (1965: 216f) for a second Temple argument of Job's writing.

fairness in divine-human relationships. The book poses a challenge of understanding the nature of Job; whether he was truly patient or not (Coogan 2006:479). He also observes that “the character of Job as a quintessentially good person was independent of the biblical book of Job⁶³, and the author of the book made use of an earlier Job legend in confronting directly the problem of the suffering of the innocent” (Coogan 2006:479-80).

It is agreeable that “[p]arts of the book may have very early antecedents” in other Semitic and Sumerian literature (Pope 1973:xl)⁶⁴. Pope’s (1973:xl) conclusion is worth noting here, namely that: “The date of the book of Job , then, is still an open question and will remain so until more convincing arguments can be given for assigning it to any given century”. He also adds that: “The fact that the dates proposed by authorities, ancient and modern, span more than a millennium is eloquent testimony that the evidence is equivocal and inconclusive” (Pope 1973:xl).

Conservative scholars usually follow the Jewish (rabbinic) opinion of an early authorship by Moses. “This early date accords with the belief that a historical book is more likely to be reliable when it as written close to the event it describes” (Dillard & Longman III 1994:200). Dillard and Longman III, as well as Newsom (2003), suggest the possibility of the work of an editor⁶⁵ of the Book of Job, which helps its composite nature to its reception into the canon of Israel and subsequently that of Christianity. Nevertheless, “while the setting of the book is without a doubt early, the date of composition is unknown” (Dillard & Longman III 1994:201).

From the above discussions, we can see that the Book of Job has an ancient setting and is linked to Edomite wisdom. But the likelihood of establishing its exact date is not possible, yet the themes of the suffering of humanity and the sovereignty of God through it all might have endeared the book in some important way to the canon of Israel, as well as that of Christianity. Although it is also very hard to be certain of the link between the Book of Job and the

⁶³ We will examine this claim in light of Job 31 to see how it either stands or falls.

⁶⁴ As highlighted in the brief survey of some similar ancient text.

⁶⁵ Newsom (2003:16-17) argues for the involvement of a Judean author, which the present writer most probably thinks could be Era the scribe because of the possibility of his being in Babylon during the exile. This might have given him an opportunity to encounter and receive the story of Job, among others.

Babylonian exile, it seems more plausible to the present writer to agree with the Babylonian origin of the legend and probably the context of composition.

2.4.2. Literary Perspective

We would like to discuss the literary features and structure of the Book of Job as a whole by way of a quick survey and then try to narrow down Job 31 as our focal text. Thus, we shall see how different scholars have viewed the literary form, texture and structure of the book of Job and have tried to analyze it in different but very important ways. For example, Georg Fohrer (1968:324) describes the book of Job as being a “poetic work of art of the highest order”. In his comments on both the structure and literary texture of the book, Fohrer mentions that: “The style of the book shows its author to be an almost unequalled master of baroque imagination and great learning; he uses images both numerous and varied to express the most diverse moods in one and the same speech, as well as expressions that seldom or never occur elsewhere” (1968:325).

The Book of Job comprises blends of genres, which provides different elements; the book starts as a prose story that develops into a lament, a lawsuit against friends who showed themselves as enemies and God, who also is seen as an enemy⁶⁶; hence, the central character, Job, blends different genres in his replies and confrontations in the quest for true justice. The speeches of Yahweh could be seen as oracles loaded with rhetorical power to also confront Job’s consciousness and intellect in order to rouse Job to a decision, thus providing a form of the typical wisdom tradition. Job’s reply contains worship-like forms that are found in the psalms, as well as an acceptance of a legal sentence (see Fohrer 1968:333-34).

Hartley (1988:37) also studies the genre of Job and mentions that Richter identifies it as a lawsuit and Claus Westermann as a dramatized lament with the blend of legal language, yet Hartley sees Westermann’s view of a dramatized lament as being too descriptive in terms of the overall contents than pointing out a particular genre that fails to categorize the entire work (Hartley 1988:38). Hartley submits that the Book of Job is “a masterpiece that is *sui generis*”.

⁶⁶ Although with ambivalent perception and characterization.

Other discussions on the genre of Job includes its possibility as didactic literature, a kind of philosophic debate, a pattern of Greek tragedy, a parable, and as an epic, are discussed by Lasor and other scholars (1996:486-87), who later submit that:

Each of these approaches may have something to contribute to an understanding of Job. The matter of genre is more than an item of intellectual curiosity; it is an essential clue to the book's meaning. Form and content are inextricably intertwined. So important, in fact, is this book's genre that it must not be fit into any preconceived mold. It does weep with complaint, argue with disputation, teach with didactic authority, excite with comedy, sting with irony, and relate human experience with epic majesty. But above all, Job is unique-the literary gift of an inspired genius (Lasor et al 1996:487).

Fyall (2002:23) admits that: "No consensus has been reached on the overall genre of the book, and the fact that it contains both narrative and poetic dialogue should make us cautious in deciding too quickly how to classify the work". He describes how K. J. Dell (1991; see also Ceresko 1980) opts to point out that the overall genre of the book of Job is parody, through which she demonstrates many interesting links with the Psalter. Nevertheless, such a classification is not appealing to Fyall, who sees the tendency of such an attempt in isolating the Book of Job from the canon and even setting it at opposition to other biblical writings. It is worth noting here that: "The nature of the book is such that no one form can cover the variety of situations, emotions, questions, protests, and characters that it introduces".

From the foregoing points of view, we can see that the Book of Job contains a blend of genres⁶⁷, although the prose and poetic genres are more prominent. There is also the use of other interesting ways of description and communication, however, which transcends a single genre or even dual-genre classification. Although it is not easy to discuss each genre as separate from the possible 'others': "Nevertheless, all contribute to the fundamental dialogic nature of the composition, as each genre and voice opens up additional aspects of a complex cultural conversation about the moral nature of reality" (Newsom 2003:17). Thus, Newsom sees the book

⁶⁷ For more on the interconnections of genres in the book of Job, see Newsom (2003:17-31).

itself as a polyphonic text in which different voices play a part towards a whole rhetorical effect of the entire book.

She further says: “Read as a polyphonic work, the purpose of the book is not to advance a particular view: neither that of the prose tale, nor that of the friends, nor that of Job, nor even that of God. Rather, its purpose is to demonstrate that the idea of piety in all its ‘contradictory complexity’ cannot in principle be fitted within the bounds of a single consciousness. The truth about piety can only be grasped at the point of intersection of unmerged perspectives” (Newsom 2003:30).

In describing the literary nature of the book, James M. Efrid (1982:246) mentions that some scholars see the book as a drama; that is, a dramatized lament: “Since most of the book is in poetic form, some have suggested that it is an epic poem. Other conjectures have been made as well. The book of Job in a sense defies absolute categorization, however, but it comes from a wisdom thinker of the later more speculative type who delighted in presenting religious ideas and discussion in story form. Whatever one calls it, the book of Job is a magnificent and moving piece of literature”.

Newsom⁶⁸ also presents a critical study of the Book of Job. She discusses the moral imaginations of Job and his friends in the different sections and genres of the book. Thus, she argues that the Book of Job has a polyphonic nature and texture composed within a synchronic structure, in which every character is given the chance to voice out their thoughts with meaning and a sense of freedom in proclaiming the truth.

In her discussion on the book of Job, Newsom (2003:11) focuses more on the genre than other preliminary discussions of the text. She argues for the recuperation of genre as a critical category for understanding the Book of Job. She further sees the function of genre in shedding light on the unity and authority of the whole text, saying that “this revaluation of genre must be closely linked to an alternative understanding of literary unity, authorship and truth”. Thus, Newsom

⁶⁸ Newsom’s views here are also discussed in my Post Graduate Diploma thesis, namely “A Critical Investigation of Tewoldemedhin Habtu’s Interpretation of Job 1:6-2:13 and 42:7-17: An Exercise in Relating African Scholarship on Job with International Research Trends” (Presented to the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, May 2013, Unpublished).

builds on Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the polyphonic text, which concerns itself with the distinction between monologic and dialogic truth. She further states the functions of genre and its relationship with the text, indicating: "The functions of genre, viewed from the perspective of the production of a text, are complementary. Genre negotiates the author's communicative relationship with readers but also establishes a dialogic relationship with other texts and genres" (Newsom 2003:12). The genre is like a pregnant literary style that bears the actual meaning and value of the sentence within it as seen from Newsom's (2003:13) words, saying: "The perceptions, values and moral imaginations of different texts belong in part to the genres in which they participate".

On the literary unity of the book, Coogan (2006:480) mentions that: "A majority of scholars conclude that the book has suffered some dislocation beginning in chapter 25. They differ, however, on the details. Many assign 26.13-23 to Zophar, and also consider chapter 28, a hymn to wisdom ... that stresses her inaccessibility, to be a later addition". This is also the case with Elihu's speeches in chapter 32-37. "The conclusion that the present form of the book of Job shows evidence of additions by later hands is not supported by any independent textual data, and recently some scholars have attempted a more holistic reading of the book, in which the inner contradictions somehow make sense. But no consensus exists on these issues".

The Book of Job opens with a narrative, related in six scenes; four on earth (i,1-5, 13-22, ii,7-10,11-13) and two in heaven (i, 6-12, ii,1-6). These scenes tell of Job's piety and prosperity, the suspicion cast on him by the Satan and his trials, sympathies and restoration (Eissfeldt 1974:456). Eissfeldt also noticed the problematic sections in Job, such as chapters 28, 1-2 and 42 and 32-37, and could also not arrive at a conclusion on these matters but believes that the likelihood exists that some editors have been active on the original manuscript up to the present piece we now have as the story and the Book of Job (Eissfeldt 1974:466).

Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton (1991:268) see the function of the prologue as a section that introduces the characters in the book, as well as the philosophical bone of contention in the whole book. Regarding Job 31, these scholars have the following to say: "This oath is intended to force God to act. If Job is guilty of any of the offenses included in the Oath, God would be

expected to enact the appropriate curses. Continued silence by God would then serve as a vindication of sort” (Hill & Walton 1991:270).

James L. Crenshaw (1998:89)⁶⁹ discusses the book of Job as a search for divine presence. He describes its structure by indicating: “The book of Job comprises a poetic dialogue, or debate, which has been inserted into a narrative frame work”. He further discusses the literary structure of the book, its narratives and poetic dialogues, thus pointing out its literary complexities and rhetorical wealth.

Dillard and Longman III (1994:201) analyze the book’s structure with reference to its Near Eastern literary background and its genre, which describes how profound its influence has been, far beyond its immediate ancient context. They see the literary structure of the book as the prologue (1-2) to Job’s dialogue with his three ‘friends’ (Job 3-31), then Elihu’s monologue (Job 32-37), Yahweh’s speech and Job’s responses (Job 38-42:6) and end with the epilogue (Job 42:7-17).

They summarized Job’s last speech (Job 27-31) as a brooding experience before a momentous conclusion in which he reflected on things in his life as they were in the past when he enjoyed God’s blessings (29). He bemoans his present suffering and complains that God has turned a deaf ear toward him (30:20). He appeals to God once again, declaring that he is blameless and does not deserve the suffering that has come upon him (Dillard & Longman III 1994:204).

The Book of Job can thus from a literary perspective be described as a book with three major divisions, namely the narrative (prologue), poetry (circles of dialogues), and narrative (epilogue). These divisions have in no doubt come into the present form with the help of an editor, whom Newsom (2003:16) decides to call a ‘Judean-author’⁷⁰. The opening narrative covers chapters 1-2, the central dialogue covers chapters 3-42:6, with some different dialogues partners coming in, such as Elihu (chapters 32-37) and Yahweh (chapters 38-42:6). Elihu’s discourse or monologue could be situated before Job’s final response in chapters 29-31, which may make more sense to

69 Also see J L. Crenshaw, *A Whirlpool of Torment*, Philadelphia, 1984; L. G. Perdue, *The Voice from the Whirlwind*. Nashville, 1992.

70 As pointed out above.

hear Yahweh then answers Job from the whirlwind in chapter 38ff. Thus, the writer of this thesis wishes to suggest that if scholars are still free to reshape (without discarding any thought or section from the book) the positions of the chapters, then Elihu's speech can well stand after chapter 27 and chapter 28, making chapter 28 presumably his last chapter or closing 'wise submission', so that Job's final words, declaration of innocence and the response of Yahweh could be logically comprehensible.

From a general point of view, the Book of Job is divided into three main sections as seen in the conventional dramatic pattern, which comprises the prologue-dialogue-epilogue. Nevertheless, there are other interesting levels of its structure that have been described by different scholars. Those mentioned below are some examples among many others, and are used here as a working sample of the structure of the book for the purpose of this thesis.⁷¹

In his discussion of chapters 1-2, Harrison remarks that: "The introductory words of the prologue indicate that the narrative deals with something other than Hebrew history, and sets the scene for subsequent events" (Harrison 1969:1028) in the entire book. "The first speech of Eliphaz (Job 4:1-5:27) began in the usual courteous oriental manner, but soon implied that Job was suffering because of some guilt, despite his protestations of complete innocence and rectitude. He urged Job to turn in repentance to God, who after a suitable chastening would restore his fortunes". In chapter 6:24-30 Job still asserts his innocence and challenged his friends to prove him wrong. Job in chapter 7:1-21 thinks deeply about the problems of life and his misery and asked God to leave him alone. In chapter 8:1-22 Bildad buttresses Eliphaz's presupposition about Job's suffering in connection to sin. Hence, the death of his children is an evidence of divine judgment on him (8:4). Yet Job defended himself, even raising a tirade against and challenging God's exercise of power (9:22-35). Zophar agrees with his other friends, although not showing a clear understanding of Job's situation (11:1-7).

At this point we could see the gradual progression of tension and the quest for justice and fairness from Job's point of view, which remains elusive to him until the end of the book. So

71 This gives space and possibilities for readers to explore more structural patterns of the book without necessary restrictions to certain limitations.

“[i]n desiring to discuss the matter with God, Job in reality recognized His essential justice (Job 13:10f), and the fact that God was his superior who would listen to his complaints” (Harrison 1969:1029).

“In reply to Eliphaz in the second circle Job seems to accept that he was under divine judgement (Job 16:6-17), and overwhelmed by this thought he relapsed into a hostile attitude towards God (Job 16:18-17:16)” (Harrison 1969:1029). Seeing that his friends are not helping matters, Job “asserted his belief in ultimate vindication before his *gō’ēl*, who would defend his good name (Job 19:13-27)” (Harrison 1969:1029).

In the third circle, Eliphaz opens again by pointing Job to his opinion that God derives no benefit from human virtue; therefore, Job should stop his tenacious argument on his innocence and just accept the fact that he sinned and so repent and receive the favor of God (Job 22:1-30). Yet Job refused and tries to press more on how to find God and argue his case with God. “Though the ways of God were hidden, Job had confidence in His ability to render justice” (Harrison 1969:1030).

Job refuted his friends’ argument by exploring the texture of true wisdom that is beyond human acquisition or comprehension, which he “sees not in the practicalia of everyday life, but in the knowledge of the divine way (Job 28:28)” (Harrison 1969:1030). “After a summary of his life he listed a series of social and moral offenses to which he attached self-imprecations if he had ever been guilty of them (Job 31:1-40). Having done this he rested his defense, and challenged God to reply (Job 31:35-37)” (Harrison 1969:1030).

Elihu’s speech, among other passages, has dragged several scholars into seemingly unending arguments and inquiries about its place and authenticity in the entire book⁷². We are not oblivious to such points of concern, although they are not within the scope of this thesis in terms of its research questions or selected passage of discussion. Nevertheless, we will treat the passage(s) as a valid part of the whole story, seeing its rhetorical value to the following

⁷² Elihu’s speech in 32-37; the poem on wisdom in chapter 28, and the speeches in or following chapters 26 and 27 (including both prose sections in some cases) are seen as later additions by different scholars. For the discussions on “later additions” in the book of Job, see Fohrer (1968:329-30) and Harrison (1969:1031-42).

confessions of Job and the coming speeches of Yahweh. By way of a brief comment we would consider Harrison's observation when he writes about Elihu, saying: "Referring to the innocence of Job he declared that suffering had a disciplinary value, not necessarily a punitive one, and hence Job ought at least to consider that God may not have been acting unfairly in his case after all" (Harrison 1969:1031). Up to the end of his speech, Elihu defends "divine justice, and showed that, in the inscrutable ways of God, affliction could well be the means of deliverance (Job 36:1-37:24)" (Harrison 1969:1031).

The dialogue reached its climax when Yahweh appears and questions Job (38:1-42:6) but Job could not contend with God, nor could he even answer the questions posed to him. Thus, he humbly resigned his case and quest (Job 42:1-6). The story ends with Job's happy ending (Job 42:7-17).

The above may be seen as a survey of the book or a quick analysis of its sections. Nevertheless, it is the structural flow, especially of Job's longings, quests and tensions that provides an important platform on which to consider his renting of heart and pouring very poignant confessions of personal conviction and innocence (Job 31). Before we go into a critical consideration of the context and structure of selected text, we would like to give another quick review of the entire book below.

Dillard and Longman III (1994:201) give an interesting outline of the structure of the book of Job, as follows⁷³;

- A. Job 1-2 Prose prologue that introduces the characters and plot
- B. Job 3-31 Job's dialogue with his three "friends"
 - i. Job 3 Job's lament
 - ii. Job 4-27 Three cycles of dialogues

⁷³ For another good example on the structure of the book of Job, see Lasor et al (1996:474).

- iii. Job 28 The poem on divine wisdom
- iv. Job 29-31 Job's last speech
- C. Job 32-37 Elihu's monologue
- D. Job 38-42:6 Yahweh speaks from the whirlwind
- E. Job 42:7-17 The prose epilogue that draws the action to a close

The above scholars analyze the structure of the book in order to respond or also grapple with the historic literary problem of the book in terms of its unity, as well as to closely explore the genres blended in it (Dillard & Longman III. 1994:202). They mention that: "The book of Job has a sandwich structure. It begins with a prose preamble, continues with poetic dialogue, and ends with a prose conclusion. The beginning and end are here called the prose frame".

On chapters 1 and 2 of Job, the scholars note that: "It is possible that the smooth narrative flow from prologue through the body to epilogue is the result of a long literary history or the result of a single authorship. What is important is the function of the prologue and epilogue in the canonical shape of the book. Throughout the book there is a coherent theological message that runs from its prologue to the epilogue" (Dillard and Longman III 1994:202)

They also add that:

The prologue opens the narrative by introducing the main characters and the setting. It initiates the plot by raising the problem that needs a resolution: Job's suffering despite his apparent innocence. The prologue also takes the reader behind the scenes into the very council chamber of God. We know what the characters do not; we know that Job is suffering as a test of his faithfulness to God (Dillard & Longman 1994:202).

In chapter 3, Job "bemoans his fate, even wondering why he was born. The form of this chapter is a lament similar in mood and structure to the individual laments found in the Psalter" (Dillard & Longman III. 1994:202). "The highly literary nature of the dialogues is revealed by their

structure. There are three cycles in each of which one of the friends addresses Job and then Job responds to each one in turn. The order is always Eliphaz, Bildad, then Zophar⁷⁴:

- First cycle; Eliphaz (4-5); Job (6-7); Bildad (8); Job (9-10); Zophar (11); Job (12-14).
- Second cycle; Eliphaz (15); Job (16-17); Bildad (18); Job (19); Zophar (20); Job (21).
- Third cycle; Eliphaz (22); Job (23-24); Bildad (25); Job (26:1-27:12); Zophar (27:13-23); Job (28-31).

Regarding Zophar's last speech, the scholars note that there could be a problem in transmission in that Zophar lacks a concrete speech, although the shortening of the three friends' speech could be a good suggestion that they are running short of arguments; hence they repeated many main thoughts already presented. Their exhaustion here could be a very good context for the coming of Elihu's daring speeches (Chaps 32-37) (see Dillard & Longman III. 1994:203).

Chapters 27-31 contain Job's last speech or argument to both God and his friends. "In Job's last words before the momentous conclusion he broods on how things were in the past when he enjoyed God's blessings (29). He bemoans his present suffering and complains that God has turned a deaf ear toward him (30:20). He appeals to God once again, declaring that he is blameless and does not deserve the suffering that has come upon him" (Dillard & Longman 1994:204).

Before Job's desired response from God, Elihu speaks (32-37). Afterwards, Yahweh speaks too (38-42:6), followed by the epilogue (42:7-17), which brings the story to a happy close (Dillard & Longman III. 1994:205). Ironically, Yahweh vindicated Job and "he became an intercessor for his friends, who had advocated a false wisdom of mechanical retribution" (Dillard & Longman III. 1994:205).

⁷⁴ It is a common knowledge that: "The three friends represent the age-old wisdom of retribution theology. In their case, however, it has become quite rigid and mechanical. God blesses the righteous; he curses the wicked. If so, then if Job suffers, he must be a sinner in need of repentance (4:7-11; 11:13-20)" (Dillard & Longman III 1994:203).

Job 42:7-17 comprises the epilogue, in which Yahweh clearly exonerates Job and asked his friends, ironically, to repent and be cleansed through Job's intercession. "His innocence now established beyond question, the fortunes of Job were reversed and he himself lived in prosperity and security to an advanced age" (Harrison 1969:1031).

Considering the structure of the book of Job, Hartley (1988) also succinctly summarizes it in the following words:

The prologue is composed of six scenes grouped into three sets of twos. The number three is prominent in the dialogue; three speakers each deliver three speeches in a threefold cycle. In each cycle Job has three responses. Job's avowal of innocence also has three parts. In the next two sets the number four dominates. Elihu delivers four unanswered speeches, and the theophany consists of four units, two long speeches from Yahweh balanced by two short answers from Job. The simplicity and symmetry of this structure contrasts with the profundity of the subject discussed (Hartley 1988:37).

In sum, the above discussion on the literary nature and structure of the Book of Job describes the scholarly interest and ongoing effort in order to understand and explain the book to interested readers and interpreters. Although there are still no consensus on the issues of genre and structural division of the book, we can join Rolf Rendtorff (1985:251), who remains optimistic about the coherence of the book when he says: "Despite the literary tensions, the general pattern of the book of Job can be recognized clearly".

2.4.3. Theological-Ethical Perspective

This section presents the views of some scholars on the Book of Job from the theological-ethical perspective. This will help us to see how different scholars see the possibility of the reception and use of the Book of Job to respond to theological-ethical questions, which may better set the stage for our critical discussion of Job 31 in particular, especially in the next chapter. Nevertheless, we shall reflect at the end of this section on what different scholars have written so far, especially as their work relates or contributes to Job 31 as our focal text.

First of all, some scholars see the Book of Job as another document that represents an ethical concern by the way in which it concentrates on the nature and plight of humanity, which Job represents. For example, Susan E. Schreiner (1994) discusses the powerful realities of human existence through notable theological lenses or interpretations. She shows how medieval and modern perspectives interact in providing her interpretation of the Book of Job. This work may help us to obtain a glimpse into the interpretation of Job's piety and its moral, theological-ethical, and social dimensions and values. Pieter van der Lugt (1995) also provides a detailed study of the Book of Job within various rhetorical categories of the discourses in the book. Thus, the Book of Job describes the dilemma and longing of a weary soul. What happens in the book is not just a literary attempt of bringing another version of wisdom to the fore, but an attempt to represent in vivid terms how a human being is and could be under normal circumstances, or not. This thought comes as a result of a meditation on the fact that Job's experience serves as a "symbol for the human condition" for many thinkers and theologians (Collins 2004:505).

Eissfeldt (1974:467) observes that human struggles was sustained and prevailed over the oddities of life when he reflects on the theory of human suffering in the book, which in his belief "...is not a theoretical solution to the problem of suffering which the original book offers, but rather we are shown how the pious man, who suffers in spite of being bound by belief in retribution, is able to overcome his suffering in practice. This he did by casting himself with ever-growing trust into the arms of God, who threatens his ethical self by decreeing underserved suffering and so appears as his enemy" (Eissfeldt 1974:467).

In addition to the human reality and function of the Book of Job, Paul R. House (1998) recognizes the dire effects of human depravity and seeks to discuss biblical ways for better understanding of life and interactions and ultimate restoration to God the Creator. Thus, from a relational point of view, he describes the book of Job under the heading 'The God who is worth serving' (House 1998:424), although he did not clearly discuss how that theological-ethical relationship between God as the creator who is worth serving relates to Job's crucial questions and his declaration of innocence in Job 31.

Horst Dietrich Preuss (1996) goes further to give a multidimensional discussion of the Old Testament, touching on its social, political, theological and ethical dimensions and significance,

as earlier started by classic studies conducted by scholars such as Walther Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad among others. The Book of Job is discussed as a discourse on human life according to different witness groups. He sees Job as a divided human being in that he is said to be pious in the narrative section, but turns impatient in the dialogue and raises questions on his piety (Preuss 1996:129).

Commenting on Job 29-31, he says:

When Job comes to speak about his human nature in his laments and accusations his frailty and his distance from the creator, he does this in order to move this God to turn about and to acknowledge his divine superiority, which must be newly, although not unconditionally, demonstrated in the fortune of an individual, weak, and in Job's opinion, guiltless human being (Preuss 1996:130).

Another recognizable trend in reading the Book of Job is that which relates to divine-human mystery. Roland E. Murphy (2001) sees Job's life and experience as a 'mystery', thus discussing the Book of Job as "The mystery of Job". He sees mystery through the book and the central person when he says: "The life of Job, from start to finish, is mysterious-a metamorphosis of a God-fearing man into a rabid accuser of God, who eventually yields to God, even if the reader does not know why" (Murphy 2001:149). Murphy further describes Job's words in Job 31 as "fireworks" (2001:155) that are used in a dire expectation of the Lord's response, given that his⁷⁵ integrity was at stake and he (Job) was very desperate for a reliable response and possible exoneration.

Still, as a book majorly characterized by a divine-human interaction and encounters, Rendtorff (1985:251), sees Job 29-31 as a "great challenge" that demands an answer from God. Accordingly, he further describes Job 31:35-37 as a call on God to "stand trial" (Rendtorff 1985:252). God indeed appeared and talked to Job, but not as one standing trial. It should be noted also that God's response in (38f) was not only an answer to Job but an answer or the

⁷⁵ Job's at this point, although both in a sense.

fulfillment of the desires of Job's friends (Rendtorff 1985:252). Rendtorff sees the Book of Job as both a crisis of wisdom and crisis of social order (Rendtorff 1985:254).

Within the God-man interactive possibilities in the Book of Job, Brueggemann (2003:293) explains that: "The book of Job lives-rhetorically and theologically- at the edge of the Old Testament". He continues by saying: "Rhetorically the book takes up older genres and patterns of speech and fashions them into the most artistic and Urbane statement of faith in the Old Testament. Theologically the book takes up Israel's faith, and refuses any easy resolution of the most difficult theological questions that appear on the horizon of Israel's faith".

Brueggemann (2003:294) sees the Book of Job more as a book "with a faith inquiry which concerns the most intense and immediate existential issues of faith, morality and fidelity that grow out of Israel's older traditions of Torah (as in the book of Deuteronomy) and wisdom (as in the book of Proverbs)". This submission is very important for our discussion of the book, especially in trying to see the dimensions of Job's piety and how that could be a challenge to contemporary Africa. This pronouncement also provides another critical dimension in understanding the ethical life of the people of God, people of wisdom who live uprightly in justice and righteousness.

Brueggemann (2003:293) once again sees the faith-dimension of the Book of Job when he says, "we are dealing with immensely sophisticated artistic work that is removed from any particular historical context or crisis, and that it stands on its own as a daring explication of the most difficult questions of faith". He believes that the author must have been well informed about the ancient story and was able to widen his search into other related works in the ancient Near Eastern contexts (Brueggemann 2003:294).

Commenting on Job's fearless speeches, especially in his last words in chapters 29-31, Brueggemann explains that:

Job speaks existentially of his dismay and despair due to the unquestioned reality of his obedience to God's requirements and yet he suffers unbearably without being able to understand why. His passionate articulation concerns the unbearable interface between

obedience and suffering, an interface that ought not to occur according to conventional categories of Israel's faith (Brueggemann 2003:294).

He further adds:

Whereas Job speaks with existential passion, albeit in measured artistic cadences, his friends do not in fact engage him, but simply reiterate the primary claims of Israel's covenantal-Sapiential tradition that the world governed by God is morally reliable, wherein obedience yields prosperity as disobedience yields adversity (Brueggemann 2003:295)⁷⁶.

From Brueggemann's discussion, we can see that Job's words are full of, among other things, ethical tension as an attempt towards an uttered dispute. "Thus the dispute concerns an unbearable mismatch between lived reality and traditional explanations that proceed by their own logic without reference to lived reality" (Brueggemann 2003:295). In Job 31 it is worth noting that "Job articulates in sweeping fashion his own innocence as a man who has singularly acted according to the best ethical norms" (Brueggemann 2003:296).

In some cases, the Book of Job is read in relation to the general wisdom tradition, which provides interesting interactive possibilities, even as confrontational to the wisdom tradition. For example, some American theological scholars⁷⁷ provide a working introduction to the Old Testament as the Church's religious document. It introduces the readers to its various dimensions and ecclesial values as a generational and transmittable religious document, thus using the Old Testament as God's revelation to God's people and for God's community of faith.

Job is described as a protest against conventional settlements. They see Job 31 as "an important one because it is the fullest, clearest articulation of ethics in the entire Old Testament" (Birch et al 1999:402). This public confession of Job or inquiry could also be seen as an attempt of

⁷⁶ It is not particularly clear here whether Brueggemann argues that Job and his friends were aware of Israel's covenantal ethics or not. His reference to covenantal-Sapiential tradition is still a matter for further investigation beyond the understandable scope of this thesis.

⁷⁷Birch, Bruce C; Walter Brueggemann, Terence E.Fretheim and David L. Petersen 1999.*A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

reimagining life and human relationship with God; hence, a theological call for a definite paradigm from which emanates wisdom theology, as described in the previous chapter.

In his discussion of ‘wisdom’ within other books in *Wisdom Literature*, Gerhard von Rad (1972:97f) refers to the “Limits of wisdom” as limits of the wise people in the search and realization of wisdom. Job’s life and words could be a suitable illustration of that point. He discusses the Book of Job alongside other books of wisdom within the nexus of trust and attack. These two incongruous realities show themselves in Job’s life experiences (Von Rad 1972:207).

From the African perspective there have been but little African research on *Wisdom Literature* in which the Book of Job is referred to within the themes of life, death, nature, wisdom and eschatology (Holter 2002:34,36, 47). Habtu (2006) also wrote a commentary on the Book of Job, especially for African readers. Thus, this present work would focus more on Job’s piety and how it could be of great significance to life in contemporary Africa.

Benjamin Abotchie Ntrel provides a scanty overview of the Book of Job. In his comment on chapters 29-31 he acknowledges in passing that Job reflects on his past and present life and declares his innocence. He juxtaposed the plight of Job with that of Africa as a suffering continent, in that Africa, like Job⁷⁸, is said to lose most of its well-trained people to the Western world or the “developed nations”. Africa thus loses its prosperity and well-being to the developed nations (Ntrel in Patte 2004:147).

There are also major commentaries on the Book of Job, for example, by Dhorme (1967), Pope (1973), Gordis (1978) Habel (1985), Hartley (1988), Newsom (2003), and Clines (2006), which contain extensive discussions of the Book of Job from the literary and theological-ethical dimensions most especially. This will be closely considered in the interactive reading of Job 31 in the next chapter.

The Book of Job has invited and allowed different scholars with materials to use in discussing many facets of life even as it relates to the theological-ethical dimensions, which we shall discuss

⁷⁸ We do not see Job as the primary figure as representing any country or state, but rather as a legendary person in an ancient world.

much better in our next two chapters. Nevertheless, the multidimensional perspectives on the Book of Job, especially in relation to the theological-ethical questions of life, still demands a closer look in order to see more possibilities and dimensions that it presents. This thesis will concentrate mainly on the place and function of Job's piety in response and challenge to continuous theological-ethical questions on and within the book.

2.5. Summary

From the foregoing discussions and thoughts on the Book of Job we can see that it is an interesting 'popular' literary story of human bewilderment with divine actions and sovereignty. The first section of this survey provides us the opportunity to survey different contexts in search of texts that are similar to the story of Job as written in the book that bears his name. These texts have their commonality in the reality of human suffering, especially the discourse on the suffering of the innocent. The Book of Job resonates well with such ancient stories, except that it has a certain uniqueness in the presence and sovereignty of God over and within it.

We also surveyed the Book of Job from different perspectives, namely the historical, literary and theological-ethical perspectives. That was done in order to see how it has been viewed and discussed by different scholars and how their thoughts can help our continuous discourse on the book especially, as we seek to concentrate on Job 31, which is seemingly neglected by several scholars or scarcely referred to. For example, in his discussion of the contents of the book, Coogan (2006:479-81) did not mention Job's Oaths of innocence in chapters 29-31, which forms the immediate context of the focal chapter of this research in the Book of Job. Cate also makes no comment on Job's final declaration of innocence in Job 29-31 when he discusses the unity and contents of the book (1987:471). Eissfeldt (1974:465) also makes little reference to Job's oaths of innocence or "cleansing" in Job 31, nor does he show the place and impact of Job's piety in that public declaration. In Crenshaw's (1998:100) work discussed above there is no discussion on Job's piety as envisaged in our discussion, although Job 31 is briefly referred to as "Job's negative confession". Collins also explores Job's experience as it is related to the readers of the book without concentrating on Job's Oaths and piety but describes the section as Job's long speech (Collins 2004:506).

Amidst this seeming ‘dis-interestedness’ of scholars and interpreters of Job, Keith H. Beebe (1970:418) sees Job 31 as containing codes of a Hebrew gentleman, which represents the ethical values admitted by the sages. Beebe’s presentation of Job’s identity is ambiguous in that it is not clear to the writer whether Job should be understood as a “Hebrew gentleman” or whether he was a representation of what or who a Hebrew gentleman was or should be. This is a point for further inquiry. Nevertheless, it is clear from the above point that Job’s life and words represent a certain ethical value system that was of great worth to the lives of the ancient people of his day (even those of the Israelites⁷⁹), as well as to present day thoughts and quests, which would be further discussed in the fourth chapter of this work.

In a similar estimation to Beebe above, Georg Fohrer (1974:1-21) and Robert Gordis (1965:283) have also positively discussed and described the theological-ethical potential of Job as great challenges worth our consideration when they see him (Job) both as an ideal righteous person and an honorable person in such an ancient context.

At this juncture we have responded to some of the questions that this thesis seeks to answer in regard to the understanding of the Book of Job in light of its ancient Near Eastern context and the various literary, historical and theological-ethical perspectives⁸⁰. The next chapter will engage more with commentaries on the Book of Job towards an interactive interpretation (close reading) of the theological-ethical potential of Job 31.

⁷⁹ This comparison does not presuppose or claim sameness between the Israel’s ethical values and those of other people in the ancient Near East.

⁸⁰ Further discussion on these perspectives will continue to recur as the thesis progresses in that chapter three with dwell more on the literary texture of the book of Job especially in regards to the selected passage of concentration. There will be consistent use of Hebrew scripts, not transliteration outside of quotation, but if there is need otherwise it will be explained as the thesis progresses. . Chapter four will consider the socio-historical context of the book of Job as well as to point out the theological-ethical potential of Job 31.

Chapter 3 A Close Reading of Job 31

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will concentrate on a close reading of the textual details in Job 31 within its literary context. This will be done within an intertextual engagement with and from Job 31. Intertextuality in this section presupposes textual interactions at different levels in order to show how one text possibly echoes the thought of another as a matter of allusion, grammatical interrelatedness or even ideological similarity within the interface between the context and the text. We shall consider Job 31 within an intratextual dimension in which we will discuss the text within itself (verse and verse discussion), thus trying to see its possible arrangement and flow of thought, as well as the possible rhetorical value and affect that it may have as a given passage. We shall also consider the interactive nature of the text in relation to other texts from the immediate, wider and distant contexts by way of an intertextual reading of the same focal text within the Old Testament Scriptures.⁸¹

This study will closely consider the textual situation of Job 31 within the whole book, as well as the immediate pericope in which it is found in the final form of the canon. We shall thus explore its structure, rhetoric and form most importantly, in order to see its potential toward the continuation of its theological-ethical discussion in relation to the issues raised in the first chapter, especially in regard to the research question, hypotheses and highlighted issues in the section on conceptualization (1.6 previously).

⁸¹ Some may like to call “intratextual” reading “synchronic” while “intertextual” is referred to as “diachronic”. Nevertheless the interactive nature and possibly mode has always been the same, in that an intratextual/synchronic reading deals with the details of the texts within itself, while the intertextual/diachronic focuses on interactive reading of the text. For more on the intertextual discourse, see James Barr, “The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?” in Johannes C. De Moor (ed) *Synchronic Or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995:1-14; D. J.A. Clines, “Beyond Synchronic/Diachronic” in Johannes C. De Moor (ed) *Synchronic Or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995:52-71; Louis Jonker and Douglas Lawrie, *Fishing for Jonah (a new); Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2005:78-89; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament; Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997:78-80.

3.2. Preliminary Demarcation of the Text

Scholars generally agree to see Job 31 as being part of Job's last response to the ongoing dialogue between himself as his three friends, which starts after his soliloquy in chapter 3 (Howard, Millard, Packer & Wiseman 1996:589; Good 2000:369; Dillard & Longman 1994:204; Harrison 1969:1030; Clines 2006:977-78). Thus, chapters 4-27 form the larger context of the debate in three cycles which comes to its height with Job's long speech in retrospect, reply, lament, protest and confrontation to God (31:35). Chapters 29-31 are the immediate context of Job's oath of innocence (chapter 31) that anticipates God's answer as in chapter 31:35f, which lingered until chapter 38f.

Thus, we can say that Job 31 presents Job's highest point of the quest to meet with God, and/or hear from God, which has led him to the point of openly discussing his inner life according to his conviction of innocence and the desperation that God should respond to point out his fault if there is any or to activate the self-imprecations that he has made in chapters 31:5-40.

This will give the reader some examples on how Job 31 has been divided by the Protestant canon, by some biblical scholars, as well as the present writer in order to possibly see some pattern of flow of thought, or areas of special concern in reading the possible progression of Job's oath.

3.3. Text Critical Notes⁸² on Job 31

- 31:1a בָּרַיתְתִּי כְּרִיתִי “made a covenant” is translated as “put a ban” (Pope 1973:228).
- 31:1a לְעֵינָי, “with my eyes” is rendered “in his presence” by Ceresko (Habel 1985:425; Clines 2006:961). This would be awkward if Job is referring to his own presence, thus not this is so clear, but the MT is rather preferable here.
- 31:1 עַל־בְּתוּלָה “upon a virgin”; seeing that 'al rehe is a preposition meaning ‘on or upon’. The word בְּתוּלָה is changed by some to “nebalah” and is translated as “folly” (Pope); “maid” (KJV), “a virgin” (NRSV; NETB) “a young woman” (NIV). The term

⁸² This note tries to highlight some important points in Job 31 that we need to closely study in order to see the various renderings of the words and problematic phrases or verses as the case may be. This interacts with especially recent Job scholars like Habel (1985:425-27), Hartley (1988:409-425) and Clines (2006:961-67), although thoughts from Dhorme, Pope and Gordis are still utilized alongside others in the section on close reading of the text.

בְּתוּלָה means only a young woman of marriageable age, and could refer both to a married or unmarried woman, though the former sense is rare (Clines 2006:961).

- 31: 1b; וּמַה (could ordinarily be “and how” or “and why or “so why”) but in this context it has a negative force rather than interrogative (Dhorme 1967:450; Habel 1985:425; Hartley) as in the NIV “not to”, unlike the KJV “why then should” and the NRSV and NETB “how then could”; or the NETB “entertain thoughts against a virgin”
- 31:1e אֶתְּבוּנֶנּוּ is hithpoel of ‘byn’ “discern” thus “shew oneself attentive, consider diligently” or consider, examine, look at. In the context, some translations such as the NEB render it “take notice of”. The REB more realistically states “never to let my eyes linger” (similarly JB) and the NJPS and Ceresko “gave (up) on” is appropriate; the word itself does not contain the idea of desire, as in Moffatt’s “look with longing,” the NIV’s “look lustfully”, and the GNB’s “look with lust”. The NAB, seeing the sense as part of an “if” clause, has “and entertained any thoughts against a maiden” (Clines 2006:961) or “pay attention” (Dhorme 1967:450).
- 31:2a; Gordis regards this verse as another of his ‘virtual quotations’, rendering “For I thought, ‘If I sinned, what would be my portion’”. The point of this suggestion is obscure, and it is hard to see the justification for adding ‘if I sinned’ (Clines 2006:961).
- 31:3b; “strange punishment” in the KJV, and “disaster” in the NIV NETB and NRSV. The word אֲנִיכָר (MT) it could have come from the root *nkr*, which means “to be alien, and also to be hostile (Dhorme) or the Akkadian, ‘*nakāru*’ or ‘to be hash, hateful and Arabic ‘*nakura*’ (Hartley 1988:409-10).
- 31: 5a אֶשָׁא (emptiness, falsehood, deceit) “vanity” in the KJV and “falsehood” in the NIV NETB and NRSV. In verse 5 falsehood is personified by the use of (‘m) “together with”; so the NEB “have no dealings with falsehood,” JB “have I been a fellow traveler with falsehood?” NJPS even more concretely “with worthless men” (Clines 2006:961). In verse 5e, the NEB more blandly “have not embarked on a course of deceit”, a translation redeemed by the REB with its “gone hotfoot after deceit” (Clines 2006:961).
- 31:6b the KJV and RSV take the subject as indefinite and so render with a passive “let me be weighed”, because the name “God” has not yet been mentioned” (Clines 2006:961).

- 31: 7, מְאֵיִם is taken as identical with ‘*mûm*’, “blemish”, and the LXX and Syriac read *mē’ûmâ*, “anything,” “blot” (KJV), “spot” (NRSV) or “anything” (NETB).
- 31:8, שָׂרֵשׁ means both to “take root” (Isa 40:24) and “uproot” (Ps. 52:7). The word צִאֲצָאִים “descendants” (KJV), “offspring be rooted out” (NRSV), “what grows for me be uprooted” (NIV) and in the NETB “my crops be uprooted”. The meaning “Yield or crops” stand for both the produce of the land (Isa. 34:1; 42:5) and human offspring (Isa 48:19; Job 5:25; 21:8; 27:14).
- 31:10; פָּרַע means “kneel to rest” (Hartley 1988:413), in the KJV “bow down upon her”, the NRSV “kneel over her”, and in the NIV “sleep with her”.
- 31:11 זָמָה “heinous crime” (KJV, NRSV); “wicked” (NIV), or “shameful act” (NETB).
- 31:12a עַד-אֲבִדוֹן תֹּאכֵל “devour to the root”; consume to destruction’ (KJV) “consuming down to Abbadon” (NRSV), “burns to destruction” (NIV); “devours even to destruction” (NETB). The word “burn” is used by Gordis when he keeps to the MT and translates (*tebu’ati*) as “offspring”: “That will consume all my increase to the roots” (Hartley 1988:412).
- 31:13e, רִיב “case or dispute”, lit. “in their controversy with me” (Clines 2006:964); “contended with me” (KJV), “complaint against me” (NRSV), “grievance against me” (NIV).
- 31:14a קוּם “rise in court” (LXX) or “takes vengeance”, but in the NETB it is translated as “confronts in judgment”. In legal contexts, קוּם means “to stand up in court” as a plaintiff presenting a case (Mic. 6:1; Ps. 74:22), a judge passing sentence (Ps. 76:10; 82:8), or a witness offering evidence (16:8; 19:25; Deut 19:15-16; Ps. 27:12; 35:11) (Hartley 1988:414). In verse 14c פָּקַד is capable of a wide range of renderings, such as “visit” (KJV) i.e. “intervene” (NEB), “demanded an account” (NAB), “holds his assize” (JB), “when [I am] called to account” (NIV), “calls me to account” (NJPS), “took me to task” (Moffatt) (Clines 2006:964), or in the NETB, “when he intervenes” i.e. visits to judge.
- 31: 15 בְּרֶחֶם could also mean “by the womb”. Given that the MT בְּרֶחֶם, “in the womb” has the article אֶחָד, “one” stands as the subject (so Vulg.). But the other versions take אֶחָד as an adjective modifying *rehem*, i.e. “one womb”. In verse 15b אֶחָד “One” refers to the divine being or Creator in the text. “Who made me” (MT), אֶחָדִי may be a Qal imperfect,

but it seems best to take it as a Polel, a contracted form of ‘*wayēkônennû*’ to avoid four *ns* in succession (Hartley 1988:414). In verse 15d וַיַּעַשׂ literally means ‘made him’, but there are two others in question, the male and the female servant, so we should translate “make them” (as the NRSV, NEB, and NIV do). Larcher reads “‘*asâm*” as “made them” (Clines 2006:964). In verse 15g, the JB and NIV translates “within our mothers”, just to avoid repetition of “the womb” (Clines 2006:965).

- 31:16d. “cause to fail” (NB); “the widow whose eyes have failed has lost her desire for living” (Clines 2006:965).
- 31:18a וַיְרַחֵם “he raised me” or “I raised him” (nurture me). In verse 18b, “as with a father”, Gordis suggests that the MT *ke’āb*, “like a father”, may be a contraction of two prepositions, *kib’āb*, “like with a father” (Hartley 1988:415). It is noteworthy here that as this verse stands in the MT it seems out of context. Some scholars accept God as the subject and Job, in the first person, as the child. Then the MT *’anhennâ*, “I guided her,” is read as *nāhanni* or *yanhēni*, “he led me”. Budde, Dhorme and Pope understand Job as the subject of the verse, however, and therefore read *agaddelennû*, “I raised him”, for the MT *gedēlani*. But Hakam and Gordis take the suffix on *gedēlani*, an intransitive verb in the Qal, as indirect, “he grew up with me”. Both of the last two views preserve the parallelism between “*minne’uray*” “from my youth”, and “*mibbeten’immi*,” “from my mother’s womb”. “The latter one is better, for it avoids emendation” (Hartley 1988:415).
- 31:21 וְיָתוֹם ‘orphan’. “Many e.g. Budde, Driver-Gray, Fohrer, and BHS, propose to emend MT *’al yātôm*, ‘against the orphan’, to *’aletām* ‘against the innocent’. But this proposal has no textual support and is unnecessary since the orphan is mentioned in v.17b” (Hartley 1988:415). In verse 21a, “support for me”: “The exact sense of *’ezrāti*, ‘my help, support,’ is uncertain. Perhaps it refers to a friend or servant of the plaintiff who took a place in the crowd assembled in the gate to hear a case” (Hartley 1988:415-16). In verse 21b, וְשַׁעַר “gate” is “court” (NETB) to help modern readers.
- 31: 22a; “‘shoulder blade’ i.e. the scapula, the large flat triangular bone on the side of the shoulder as distinct from *shkm* the ‘shoulder’ proper, which is the scapula and the collarbone (clavicle) together; if the collarbone is broken, the shoulder is broken, and the whole shoulder sags” (Clines 2006:967). In verse 22b וְקָנָה *qane*, “socket” lit. “reed”

(KJV), “bone” (NRSV), “socket” (NETB) and in the NIV “joint”. Some see it as ‘elbow’. Cf. Ps. 10:15; 37:17; Jer. 48:25; Ezek. 30:21-22) (Hartley 1988:417).

- 31: 23a אֶל אֵיִךְ אֶלְיָי פֶּחַד “For a terror unto me is a calamity of EL” (KJV); “For destruction from God was a terror to me” (NRSV); “For I was in terror of calamity from God,” (NIV); “For I dreaded destruction from God”. The construction is also rendered “because the dread of God has come over me”. The LXX and Syr support this reading, while the MT remains problematic (Hartley 1988:416). My translation of 23a, “for (indeed) I tremble at the disaster of God”, in verse 23b *se’eto* “his majesty” (MT) is read as *meso’ato* “his destruction” (Gordis), but considering the immediate context there is no need for the emendation.
- 31: 25 The Hebrew מָצָא “find”, also has the nuance “arrive at, reach, attain” (Hartley 1988:418).
- 31: 26 “*moving*”, literally to “walk, go”, here means “wane” and *hll*, “shine” in the first line means “wax” (Ceresko) (Hartley 1988:418).
- 31:26, 27 אֹרֶךְ which is seen literally “sun” or “light”, paralleling with the moon in the text.
- 31:27b; “my hand has kissed my mouth” (KJV); “my mouth hath kissed my hand” (NRSV); “my mouth has kissed my hand” (NIV); and “my hand offered them a kiss of homage.”
- 31: 29. Dhorme thinks that the verb “*wehit ‘ōrarti*”, “I stirred myself”, can mean “exult” in the Hithpolel (Hartley 1988:419). “*ur*” has the idea of “exult” (NETB).
- 31:33a מִכְּאָדָם is rendered variously as “from men” (RSV); “like the common herd” (Dhorme), “as men do” (NEB; NETB); “as Adam” (KJV); “as others do” (NRSV); “as people do” (NIV etc) . In verse 33, MT “*hōb*,” a cognate to the common Aram. *Hubbā*, means “bosom, hollow” (Hartley 1988:421), “bosom” (KJV, NRSV); “heart” (NIV, NETB) (this is the only place where this word is found in the OT).
- 31: 35a מִי יִתֶּן-לִי שְׂמִיעָה לְ “Oh, if only” (various). Literally, “who will give to me a hearing, to me?” There is great emphasis on “me” (*lî*), for this pronoun occurs twice. “Some LXX (Theod), and Syriac omit the first *lî* while many, e.g Drive-Gray, wish to eliminate the second *lî*. Gordis finds the double preposition acceptable for emphasis; in

fact, the first line would have too few syllables with the removal of either *lî*. Others suggest that the first *lîwa* originally ‘*el*, “God”, having arisen from a displaced ’; this offers a fine reading, but it would detract from the emphasis on *šadday* in the second line, according to Fohrer” (Hartley 1988:423).

- 31:35b תָּוּ “mark/sign” (Pope 1973:238, Habel 1985:427), although some would rather render it as “desire”(KJV).
- 31: 36a אֲלֵ-אִם “surely” (NETB), a positive formular (*‘im lo*).
- 31: 36 שֵׁכֶם is “the nape of the neck”, “shoulder” or “both shoulders” on which burdens were borne (Hartley 1988:425). In verse 36b, the Heb. “crown” (*‘atārôt*) is in the plural, for the plural may represent the tiers of a crown. (In wisdom literature the crown is a symbol of honor, beauty, and blessing, such as in Prov.4:9; 12:4; 17:6; Sir. 6:31; 15:6; 25:6) (Hartley 1988:425). The word “proudly” is not in the Hebrew translation (NETB), but it is implied in the text.
- 31:37a נָיִד “Prince”, “chief, leader, sovereign” (in Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament).
- 38-40 Many scholars consider these verses misplaced after the final challenge of Job in vs 35-37. Pope relocates them after v 8, Budde after vs 12, the NEB after vs 28, and Fohrer and Gordis after vs 34 (see Habel 1985:427).
- 31: 39b שָׁפַח “breathe out” has been interpreted as “expire, snuff out” (RSV, Dhorme, Ceresko) or “loss of spirit, despair” (Gordis 1978:354).
- 31: 39 אֲרָעַל “tenant” usually means “owner”, but Job is the master. It appears that he is thinking of those who supervise an area of his vast holdings, i.e. “tenant”. Possibly *ba’al* is a dialectal variant of *pa’al* “worker” (Hartley 1988:422). Dahood translates this as “laborers” in the NETB.
- 31: 40. רָאָשָׁה comes from the root *b’š*, “to have a bad smell, stink” (Hartley 1988:422).

3.4. Own Translation of Job 31

- Vs.1 I made a covenant with my eyes not⁸³ to pay attention to a young woman
- Vs.2 What would be my portion from God above, my inheritance from⁸⁴ the Almighty on high?
- Vs. 3 Is not misfortune for the wicked, and strange⁸⁵ disaster for those who practice iniquity?
- Vs. 4 Does he not see my ways⁸⁶ and count all my steps?
- Vs. 5 If I have walked with falsehood, and if my foot has hastened⁸⁷ to deceit
- Vs.6 Let me be weighed in a just scale, and let God know⁸⁸ my integrity
- Vs. 7 If my step has turned out of the way, and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if anything⁸⁹ has stained my hands
- Vs. 8 then let me sow and let another eat, and let my crops⁹⁰ be uprooted
- Vs. 9 If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or I have lain in wait at my neighbour's door⁹¹
- Vs. 10 then let my wife grind⁹² for another, and may other men have sexual relations with her⁹³,
- Vs. 11 For that would have been a terrible act⁹⁴, for that would have been an act to be judged,
- Vs. 12 For it is a fire that eats even to destruction⁹⁵, and it will totally uproot⁹⁶ my yield,

⁸³ The interrogative *māh* (מָה) is interpreted as a negative force here (Habel 1985:425).

⁸⁴ וְיַחַד לֹתְ שַׁדַּי “and lot of Shadday” is understood as a genitive of source as “inheritance from the Almighty” (Clines 2006:961).

⁸⁵ נֶכְרִי is ‘strange’ or ‘alien’ (Clines 2006:961).

⁸⁶ Unlike the LXX, “way” is plural here as in the MT (Dhorme 1967:451).

⁸⁷ “Walked” in reference to the foot walking quickly.

⁸⁸ וַיֵּדַע ‘and know/discover’ (Clines 2006:962).

⁸⁹ מְאֻמָּה (*mu’um*) is taken here as “*mu’umah* (Pope 1973:230).

⁹⁰ From the word *yatsa*, which could refer to children in some translations. However, given that Job’s children are already dead, this should fit best for ‘crops’ (Pope 1973:230).

⁹¹ “Door” here means the “gate” of the house to let him go, then the one waiting may go into his house, to his wife.

⁹² “Turn the millstone”. See the NETB (i.e Net Bible).

⁹³ The Hebrew idiom “bow down over her” is here understood as to ‘have sexual relations with her’, which could come beyond consent but even as rape (Clines 2006:962).

⁹⁴ וְאִשָּׁה is translated as a ‘terrible act’ that connotes “a shameful act” (NETB).

⁹⁵ In Hebrew “to Abbadon” or “Sheol” (Dhorme 1967:455).

⁹⁶ The verb means “to root out”, which may not fit with a fire’s work, yet it means to destroy to the root; or to destroy/burn up completely (cf. Dhorme 1967:455; Clines 2006:963-64; Habel 1985:425).

- Vs. 13 If I have refused justice to my male and female slaves, when they have case⁹⁷ against me,
- Vs. 14 what then will I do when God confronts me in judgment?⁹⁸ When he makes inquiry⁹⁹, how shall I answer him?
- Vs. 15 Did not the one who made me in the womb make them?¹⁰⁰ Did not the same one¹⁰¹ form us in the womb?¹⁰²
- Vs.16 If I have refused anything that the poor desires, or caused the eyes of the widow to fail¹⁰³
- Vs. 17 And eaten my piece of bread alone, and the orphan did not happily eat¹⁰⁴,
- Vs.18 for from my youth I reared the orphan¹⁰⁵ like a father, and from my mother's womb¹⁰⁶ I guided the widow¹⁰⁷
- Vs. 19 if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a poor person without covering,
- Vs. 20 if his body has not blessed me¹⁰⁸ and from the fleece of my young rams¹⁰⁹ become warm
- Vs.21 If I have raised my hand¹¹⁰ against the orphan when I saw my support in the court¹¹¹
- Vs.22 then let my arm fall from the shoulder, and let it be broken off at the joint¹¹²

⁹⁷ רִיב “to contend” “have controversy” or “a legal case/complaint” (Clines 2006:964).

⁹⁸ Hebrew קוּם “arises”, LXX “takes vengeance”, which is actually implied (Habel 1985:425; Clines 2006:964).

⁹⁹ פָּקַד “to visit”, which connotes a divine intervention (NETB), to inquiry or investigate the case as the judge *par excellence* (Clines 2006:964).

¹⁰⁰ In Hebrew it is “him”, but the plural here is used to describe the two persons in view from v13 (Dhorme 1967:456; Clines 2006:964).

¹⁰¹ That is the same Creator (God) (Dhorme 1967:456; Clines 2006:964).

¹⁰² This could also mean “by the womb”, to show the manner of everyone’s coming into existence.

¹⁰³ פָּלָה “to finish”, “to waste” or “grow weary” (Clines 2006:965).

¹⁰⁴ My translation of לֹא־אָכַל יְתוֹם מִמֶּנָּה

¹⁰⁵ Hebrew “he grew up with me” (cf. Habel 1985:426; Clines 2006:965).

¹⁰⁶ This is hyperbolic to connote the fact of what he was doing right from the beginning of his life (cf. Dhorme 1967:458; Pope 1973:233).

¹⁰⁷ The “widow” here could refer to his own mother (this is done for the use of the genitive) (Clines 2006:966).

¹⁰⁸ My translation of the MT: “if his loins did not bless me.”

¹⁰⁹ “My sheep” (NETB, NIV).

¹¹⁰ As a threat in court, which connotes “vote against” (NETB).

¹¹¹ Hebrew “gate”, which signifies the city gate where the court convenes to discuss legal cases etc (Dhorme 1967:459).

¹¹² Hebrew קַנְה “shaft, or shoulder joint” (Clines 2006:967)

- Vs.23 For (indeed) I tremble at the disaster of God,¹¹³ and to his majesty I cannot endure
- Vs.24 If I have put my hope in gold, and said to pure gold “my trust”
- Vs. 25. If I have rejoiced because of my great wealth, or for the great wealth my hand has found¹¹⁴
- Vs. 26 If I have considered the sun ¹¹⁵when it shone, or the moon walking¹¹⁶ in brightness
- Vs. 27 so that my heart was secretly enticed, and my hand threw them a kiss from my mouth¹¹⁷
- Vs. 28 that also would be iniquity to be judged, for I would have been false¹¹⁸ to God above.
- Vs. 29 if I have rejoiced over the misfortune of my enemy, or exulted¹¹⁹ when evil found him
- Vs.30 I have not allowed my mouth¹²⁰ to sin by asking for his life in a curse¹²¹
- Vs. 31 if those in my household¹²² have not said, “Who has been given from his meat and cannot be satisfied?”¹²³
- Vs. 32 No stranger had to spend the night in the street, for I opened my doors to the traveller¹²⁴
- Vs. 33 If I have hidden my transgression as human beings do¹²⁵, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom¹²⁶

¹¹³ My translation of *כִּי פָחַד אֱלֹהֵי אֵיִד אֶל*

¹¹⁴ Hebrew *מָצָא* “to find.”

¹¹⁵ Hebrew *אֹר* “light”, which parallels the moon in this sentence to connote luminary worship.

¹¹⁶ Hebrew *הִלָּךְ* here is figuratively understood to mean the “moving” of the moon.

¹¹⁷ Hebrew *וַתִּשָּׁק יָדִי לְפִי* “and my hand kissed my mouth”. But here it means taking to hand to receive a kiss from the mouth and throw to the sun and moon as a love gesture (or sign of worth and endearment) (Pope 1973:235; Clines 2006:969).

¹¹⁸ Hebrew *נָחַשׁ* “to deny”, “to deceive” or “to be unfaithful” (Clines 2006: 969).

¹¹⁹ Hebrew *עָוַר* has the idea of ‘exult’, or ‘be excited’, ‘raise a shout’ (Dhorme 1967:463; Clines 2006:970).

¹²⁰ Hebrew “I have not given my palate” (Clines 2006:970).

¹²¹ Hebrew *אָלָה* an imprecatory curse/prayer/wish (Clines 2006:970).

¹²² Hebrew “the men of my tent”, which refer to the people in Job’s household, whether his blood relations or not (Dhorme 1967:464).

¹²³ My translation of the Hebrew *מִי־יִתֵּן מִבְּשׂוּרוֹ לֹא נִשְׁבַּע*

¹²⁴ Hebrew *אֶרֶץ* “way” from *oreakh* “a way-traveler” (Habel 1985:426).

¹²⁵ My translation of the Hebrew *כְּאָדָם*, which is rendered “as Adam” by some (cf. Dhorme 1967:467; Pope 1973:238; Clines 2006:971).

¹²⁶ “My heart” (Clines 2006:972).

- Vs. 34 because I was terrified of the numerous crowd¹²⁷, and the contempt of families terrified me, that I kept silent and would not go outdoors
- Vs. 35 Who will give only me a hearing?¹²⁸ Here is my signature¹²⁹, Let the Almighty answer me, and may my accuser write a document¹³⁰
- Vs. 36 Surely¹³¹ I would carry it on both shoulders, I would put¹³² it on myself like a crown
- Vs. 37 I would declare unto him the account of my steps; like a prince I would approach him
- Vs. 38. If my land cries out against me; and all its furrows also lament¹³³
- Vs. 39 If I have eaten its produce without paying¹³⁴, and caused the death¹³⁵ of its owners¹³⁶
- Vs. 40 then let thorns grow instead of wheat and stinking weeds¹³⁷ instead of barley. Job finished speaking.

3.5. The Division of Job 31 by Clines (2006:976) and Hartley (1988:408)¹³⁸

Clines' chapter division:¹³⁹

- Strophe 1 31:1-4 4 lines

¹²⁷ Hebrew has “the great multitude” (cf. Dhorme 1967:468).

¹²⁸ Literally, “Who will give to me a hearing to me?” the Hebrew is מִי יִתֶּן-לִּי שְׁמִיעָה לִּי

¹²⁹ Hebrew חֶטֶם “mark, sign/signature” (Habel 1985:427; Clines 2006:974).

¹³⁰ The Hebrew is to write “a scroll”, “a book” etc, which should contain Job’s indictment if he has any (Dhorme 1967:469).

¹³¹ Hebrew אָמֵן is seen as a positive oath formula here (Clines 2006:975).

¹³² Or “bind it/tie it” (Clines 2006:975).

¹³³ The word בָּכָה means “to make a lament/complain/weep”(Clines 2006:973).

¹³⁴ This is in Hebrew “without silver” בְּלִי-כֶסֶף

¹³⁵ The “snuffing out of breath, the gasping”, thus connoting their death (see Clines 2006:973).

¹³⁶ The Hebrew חֲבָלֵי הָאָדָם; those in charge, the lords/owners (Clines 2006:973).

¹³⁷ The Hebrew means “foul smelling weeds” (Dhorme 1967:467).

¹³⁸ Among other scholars who discuss Job 31 as referred to in this thesis, Clines and Hartley are chosen as examples of scholars in Job research who have clearly proposed a structural division of the passage in question that the present writer feels needs consideration here, as well as to see the possibility of making his own proposal on the same issues in a similar, but not the same way or same motivation.

¹³⁹ This division is according to the literary flow of the verses. This is the same as in the NIV, except for the rearrangement of ‘Strophe 7’, while the NIV has verses 38-40 directly following numerical pattern, thus following verse 35-37.

- Strophe 2 31:5-8 4 lines (v.7 a tricolon)
- Strophe 3 31:9-12 4 lines
- Strophe 4 31:13-15 3lines
- Strophe 5 31:16-23 8lines
- Strophe 6 31:24-28 5 lines
- Strophe 7 31:29-34, 38-40 9 lines (v.34 a tricolon)
- Strophe 8 31:35-37 3 lines (v.35 a tricolon) (Clines 2006:976).

Hartley's division of Job 31:¹⁴⁰

1. Lust (vv 1-4)
2. Falsehood (vv 5-6)
3. Covetousness (vv 7-8)
4. Adultery (vv 9-12)
5. Mistreatment of one's servant (vv 13-15)
6. Lack of Concern for the Poor (vv 16-18)
7. Failure to cloth the Poor (vv 19-20)
8. Perversion of justice against the weak (vv 21-23)
9. Trust in wealth (vv 24-25)
10. Worship of the heavenly bodies (vv 26-28)
11. Satisfaction at a Foe's Misfortune (vv 29-30)
12. Failure to extend hospitality to a sojourner (vv 31-32)
13. Concealment of sin without confession (vv 33-34)
14. Abuse of the land (vv 38-40b).

3.6. A Close Reading of Job 31

As already stated in the section on methodology, this thesis provides a critical interpretation of Job 31 from a multidimensional perspective, which we conveniently call "a close reading". This is an aspect of literary critical analysis in which the reader gives a careful attention to the semantics of the texts, as well as allows the place and functions of other contributing thoughts or

¹⁴⁰ This division is according to the sins envisaged, but not committed by Job in his oath.

voices from different but relevant interpreters of the text. Thoughts will be gathered from different, but relevant authors towards an informed understanding of the selected text, which would lead us to a better understanding of Job’s piety and how it played a role in his life from various dimensions and also serves as a vital potential towards addressing our personal and social lives in Africa in contemporary situations.

In the following critical interpretation (close reading), liberty has not been taken to alter contributing authors’ thoughts or rendering, although we intend to engage them into meaningful dialogues within the texts. Nevertheless, words will be taken as they appear in the different authors’ rendering of especially the Hebrew words in that some Hebrew words may be quoted and used in the discussion as they are in the pre-Masoretic texts; that is, words without vowels. In some instances, they may be quoted and used as they are in the Masoretic Texts (MT)¹⁴¹, some will be in transliterated format, and some in italics.

The following sub-sections provide the close reading of Job 31:1-40 (Own translation) based on objects of Job’s concerns in which the themes/topics of discussion may overlap at one point or another, as we shall see as the discussion progresses.

3.6.1 Young woman (31:1)

MT	כְּרִית כְּרַתִּי לְעֵינַי וּמָה אֶתְבּוֹנֵן עַל־בְּתוּלָה
Own Translation	I made a covenant with my eyes not to pay attention to a young woman.

¹⁴¹Hebrew rendering with vowel pointing

Job's first declaration of innocence has to do with an inner act of lust or covetousness upon a member of the opposite sex. Job declares that he has "made a covenant", which is literally to "cut a covenant" (KJV, NRSV, NIV)¹⁴² as the translation of the Hebrew כָּרַתְיָבְרִית .

Various scholars have contributed meaningfully in an effort to provide a good possible sense of these lines of Job's solemn oath/covenant with his eyes. According to E. Dhorme (1967:450), the phrase "cut a covenant" is to be explained by the fact that a victim was cut into two and one passed between the two halves (Gn 15:10; Jer 34:18)." Thus, signifying a solemn engagement between two entities entering into a meaningful and usually a lasting commitment to each other, in this case Job's imaginary discourse describes his eyes עֵינָי (my eyes) as separate entities from his body with which he could enter into a covenant. This shows a very seriously determined state of mind that Job takes upon himself, in which he and his eyes must, 'kind of', be corporate to maintain.

About the object of Job's personal restraint, the 'virgin'(NRSV) , 'maid'(KJV), 'young woman' (NIV) and the process of mental action toward her, Dhorme observes that: "The verb הִתְבּוֹנֵן with עַל before the complement to connote 'pay attention to' cf. Sir 9:5 בְּתוֹלָה אֵל תְּחַבּוֹן 'Pay heed not to a virgin!'... The Son of Sirach gives the reason for the prohibition: 'lest you be compelled to pay fines because of her'. Job does not inquire what the consequence of such action would be. He declares merely that he has avoided even the occasion of sinning. Hence he might be justified in expecting a better fate than the one which has been meted out to him (vv 2-4)" (Dhorme 1967:450).

Pope translates "cut a covenant for" as 'put a ban on'. The preposition "for" (*lē*), in place of the usual "with" (*im* or *'ēt*), designates conditions imposed by the superior party onto the inferior party in a treaty; cf. I Sam xi 2; II Sam v 3; II Kings xi 4. Job, seen in this verse as master of his sense and his emotions, laid an interdict on his eyes (Pope 1973:228).

Pope reads "folly" for "virgin" by reading "*bētūlāh*" (MT) as "*nēbālāh*" (1973:228).

¹⁴² For convenient sake, in terms of the time and space of these words the compared English language translations of the Bible discussed here are mainly the KJV, NRSV, NIV and the NETB.

It is noteworthy here that the reading with ‘virgin’ recalls Ben Sira’s warning (Ecclesiasticus ix 5): “At a virgin do not look, / Lest you be trapped into sin with her” (Pope 1973:228).

Pope refers to Rashi’s comment as he quotes Pirque Abot de Rabbi Nathan to the effect that Job’s piety was such that he would not even look at an unmarried woman¹⁴³, for fear that when she was married he might feel attracted to her (Pope 1973:228)¹⁴⁴.

In Habel’s (1985:425) discussion of verse 1, Ceresko is referred to, arguing that “*l^eēnay*,” “with my eyes,” is best rendered “in his presence”, taking the *yodh* suffix as a 3 masc.sg. rather than 1c.sg. He cites Gen. 23:11 in a similar sense in a covenant context. However, “eyes” are appropriate in association with the verb “*byn*” (in hithpolel). For the preposition *l^e* used in connection with making a covenant, see II Chron.29:10. In verse 1b, *mā* has a negative force here. Given that sexual sins are treated below, the noun “*b^etūlā*” “virgin”, is changed by some to “*n^ebālā*” “folly”¹⁴⁵. Habel’s argument from a contextual point of view confronts and contradicts Pope’s translation of the text as discussed above, and gives a better sense of the verse with the translation of “virgin” or “maid” instead of “folly”.

In this opening declaration Habel (1985:431) explains that: “Job commences his oath of purity with a declaration that he chose to govern the impulses of his life as a deliberate act”. He also adds that “...a covenant with the eyes implies a decision to avoid all possible temptation”.¹⁴⁶ Hartley (1988:409) also concurs with this statement when he says, about Job, that: “He has resolutely controlled his eyes to keep any sinful longing from entering his heart”. Clines

¹⁴³However, such a look has been interpreted from the Jewish point of view as a way of celebrating a woman’s beauty as God’s favor to the world (Pope 1973:228). In addition, David Clines (2006:1014) notes that: “In Job’s culture there is nothing wrong with men, even married men, looking with pleasure, delight, longing, or even lust upon young women. How is a man of Job’s social standing ever going to acquire a second wife or concubines otherwise?” (2006:1014); see also G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer, D. A. Carson & R. T. France (eds). *New Bible Commentary*; 21st Century Edition. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (1994:478).

¹⁴⁴ Pope takes responsibility for his emendation of this verse when he says: “It is with some reluctance that I emend away the reference to Job’s modesty in respect to virgins, but the context calls for some more comprehensive term for evil” (Pope 1973:229).

¹⁴⁵ As seen in Pope above.

¹⁴⁶ Job’s personal decision of self-restraints is meaningful and required, seeing that the act of violating a virgin in ancient contexts is a heinous crime, which calls for a dire punishment (see Exod. 22:15-16).

(2006:1015) observes that: “If he so rigorously repressed an impulse that could just possibly lead to sin, how much more would he have been careful to avoid any deliberate act of wrongdoing”.

This verse is very important in discussing Job’s piety from a perspective of inner personal purity, which has much bearing in his life in light of the whole book and makes sense of his tenacious grip on his integrity .“Job’s covenant with his eyes is thus a thematic statement emphasizing the basic commitment to inner purity which governs his life of righteousness” (Habel 1985:432).

At this point one may wonder why Job would decide to make such a solemn commitment against the temptation of sexual lust and covetous attitude towards a young woman of marriageable age? The following verses display Job’s motivation for these strict ethical measures against spiritual and moral breakdown.

3.6.2 Justice of God (31:2-4)

MT	<p>וְיָמָה חֵלֶק אֱלֹהִים מִמַּעַל וְנַחֲלַת שְׁדֵי מִמְרָמִים הֲלֹא־אֵיד לְעֹל וְנִכְר לְפַעְלֵי אָוֶן הֲלֹא־הוּא יִרְאֶה דְרָכַי וְכָל־צִעְדֵי יִסְפֹּר</p>
Own Translation	<p>What would be my portion from God above, my inheritance from the Almighty on high? Is not misfortune for the wicked, and strange disaster for those who practice iniquity? Does he not see my ways and count all my steps?</p>

In verses 2 and 3 Job focuses his attention first and foremost on the being and acts of God upon the wicked. He raised critical questions on God and God’s acts with a very strong rhetorical effect to show his personal consciousness and estimation of God’s might and acts among all people. In reference to Job’s question in verse 2, Dhorme (1967:451) observes that: “The

question which Job asks is elucidated by v.3. God ought to award misfortune to the wicked man as his due heritage. In point of fact however, it turns out that it is the most scrupulous of righteous men (*sic*) who is the victim.” This could stand as God’s self-contradiction in disseminating the portions of people according to their acts, in that Job may see God as just but not directly exhibiting that justice in his case; many of his readers may also think so.

“The particle *māh* is here to be construed as the negative rather than as the interrogative ‘How?’”, as in xvi 6b” (Pope 1973:228), thus confronting the veracity of the NRSV translation, which renders the particle “how”. The NIV “not to look” could therefore be preferable.

In verse 3, נכר agrees with the Targ. תבירה ‘ruin’, ‘misfortune’ being the clear and correct sense of the rendering. Thus, verse 3¹⁴⁷ provides the answer to verse 2¹⁴⁸ in that Job seems to be agreeing with current ethics as expounded by his interlocutors, according to whom misfortune (איך) as here, dogs the footsteps of the wicked (18:12), although it appears that his experience contradicts the common theory (Dhorme 1967:451). Clines also agrees with this assertion when he says that: “He (Job)¹⁴⁹ had always believed that the wicked were punished for their wrongdoing, and the fear of divine retribution had always been in his mind” (Clines 2006:1015). Not that he accepts his suffering as punishment from God, but that he expects to see the justice of God in his own case of innocence.

These two verses highlight Job’s theology and the severity of God’s judgment on acts of injustice and unrighteousness. “He believes that God, who is exalted, living on high, fixes a lot or plans a ‘heritage’ for every person on earth in just measure to his (*sic*) deeds (Hartley 1988:409) ... Here it is clear that although Job believes that God is transcendent, he is also convinced that God knows and judges every human deed” (Hartley 1988:410).

¹⁴⁷ Regarding verse 3, Hartley (1988:410) observes that, in the MT “*nēker*” is unknown in Hebrew. The *qatl* form appears to mean the same as the *qutl* form, “*nōker*”, meaning ‘disaster’ (Obad 12).

¹⁴⁸ Commenting on verse 2, Pope (1973:227) points out that: “This expression appears to be an adaptation of the cry of secession as in II Sam xx 1; I Kings xii 16. Here, however, the particle *māh/meh* has the interrogative sense ‘What?’ rather than negative force as in xvi 6b and 1b above; cf xx.29”.

¹⁴⁹ The word in parenthesis is my own.

In verse 4 Job reflects rhetorically on the fact that God sees (יִרְאֶה) his ways (דְּרָכָי) and counts all his steps (אֶעְדֵּי יִסְפּוֹרָלָי) ¹⁵⁰. The plural ‘my ways’ i.e. my good works,’ ‘my conducts’, is thoroughly in accord with the style of the Book of Job (4:6; 13:15; 22:3). Pope suggests a comparison of verses 4, and 14:16¹⁵¹, in which seeing and counting or ‘numbering’ the steps of Job gives the meaning and possibility of God also knowing or watching over his life¹⁵². Regarding Job’s awareness of God’s watchful eyes on his life and acts, Hartley (1988:410) agrees that: “In his own case Job is convinced that God is fully aware of everything he has done and is completely knowledgeable about the reasons for Job’s present sufferings”. Clines also mention that: “He (Job)¹⁵³ is particularly aware that his ‘ways’ (*drkym*) like that of everyone, is subject to divine scrutiny (cf 23:10 and 4:6; 13:15; 22:3). So untroubled is he by the idea that he had long ago imagined a dream scenario in which God would indeed count his steps, though he would not find any fault with his conduct (14:16)” (Clines 2006:1016).

The foregoing verses describe Job’s purity of eyes and heart (body)¹⁵⁴. He bridled his eyes in order to keep in heart in check too. Clines (2006:1014) observes that: “He (Job)¹⁵⁵ does not mean presumably, that he has done what is right only to avoid punishment; he must mean that he is not such a fool as to lay himself open to divine wrath for misconduct”. His piety is now demonstrated, not necessarily in what he actually does, but even what he thinks about, given that what he thinks about would play a vital role in determining what he might do. Job states his motivation for such a piety as being the active presence and activities of God, whom he sees as

¹⁵⁰ The idea of the steps or ways of humans being open to the sight of God is common especially in the wisdom literature (cf. Pss 33:13; 69:5 (6); 94:11; 119:168; 139:1-4; Prov. 5:21; Jer. 23:24).

¹⁵¹ Job 14:16: “For now thou numberest my steps; dost thou not watch over my sin?” (KJV) Thus, if Job has any sin at all, he has no doubt that God would know it. Therefore, he calls on God to say it and even punish him for each as stated in his oath of innocence.

¹⁵² “Job is not complaining that he has no privacy from the divine gaze; he has no quarrel with the principle of accountability, only with God’s failure to implement what he has been given out as his own policy” (Clines 2006:1014).

¹⁵³ The word in parenthesis is my own.

¹⁵⁴ “There are in these lines not a few places where Job depends on a distinction between himself and his body. Here, he, the “real” Job, has imposed an injunction on his eyes; in v 5 he imagines that his “foot” may have hastened to deceit, in v 7 that his “heart” may have followed his “eyes” and that some blemish may have attached itself to his “hands”. In v 9 his “heart” could have been enticed to his neighbor’s wife, or in v 27 to false worship. In v 30 he could have let his “mouth” sin. All this is not just picturesque poetic language, although of course it is all metaphorical. What it bespeaks is a worrying disjunction between the person and the body, that can enable, in other circumstances, an offloading of guilt from the person to the body” (Clines 2006:1015).

¹⁵⁵ The word in parenthesis is my own.

both “*Élôâh*” and “*Šadday*.” These are names of God that show God’s essential attributes and God’s being active in those attributes in power and might.

This rendering describes God as one who enacts destruction, punishment to the wicked/workers of iniquity, as well as being the one who sees Job’s ways/steps. The rhetorical questions portray God’s actions in those ways demanding decisive answers in the affirmative. Hence, Job’s piety is not unaware of the person and power of God and what God does and what God would do to others, as well as to Job himself. He was not living a carefree life, but instead a very careful and cautious life. This reveals God’s unfathomable knowledge of human life and God’s activeness in knowing “all” of human ways.

After describing his motivation for making a covenant with his eyes against the temptation of sexual lust and coveting another person’s daughter (or wife) Job continues on the theme of temptation to be enticed and stray from the way, as the following section examines.

3.6.3 Falsehood (vv 5-8)

MT	<p>אם־הִלַּכְתִּי עִם־שָׁוְא וַתַּחַשׁ עַל־מְרֻמָּה רַגְלִי יִשְׁקָלֵנִי בְּמֵאזְנֵי־צֶדֶק וַיִּדַע אֱלֹהִים תְּמִמְתִּי אִם תִּטָּה אֲשָׁרִי מִנִּי הִדָּר וְאַחַר עֵינַי הִלַּלְבִּי וּבְכַפִּי דָבַק מְאוֹם פ אֲזַרְעָה וְאַחַר יֵאָכְל וְצִאֲצָאִי יִשְׁרְשׁוּ</p>
Own Translation	<p>If I have walked with falsehood, and if my foot has hastened to deceit Let me be weighed in a just scale, and let God know my integrity If my step has turned out of the way, and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if anything has stained my hands then let me sow and let another eat, and let my crops⁹¹ be uprooted</p>

Job starts his “if” אִם (*’im*) declarations, which repeatedly and forcefully characterizes the rest of his speech in this chapter. It is his characteristic way of placing himself at the mercy of God and

all those who know or hear him to carefully consider his way of life from different angles and judge whether he has been walking in wrong doing or not. Verses 5 and 6 focus on Job's claim of truthfulness in his words and deeds when he calls his judge to examine and see if he has been walking in 'falsehood'¹⁵⁶ (NRSV and NIV) or 'vanity' (KJV) of life. To walk in vanity or falsehood in this context is paralleled with leading a life of 'deceit' (KJV, NRSV and NIV). A life characterized by selfishness and evil intent in order to deceive and destroy the lives of others to one's own gain.

Job consciously submits himself to the scrutiny of God when he asked that God, (אֱלֹהִים) (especially in the NIV translation) should have him "weighed in an even balance" (KJV), "honest scales" (NIV), or 'just balance' (NRSV), so that his "integrity" (*tmthy*) may be known and established. Dhorme (1967:452) discovers that the Greek text begins at verse 5, with Υελοιαστών replacing the abstract שווא by a concrete. But the parallelism with מרמה (deceit) favors the MT, thus: "The phrase 'walk with falsehood' is perfectly understandable; it means taking falsehood as one's companion, and the guide of one's steps i.e. one's deeds."

On verses 5 and 6, Pope (1973:229) observes that: "Job begins his series of oaths repudiating evil with a general denial of any sort of sinful conduct. There is nothing here to indicate that the vanity and deceit refer specifically to commercial dishonesty. The sanction invoked is not properly self-imprecation, but a challenge to God to judge justly and thus exonerate him".

Pope continues by referring to Dahood's translation, in which he "makes the nature of the offense specific by rendering the words "*šāw*" and "*mirmāh*" as 'an idol' and 'a fraud' so that the verse reads 'If I went to¹⁵⁷ an idol, or my foot hastened to a fraud"¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁶"Falsehood (*šāw*) describes something as insubstantial, worthless" (Hartley 1988:411).

¹⁵⁷ Or "toward", seeing as: "The preposition '*im* here parallel with '*al* has directional meaning" (cf Psalm 2) (Pope 1973:230).

¹⁵⁸ Ceresko also follows Dahood in rendering "*šāw*" as "idol, figurine". However, the meaning of 'emptiness, falsehood, deceit' is appropriate here, as elsewhere in Job (7:3; 11:11; 35:13). Moreover the theme of worshipping false gods is not a major motif of the poet" (Habel 1985:425).

But the fact that Job denies any false worship (Job 31:26-28) of either a natural or material idol renders the translations of Dahood and those who follow him like Pope and Ceresko as questionable or even unfitting. In these verses, Job argues for integrity in the public and private life, not necessarily concerning religious affiliation, in which he is not also found wanting. This can be seen in the larger picture of the whole book.

In verse 6, Job submits himself to divine scrutiny. Commenting on verse 6, Dhorme (1967:453) refers to the Greek ἔσταμαι γὰρ, which avoids the anthropomorphism of ישקלני, Vulg. *Simplicitatem meam* (cf 1:1). “Job begins by asking God to assess justly his conduct as a whole. He will then enter into a real and detailed negative confession. The word תמת ‘my perfection’, ‘my integrity’ as in 27:5, where Job vindicates his conduct as a whole”. In the prose narrative (2:3, 9) Job clings unshakeably to his ‘perfection’, תמתו. Job wishes to be weighed¹⁵⁹ on ‘just’, ‘even’, ‘balance’ or ‘honest’ scales, because “[f]alse scales and weights are often condemned; cf Prov xi 1; xx 10,23” (Pope 1973:230). Clines (2006:1016-17) notes carefully that: “Job’s insistence that he be weighed in ‘just balance’ or ‘balances of righteousness (*tsadek*)’ is not a cynical reference to divine dishonesty ... but his confidence that if God truly considered his case instead of throwing his weight about he would find out that Job is the innocent man he claims to be”.

In verse 6b, Job wishes that his “integrity” or “innocence” be known and established so he may be proven to be truly blameless (NIV). But Pope points out that Dahood suggested that the congruity of the metaphor here requires that “*tummāṭi*” be rendered “my full weight,” not “my innocence” (cf. xxvii 4-6; Pope 1973:230). If we carefully considers Job’s plight from the early part of the book that bears his name, we would see that Pope once again follows Dahood outside the context and contest of Job and his friends (and wife) and even God¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁹ For the figure of judgment as weighing cf. vi 2; Dan v 27; Matt vii 2. “Among the Egyptians, the heart of the deceased was represented as weighed against the father of Truth” (Pope 1973:230); see also Habel (1985:432) for a similar explanation of the same issue.

¹⁶⁰ This contextual contest is arguable in that each reader/ interpreter tries to see what makes sense to them from the text as well as around it, but in the case of the present writer, the immediate context of Job’s life and experience as described in the book that bears his name is primarily significant in making sense of the selected text as well as the book without much emendations.

From the above considered avowal, Hartley (1988:411) asserts that: “Job has never let his foot hasten to follow a path of deceit or treachery (*mirmā*) by which he could advance himself at the expense of others”. He also adds that: “Should anyone suspect him of using deceit, Job requests that God weigh him in the scales of justice as a proof of his integrity (*tummā*)” (Hartley 1988:411).

From the foregoing verses, we can see that Job is sure of his integrity and confident that if only honest, just and righteous measuring instruments would be used, even by God, then his integrity would be clearly seen and known, even by those who accuse him of wrongdoing. Job is not afraid of the test, or examination or scrutiny of God, but in all this he asks for justice and truth. This rhetoric does not necessarily show that Job is in doubt of God’s ability to judge righteously, but as a defendant before a court of justice he appeals for nothing but justice and honesty. This also asserts the ability of God to stand in judgment of human acts¹⁶¹.

Job returns to the themes of temptation and covetousness (vv 7-8)¹⁶². The opening phrase of verse 7, “If my steps have turned from the path,” echoes, in a poetic parallel way, the thought in verse 5: “If I have walked with falsehood”. This is far more than the physical change of direction, but rather an internal change of heart and action, which is portrayed in the words, “if my heart has been led by my eyes”¹⁶³. This describes a covetous live style, in which the eyes would be enticed and lead the heart towards wrong actions in order to obtain what one sees and desires¹⁶⁴.

Regarding verse 7, Dhorme (1967:453) states the following: “After the mention of the foot, the eyes, the heart, one is not surprised to find the hands figuring as the principle of action”. It is usually to the hands that are assigned the stain occasioned by sin (11:14; 16:17) or the purity that

¹⁶¹ This theme shall be explored much clearer when we discuss verses 13-15 below.

¹⁶² Regarding verses 7-8, Habel (1985:433) observes that the protasis of each formal oath in Job’s speech (vv 7-8, 9-10, 21-22, 38-40) is introduced by an ‘if’ (*’im*) clause and the apodosis, characterized by a jussive verb. “In these verses the entire body is pictured as participating in a sinful act: the eye covets, the heart plots, the feet turn aside, the hand acts. Job asserts that he has kept his body under control” (Hartley 1988:412).

¹⁶³ cf Num. xv 39; Prov. iv 25-27; Matt vi 22; II Pet ii 14; I John ii 16 (Pope 1973:230)

¹⁶⁴ But Job “... has never let his heart follow his eye, i.e., his mind has not been controlled by his lusts” (Hartley 1988:412).

righteousness confers (22:30). Pope suggests the comparison of 7a with 23: 11¹⁶⁵, which asserts Job's sure footedness in following the steps of God or in keeping his own steps on the path of God without deviation or decline; he has been steadfast in his commitment to the ways of God. In verse 7c Job denies that "any blot" (KJV), "spot" (NRSV)¹⁶⁶ is "cleaved" or has "clung" (NRSV) to his "hands". If this had happened, according to the NIV his hands (a synecdoche of his body or life) would have been "defiled".

Regarding verse 8, Dhorme (1967:453) believes that: "It is the sower who ought to eat the produce of his land, and the one who plants who should profit by his work, for 'they do not plant that another might eat' (Isa 65:22). The punishment would consist in seeing another reap what one has sown one's self: Thou shalt sow and thou shalt not reap (Mic 6:15)". On the mention of "offspring" (v 8b), Pope (1973:230) observes that: "Some interpreters take the word (*še'ēšā'im*) here to refer to produce of the earth rather than human progeny, citing Isa xxxiv 1 and xlii 5 as examples of this meaning. In these, and other cases, the context and the parallelism indicate that the reference is to human progeny ... Human beings may be 'uprooted' as well as plants; cf Ps lii 5(7) and Job xxxi 12b". In contrast to Pope, Clines (2006:1017) explains that: "In this self-curse, Job invokes the loss of his means of survival; it is a kind of death wish. Had he been specifically referring to coveting the property of others ... the self-curse would be especially appropriate; if he had enjoyed their goods, may they now enjoy his. But the thought is probably much more general reference to deceit of any kind". He also adds that: "In the context, Job's 'produce' (*tse'ētsa'im*) is more likely to be his crops (as in Isa 34:1; 42:5) than his offspring or descendants (as elsewhere in Job, at 5:25; 21:8; 27:14). It would be strange for Job to wish that his children should be 'rooted out' when in fact they are already dead"(Clines 2006:1017). Therefore, the latter interpretation is preferable here.

¹⁶⁵ Job 23:11: "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined" (KJV).

¹⁶⁶ About the translation that has 'spot' for 'blot' in vs7c, Pope explains that the Oriental Kethib, Syr, and Targ. represent "*mē'ūmāh*" "anything" instead of *mūm* (wrongly spelled *mē'ūm*), "spot, blemish", probably as a reminiscence of Deut xiii 18. Clean hands (cf. ix 30, xvii 9) go with a clean heart (i.e., "mind"), Prov xxiv 4 (Pope 1973:230). Hartley (1, 988:411) also adds that: "MT *mu'ūm* (cf Dan 1:4) is taken as identical with "*mūm*", 'blemish', written here with a quiescent. LXX and Syr. apparently read "*mē'ūmā*", 'anything'".

Thus, verse 8¹⁶⁷ declares the verdict or curse that should befall Job if he has misused his strength in vile walk and acts with his hands. He calls for someone to eat up his farm produce and let his offspring be rooted out; thus, the curse should fall on his exertion of physical strength to gain food to eat, as well as wealth to store, to have a means of present and future survival. Job calls for terrible curses that reverse some of the prominent items and signs of blessings and continuity of one's life and enjoyment.

Job then moves to the climax of the temptation to lust after a young woman (31:1) or to stray from the right path (vv 5, 7) to the actual result of such a derailment of its possible consequences, as described in the following verses.

3.6.4 A Woman/ neighbour's wife (31:9-12)

MT	<p>אם־נִפְתָּה לְבִי עַל־אִשָּׁה וְעַל־פֶּתַח רְעִי אָרְבָּתִי תִּטְחַן לְאַחַר אִשְׁתִּי וְעָלֶיהָ יִכְרַעוּן אַחֲרָיו כִּי־הוּא [היא] זְמָוְהִיא [והוא] עוֹן פְּלִילִים כִּי אֵשׁ הִיא עַד־אֲבִדוֹן תֹּאכַל וּבְכָל־תְּבוּאָתִי תִשְׂרֹשׁ</p>
Own Translation	<p>If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or I have lain in wait at my neighbour's door then let my wife grind for another, and may other men have sexual relations with her, For that would have been a terrible act, for that would have been an act to be judged, For it is a fire that eats even to Destruction, and it will totally uproot my yield, -</p>

¹⁶⁷ Pope suggests that verse 8 should be compared with v 5; xxvii 17; Lev xxvi 16; Mic vi 15; Isa lxx 22.

Job avers his innocence on the issue of lust, covetousness, and adultery by uttering his self-imprecation if he did, full of rhetorical strength. The strength of his rhetoric is seen in the rhetorical synthesis of each verse above in that each of the lines has a synthetical arrangement of synonymous parallelism, thus doubling the thoughts in order to give them force and clarity. Job submits his matrimonial honor to public disgrace and shame, even unto his wife as he agrees that she may become a mere object of servitude and sexual satisfaction to his neighbor (and others) if he has violated the sacred honor of adultery, even that which may be done in the heart (31:9).

From Job's words we see that the sin of adultery starts as a thing of the eyes and heart to the 'door' of one's neighbor or friend in order to get to the neighbor's wife or daughter. In Job's case, and probable context, the wife is primary. Hartley's (1988:413) comment on verse 9 explains that the word פתח 'door'¹⁶⁸ is with the possibility of having a double meaning; "access to his neighbor's house and access to his neighbor's wife's womb".

Dhorme (1967:454) observes that after speaking of sins in general, Job now goes into detail about adultery with a neighbour's wife. "A characteristic of the adulterer is that he lurks in wait for dusk (24:15) and stands guard to seize the chance of the husband's absence (Pr 7:19). The word רע denotes the neighbour, as in the Decalogue (Ex 20:17; Dt. 5:18)". Dhorme further discusses verse 10 by noting the fact that: "Job demands the law of retaliation. The wife will become a servant, and by that very fact, the concubine of another. The function of a slave either male or female, is to grind the wheat for daily bread (Ex. 11:5; Is 47:2). A rabbinic interpretation, followed by Targ. and Vulg. assigns to טחן 'to grind' the meaning of 'to have intercourse with someone.'"

In Pope's analysis of verses 10-12 about Job's declaration of innocence on the issue of adultery, he considers verse 10b in light of Rashi's comment as a pointer to the interpretation of this verse in the sense of sexual intercourse, which Pope also validated by explaining that:

The verb *kr'* is used to kneeling to rest, to pray, to give birth, of physical exhaustion, and submission. In Arabic the word is used of the woman's sexual acquiescence, *kara* 'at al-

¹⁶⁸ Or 'opening'.

*marāt ilā arrajul, curvat se mulier ad virum*¹⁶⁹. The self-imprecation, the accused adulterer asking to be paid in kind, recalls the common truncated oath formula, “May Yahweh/God do thus to ... and worse, if ...” (Ruth I 17; I Sam iii 17, xx 13, xxv 22; II Sam iii 9, xix 13; II Kings vi 31). Here, as generally in this series of oaths, the sanction invoked is specified. To have one’s betrothed ravished by another man is one of the most repugnant of curses (cf. Deut xxviii 30) (Pope 1973:231).

He further discusses the “heinous crime” (KJV; NRSV) or the “wicked sin” (NIV) of verse 11a as “licentiousness”. The above mentioned scholar explains that: ‘This word (*zimmāh*) is used regularly of lewdness, indecent and disgusting sexual conduct’ (Pope 1973:231)¹⁷⁰. This described the nature of the sin or crime of adultery as a deceitful or planned act with bad or selfish intent.

Still on verse 10, Pope continues to explain the verb to “grind”, which describes Job’s wife’s curse in another person’s service. He observes that “some interpreters understand this verb in the literal sense, i.e., ‘may my wife become a drudge, ‘the slave girl behind the mill’ Exod xi 5; Isa xlvi 2”. Pope shows how this humiliating life of Job’s wife came to reality during his illness according to the Jewish tradition in the Testament of Job. Nevertheless, “[a] Talmudic dictum (Soṭah 10a) asserts that the word *ṭhn* refers to (carnal) violation or trespass (*ābērāh*) and this view is cited by Jerome in connection with Samson, Judg xvi 21, and reflected in the rendering of Lam v 13b, *adolescentibus impudice abusi sunt*” (Pope 1973:231). This is an act of violating her right and personhood in terms of her security, freedom of choice and personal pleasure, joy or happiness.

Although “*zimmāh*” in Ps xxvi 10 is translated by Dahood to mean ‘idols’, Pope maintains that: “It seems best to maintain the abstract sense, “lewdness”, “licentiousness” as a metaphor for idolatry rather than real idols” (1973:232), thus still retaining the adjective as a cogent way of describing the nature of the act rather than seeing it as the direct object or the actual act in question.

¹⁶⁹ “*curvat se mulier ad virum*” is in Latin not Arabic.

¹⁷⁰ For the use of a similar cognate word in Ugaritic to refer to a shameful misdeed, see Pope (1973:321-32).

The act of adultery is seen in verse 11b literally as a “judicial iniquity”, i.e. iniquity deserving of judicial condemnation, reading “*pēlīlī*,” as in vs 28, and regarding the final *-m* as the enclitic emphatic particle which is so common in Ugaritic and is being recognized with ever-increasing frequency in OT poetry. “This whole verse, however, is suspect as a pious, moralizing comment” (Pope 1973:232), thus it is appropriate for the NRSV to translate it as “a criminal offense”¹⁷¹. In a very serious way this conjures the reason or motivation of a pious person to avoid adultery, which directly confronts, judges and negates our contemporary view of it, generally speaking, as a game or an alternative way of seeking and achieving pleasure. The foregoing thought could be strongly supported by the pious view of the act of adultery, not only as a wicked/criminal act, but also as a “fire that consumes to destruction” (vs 12 KJV). The word ‘destruction’ is also rendered as ‘Abbadon’. Pope sees this as an echo of Deut xxxii 22 (Pope 1973:232) and refers to Prov vi 27-29 and Ecclesiasticus ix 8b, in which the punishment for adultery is likened to a deadly fire as well. Gordis (1978:347) explains the *ו* particle that begins verse 12a as being emphatic, which means “indeed”. He further asserts that: “Adultery is compared to a fire because of the strength of the sexual passion and its destructive potential (Pr. 6:23-29)”.

In consideration of Job’s declarations in verses 9-12, Clines (2006:1018) notes that: “Job cannot be evading punishment, though here he focuses solely on the effect of the sin upon the wife”. Thus, if Job had committed the sin of adultery: “What he would have deserved is public humiliation, he thinks, and he knows of no worse humiliation than a disgrace to his wife; for a woman of his household to be shamed is the worst blow his own honor can suffer” (Clines 2006:1017-18)¹⁷².

In his understanding of verse 9, he explains that: “Job has not watched outside a neighbor’s house for the husband to go out and the wife to be accessible” (Clines 2006:1018). But, “[i]f Job or anyone else in his position is seduced, he is seduced by himself or, as Job would say, by his heart or his eyes”. Hence he should bear the curse alone if he is found guilty of the sin he

¹⁷¹ It is noteworthy here that both the law and the wisdom literature forbid adultery (Exod. 20:14; Prov. 6:23-35).

¹⁷² “Since in Job’s world a man’s adultery with a married woman is not an offense against his own marriage but an offense against the woman’s husband, the punishment Job would have envisaged for himself is the adultery of other men against himself” (Clines 2006:1018-19).

mentioned. In verse 11, Clines (2006:1019) continues that: “The term for crime or ‘wickedness’ רָעָה is especially used for sexual offenses such as incest and prostitution (e.g. Lev 18:17; 20:14; Judg 20:6; Jer 13:27), though not exclusively (Hos 6:9; Prov 21:27)”. Thus, in verse 12, “The act of adultery, Job means to say, is not a self-contained or containable incident, but the initiation of a process of annihilation; there is a destructive evil inherent in the act”.

On Habel’s (1985:433-4) side of the discussion of verses 9-10 of Job’s oath, it is observed that Job’s oath on adultery seems to be replete with hidden meaning and euphemisms. The assonance between ‘seduce’ (*pthy*) and ‘door’ (*pethah*) suggests a subtle wordplay (v.9). “The sexist orientation of the passage seems to reflect a society where the wife is the virtual possession of the husband and her fate is bound up in her husband’s behavior”. His comments on verses 11 and 12 with regard to Job’s focus in such an avowal, maintains that: “The focus here is not on a punishment relevant to the crime, but on the destructive evil inherent in the act which inevitably rebounds on the perpetrator of the act”. Thus, he concludes that: “The punishment does not truly fit the crime”.

But in Newsom’s (2012:213) view of verse 9-10, “Job’s words are in keeping with the patriarchal perspective that saw a woman’s sexuality as the property of her husband and an abuse of it as an injury to the husband, rather than to the woman herself.” She further notes that: “Although modern readers are critical of the propriety view of women in Job 29-31 and of the way concern for honor tends to translate into social resentment and contempt, there is little indication that an ancient audience would have so reacted. For them, chapters 29-31 would have presented Job in the noblest possible terms- a model patriarch. He is, as God has described him, a man who ‘fears God and turns away from evil (1:8)’ (Newsom 2012:214).

Hartley (1988:413-14) also explains the curse that might have befallen Job’s wife had he committed any act of adultery as being subservient and dehumanizing when he explains verse 10, saying: “Both ‘grind’ (*tāhan*) and ‘bend’ (*kāra*), particularly the latter, carry sexual connotation”. Thus she may be subjected to bending in order to satisfy the sexual whims of another person. Hartley continues that, “Though this curse is strange to a modern audience, in the ancient world it would be viewed as an acrid curse against her husband, for a wife is so closely identified with her husband that his disgrace is as great as hers for letting this grave injustice

happen to her”. Thus, according to his understanding of verses 11 and 12, “ ... if Job were guilty of seducing his neighbor’s wife, the court would render a stiff judgment against him.”

Verse 12 describes another side of the effect of the curse if it were activated, resulting in both material and biological loss. Pope suggests the comparison of verse 12a with 26:6, which also describes the state and nature of ‘destruction’ or ‘Abaddon’.¹⁷³ Pope further explains תְּבוּאָה which is translated in “mine increase” (KJV), “all my harvest” (NRSV), and “my harvest” (NIV) as “my income”, saying: “Though this rendering may seem objectionable because of its modern connotation, it is most exact and literal translation possible for the word “*tēbū’āh*”, from the root *bw’*, “arrive, come in” (Pope 1973:232). Hartley (1988:414) seemingly adjudicated by indicating “The teaching is that such a sinful deed consumes all one’s wealth and destroys one’s household”.

Job progresses in the following verses into another sphere of communication and life interaction, in which he concentrates on his enactment of justice and dignity in his own household. This will introduce us to the theme of caring for the weak and needy, which may also be a recurring theme in the subsequent verses.

3.6.5 His Servants (vv 13-15)

MT	<p>אִם-אָמַאס מִשְׁפֹּט עֲבָדַי וְאִמְתֵי בְרַבִּים עִמָּד וְמָה אֶעֱשֶׂה כִּי-יִקְוֶם אֵל וְכִי-יִפְקֹד מֶה אֲשִׁיבָנּוּ הֲלֹא-בִבְטָן עֲשֵׂנִי עֲשֵׂהוּ וְיִכְנָנּוּ בְרַחֲמִים אֲחָד</p>
Own Translation	<p>If I have refused justice to my male and female slaves, when they have case against me, what then will I do when God confronts me in judgment? When he makes inquiry, how shall I answer him?</p>

¹⁷³ Job 26:6 “Hell is naked before him, and destruction has no covering” (KJV). In verse 12a, Greek renders עַד-אֲבוֹדוֹן by ἐπὶ πάντων των μερών (Jerome *in omnibus membris*). It is a paraphrase of ‘even unto Abaddon, to the very bottom’... Verse 12 explains Job’s horror at the sin of adultery. We have seen that Abaddon was a synonym for Sheol (26:6; 28:22) and that Sheol was situated under the earth (7:9). Abaddon or Sheol well expressed the idea of ultimate depths (11:8) (Dhorme 1967:455).

	<p>Did not the one who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us in the womb?</p>
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Job shifts his dimension of self-scrutiny and public avowal of innocence. From searching through his innermost being of possible sins of deceit or enticement to go after sin, he now moves into a more practical aspect of his life in relation to other people around him. He considers his social interactions and contributions to people with whom he has come across from in verses 13-20 under different but very important rubrics of human interactions, actions and response to human needs. In this segment of his oath (vss.13-15), we shall examine how he treated his servants.

Job avows that he has done justice to his servants/slaves¹⁷⁴ of both sexes. Verses 13-15 state his claim and motivation toward his just conduct towards his servants/slaves. Commenting on verse 13, Dhorme (1967:455) reports that: “Job has not violated the claims of justice in his relations with his neighbor (v.9). He was careful to fulfil its demands also in his own household. In 19:15-16 he described the attitude of his manservant and maidservants after he had been visited by calamity. And yet he had not swerved from justice in his dealings with them.” He goes further, to verse 14, by saying: “The opening ומה as in v.2, welds together the two parts of the argument. The verb קרם is well chosen to convey the idea that God rises up to judge humanity (Ps 76:10)¹⁷⁵. Cf. the use of the same verb in 16:8; 19:25; 30:11. The verb פקד ‘visit’, ‘inspect’ (5:24; 7:18) is just the one that is normally used to suggest the trial which God imposes on mankind, and the sanctions which follow this process (35:15)” (Dhorme 1967:456). Verse 15b describes the doer of the foregoing actions by the use of *’ehād*, which means ‘One’ as a description of the divine

¹⁷⁴ For the link of the treatment of slaves with the Mosaic Law in light of the ancient world, see Pope (1973:232-33).

¹⁷⁵ 14a, the rendering “rise in court” (*qwm*) is based on the sense of the verb in 30:28b (cf Micah 6:1; Pss 74:22; 76:10) and the forensic context of the passage.

entity in mind, thus the use of “One” as a divine title is evident from Zech. 14:9 cf. Deut. 6:4; Job 23:13) (Habel 1985:426).

Regarding verse 15, Dhorme explains why Job respected the rights of his subordinates. The clause is introduced by אלה (vv 3-4), which replaces the כִּי of v.12. We have here an allusion to the formation of the foetus in the maternal womb; the slave and his master are equal with regard to the mode of their conception and birth as they are also in death (3:17-19). The reason is that they are made by one and the same Creator; the slave and the master are not fashioned in one and the same womb, but by the same Creator. God alone can form the embryo and guide its development to completion (cf. 10:10) (Dhorme 1967:456).

Hartley (1988:414) also discusses verses 13 and 14, on Job’s treatment of his servants and asserts that by implication: “Job contends that he has treated his slaves fairly and kindly. He insists that he has never refused to listen to a just complaint from either his male or his female slave, including a complaint against himself. He has accepted the responsibility of treating his slaves justly as a God-given obligation¹⁷⁶, convinced that in the time of judgment God, either as a judge or a witness, will rise (*qûm*)¹⁷⁷ to their defense”. In verse 14 “Job knows that if he has mistreated any of his slaves, he could not answer God”.

Habel asserts that in verse 13-15; “...Job regarded his servants as individuals with legal rights as human beings” (Habel 1985:434)¹⁷⁸. Considering Job’s gesture within the wider context, Habel (1985:435) cites an ancient Near Eastern text on the Egyptian instruction of Amenomope which reflects Job’s understanding and willingness to treat the underprivileged with fairness and dignity.

¹⁷⁶“Perfidy in dealing with slaves was interpreted by Jeremiah as a factor in Yahweh’s condemnation of the southern kingdom to destruction by the Babylonians, Jer.xxxiv 15-22”(Pope 1973:233). Thus, “Underlying the civil protection of slave rights were two related theological affirmations: first, the righteousness of God underlay social justice; and second, the common origins of all humans, regardless of social class” (Perdue 1991:186).

¹⁷⁷On the verb “arise”, Pope (1973:233) here refers to Dahood’s interpretation, which suggests that *yiqqôm*, “take vengeance”, is to be read here, as in xix 25b. LXX *ean etasin mou poiēsetai*, “when he prepared my trial,” may be taken as support to this reading”.

¹⁷⁸ He also points to Job’s irony on God for owning and/or treating him like a slave (7:1-2; 14:6) and 1:8, Job’s status before God (Habel 1985:435).

On his comment on verse 15, considering Job and his male and female servants, Hartley (1988:415) continues, indicating: “Both were made (*‘āsā*) or fashioned (*kônēn*), each in his mother’s womb, by the same God¹⁷⁹. The word fashion suggests the arrangement of the parts of the body into an intricate structure.” He also adds a commendable thought on Job, saying: “His faith has led him to a liberated attitude toward those who were usually considered as having little worth” (Hartley 1988:415). Gordis (1978:348) explains verse 15 by saying that: “The (verse) is a ringing affirmation of Job’s conviction that all men, the lowest and the highest alike, are equal in rights because they have been created by God in the identical manner”. Habtu (in Adeyemo 2006:592) also asserts that: “Job’s confession that he and his servants are equal before God (31:14-15) is unique-especially in the context of the stratified society of the ancient Near East”.

Clines (2006:1020) is perplexed to think of verses 13-15, in which he marvels that “it strikes us as faintly incredible that many of his domestic or agricultural slaves would have had the nerve to approach him with a grievance, let alone with a personal complaint against him”. Additionally, regarding Job’s claim of verse 13, he indicates: “In not ‘despising’ (מִצַּד) their cause, he means that he has not ignored it or brushed it to one side”. This further confounds Clines to the extent that he doubts the veracity of Job’s utterance for the possibility of their being genuine or even tenuous. He claims that slaves had no rights to their masters so they cannot even take them to any court to seek justice, thus when Job mentions such a possibility “he is already out of line by the standard of slave-owners the world over”¹⁸⁰

Nevertheless, by closely looking at Job’s claims, Clines (2006:1020) agrees that “Job’s attitude certainly outstrips the norms of his day ... and contains at least the seeds of a very revolutionary social order”.

¹⁷⁹David Clines (2006:964) notes on 31:15d on עָשָׂהוּ “made him”, saying “but there are two others in question, the male and the female servant, so we should translate “make them”.

¹⁸⁰It is worth noting here that Clines (2006:1020) sees injustice in being a slave, so even though Job claims to be a just person here the fact that he still keeps slaves makes his “oath of protestation rings very hollow”. What Clines fails to perhaps carefully observe here is that Job is calling very serious curses upon himself if what he is saying is found not to be true before God and people. Thus, to describe his act as ‘very hollow’ shows a disregard to the intratextuality of the reality of the text in question.

When Job thought of God arising in judgment/testimony against him in verse 14: “He is certainly not thinking of a postmortem judgment, but more, in the ideology of the psalmists, of God’s capacity to intervene at any time on behalf of the oppressed” (Clines 2006:1020).

In the end of this segment on Job’s reference to the human equality from creation argument in verse 15, Clines claims this negatively, stating that: “Job ... says nothing of human equality, which he does not believe in¹⁸¹: he only says that he and slaves have also been created by the one God, and implies that that fact gives them some basic human rights, not that all humans should be treated alike or that they are ‘equal in rights’ ... God is also the creator of animals, but that does not entitle them to human rights” (Clines 2006:1021).

Clines’ attempt to negate the reality of equality in human rights in Job’s oath goes contrary to many commentators’ views, according to Richard W. Neville (2003:183-4)¹⁸², who reports that many commentators express the idea of equality in terms of an equal rights. He further reports that the idea that slaves have rights (v.13) is one of the most remarkable in this chapter. Neville is not unaware of the fact that several commentators argue that creation from the same God, and not directly in the same manner does not suggest equality and rights. Those who argue otherwise are said to follow the translation of the LXX, which has “same womb” rather than “same God”.

According to Neville (2003):

It is evident even from this brief survey of commentators¹⁸³ that, while many understand Job to be affirming human equality, there is significant disagreement over the manner in which Job expresses this principal. Some suggest Job is saying that all humans are made from the *same materials*¹⁸⁴, others that all humans share a *common mode* of formation (originating in a mother’s womb), yet other commentators observe that the *same God*

¹⁸¹ It is hubristic and untenable for Clines to claim to know what Job believes or not.

¹⁸² Richard W. Neville, “A Reassessment of the Radical Nature of Job’s Ethic in Job XXXI 13-15” in *Vetus Testamentum* LIII, 2. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2003:181-200.

¹⁸³ He made a brief survey in his article referred to above, of various commentators’ view on Job 31:13-15, to which he refers here.

¹⁸⁴ All italics in this quote are his (Neville’s).

made them all, and finally there are those who follow the LXX reading and have Job saying that all humans originate in the *same womb* (2003:186).

He further contends that:

The argument from the *same materials* can be dismissed immediately since the text nowhere mentions the materials from which Job and his slaves were made. On the other hand, the problem with arguing for common humanity based on *common origin* is the fact that the text itself does not focus on the latter. While the text does refer to the womb twice, the notion of sameness is associated with the *one who* made Job and his slaves and not with the *place where, or manner in which*, Job and his slaves were made. This notion of being formed by the same God is expressed twice and is the dominant idea, to which the notion of being formed in the womb adds an essential, yet subsidiary, point (Neville 2003:186-7).

In other words, Habel (1985:435) asserts that: “The belief that a common Creator and a common human origin justifies regarding all mortals as equals with common rights before God and the court is consistent with the creation theology elsewhere in wisdom literature (Prov 17:5a; 22:2)”.

Pope (1973:233) also explains the point of contention among scholars in verse 15 concerning the relationship of God and people, saying: “This passage is as close to expressing the full implication of the doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God and its corollary, the brotherhood of all mankind, as anything in the OT (see Mal ii 10, Prov xvii 5a, Job xxii 2 and Eph vi 9) ... Job here accords, at least in theory¹⁸⁵, to the lowliest of human beings respect as a child of God with equal claim for justice”.

Thus, Job treated his slaves with justice and equity because of their common origin, God being their Creator, and sole owner, who would one day call Job to account on how he lived his life and treated those under him (verse 14). It is an unthinkable act to Job not to treat his servants with justice and equality, for if he had done otherwise he would definitely have no answer to God at the judgment (Neville 2003:193-4).

¹⁸⁵ Job’s assertions and survival prove his points beyond a mere theoretical propaganda.

In his declaration of his justice and righteousness to the servants in his own household, Job moves further outside his own family circle into the public, where he continues showing concern, care and justice for the weak¹⁸⁶, in this case the poor, as contained in the following verses.

3.6.6 The Poor (vv 16-20)¹⁸⁷

MT	<p>אִם-אֶמְנַע מִחֶפֶץ דְּלִים וְעֵינַי אֶל־מְנַה אֶכְלָה וְאֶכֶל פִּתֵי לֶבְדֵי וְלֹא-אֶכֶל יְתוֹם מִמְנָה כִּי מִנְעוּרַי גָּדַלְנִי כָאֵב וּמִבֶּטֶן אִמִּי אֲנִחְנָה אִם-אֶרְאֶה אוֹבֵד מִבְּלִי לְבוּשׁ וְאִין כְּסוּת לְאֶבְיֹן אִם-לֹא בִּרְכוּנֵי חֶלְצוֹ [חֶלְצִיר] וּמִגֹּזְכָּשֵׁי יְתֻחָמֶם</p>
Own Translation	<p>If I have refused anything that the poor desires, or caused the eyes of the widow to fail And eaten my piece of bread alone, and the orphan did not happily eat, for from my youth I reared the orphan like a father, and from my mother’s womb I guided the widow if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a poor person without covering, if his body has not blessed me and from the fleece of my young rams become warm</p>

¹⁸⁶ Job’s justice towards the weak could contain a seeming contradiction when we read the seeming plight of his wife, if he had committed adultery with another man’s wife. The punishment he swore to come upon his wife may be a kind of injustice toward a her, thus not living up to his character of justice to the vulnerable, namely, the young woman (vs 1), his own wife (vs 10), his servants (vss 13f), the poor and orphans (vss 16ff). Nevertheless, his life of integrity, kept his wife away from such humiliation, thus he has protected her by his own lifestyle.

¹⁸⁷ From verse 16-23: “Job now turns to his humanitarian deeds toward the underprivileged of his society” (Clines 2006:1021). Clines also mentions references where it has been the duty of any good ruler to take care of the needy of the society in the Ancient Near Eastern contexts. Thus, Job’s actions and responses to the needs of others in this oath portrays him as a ‘good’ person (ruler/official) of his day. His actions, as we have seen above and as we shall see below, are motivated and guided by his piety, his consciousness of God in the world and in the affairs of people.

Job continues on the issues of care-giving, hospitality, and human dignity in verses 16-18. He declared to have had concerns for the trio in the Old Testament that Yahweh has called for their concern for life and well being, namely the poor, widow and orphan¹⁸⁸.

Regarding verse 16, Dhorme (1967:457) explains that the construction of מנע is done with the accusative in reference to the person who is refused, and the preposition מן before the thing that is refused (Nu 24:11, Ec 2:10). Thus we have seen the converse construction in 22:7, where basic food and drink are withheld from the weary and hungry. The word הפך ‘wish’ is used to denote the object of desire, what one wishes (cf Pr 3:15). The דלם denotes the ‘poor’, ‘weak’, ‘underprivileged’ (20:10, 19), types of which category are the widow and the orphan (22:9; 24:3).

Job was not selfish in verse 17, enjoying his blessings of food alone without extending it to the needy. “Putting it more positively, what he means is that he always had at his table less fortunate people than himself; or perhaps the picture of a large group of socially disparate diners is no more than a metaphor for his generous support of the needy” (Clines 2006:1022)¹⁸⁹.

Verse 18 is seriously problematic in terms of interpretation. See the following table for an example of how it has been variously understood and presented:

KJV	(For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;)
NRSV	for from my youth I reared the orphan like a father, and from my mother's womb I guided the widow—
NIV	but from my youth I reared them as a father would, and from my birth I guided the

¹⁸⁸ Pope compares verses 16-17 with 22:7-9 to see how Eliphaz’s charges against Job are denied under oath.

¹⁸⁹ “Job did not sit down to eat bread by himself without being concerned about an orphan’s hunger. He shared the abundance from his fields with the unfortunate” (Hartley 1988:416).

	widow—
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Pope (1973:233) tries to make sense of it when he explains that as it stands, the MT would have to be rendered: “For from my youth he grew up (with) me as a father/ And from the womb of my mother I guided her”. Of several expedients, the simplest appears to be the alteration of the first verb “*gēdēlanî* to *’āgaddēlennû*”, “I reared him”. The picture of the infant Job rearing orphans and guiding widows is something of a hyperbole. What he intends to affirm is lifelong concern for the unfortunate cf. xxix 12-13; Matt xix 20”.

Habel’s (1985:426) discussion of the verse is very interesting and worth close consideration as well. With regard to verse 18a, he writes that the verb “*gēdēlanî*” has troubled commentators. Some of them have pointed to the verb as a pi’el, taken God as the subject, and rendered the expression “he raised me”. But an allusion to God is intrusive at this point. Pope follows Dhorme in emending the text to a 1c.sg. piel, “I raised him”. Ceresko proposes to point the verb as pual and render “he was raised by me”. But Gordis correctly recognized the MT is intransitive qal and renders “he grew up with me”. Nevertheless, Clines (2006:1022) believes that: “There is more than a touch of hyperbole here. From his earliest youth, says Job, he has played the role of father to the fatherless, and, even more extravagantly, he began acting as ‘guide’ of widows even before he was born”.

Habel (1985:435) comments on verses 16-20 on Job’s kind acts, saying: “He was, in fact, blessed by the destitute who enjoyed fleeces from his flock to clothe their nakedness (vs. 19-20, cf. 24:7)”. He also adds that: “Not only did Job claim to receive the blessings of the downtrodden (29:13), but his actions were also a dispensation of life and blessings to others (29:24-25)”.¹⁹⁰ Thus “[p]rotecting the rights of the poor is an especial duty of the ideal ruler, not only in the Hebrew Bible but in other ancient Near Eastern texts” e.g. King Kilamuwa (Clines 2006:1021).

Job continues with his assertion of justice and love to others in how he extended care and provision to the weak, namely the poor, by providing them with cloth to keep warm among other things (vv 19-20). This is done still in his response to the social and individual needs of the

¹⁹⁰ In the same vein, Habel also quotes Kilamuwa’s benevolent self-attestation toward the needy.

needy and vulnerable like the poor and the destitute. Job declares in verses 19-20 that he was not selfish, but selfless, benevolent, hospitable and sensitive to the needs of others. Concerning Job’s position and gesture towards the needy, Dhorme (1967:459) comments that: “Job has refrained from abusing his importance in the city , and the support which the judges were accustomed to give him ... It is before the tribunal that the unfortunate run the risk of being crushed by the powerful (5:4).” But encouragingly, in Job’s case they were not crushed under the feet of the powerful but were instead strengthened by the strength of the powerful, in this case Job, and were lavished with his graciousness in particular.

From Hartley’s (1988:416) point of view on verses 19 and 20: “Job showed compassion to whoever was languishing from exposure to the elements due to lack of clothing.” He further adds a notion worth noting derived from Job’s attitude and actions portrayed in the verses when he says: “Good works done with an attitude of superiority or contempt demean the recipient, but when they are done out of genuine concern, they have the potential of establishing a bond between the parties and enriching both lives” (Hartley 1988:416-17). Clines (2006:1022) explains that Job’s acts here echo the self-description of Kilamuwa, King of Sam’al when he says: “To some I was a father, to some I was a mother. To some I was a brother”.

Job further moves to the legal scene, in which he has been sitting in court with other people in order to investigate and dispense justice and order in the society. He continues his claim of being pious, upright and just even in court, in his cause of defending the right of the weak, which in this case is the orphan.¹⁹¹

3.6.7 The Orphan (vv 21-23)

MT	<p>אִם-הִנִּיפוּתִי עַל-תּוֹם יָדֵי כִּי-אֶרְאֶה בְּשֹׁעַר עֲזָרָתִי כִּתְפִי מִשְׁכָּמָה תְּפֹל וְאֶזְרְעִי מִקְנֵה תִּשְׁבֵּר כִּי כַחַד אֵלַי אֵיד אֵל וּמִשְׁאֲתוֹ לֹא אוֹכֵל</p>
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¹⁹¹ The orphan is also a weak and defenseless person like Job’s wife (v 10), the servants (v 13f), and the poor (v16ff) as discussed above.

Own Translation	<p>If I have raised my hand against the orphan when I saw my support in the court then let my arm fall from the shoulder, and let it be broken off at the joint For (indeed) I tremble at the disaster of God, and to his majesty I cannot endure.</p>
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In the above verses Job goes into the court room as he declares his innocence and righteousness without any selfish gestures or inclinations when he claims not to pervert justice in the court to deny the vulnerable and uplift himself. Verse 22 declares the curse that Job expects to be activated against him if he had done any such wrong in the court. Additionally, he further states his reason or motivation for such a pious conduct in verse 23, which is the dread or fear of the terror and majesty, or highness of God.¹⁹²

Pope (1973:234) explains verses 21-23 as follows, for Job to ‘lift’ his hand (KJV) or ‘raised’ it (NRSV, NIV) as in verse 21a, is an action that could mean to: “Swing or wave the hand to strike or menace cf Isa xi 15, xix 16; Zech ii 13. The poor, the widow, and orphan had no hope for justice or redress of wrong unless some powerful citizen was willing to support their cause cf. v 4, xxix 12, Prov xxii 2.” In verse 21b, “‘advantage’ is literally interpreted as ‘saw my help’. This may refer to the custom of parties to a dispute having an escort to shout down, or, if necessary, beat down the opposition”. Gordis (1978:349) says: “Here the offense is the corruption of justice ‘in the gates’. The orphan symbolizes the weak classes in society who have no influence with the judges”. Raising one’s hand in the court could possibly be an act of not seeking false help or cheating on another by calling for silence, for “[i]n ancient courts if a party was silenced, that party lost the case” (Hartley 1988:417). If Job had done this, he would have been charged, at least by God, of misusing his power and position to manipulate justice against the vulnerable.

He further mentions that: “The words rendered “shoulder” and “socket” both mean shoulder (vs. 22a). Tur-Sinai’s notion that the meaning is ‘let my (one) shoulder fall from the other’ seems unlikely”. In verse 22b, “The word here rendered ‘elbow’ actually means “reed”¹⁹³, and is used in several senses in the OT, as a unit of measure (whence is derived the term ‘canon’), in the

¹⁹² 23a, “Literally, “For a terror unto me is a calamity of El” (Habel 1985:426).

¹⁹³ 22b. “*qāne*”, “socket” is literally “reed”. Dhorme renders “humerus” and Pope “elbow”. However, *’ezrōa*, “arm”, does not refer exclusively to the forearm but may be used for the whole arm including the shoulder (Num 6:19; II Kings 9:24) (Habel 1985:426).

sense of stalk, shaft, or the arm of a balance...The passage in question describes the violent mourning rites such as proscribed in the Mosaic Law (Lev xix 28, xxi 5)” (Pope 1973:234). Pope further relates the scenario to an Ugaritic text on how Anat mourns for her dead brother and consort Baal. Coming to verse 23, Pope here recognized that a number of critics transposed this verse after 14 and offer various emendations, but he tries to strike a balance by leaving the text unaltered but placing it after v 14.

For Job to call such a curse upon himself, namely the breaking off of his arm/elbow if he had done any wrong as mentioned in his declaration would mean to ask for a total devastation that renders one helpless and defenceless. Hartley (1988:417) mentions that: “In the OT a broken arm indicates that one’s power has been decisively broken. Often God is the one who does the breaking (cf Ps. 10:15; 37:17; Jer. 48:25; Ezek. 30:21-22).” In verse 23 we can see that: “A profound awareness of God’s majestic holiness guides a person to pursue righteousness and to shun evil¹⁹⁴. A person who believes this acts in all matters as though he is directly accountable to God” (Hartley 1988:417).

In verses 21-23 Habel (1985:436) observes that: “Job disclaims involvement in any miscarriages of justice at the city gate (v.21) ... Job administered justice with the belief that El was a rigid upholder of justice”. Clines (2006:1023) commends Job’s meticulousness in caring for the needy when he says: “Not only is Job active in caring for the underprivileged; he also makes sure that he does not harm any poor person. Though he could have the support of his fellows in the town council (the “gate” as in 29:7), he would not use his power to injure an orphan, he says”. Thus, in verse 23, “[a]s in v 14, Job found his ethic upon fear of divine punishment. That need not mean that he has acted justly and charitably only through fear of suffering if he did not, but rather that the divine displeasure has always been a consideration, perhaps the ultimate sanction, in guiding his behavior” (Clines 2006:1023). This accentuates his piety and how it translates itself in his life and actions in relation to God, as well as other human beings around him, whom he sees and interacts with.

¹⁹⁴23b The text and parallelism of 13:11 favors retaining MT “*še’ēlō*”, “his majesty”. There is no need to seek an improvement on the parallelism by revocalizing as “*mšō’ālō*”, “his destruction” (Habel 1985:426).

3.6.8 Trust in Wealth (vv 24-25)¹⁹⁵

MT	<p>אִם-שְׁמֵתִי זָהָב כֶּסֶלִי וְלִפְתָּם אֶמְרֵתִי מִבְּטָחִי</p> <p>אִם-אֶשְׂמַח פִּי-רַב חֵילִי וְכִי-כִבִּיר מְצָאָה יָדִי</p>
Own Translation	<p>If I have put my hope in gold, and said to pure gold “my trust”</p> <p>If I have rejoiced because of my great wealth, or for the great wealth my hand has found</p>

In this segment of his oath Job distance himself from his material wealth. He does not put his ‘hope’ (KJV) or, ‘trust’ (NRSV, NIV) in ‘gold’, not even in a ‘fine gold’ (KJV), ‘pure gold’ (NIV)¹⁹⁶. Hope and fine gold in this verse create a good poetic alliteration, thus adding to the accent that materialism is not the primary anchor of Job or the most attractive adventure or goal in his life. His piety creates and sustains virtues that overcome the power and place for obsession to materialism.

In his study of verse 24, Gordis (1978:350) discovers that: “Job here repudiates the idolatry of wealth, which takes on two forms, trusting in one’s possessions so as to feel free to act oppressively (v 24) and rejoicing in the possession of gold, like a miser (v 25).” In Clines’ (2006:1025) view of Job’s attitude to material possession and piety, it is noted here that, “in opposing wealth and God as antithetical, Job displays his nervousness about a sin he has felt inclined to but has resisted nevertheless”.

3.6.9 Worship of the heavenly bodies (vv 26-28)

¹⁹⁵ In reading verses 24-25 compared with iv 6, viii 14; Pss xl 4, xlix 10-13, lxxi 5, lxxviii 7; Prov xi 28; Jer xvii 7; Ecclesiasticus xxxi 5-10; Matt vi 24 (Pope 1973:230)

¹⁹⁶ Trusting in wealth rather than in God is the subject of typical wisdom reproaches (see Pss 49:6-7 [7-8]; 52:7 [9]; 62:10 [11]; Prov 11:28; Eccles 5:1,8; 11:24; 31:5-7; 40:25-26) (Clines 2006:1024).

MT	<p style="text-align: right;">אִם־אֶרְאֶה אוֹר כִּי יִהְיֶה וְגִרְתָּ יִקָּר הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּפְתֶּה בְּסִתֵּר לִבִּי וַתִּשְׁקֵן יָדַי לִפְנֵי גַם־הוּא עֵוֹן פְּלִילִי כִּי־כַחֲשֵׁיתִי לְאֵל מִמַּעַל</p>
Own Translation	<p>If I have considered the sun when it shone, or the moon walking in brightness so that my heart was secretly enticed, and my hand threw them a kiss from my mouth that also would be iniquity to be judged, for I would have been false to God above.</p>

Here Job reflects on his religious life and allegiance. He declares his fidelity and piety against cosmological idolatry. Verses 26-27 display Job's utterance about the object of attraction of worship that might have been his snare. Verse 28 spells the certainty of judgment on idolatrous act as a sin of betrayal or denial of God.

In verse 26 the shining of the sun or the brightness of the moon might pose attractive challenges to people for worship of them. The movement of the moon in its brightness (KJV) or 'splendor' (NRSV, NIV) is the word *yqr* that shows a quality of being of great value and preciousness. According to Dhorme (1967:462), "the word יקר 'dear', 'precious' (28:10, 16) is especially used like the Assyrian *aqartu*, in speaking of precious stones. Whence the meaning 'splendid', which is most appropriate to the moon proceeding majestically through the sky". This can pose a religious appeal or enticement for idolatry, "thus in verse 27, the idiom בסתר 'in secret' (13:10), is to express the stealthy character which marks idolatrous cults" (Dhorme 1967:462).

Pope (1973:235) sees the אוֹר "light" in verse 26 as the light *par excellence* (Gen i 16), just as Homer used *faos* of the sun. Similarly, xxxvii 21 and Hab iii 4; cf. Deut iv 19; Jer viii 2; Ezek viii 16; II Kings xxi 5, xxiii 5, 11. Worship of the sun, moon, and stars (the army of heaven) was as severely condemned by the prophets as it was avidly practiced by the majority of the people". Gordis (1978:350) notes that in verse 26: "The worship of the moon and the stars is the only non-ethical transgression mentioned, but one of fundamental importance and so worthy of inclusion.

The worship of the sun and the moon was central to pagan religion and exerted a powerful appeal in Israel as well, being widespread in the 7th century (II Ki. 21:3; 23:4,5; Ezek. 8:16)."

Pope (1973:235) also carefully considers the difficulty of verse 27b if the line were to be taken literally. The reading is not "and my mouth kissed my hand", but "and my hand kissed (to) my mouth". The kiss is an ancient form of adoration¹⁹⁷. Idols were kissed by worshipers in the pagan fertility cult, Hosea xiii 2; I Kings xix 18. Because the celestial bodies themselves were inaccessible, the worshipers may have thrown them a kiss; if the line under discussion actually refers to the "wafting" of a kiss with the hand, the grammatical difficulty is easily solved by taking the preposition *l-* in the sense of "from" rather than "to", "my hand kissed from my mouth".

Dhorme (1967:463) believes that "v. 28 emphasizes vv 26-27 by giving the reason for Job's avoidance of the cult of the stars". *Job was not comfortable to do it, in fact, he does not like to do it because of his pious allegiance to God*¹⁹⁸. The word מִמַּעַל 'from on high' (cf. v.2 and 3:4) ends by becoming an epithet for God. The author uses the expression because the cult of the stars is in fact the substitution of the creatures 'from on high' (Ex 20:4; Is 45:8) for their Creator". Thus, Job's understanding and fear of God motivates him to avoid materialistic and luminary deification. Any idolatrous involvement of Job toward other creatures is seen as a "perfidious sin" (v 28, Pope). The same phrase is rendered "criminal iniquity" in v 11 above (Pope 1973:235). Hence, "[t]o worship the creature rather than the Creator was to him absurd, for in so doing he would have denied God, separating himself from God's favor" (Hartley 1988:419). Thus "Job evidently regards reverence to sun and moon as a form of illegitimate worship; to worship them is to deny God above (v 28)" (Clines 2006:1025).

¹⁹⁷ "Perhaps throwing a kiss with the hand is the action involved" (Habel 1985:426); in Hartley's (1988:419) view "Apparently Job is referring to the gesture in which one kissed his hand and threw the kiss to the heavenly bodies. He has never shown other gods affection even in secret".

¹⁹⁸ The words in italics are only mine (for emphasis).

3.6.10 Satisfaction at a Foe's Misfortune (vv 29-30)

MT	<p>אם־אֶשְׂמַח בְּפִיד מִשְׁנֵאֵי וְהִתְעַרְרְתִּי כִּי־מָצְאוּ רָע וְלֹא־נִתְתִּי לְחַטָּא חֶכְי לְשָׂאֵל בְּאֵלָה נַפְשׁוֹ</p>
Own Translation	<p>If I have rejoiced over the misfortune of my enemy, or exulted when evil found him I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for his life in a curse</p>

Job here declares his innocence over his attitude toward his enemy, namely “him that hated me” (KJV), “those who hate me”¹⁹⁹ (NRSV), rendered “enemy” in the NIV. Dhorme (1967:463) explains that the ׀א is interrogative (vv.5, 16, 20, 24, 25, 26). Job was a stranger to what the Germans call *Schadenfreude*,²⁰⁰ “the delight that is felt when misfortune strikes one’s enemy” but instead of gloating over his enemy for their misfortune Job rather practiced Prov. 24:17, and Exod 23:4-5, which prohibit such an attitude. Job’s piety here allows sympathy to his enemy (enemies) in an unfortunate situation. Dhorme also points out that: “the verb מצא with רע ‘evil’ as subject, as in Gen 44:34, to imply the evil which meets someone, the misfortune which overtakes him”.

Pope (1973:235) noticed that rejoicing at the calamity of an enemy is all too common and natural in the Holy Writ and even unto this day cf. viii 22, xii 5, xxvii 7. But Job chose not to do it most probably because of his inner piety and ethical ideals. Thus Job did not also use his mouth (דָּבָר) to give (נָתַן) and/or wish (שָׂאֵל) any imprecation to the life (נַפְשׁוֹ) of his enemies. Thus, on verse 30: “Perhaps Job means to say that he has never rejoiced over the troubles of his enemies; and on the principle of *qal wahomer* (Latin *a minore*), how much less will he have cursed anyone or uttered a wish for their death” (Clines 2006:1028). This also displays Job’s piety in the use of his mouth.

¹⁹⁹“ The term ‘foe’ is literally, ‘the one hating me’ (Hartley 1988:420).

²⁰⁰ The Hausa people of northern Nigeria also have an expression of derision which connotes rejoicing over the misfortune of an enemy when they say, *Allah shi kara* i.e. may God add more.

3.6.11 Failure to extend hospitality to a sojourner (vv 31-32)

MT	<p style="text-align: right;">לֹא אָמְרוּ מִתִּי אֲהֵלִי מִיִּתְּמוּבְּשָׂרוֹ לֹא נִשְׂבַּעְעָאם</p> <p style="text-align: right;">לֹא־גֵלִין גַּר דְּלִתִּי לְאֶרֶח אֲפִתְחֹחֻזִיב</p>
Own Translation	<p>If those in my household have not said, “Who has been given from his meat and cannot be satisfied?”</p> <p>No stranger had to spend the night in the street, for I opened my doors to the traveler.</p>

Job also continues to assert his benevolence to the people of his own dwelling place, tabernacle (KJV), tent (NRSV) or household (NIV) as well as the *gêr*²⁰¹ “stranger” (KJV, NRSV, NIV) on the ‘street’ or outdoor or field dweller. In verse 31 (and 32); family, alien, passer-by: “All have had occasion to be gratified by the benefits which Job had conferred on them. To those who had no place of refuge (v.32) he offered the hospitality of his tent. To those who already enjoy the protection of his tent he offers food. The peak of generosity is to kill sheep in honour of the guests. It thus, becomes apparent that בשרו means ‘his meat’ that which he offers to his friends”(Dhorme 1967:464). The question of v.31 is continued by a negative sentence (cf. 29-30). It is not only that the people in the immediate entourage of Job have profited by his liberality, but strangers themselves have had cause to be gratified by it; ‘No stranger spent the night without shelter’ (Dhorme 1967:465).

From Pope’s (1973:236) point of view, verse 31a which says, “If the men²⁰² of my tabernacle said not” (KJV), is a truncated or incomplete oath introduced by “if not” (*’im lô*) which would require that we understand it as the equivalent of an asseveration that the men of Job’s tent did indeed say, “O that we might be sated with his flesh”...The grammatical difficulty may be solved by deleting either *’im* or *lô*. If *lô* is retained, it should be vocalized *lû*, the conditional

²⁰¹ The גר is the stranger or alien who seeks refuge (19:14-15) (Dhorme 1967:465).

²⁰²*mith* ‘adult people’.

practice designating unfulfilled action”. He further points out the difficulty of this text and discusses it at length as a case of hospitality, although not clearly understood by many interpreters of the same text.²⁰³ Here Job allows a presupposition in his mind that strongly asserts his believe and confidence on his own hospitable and ethically courteous actions towards the people of his house and strangers alike, in that even if the adult people of his house do not vocally, and publically say that they need to eat the meat/food of Job and enjoy his benevolence to be satisfied, he knew that they do.

Clines (2006:1029) also explains verse 31 in the following words:

It redounds not only to Job’s righteousness, but also to his honor, that people say, no doubt with good-humored irony, “If only we could find someone who has not eaten their fill at Job’s table!”-admitting the utter hopelessness of finding a person who has not benefited from Job’s hospitality. And it is not just run-of-the-mill fare that Job’s guests enjoy: those who dined with him eat meat, “flesh” (Heb. *bshr*) which in ordinary Israelite society seems to have been reserved for high days and holidays....

The act of being receptive and hospitable to strangers in verse 32²⁰⁴ is said to be the situation envisaged and exactly elaborated that in Gen xix and Judg xix; cf. especially Gen xix 2 and Judg xix 20²⁰⁵. To sleep in the street would have been a sure invitation to abuse by the local degenerates. Job, like Lot and the hospitable old stranger in Gibeah, made special effort to spare the stranger this outrage by offering the protection of hospitality” (Pope 1973:237).

3.6.12 Abuse of the land (vv 38-40a-b)

MT	אִם-עָלִי אֲדַמְתִּי תִזְעַק וַיִּחַד תִּלְמִיּהוּבְפִיּוֹן אִם-כִּנְזָה אֲכַלְתִּי בְלִי-כֶסֶף וַנִּפְשַׁבְעָלֶיהָ הַפָּחַתִּי
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²⁰³ For further discussion of the text in light of the ancient Near East see Pope (1973:236-37).

²⁰⁴ “In the true nomadic spirit Job entertained his guests graciously and generously” (Hartley 1988:420).

²⁰⁵ Although there is no claim of any coincidental sameness in the similar stories in view here.

	תחת תפסה יצא חום ותחת-שערה בקא'שה
Own Translation	If my land cries out against me; and all its furrows also lament If I have eaten its produce without paying, and caused the death of its owners then let thorns grow instead of wheat and stinking weeds instead of barley.

Job further declares his innocence on his stewardship and justice even to his own land. He claims not to have eaten the fruit of his land irresponsibly (v 38) and he did not acquire his land by deceit or force from a vulnerable person (v 39b). If he had done that, he believes the land may “cry” against him (v 38a) and the furrows also complain or be wet with tears (v 38b). If Job had dealt unjustly with his own land he called for “thistles” and “cockle” or “stinking weeds” to grow on it instead of the desired produce of the land, namely “wheat” and “barley”.²⁰⁶

Although “[i]t is not entirely clear what the crimes he might have committed could be. They might be crimes against former owners of the land, or against those who work on it now, or they could be crimes against the land itself” (Clines 2006:1031). In responding to the difficulty of the land issue of this verse, Clines suggests that:

Alternatively, if we connect this verse more closely with the following, the land is personified as crying out against Job, whether as a person who has removed its rightful owners or as one who has withheld wages from those who work on it, whether with or without the support of the law. Job is aware that the law protects the strong rather than the weak²⁰⁷, and that the weak can be injured lawfully. So he does not necessarily imagine himself violently and illegally throwing peasants off their land, still less

²⁰⁶ “Job’s imprecation, if he should have been guilty of offenses against the land or have committed theft against the land of others, is that the land should become useless, and revert to its unsown nature, which produces only thorns and weeds (as Gen 3:18, where the terms are (*qôts*) “thorn” and (*dardar*) “thistle” cf. also Isa 5:6; 34:13; Hos 9:6; Prov. 24:3-31) (Clines 2006:1032).

²⁰⁷ It is not clear what law Clines is referring to here.

shedding the blood of former owners ... acts of which he would no doubt have incurred public opprobrium if nothing worse, but as forcing peasants into debt and so eventually off their land (Clines 2006:1031).

In Pope's (1973:230) view, verses 38-40 give a rhetorical decline perhaps instead to intensify. He says: "[t]hese verses provide a rather weak ending to Job's eloquent deposition and markedly weaken the rhetoric effect. Accordingly, with many critics, I transfer them to follow v 8 where they appear to fit better". On the 'cry' of the land on verse 38, he indicates: "The very soil may protest injustice, as Abel's blood cried from the ground (Gen iv 10), or the walls and beams of a house cry out against ruthless tenant, Hab. ii 11" (Pope 1973:230)²⁰⁸. The cry would be an indictment to Job for taking its strength unjustly ²⁰⁹ as Dhorme (1967:466) observes on verse 39a, saying that the word כחה 'its strength' exactly as in Gen 4:12, to denote what the strength of the earth produces, crops or fruit.

Pope (1973:230) critically discusses verse 39b about the "owners" of the land, suggesting that the verbs should be translated "not 'owners', but 'workers'. The reference is certainly not to independent owners but rather to serfs or share croppers." He further refers to Dahood's translation by saying "there is no need to emend *b'l* to *p'l* to get the required sense of 'workers' rather than 'owners'. The treatment Job gave to his land and workers or laborers did not go to the unjust state of making them to lose their lives in order to satisfy his bidding.

If he were cruel and unjust, the land should also be cruel to him, thus paying him in kind when it produces deadly shrubs (vs.40a, b)²¹⁰. Dhorme (1967:466) states that "the imprecation is aimed at the thing which has been the instrument of sin (cf. v.10 and v.22). The cultivated land will

²⁰⁸ "The earth cries out against any offense committed upon it, be it murder (Gen 4:10), or undeserved suffering (Job 16:18), or the unjust expropriation of land, as here, the classic case of which is that of Naboth (I Kings, Chap 21)" (Gordis 1978:354).

²⁰⁹ "The 'ground/earth', however, is a symbol and gauge of human righteousness before God . The sympathy of nature motif reflects the belief that human actions produce sympathetic response from nature...Job is willing to experience the primordial curse of Adam anew if he, Job, has violated the fundamental relationship of obedience between himself and the 'ground' of his origin" (Habel 1985:440). In other words, "... when the people are disobedient, the land withers and mourns beneath the weight of their sins (cf. Hos. 4:1-3; Isa. 24:1-13). Conversely, when the people obeyed God's laws, he blessed the land so that it yielded abundantly" (Hartley 1988:423).

²¹⁰ Pope suggests that verse 40a,b should be compared to Gen iii 17-18, iv 12; Hos x 4, 8; Jer xii 13 to see how such a curse endangers the wellbeing of humanity.

become like the land which is unsown and desolate, and which naturally produces thorns and brambles (Gn 3:18).

3.6.13 Concealment of sin without confession (vv 33-34)

MT	<p style="text-align: right;">אִם־כִּפִּיתִי כְאָדָם פִּשְׁעֵי לְטָמוֹן בְּהֶבְי עֹנִי</p> <p style="text-align: right;">כִּי אֶעְרוֹץ הַמּוֹן רַבָּה וּבְיוֹז־מִשְׁפָּחוֹת יִחַתְנִי וְאָדָם לֹא־אֶצְא פֶּתַח</p>
Translation	<p>If I have hidden my transgression as human beings do, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom</p> <p>Own because I was terrified of the numerous crowd, and the contempt of families terrified me, that I kept silent and would not go outdoors</p>

Job, in verse 33-34, avers in boldness and transparency about his work and in life personally, privately, as well as publicly. Dhorme (1967:467) observes that v 33 is explained by v 34, where it is clear that the thought is that of avoiding embarrassment and confusion before others. Now, it was from God that Adam hid his fault, and one is bound to admit that in the mouth of Job the phrase ‘like Adam’²¹¹ seems too Jewish in tone”. Verse 34 gives the reason why Job might have sought to conceal his faults (Dhorme 1967:468), which in this case is “the contempt of families” (KJV, NRSV).

Habel (1985:426) explains verse 33a as follows, “*k’e’ādām*”, “like Adam,” is rendered variously as “from men” (RSV), “like the common herd” (Dhorme), “as men do” (NEB) ... Thus, Job denies attempting to conceal his sins in the earth beyond God’s rule. However, an allusion to

²¹¹ 33a “like Adam”. With KJ, rather than “after the manner of man” JPS, or emending with RSV, “from men” cf. Gen iii 8, 10; Pope (1973:238), also compares v 34 cf Gen xix 4,9; Judg xix 22. He further notes that v 34c. “man”. “Reading *’ādām* for *’eddōm*, “I kept silent”. “I bought ...out” reading *’ōšî* for *’ēšē*, “I went out”. In spite of the threat of violence, Job did not give over his guest to the mob; cf Gen xix 6-11; Judg xix 22-26” (Pope 1973:238).

Adam is quite in place seeing as he belongs to the common heritage of Job’s pre-Israelite heroes²¹².

Moreover, the seeming allusion in vs. 38-40 and 5:6-7 may make it clear the poet was familiar with the Fall tradition in Gen. 3. But from another, personal critical point of view, the thought of this passage being a conscious allusion to “Adam” or the primordial sin in Gen. 3 is vague. It could also rather be seen as a grammatical coincidence in which Job uses the generic name “Adam” for humankind.

In order to find a suitable interpretation of this verses, we can agree with Hartley (1988:421) when he says that Job “... overcame the human tendency to conceal his mistakes and wrongs in order to avoid embarrassment and to skirt the responsibility of that error”. In this case, Job represents himself to be a unique human being in what he did, what he says and fears. He stands in these verses away from the crowd in terms of his self-confidence, knowledge of his integrity as well as his earnest quest beyond the status quo.

3.6.14 Job’s resolve and end of words (35-37, 40c)

MT	<p>מי יתן־לי שִׁמְעָ לִי הוֹדֹתַי שְׂדֵי יַעֲנֵנִי וְסִפֵּר כְּתַב אִישׁ רִיבִי אִם־לֹא עַל־שִׁכְמִי אֶשְׁאַנּוּ אֶעֱנֶדְנּוּ עֲטָרוֹת לִי מִסִּפֵּר צְעָדַי אֲגִידְנּוּ כְּמוֹ־נָגִיד אֶקְרָבְנּוּ תָּמּוּ דְבָרַי אִיּוֹב פ</p>
Own Translation	<p>Who will give only me a hearing? Here is my signature, Let the Almighty answer me, and may my accuser write a document Surely I would carry it on both shoulders, I would put it on myself like a crown I would declare unto him the account of my steps; like a prince I would approach him Job finished speaking.</p>

²¹² This is accepted very liberally here. My reason is because I am not sure of Job’s knowledge and view of Adam (the first human in Genesis story).

Verses 35-37 present Job's final longings and desires. He avers his resolve if he is found and label as guilty (vv 36-37). He is a person who tried his best to dispense truth, justice and equity and he desired and demanded no less from people and God. With regard to verse 35, Dhorme observes that the desire expressed by Job recalls 19:23-4, where the solemn affirmations of vv 25-7 were preceded by a similar wish (Dhorme 1967:469).

Job is so determined that someone, in this case God, should hear him²¹³, he (Job) in verse 35a avers "Oh that one would hear me", which Pope (1973:238) explains literally as: "'Who would give me a hearer'²¹⁴. All along Job had been pleading for a hearing (cf xiii 22-23, xix 23-24, xxiii 4) and now he concludes his deposition of innocence under oath, which is tantamount to acquittal, unless the curses fall upon him as invoked". Job goes further to write his "tâv", which is interpreted as desire (KJV), mark or signature (NRSV)²¹⁵ about which Dhorme (1967:469) says: "It goes without saying that the expression is to be understood in the most general sense, and does not class Job as one of the illiterate". The sign also intensifies his quest in that: "With his signature Job makes the document official. Legally he has demanded that *Shaddai* answer him" (Hartley 1988:424).

Job wished that his adversary²¹⁶ had written a book about his case (35c). About the "document" that Job expects to be written, it is not clear whether Job has in view a writ of indictment or of acquittal, but in the light of the following verses the latter appears more likely" (Pope 1973:238). Dhorme (1967:469) also says that the ספר 'letter', 'document', 'book' sometimes denotes a legal

²¹³ "The one who Job desires would listen to him is of course none other than God himself" (Clines 2006:1033).

²¹⁴ "a hearing"

²¹⁵ 35b "signature". Literally "mark", the final letter of the alphabet, *tāw*, which had the ancient form of the cross-mark (X or +). Perhaps the symbol was used as a signature by illiterates. In any case, Job would be willing to validate his oath by signature" (Pope 1973:238). The term *tāw* is variously interpreted. It seems to mean "authenticating mark, signature" in Ezek 9:4, 6 and hence the evidence of innocence. Others, however, link the term with *taw* as the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet (cf. JB). Still others follow the lead of the Targum and the Vulgate and render "desire", assuming a contracted form of *ta'awā*. The reference to writing in v. 35c, however, favors the sense of a written signature or mark" (cf. 19:23) (Habel 1985:427). About the use of *tāw* by some interpreters Gordis argues for 'mark or signature' instead of *tāw* saying, "There is, however, no evidence for the use of the names of the letters of the alphabet in this early period or for the addition of a suffix to any name in any period of the language" (Gordis 1978:355).

²¹⁶ "My opponent", literally "man of my controversy," i.e. God as his accuser (Pope 1973:238).

document, such as the *libellum repudii*, the act of divorce (Dt 24:1, 3; Is 50:1) or the deed of purchase (Jer 32:11-12, 14,16). In this case, the document should be written to display Job's state whether he is guilty or not, if he appears not guilty then the document should be his certificate of acquittal. Clines (2006:1033) notes succinctly that:

Job here represents his protestation of innocence as a written legal document. It is of course, within the world of the story, a purely oral statement, like all the speeches in the book; but it has also become, in the book of Job, a written text. So, though the character Job does not know it, his oral text that is metaphorically a written text has become eventually a written text literally, and his signature, which was originally no more than a gesture, is now a physical reality, an appendage to a written text.

Dhorme (1967:469) also notes that: "Job is so completely convinced of the right that he knows in advance the futility of charges which might be drawn up against him. On the contrary, he will use the accusing document as an ornament and brandish it as a trophy (v. 36)". Thus, he even goes to the extent of asking for a book to be written of his state that he resolves to wear around and display his state for all to see.

Regarding verse 36 Dhorme (1967:470) observes that the word שֵׁכֶם 'nape of neck' (v 22) essentially means the part of the body on which a burden is carried, and thus becomes synonymous with כֹּתֵף 'shoulder'. This describes one of the places in Job's body that he plans to bear the document, as well as put it on as 'crown'.²¹⁷ On this verse, Habtu observes that: "The twice repeated 'it' is a reference to the bill of indictment Job is challenging his accuser to present" (Habtu 2006:593).²¹⁸

In verse 37, Job does not fear to present himself before any one whomsoever (vv 33-4). He is proud even of what his adversary might have invented by way of accusation (vv 35-6). He vows

²¹⁷ In verse 36, what Job would wear on his shoulder and head is not immediately clear. The natural antecedent is the aforementioned document. To wear or carry something on the shoulder is to display it proudly; cf Isa ix 5(6) (perhaps the symbol of authority) and Isa xxii 22 ("the key of the house of David") (Pope 1973:238).

²¹⁸ Habtu concludes his discussion by viewing Job's confessions as an act of "overconfidence" (see Adeyemo 2006:593). Interpreters can qualify Job's confessions as they wish but the fact that the curses he calls for were not activated and Yahweh in the end (42:7ff) exonerates him gives his confessions the respect and acceptability they deserve especially by the believing community.

to go before God boldly when summoned to declare himself perhaps for ultimate scrutiny (v 37a). “Job will disclose to God all his steps and approach Him with dignity like a prince”²¹⁹ (Gordis 1978:355-6). That is why he adds: ‘like a chief will I present myself before him!’ Not in the attitude of a guilty man but his head erect like an innocent one” (Dhorme 1967:471). Thus, “Job has nothing in his life to be ashamed of, and so he refuses to be cowed by the prospect of a written indictment from God” (Clines 2006:1035).

After all his confessions of innocence and decisive resolutions at the end, “Job’s words were ended” (40c)²²⁰. “To the end Job remains tenacious. He will not succumb without a final verdict rendered by the divine Judge himself. Having worn to his own innocence, Job will remain silent until God speaks” (Hartley 1988:425). Job ends his words with expectations of hearing from God. His desperation has been displayed in his foregoing confessions or declarations of innocence which we have critically tried to understand from and alongside erudite scholars from the pious perspective of Job’s life that permeates his personal, private and public life.

3.7. A Thematic Structure of Job 31²²¹

From the close reading above we would like to propose a thematic structure to Job 31, although it is not much different from other extant proposals. Nevertheless, the following is the writer’s suggestion for structuring Job 31 in terms of objects of Job’s concern²²² in the oath:

1. Young woman (31:1)

²¹⁹ The wordplay between ‘announce’ (*ngd*) and ‘prince’ (*nāgid*) highlights the climactic force of this verse” (Habel 1985:439).

²²⁰ Job’s words are ended is an editorial comment as in Jer. 51:64 and Ps. 72:20 (Hartley 1988:425). V 40c, cf. Ps lxxii 20; Jer li 64. (Pope 1973:239). Clines (2006:1036) sees the end of Job’s words as a transitional note rather than an editorial note as many scholars believe.

²²¹ This is my own choice of structuring the chapter which would guide the flow of my close reading of the same chapter in below.

²²² It is easier to discuss the progression of the chapter in terms of Job’s objects of concern in his declaration rather than to try to demarcate the chapter in terms of themes or topics found in it seeing that many of the themes overlap and it would not be good to strictly separate them from each other. But the division based on Job’s objects of concern in the oath would give us the opportunity to discuss even the overlapping topics back and forth without necessarily looking at one against the other, but rather from one to the other within a meticulous self-search, in Job’s case, to truly declare his innocence. At this juncture, Balentine’s (2008:329) observation is appropriate when he says: “The diversity of the expressions, plus the possibility for grouping them in different ways, makes it difficult to determine precisely how many oaths Job declares proposals range from ten to sixteen”. See Samuel E. Balentine “Job, Book of” in Sakenfeld (ed) *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible I-Ma Volume 3*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008:325).

2. Justice of God (31:2-4)
3. Falsehood (31:5-8)
4. A neighbor's wife (31:9-12)
5. His Slaves (31:13-15)
6. The poor (31:16-20)
7. The orphan (31:21-23)
8. Trust in Wealth (31:24-25)
9. Idols (31:26-28)
10. Enemy (31:29-30)
11. Stranger (31:31-32)
12. Land /Workers (31:38-40a-b)
13. Concealment of sin without confession (vv 33-34)
14. Job's resolve and end of words (35-37, 40c)

3.8. Some Literary Characteristics of Job 31²²³

This section would give some examples of the literary devices used in the speech of Job in our focal text, and would try to highlight how they could be seen from a literary analytical point of view.²²⁴

- There is *rhythmic*²²⁵flow in Job's final speech here especially with the recurrence of the oath formula using "if" and "if not" to set the condition and "then" to describe the result or consequent curse that may fall on him if he is found guilty in what he says (cf. 31:5, 7, 9, 13, 16, 19, 21, 25, 26, 29, 31, 33, 38 and 39).

223 Hebrew words will be transliterated in this section for the purpose of clarifying the intended literary points, as well as the ease the reading of the thesis by future readers who may not have a good knowledge of the Hebrew language and thus may find it difficult to decipher the Hebrew scripts.

224 This has no intention of given any exhaustive analysis of the literary devices in the text, but rather would just mention a few for example.

225 See Kugel (1981:233) for rhymes in the Bible.

- Job's assertion concerning making "gold" and "pure gold" his "hope" and "security/confidence" is a *metaphoric*²²⁶ way of one's show of interest, trust and/or confidence in wealth (or money i.e. financial strength in our contemporary term), which Job denies doing in v 24. In verse 12 the sin of adultery is described as "a fire" that burns/consumes to destruction. Perdue (1991:189) discusses the use of the "metaphors of Word and Birth" (Perdue 1991:185) and "metaphor of ruler", see v 37. Job also uses legal metaphors (see Dick 1992:330; Balentine 2006:475). Verse 14 contains a legal metaphor; "to rise", which in a "legal context means either a witness standing to testify against accused (Deut. 19:15-16; Mic. 6:1) or a judge standing to give the verdict (Ps. 74:22)" (Perdue 1991:186). Balentine (2006:475) points out that: "The legal language provides a specific context for assessing Job's objectives. It accents Job's pursuit of justice, his need for a fair and impartial hearing of evidence, his belief that innocence and guilt are not disposable qualities, either in life or in law, and his presumption that if God is just, then God will bear witness to his truth".
- *Simile*²²⁷ occurs in v 33, when Job says "as Adam" or "like Adam", thus using *simile* to compare his actions with that of general human beings. There is also a *simile* in Job's preparation to approach God boldly and/or proudly? "like a prince (ruler)" (v.37).
- Job asks *rhetorical questions*²²⁸, which are literary speaking questions that do not require an answer but the answer may rather be obvious within them. Thus, such questions are meant to persuade one towards any cause of action or to dissuade otherwise. Job employs *rhetorical questions*, for example when he contemplates the portion of the wicked from God above in v 3 and 4, saying: "Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? Does he not see my ways and count my every step?" He also repeats such questions in describing how he treated his servants and the motivation behind his actions, arguing from God's sovereignty in human

²²⁶ Regarding metaphor, Kafang agrees that "a metaphor is a figure of speech, an implied analogy in which one thing is imaginatively compared to or identified with another, dissimilar thing. In a metaphor the qualities of something are ascribed to something else" (Kafang 2002:62).

²²⁷ "Simile is one of the figures of speech (expressions that make comparisons or associations meant to be taken imaginatively rather than literal) used in Hebrew and, by implication, biblical poetry. Thus when a formal comparison is made between two different objects to further enlighten the mind of the listener with the resemblance or likeness of the two objects, such comparison in poetic language is called 'simile'" (Kafang 2002:64).

²²⁸ In Kafang's (2002:65,66) view: "Rhetorical question is a form of question that is asked but does not require an audible, or immediate response. Rhetorical questions are very prominent in Hebrew poetry ... Rhetorical questions are sometimes invoked in reaching a situation to provoke reasoning on the part of the listener". For more on rhetorical questions see Walter (2008:1225).

creation in vss 14 and 15, saying: “What will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?”

- *Apostrophe* is also used in Job’s speech. This is a literary technique of speaking to a person(s) that may not be presently around one (Kafang 2002:75). Although God is omnipresent, yet God’s silence to Job through his suffering has made Job to speak to an unseen being, although he may believe that God exists and God can hear him. Thus, his words in v 35 when he signed his document or put a mark on his assertions of innocence demonstrates his engagement with an invisible personality that he desires to see or hear respond to him, which he also prepared to approach “like a prince” (v 37).
- *Synecdoche* is used literary to demonstrate a situation where a part represents a whole²²⁹. For example, Job uses words like “foot” (v 5), “step” , “heart”, “hands” (v 7) also “heart” (v 9) to represent his whole body as being pure and kept away from any sin of deceit and secret enticement (vv 7, 9).
- *Alliteration* shows the recurrence of similar sounding consonants in a sentence. Kafang (2002:68) also agrees that: “Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words or within words”²³⁰. This could be seen in Job’s use of “covenant” (*berith*) and “young woman” (*betulah*) in v 1, thus repeating the “b” sound. An “l” sound is repeated in the words “lot” (*khalek*) and “heritage” (*nakhālah*) in v 2. The words “entice” (*pathah*) and “door” (*pethakh*) repeat the sound of “p” and “th” in v 9. The words to “burn” (*akal*) and “Destruction” (*abbadon*) in v 12 each begins with an *aleph*=א, which although it has no definite sound, still carries the idea of an alliteration in the usual “a” sound of the pronunciation of the words it begins in the sentence. The words *mah* as “what” and *kiy* as “when” are each repeated in v 14, which gives the alliterative sounding of both “m” and “k” through the sentence. There is another alliteration in the words “hear” (*shama* ‘) and “Almighty” (*Shadday*) in v 35 which repeats the sound of “sh”. The “b” sound is repeated in v 39 in the words “without” (*beliy*) and “owners” (*be’aleyhah*).

²²⁹ Kafang (2002:75) also explains that: “Synecdoche is the exchange of one idea for another associated one. In that case, a part may be used for the whole or the whole for a part...”

²³⁰ For more on alliteration see Walter (2008:37).

- *Assonance* is the repetition of a vowel sound, usually occurring in the middle of words within a given sentence. According to Berlin (1985:103), assonance entails sound repetition, “it is properly confined to the repetition of like vowels or diphthongs”. Kafang also concurs that “assonance is a repetition of vowel sounds throughout an utterance, or the close repetition of middle vowel sounds between different consonant sounds” (Kafang 2002:68)²³¹. In Job 31 we can see it occurring in the repetition of vowels²³², such as:
 - “a”, = “made” (*kahrāt*), “heritage” (*nākhalāh*), “Almighty” (*Shadday*) (v 1); “consume” (*‘akal*), “destruction” (*‘ābbadon*), “root out” (*sharash*) (v 12); “eaten” (*‘akal*), morsel” (*path*), “alone” (*bad*) (v 17); “seen” (*ra’ah*), “perish” (*‘abad*) (v 19); “loins” (*khalats*), “blessed” (*barak*), “warmed” (*khamam*) (v 20); “rejoice” (*shamakh*), “great” (*rav*), “hand” (*yad*), “found” (*matsa*) (v 25); “beheld” (*ra’ah*), “shone” (*halal*), “walking” (*halak*), “brightness” (*yaqar*) (v 26); “rejoice” (*shamakh*), “evil” (*rā’*), “found” (*matsa*) (v 29); “covered” (*kasah*), “humankind” (*‘ādam*), “hide” (*taman*) (v 33); “fear” (*‘arats*), “great” (*rav*), “families” (*mishpakhah*), “terrify” (*khathath*), “silence” (*damam*), “door” (*pethakh*) (v 34); “hear” (*shamāh*), “sign” (*tav*), “Almighty” (*Shadday*), “answer” (*‘anah*), “write” (*kathav*) (v 35); “declare” (*nagād*), “steps” (*tsa’ad*), “prince” (*nagid*), “approach” (*qarav*) (v 37); “land” (*‘adamah*), “together” (*yakhad*), “lament” (*bakah*) (v 38); “eaten” (*‘akal*), “owner” (*ba’al*), “breathe out” (*naphakh*) (v 39); “come out” (*yatsa*), “instead” (*tahath*) (v 40).
 - “e”, = “way” (*derek*), “heart” (*lev*) (v 7); “fleece” (*gez*), “sheep” (*keves*) (v 20)²³³; “hope” (*kesel*), “pure gold” (*kethem*) (v 24); “money” (*keseph*), “life” (*nephesh*) (v 39).
 - “i” = “covenant” (*berith*), “eyes” (*‘enayim*), “consider” (*biyn*) (v 1); “judge” (*peilyiyi*) “for” (*kiy*) (v 28) etc.
- *Synonymous parallelism*²³⁴ has the idea of having an idea or thought being similar to the one in the following line from the previous one. In other words, synonymous parallelism

²³¹ For more on assonance see also Walter (2008:78).

²³² The vowels recur in both long and short forms.

²³³ There is assonance even in the English translation of “fleece” and “sheep” in verse 20.

entails the repetition of the expression of “several similar and repeated actions” (Berlin 1985:14) it is the “restatement or saying the same thing twice” (Mills 1990:697). Such an arrangement of thought following each other can be seen in verses 2-4, saying:

For what is our lot from God above,

Our heritage from the Almighty on high?

Is it not ruin for the wicked,

Disaster for those who do wrong?

Does he not see my ways

and count my every step?

This falls in the rhythmic pattern of (AB, AB, AB). In Job’s first assertion of innocence in verse 5 there is also another synonymous parallelism, which says: “If I have walked with falsehood or my foot has hurried after deceit”. Verses 8 and 9 could also be seen as such. So also in verses 14 and 15, saying:

What will I do when God confronts me?

What will I answer when called to account?

Did not he who made me in the womb make them?

Did not the same one form us both within our mothers? (NIV)²³⁵

- *Synthetic parallelism* describes the idea in which the following line of a written thought completes the preceding. In other words, synthetic parallelism carries complimentary ideas from the preceding line through the following one. For example, verse 4 says:

²³⁴ Berlin (1985:156) explains Hebrew parallelism as the activation of linguistic equivalences and/or contrast within or among words, phrases, lines, or entire texts. For more on Hebrew parallelism and its various types, see also Kugel (1981:1) and Mills (1990:697).

²³⁵ The subsequent quotations in this section come from the NIV translation, which is used here as a good translation that represents the Hebrew texts and the intended literary devices.

Does he not see my ways
and count my every step?

Also in verse 8;

then may others eat what I have sown,
and may my crops be uprooted.

Vs. 10;

then may my wife grind another man's grain,
and may other men sleep with her.

Vs. 18²³⁶;

but from my youth I reared them as a father would,
and from my birth I guided the widow

vs. 23;

For I dreaded destruction from God,
And for fear of his splendor I could not do such things.

Vs. 27;

So that my heart was secretly enticed
and my hand offered them a kiss of homage,

vs. 34;

²³⁶Although very hard to clearly understand and translate.

because I so feared the crowd
and so dreaded the contempt of the clans
that I kept silent and would not go outside

vs. 38;

If my land cries out against me
And all its furrows are wet with tears,

vs.40;

Then let briers come up instead of wheat
and stinkweed instead of barley.

- Synthetic parallelism is explained as “a catchall category of sequence or combination” (Mills 1990:697)²³⁷. It could also be seen in seemingly alternating conditions or thoughts when the Hebrew conjunction (*ve*) is variously translated as either “and” or “or”.

-*Hyperbole* is known as an exaggeration or an overstatement. Kagang (2002:65) also explains that: “A hyperbole is a grossly exaggerated speech used to impress on the listener that something happened much or that an object is big or great. In other words, a hyperbole is a figure of speech used for its dramatic effect”²³⁸.

Several scholars and theologians may judge Job’s declaration of innocence in Job 31 as a hyperbolic self-witness. It is not so judged in this present document. Nevertheless, there could be a place for discovering a hyperbolic statement or two in Job’s assertions and denials. For example, in verse 18 he says, “but from my youth I reared them as a father would, and from my birth I guided the widow”, which could be translated to mean that Job claims to guide the widow

²³⁷ See also Berlin (1985:22).

²³⁸ For further note on hyperbole see also Walter et al (2008:709).

even from his mother's womb. So also his confessions of not even being enticed in the heart toward a wrong ethic etc (cf. vss 7, 9, 24, 29, 30, 33, 37 etc).

-*Personification* is the rhetoric of ascribing human characteristics to inanimate objects and/or ideas. Thus "[p]ersonification is a figure of speech in which abstract elements, animate, inanimate objects take on life and are often referred to in human terms" (Kafang 2002:66). This happens severally in Job's speech in our focal text, for example:

Vs. 5;

If I have walked with falsehood
Or my foot has hurried after deceit

vs. 7;

if my steps have turned from the path,
if my heart has been led by my eyes,
or if my hands have been defiled,

vs. 20;

and their hearts did not bless me
for warming them with the fleece from my sheep,

vs.38;

if my land cries out against me
and all its furrows are wet with tears.

- *Imagery* implies the pictures of things or situations in life portrayed in words. Job's declaration of innocence is full of imageries of abstract ideas and/or virtues like piety, hospitality, honesty, compassion, fidelity, etc. It also contains imageries of anxiety, despair, weariness, and confidence. There are imageries of poverty, loneliness, power and powerlessness.

It is noteworthy at this juncture that some words are used in different ways, for example there are places where the same English words are described in different Hebrew words, for example the words for "mouth", "God" "door" are described in different Hebrew words in Job 31.

Additionally, there is a favorable (positive) use of *'im lo* to mean “surely”, “truly” etc. (see vs 36).

3.9. Form Criticism

As explored in the previous chapter on the Book of Job, we discovered that the book has three main divisions comprising two major genres of prose and poetry. The first section of the book is a pleasant one in that Job is seen as a happy person with a lot of wealth (1:1-5). Suddenly tragedy strikes as a result of the discussion of Yahweh and the Satan (1:6-2:10). Job was highly devastated to have lost almost everything that life would have to offer. He sat in an ash heap where his three friends met him to sympathize with him (2:11-13).

In such bitterness, Job broke the silence of his friends by a curse-lament (chap. 3), which also opens the doors of further conversations with his three friends (chaps 4-27). These chapters are known to be replete with words of serious discourse of complaint, explanations, retributive accusations, replies of protests and contention between Job and his friends. Job's knowledge and tenacious hold on his integrity and the failure of his friends to come to terms with that confounded him the most. Thus, he pushed harder, beyond asking for human response or explanations, but now towards God. Job raised very serious questions towards God (chap 10; 13; and 27) all as an attempt to have God respond to him. With all seemingly not working, Job now takes the last step of inquiry, protestation and quest. He made his declaration of innocence in chapter 31 amidst backward (chap 29) and present (30) reflections on his life and situation.

Chapter 31 forms Job's highest point of discourse in the book that bears his name. His declarations were done in order to further accentuate his innocence before people and God, amidst serious measures, namely imprecatory utterances²³⁹ that should be activated upon him 'if'²⁴⁰ what he claims to be and say is false in any way.

²³⁹ Regarding such swearing of curses; “The swearer usually suppresses the actual curse either with evasive language or abbreviated formulas, no doubt fearful of the very verbalizing of a specific curse. But Job is so bold that four times he specifies the curse that should befall him if he be guilty (vv 8, 10, 22, 40). His reckless bravery reflects his unwavering confidence in his own innocence” (Hartley 1988:406-7).

²⁴⁰ “There are more conditional clauses than result clauses, for sometimes two or three ‘if’ clauses are lumped together ending with one consequence clause. Each conditional clause mentions specific sin, often mentioning who

Considering the inner dimensions of Job 31, it is noteworthy here that the text is formed by four kinds of expressions: questions (vv. 2-4, 14-15); statements of facts (vv. 11-12, 18, 23, 28, 30, 32); statements of hope/ expectation (vv. 35-37); and oaths (the “if I have’ and “if” not sayings) (see Balentine 2008:329).

This is a legal rhetoric that extends his quest to bring God to trial (Job 9-10; 13; 16; 19; cf. 35-37). This rhetoric “accents Job’s pursuit of justice, his need for a fair and impartial hearing of evidence, his belief that innocence and guilt are not disposable qualities, either in law or in life, and his presumption that if God is just, then God will bear witness to his truth” (Balentine 2008:330); there are also attitudinal assertions which are beyond actual human verification and judgment for examples issue of inner enticement to evil or wrong doing, and failure to uphold moral values (see vv. 5-8, 16-18, 32, 33-34, 24-28).

Balentine (2008:330) succinctly describes the function of Job’s oaths when he says,: “They accentuate personal integrity, the belief that personal ethics make a vital contribution to communal solidarity, the presumption that an honorable declaration of personal virtues gives God the opportunity to affirm God’s own commitment to relationships that are moral and ethical”.

Different scholars have different views of Job 31 that can be seen from the way they title it and also discuss its focus or purpose, which is to either openly declare Job’s innocence from a moral/ethical perspective or to confront God in order to force God to respond to him, while others see Job as one displaying honorable virtuous worth considering and emulating, for example, Gordis titles Job 31 as “The Code of a Man of Honor” (Gordis 1965:283) in which he sees Job 31 as a “soliloquy”²⁴¹. He further explains the oath by saying: “These are not gross crimes, which are totally beyond the realm of possibility for him, but subtler sins that often prove a temptation to the respectable and respected citizen” (Gordis 1965:283-4). Regarding Job, he

might have been wronged by the sin, and then states what the consequence should be if Job is guilty of that sin” (Habt 2006:591).

²⁴¹ The present writer does not see it as a “soliloquy” because it is part of his long speech addressed primarily to God, and his friends.

says: “He has not feared the tyranny of the mob, nor has he been ashamed to confess his errors in public” (Gordis 1965:284).

Pope (1973:227) sees Job in chapter 31 as one who “rests his case on a series of oaths of clearance. The oaths are in some case complete, with the sanction of self-imprecation fully expressed (Num. v 20-22).” He further explains that: “Belief in the efficacy of the oath made it the ultimate test of probity; cf. Exod xxii 9-10; I Kings viii 31-32”. Additionally, he briefly mentions that there are striking similarities of Job’s oaths in this chapter and those in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, in which a person who was about to be killed by Osiris enumerates a long list of sins that the person claims not to have committed²⁴². Although the similarities are amazing, Pope refers to the document without necessarily showing any reason for interdependence: “Both catalogues of sins reflect high ideals of social ethics. The Egyptian list is a mixture of ethical and ritual concerns, while Job’s, with one exception (Vss 26-28), is entirely ethical”.

George Fohrer (1974:11) also discusses Job 31 in search of the righteous man, in which he sees Job’s oaths as originating from a legal community rather than from a cultic ethics, although there are striking similarities between the two spheres of ethics in terms of the grand presence and person of God as the leading motivation behind them all. Moreover, “...the oath of purity undoubtedly represents a high point of Old Testament ethics” (Fohrer 1974:14). About the oath he observes that “...Job is concerned about attitudes in man which cannot be controlled legally, attitudes which can only lead to sinful acts, or about secret sins among the suspected crimes which had not been exposed. This concern is based on the wisdom teaching and not the Law” (Fohrer 1974:13)²⁴³.

Hartley (1988:407) discusses Job 31, saying that: “In this oath Job enumerates a long list of sins that he has never committed. The sins he denies, however, follow no order attested elsewhere in

²⁴²Habtu also highlights the origin of Job’s oath from the background of the ancient Near East as a necessary start to establish one’s clearance or ‘innocence’ in public (Habtu 2006:592); also see Michael Brennan Dick, “The Legal Metaphor In Job 31” in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Vol.41. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1979:37-50

²⁴³ Although it could be comparable to the Law (*Torah*), yet we cannot claim any necessary interdependence of Job’s clearance and the Law except in the ideals they motivationally portray.

the OT or related documents. They appear to be those sins that were foremost in his mind”. He further adds that: “Instead of denying blatant acts of transgression punishable by law, Job scrupulously tests his attitudes and motives. His primary interest is to demonstrate that he has maintained right relationships on all levels.” About the pious flavor of Job towards morality, “[i]t is clear that Job knows that one is accountable not only for overt acts of sin but also for contemplating immoral behavior and cherishing cruel, vengeful thoughts against others” (Hartley 1988:408). Thus, he adds that Job swore his oaths of innocence out of his desperate need to hear from God, not out of arrogance.

According to Leann Snow Flesher’s (see Kroeger and Evans 2002:284) comments on “Job”, she mentions that Job 29-31 is one long speech that builds rhetorically, incorporating elements typically found in the lament, to Job’s final request for a hearing. The utterances of Job in Job 31 do not only stand in contrast to Elipaz’s former speeches in accusation to Job, but also it stands “in sharp contrast to the accusations Job makes against God (Job 24).” She carefully weighs the tension and plight of Job within divine awareness and sustainability when she says: “The only constant in which we may have hope is God’s grace”.

Claus Westermann discusses²⁴⁴ Job 31 as “Job’s Asseveration of Innocence”, in which he asserts that: “The asseveration of innocence (*Unschuldsbeteuerung*) is a fixed form in the psalms of lamentation. Under certain circumstances it can take the place of the confession of sins” (Westermann 1992:317). From a wider (con)textual comparative analysis, Michael Brennan Dick²⁴⁵ considers the oath of Job in relation to the ancient Near Eastern civil law in which he explores the place and voices of the defendant, as well as that of the plaintiff. On the example of the defendant he cites other biblical examples like Gen 44:3-12; (see v 9) and 1 Sam 24:10-16; 18 (see vv 13,16) about which he points out that: “Although the two texts from 1 Samuel and Genesis are not juridical documents *sensu stricto*, they do reveal that the options open to the defendant in the OT are quite similar to those isolated in the cuneiform records” (Dick 1992:325). Chapters 29-31 signal a new strategy. In these chapters Job recapitulates the internal dialectic of his earlier speeches by completely turning away from his friends to face his real *’iš*

²⁴⁴Claus Westermann, “Job’s Asseveration of Innocence” in Zuck (1992:317-19).

²⁴⁵Michael Brennan Dick, “The Legal Metaphor in Job 31” in Zuck (1992:321-334).

rib “opponent”, God.” (Dick 1992:330). Thus “[t]he oath of clearance was a common juridical procedure in civil cases throughout the Near East from Babylon to Elephantine” (Dick 1992:331).

Fyall (2002:67) explains that: “The emphasis in this chapter is on inner attitudes rather than on outward actions and this again has a choric function”. According to Wharton (1999:132): “His (Job) affirmation of innocence proclaim his unswerving integrity toward people; that these affirmations are addressed to God and no other (31:35-37) expresses his unswerving integrity toward God” (Wharton 1999:132). He also adds that: “The single thread that runs throughout Job’s oath of innocence is a human center of thinking and deciding and acting that is simply not influenced by the kinds of external seductions and pressures that so easily nudge ordinary people morally off course” (Wharton 1999:132).

Gerald Janzen explains that recent analyses of Job’s oaths have emphasized the formal character and the legal setting of such verbal acts. The result is an interpretative procedure that examines the text within strict categories of social behavior and principles of moral or legal logic (Janzen 1985:210). The catalogue of possible offenses portrays sin as the violation of concrete social relations—indeed, as the unfeeling disregard of primal sympathy as educated into social and moral sensibilities rather than of abstract principles (Janzen 1985:213). Thus, he warns that: “Job’s self-imprecations are not to be interpreted, therefore, merely at the level of abstract moral logic, and as re-statements of a rigid reward-punishment dynamic which he has earlier both denied and presupposed. These self-imprecations, rather, serve to affirm Job’s loyalty to the human community and to God, and to lay the basis for his appeal to an answering loyalty to God” (Janzen 1985:213).

Newsom titles Job 29-31 as “The Moral World of Biblical Patriarchy and the Problem of Solidarity”, in which she fears within a seeming definite personal conviction that the problematic context of the patriarchs distorts the image of God when she says: “Indeed, to some extent the biblical image of God is drawn from the model of the patriarch” (Newsom et al 2012:212). In her understanding, “[t]he moral world of ancient patriarchy was an essentially paternalistic and hierarchical one” (Newsom et al 2012:213). This might impinge on the role of Job’s friends and

God in terms of trying to ascertain the truth about Job's claims and plight. Thus, she sees Job in his last speech as a "proud patriarch"²⁴⁶.

Job was "pushed to the wall" by his friends (perhaps wife too) and personal confusion on his plight. His protestations and ultimate declarations are not a mere show off of personal pride or 'goodness' but rather decisive actions necessitated by his horrible experiences described in the entire book. Thus, Job's last wrestle was with God, for God's acquittal/exoneration or condemnation. In chapter 31: "We are being asked to imagine what it might mean to persist in one's integrity in its most extreme form; on the part of one who has been cast down from unparalleled God-blessedness to unparalleled godforsakenness 'for no reason' (2:3)" (Wharton:1999:131).

From his declaration of innocence, we can see that: "The standard by which Job wishes to be judged are all ethical and deal more with honor and integrity than with outright violation of a law code" (Bergant 1982:149). Bergant continues regarding Job's life, saying: "He has been more than righteous, he has been exemplary in his conduct" (Bergant 1982:149). If the oath has any purpose it is seen as "He (Job) is actually putting God to the test by his challenge. If God is truly just and Job is culpable then disciplinary measures will have to be taken" (Bergant 1982:150). Perdue also sees the declarations of Job's innocence as having the intention "to force God into the open, i.e. to appear and defend divine integrity in the governance of creation. For if Job is indeed innocent, God by implication must either be guilty or forced to respond to the indictment of misgoverning creation. And deafening silence as a response would only underscore divine culpability" (Perdue 1991:183)²⁴⁷. Thus, in view of Amit's (2000:241-49) narrative analysis of hidden polemics in the biblical literature, we could at this point refer to Job 31 as an open polemic²⁴⁸, seeing that it is an open confrontational avowal in quest for a decisive response.

²⁴⁶ This is no doubt evident in the texts but it should not be seen as a manifestation of empty hubris for Job's actions testify compellingly to the reason why he appears to be "proud" of himself, which is seen as "personal confidence" in this thesis, exhibited within pious consciousness and cautiousness.

²⁴⁷ See also Abigail Pelham, "Job's Crisis of Language: Power and Powerlessness in Job's Oaths" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*; Vol.36.3(2012):333-354.

²⁴⁸ "Polemic" in rhetorical discourse can be understood as a rhetorical presentation or persuasion of an argument in dispute. "The argument articulated within a text defined as polemical, and pertaining to some war of ideas, is

Yet, it may not be too hard to see from Job 31 that: “This code of conduct and honor describes Job as a man of integrity with impeccable social morality” (Bergant 1982:150). Good²⁴⁹ agrees with Bergant so much in the presupposed purpose and ethical sense of Job’s oath when he says: “I have argued that the curse is a way of forcing [God] to respond, requiring his attention, because the curse cannot be unattended” (Good 1992:340). He also adds that: “The series of curses demonstrates that he has been the very model of the ethical man, the assiduous follower of all the rules and the attitudes that the ancient Hebrew super-ego inculcated” (Good 1992:343).

From the foregoing discourses on Job 31, we would agree that the chapter contains the yearnings of a desperate, honorable, wearied human being who seriously wanted to discuss his ethical life which in his view and ultimately in God’s view was blameless especially in regards to the calamity he had to suffer. All the above discourses are valuable towards various degrees of making sense of the oath Job’s innocence which was given in a poetic fashion as a “powerful rhetorical poem” (Clines 2006:978).

3.10. Job the Pious? An Intertextual Reading of Job 31

3.10.1 In the Book of Job

Right from the beginning of the book that bears his name, Job has been described as a pious person who was “blameless”, “upright”, one who “fears” God, and “turns away from evil” (1:1). The fact that Job turns away from evil is demonstrated in his assertions of innocence in what he professes to have done, as well as things he refrained from doing. Job’s piety is seen in how he puts a constraint on his eyes, heart, foot, and mouth (31: 5, 7, 9, 30) hence keeping his entire body away from being led astray, and enticed by evil thoughts, persons and desires.

Job’s integrity (*tummah*) is attested to even by his own wife (2:9) and he appears to be one who tenaciously holds unto his integrity not for any hope of reward in the future nor even towards any hope of survival (13:15). Job’s resolve to continue to keep his integrity resounds throughout his words of lament and response to his friends (27:6) and even towards God, in that he calls on God

intended to strengthen or to reject an explicit or covert position taken by that text, in other biblical texts dealing with the same subject, or in frameworks external to the Bible” (Amit 2000:7).

²⁴⁹ Edwin M. Good, “Job 31” in Zuck (1992:335-344).

to closely examine him so that God may “know” (*yadah*) his integrity (31:6). This is a quest out of self-confidence and personal assurance of his ways and steps before the all-seeing eyes of God, thus having nothing to fear even before the judgment throne (presence) of God (31:37).

Job has been severely accused by his three friends of sinning against God, and bringing calamity upon himself and his family (e.g. chaps. 8, 11, 20, 22), yet his personal knowledge of himself and his ways with God and before God makes him to clearly repudiate such charges in his oath (cf. 1:9-11; 2:4-5; 42:7-8 as points of response to 22:4-11). He declared to have shown compassion and hospitality to the needy (31:16-23; 31,32), which has been evidenced even in his own household (31:20f). Job declares to be compassionate and supportive, supposedly from and even before infancy (31:18).²⁵⁰

Job’s assertion of not having the attitude of hiding his sins like other people do (31:33) accentuates his honesty, transparency and vulnerability²⁵¹. This could sound a very serious reply to the suspicions and/or presuppositions of his friends against him, and concerning some hidden and un-confessed sin in his life that warranted his suffering.

The internal piety of a person should be done in a very good sense to safeguard the external conduct. The fact that God gives a portion of punishment to the wicked (31:2) is already envisaged in one of Zophar’s addresses to Job (Job 20:29). Furthermore, the content of the portion reserved for the wicked (31:3) also resonates with Job’s convictions on why the wicked is spared and what lies ahead of them (Job 21:30). The deceptive tendency of the eye of the adulterer (31:9) echoes Job’s conviction and assertion of its nature earlier (Job 24:15).

Job 31:16 stands as a direct reply to Eliphaz’s charges (Job 22:9), where Job’s compassionate support of the poor forms the primarily point of concern. Job’s confidence in taking care of his household and those who come by (31:31) is another reply to charges posed by people like Eliphaz (Job 22:7). Job’s call on God (his “adversary”) to respond (31:35) echoes his longing

²⁵⁰If this verse allows such sense (though in a hyperbolic sense).

²⁵¹ Alongside his confession of innocence is included statements on why he chose to be virtuous (pious) rather than to live a sinful life (Chapman 1968:98-100).

and desperation (Job 19:7; 30:28) thus Job as in Elihu's perspective has nothing else to do but to wait unto the Lord (35:14).

Job's thought of God as his enemy echoes his lament over the misfortune he passed through in his household, as well as his physical life (cf. 10:1-17; 16:1-14; 19:1-6). Yet, the terrific effect of the splendor of God (31:23) also echoes the same notion envisaged by Job (Job 13:11). Job is aware of the superiority of God and he accepts the fact that he is answerable to God (31:37 cf. Job 1:3; 29:25). Job's severe imprecation to have his arm broken from the joint if he is guilty (31:22) echoes Yahweh's assertion that indeed the arm of the wicked is broken (Job 38:15), most probably as a divine punishment.

3.10.1. In the Writings and the Prophets

The all-seeing nature and power of God as described in 31:4 also has been a characteristic understanding in other texts (2Ch 16:9; Prov. 5:21). Job's assertion of having sure and faithful feet in following the steps of God in obedience has been part of his progressive convictions and self-effort (cf. 31:7; Job 23:11). Job was very careful not to rejoice in wealth, no matter how it is gotten as also cautioned by the Psalmist (31:25; cf. Ps. 62:10).

Just like the punishment that Job envisaged for the sin of adultery with another man's wife (31:10), God also promises to punish the sins of his people by giving their wives to other men, (Jer.8:10) thus to humiliate the honor of the husbands primarily, as well as the glory of the wives. Job restrained himself from being enticed to pay respect or worship to luminaries (31:26) like some of the people of God are reported to doing (Ezek 8:16), which led to the going away of the glory of God from his people.

Job's life of integrity qualifies him to be able to approach the presence of God and dwell comfortably on God's holy hill according to the requirements in Psalm 15. Thus, Job meets the requirement of honesty, purity, transparency, justice and righteousness (cf Ps 15:2, 3; Job 1:1 31:1-12; 29-30). Job also guards against falsehood (31:5f); thus, in the Old Testament texts God punishes anyone who is false in their dealings with neighbourly ties as well as personal/corporate oaths of fidelity or loyalty (cf. Exod.22:7-11; 21:2-23:8; 22:11; Ruth 1:17; 1 Sam 3:17; 14:44; I Kings 19:2; 20:10).

Job 31 could be comparable to OT theological-ethical²⁵² principles at many levels, especially in light of general wisdom teaching concerning life, sin, human beings and God. When we consider how sin develops in Job 31 and the OT view of sin from “seeing” in Wisdom teaching (and other related passages) we would see a lot of similarities in the progression as in the ideas of lust for women in Job 31:1-4, 9ff, cf. Prov 6:17; 10:10; 30:17; Sir 14:9; 27:22) pride cf Prov. 30:13; God seeing man’s ways (cf Pss 33:13-15; 69:6; 94:11; 119:168; 139; Prov 5:21; Sir 17:15; 23:19); 31:5-8; “foot” (cf Ps 119:59, 101; Prov 1:15f; 4:26; 6:18) offence against the truth Prov 12:22; 17:7; 19:22; 29:12) God weighing man (Prov 16:2; 21:2; 24:12); 31:9-12; (cf Prov. 5; 6:24-35; 7:5-23; Sir 23:18-27); 31:24ff trust in wealth; Ps 78:7; Prov 3:26; 31:29-30 going against another (cf. Lev 19:18,34; Prov 25:21f 20:22; 24:19)²⁵³.

3.10.2. In the Torah

Job’s envisaged punishment for disobedience to God could affect his source of livelihood (31:8) as also promised by God in the priestly document (Lev. 26:16). The sin of adultery is seen as a terrible sin to be punished severely (31:11), just as Judah has also envisaged and decided to punish his daughter-in-law Tamar (Gen. 38:24). Giving justice to servants is taken seriously by Job (31:13), which is also impressed upon the hearts of the people of God (Deut 24:14-15) in order to know how best to care for the poor and avoid the wrath of God for the sin of not doing so.

Job’s hospitality to strangers (31:32) resonates with an ancient Near Eastern culture of responsible receptive gesture to strangers (Gen. 19:2-3; Jud. 19:1 -21). Job was also careful with his heart and mouth not to rejoice over the misfortune of his enemy (31:29 cf. Prov. 17:5). He did not fear the crowd to hide in sin or wrong doing from confession and/or public scrutiny neither was he enticed to follow the crowd in doing wrong by perverting justice (31:34 cf. Ex 23:2).

The acts of concealing one’s sins (31:33) could be likened to the response of the first human beings in the Garden of Eden (Gen.3:9ff). It is an act that does not bring prosperity until it is

²⁵² Although Job 31 is more in terms of moral ethics than cultic ethics.

²⁵³ See Crenshaw and Willis (1974:9ff).

confessed (Prov. 28:13). The worship of other gods, or turning the created into objects of worship would be a sin of unfaithfulness unto God (31:28) as warned in the priestly documents of the Law (Deut 17:2-7). The land is portrayed as crying out for justice in time of injustice, which could emphasize the cruelty of humanity in perverting justice (31:39 cf. 1 Kg 21:19; Jas 5:4; 31:40); thus, the coming of thistles from the land instead of good crops (31:40) is a sign of punishment from the land to the unjust (Gen. 3:18).

Compared to the theological-ethical principles of ancient Israel as recorded in the Bible, Job could have a sure standing among the blameless, upright, and pious people of his day, as well as through the days and history of God's people according to Old Testament biblical ethics.²⁵⁴ Below are a few examples to highlight the possibility of Job's piety from Old Testament ethical principles set by God (Yahweh) to the Israelites.

Yahweh starts the Decalogue, which would provide the ethical principles for the Israelites with the imperative on monotheistic fidelity (Exod. 20:1-3). Job declares not to have worshiped any other deities but the Almighty God, which is literary designated in the singular (*Shadday*) where the description '*El*' could still be problematic to our general understanding and acceptance of the possibility of Job's monotheism.²⁵⁵

Job guarded his eyes and heart against being enticed by a sensual woman, or having his desires draw him towards a young woman of marriageable age (31:1) or another man's wife (31:9). Job sees adultery as an ethical evil that leads to destruction (31:12); thus, he decisively refrained from it in any way possible. This also echoes the command of God in the Decalogue which warns against covetous promptings that may lead to adultery (Exod.20:17), as well as the act of committing adultery itself (Exod. 20:4 also cf Lev 20:9, 11, 12,14).

The ethic of being fair to one's servant(s) is an imperative in the book of the covenant (Exod.21:1-13). Job also declares his innocence, justice and righteousness in that area of life (31:13-15), arguing from a creation theological perspective. He was also just and compassionate

²⁵⁴ This would not be an exhaustive discussion of Old Testament ethics, but just a highlight of some important ethical principles that could be comparable to Job's life of piety.

²⁵⁵ Even here it still stands as a contestable presupposition and it will continue to be as well as stand open to correction with substantial arguments.

to the needy, namely the poor, widow, orphan and stranger which has explicit commands²⁵⁶ also in the Old Testament Law (*Torah*) which formulates and guides the ethics of God's people.

3.11. Summary

Job 31 is a chapter replete with words of clearance before people and God, protesting against the estimation of his (Job's) friends and the seeming silence and insensitivity of God. Job speaks earnestly in serious desperation in order to rouse God to a response. Until the end of his declaration of innocence, God is surprisingly and ironically silent, although that is not the end of the whole story. God indeed responds in chapters 38-42 and Job is clearly exonerated²⁵⁷. For the meantime, however, we have tried in this chapter to critically study Job 31 in order to see Job's motivation for good actions in different dimensions of life and his piety stands conspicuously throughout the chapter.

The above close reading of Job's clearance has, to a very large extent, set the stage for our continuous discussion of Job's piety and ethics in the next chapter. But before then it is worth mentioning here that the different scholarly materials used in the above discussion have various points of interest, as well as emphasis with regard to Job's oath of innocence, which has been examined by several of them with different titles. With regard to the points of concern of the chapter and the scholars' view, we can see that some of them focus more on the literary critical analysis of the text, like Dhorme, Gordis, Pope, Westermann, and Clines, while Habel, Hartley, Fyall, Janzen, and Good discuss the theological-ethical questions of the text and from the text. Wharton, Fyall and Habtu are more strictly focused on theological issues in the text. Fohrer, Perdue, Clines, Newsom, Bergant and Balentine on the other hand, combine both literary analysis and possible theological-ethical questions tailored within rhetorical critical mode of discussion. With the latter, the present writer closely agree because such rhetorical methodology invites the reader into the multifaceted areas of the text and allows one to see how the dynamic interplay of the literary pattern of the text functions towards a decisive reception of the text in view of its context, purpose, and function.

²⁵⁶ See Lev 19:9-10; 25:25; Deut 10:18; 24:17; 27:19 etc.

²⁵⁷ We will not go into that discussion for it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

From the foregoing reflections on the intratextual and intertextual potential of Job 31, we could see that Job stands among the pious people that Yahweh required for Yahweh's kingdom and priesthood (Exod.19:6), as well as in Yahweh's worship (Ps.15 etc)²⁵⁸. The self attestations of Job in chapter 31, as we have closely considered, sets him on a high theological-ethical paradigm that may cause us to marvel and even raise suspicious arguments. Nevertheless, the fact that he avers his innocence before God and his friends²⁵⁹ gives his words and testimonies the credence they deserve from a willing reader. Unless we want to stand with Job's friends who ended up saying what was not right about God (42:7) and Job, we would take his self-testimony and declaration of innocence at face value.

In the next chapter we shall read Job's piety in light its socio-cultural context and theological-ethical potentials from his declarations of innocence alongside the contemporary situations and quests of life in African contexts in order to see the significance of Job's oath towards a decisive challenge to the African contexts, in particular for a better life with God and other human beings, thus seeing the interface between piety and ethics.

Chapter 4 A Theological-Ethical Study of Job 31

4.1. Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis issues were raised concerning the inadequate interest or attention on the Book of Job, especially by African readers, writers and believers in general, except for occasional purposes on preaching on suffering of humanity, in which disturbing issues of theodicy are highlighted and often not critically and biblically addressed. According to the set problem and other concerns of this research set in chapter one (1.1 &1.6) we would concentrate

²⁵⁸ Fohrer (1974:9)²⁵⁸ compares the oath of Job 31 with different levels of the Law of Ex. 20:1-17; 34:10-26; Lev 18:6-18; plural decalog 19:3-12; singular decalog Lev 19:13-18; Ezk 18:5-9; Neh 10:31-40; Ex. 23:10-19; Dt 27:15-26; ethical non-cultic example is Ps. 15 others are Isa 33:14-16; Ps. 24:3-6 and 34:13-15).

²⁵⁹ Probably also other people who may listen to his witness.

in this chapter to see the potential of Job 31 in terms of its relevance/significance in providing important challenges towards a decisive rethink and hopeful redress of issues in Africa, primarily from the biblical perspective. This, in other words, would serve as an added suggestion or emphasis for an in-depth study of the Book of Job and its theological functions to its readers in order to emphasize religious, moral and ethical standards in promotion of better ways to foster mutual respect and freedom in terms of equity, equality and human dignity for both religious and social change.

In order to achieve this goal, this chapter will present a synthetic dialogue on the issues raised in chapter one (1. 2. &1.6) in light of the lacunae observed in Job research from many scholars' perspectives from the mid-twentieth century, as highlighted in chapter two above, together with the observed meaning (interpretation) of Job 31 in chapter three, thus comprising chapter four by considering the significance of Job 31 to contemporary African contexts.

4.2. Socio-cultural setting of Job 31

The fact that Job was an ancient figure in an ancient patriarchal context is a plausible idea by many scholars. For example, Mills (1990:455) agrees that Job was probably a patriarchal figure who lived in an ancient Edomite context. Newsom and other scholars (2012:212) see him as a village patriarch who might have some very significant representation. Balentine (2008:329) and Job (1977:42) also concur that the person Job was a man from an ancient context with very high moral and ethical code and expectations.

Seow (2013:46-47) summarizes the ancient patriarchal setting of Job when he says: "Wealth is reckoned in terms of the abundance of animals and slaves (1:3); commerce is facilitated by barter (2:4); when currency is mentioned, the term use is *qěsîttâ*, a word used elsewhere only in Israel's early history (Gen 33:19; Josh 24:32). Sacrifices are offered not by a priest at a central sanctuary but by a patriarch at home (1:5); home is often referred to as *'ōhel*, "a tent" (5:24; 8:22; 11:14; 12:6; 15:34; 18:6, 14; 19:12; 20:26; 21:28; 22:23; 29:4; 31:31) and sometimes as *miškān* (18:21; 21:28; 39:6); and Job lives a phenomenally long life, just like Israel's ancestors of old (42:17)".

The ancient atmosphere of the Book of Job is retained and observable in the use of language, especially in the central part of the book that contains the discourses/dialogues between Job and

his friends, and later by Elihu and Yahweh (Seow 2013:47). Thus, from a linguistic perspective, Good (2000:370) argues that the book was written in Israel although it has Edomite setting. It might also have linguistic relations to Egyptian context, yet its reception in Israelite canon gives us the clue that it was received and revised by the Israelites. A Judean author (Newsom 2003:16) who might have collected and compiled it as a wisdom text from the exilic experience which gave them hope of restoration by Yahweh²⁶⁰. Thus, it is most probable that the oral and in a sense some written part of Job must have been collected from the exilic context in Babylon, seeing that some Judahites who were taken captive to Babylon were trained even in the literary traditions of the Babylonians (Dan.1: 3,4ff), which may have given them sure access to such an ancient legend and/or parable. In terms of its original reception, it may be safe to posit that the Book of Job emerged from the exilic milieu and might have reached its final form in the post-exilic period. It is noteworthy here that: “The germ of the book consists of a Job legend, which can no longer be reconstructed, that told of a man named Job who proved himself in suffering” (Witte 2012:561). Nevertheless, in terms of language and the history of tradition, the Book of Job stems from learned wisdom circles in the Persian/Hellenistic period (Witte 2012:564).

Its reception into the Israelite canon must have been another taste of wisdom literature from an international background, which may be utilized towards informing and enhancing the theological-ethical life of the people of God, as well as everyone who gives ear to them.²⁶¹ Job 31 emerged from this ancient background that heightens Job’s quest for justice in terms of his suffering, although as one who is innocent because of his tenacious grip on his own integrity. Job 31 is given in light of a contextual legal polemic in order to call God to action in terms of a definite response²⁶².

²⁶⁰ For more on the composition and redaction of the Book of Job, see Markus Witte, “The Book of Job” in Jan Christian Gert, Angelika Berlejung, Konrad Schmid and Markus Witte (eds), *T & T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament; An Introduction to the Literature, Religion and History of the Old Testament*. New York: T & T Clark, 2012:561f

²⁶¹ See also my argument on the exilic and post-exilic possibility in providing context to the Book of Job (2.3.1 above).

²⁶² For more on the legal rhetoric of Job 31 in light of ancient Near Eastern context, see Michael Brennan Dick, “The Legal Metaphor in Job 31” in Zuck 1992:321-334.

4.3. The Piety of Job in Job 31

This section intends to examine the theme of Job's piety within our focal text namely, Job 31. The flow of thought in the chapter is not so easy to follow because of the variant arrangement of the oath in terms of those in a clause of consequence/result and those without it. Nevertheless, that the oath presupposes Job's self-understanding and assertion of piety is not in doubt in this work. Its framing alongside other scholars' views would be helpful to see a possibility of its strength and ethical seriousness. Fohrer (1974:4) reads Job 31 in light of its immediate context, which is chapters 29-31, in which he points out that "the desire for restoration (29:2) and the challenge to God (31:35-37) are the framework for Job 29-31."

When he considers the structure of the verses and the flow nature of the oath, he further observes three forms (stages) of Job's oath, which are:

- Unconditional covenant to refrain from sin (vv.1-4).
- Conditional self-imprecations that are completed with a form of an imprecatory final clause (vv.5-23, 38-40a), just like the principle of *jus talionis* in the Old Testament (especially in the Torah e.g. Exodus and Deuteronomy).
- Conditional self-imprecation in shortened form without a final clause, i.e., as a real oath (vv. 24-35) ²⁶³(Fohrer 1974:11).

Still on the nature of the oath, it is also noticed that four topics follow the conventional oath pattern, which has the following result after the utterance (vv 7-8, 9-12, 16-23, and 38-40), while the others contain the protasis, but either leave out the apodosis (vv. 24-25, 33-34, common in Old Testament oaths since it was implied), or shape into a declaration (vv 26-28, 29-30, 31-32), an imperative (vv. 5-6), or a rhetorical question (vv. 1-2, 13-15) (see Perdue 1991:183-84).

Good (1992:335-44) considers the kind of expressions used in the chapter, in which he points out that: "Four kinds of expressions are mixed up together in this chapter; questions, rhetorical and ordinary (e.g.; vv. 11-12, 28, 30, 32), an exclamation (v. 35); and curses (e.g. vv. 5, 7-8, 9-10,

²⁶³ Though no final clause is mentioned as a possible result of the oath, it is implied in light of the general oath and its purpose.

13). There are two kinds of curses (1) eleven (or twelve, depending on how we read vv. 19-20) are the kind of ‘if (not)’ curses without result clauses that we have seen again and again throughout the book, (2) unusually, four are ‘if (not)’ with result clauses” e.g. vv 7-8, vv. 9-10; vv. 21-22; vv. 38-40)” (Good 1992:337).

He further notes that:

It is structurally interesting that four curses are spread out through the chapter: the first two are the second and third curses in the chapter, the third is the seventh (or eighth, if vv. 19-20 are two curses), and the last fifteenth and last curse. It is also structurally interesting that the curses with result clauses are always preceded by curses without result clauses, though a statement (v.6) intervenes between the first pair (vv.7-10) and the preceding curse (v.5) (Good 1992:337-8).

He acknowledges that the structure of the chapter is not symmetrical: “Nevertheless, the design is a way by which we may more efficiently see what Job is saying. It allows us to see, for example, how the poem moves from the steps in verse 4 to the walking and hurrying in verse 5, and how the steps in verse 4 are matched by numbering steps in verse 37. The threat of ‘disaster’ in verse 3 is matched by the fear of ‘disaster’ in verse 23. Such linkages between sections (see e.g. ‘eyes’, vv. 1, 7; ‘Orphan’, vv. 17, 21; ‘fist’ [*yad*, ‘hand’], v. 21 and ‘hand’, vv. 25, 27, ‘rejoice’, vv. 5, 29) show that the speech is not mere words flung into the air or onto the page, but structured, carefully calculated thought” (Good 1992:339). When we closely consider Job 31 we will notice that Job mentions the sins he has not even committed in his heart (in vv 1-12) against his neighbor (vv 13-23), or against God (vv 24-34), further inward sins (vv 1-4; 24-25; 26-27; 29-30; 31-32; 33-34).

In trying to point out the possible flow of Job 31, the present writer presupposes two points of consideration in doing this, namely Job’s quest in the oath, and Job’s enumeration of sins that he has not committed to accentuate his innocence. In that verses 35-37 could serve as the high point of Job’s quest in the oath, they show his desperation and compelling intent to hear God’s response concerning his plight. On the other hand, verse 26-28 concerning worshipping other things instead of God is seen as the high point of Job’s confessions of innocence. Thus, the flow

of thoughts in the chapter could be seen in a zig-zag format in that Job starts with inner sins, (vv 1-12) to his outward life in his dealings with others (vv 13-23), then back to inner life in terms of what to trust and worship (vv 24-28), then goes back to his dealings with other people, even his enemy (vv 29-30), then back to the issue of his household concerning how he feeds them (v 31), then outward dealings again in receiving strangers (v 32), then he goes back into his inner life again concerning concealing his sins and being ashamed of the crowd (vv 33, 34), and finally he considers also his inner and outward dealings with his land and workers/owners (vv 39-40).

In sum, we can say that Job was very meticulous concerning his life and in his confessions; he tries to say all that is necessary in terms of areas that he might have sinned against God and his neighbour. His meticulousness is seen closely when he considers the thoughts of his heart (vv. 5-7, 9, 24-25, 29-30 etc). There are thematic overlaps in Job's oath, especially when we consider the themes of his inner enticement (in the heart), care /justice for the weak and righteousness before God. Considering the meticulousness of Job 31, we will agree with Fohrer's (1974:19) assertion that "Job is the righteous, pure, and perfect man who can maintain that he is without sin"²⁶⁴. Thus, we shall in the following discourse also consider its theological-ethical potential in light of our contemporary situations and quests in Africa.

4.4. A Theological-Ethical Study of Job 31

In the following subsections we shall closely consider how the Book of Job holds potential and poses challenges to the African contexts in light of various concerns, especially within contemporary Africa.

4.4.1. Wisdom Theology

Wisdom theology, as discussed in chapter one, entails the understanding of life and living it in terms of God-given practical experiences (Von Rad 1970:418; Douglas & Tenney 2009:1529). Thus, wisdom theology is faith in Yahweh, seeking understanding of the meaning and purpose of life as revealed by God through everyday life experiences (Birch et al 1999:414). It could come

²⁶⁴ This assertion means Job stands innocent of the charges labeled, or assumed against him.

from a series of instructions from the sages, or old people and it occurs also in parent-child relationship of teaching guidance and instructions (Prov. 3; 31). Going back to the issue on learning and living by the human experience allowed by God results in people having a grasp of a conventional way of life that may constitute a certain tradition, which would greatly characterize their lives and interactions with people around them. In the ancient Near East, the understanding of “retributive theology” or life based on deeds and consequence has been understood and accepted as a conventional order of the day. In that, if one does ‘X’ then consequently ‘Y’ would happen to the person according to the act; if it is good, it would bring a good consequence, and vice versa. This is seen in the wisdom theology of Job’s friends throughout the dialogues (Job 4-27).

Job’s friends were so convinced within themselves that Job was not suffering for nothing but that he had done something wrong and that that is why calamity came upon him (Job 4, 5 8, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22). This kind of understanding is also found in African traditions and cultures, in that calamities, diseases and other misfortunes are often interpreted in relation to a certain act that someone has done (see Turaki 2012:17,18, 21-24), thus offending the spiritual world and incurring their wrath etc.

Greg W. Parsons observes that the Book of Job confronts the understanding of conventional wisdom context. For example, the harmony of the social and moral (spirit) realms are presupposed, in that “[w]hat one observes in the natural order has implications for the social or moral order”. But Job’s experience and the speeches of Yahweh that describe chaos as being part of the cosmos which Yahweh created and controls disturbs and confronts such conventional knowledge or perception (Parsons 1994:403).

Additionally, the Book of Job confronts and refutes the “retributive dogma” of Job’s day, which presupposes “that there is an automatic connection between one’s material and physical prosperity and one’s spirituality” (Parsons 1994:404).

With regard to the retributive principle in biblical theology, Parsons clearly explains, saying: “Though divine retribution is a valid biblical principle (Deut. 28), the error is making it an unconditional dogma by which man (*sic*) can predetermine God’s actions and judge a person’s

condition before Him. God is not bound to act according to this manmade retribution dogma, though He will normally bless the righteous and punish the wicked” (Parsons 1994:404).

Furthermore, in a confrontational point of view that is found in the Book of Job toward conventional wisdom theology and ethics, Branick discusses the existential nature of life as an experience between the facts of order, (harmony) and chaos, which are beyond human power to fully comprehend, control and determine. He points out how the Book of Job contributes toward the reality of human longing for security and joy in life although he (Job) could not determine it as he wills, he had to grow strong enough to live against the odds and leave everything for God to handle (Branick 2006:82-3). This could be seen in Job’s final confrontation and challenge to God that God may come and answer his case (Job 31:35-37).

Different people, like Job, when they are puzzled by life ask many searching questions. This is also part of African life and the quest to always try to know the reason behind a certain occurrence, usually in terms of “who” is responsible for “what”? Turaki observes that: “Many Africans seek quick and easy answers in traditional religion” (Turaki 2012:2) concerning different important questions of life. Some questions could be regarding life and death, sin and righteousness, death and mystery, good and evil, order and mystery etc. But one of the key points to note in the book of Job is that his “Why-me-God?” questions were not answered. Not even when God speaks out of the whirlwind (Job38-42:6). His friends tried to explain but unfortunately with all their sincerity they ended up with the wrong estimation and judgment of the whole situation concerning the life and experience of Job (42:7, 8). Thus, wisdom theology or conventional understanding in terms of deeds and consequences is highly challenged in the Book of Job when a righteous, blameless and upright servant (Job) struggles in life from the situation for able-bodiedness to one of brokenness and disability without reason (2:3). From a resultant point of view, after studying the book of Job as a redress, or a confrontation of the dogma of traditional wisdom theology we are left with Branick’s point on human maturity, which posits that: “The mature person lives life in deep trust, not in artificial answers” (Branick 2006:83). This is a call for an absolute and continuous ‘trust’ in God for everything in life concerning our past, present, and especially future, about which we seem to always be anxious.

“Trust in God and in God's gift of the future remains constant. The prayer for future success remains a legitimate prayer” (Branick 2006:83-4).

The Book of Job is very relevant to our African situation of life in terms of human suffering, diseases, questions, human assessment etc. This book provides us with another but very strong and normative imperative concerning the ultimate; that is God. God alone knows and does all things and God's plans cannot be thwarted (42:2). Wisdom theology is relevant to our ethical and moral formulations and conduct. We can discuss that in the following section in light of Job 31 as a motivating factor or passage of concern.

4.4.2. Ethics/Morality

The polarity of “Justice and Righteousness” runs through almost all the parts of the Book of Job.²⁶⁵ Thus, among other places of the book it also occurs in words and character in Job 31, which we shall take as our point of departure in terms of trying to consider the place of justice and righteous in human life and interactions from a Job-God point of view in relation to our lives in contemporary Africa.

In Job 31, the man Job is a man of *tsâdēkâh* in what he says about himself, towards others and what he expects through the book from both God and human beings. These ideas as ideals of human life hinge upon his piety, which prompts the demonstration of his righteous and just acts. Job's sense of justice and righteousness is seen in what he does and what he refused to do. He is determined to put restrictions on his mind about what he would feed his mind with (31:1) and he refused to let his eyes lead his heart astray (31:5-7), his justice and righteousness are displayed in inviting, compelling and disturbing ways in 31:13-23. These verses contain Job's assertion of doing justice in righteousness towards his “servants/slaves”, i.e. his *'ēbēd* and *'âmâh* (manservant/maidservant). Those servants could be relegated to the position of property alone, to their master, yet Job saw more than that in how he testified of his attitude towards his own servants. In his comments on verses 13-15, Francis Andersen (1977:242) says: “This section embodies a humane ethic unmatched in the ancient world. Job lived in a society of slaves and

²⁶⁵ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to thoroughly discuss the theme of “Justice and Righteousness” in the Book of Job, but we shall comment on its existence and call in light of our study in Job 31.

owners (1:3), as everywhere in the ancient East. But in his valuation a slave is not a chattel, but a human person with rights at law, rights guaranteed by God Himself, their specially active Defender”.

Samuel Balentine (2006:476) also adds that: “When he (Job)²⁶⁶ claims that he has not used power abusively against his male and female slaves (vv. 13-15), or against strangers (v.32) or even to exploit the land (vv 38-40), he testifies to his personal investment in what he firmly believes are the moral values that make life peaceable and fulfilling”.

In this impressive moral ethics, Job’s motivation has come from his piety, his devotion to God. His knowledge of God and the awareness or expectation of the coming judgment of God informs Job to do what is just and right, even to those whom he may be tempted to care less about. This stands as a challenge to our African leaders in religion and politics. They always have people serving them, and/or serving under them who need to be treated fairly and justly in view of God’s character and judging sovereignty.

Another ethical/moral virtue that Job has shown is that of compassion to those in need. Job cared for the poor, widows, orphans and strangers (31:16-18; 19-20; 21-23). Job’s compassion to these human beings is seen in how he provided them with food to eat, clothing to wear and justice in the court.

In verses 16-17 Gerald Janzen (1985:214) observes that, “... Job takes his awareness of God’s parental nurture of him as the feeling-ground for his own treatment of the widow and the fatherless (vv 16-17)”. Africa is also replete with people, among whom are many who are the poor, widows, orphans and also aliens/strangers or foreigners; people who have come to Africa in search of a place to stay out of war, persecution, or other very important reasons that we must consider carefully and reasonably like Job did. Those people in need are people indeed who need our support, care and share in what we have so that they too can enjoy a better life.

Close to the aforementioned ethical virtue of compassion is that of acceptance and inclusion. Job welcomed and included strangers in his home as an act of hospitality and righteousness (piety),

²⁶⁶ The word in parenthesis is my own.

as was seen in verse 32: “the stranger has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler”. This is an act of hospitality in that Job makes the stranger/foreigner his guest. He opened the door of his house to them and made them feel at home with him, among others.

Furthermore, Branick (2006:69) sees the potential of wisdom ethics for moral alternatives in business (public-social life). He considers the “existential situation” of humanity as one of the common factors that should make us to read the biblical texts as normative, thus touching and addressing our lives in many ways. This could be seen in his avoidance of “deceit” to be part of his heart and life, which by implication means that he conducted his life in honesty, and faithfulness of heart, which are very relevant for our present life in Africa in terms of living as citizens, business people or leaders in every sphere of life.

Another ethical/moral standard that characterizes Job’s life and is relevant to our contemporary life is the implicit issue of self-control. Job’s controlled his inner desires against adultery (vv 1-12) injustice and infidelity (vv 26-28). This he did through his awareness and determination to maintain his integrity according to his conscience.²⁶⁷ Job kept himself from the sway of anything that might entice him to break or distort his morality and purity in his personal life, as well as his religious and communal life. This virtue of a pious life before God and human beings is essential if Africa would properly succeed in curtailing the ravaging acts and effects of sexual violence in many parts of it. Sexual violence is a brutal act of dehumanization and destruction of conventional order and sanity of a given society, which could be addressed and well checked if the portrait of Job as a self-controlled person stands out as an example of the ‘good-life’ that we need to closely consider and emulate.

The entire idea and enactment of the oath of innocence/clearance in Job 31 provides a lot of meaning and significance to the African reader, which cannot be overestimated. Such an oath rings a bell to every person who is born and bred within African walls that still retain some traditional elements and virtue of a “good life”. Good (1992:340) admits that: “Our culture does not know what to do with curses, because we do not believe in their magical efficacy”. But on

²⁶⁷ Janzen (1985:210) discusses Job’s oath of clearance also in view of psychoanalysis, namely the prick of conscience and self-imprecation.

the other hand, when he considers the Hebrew point of view in terms of oath taking, he (Good) notes that: “A curse was not a casual expression, to be trifled with or tossed aside. It was the most powerful way people had of setting in motion a train of forces of action and reaction, and no one would take a curse lightly”. This serious attitude towards oath taking like that of Job, is also taken very seriously in African contexts because of the ethical/moral implications it has, as well as the moral/ethical need that warrants it.

John S. Mbiti (1975) discusses the African worldview of life in relation to God (or the Supreme Being) and affliction, morality, and ethics, in which he points out that Africans, like the people in Job’s socio-historical context, understand that afflictions are related to God. He mentions that many afflictions from time to time befall the African person and explains that: “In a large number of peoples, explanation for these afflictions involves God in one way or another” (Mbiti 1975:43). He also adds that: “Some societies hold that God may use spiritual beings to bring afflictions to men ... National calamities such as drought, epidemics, locust invasions, wars and floods are beyond individual human cause or control. They are generally attributed to God’s activity, or to a spiritual being. If God is thought to be responsible, it is often taken that He is punishing people for their mischief” (Mbiti 1975:44). This goes together almost exactly with the understandings and assertions of Job’s three friends concerning Job’s afflictions (Job 4, 11, 15, 20 and 22 for example).

In such contexts morality is restored by punishing the wicked or culprit if they are found guilty, as Mbiti observes, saying: “The majority of African people believe that God punishes in this life. Thus, He is concerned with the moral life of mankind, and therefore upholds the moral law” (Mbiti 1975:210). Thus, the oath of Job 31 is significant to the African reader in that it boldly accentuates Job’s seriousness in terms of his piety, as well as his earnest quest for justice that can be seen in his bold claims of innocence without any fear of punishment. His friends (as elders of the community), who have the mandate to restore order and morality in the society²⁶⁸, are presumably approving Job’s final resolution to declare his innocence. Accordingly, more

²⁶⁸ In an African context: “Traditional chiefs and rulers, where these exist, have the duty of keeping law and order, and executing justice in their areas” (Mbiti 1975:211).

punishment may come upon him if he is found guilty or he may be exonerated before everyone, which to them seems unlikely.

The understanding and use of “curse or curses” is very serious in African contexts. That is why they are seldom used except in grave situations, because: “There is one form of justice administered through the use of the curse. The basic principle here is that if a person is guilty, evil will befall him according to the words used in cursing him” (Mbiti 1975:211). This concept of curse and consequence is also clear to Job and his friends. His taking the steps of self-clearance by the use of self-imprecations (curses) if he was guilty, suggests above all his seriousness to see justice done in his situation, as well as his own surety or confidence in his personal life and conduct.

Mbiti further highlights that: “There are many stories in African villages, telling about the fulfillment of curses where a person is guilty. If one is not guilty, then the curse does not function” (Mbiti 1975:211). This happens because: “The belief behind oaths is that God, or some power higher than the individual man, will punish the person who breaks the requirements of the oath or covenant” (Mbiti 1975:212). If this could be applied directly to Job’s situation, based on contextual similarities, without anachronism, we can say that the fact that Job’s curses lay dormant without activation of their having any negative effect in return to him proves his innocence before God and people, which is also seen in the epilogue (42:7-10).

Going back to the African concept of ethics and morality, Mbiti acknowledges a distinction between moral and natural evils, which could both happen to an individual or community. He explains that: “Moral evil pertains to what man does against his fellow man” (Mbiti 1975:213). Thus, ethics and morality are highly intertwined and inseparable from one’s daily practical life. Job’s inner piety prompts his conduct and public actions towards enhancing the lives of people in his community; thus, trying his best to maintain the moral and ethical order of his day.

Ethics and morality are seen as measuring rods in Africa to test and perhaps approve one’s quality of life, as Mbiti observes here, saying: “To say, in African societies, that a person is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ has extremely profound connotations, for it summarizes the whole image or picture of the person in the context of his actions” (Mbiti 1975:215).

Mbiti describes morality in African contexts in the following words, using ‘morals’ as an ethical nuance to describe a body of principles that constitute morality, saying: “Morals deal with the question of what is right and good, and what is wrong and evil, in human conduct. African peoples have a deep sense of right and wrong. In the course of the years, this moral sense has produced customs, rules, laws, traditions and taboos which can be observed in each society. Their morals are embedded in these systems of behavior and conduct” (Mbiti 1977:175). He continues that: “Morals deal with human conduct. This conduct has two dimensions. There is personal conduct, which has to do specifically with the life of the individual ... But the greater number of morals has to do with social conduct, that is, the life of society at large, the conduct of the individual within the group of community or nation.”

From the foregoing discussion, we could see that “African morals lay a great emphasis on social conduct, since a basic African view is that the individual exists only because others exist” (Mbiti 1977:175). This ‘integratedness’ with others necessitates an interactive life between an individual and the others in the community. Thus, Job’s social gestures of help and provision accentuate this vital aspect of communalism, which we need to value and enhance in meaningful ways and manners. Still, in reference to the African contexts, Mbiti (1977:175) asserts that: “It is morals which have produced the virtues that society appreciates and endeavours to preserve, such as friendship, compassion, love, honesty, justice, courage, self-control, helpfulness, bravery, and so on”.

Job’s acceptance and inclusion of strangers (31:32) to his home and sharing his food and clothing with them is an act of family hospitality. Brueggemann (1982:73-83) describes hospitable eating as a form of order that does not exclude the other, but includes them. This is also another cardinal virtue extolled in African societies. “There are morals concerned with hospitality to relatives, friends and strangers. It is held to be a moral evil to deny hospitality, even to a stranger” (Mbiti 1977:177). Thus, Job’s act of extending a welcoming hand of hospitality demonstrates him as a good person, even in African contexts where²⁶⁹ such virtues

²⁶⁹ Thus, stressing the possibility of places in Africa “where” this virtuous aspect of life is respected and practiced and thereby showing that it might not be same in the other “African contexts”. That thought does not and should not mean that Africa is the “only” place with such possibilities.

are recognized and encouraged. Hospitality still remains a big challenge to many African people and communities in this contemporary age of travels and migration from one place to another for economic, educational (academic), technological, and security reasons.

In African moral (ethical) life: “There are many things held to be morally wrong and evil, such as: robbery, murder, rape, telling lies, stealing, being cruel, saying bad words, showing disrespect, practicing sorcery or witchcraft, interfering with public rights, backbiting, being lazy or greedy or selfish, breaking promises, and so on. All these and many others are moral vices in the eyes of the community. Whoever does them is considered to be a bad or evil person” (Mbiti 1977:178).

It is also noteworthy here that God is the giver and guardian of morality in African understanding (Mbiti 1977:180). Hence, the “African peoples take the moral life seriously ... Morals are the food and drink which keep society alive, healthy and happy. Once there is a moral breakdown, the whole integrity of society also breaks down and the end is tragic” (Mbiti 1977:181). In Balentine’s (2006:487) discussion of the Book of Job, he notes that: “Justice requires moral relationships in all areas of life. Moral relationships, whether subject to legal sanction or not, require justice and righteousness that passes muster before God”, although he also adds that: “His (Job’s)²⁷⁰ demand for justice is clearly couched in legal rhetoric, as commentators have often noted, but it remains quintessentially ritual and ethical”.

Nevertheless, from what we see and hear at present in and about Africa, there are still many things to be done. Africans are very traditional in their worldview system, so it makes it very hard for them to accept a change that constitutes a serious dilemma in discussing Africa and its various issues. There are many things that need urgent and decisive change in our religio-political contexts among others, yet the dilemma of the need to change and the attitude of not wanting to change still holds sway in many ways. Mbiti (1975:271) observes that: “In this dilemma their foundations of existence and sense of security are shaken and undermined. Africa must now search for new values, new identities and a new self-consciousness. In the political and

²⁷⁰ The word in parenthesis is my own.

cultural spheres, attempts are under way to relate modern ideas to the values of our African *Zamani*²⁷¹”.

This thesis could be one of the responses that Mbiti calls for in the above suggestion, in that we are calling for a decisive change in our morality and ethics in terms of their motivation and enactment. Like Job, we wish to see our God-consciousness motivating us toward decisive change and life decisions that would always see the good of others, the health and growth of society, the mutual enhancement of life in terms of human dignity and inclusion within godly parameters of life.

Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (1972) explore the theological basis of ethics as a study of the ethics of dynamism of life in terms of morality and ethics. The scholars explain that: “Everywhere in Africa, morality is hinged on many sanctions. But the most fundamental sanction is the fact that God’s all-seeing eyes scan the total areas of human behavior and personal relationships” (Dickson & Ellingworth 1972:116). Job’s understanding of such reality constitutes his motivation towards a pious life (31:2-4). Dickson and Ellingworth further point out the place of sin in light of one’s morality, saying: “A Christian doctrine of sin close to the heart of African ontological morality will begin with a definite recognition of sin as fundamentally an inward problem of character. The cause of sin will be seen as lying at the centre of human personality, springing out of man’s urge for vital force, consisting of the inner motives animating the search for life-force and the extent to which one is able to universalize this desire for life-force” (1972:133). If this is done against the will of God, then the searching eyes of God would see and declare God’s verdict on the action, if it is good and acceptable, God would account and reward it as righteousness, otherwise God would punish it; thus, Job was motivated by that reality to keep himself pure and hold fast to his integrity, no matter the circumstances (Job 27:6).

Balentine’s observation on Job’s oath of innocence in Job 31 is worth noting here in terms of ethics and morality, when he says that: “The ethical and moral code by which Job swears is so

²⁷¹*Zamani* is an African description of an unlimited past as “Macro-Time” (Big Time), which has *Sasa* as its counterpart, although still distinct. For more on this concepts, see Mbiti (1975:22-23).

comprehensive, so lofty, so far beyond most any imaginable reproach that commentators yield to hyperbole in the effort to describe it” (Balentine 2006:471). He also adds that the oath of purity in Job 31 “stands almost alone upon an ethical summit”. He then explains carefully that: “One can only imagine that the words “almost” alone leave room on this summit for God and Jesus”.²⁷²

The value of Job’s life and personal piety cannot be overestimated, especially if we consider Balentine’s description of it, where he postulates: “The moral and ethical connotations of Job’s rhetoric provide another hermeneutical context for assessing his objectives in Chapter 31. They accentuate his personal integrity, his belief that a solitary individual’s personal ethics make a vital contribution to communal solidarity, his presumption that an honorable declaration of personal virtues gives God the opportunity to affirm God’s own commitment to relationships that are moral and ethical” (2006:476). This could remain a valuable challenge to us in contemporary Africa, where, as discussed above from Mbiti’s point of view, the communal life is understood and is vital in defining one’s life within a community. Thus, as Balentine suggests above, providing another hermeneutical context, although to an African reader this may not be a totally new hermeneutical context, we nevertheless need to catch the vision of living for God, with others, for others, and among others.

4.4.3. Irony

The Book of Job contains interesting ironies of life. Parsons points out that dramatic and verbal ironies are prevalent in the Book of Job (1994:401). Dramatic irony is seen where a character does not know things that are known to and by the audience; thus, he or she will act in a different and ironic way, for example the ‘hiddenness’ of some scenes and conversations in the prologue (Job 1-2), which helps the reader to undermine the assertions of Job’s friends on him. Verbal irony is seen in the oppositions and modification of the words spoken to Job and Job’s friends, as well as to Job himself (Parsons 1994:401-2). Regarding Job 31, Good mentions that: “It includes an element of sarcasm as well as irony, of comic parody as well as of serious argument” (Good 1992:342). Thus, in discussing irony in the Book of Job, chapter 31 is not an exception.

²⁷² Compare with Jesus’ Kingdom ethics in Matthew 5-6.

Therefore, we shall highlight some of the notable ironies in it in light of the whole book in the following section.

Considering Job's entire plight from the perspective of a wisdom tradition that believes that God usually treats people according to their action, thus rewarding the righteous with good things, and punishing the wicked with calamities, poses a serious irony in that Job has been a person who has been doing his best to keep himself pure and righteous before God in his thoughts and actions (31:1;5-12 etc), yet he suffers calamity as if he had done wrong in the eyes of God.

Job gives his servants fair treatment in 31:13-15, and he has been introduced as the servant of Yahweh in acclamatory ways (1:8; 2:3; 42:7). Why then would Yahweh not treat him fairly in this situation? Moreover, Job has been living in 'absolute' loyalty to God (31:26-28). Thus, it is also ironic to see the same God allowing Job to pass through such a hellish experience.

It is also ironic that Job has been caring for other people (31:13-15; 16-18; 19-20; 21-23), yet he seemingly has no one who cares about him. He is now disabled and diseased, but no one is showing their love and concern, "not even God". Accordingly, he calls on God earnestly through his oath of clearance to show some concern to either accentuate his integrity or condemn him if he is guilty. There is irony also in Job's determination to give the "account of all my steps" (31:37) to an all-seeing God who sees "my ways and number all my steps" (31:4).

Job ironically refers to God as his adversary (31:35 cf 9; 10; 16), whereas God has been proud and fond of Job as a loyal servant in God's testimony about Job to the Satan (1:8; 2:3). Job's speeches of challenge and verbal confrontation to God and God's acts and purpose in God's acts in Job 9:14-24; 10:1-7; 16:6-17, as a Creator who fiercely turns against the creatures in the cosmos is also a clear irony in light of Job's piety and a confrontation to the wisdom tradition of his day. In 31:38, "He has moved from consoling mourners through mourning and weeping to denying weeping" (Good 1992:344).

4.4.4. Human Dignity

Job's avowal on the treatment of his servants (31:13-15) is a vital case in point here in terms of how he sees human beings. His realization that his slaves could bring a charge against him opens

the door to discuss how much dignity Job sees in his servants, not for anything more than the activity of God in their lives, as well as his own life (31:15). Job's motivation to think that the mistreatment of his slaves is something unthinkable is the reality of God's coming judgment (31:14). According to Andersen's understanding of verses 13-15 in relation to Job and his servants, it is worth noting that: "An act of injustice against the meanest slaves would be heinous in God's sight because each and every human being is precious to Him (15) and under His immediate protection" (Andersen 1977:240).

Balentine (2006:487) also notes that: "Job recognizes that his servants have a right to justice, not because the law requires it, but because they are human beings. They have been created by the same God and birthed from the same primal womb of compassion as Job, which means their life, regardless of the status assigned to them by law or society, carries the full measure of God's hopes and expectations for every human being (v. 15)." ²⁷³

Dignity was also extended to the vulnerable people of Job's day, such as the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the destitute (31:16-23) when Job's says:

If I have withheld anything that the poor desired, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel alone, and the orphan has not eaten from it— for from my youth I reared the orphan like a father, and from my mother's womb I guided the widow— if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, or a poor person without covering, whose loins have not blessed me, and who was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; if I have raised my hand against the orphan, because I saw I had supporters at the gate; then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket. For I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ "This does not permit us to characterize Job as an 'abolitionist' millennia ahead of his time, but the principle enunciated here was surely destined to call the institution of slavery itself into question" (Wharton 1999:134) see also Hartley (1988:415); Gordis (1978:348); Habtu (in Adeyemo 2006:592).

²⁷⁴ In relation to Job's compassionate gesture to the vulnerable, it is worth noting Kwame Bediako's (1995:144-48) proposal and optimism in relation to the Christian faith when he envisaged the possibility of the Christian faith (or in this study "piety") playing a vital mediatorial role of love, compassion, care and relevance towards the vulnerable of

Africa is also struggling with the quest for human dignity and the re-humanization of those who have been dehumanized for various reasons and in various ways and places (Hansen et al 2011:500-509). For example, Koopman (2008) gives a response to the meaning and place of “holiness,” which in our discussion of Job 31 provides a synonym for “piety”, one of the leading words and motivations of our discussion, in light of the African contexts that brings to the fore the need for holiness (piety) as wholeness, which would prompt actions of human dignity, embrace and inclusion.

He also, from a Christological perspective, reads the meaning of holiness as wholeness in that “Holiness as wholeness ... implies that justice is done to all God creatures, that is, to humans and the non-human part of creation” (Koopman 2008:167). As could be seen in Job’s pious life (31:16-23): “Holiness is manifested in solidarity with the poor and in protest with them against poverty” (Koopman 2008:172). Thus, holiness (piety) becomes an essential element for dignity in that: “Holiness implies reverence for life, both the life of human and natural societies”(Koopman 2008:173).

Furthermore, in his description of the African situation in that light, he notes that it calls earnestly for holiness in action, saying: “We are a continent that hungers for embrace and inclusion, for the restoration of justice. Africa is the most excluded continent in the world. Africans are described as people who live in sub-modernity, and who constitute the so-called fourth world. All of this means that Africa is the most vulnerable, most marginalized and most excluded continent. We have the least access to the goods of life that is brought about by current global economic forces” (Koopman 2008:178). He also adds that: “Besides its exclusion as continent, Africa also knows about various forms of exclusion and stigmatization, victimization and injustice amongst various African groups from different nationalities, races, ethnicities, tribes, genders, sexual orientations and socio-economic positions” (Koopman 2008:179). Turaki also observes that: “Africa is crisis-ridden and chaotic, with a lack of human rights, peace, justice and equality. It is thus vitally important that we work to develop a just, participatory and sustainable society” (2012:179). These alarming realities in Africa are enough to raise our

the society, thus mediating between the rich and the poor towards enhancing the lives of the poor and the destitute in light of Christian biblical convictions and the practical life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

consciousness and willingness to work earnestly and decisively in order to contribute our quota in enhancing the unfortunate situations of life in Africa.

The stories of Ruth and Tamar in the biblical literature are discussed by Claassens (2012), as cases where resistance of dehumanization²⁷⁵ is shown in the quest for human dignity. Claassens approaches these biblical characters and the written texts in which they are portrayed from the perspective of human dignity, which has the potential to closely investigate and present a portrait of what it means to be human, "...in a world where people are exceedingly vulnerable to forces beyond their control". She presupposes that being human "means, first, to resist those forces that seek to violate or obscure one's dignity; and, second, to be able to see or recognize the plight of another" (Claassens 2012:660).

Like the story of Job in the book that bears his name, it is clear from Claassens's discussion that the narratives of Ruth, Naomi and Tamar "are set in the context of the dehumanization of the most vulnerable members of society (women, foreigners, and widows)" (2012:661).

In reference to the Ruth/Naomi narratives about the role of famine in threatening the dignity and livelihood of women (human beings)²⁷⁶, Claassens observes that: "In biblical times, as in our day, not to have access to food is extremely dehumanizing. It leaves people, quite often women without male providers, to beg or do degrading work in order to survive" (2012:663). In her call towards a mutual effort towards human dignity, Claassens agrees with Frits de Lange, saying that "the one who spontaneously cares for another not only values the other's personal dignity but, at the same time, expresses his or her own" (2012:674).

The above discussions could help the African reader to see the significance of Job's life and piety, purity and generosity in relation to other people around him. His provision of food and clothing to the destitute is in this case an act of re-humanization; restoring the humanity and dignity of others. In Africa we need to pick up this challenge from the pious life of Job in order

²⁷⁵ "Dehumanization can be defined as a situation in which the human ability to flourish is severely restricted and impaired" (Claassens 2012:661).

²⁷⁶ The words in parenthesis are my own.

to appropriately and compassionately respond to the unwelcome menace of poverty and epidemics on our continent.

Job's refusal to be enticed to any girl or married woman (31:1, 9) kept him from the acts of adultery, which if he had committed would have destroyed the dignity and human wholeness of his own wife (31:10). Not only that she would have been abused by another and other men, but even more as seen in the following words: "For that would be a heinous crime; that would be a criminal offense; for that would be a fire consuming down to Abaddon, and it would burn to the root all my harvest" (31:11-12).

Job's avowal that his wife should be taken and used by others as a slave and sex object may sound horrible and outrageous. Nevertheless, his personal conduct that did not warrant this could by implication display his consciousness of the heinousness of such a crime before people and God; hence, it is piety that disallows him to do that and has in a forceful way resulted in him guarding and securing his wife's dignity and matrimonial security.

Job 31 could be seen as a decisive polemic seeking justice and dignity before God and other people. Job signed his case and earnestly calls and waits for Yahweh to respond (31:35); thus, to come up and vindicate him from the stereotypical interpretation and treatment by the people around him (Job 22 and 30). Job's declaration was done in a situation of disability, which Claassens sees also as a crucial case calling for attention and restoration of dignity. In her discussion of Job's experience in terms of disability and human dignity, she notes David Kelsey's quest for an *Eccentric Existence* (2009) in which he raises a plea "...for another understanding of human that is not based on people's abilities such as physical appearance, intellectual or sport aptitude, or in the case of Job, wealth, health and progeny, but that rather holds on to the inherent dignity of a person that asks for unconditional respect" (Claassens 2013:176). According to Kelsey's point of view of humanity, which he also discusses, "...personhood is not rooted in one's intellectual or physical capacities but in the individual's relationship with the Creator God who enters into a special relationship with each and every

unique person regardless of his/her ability; thus relating to different kinds of creatures on their own terms”²⁷⁷ (Claassens 2013:176).

Thus, Job’s declaration of innocence could be rightly seen as an attempt and quest to restore his own dignity, which many people around him do not respect anymore. Newsom (2003:196) observes that in Job 31, “Job is in possession of a language that knows how to refuse tragedy”. Therefore, “[b]y employing the resources of his inherited moral language in a novel way, Job has effectively rehabilitated himself” (Newsom 2003:197).

From the foregoing discussions, we can see that human dignity is essentially who we are from God’s point of view and not necessarily other people’s. Thus, our Creator’s opinion should rank first in how we see ourselves and our dignity; if we then do like Job, we will always be more concerned about what God says about our situations than people in general’s opinions. In the same way, Turaki discusses the concept of “*Imago Dei*” as a unique, vital and compelling basis for human dignity (1999:303-305). This is seen in the following words:

The “image of God” is man’s *differentia*, which marks him out from the rest of all created things and also forms the basis of his sacredness and the sanctity of human life. Man’s dignity, worth, sacredness and dominion are universal moral principles and values that are inherent and innate in the human person. Man’s divine creation in God’s image and God’s divine purpose and command to man form the basis and foundation of human dignity, worth, sacredness and dominion. These universal moral principles and values emanate and radiate from man’s very being, his person and nature. They are not conferred upon man by any other means apart from the inherent or intrinsic qualities of the divine creation of man. This divine creation of man in the image of God is the ground of man’s uniqueness and distinction from the rest of creation and man’s right to be recognized as such (Turaki 1999:304).

Job 31 accentuates the fact that human dignity is a vital necessity in human life and relationships. Every human being needs respect and dignity, which should be recognized from God’s point of

²⁷⁷ Rather in God’s own terms, which are revealed and if accepted by the people, then they can as well be their own terms in terms of belonging to Him but not origination directly from them.

view primarily, and which would open wider doors of acceptance, dialogue, understanding, and inclusion.

4.4.5. Gender Equality

Job 31:13, which says, "If I have rejected the cause of my male or female slaves, when they brought a complaint against me;" holds the potential for our discussion of gender equality in light of Job's piety and oath of clearance. Job's treatment and freedom of life and justice was given to both his "male and female slaves". Job was a slave owner in a patriarchal system of social life, which is often characterized by injustice, cruelty and dehumanization, yet Job provides an exception even in this case, which is worth considering. Job's compassionate treatment of the "widow" (31:16ff) and the "poor", which could also come from both genders, could also be seen as a relevant point for his gender respect and inclusion.

It would be naïve to generalize patriarchy as 'just' a cruel, segregational and inhumane system of religious and social life. Nevertheless, it would also be untenably hubristic to assume that no one practiced those vices in that system of society. This point is an attempt to call for an honest possibility and flexibility in reading the context of the patriarchs, thus giving room for positivity and not closing up on negative suspicions. Job did not mistreat his male and female servants, nor did he allow his personal life to destroy the dignity of his wife. He lived a life that esteemed positive choices and decisions, not only for himself but also for others, especially as he lived under to all-seeing eyes of God (31:4). This could disturb our critical understanding of Job and his assertions. If the truth is what we can say and stand by, however, then Job's words should be taken at face value. If we do, we may have more room for possible positivity than otherwise.

From the above perspective we would like to call for mutual respect of all genders, as well as equal recognition of human worth and dignity. We can do this in terms of affording equal educational opportunities, equal and considered work ethics, and equal participatory towards a growing and sustainable life. This could be a good response to the concerns raised by Nkabala, Kaunda, Simmonds, Yurkivska etc as discussed above (see 1.6.9).

4.4.6. In Response to Prosperity Theology

As seen in the dogma of traditional wisdom, the notion that God deals with people according to their actions in terms of cause and effect or deeds and consequences is a major ingredient of prosperity theology, in the sense that one receives blessings and curses from God based on one's life before God. This theology hangs its vitality in promises that could spur its adherents (especially the poor) towards a rigorous life of holiness or goodness in order to win the favor of God and be materially blessed (see discussion 1.6.10 above). It also has a high propensity of concluding that, if one suffers from poverty, death or disease, then that means the person has done something wrong before God and God may actually be punishing him or her by sending calamity upon them (Je'Adayiba 2001:29ff; Nihinlola 2006:29-41).

The Book of Job confronts and counters the theological dogma that, as mentioned before, is still obtainable among the prosperity preachers or the Charismatic churches in contemporary Africa and around the world at large. This theology strongly appeals to the African people, who in many ways suffer afflictions such as poverty, diseases, death, draught, etc. Thus, many people seem to rush to those prosperity preachers in search of solutions to their problems. In many ways this has ended up either in total confusion or in a more serious problem, where the sufferer suffers more from sin indictment than finding a solution to his or her problems.

Job, in the book that bears his name, and in chapter 31 where he declares his innocence, can be seen to be an upright, righteous, and blameless person right before calamities befell him (1:2-5). Yet he suffered so much in his life in terms of the loss of almost everything he valued in life, being disabled and estranged from the society (Job 30). All this suffering happened to him for no reason (2:3). Job declares how upright and righteous he has been in his motives, in his actions, both privately and publicly (Job 31). His suffering was indeed a point of concern to himself, as well as the reader. It drags us into the mystery of theodicy where we raise questions of the justice and righteousness of God, the powerfulness of God and the powerlessness of humanity, as well as being thrilled with the issues of the vulnerability and wisdom of God and the Satan, the inviting thought on the interplay of order and chaos in creation, life and mystery.

All this confronts the dogma of deeds and consequences from Job's contextual point of view to his personal dilemma, as well as the readers' wonder and dilemma. In a powerful way this prompts us to agree with Job's assertion in chapter 42:2 that Yahweh can do all things, and no purpose of Yahweh can be restrained, hindered or thwarted. This accentuates the sovereignty of God and displays the reality that God can do everything in God's plan. God must not always be understood from a single dogmatic point of view; God allows flexibility, God does things different from what we know, think and expect. The Book of Job is an invitation to that reflection and chapter 31 is positive evidence of the fact that God can do strange things beyond our human possible understanding or conventional knowledge.

4.4.7. Theological Propositions

Job 31 is a part of Job's final speech (29-31), which we could see as the climax of his final response, his polemical speech in order to stand before God and people to declare his innocence. In chapter 31 Job strictly directs his address, confessions, declarations, and testimonies primarily towards God. This reality invites us to reflect on the significance of the passage in terms of the activity of the Divine, the place and activity of God/Yahweh as perceived, understood and declared by Job. This could provide us some important theological propositions that may not necessarily be different from the assertions of the rest of the Scriptures about God; nevertheless, it may add some freshness, and revelatory impart to see how Job and the narrator of the Book of Job understood and describes God in this passage, namely Job 31.

The impact of the legal metaphors in Job 31 cannot be overestimated in projecting the picture of God as the ultimate judge. God is one who is on high and sees all the ways and counts all the steps of Job (and human beings altogether; hence, what applies to Job, applies to all), God gives portion or consequence of every act (31:2-4); to the wicked God brings disaster, and to the righteous, blessings.

God is the defender par excellence of the weak and the vulnerable (31:13-14). God has the sovereign power of judgment towards all people and for all things that people do (31:6, 14). God is given "monotheistic" fidelity (31:26-28); thus, Job's piety stands as a great challenge to

African syncretism (Habtu 2006: 592), which should prompt us back to religious firmness, fidelity and loyalty to God.

This concept (“monotheistic fidelity”) is used liberally in making this point with regard to Job’s religious life, yet he testifies that he has not been enticed and inclined to worship the creatures instead of the Creator. If he had, that would have been a serious crime against him, which is punishable publicly (31:28). Thus, Job’s piety was anchored in a faithful, loyal fidelity to the only Supreme Creator and Controller of the universe; God is perceived, understood and described by Job and Job’s narrator as a powerful, active, Supreme Being. This strikes the difference between Job’s story recorded in the biblical literature from other similar texts from the ancient Near East, which we have discussed previously.²⁷⁸

4.5. Summary

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this chapter concerns itself with discussing the significance of Job 31 in contemporary African contexts of life that has to do with wisdom theology, ethics/morality and piety, as well as other crucial concerns of human dignity, gender equality and prosperity theology.

The African contextual analysis of Mbiti has been of great help in the discussion above, in that it helps us to also see some vital similar ideas, actions and attitudes in African life that are crucial for the understanding of Job 31 as we investigate the role of piety in the life of Job in terms of its motivation and actual display, in order to live up to the integrity that was attested to right at the opening section of the book that bears his name (1:1-5).

Being pious is very crucial to realizing one’s potential for living a better life that will always be of help and enhancement to the life of another person. Discussions from Claassens, Koopman and Turaki have been of great help in terms of the need and realization of human dignity,

²⁷⁸ The book of Job is unique among other ancient Near Eastern texts that have similar burdens and characterizations, namely, the “suffering of the righteous” in “the direct theophonic intervention of God and His direct speeches (chaps. 38-41)” (Parsons 1994:405).

especially in view of our God-given nature and divine image in our lives that necessitates love, respect and just treatment of other persons that God brings our way.

Among other things also, Job's life and avowal in chapter 31 has been a great challenge both to traditional wisdom theology and prosperity theology, in that it has called for another important paradigm of understanding how God (Yahweh) deals with people, even as individuals, in ways of grace and silent presence, not necessarily because of any wrong that we might have done, but in order to display grace and sustaining power beyond what we could perceive or know conventionally.

There is both need and call for caution in the studying and applying of the book of Job to contemporary life situations and religious discourses. It is imperative to be careful when studying and applying the portrait of Job to contemporary contexts; his two faces of piety and disturbance are intertwined, accordingly, Parsons suggests that: "The traditional portrait of Job as the patient 'saint' who belongs on a stained glass window (with a halo) must be modified (in light of the poetic body) to portray Job as the persevering saint who struggled with his emotions. Thus he is a person with whom each believer may identify" (1994:407). Parsons also suggests important connections between the book of Job and the theology of the New Testament, as well as the whole Bible. This is very important for consideration, especially in terms of making contemporary links or finding application clues to address how the book of Job raises human concerns and hold the potential to achieve their answers, as well as how the New Testament provides these responses in a dynamic and important way for any believer's faith and practice (Parsons 1994:420-11).

The life and experiences of Job have been another eye opener to the sovereignty of God, even when we are devastated with tragic issues of life. Piety should be displayed in our daily lives and actions as necessary and sincere evidence of our knowledge and devotion to God, holding on to our commitment no matter what the circumstances may be. Job's declaration of innocence was full of expectations of God's response, either to exonerate him or to declare the enormity of his piety for everyone to see. This actually happened at the end of the story (42:7-17), after Job's words of argument and protestations had come to an end (31:40c).

The next chapter of this thesis will provide the concluding discourse on Job 31, in which we shall reflect on the motivational reasons of the study and see how we have finally done it, what it has possibly contributed to Old Testament ongoing scholarship, and what would be our final remarks on the relation of piety and ethics, primarily in contemporary Africa.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the major study contained in the previous chapters and would highlight the major insights that was come to in this thesis for a progressive study of the Job literature, especially Job 31, thus providing relevant recommendations for further studies on Job research and other related areas. The chapter would close with some relevant concluding remarks on the entire work.

5.2. Summary

The first chapter presented the need for the study of the book of Job, especially for understanding the lack of interest on the book by many contemporary readers and interpreters of the biblical literature in African contexts. The difficulty of the book in terms of its complex nature and texture is still taken into consideration. Chapter two provided a survey of Job research in which we have seen some ancient texts that are similar to the book of Job in the ancient Near Eastern contexts. We do not argue for the similarity of those ancient texts to the book of Job, but rather point out the literary and in some way the material context in which the story of Job might have evolved up to its final form in the biblical canon. Thus, the book of Job does not stand alone in the discussion of human suffering and the mystery of life. Nevertheless, the practicality it contains invites an unending interest to its study and progressive discussions. In light of such need, amongst other things, this thesis concerns itself mainly with the discussion of the nexus between piety and ethics in light of Job's declaration of innocence in Job 31.

The primary research question that this thesis responded to is: "What is the theological-ethical relevance for contemporary African interpreters of the piety of Job according to Job 31?" This question is discussed within the following hypothetical presuppositions, namely:

- (1) That Job 31 can be interpreted as one of the foremost examples of Old Testament ethics and piety and as such, offers a remarkable description of what constitutes a "good / righteous person".

- (2) That the above-mentioned ethical example in Job 31 is relativized in an ironical manner by the lack of response to it in the subsequent chapters of Job, especially in the YHWH speeches in Job 38 ff.
- (3) That an ironical interpretation of Job 31 is of great challenge for African readers who adhere to a type of “prosperity gospel”.
- (4) That the reflection on the presuppositions of Job as a model for piety in chapter 31 can function as an important hermeneutical sounding board for contemporary reflection on human dignity and gender equality.

This engagement invites us into close consideration of the book of Job in relation to chapter 31, as well as his oath of clearance in regard to his suffering and entire life, in that we investigated Job’s final responses in chapters 29-31 as the climax of Job’s reply to his friends, as well as to God with the dire need of urging God to publicly and decisively respond to him, either to exonerate him or to declare his offence so that all people may hear and know why he was suffering (31:35-37).

The above research question is proven right by the interactive response we provided in chapter four. Additionally, the hypotheses are also proven to a good extent, although not exhaustively *per se*, by our exploration of Job’s ancient Near Eastern contexts in search of texts with similar themes and possibly projection in that the book of Job stands out as a foremost example of ethics based on its motivational values and demonstration, even when we choose to evaluate them in light of Yahweh’s code of conduct in Israel, which we have also done to some extent in our intertextual reading of our selected text. Further discussions of Job’s life in practical terms are used in chapter four to respond to challenges raised in section 1.6 of this thesis, which still need more decisive attention in the contemporary world.

Job’s attempt to persuade God to respond to him is seen in his verbal ranting of his own life in pieces and bearing it out that everyone may see and know both his inner and public life. In his oath, Job declares himself righteous by taking an oath that could be very dangerous and disastrous had he been guilty of any of the sins mentioned in Job 31. Job’s piety has been the leading virtue in conducting such a saintly life, even in an era that is generally seen and cruelly patriarchal and remote from contemporary socio-religious ideals. Nevertheless, compared with the requirements of the revealed cultic and ethical/moral laws in Israel, Job stands as a

commendable human being who can truly be said to be righteous, blameless, and upright (Job1:1-5) in heart and practical life.

Job's piety as "fear of God" is seen in principle in his oath of innocence in Job 31. His awareness of the presence, nature, and power of God stands as a powerful motivation for his commendable ethical life, although as seen in the prologue, Job did not suffer because of anything that he did wrong (2:3); thus, his life experience, conducted within a context that is very much aware of the retributive dogma, was a serious challenge and a call away from the common understanding of life in such a stereotypical way and terms into another level of God's interaction with God's people based on God's grace and not for anything that they have done.

Job's piety was not any quest for blessed favors from God as envisaged by the Satan (1:9); he stays faithful to God, holding up to his integrity beyond fear of the worst (3:25) or any hope for future reward (13:15). Thus, Job stands as an ideal righteous person before God "...who can endure only when he subjects himself to the sovereign authority of this God and lives in communion with him (Job 40:2-5; 42:2-3,5-6)" (Fohrer 1974:21).

Right from the first chapter, we have presupposed the potential of Job 31 as an impetus for challenging the lives of people, especially in African contexts, to reconsider the value of piety in light of social ethics. In other words, we envisaged the significance of leading a pious life like Job's to be a way of presenting a powerful response to the theological-ethical concerns we have in contemporary Africa, namely, the need for a progressive (and realistic) wisdom ethics, the need for a progressive response and provision of hope, human dignity, gender equality and theological significance of our religious convictions into our daily lives. This is done in the fourth chapter of this thesis in light of the scholarly study of the Job 31 in chapter three.

Thus, this thesis has contributed to the African biblical scholarship by providing another discourse on the book of Job in the African context and towards proffering biblical responses to some of the challenges of life in African contexts, which may also be useful in other global contexts. This thesis has provided a multidimensional discussion of ethics from Job as an ancient wisdom text. In sum, this thesis has contributed to Old Testament scholarship by the discussion of the theme of piety in terms of its motivation and relation to ethics and call for a decisive

harmony. This contribution is more specifically described in chapter four. It does not claim any exhaustiveness but at least provides some possible responses to contemporary needs and invites readers for further contemplation of such issues, especially in light of theological-ethical paradigm.

5.3. Suggestions for Further Research

This thesis on the theological-ethical potential of Job 31 in contemporary Africa could be said to achieve an affirmative response to its leading research question in the discussion of chapters three and four. Nevertheless, it cannot be said to be exhaustive material on the study of Job's piety; thus, it is necessary for us to open doors for possible progression on Job research by the following recommendations:

- Job presents laments from his crucial experience in life, thus we could investigate the role of laments in being human in light of Job's laments as open polemics towards God and his friends.
- The motif of suffering is the golden thread that runs through the book of Job, which could afford us the opportunity to trace the theological-ethical significance of the "Suffering Servant" motif in the book of Job in relation to other biblical books of the Old Testament.
- Another very important area of concern in the book of Job to closely investigate is the theological mystery of chaos and order and its significance to our religious and ethical lives.
- The book of Job can also be further studied for a more decisive response to prosperity theology, especially in contemporary Africa.
- Job 31 ends in an urgent expectation of the response of Yahweh, which only comes in chapter 38. Now, the invasion of Elihu in Job 32ff also leaves us with another area of concern, especially in African ethical discourse to try to see the significance of the responses of Elihu and their value towards the entire discourse.
- The responses of Yahweh in Job 38ff present very interesting areas of exploration, especially in light of creation theology, to see the significance that it holds towards piety, as well as ethical life in the cosmos.

With these thoughts in mind, the book of Job still holds a lot of ground to be discovered and investigated by interested students and learners of the Old Testament.

5.4. Conclusion

This thesis can come to a conclusion at this juncture with some affirmative assertions on the role of piety and ethics as interconnected elements of life that should be critically recognized and utilized appropriately in order to enhance life on earth. This could be done not only by what one does from a personal, individualistic point of view alone, but by what one does together with others and for the good of others as well.

Piety can be a very important virtue to understand and utilize to make our contemporary Africa, as well as the larger world, a better place to be; a place where there is self-discipline, mutual respect, justice, righteousness, acceptance, inclusion, transformation of the lives of the vulnerable, a place where new vocabularies are developed for a progressive and improved life before God and with God in view.

Job stands almost alone in the ethical ideal he envisaged, pursued and stood for, no matter what comes his way. This should not be the end of the road for us but a possible beckoning that we all may be willing to respond to.

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