

“You Are Engulfed with Misfortune because You Are a Sinner”: A Reading of Job 4:1–9 for Nigerian Christians through the Lens of African Biblical Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

Job was written as a dialectic to refute the theology of reward and punishment of the Deuteronomistic theology. Using rhetorical approach, this article analyses Job 4:1–9, a passage where Eliphaz responds to Job’s lament by advising him to accept suffering as divine punishment for sin. The study argues that Eliphaz’s attitude of civility and advising are desirable attitudes, which contemporary Nigerian Christians can emulate when faced with life’s hardships. Thus, the study concludes that the text can encourage civility, selflessness, and supportive counsel within faith communities, offering meaningful guidance for those in distress.

KEYWORDS: Job 4:1–9, misfortune, retributive justice, undeserved suffering, mystery, African Biblical Interpretation

A INTRODUCTION

Job belongs to the sapiential corpus of Israel. This ancient text was written as a dialectic to interrogate the religious and theological outlook of Deuteronomistic

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theology. Job 4:1–9 contains a well-crafted strategy of Eliphaz in response to Job's mournful soliloquy in chapter 3 that his suffering is unmerited. This pericope is delimited from verses 1–9 because the authors considered it significant, as it celebrates Eliphaz as a prudent interlocutor whose words are measured and carefully considered.¹ It is fascinating to note that Eliphaz's expression in this text seems to underscore both his admiration for Job's righteousness and blameless character as well as his sharp rebuke to him. Clines² contends that Eliphaz's words are fashioned with sneering and ambiguous tonality. Burnight³ maintains that Eliphaz accuses Job of failing to recognise that his misfortune and misery are clearly divine punishment for moral transgression. Therefore, Eliphaz rebukes Job and counsels him to acknowledge his sin, accept his misfortune and stop accusing God of being unjust. This is the view of the exponents of retributive justice who affirm that there is an existence of a moral order that dictates a person's fortune according to his or her righteousness or wickedness.

In this essay, Job 4:1–9 is studied in the light of Nigerian Christianity and aims to extract a contextual relevance of the text for the Nigerian Christians. A rhetorical approach has been adopted, which is complemented with an aspect of African Biblical Interpretation (ABI)—a scientific tool of interpretation that explores biblical texts through the lens of the African context and cosmology. This approach strives to extract the theological relevance of a biblical text for today's African society.⁴ The article is organised into five units. It explores an

¹ James L. Crenshaw, *Reading Job: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2011), 383.

² David J. Clines, *Job 1-20. WBC 17* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 33.

³ John Burnight, "Does Eliphaz Really Begin Gently? An Intertextual Reading of Job 4:2-11," *Biblica* 95/3 (2014): 347–370.

⁴ See Masenya, M. (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) and Kenneth N. Ngwa, "What Comes out of the African Pots and Calabashes," *Navigating African Biblical Hermeneutics: Trends and Themes from Our Pots and Our Calabashes* (eds. M. Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) and K. Ngwa; Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 1–19; Andrew M. Mbuvi, "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline," *Currents in Biblical Research* 15/2 (2017): 149–178; Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, "Rise of Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa," *HTS Theological Studies/Teologiese Studies* 64 (2008): 1347–1364; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v64i3.77>; David T. Adamo, "The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutic(s)," *OTE* 28/1 (2015): 31–52, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2015/v28n1a4>; David T. Adamo, *Explorations in African Biblical Studies* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 6; Elelwani B. Farisani, "Current Trends and Patterns in African Biblical Hermeneutics in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Myth or Fact?," *Scriptura* (2017): 1–20, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7833/116-1-1339>; Justin S. Ukpong, "Rereading the Bible with African Eyes," *JTSA* (1995): 3–16; Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (eds. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube; Leiden: EJ Brill, 2000), 24.

overview of scholarly thoughts on Job, the structure of Job 4:1–9, the literary context of the pericope and a close reading of Job 4:1–9 for Nigerian Christianity from the perspective of African Biblical Interpretation.

B OVERVIEW OF JOB

The book of Job is a product of a gifted literary artist. This ancient Israelite sapiential work is noted for its philosophical and theological rationalism on the enigmatic suffering of a righteous person. Aden writes that the author of Job ruminates at great length on the character and the problem of a good man's unexplained suffering.⁵ He avers that Job is written to address the enigmatic matter of exceptions to the general principle of retribution. Similarly, Anderson⁶ postulates that the Joban text tells the story of a good man overwhelmed by troubles. This literary composition has been explained as a sapiential work that reflects on human suffering, particularly the tribulations of the innocent, the possibility of divine complicity in underserved suffering, the nature of such a God and the appropriate response of the faithful when confronted with terrible injustice.⁷ Job is a didactic and poetic text framed by a prose narrative that navigates the weighty issues like the nature of wisdom and the mystery of suffering.⁸ This view agrees with the view that Job deals with the theological and intellectual aspects of underserved suffering.⁹ It has been explained that human suffering is a mystery and that adversity does not always mean that the victim is being punished by God for moral transgression.¹⁰ In fact, the book of Job teaches implicitly the proper conduct or attitude of human beings towards suffering rather than focusing on what causes it, which itself is beyond the realm of human comprehension. The book of Job belongs to the group of Old Testament texts known as Wisdom Literature, of which Proverbs and Qoheleth are two notable examples within the Old Testament Canon and Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon are classic illustrations from the Apocrypha.¹¹

⁵ Robert L. Alden, *Job* (The New American Commentary Vol. II; Nashville: Broadman & Holman 1993), 39–40.

⁶ Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 15.

⁷ Choon-Leong Seow, *Job 1-21* (Interpretation and Commentary; Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2013), 1–2.

⁸ Tremper Longman, *Job* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 34.

⁹ Clines, *WBC*, 65; JiSeong J. Kwon, "Meaning and Context in Job and Tobit," *JSOT* (2019): 627–643.

¹⁰ See Muner Daliman, Hana Suparti, Fajar Gumelar, Ezra Tari, Hengki Wijaya, "Understanding Theodicy and Anthropodicy in the Perspective of Job and Its Implications for Human Suffering," *HTS Theological Studies/Teologiese Studies* 78/1 (2022): 1–6; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7679>.

¹¹ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 2.

The literary exposition of Job is ranked as a *locus classicus* of Old Testament Wisdom revolt. It vehemently rejects the inflexible doctrine of retributive theology, namely, that the world operates according to the principle of retributive theory that appropriately apportions fortune and success to the righteous and misfortune and calamity to the wicked. There is no consensus amongst Old Testament scholars on the authorship or date of Job¹² Supporting this line of thought, this study posits that it is difficult to establish with certainty when Job was written since this is not mentioned in the text. The scholarly dating of Job has ranged from the 10th century BCE to the second century BCE.¹³ Kwon surmises that Job is perhaps written in a late Persian or early Hellenistic period.¹⁴ In his contribution, Aimers¹⁵ states that, "conventional interpretation has placed Job in the context of the crisis of confidence of the Israelite nation following the exile. Similarly, both Dell and Habel state that establishing the identity of the Joban author or a precise date of its composition is difficult because its author did not provide explicit historical clues which could lead to identifying a specific period in which Job was composed."¹⁶ Having explored the scholarly positions on Job, the next section looks at the structure of Job 4:1–9.

C STRUCTURE OF JOB 4:1–9

Job 4:1–9 may be divided into four units. The first part (vv. 1–2), highlights Eliphaz's civility and mild rebuke to Job. In this introductory part, Eliphaz employs a measure of courtesy to solicit Job's permission to counsel him. In the second division (vv. 3–4), Eliphaz extols Job's past virtues. He deliberately crafts his words as a doxology, perhaps to console Job and convince him to accept his current misfortune in good faith. The third section (vv. 5–6) shows that Eliphaz lambasts Job for his hypocrisy and inability to bear his malady. The last unit (vv. 7–9) describes Eliphaz's utterance that Job's misfortune is merited because of his moral transgression. He therefore charges Job to acknowledge his sin and stop accusing God of treating him unjustly.

¹² Alden, *Job*, 28; Marvin H. Pope, *Job, Introduction, Translation and Notes* (The Anchor Bible; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), xxxviii; Nahum N. Glatzer, *The Dimensions of Job: A Study and Selected Readings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 1.

¹³ See Carol A. Newsom, "Job," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (Revised and Updated; 3rd ed; eds. C. A. Newsom, S. H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012): 208–220.

¹⁴ Kwon, "Meaning and Context in Job and Tobit," 627.

¹⁵ Geoffrey J. Aimers, "The Rhetoric of Social Conscience in the Book of Job," *JSOT* 25/91 (2000): 99–107, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030908920002509106>.

¹⁶ Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (BZAW 197; 1st edition; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), 161; Habel, *The Book of Job*, 42.

D LITERARY CONTEXT OF JOB 4:1–9

Job 4:1–9 belongs to a macrocosm of the three cycles of speeches (4–27:23). This pericope begins with the chain of heated poetic dialogues between Job and three of his interlocutors. An analysis of the literary unit shows that it is connected to the lamentful soliloquy of the heroic figure in chapter 3. The magnitude of Job's affliction no doubt overwhelmed him and led to the explosion of anguish in chapter 3. Eliphaz clearly considers Job's words in 3:23–26 blasphemous because he accuses God of being unjust for punishing a righteous person as well as an affront to the ancient Israelite retributive dogma. Highly enraged by Job's accusatory remarks towards God in verse 23, Eliphaz feels compelled to counsel Job and inform him that his misfortune is merited. He states that God does not punish the righteous but afflicts the wicked with misfortune and calamity.

E CLOSE READING OF JOB 4:1–9

Eliphaz's utterance in Job 4:1–9 is the first recorded response from one of Job's interlocutors within the poetic dialogues. Eliphaz's articulation הַנְּסָה דְבַר אֱלֹהִים in verse 2 seems courteous and rebuking. "Could one try a word with you; will you be offended? But who could refrain from speaking?" This is a well-crafted utterance that is seemingly laced with an inspiring measure of civility. Pelham argues that Eliphaz's opening speech in this unit was coated with cautiousness and timidity.¹⁷ She notes that Eliphaz found it difficult to begin to answer Job, whose words have always had the power to command silence in the community but now have lost that power. Eliphaz's speech in this verse is marked with courtesy and appears apologetic. Pope observes that Eliphaz starts with a note of apology and requests Job's permission to lecture him in such a state of misery.¹⁸ The poet's expression, הַנְּסָה דְבַר אֱלֹהִים, underscores Eliphaz's reverence for Job and polite request to counsel him. For Habel, the poet identifies here a diplomatic hesitancy in Eliphaz as he cautiously responds to Job's violent imprecations in chapter 3 and inquires if Job is able to cope with appropriate counsel.¹⁹ Eliphaz's compassion is matched by his compulsion to speak. A close look at the word, הַנְּסָה, shows that it is a *piel* verb and in 3rd person masculine singular. This word is fashioned as a conditional clause and is translated here as "could one try." In the light of verse 2, Habel sees Eliphaz's words as "an apologetic statement of intent."²⁰ He notes aptly that the rhetoric of Eliphaz reflects the role of a friend offering wise counsel to Job. However, it could be argued that the second poetic line of verse 2 seems to suggest that Eliphaz's

¹⁷ Abigail Pelham, "Job's Crisis of Language: Power and Powerlessness in Job's Oaths," *JSOT* 36/3 (2012): 333–354; DOI: 10.1177/0309089212437997.

¹⁸ Pope, *Job, Introduction, Translation and Notes*.

¹⁹ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 124.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

intention is really to rebuke Job for saying that God has hedged his way in 3:23. Admittedly, the words of Eliphaz in this unit are fashioned in an ambiguous tone. In line with this thought, Burnight,²¹ asserts that what at first appears to be concern and encouragement on Eliphaz's part is in fact a sharp rebuke of Job for his complaints about his fear and inability to find rest. Employing a literary technique of erotesis that is used to ask a question without necessarily waiting for an answer in the second line of verse 2, the poet smartly transmits an upwelling of Eliphaz's great tone of urgency to respond to Job's inflammatory speech in chapter 3. An analysis of the poet's expression, וְעָצַר בְּמִלִּין מִי יוֹכַל (but who can refrain from speaking), no doubt suggests that Eliphaz's opening remarks in this unit "are not words of a comforting friend but are rather an utterance of one who is indignant at what he has heard and feels compelled to speak."²²

The second segment of the literary unit covers vv. 3-4 in which Eliphaz extols Job's past virtue. The poet uses the Hebrew יִסְרָתָּהּ to establish this fact. The word, יִסְרָתָּהּ, is the verb. It is fashioned in the second person masculine singular and it means "you have instructed." Taken together with the masculine plural adjective, רַבִּים (many), it is rendered as "you have instructed many." The gifted literary artist of this poem employs, in this part, a device of synonymous parallelism to showcase the immensity of Job's role as a counsellor and a supporter of those who are despairing and facing a crisis of existential reality. The technique of synonymous parallelism is expressed in Hebrew when an idea raised in the first line is repeated in the second line using a slightly different phrase or words.²³ With the aid of the Hebrew Piel verb, תְּחַזְּקֶנָּהּ (you have strengthened), the poet stresses the message to the reader that Job had not only instructed but had also given hope to the weak and the hopeless in society.

Andersen opines that Job's track record as a comforter has left a positive impression on Eliphaz, who reminds Job that his words have helped the weak from stumbling.²⁴ In other words, Eliphaz's utterance in (vv. 3-4) is a pleasant tribute to Job's reputation, especially his ability to assist others in their difficulties. An interpretation of the Hebrew construction, בּוֹשֵׁל יְקִימוֹן מִלְּיָד וּבְרַבִּים,

²¹ Burnight, Does Eliphaz Really Begin Gently, 347-370.

²² Ibid.

²³ Gareth Crossley, *The Old Testament Explained and Applied* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2002), 470; Malachy I. Okwueze, *The Old Testament as History, Religion and Literature* (Onitsha: African First Publishers, 2013), 240; Damian O. Odo, Kingsley I. Uwaegbute and Virginus U. Eze, "A Good Name Is Better than Wealth" in Proverbs 22:1 vis-à-vis the Related Igbo Maxim: "Ezi Afa Ka Ego" (Integrity Surpasses Wealth)," *OTE* 33/3 (2020): 428-444; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2020/v33n3a5>.

²⁴ Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, 57.

בְּרֵעוֹת תִּצְמַק, no doubt makes for an interesting reading: "Your utterances used to uphold him that was stumbling and the weak knees you made firm." From this expression, it could be inferred that Job was a man endowed with great wisdom whose words were a beacon of hope and a source of inspiration and strength to those assailed by the storms of life. Both Dhorme and Balentine aver that the verb, בּוֹשֵׁל (Job 4:), is used specifically to refer to a knee that gives way.²⁵ With such perspectives, Job is a notable and selfless counsellor who has offered an advisory role to support the bending knees (those who are weak and assailed by manifold storms of life) to withstand their misfortunes.

In the third division of the text (vv. 5–6), Eliphaz lambasts Job for his hypocrisy. He tells Job that he has become impatient because misfortune has בּוֹא (come) to him. He cannot fathom that Job, whose utterances have strengthened the weak to withstand their suffering, now fails to apply his wisdom to address his own situation. Arguably, Eliphaz no longer believes that Job's words are still invested with wisdom and relevance. Similarly, Pelham states that Eliphaz's audacity to speak to Job entails an admission that Job's words no longer possess the authority they once had.²⁶ In fact, for Eliphaz to be compelled to speak to Job at all necessitates an absolute reversal of Job's revered status. Hoffman's interpretation of v.5, "you dare to chastise others, but now, when you share their misfortune, you blaspheme God,"²⁷ is apt and fascinating. It could be argued that in this unit Eliphaz is telling Job that as a counsellor, he must have the wisdom to 'befriend' his own suffering.²⁸ In other words, a teacher should put his own teachings into practice.

In the last section of the pericope (vv. 7–9), the nexus between cause and effect is clearly stated. Eliphaz tells Job that no one who is נִקְיִי (innocent) ever אָבָד (perished). His statement underscores the notion of retributive justice. He claims that Job's misfortune is no doubt merited. Seow shows that Eliphaz uses an agricultural metaphor to emphasise that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between evil actions and negative consequences.²⁹ Eliphaz's idealism here shows that all people who are engulfed with misfortune are culpable of moral transgression, while those who prosper are no doubt good

²⁵ Édouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (Trans. H. Knight; London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 43; Samuel E. Balentine, *Job* (Smith and Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon: Smith and Helwys, 2006), 83.

²⁶ Pelham, *Job's Crisis of Language*, 336.

²⁷ Yair Hoffman, "The Use of Equivocal Words in the First Speech of Eliphaz Job (IV-V)," *VT* 30 (1980): 114–119.

²⁸ Newsom, "Job," 105.

²⁹ Seow, *Job 1-21*, 117.

people. For Habel, Eliphaz infers that Job, who is on the verge of perishing, is far from being innocent, but that if he acknowledges his sin, he may survive.³⁰

F READING OF JOB 4:1–9 FOR NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS THROUGH THE LENS OF AFRICAN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Nigeria is a heterogeneous and multi-religious nation with three major religions, namely African traditional religion, Islam and Christianity. The population of Nigeria is estimated to be 232,679,479.³¹ and the country is noted as having one of the highest numbers of Christians in Africa. The current number of Nigerian Christians is approximately 74.4 million.³² The seed of Christianity was firmly planted in Nigeria during the 19th century.³³ It should be noted that Nigerian Christianity is unique and may be different from other brands in other African societies. Uwaegbute describes this peculiar type of Christianity practiced in Nigeria as an “inculturated Christianity” that recognises and incorporates Nigeria’s cultural practices into Nigerian Christianity.³⁴ Uwaegbute explains further that Nigerian Christianity would include, although not in absolute terms, mainline Christianity represented by Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, Methodism, etc., the African Independent Churches (AICs) and/or Pentecostalism.³⁵ Ezechi avers that “the basic notion about inculturation is the expression of the dynamic relation between the Christian gospel and world cultures.”³⁶

At present, Christianity is rooted deep in the Nigerian society. However, the mainline churches hold different beliefs and teachings from the Pentecostal churches and approach the issue of suffering in society differently. Onwu states that the mainline churches maintain that suffering is part and parcel of a

³⁰ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 25.

³¹ See “Worldmeter on Nigerian Population.” Cited 24 October. Online: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/nigeria-population/>.

³² Statista 2024 “Christian Population in Africa 2024, by Country,” Cited 24 October. Online: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1368604/christian-population-in-africa-by-country/>.

³³ Hillary C. Achunike, *Dreams of Heaven: A Modern Response to Christianity in North-Western Igboland, 1970–1990* (Enugu: Africana-Feb Publishers, 2002), 43; Ikenga R. Oziogbo, *A History of Igboland in the 20th Century* (Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1999), 126.

³⁴ Kingsley I. Uwaegbute, *Material Possessions in Luke 12 and in Nigerian Christians’ Practise* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2023), 114.

³⁵ Uwaegbute, *Material Possessions in Luke 12*, 114.

³⁶ Joy C. Ezechi, *The Dead Are Never Gone: Odo Masquerade and Contemporary Realities* (Enugu: Kingsley’s, 2011), 235.

Christian's experience on the journey of faith.³⁷ The doctrine of the Pentecostals, however, is quite different. They believe that Christians should not suffer.³⁸ African Biblical Interpretation (ABI) is a unique biblical approach that considers the African reality and worldview as the subject of its interpretation of biblical text; ABI focuses on the "actualization of the theological meaning of the text in today's context so as to forge integration between faith and life and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation."³⁹ African Biblical Interpretation strives to adopt and make socio-cultural aspects of African contexts the subject of biblical interpretation.⁴⁰ What this entails is that ABI interprets a pericope from the optics of Africentrism and worldview.

As shown in the exegesis, Eliphaz employs politeness and respect in his speech to Job, who has been a beacon of hope to the hopeless and those being tossed about by the winds of misfortune, as he requests his permission to advise him. This has a theological relevance for Nigerian Christians. In African cosmology, showing respect to the elders of a society, especially those who have impacted positively on the lives of many people, is regarded as one of the salient cultural norms in the society.⁴¹ It is quite regrettable, however, that in the present Nigerian society, this cherished cultural value has been eroded by the wind of westernisation and colonisation. Okwueze laments that westernisation and modernity have had a detrimental effect on Nigerian culture in particular and Africa at large.⁴² The interpretation of the text through the optics of Africentricism argues that this seemingly fading cultural practice should be reinvigorated and sustained for the development and transformation of contemporary Nigerian society. The text under study reveals that Job is a notable man of wisdom and a person with a large heart who employs his talent to serve

³⁷ Emmanuel E. Onwu, "Poverty and Prosperity in Nigeria Pentecostal Theology: A New Testament Critique," *JNTR 1* (Umuahia: Glorious Dawn Publishers, 2006), 219–245.

³⁸ 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), 131–132.

³⁹ Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (eds. by G.O. West & M. Dube Leiden: EJ Brill, 2000), 24.

⁴⁰ David T. Adamo, "The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutic(s)," *OTE* 28/1 (2015): 31–52, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2015/v28n1a4>.

⁴¹ Odo, Uwaegbute, and Eze, "A Good Name," 435; Christopher O. Ugwu, "The Changing Role of Women in Igbo Society," in *The Nigerian Primary Education System: Trends Issue and Strategies for Improvement* (vol. 2; eds. B.C. Nworgu and B.C. Emenogu; Onitsha: Etukokwu Publishers, 1991), 39–49.

⁴² Malachy I. Okwueze, "Religion and the Decaying Moral Values in Contemporary Nigerian Society," in *Religion and Societal Development Contemporary Nigerian Perspective* (ed. M. Okwueze; Lagos: Merit International Publications, 2004), 240–254.

humanity. Generosity is a virtue that is highly valued and celebrated in Nigerian society. Employing the Hebrew word, קַיִן, the poet conveys the message to the reader that Job has been a great counsellor and generous man who has offered a notable advisory role and assisted many despairing people in the society to become strong and withstand the crises of existential reality.

In the last division of the literary unit (vv. 7–9), Eliphaz shows, *inter alia*, the nexus between sin and misfortune or suffering in human society. He employs the word, נָקִי (innocent), to establish that no righteous person is ever punished by God. Meanwhile, misfortune and suffering affect only the wicked people but not the righteous. The text of Job 4:1–9 shows that ‘innocent Christians or religious people’ can suffer misfortune in society, not necessarily because they are sinners, but because they are like the righteous Job of the Old Testament, who suffered greatly in a mysterious way. However, it should be noted that some people can be afflicted with misfortune in society as a result of their moral transgression. For example, it was reported that:

A girl from Enugu State in Nigeria was impregnated out of wedlock by a man. The siblings of this young girl instructed her to get the child aborted because they would not allow her to bring shame upon their family by giving birth to a child outside marriage. She pleaded with them to allow her to give birth to her baby, but they refused as they arranged for a ‘chemist man’ (*sic*) who came to their house and forcefully injected the poor girl and got her child aborted. The lady suffered complications and died in the process, but before she breathed her last, she placed a curse on her siblings, saying, ‘You forced me to abort my child against my wish; none of you will have children.’ This event happened in 1995 when none of her siblings had married. The brothers and sisters of the girl later got married, but up to this day, none of them has given birth to any child.⁴³

Odo’s submission and insight from the text of Job 4:1–9 show that both righteous and evil people can suffer misfortune in any society. Obviously, some people suffer because of their evil act. However, it would be wrong to judge that every misfortune or suffering is caused by sin on the part of the sufferer.⁴⁴ This point has contextual relevance for Nigerian Christianity, especially Pentecostalism, which, in the words of Ugwu, posits that “many Pentecostal pastors spell out clearly that suffering is not of God and has to be kicked out.” In fact, Christians in Nigeria (Africa) should realise that human suffering is often

⁴³ Odo, “Dialectics on Theodicy in Job,” 131–132.

⁴⁴ Damian O. Odo, Kingsley I. Uwaegbute and Onyekachi G. Chukwuma, “Exploring Retributive Justice in Job 9: 1–24 in the Context of Christianity in Enugu State, Nigeria,” *OTE* 36/2 (2023): 428–444; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/23123621/2023/v36n1a8>.

punctuated by a mystery that eludes human understanding. Luc⁴⁵ notes that suffering, often like an indiscriminate and destructive storm, defies human understanding, but God sees wisdom in it.

G CONCLUSION

The article examined Job 4:1–9 through the optics of African Biblical Interpretation. The utterance of Eliphaz in the literary unit is regarded as the first response of Job’s interlocutors in the cycles of poetic dialogue. An exegetical exploration of the pericope underscored that Eliphaz’s opening expression is laced with reverence and a great measure of civility. Eliphaz acknowledges Job as a famous counsellor who has rendered a selfless advisory role and strengthened many stumbling people in society to overcome the crisis of existential reality. The contextual relevance of the study underscored prudence and reverence, selflessness and generosity for the religious community in Africa, especially to Nigerian Christians. The study contends that both the righteous and the wicked can suffer misfortune in society, hence, it would be misleading to believe that if a Christian suffers, it means that the person is a sinner. This is a mystery that cannot be fully understood by mortal beings.

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