

Job 9:17–18 read through the lens of resilience for the Christian community in Benue State, Nigeria



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This article explores Job 9:17–18 through the optics of resilience within the Christian community in Benue State, Nigeria. In this passage, Job exemplifies a positive coping strategy in the face of misfortune, rejecting the insinuations of his friends that his suffering is a result of moral transgression. Job's bold stance and ability to maintain his integrity amid undeserved suffering highlight his resilience. By honestly expressing his inner turmoil and emotions before God, Job provides the Christian community in Benue State with a model for coping with misfortunes and feelings of divine abandonment. This study suggests that Christians should not adopt a passive response to adversity or distance themselves from God during difficult times; instead, like Job, they should genuinely preserve their burdens and express their anguish to God through prayers.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This study examined Job 9:17-18 through the lens of resilience within the Christian community in Benue State, Nigeria. It involved Old Testament exegesis, contextual biblical studies and resilience studies.

Keywords: Job 9:17–18; misfortune; divine abandonment; Christian community in Benue State; honest protest.

Introduction

The text of Job is a product of a gifted literary artist who ruminates on the complexities of unmerited suffering and the misfortunes that engulf the righteous or godly people in human society, despite the existence of a righteous God. Job belongs to the (Alter 2010):

[I]nternational movement of ancient near eastern wisdom literature in its universalist perspective whose poet is a bold dissenting thinker and genius. It dissents from a consensus of biblical writers and radical rejection of the anthropocentric conception of creation that is expressed in Genesis. (p.17)

Job is a work by the sages who found the optimism of Proverbs to be an oversimplification (Murphy 1983:20). Experientially, 'Job deals with issues that resonate with the enormity of suffering in the world' (Ngwa 2009:362). It is written as a polemic to interrogate the theology of the inflexible doctrine of reward and punishment of the Deuteronomist theology, which maintains that the righteous are blessed with success and fortune while the wicked are punished with evil and calamity accordingly. This is the theological position adopted by Job's interlocutors in the poetic dialogue as they strive to convince Job that his misfortune is merited. They attempt to recall him to the received traditions, which are accepted as common heritage within their community that God acts in accordance with justice, treating persons as they deserve (Newsome, Ringe & Lapsley 2012:211). Placing himself on a crucible lens, Job 'knows that his friends' common sense and their tradition are inconsistency with his own experience' (Newsome et al. 2012). Hernández (2022:4) writes that:

[T]he prosperity of the wicked is a major theological difficulty for Job, and consequently, a significant theological theme of the book, which is ever so conspicuous in the first two rounds of speeches. (p. 4)

Arising from this backdrop, Job in the poetic dialogue revolted vehemently against the friends' theology of credulity and protests that he is blameless yet suffers a torrent of misfortunes from God. In the literary unit of Job 9:17–18, the protagonist continues his verbal protestation and injustice of God against him. He laments that God unleashes his whirlwind and crushes him and multiplies his wound without cause. Leo Perdue (1991) states that God brutally assaulted Job as if he were a sinner and denied him the divine, life-giving breath and thereby exposing him to death. Amid this injustice and misfortune, Job did not turn away from God but was resilient in

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his vocalisation that God is afflicting and multiplying the wounds of the righteous person without any reason. Job's demonstration of audacity and ability not to succumb to his friends' innuendos that his misfortunes are merited underscores his resilience posture. Like Job of the Old Testament, the Christian community in Benue State, northern Nigeria, is undergoing a crisis of faith and existential reality as they are being killed in numbers by the notorious Islamic terrorists and Fulani herdsmen who attack them periodically in their place of worship. Resilience is the ability to maintain or display positive outcomes amid existential life challenges. Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000:1) explain that 'resilience refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity'. Rutter (2013) posits that resilience is demonstrated when some individuals have a relatively good outcome despite having experienced serious stresses or adversities. In a similar way, Garmezzy (1991) explains that to be resilient, one needs to exhibit functional adequacy despite an interfering emotionality as a benchmark of resilient behaviour under stress. Werner (1982) sees resilience as the capacity of individuals to cope effectively with the internal and external stresses of their vulnerabilities. This article, therefore, aims to employ the resilience lens to read Job 9:17–18 in the light of the Christian community in Benue State, Nigeria. The study is organised into three parts. The first division focuses on the structure of Job 9. The second part provides a close reading of Job 9:17–18 while the last part examines a dialectics on Job 9:17–18 vis-à-vis the crisis of faith amid the Christian community in Benue State.

Structure of Job 9

Job is a literary piece that reflects on the complexity of a good man's unexplained misfortunes. The book of Job, 'theologically is a radical challenge to the doctrine of reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked' (Alter 2010:17), and it has a total of 42 chapters written mainly in poetry with the exception of prose prologue (1–2) and epilogue 42:7–17 that are fashioned in narrative that Seow (2013:75) refers to as 'elegant in its apparent simplicity'. This sapiential piece has seven structures. The first section (1–2) is regarded as the narrative prologue. The second section (3:1–26) that opens the poetic exposition is Job's lamentful soliloquy. In this segment, the poet discloses that Job, unable to bear his mental and physical anguish any more, exploded bitterly and cursed the day of his birth. Langton (2012:460) writes that 'Job's opening speech in 3.1–10 is a satirical reversal of a birth incantation designed to undo his birth rather than to assist a birth'. Dell (2016:66) explains that the immensity of Job's physical and mental deformation exposes him to psychosomatic disorder. Ngwa (2009:361) describes the mental malady that Job suffers as more or less an 'artifact of violence'. In his contribution, Leo Perdue (1994:144–145) avers that 'Job's incantation in ch. 3 is a curse to destroy all creation'. The third section (4–27:23) contains three cycles of heated poetic dialogue between Job and his three sage friends. The friends employ the dogma of retribution and express inter alia that misfortune and suffering are the consequences of

wrongdoing and sin. Job refuted this inflexible doctrine of reward and punishment and claims that he is blameless yet suffers severely from God. The fourth section (28–31:40) is Job's monologue and contains the protagonist's yearning to encounter God in order to hear from him why he torments the righteous person (Job) without cause. The fifth section (32–37:24) contains Elihu's monologue. The poet in this unit discloses Elihu's insight into the inscrutability of God's nature. The sixth section (38–42:6) explains God's appearance to Job in the whirlwind and Job's submission before God. In this encounter between God and Job, the creator of the universe affirms that Job is blameless and has spoken right about him.

The seventh section (42:7–7) belongs to the narrative framework and is seen as the epilogue. It happily brings the book of Job to its end as Job's health and fortunes were all restored. Job 9:17–18 belongs to the third division of the book. The pericope narrates the protagonist's mournful devastation at God's injustice and affliction of misfortunes on him without any apparent reason. This literary unit is considered as Job's response to Eliphaz's utterance in 4:8 that his suffering is merited. Job demonstrates a resilient posture in his expression of innocence and protests energetically against God's apparent affliction of calamity on him without cause.

Hebrew Text of Job 9:17–18¹

הַנֶּחֱמָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעֲרָה יִשׁוּפְנִי וְהִרְבָּה פְּצָעֵי הַנֶּחֱמָה	for he torments me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause
וְלֹא יִתְּנֵנִי הַשֶּׁבַע רוּחִי כִּי יִשְׁבַּעֵנִי מִמְרִירִים	He will not allow me to get my breath but saturates me with bitterness

Close reading of Job 9:17–18

This section examines a close reading of the pericope through the lens of resilience. A curious cogitation on the poet's utterance *הַנֶּחֱמָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעֲרָה יִשׁוּפְנִי וְהִרְבָּה פְּצָעֵי הַנֶּחֱמָה* [for he torments me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause] in verse 17 underscores Job's perseverance and ability not to give up to the retributive dogma of his sage friends on the deed-consequence nexus between cause and effect. Employing these words, the poet transmits a message to the reader of Job's knowledge that it is God who afflicts him with misfortunes. The Hebrew word *יִשׁוּפְנִי* is a Qal imperfect verb and in the third person masculine singular. Standing alone, it could be rendered in English as 'he will crush me, or he crushes me'. However, its syntactic structure in this verse shows that it is being used in a habitual sense. In this context, the word is translated here as 'he crushes me', arising from the fact of Job's laments that God used to torment him often with a *בְּשַׁעֲרָה* [tempest] and increases his wounds or misfortunes without obvious reason. An analysis of this expression indicates that God's attitude or action of afflicting pains or wounds on Job has become a

¹The Hebrew text used here is from <https://biblehub.com/text/job> while the English translation provided is the author's rendition.

habitual practice or recurring phenomenon. However, it is quite impressive that amid this regular unleashing of terror and misfortunes on Job, he did not give up on God nor turn away from him but was persistent in his protestation that God is punishing a righteous person with נִצְעִי [misfortunes] without any cause. Of truth, this responsive reaction of Job highlights a positive coping strategy of individuals who are engulfed with misfortunes or are threatened by existential life challenges. Lee and Cranford (2008:213) posit that 'resilience is the ability to withstand or successfully cope with adversity'. Masten (2001:1) expresses that resilience 'refers to a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes despite serious threats to adaptation or development'. Commenting similarly, some researchers agree that resilience is concerned with individual variations in response to life challenges or misfortunes. They noted that some individuals succumb to stress and adversity, while others survive and respond well to the challenges associated with life's hazards (Ledesma 2014:2; Rutter 1987:316). An analysis of these views of Werner & Smith, Rutter and Ledesma align with the exhibition of our protagonist's strength in 9:17–18. Job did not embrace a passive response against his suffering nor subscribe to the friends' doctrine of retribution that his agony is caused by a moral transgression but rather responded positively towards his malady as he pours out his feeling before God, protesting that God cares nothing for me 'but treats me with disproportionate hostility' (Clines 1989:235). Speaking in this line of thought, Kushner (2012) asserts that:

[I]f we are angry at the way life has treated us but feel we cannot speak out against the unfairness of God's world, we are being emotionally dishonest in our prayers. Those are honest feelings, and we should be able to share them with God. (p. 51)

In this connection, Job's astonishing boldness and ability to continue insisting on his integrity amid misfortunes underscore his resilient spirit and capacity, which have been identified by researchers of resilience studies as positive coping strategies against misfortunes or extreme life challenges (Greene et al. 2002; Janas 2002; Ledesma 2014; Perry 2002).

In the second segment of the text, the poet expresses in verse 18 thus לא יתנני השב רוחי כי ישבעני ממררים [He will not allow me to get my breath but saturates me with bitterness]. The word ממררים is a Hebrew noun and in the masculine plural form. It is translated as 'bitterness'. Job uses this word to show that despite his 'blamelessness', God fills him with sorrow and bitterness. A careful reading of the poet's articulation in verse 18 shows that they are in a distant semantic parallelism with Eliphaz's expression in 5:18 that God causes pains but binds the wounds. Alter (2010) remarks that:

[T]his whole line is particularly addressed to Job's present predicament of terrible suffering. Job is encouraged by Eliphaz to imagine that his agony is reproof from God, who will heal him when he mends his sinful ways. (p. 60)

However, Job in this verse counters Eliphaz's thought and laments that God does not allow him to breathe but satisfies him with bitterness. Crenshaw (2011:75) maintains that:

Job sees no evidence that the one who wounds also heals as Eliphaz has claimed in 5:18. Job's experience is that God increases his misery, starting with a tempest and then multiplies the wounds for no reason. God has been so relentless that Job has not been permitted to recover. (p. 75)

This is in contrast with Eliphaz's dialectical view of God as one who both wounds and heals. Job expresses that God would not even permit him to recover or to vent his anger before injuring him again (Seow 2013:547). Leo Perdue (1991) writes that:

[N]ot only has the divine warrior brutally assaulted Job as though he were a sinner, but he does not allow the divine, life-giving breath to return. The gift of God's breath animates all creation while its withdrawal leads to withering and decay. Instead of the divine breath, God fills Job with bitterness. (p. 139)

Balentine (2006:169) opines that 'God crushes Job with the force of a whirlwind leaving him gasping for breath, God wounds him again and again without cause until he is satiated with bitterness'. It is quite probable that Job's lamentable anguish in the text under study was deliberately framed in antithesis to refute his friends' causal theory that Job's misfortune is caused by moral transgression. Newsome et al. (2012:211) express that while the friends buttress their arguments with tradition, Job knows that their common sense and traditions are inconsistent with his own experience; for Job to hold fast to his integrity means to insist on validity and authority of his own experience, even when it seems to be contradicted by what all the world knows to be true. This thought is in line with the contribution of Edward (2008) that:

Job's epistemology is then the opposite of his friends. Their world view is theoretical and abstract while his is felt in the bone. While they stumble in attempting to apply a general, traditional doctrine to the specific case of Job, he relies on what he personally knows and interprets the workings of the world in the light of his experience. (p. 66)

It is said that when God assaults the innocent without reason, it is divine justice, not human fidelity, which must be put on trial. It is well within reason to argue that the weight or gravity of Job's misfortunes could have been enough to weaken his strength and hence in this regard, make Job to shut up his mouth and subscribe to the thought of his interlocutors or even desert his faith and turn away from God. But interestingly, Job persisted and survived the ordeals. Admittedly, Job's persistent ability and insistence on his integrity when God crushes him with misfortunes and satisfies him with bitterness are not impatience but a demonstration of resilient attributes. Ngwa (2009:370) aptly postulates that it is not escape from suffering that distinguishes the noble religious Job but his resilient ability to withstand suffering or misfortune. This misfortune, in the view of Leo Perdue (1991:137), is without הַנֵּם (reason), an expression echoing the words of the divine judge in the prologue (2:3) 'you have incited me against him without cause'.

Dialectics on Job 9:17–18 vis-à-vis crisis of faith amid the Christian community in Benue State

Benue State was founded in 1976, and it belongs to the North Central geopolitical zone of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Benue State Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning 2025):

It lies roughly in the middle of the country and shares boundaries with six other states which include Nassarawa to the North, Taraba to the East, Kogi and Enugu states to the West and Ebonyi and Cross-River states to the South. It also shares an international boundary with the Republic of Cameroun on the South-East. Benue State has a landmass of 33,955 square kilometers and lies between Latitudes 6.5° and 8.5° North and Longitudes 7.47° N and 10 East. (p.1)

The estimated number of its population according to the National Bureau of Statistics online (2025:1) is 6.64 million people. Interestingly, the Christian population in Benue State is approximately 97% (Aid to the Church in Need); however, it has been described as an 'epicenter of Christian's genocide in Nigeria because of frequent killing of Christians in the area' (Odeh & Ekani 2024:1). Vatican News (2022) reports sadly that:

[A]t least 68 Christians were killed, with many more abducted or displaced towards the last months of 2022 in Benue State. The Jihadists' scale of killings, displacement, and wanton destruction of property in Benue State is really devastating and barbaric as they strive to depopulate the Christians in the area. (p. 2)

The impacts of these attacks are enormous. Thousands have been killed, properties worth billions destroyed and villages devastated, leading to hunger and displacement. It is bad to note that the Benue people, who are regarded as 'The Food Basket of the Nation', now have many of their citizens living in internally displaced people's camps, dying of hunger.

Fulani militias have (International Christian Concern 2024):

[K]illed approximately 50,000 people in Nigeria over the past four years. In Benue State alone, the numbers are staggering: 2,673 Christians were killed from 2019 to 2023. On Sunday, July 14, 2024, suspected Fulani extremists launched attacks on Benue communities, killing 13 Christian farmers and displaced many others. (p.1)

According to Odeh and Ekani (2024), there was a genocidal attack in Benue State on 17 May 2015, when Fulani terrorists ambushed church worshippers at St. Michael Catholic Church, Methodist, Apostolic Church, Deeper Life Church and Steward Church Egba Community, killing 105, including 50 Sunday School children. This tragic event created untold hardship and psychological torment for the victims and their family members. It is really disheartening that Christians should be massacred in their homes by extremist militants without cause. This re-echoes the lamentation of Job in 9:17 that God crushes him with a tempest and multiplies his misfortunes without cause. Obviously, these people did not commit any crime or wrongdoing for this misfortune that

beset them. In Benue State, thousands of Christians are living in the Internally Displaced Peoples' Camp (IDP) because of violent persecution against them. Pastor Barnabas, one of the victims, explains that thousands of Christians live in an IDP in Benue State following violent attacks from the terrorist group. Barnabas noted that he was working on their farm with his family members when the Fulani herdsmen invaded them with guns and machetes and shot and slaughtered two of his brothers and started chasing him, but God saved his life. He explains that his family members have lived in an IDP camp for five years in Benue State. It is terrible to live in this IDP camp because of hunger and hardship. We do not have good hygiene, we do not have water, we do not have toilets and we do not have good sanitation. Many people are dying. Last week, eight people died in this IDP camp (Open Doors 2024).

The government's failure to protect Christians and punish perpetrators has only strengthened the militants' onslaughts on the Christian community in northern Nigeria. It is recorded that the Islamic Fulani militants in July 2024 launched an attack on the Mbacher community of Katsina-Ala local government area, killing 18 Christians and wounding many others in Benue State. The militants reportedly 'went from house to house, gathering villagers, whom they brought to another location and shot them' (International Christian Concern 2024:1). The attacks are shockingly brutal. Many believers were massacred, particularly men, while women were often abducted and abused sexually by the mindless militants. According to Vatican News (2022):

Makurdi, the Benue State capital, houses 80 percent of the displaced people in the state. Despite financial challenges, the Church is doing its best to respond in order to relieve the sufferings of those in need, including providing food, spiritual needs and clothing for those in camps. (p. 2)

The Christian communities in Benue State demonstrate resilient capacity amid persecution from the Fulani Jihadists as they still hold to their faith and engage in church services. Voice of the Martyrs (2024) reports that 18 Christians, including women and children, were on their way to church services. On 24 November 2024, in Azege village when they were ambushed and gunned down by armed Islamist jihadists. This is an abuse and violation of Christians' fundamental human rights. A few months afterwards, these Islamist Jihadists (Aid to the Church in Need 2025):

[A]ttacked Anwase in Benue State and killed 47 Christians on the Christmas day and burnt down eight Catholic Churches, schools, clinics and other houses including the priest's residence. The parish priest and his assistant escaped death and fled to the bush for their lives. (p.1)

Despite this incessant and horrendous persecution of Christians in the area, many victims of Christian's persecution in Benue State IDP camp still attend and participate in church services in their place of displacement, praising God in the face of this malady (Open Doors 2024).

This agrees with the view of Vichealth (2015:6) that there are two critical conditions that must be met to be resilient,

which are exposure to a significant threat or severe adversity and the achievement of positive adaptation. The Christian communities in Benue State have been in constant threat of genocide from the Islamist Jihadists and have every reason to be angry with God, who watches them suffer severely without coming to their rescue. It is very challenging and heartbreaking that a just and powerful God should permit the wicked people to attack and kill innocent Christians for no just reason, yet fail to come to their aid. The resilient ability of Benue's Christians amid existential challenges is no doubt impressive and accentuates a similar resilient capacity of Job as the close reading of the text in verse 9:17 shows that despite God's habitual crushing and multiplying Job's misfortunes for no reason, he holds tenaciously to his faith and portrays a staunch antidote against adversity. Admittedly, this is a positive coping strategy as Ledesma (2014:1) shows that 'survival, recovery, and thriving are attributes of resilience and describe the stage at which a person may be during or after facing adversity'. Harold (2012:155) articulates that the 'resilience of human souls and their ability to find that even a pain-filled life and grossly unfair life worth living' underscores the astonishing resilience of the Christian community in Benue State despite their crisis of faith. A contextual reading of Job 9:17–18 in the light of Christian community in Benue State shows that being angry at God or protesting divine abandonment when good people suffer severely in a human society for no cause is not offensive before God but a sincere presentation of Christians' burden and feelings to God. In fact, Job teaches Christians that (Harold 2012):

[I]f we are angry at the way life has treated us but feel we cannot speak out against the unfairness of God's world, then we are being emotionally dishonest in our prayers. Those are honest feelings, and we should be able to share them with God. (p. 51)

A critical survey of Job's utterance in 9:17–18 underscores his vehement rejection of the doctrine of retribution. He protests against divine injustice and affirms that he is blameless yet suffers intensely. Our contextual reading of Job 9:17–18 in the light of the Christian community in Benue State has shown that their adversities or misfortunes are not caused by their own moral transgression or wrongdoing. This finding correlates with Job's case in the studied text, who suffers some misfortunes yet is righteous. The contextual implication of Job 9:17–18 through the lens of resilience teaches the Christian community in Benue State that adopting a passive posture towards misfortune is not a positive coping strategy against affliction. Job's resilient demonstration and ability not to keep silent against his misfortune in the study text give us a template for our grief, transforming experiences of personal eclipse into moments of profound human affirmation. His expressions of grief and despair give us hope, suggesting that our own outbursts may be signs not of weakness but of strength and even of hope (Scott 2020:225).

Conclusion

This article examines Job 9:17–18 through the lens of resilience in the light of the Christian community in Benue

State, northern Nigeria. The pericope celebrates Job's resilient capacity and astonishing insistence on his integrity. He protested against divine injustice and the abandonment of a righteous person amid misfortunes. Through this demonstration of sincere feelings and inner torment of his situations, Job implicitly teaches the Christian community in Benue State and the world at large that it is not morally wrong to protest or present their perceived injustice and undeserved suffering to God in prayers. This article argues that Christians should not adopt a passive response to misfortunes or turn away from God amid anguish; rather, it encourages Christians to be resilient in their faith and boldly present their burdens to God in prayer.

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