

Exploring Retributive Justice in Job 9:1–24 in the Context of Christianity in Enugu State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the idea of retributive justice in Job 9:1–24 in the context of Christianity in Enugu State. In this pericope, Job refuted the inflexible doctrine of his sage friends who interpreted his misfortune from the standpoint of moral transgression, as they accused him of being culpable for the calamity that enveloped him. Job argued that there is no direct nexus between sin and suffering since the righteous and the wicked are indiscriminately rewarded. The study employed literary analysis as its methodology. Like Job of the Old Testament, some Christians in Enugu State experience diverse misfortunes, but their suffering is not necessarily because of their sins. This situation strongly contrasts with the erroneous view of the exponents of retributive justice that every misfortune is the consequence of sin. The study demonstrates that the suffering of Christians in Enugu State is an existential reality that cannot be explicated through the lens of retributive justice.

KEYWORDS: Job 9, Retributive Justice, Christianity, Moral transgression

A INTRODUCTION

The pericope of Job 9:1–24 is a wisdom corpus fashioned to interrogate the concept of retributive justice, which assumes that every misfortune that besets a person is caused by the sufferer's moral transgression. Scott maintains that blessings or ill fortunes are explained as rewards or punishments from God.¹ This literary unit is studied in the context of Christianity in Enugu State; it expostulates that innocent Christians² suffer in the state. In this text, Job refuted

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¹ Robert, B. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 138.

² The term "innocent Christians," as used in this study, does not mean that these Christians are impeccable or sinless human beings. Rather, it means that their

the inflexible doctrine of his three wise counsellors who viewed his calamity through the lens of moral transgression as they judged him to be responsible for the misfortune that beset him. Acknowledging the wisdom of the sage friends, Job spoke effusively and with vigour to them that he, too, was endowed with wisdom and hence was not inferior to them in the enterprise of wisdom. He exploded and released his rationalistic acumen against the traditional and unexamined dogma of his time. His observable and practical experience had taught him that this long conservative belief that the just were being rewarded accordingly with prosperity and fortune and the wicked with misfortune hit him severely on the marrow. Perdue rationalises that Job's practical experiences of agonising pain, including the loss of family and honour made him realise that this dogma was faulty.³ With this realisation, Job's emotional turmoil reflects an obvious breakdown of traditional wisdom's symbolic universe in which the sages participated and carried out their work. What really troubled the poet of Job is the epistemological as well as the intellectual explanation of this crisis of faith. Of a truth, Job does not categorically deny the feasibility of having committed minor sins, but what he contends is that he has not done anything wrong to deserve such calamity.⁴ In Enugu State, some Christians suffer unjustly in diverse forms, like Job, who, although righteous, suffers intensely (Job 9:15–21). It is misleading and fallacious to employ a principle of retributive theory to adjudge that every misfortune that befalls a Christian in Enugu State is caused by sin. Christians in Enugu State should understand that suffering or misfortune besets both the innocent and the wicked people (9:22). They should understand that suffering is an inseparable existential reality that punctuates human existence in life. This is a mystery that cannot be explained through the lens of retributive justice.

This study employed a literary analysis as its methodology. Literary analysis is a synchronic approach that studies a biblical text as it appears in its final form.⁵ The article explores the idea of retributive justice in Job 9:1–24 in the context of Christianity in Enugu State in order to encourage Christians going through crises of faith such as prolonged sickness, humiliation and suffering,

sufferings are underserved because they suffer not as a result of any wrongdoing of theirs.

³ Leo G. Perdue, "Wisdom in the Book of Job," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G Gammie* (ed. Leo G. Perdue et al.; Louisville: Westminster Press, 1993), 89.

⁴ David N. Freeman, *The Job* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1964), 55.

⁵ See Hannes O. Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 21; Ngengi A. Mundele, *A Handbook on African Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Limuru: Kolbe Press, 2012), 11; Caroline, Mbonu, "Biblical Exegetical and Hermeneutical Approaches," in *Fundamentals of Research Methodology in the Humanities* (ed. C. I. Ejizu; Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2013), 107; Mary J. Obiorah, *Bibliotheca Divina: A Basic Introduction to the Bible* (Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press, 2015), 90.

death, barrenness and other misfortunes to learn from Job, who although righteous, suffers intensely but does not abandon his faith in God. The article does not suggest that Christians in Enugu state suffer exactly what Job suffered. Rather, the point is that the text of Job 9:1–24 can be a great source of encouragement for Christians who suffer misfortunes amidst belief in a righteous God and their own righteousness. This article is organised into six parts. The first part deals with literary context of Job 9:1–24, followed by the structure of Job 9:1–24. The third section focuses on the literary form of Job, while the fourth part is a close reading of the text of the passage. The next section presents a brief overview of the arrival of Christianity in Enugu State and the last part is a reading of the text in the context of Christianity in Enugu State.

B HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT OF JOB 9:1–24

The historical context of Job 9:1–24 is traced to the long aged religious rationalism prevalent in the ancient Israelite society that the universe operates on the principle of retributive justice. This view was championed by the exponents of retributive theology who maintain that God rewards fortune and success to the righteous but punishes the wicked with misfortune and suffering. The resonance of this rationality is seen in the book of Proverbs: "The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked" (10:3) and "The Lord tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries" (15:25).⁶ The understanding of and belief in the above views inspired the wise advisers in the book of Job to tell Job that he was responsible for the misfortunes that befell him.

An objective survey of the pericope of Job 9:1–24 shows that the remote literary context of the text has a link with the framework of Joban construct of the prologue (Job 1 and 2). It was in the narrative prologue that Satan got permission from God and afflicted Job with a series of misfortunes. Therefore, the literary composition of Job 9:1–24 interfaces with the prose framework of Job. This view is logical because without Satan's insinuation that Job's reverence of God and religion were coated with incentive, Job would not have been afflicted. So, the remote literary context of Job 9:1–24 could be traced to the prologue.

The immediate literary context of the pericope is found in Job 4 or 8. In Chapter 4, Eliphaz expresses that no human being is righteous before God. Eliphaz maintains that no innocent man has ever perished. He underscores the concept of retribution and tells Job that those who plough evil and sow in trouble reap calamity. Bildad's articulation in Chapter 8 urges Job to repent and turn to God. He contends that God will restore Job to his former glory if he is innocent for God does not pervert justice. Objective interpretation of Job's

⁶ Scott, *The Way of Wisdom*, 138–139.

situation by Eliphaz and Bildad claims that Job is culpable for the misfortunes that engulfed him as a result of his sin.⁷ The reaction to the words of both Eliphaz and Bildad in Job 4 and 8 stimulated the protagonist's articulations in 9:1–24. The researchers delimit the study from Job 9:1–24 because in it is found a literary unit that is significant in itself.

C STRUCTURE OF JOB 9:1–24

The literary unit of Job 9:1–24 is embedded in the enigmatic concept of retributive dogma. The poetical composition that endowed this literary unit was stimulated by Eliphaz expression that Job was culpable for the nemesis that struck him. A critical reading of Eliphaz's expression in Job 4 shows that Job's speech in 9 was a response to Eliphaz's claim that no human can be just before God. Based on this line of thought, Job responds, "Indeed I know that this is so; but how can a mortal be just before God?"

Job 9:1–24 could be segmented into four parts. The first division (vv. 1–3) portrays God's supremacy over mortals. Job acknowledges and affirms the surpassing power of God over human beings. This unit maintains that none can withstand God in a verbal argument. For Clines, the most developed statement of Job's powerlessness before God is observed in this segment. He explains that Job's perception of being trapped and his growing awareness that all of God's unremitting care for him, from the moment of his conception onward, was not for his good but to fasten guilt upon him.⁸

The second part of Job 9:1–24 brings to the fore God's power over all his creation. This unit covers verses 4–10. The poet explains that God is mighty and wise in heart and that no one has resisted God and come out of it. Even the mountains are under God's control and he exercises dominions over all his creation. The constellations, the earth, the sea waves and the pillars bow before him. The third part (vv. 11–14) focuses on the overwhelming presence of God. Job says that God passes beside him, yet he is unable to see him. He discloses his powerlessness in perceiving God. He however admits that his presence is well felt. In this unit, Job highlights vividly his lack of perception to grasp the true nature of God. God's activity is beyond human understanding or control. Mackenzie⁹ avers that God's way is strictly a mystery. The last division of the pericope (vv. 15–24) deals with the potency and authority of God and Job's impotency and helplessness. Job acknowledges the sovereignty of God over him. The heroic character of the text argues that despite his innocence and blamelessness, he cannot stop God's doing or question him. This segment

⁷ R. Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 256.

⁸ David Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC 17; Dallas: Word Books Press, 1998), 225.

⁹ Raymond Mackenzie, "Job," in *New Jerome Bible Commentary* (ed. E. B. Raymond et al.; Englewood Cliffs: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000), 474.

underscores Job's helplessness in circumventing the injustice unleashed on him by God. He laments that if God found you guilty, then, it is so. This is because whatever he decides is just and right and "it is impossible for him to sue God or to establish his innocence if God condemns him."¹⁰ This last section of the pericope shows that God rewards both the righteous and the wicked alike. To this, Job responds that there is no difference, for God destroys both the wicked and the blameless. Job laments that God perverts justice as he fails to relieve the plight of the innocent.

D LITERARY FORM OF JOB

The Joban text of the Old Testament is a complex literary work. The book is written in both narrative and poetry. The prologue and the epilogue are written in prose while the rest of the exposition is in poetic form. There is no general agreement among Old Testament scholars on the specific literary form of the Joban text. Ellis opines that the poetic construction of Old Testament Job is a psychological drama but not a drama in the conventional sense of the term. He explains that at the centre of good drama is the character of the heroic personage in response to the crisis around which the dramatic action revolves.¹¹ Interestingly, in the wisdom book of Job, this unfolding of the outstanding character is underscored in Job's dialectic exercise with his sage friends on the complex suffering of the blameless man. Similarly, Soggin affirms that the literary form of the Joban text is a dramatic representation of the literary genre of the individual lament in a dramatic form.¹² It is difficult to describe specifically what the literary form of OT Joban text is. The literary style of Job is interplay of lament, wisdom and law.¹³ Habel argues that the book of Job belongs to the literary genres of disputation and lament.¹⁴ For Pelham, the literary work of Job is a comedy.¹⁵

In addition, Raymond et al. see the book of Job as dramatisation of a lament.¹⁶ The present researchers affirm that the Joban text is a mixture of dialectic on retributive dogma and sapiential literary work. This affirmation is stimulated by the fact that the literary composition of Job is a wisdom construct

¹⁰ Mackenzie, "Job," 474; S. Cook, "A Reading of Job as a Theatrical Work; Challenging a Retributive Deuteronomistic Theodicy," *Literature and Aesthetics* 24/2 (2014): 53.

¹¹ Peter F. Ellis, *The Men and the Message of the Old Testament* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1962), 478.

¹² J. Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 389.

¹³ See G. Fohrer, cited in Mackenzie, "Job," 468.

¹⁴ Cited in C. Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 94.

¹⁵ Abigail Pelham, "Job as Comedy, Revisited," *JSOT* 35/1 (2010): 89–112.

¹⁶ Mackenzie, "Job," 468.

fashioned in persuasion to re-examine the inflexible doctrine that every misfortune is the consequence of the sufferer's wrongdoing.

E A CLOSE READING OF JOB 9: 1–24

The literary unit of Job 9:1–24 is one of the most complex Old Testament texts to interpret. Job expresses the complexity of innocent suffering in human society. He laments that God perverts justice. This is obvious because God indiscriminately rewards both the wicked and the righteous equally. Putting himself in the crucible lens, he affirms that God perverts justice. The close reading is done under the following subheadings.

1 No Mortal Is Righteous before God

The first three verses of the pericope (vv. 1–3) express the supremacy of God over mortals. These verses explain the futility of vindicating humans against God. The Hebrew word וַיַּעַן is a Qal verb in the third person masculine singular and in *waw* consecutive. Ordinarily, this verb should be understood as imperfect and rendered as “and he will answer.” However, its appearance with *waw* in this verse has affected its meaning. Interestingly, Jouon refers to *waw* consecutive as inverted future.¹⁷ As an inverted future, its meaning has been transposed to a perfect. In this regard, it means “and he answered.” The word וַיֹּאמֶר similarly is also in *waw* consecutive and in third person masculine singular. It means “and he said.” Job's utterance, וַיֵּדָעַי כִּי־כֵן (“truly I know that it is so”), refers to Bildad's asseveration that God is just and does not pervert justice. The word וַיֵּדָעַי is a Qal perfect verb and in first person common singular. It means “I know.”

Commenting on the word וַיֵּדָעַי (“truly”) which is a Hebrew adverb, Clines posits that the word as used in this verse is embellished with verbal irony.¹⁸ Verbal irony is a statement in which the implicit meaning intended by the speaker differs from that which he ostensibly asserts.¹⁹ Referring to Bildad's declaration in 8:3 that God does not pervert justice, “Job admits Bildad's contention, but points out that it is all aside from the issue.”²⁰ Job's articulation in verse 2b is similar to Eliphaz's words in 4:17. However, the meaning of Job's utterance is different from that of Eliphaz.²¹ Similarly, Habtu

¹⁷ Paul S. Jouon and Takamitsu J. Muraoka, *Subsidia biblica: A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993), 141.

¹⁸ Clines, *Job 1–20*, 227.

¹⁹ Jean L. Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narrative* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1990), 57.

²⁰ W. Irwin, “Job,” in *Peak's Commentary on the Bible* (ed. H. Rowley; Nairobi: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), 395.

²¹ Clines, *Job 1–20*, 227.

notes that Job's argument that no mortal can dispute with God and win.²² These verses extol the supremacy of God over mortals, which implies that it is highly impossible for human beings to get vindication from God. To Job, since God is the one who metes out pain and injustice to him, then, it would be impossible for him to be justified by God himself. Objective evaluation of Job's response to Bildad's position that God never acts unjustly and that whatever he does is right is coated with irony.

Acknowledging man's powerlessness before God, Job underscores the futility of a mortal being attempting to prove right before God when God who set the standard of righteousness is determined to prove the person guilty. Simonetti shows Job does not agree completely with Bildad's judgment but only accepts a part of it.²³ Similarly, Edward writes that Job agrees with Eliphaz's nocturnal visitor that mortals can never be just before God. He, however, argues that this is not because humans are essentially impure but because they would be unable to speak in their own defence for God will always make them appear in the wrong.²⁴

The phrase *אם־יִהְיֶה לְרִיב עִמּוֹ* ("if one would wish to dispute with him") is a conditional clause. The Hebrew *לְרִיב* is a combination of two words *לְ* which is a preposition "to" and *רִיב* a verb, which could be rendered as "contend, dispute, quarrel." The expression *לְרִיב* is a verb *qal* in infinitive construct. Taken together, it means "to dispute." Irwin argues that the Hebrew word *רִיב* ("to contend") is a legal term and in such a cosmic court of law, God is unanswerable.²⁵ The word *יִהְיֶה* connotes a futuristic action. In this regard, a translation such as "if he would wish..." is quite appropriate. Dhorme argues that the poetic utterance *לֹא־יַעֲנֶנּוּ אַחַת מִנִּי־אַלְפֵי* in verse 3 has human as its subject. The meaning of this is suggestive that a human being would be incapable once in a thousand times of answering God's questions or accusations.²⁶

2 God's Power over His Creation

This second segment covers verses 4–10. It celebrates the majestic power of God over his creation. The first sentence that opens the segment says: *חֲכַם לְקֹבֵץ*

²² See Tewoldemedhin Habtu, "Job," in *Africa Bible Commentary* (ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo; Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006), 577.

²³ M. Simonetti and M. Conti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. (Volume VI; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 49.

²⁴ Kissane. J. Edward, *The Book of Job: Translation and Commentary* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1939), 53.

²⁵ Irwin, *Job*, 395.

²⁶ See, E. Dhorme, *Commentary on the Book of Job* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1984), 127; S. Roller and G. Gray, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1977), 84.

וְאֵלֵינוּ כֹּחַ. The translation of this statement, "He is wise in heart and mighty in strength," is remarkable. The poet employs the expressions "wise in heart" and "mighty in strength" to demonstrate both the intellectual and physical prowess of God. Therefore, any attempt to struggle with him would be foredoomed to failure. Agreeing with this thought, George²⁷ explicates that in a contest of strength with the deity, mortal beings would be silenced at once. Job's understanding that God exercises absolute power over his creation and that nothing happens without his permission led him to rationalise that God perverts justice. Wharton aptly explains that the transcendent wisdom and power of God are so awesome that no mortal can get a fair trial in God's presence.²⁸

The poet implanted a literary device of *erotesis* in the second poetic line of verse 4 to stress that none can resist God and remain unhurt. The word הִקְנִיחַ is a Hebrew *hiphil* verb in 3rd person masculine singular. As a perfect verb, it means restrained. The poet opines in a rhetoric מִי־הִקְנִיחַ אֵלָיו וַיִּשְׁלַם ("who has circumvented (to) him and remained in peace?"). The Hebrew word וַיִּשְׁלַם is a combination of two words וַ ("and") and יִשְׁלַם ("remained in peace"). Standing alone, this word means "he will be in peace." However, its morphological and syntactic appearance in this verse explains that the two words are in *waw* consecutive. In this sense, וַיִּשְׁלַם means "and remained in peace." Using the *hiphil* participle masculine singular absolute, הַמְעִתִיק ("he removes"), the poet praises God's power that displaces mountains effortlessly without their knowledge. This describes the majestic power of God over his creation. The destructive act of God against his creation is portrayed in this segment. The poet says that God commanded the sun not to rise and got the stars sealed. God equally set up the heavens and he treads upon the back of the sea.

The poet's expression in verse 10 brings to light the marvellous and great works of God: עֲשֵׂה גְדֹלוֹת עֲדֹ-אֵין חֶקֶר. These Hebrew words literally mean "he performs great things that cannot be searched." For the sake of a clearer rendering, it could be translated as "he performs a great thing that is beyond understanding." In the second poetic line, the poet intones that God does a marvellous thing that cannot be compared in number or quantity. The word נִפְלְאוֹת is a verb *niphal* plural participle feminine. It means wonderful or marvellous. A close survey of the word מְסָפֵר reveals that it is clothed in comparative garb. To express a comparative, the Hebrew writers do not alter the adjective to convey this meaning. Rather, the Hebrew preposition "mi" is appended in front of the noun which is the basic of comparison.²⁹ Interestingly, the Hebrew noun מְסָפֵר ("number or quantity") compares with the word נִפְלְאוֹת

²⁷ Arthur George, *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 976.

²⁸ J. Wharton, *Job* (WBC; ed. D. Patrick and D. Bartlett; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 55.

²⁹ Thomas Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), 118.

“marvellous” along with ׀א a negation “not.” Thus, the second line of verse 10 is translated as “and marvelous thing that cannot be compared in number.” In fact, what this entails, as Habtu avers, is that “God’s ways and person are mysterious.”³⁰

3 Mystery of God’s Existence

The third unit covers verses 11 to 14. In this segment, Job exhibits the mystery of God’s existence. Dhorme comments that Job’s articulation in this verse means that God’s presence eludes human vision. He postulates that the verb אָרָא (“see”) could mean also “know, be acquainted with.”³¹ The poet transmits the notion that God’s presence is unseen by humans and his activity is mysterious and that no human can defend himself/herself against God. The poet laments that no one can save Job if God arrests him. Job’s pessimism is anchored on the fact that God does not hold back his anger from mortal being. The Hebrew word עָבַר is a Qal verb imperfect and in 3rd person masculine singular. It means “he passes.” It is observed that the word עָלַי is a confluence of two Hebrew words – עַל a Hebrew preposition translated into English as over, on or upon and “אֲנִי” a pronominal suffix representing the first person common singular in objective case “me.” Thus, together, they mean “upon me.” The second part of this verse shows that the translation, “and I do not see him,” in the New Revised Standard Version and in most English Bible translations is implied and not found in the Hebrew text. The phrase וְלֹא אֶרְאֶה (“and I do not see”) underscores this postulation. In fact, there is no Hebrew word “he” in the above phrase. Therefore, to render וְלֹא אֶרְאֶה as “I do not see him” is undoubtedly implied since the expression means “and I do not see.”

A survey of the Hebrew word יִקְחֶהָ (“he seizes”) shows that it occurs once in sapiential corpus. It is quite fascinating to observe that its place of occurrence is in Job 9:12. This is referred to as *hapax legomeonon* in biblical scholarship. Both Walter³² and David³³ reiterate that the word יִקְחֶהָ is a *hapax*. It is obvious from Job’s articulation in this unit that the powers far superior to his are no match for God. It is in recognition of this fact that Job posits that an ordinary mortal like him cannot withstand God. Job’s perception of the devastating and violent demonstration of God’s power led him to admit that he could not dispute with God. Irwin explains that the Hebrew word רָהַב (*rāhab*) is a frequent Old Testament name for the primeval monster overthrown at creation, like Tiamat in the Babylonian epic. Reading in-between lines of verse

³⁰ Habtu, *Job*, 577.

³¹ Dhorme, *Commentary on the Book of Job*, 133.

³² L. Walter, *Job in the Light of Northwest Semitic Volume 1* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1987), 209.

³³ Freeman, *The Job*, 71.

14 shows that the Hebrew word אֶבְרַחְרָה is fashioned in cohortative. The cohortative is the volitive mood of the first person indirect imperative.³⁴

4 The Lamentation of the Righteous Hero

The last division of this pericope which covers verses 15–24 is entitled “The Lamentation of the Righteous Hero.” In this segment, the heroic personage expresses his lamentation. He affirms that he is righteous but suffers tremendously. Employing the Hebrew word יִצְדִּיקָתִי, Job declares that he is righteous. It is quite regrettable that in spite of Job’s righteousness, he lacks the ability to compel God to be the defendant and take the stand. Job laments the situation because God has reversed the roles and left him with no other option than to plead for mercy with God who is the cause of his affliction. Sharing the above thought, David posits that despite that Job is innocent, he cannot expect justice but can only throw himself at the mercy of his adversary who is also the judge.³⁵ A survey of the phrase מִי יִעֲדֵנִי (“who can summon me”) shows that there is a haplography in this construction, meaning that there is a scribal error in the above words. Arguably, it is highly probable that what the scribe intends to write is מִי יִעֲדֵנִי (“who can summon him [God]”). Walter explicates that although Job is undoubtedly sound and righteous, God pronounces him guilty and perverse.³⁶ Job laments that God destroys both the righteous and the wicked alike. In light of this last unit of the pericope, Habtu comments that Job:

Frustrated by the injustice he is experiencing, gives the adherents of the wisdom school and his friends who uphold an inflexible doctrine of retribution- the shock of their lives when he says that God destroys both the blameless and the wicked. He extends his sense of injustice from his own experience to the experience of all humanity.³⁷

Enlarging this utterance of Job entails that Job’s agony lies in the fact that both the good and the wicked in the world are being rewarded with the same fate. The Hebrew word פְּתָאֵם is an adverb which means suddenly.³⁸ Job observes that when misfortune suddenly emerges, God slays and rejects the righteous by his indiscriminating action, as he punishes both the righteous and the wicked alike. With this realisation, Job explicitly denies any moral order in the universe. God is simply indifferent to good or evil.³⁹ God’s act of mocking

³⁴ See, Jouon and Muraoka, *Subsidia biblica*, 374; Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 118.

³⁵ Freeman, *The Job*, 72.

³⁶ Walter, *Job in the Light of Northwest Semitic*, 209.

³⁷ Habtu, *Job*, 578.

³⁸ J. Kohlenberger, *The Interlinear Hebrew–English Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 295.

³⁹ Roller and Gray, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 73.

at the despair of the innocent makes him to rank himself among the godless.⁴⁰ It is really disheartening for an innocent man to realise that God perverts justice. This knowledge is too heavy for Job to bear. Reflecting on this perplexity, Job spontaneously laments, *לֹא יָדָע נַפְשִׁי* ("I do not know my soul").

Highly enraged, Job declares that God enjoys seeing him in pain. If not, how can one explain the claim that God mocks the righteous as sudden death besets them? On Job's assertion in 9:21, "I do not know myself," Wharton remarks that the severity of Job's affliction really affects his entire self.⁴¹ This observation is in line with the inability of Job's friends to recognise him in 2:12 because of his suffering. Dhorme writes that the complement *נַפְשִׁי* "my soul" has the value of a reflexive pronoun "myself." Job does not know himself and so cannot affirm his innocence. Thus, the poet's utterance, *אֲנִי מֵתָם*, in verse 21 is to be regarded as an interrogative, "Am I perfect?" He no longer knows on what or whom he can rely. Apparently, this explains why Job's last cry is one of dejection and despair.⁴² The word *רָצָה* that begins verse 24 of the pericope indicates that Job believes that human society as a whole is given into the hands of the wicked. Dhorme further observes that it is the special business of the judges to compel such criminals (the wicked) to make restitution in order to re-establish and vindicate justice.⁴³ Regrettably however, God veils their faces. In the last segment of the pericope, Job identifies himself with all the people who suffer for no reason. Job believes that God is responsible for the injustice that punctuates human society. For if God is not responsible, then, who is?⁴⁴

F BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ARRIVAL OF CHRISTIANITY IN ENUGU STATE

Enugu State is one of the 36 states that make up the present Nigeria. It belongs to the Igbo ethnic group which is one of the three largest linguistic groups in Nigeria. According to Ministry of Information Enugu State, Enugu State is in the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria. It is located at 6o30' North of Equator and 7o30' East of Latitude. It is plus one hour (+1hr) GMT on the World Time Zone. It shares border with Abia and Imo states to the south; Ebonyi to the east, Benue to the north-east, Kogi to the north-west and Anambra State to the west. It covers an area of 7,161 km² (2,765sq mi), and ranks 29th out of the 36 States of Nigeria in terms of land mass.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Clines, *Job 1–20*, 237.

⁴¹ Wharton, *Job*, 56.

⁴² Dhorme, *Commentary on the Book of Job*, 139.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁴ Wharton, *Job*, 57.

⁴⁵ For details, see Ministry of Information Enugu State, 1; <https://www.enugustate.gov.ng>

The present practice of Christianity in Enugu State has its provenance with the Niger expedition in the 19th century CE. Both Ozigbo⁴⁶ and Achunike⁴⁷ affirm that the Christian religion was first propagated in Igboland in 1841 during the Niger expedition. They, however, add that the faith was not planted in the region until 1857 when Rev. Ajayi Crowther of the Church Missionary Society spearheaded the establishment of Christianity in Onitsha. Following this success, Christianity spread to Enugu and other parts of Igboland. At present, Christianity is rooted deep in various villages and towns in Enugu State.

G JOB 9:1–24 AND RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE VIS-À-VIS CHRISTIANITY IN ENUGU STATE

Exegetical exploration of Job 9:1–24 confirms that innocent persons do suffer. Job suffers intensely yet he is blameless and righteous. A contextualised study of the pericope corresponds with the view that Christians in Enugu State also suffer misfortune in diverse forms. This, although, does not entail that non-Christians do not suffer in the state. However, we do not claim that the Christians in the cases mentioned below are righteous from God's point of view. Rather, the argument here is that from the point of view of Christians in the state, those who died or experienced different misfortunes were innocent since they were not the cause of their sufferings. We are also aware that in a complex society like ours people may suffer unjustly for various reasons. Political as well as socio-economic factors sometimes come into play but these do not negate the fact that the sufferers who are believers in God do have reasons to plead their innocence before God. This is the Joban situation, as the pericope reveals. For instance, the killing of two siblings at Abbi community in Uzo-uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State on February 11, 2016 by heartless Fulani herdsmen lends credence to this view.⁴⁸ Reporting two months after this tragic event, Mamah et al write that on April 26, 2016, Fulani herdsmen also invaded Nimbo community in Uzo-uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State and killed about 40 innocent people while injuring others with machetes.⁴⁹ Ibenwa confirms attack on Ukpabi Nimbo by herdsmen,

⁴⁶ I. Oziogbo, *A History of Igboland in the 20th Century* (Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1999), 126.

⁴⁷ Hillary C. Achunike, *Dreams of Heaven: A Modern Response to Christianity in North-Western Igboland, 1970–1990* (Enugu: Africana-Feb Publishers, 2002), 43.

⁴⁸ See M. Ebonugwo and C. Ozor, "Another Herdsmen Inversion of Enugu Community," <https://www.vanguardngr.com>; A. Aondofa, and M. Mwuese, "Human Rights, National Insecurity and Fulani Herdsmen Attacks in Nigeria," *Benue State University Law Journal* (2018): 22.

⁴⁹ E. Mamah, C. Ndujihe, C. Nkwopara and C. Ozor, "Bloodbath in Enugu as Fulani Herdsmen Kill 40," [cited April 26]. Online: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/04/bloodbath-enugu-fulani-herdsmen-kill-40>.

which resulted in the death of many people while survivors fled to neighbouring communities.⁵⁰

Lamenting on the killing of Christians in Enugu State, both Ugwueye⁵¹ and Ngwoke⁵² write that on March 7, 2002, 14 Christians including a pregnant woman were killed at the Adoration Ground, Government Technical College, Enugu by suspected hired assassins who used toxic gas. This is no doubt barbaric and devastating.

Odo comments on the suffering of Christians in Enugu State thus:

One Christian woman from Ezagu Local Government Area of Enugu State has been in agony for years. The woman is a pious and committed Christian who lost her husband some years back. They were blessed with eight children; four boys and four girls before the woman's husband passed away. But regrettably, this widow witnessed the tragic death of all her four daughters within a year. It was indeed a very devastating experience to the poor Christian widow. The sudden departure of her daughters to the great beyond within a year got the woman to the head (*sic*) as she became psychologically unstable. Yet, as if this agony was not enough, three out of her four sons are currently undergoing mental disorder.⁵³

Obviously, the misfortunes experienced by this Christian widow defy logic and any theory of retributive justice.

In addition,⁵⁴ in 2005, some members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement of Nigeria of St Antony's Parish, Isi-enu in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State were accused of murder by some traditionalists in the community. According to Odo, they humiliated these Christians and ordered that their houses be burnt and their valuable items destroyed. These Christians were later arrested and taken to Nsukka police command for interrogation. After careful investigation, the police found them innocent of the crime. The above misfortunes which engulfed these people show that not every misfortune is the consequence of moral transgression since both good and wicked people suffer indiscriminately in the society. This is a

⁵⁰ Christopher N. Ibenwa, "A Critical Analysis of Conflicts between Herdsmen and Farmers in Nigeria: Causes and Socio-Religious and Political Effects on National Development," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74/1 (2018): 2. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.5065>.

⁵¹ Luke E. Ugwueye, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Old Testament* (Nsukka: Prize Publishers, 2012), 112.

⁵² Emeka C. Ngwoke, *The Gospel and Church in Service of Society* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 2016), 172.

⁵³ Damian O. Odo, "Dialectics on Theodicy in Job 9:1–24 in the Context of Christians in Enugu State" (PhD diss., University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2019), 126.

⁵⁴ Odo, "Dialectics on Theodicy," 127.

mystery that should not be interpreted from the standpoint of retributive justice, as the lamentable anguish of the righteous hero in Job 9:23–24 also shows. Job laments bitterly in the above verses that it does not pay to be righteous in society since God does not justify the innocent but treats both the righteous and the wicked equally, as he mocks at the calamity of the innocent when disaster brings sudden death. This perhaps underscores the fact that no mortal is righteous before God and that He has power over all his creation.

It could be argued that some Christians suffer circumstantially and not necessarily because they are sinners. A case in point is a caste system in some parts of Igboland through which people's fundamental human rights are violated and abused. Throwing light on human rights, Okwueze and Kanu⁵⁵ explain that human right is uniformly possessed by every human being because all human beings are equal in dignity. They, however, disclose that human rights is daily abused due to circumstances of birth. For example, the many victims of the caste system in Umuode in Oruku Community in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State suffer this circumstantial social stigma and now live as refugees in their own land.⁵⁶ Undoubtedly, this attitude of treating a person as a sub-standard human being because of the circumstance of the person's birth causes the victim unstoppable psychological pain. Job of the Old Testament found himself in a similar unpleasant life experience as he was ostracised and deserted by his people who interpreted his misfortune from the standpoint of moral transgression.

Onwu notes that many Pentecostal Christians believe that a Christian should not suffer.⁵⁷ This thought is prevalent among some Christians who patronise various charismatic ministries of healing and prayer for solutions to their sufferings.⁵⁸ The text of Job 9:1–24 has implications for the suffering Christians in Enugu State, as they could learn from Job's misery that being righteous or innocent does not exonerate one from misfortune. Christians are not immune to misfortune but, like Job, are being encouraged to have faith in God amidst their sufferings because not every misfortune is caused by sin on the part of the sufferer.

H CONCLUSION

Intellectual rationalism vis-à-vis undeserved suffering is a theological cynosure of the literary piece emanating from an ancient, gifted poet. A study of the

⁵⁵ See Malachy I. Okwueze and Rex Kanu, *Religion and Healing of Human Rights Abuse* (Enugu: Don Simons Publication, 2003), 19–45.

⁵⁶ Malachy and Rex, *Religion and Healing*, 48.

⁵⁷ Emmanuel Onwu, "Poverty and Prosperity in Nigeria Pentecostal Theology: A New Testament Critique," *Journal of New Testament Research* 1 (2007): 219.

⁵⁸ Kingsley I. Uwaegbute and Damian O. Odo, "A Psychological Reading of Romans 8: 12–19 for Igbo Christians," *Neotestamentica* 52 (2018): 53.

pericope of Job 9:1–24 implicitly affirms that the literary unit is a revolt against unexamined rationalism of the credulity of the teachers of retributive theology that the universe is fashioned on the principle of retributive justice as God rewards the wicked with misfortune and the righteous with fortune and prosperity. The study findings, in the context of Christianity in Enugu State, show that Christians suffer in diverse forms in the state. Equipped with this discovery, this study expostulates that it is fallacious to use the inflexible doctrine of retribution to explain that every misfortune that engulfs a Christian is caused by sin on the part of the sufferer.

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