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Job 31 : the Sermon on the Mount in the Old Testament

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JOB 31:
THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

By
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This thesis may be duplicated.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BDAG W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature*

CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

HUCA *Hebrew Union College Annual*

JJS *Journal of Jewish Studies*

KJV *King James Version*

LXE *The English Translation of the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament*

LXX *Septuagint*

NASB *New American Standard Bible*

NCCHS R. D. Fuller, et al., eds., *New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*

NIV *New International Version*

NJPS *New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh*

NLT *New Living Translation*

NRSV *New Revised Standard Version*

TNIV *Today's New International Version*

RSV *Revised Standard Version*

VT *Vetus Testamentum*

ZAW *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Job is a bit of an oddity in the Bible. It has many characteristics that help it fit into the Old Testament, but does not strongly mesh with any of the generally recognized categories of biblical literature. It is not part of the first five books of the Bible – Torah. It is certainly not Deuteronomistic history. It is not the story of a prophet. It ends up in the category of wisdom literature. It shares a general concern for creation theology with the other wisdom literature (Proverbs and Ecclesiastes), while many of the other Old Testament books are focused on salvation history.¹ Even within wisdom literature Job diverges from the norm. Job does not tell the story typically found in the wisdom literature. It is definitely not the case here that: “What the wicked dreads will come upon him, but the desire of the righteous will be granted” (Proverbs 10:24 RSV). Job is righteous and Job suffers.

In Job the struggle of the faithful is faced head on: “If God is good, then why do bad things happen to good people?” What makes this question more difficult is that at first glance one might think the answer in the Book of Job is: “because God wants to prove Satan wrong.” The complexity and issues of Job are not something that has been figured out “once and for all.” Rather, Job’s story continues to unfurl for generation after

¹ William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Pub., 1996) 1-2.

generation of believers. Because of the fundamental nature of Job's questions, there is a great deal of diversity in the interpretation of the book even in contemporary scholarship.

In this milieu of meaning, all that is left is the human reaction to struggle and suffering. Job and his friends do a totally adequate and even exemplary job of demonstrating how humans process their struggles. Fingers are pointed, and everyone's views of God seem to fall completely short of providing an answer that is the least bit helpful.

Job 31

In the midst of all of this, Job makes an oath, an oath to end all oaths. Job makes it clear that he is righteous, and Ezekiel (14:14,20) and James (5:11) both attest to his righteousness. Upon first reading it is clear that this section is exceptional in the Old Testament, both for its scope and its severity.

When first reading Job 31 as part of the whole book, one can notice striking similarities to the way that Jesus approaches the questions of morality and ethics. It has commonalities to the Sermon on the Mount – something many people are very familiar with. Job seems to approach issues differently than the rest of the Old Testament. Dallas Willard, in his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, attempts to get at the essence of what ethics are for Jesus, and the life that Christians are called to live. In fact, in Willard's discussion of the Sermon on the Mount and the call to be disciples of Christ, Willard cites Job as an Old Testament example: "To be right sexually before God is to be precisely as Job was."²

² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 160.

One way to prove this connection is extremely mathematical: one could do a word count of the two sections of the Bible (Job 31 in the Septuagint and Matthew 5-7) to see whether there is a large correlation of words. There is, however, no such large correlation of words in these two texts. In spite of this, the connection and the similarities still show up, without the linguistic correlation. One can even find confirmation from articles such as Georg Fohrer's: "The Righteous Man in Job 31." Fohrer discusses this connection with Jesus several times.³ The similarity of what these men are saying is hard to miss.

In study of the Bible as a whole, the commonalities between these two texts become more obvious. Job 31 goes beyond legal requirements, and towards the righteousness reflected in Jesus' preaching. Here is found the thesis for this paper: Job 31 points from Torah and the prophets towards the righteousness of Jesus in the New Testament. Torah and the prophets were asking Israel to not do things that were illegal, while Jesus and Job are seeking to please God. Herein lies the difference. This is a very nuanced difference. Hence, the difference does not come out in mathematical analysis of vocabulary or verb tense. It is subtler than that, and becomes apparent in looking at how different biblical authors and characters talk about specific moral issues.

Structure of This Paper

This paper will look at three issues from Job's oath of righteousness in chapter 31: slaves' rights, treatment of orphans and widows, and attitude towards enemies. This paper will first examine the book of Job, and the setting and purpose of chapter 31. It will

³ Georg Fohrer, "The Righteous Man in Job 31," *Essays in Old Testament Ethics*, ed. James Crenshaw and John Willis, (New York: KTAV, 1974), 15-16.

also address the overall structure of Job, and talk about the purposes and context of oaths in Israel and in the ancient Near East. After giving context for this chapter of Job, the paper will look at the overall structure and content of Job 31. This chapter will explore the major issues that Job addresses with special attention being paid to the three issues of righteousness of this paper. The next chapter will look at these three issues in the rest of the Old Testament, looking at Exodus as representative of the Pentateuch, and Jeremiah as representative of the Prophets. This chapter will analyze the vocabulary used and look at relevant texts within each of these books. The final voice to be explored is that of the New Testament, represented by Matthew. This chapter will also address vocabulary issues that exist between the Hebrew Old Testament, the Septuagint, and the New Testament, in order to see how Jesus speaks about these issues of social righteousness. After examining all the relevant texts individually, the final chapter will compare how these issues are spoken to by the different authors and in the different contexts. It will look at how Job 31 sits between Torah and the Prophets, and the teachings of Jesus.

It is not within the scope of this paper to cover all the books of Torah or all the books of the Prophets. There is only space to make an approximation and an estimate. Exodus and Jeremiah will be the representatives for their respective categories. Exodus speaks to the issues of Torah as a whole, providing narrative and extensive law texts. For some topics it will be necessary to look at Deuteronomy for a fuller picture of what Torah has to say on the topics that Job addresses. Jeremiah is an exemplary prophet for topics covered, and for the length and variety of prophecy and narrative. The amount of dialogue from Jesus makes Matthew an appropriate representative of the New Testament

ethic. As each book of the Bible is discussed in detail, the paper will speak more to how each representative book was chosen in each chapter.

It is the assertion of this paper that mapping Job's oath in chapter 31 against the rest of the Bible will give a way to see how conversation about righteousness within the Bible has developed and spoken to succeeding generations. It becomes clear how the understanding of God's love and purpose has unfolded before the people of Israel for thousands of years. God's hopes and dreams will also continually unfold for his chosen people. Though many see what Jesus had to say as very radical, Jesus did not come to change the law; he came to make it more present (Matt 5:17). There is continuity in Jesus' message, just as there is in Job's. However, there is something more to say about the intent of God's law that Job's oath hints at, and Jesus lays it on the table.

With these points in mind, the paper will now expand on these topics in Job, as part of Torah teaching, prophetic teaching, and Jesus' teaching, starting with a look at the setting and purpose of Job 31.

CHAPTER 2
THE SETTING OF JOB 31

The thirty-first chapter of Job is a distinct part of the book of Job, and very distinct within the Old Testament. In chapter 31 Job argues for his innocence. This chapter will look at this section of Job and its location and function in the text of the book of Job. This chapter will also look at the context of Job as part of ancient Near Eastern culture, and part of the biblical and Hebrew culture.

Brief Overview of Job

The book of Job has four main sections. There is a prologue written in prose, a poetic dialogue between Job and his friends, God's response in poetry and then a brief epilogue in prose. The basic overview of the book is as follows:

- Prologue (Ch 1-2) Prose
- Dialogue (Ch 3-37) Poetry
 - First Cycle (3-14)
 - Job – First Lament
 - Eliphaz -> Job
 - Bildad -> Job
 - Zophar -> Job
 - Second Cycle (15-21)
 - Eliphaz -> Job
 - Bildad -> Job
 - Zophar -> Job
 - Third Cycle (22-27)
 - Eliphaz -> Job
 - Bildad (very brief) -> Job
- (Dialogue breaks down and Job speaks alone)
- Meditation on Wisdom (Ch 28)
- Job's Final Defense and a Call for Justice (29-31)
- Elihu Responds (32-37)

Divine Speeches - God Speaks (Ch 38-41) Poetry
 Epilogue (42) Prose
Figure 1 - Outline of Job.

In the prologue God and the Satan make a deal, and Job is afflicted as a test of his faithfulness to God. Job then begins to argue with his friends that he is innocent and does not deserve this type of punishment – this is the dialogue:

Job: “God has done this to me, yet I have done nothing”
 His friends: “God has done this to you, so you must have done something.”

As the accusations become harsher and harsher from his friends, Job persists in his innocence. Readers watching this story unfold know, because of the prologue, that Job is “blameless and upright” (Job 1:8 RSV). This comment comes from God’s own mouth. This knowledge shapes the way that you read the dialogues. Here resides the thirty-first chapter of Job. It is the last thing Job says until after the divine speeches. After Elihu’s diatribe – God speaks, makes his case known and consequently Job begins to live his life again – in what seems a far more liberated and exuberant fashion.

One of the main issues that is prevalent among many Job scholars is the arrangement of the text. Many of the most useful sources for this paper have contended that the text has been corrupted by scribes or by later editors/redactors of the text: Fohrer asserts this in his essay,¹ Michael Dick’s translation of the text, rearranges several verses,² and Snaith includes an entire appendix of possible re-organizing of chapters 24-27 by noted Biblical scholars.³ The paper will work a great deal with what these authors have put together. They offer many insights into the context and evolution of the Book of

¹ Georg Fohrer, “Righteous Man,” 3.

² Michael B. Dick, “Job 31, The Oath of Innocence and the Sage,” *ZAW* 95 (1983): 33-35.

³ Norman H. Snaith, *The Book of Job: Its Origin and Purpose*, (London: SCM, 1963), 100-103.

Job and of this chapter in particular. This paper argues, however, that readers are best served by reading the text as we have received it. Once one begins arranging the text, the text can now be subject to one's own motivations and desires and predispositions, and it not clear how any of these rearrangements provide insight into the book that cannot be gleaned from reading the text as it is.⁴

In all of this deconstruction one can look at how the 31st chapter sorts out. When Snaith is taking apart the Book of Job, looking for the earliest form of the text, he makes some assumptions about our chapter:

If we omit the three friends and all that they say, all that Job says in reply to them, together with Elihu and all that he says, also ch. 28, then we are left with chs. 3; 29-31, the Yahweh speeches (38-39; 40:6-41:26), and an apology (40.3-5) and recantation (42:1-6) by Job. All this is included within a prologue and an epilogue... This all makes a coherent story.⁵

This speaks to the essential part that chapter 31 plays in the drama of Job with God as it unfolds. Even with the deconstruction that so many scholars employ – chapter 31 still stands as pivotal in the story of Job. Readers know that Job is innocent from the introduction of the story. The 31st chapter makes it very clear that through all the debates and arguments with his own friends, Job knows his innocence also.⁶

⁴ Dick, "Oath of Innocence," 33-35. Dick's removal of the speeches of Elihu may be the most obvious example of the problems created by rearranging the text that we have received. His article does an amazing job of creating an understanding of how trial speeches worked in the rest of the Bible and in the ancient Near East. Dick neglects to consider how the current explanation of the trial metaphor could be reflected in the text as we have received it. Reading Elihu's speeches with Dick's insight into ancient Near Eastern and Biblical trial procedures, it becomes clear that Elihu is attempting to function as the judge or mediator in the case. God's appearance then disrupts the normal legal process in many ways – now the judge is the defendant – which makes the situation very odd before the first word comes out of God's mouth.

⁵ Snaith, *The Book of Job*, 7.

⁶ Sheldon H. Blank, "An Effective Literary Device in Job XXXI" *JJS* 2 (1951): 104.

Placement and Purpose of Chapter 31

Chapter 31, as stated previously, is situated as Job's very last appeal for justice, (משפט) his last chance to speak before God makes the case that Job has been asking for. It is a strong and determined discussion of what makes Job innocent of all the charges that have been levied against him by his "friends". The critiques of his friends have become more and more severe up to this point. The last comment of Bildad asks: "How then can man be righteous (צדיק) before God?" (Job 25:4) This is where the dialogue breaks down and Job seems to use his last breath to make his final case.

Fohrer makes several important points about the placement of Job's speech in the text. The first is that chapter 31 is often called the end of Job, but it has no intention of being the end, instead it is the progression towards the Divine Speeches of chapters 38-41. Job is demanding that this not be the end.⁷ The other point made is that this chapter sits as the third portion of what Job is saying. Chapter 29 explains Job's desire for his former good fortune, and chapter 30 explains Job's disdain for his current situation.⁸

The last line of Job 31 is "The words of Job are ended." This is where Elihu steps in to make his case. There is a small prose section, 32:1-5, which makes it clear that three of Job's friends have given up on talking to Job altogether, and a fourth, younger man comes into the picture - Elihu. Elihu is very angry, and in fact goes on for five full chapters. One of the places where Elihu quotes Job is a very interesting one – "I am innocent (צדיק), but God denies me justice (משפט)" (34:5 RSV). Elihu refutes Job's claim. He claims that Job is not innocent, and God denies no one justice. Elihu speaks about

⁷ Fohrer, "Righteous Man," 5-6.

⁸ Ibid., 4.

righteousness (צִדִּיק) many times in his speech: 33:12, 33:32; 34:5, 35:2, 35:7, and 36:3. Elihu speaks also of justice or right judgment (מִשְׁפָּט) many times: 32:9, 34:4, 34:5, 34:6, 34:12, 34:17, 34:23, 35:2, 36:6, 36:17, and 37:23. God uses both of these only once in the divine speeches: “Would you discredit my justice (מִשְׁפָּט)? Would you condemn me to justify (צִדִּיק) yourself?” (40:8 TNIV) This responds directly to many of the accusations that Job levies in chapter 31.

Job’s Final Discourse

As stated earlier, this is the final chapter of a three-part appeal by Job for justice. Job is the only one talking from chapter 26 till the end of chapter 31. There is a pause after he gives a homily in praise of wisdom in chapter 28, and then begins his final appeal. Job argues the case simply. Chapter 29 states how Job’s life was, chapter 30 states how awful his life has become, and chapter 31 states that Job has done nothing to deserve this.

Chapter 29 shows Job’s longing for the past. Job makes clear that he was blessed, and that all respected him; for when he entered the square “the voice of the nobles was hushed” (29:10 RSV). Job makes it clear that all was wonderful in his world – his life was amazing: “...my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil” (29:6 TNIV). What truly demonstrates Job’s character is that this chapter does not only speak about “the good things of life,” but makes it clear that part of the goodness was Job’s ability to serve others, to care for the less fortunate: “I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame...I broke the fangs of the wicked, and snatched the victims from their teeth” (29:15,17 TNIV). Job was confident that he had lived a good life, and expected to die peacefully and with honor in his own home (29:18).

Chapter 30 spells out the pain and suffering that has come upon Job through all of the issues that he is facing. Job does a wonderful job of contrasting in this chapter the good times before all these issues befell him. The men who paid Job respect before, now mock him (30:1). He is not only disrespected by prominent men, but by the “abase and nameless brood” (30:8), that is described in detail in the first eight verses of this chapter. One thing that Habel brings to light in his commentary is that the words of Job accuse God of failing where Job has not.⁹ Job made it clear in chapter 29 that he “took up the case of the stranger” (29:16 TNIV). However, Job cries out to God, but he does not answer (30:20). Through all of this, Job is left with the dirtiest of the dirty. Job finds himself surrounded by outcasts, spending time with unclean animals (30:29).

Chapter 31 As Oath

It is important to note what type of literature this is. Job 31 is classified as an oath. There are many oaths in the Bible besides this one. The Catholic Encyclopedia begins explaining an oath as “an invocation to God to witness the truth of a statement. It may be express and direct...or implicit or tacit...”¹⁰ It is important to look at this text as an oath not for the sake of form criticism, but for the sake of understanding why this chapter exists as we have it.

Blank analyzes the function of the oath throughout the Old Testament, and also makes a point of looking at what makes this oath special. For an oath to be “complete”

⁹ Norman Habel, *The Book of Job. The Old Testament Library*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985): 434. Habel illuminates the beauty and mastery of the Joban poet through his analysis of the parallelism that flows through the entire book.

¹⁰ A. Vander Heeren, “Oaths,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11176a.htm> (accessed December 20, 2006).

under Blank's criteria there must be an apodosis, a consequence. However, nearly all of the oaths in the Old Testament lack the apodosis. Blank looks at David in 2 Samuel 3:35:

David swears: "God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or aught else, till the sun be down." This is the invariable form of the eleven Biblical examples of this oath formula. But that is not all...frequently...even the evasive words "God do so to me, and more also" are entirely omitted.¹¹

It is starting to become clear that this is a very different kind of oath here in Job chapter 31. It would be hard to think that anyone well versed in the Bible would be able to look at this text without a shudder of awe. There was a real belief in the power of the spoken word. From this belief arose a sort of "word-taboo" in ancient Israel. An actual oath, with the inclusion of the apodosis, the consequences, only shows up three times in the entire Bible. The other two of these occurrences are in Psalm 7:3-5, and Psalm 137:5-6.¹²

Blank designates Job as the third location of a complete oath. However, there are at least four clear instances of complete oaths in this one chapter alone. Job is not only asking for repercussions, but fairly grim ones at that. He will end up losing an arm, having an adulterous wife, and losing his crop to weeds and other harvesters.¹³ The oath is one part of Job's final appeal to God. This of course must also be put in the broader context of the book as a whole. There is a function that is served by this oath. This speech takes righteousness one step further, and goes far beyond any of the other oaths in the Bible. Most oaths are regarding one act or one issue of righteousness. Job lists at least

¹¹ Blank, "Literary Device," 106.

¹² Ibid., 106-107.

¹³ Ibid., 107. Blank splits up the complete oaths in chapter 31 of Job in this way: 1. vs. 5-8 2. vs. 9-10 3. vs. 13, 16-17, 19-22 4. vs. 38-40.

five different ethical issues and possibly as many as fifteen depending on which biblical scholar you listen to.¹⁴

Job as Trial Speech

As stated before, Habel speaks a great deal in his commentary on the parallels between the things that Job accuses God of, and the claims of Job's own righteousness made in Chapter 31. One example of this comes from the commentary on vs. 13-15:

The ironic side of Job's claim to have treated his "slaves" ('ebed) with equity and justice is its bitter reminder to God that Job had earlier accused him of treating human beings as slaves forced to labor on earth, where they longed for death. In his opening speech to the council of Heaven YHWH had spoken of Job as "my servant/slave" ('ebed, 1:8). Now Job implies that he, not God, has demonstrated how a "slave" should be treated in juridical matters.¹⁵

We can see that Job is entering a high-stakes dialogue. Job has called God to the mat. Throughout this conversation, Job has challenged his friends' concepts of God and their understanding of God's justice and righteousness. However, this issue does not seem to be of major concern to God in his response to Job.¹⁶ There is a major shift in the way that Job argues compared to that of his friends. Job's "Oath of Purity" in chapter 31 is one of the best examples of Job's ability to speak differently than the way his friends speak. While his friends speak of negative modes of righteousness, one sees Job start to speak in terms of things to do – good things.

¹⁴ The next chapter of this paper will expand on the ways different authors divide up the issues that Job raises.

¹⁵ Habel, *The Book of Job*. 434.

¹⁶ There are scholarly questions being raised about God's pursuit of human justice. For a compelling argument for the complete otherness of divine justice see Matitiah Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job," *HUCA* 37 (1966): 73-106.

From this structure one can begin to think about the implications of this entire book as a trial. Many scholars note the juridical tone of much of the Book of Job. The trial metaphor lends itself to understanding what is going on between Job and his friends, and may lend insight into God's ultimate response. This paper will not spend time on making sense of the entirety of the Book of Job, but will stay focused on how the trial understanding of the book affects the function and purpose of the 31st chapter in this book.

Michael Dick adds a great deal to this conversation. He sees this chapter as a pivotal piece of the trial that we are witnessing. Dick examines both biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts for an understanding of the function and purpose of what Job is saying in the thirty-first chapter. If we look at the story of Joseph's brothers in Genesis 44, we can see a similar structure to what is going on in Job. When Joseph accuses his brothers of stealing the silver cup, they respond with a sort of trial challenge. The brothers do not simply say, "We did not steal the cup." They say: "With whomever of your servants it be found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves" (Genesis 44:9 RSV).¹⁷ These oaths were very common in the ancient Near East, and were a very common way of resolving issues in the Bible:

The oath of clearance was common juridical procedure in civil cases throughout the Near East from Babylon to Elephantine. Its widespread usage in Israel is implied by the reference in Solomon's temple prayer (1 Kgs 8:30-32 // 2 Chr 6:22-23).¹⁸

There is also another portion of the trial that shows up in this chapter of Job.

There is a specific trial oath that Job speaks in verses 35 thru 37 of this chapter:

¹⁷ Michael B. Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in Job 31," *CBQ* 41.1 (1979): 45.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

If only I had some one to give me a hearing!
 Here is my mark! Let Shaddai answer me!
 Let my opponent write out an indictment!
 I swear that I shall wear it on my shoulder,
 I shall fasten it on like a crown.
 I shall tell him the number of my steps,
 I shall approach him like a prince. (Job 31:35-37)¹⁹

Job is making an appeal for a trial:

An examination of Biblical and extra-Biblical legal documents establishes 31:35 as a defendant's official appeal before a third party for a civil hearing at which the judge would compel the plaintiff to formalize his accusations and to present any supporting evidence.... the request is ordinarily made after all attempts at an informal arbitration had been exhausted....²⁰

This idea fits the situation that we find in Job. Job has pleaded his case to anyone and everyone that he can find. He has completely exhausted three of his friends, and now the back-up hitter is coming in to address him. We can start to see the gravity of what Job said. Job was no longer speaking metaphorically about a trial before God, but was making the outrageous request for a trial before God. In many ancient courts, there would be no case until such a pledge of innocence was taken.²¹

Job has the interesting situation of being charged with general moral depravity. Job is not charged with a specific issue as someone in a court would be. This sets the stage for our conversation. If Job knows that he is righteous, but is accused that somewhere along the way he has sinned against God, how is he to defend himself from that accusation? Job is forced to proclaim his righteousness entirely. Job names all that he can think of. Every wrong that he has avoided and every good that he has done is listed in the hopes of receiving a hearing with God. This is one place where our concept of trial

¹⁹ Dick, "Oath of Innocence," 36.

²⁰ Dick, "Legal Metaphor," 38.

²¹ Ibid., 43.

goes horribly awry with this story.²² Job has no list of accusations, only loss and pain that he himself considers to be a judgment of God. His friends are there to support any concept of God's punishment as just and deserved.

Job, backed into a corner, has done all he can to capture as comprehensive a list of his virtues as he can. He has put together a very encompassing group of moral rights – of things that we should do to please God – to do God's work in the world. Through this trial for general moral failure we get something amazing. We have an intentionally staggering piece of literature that documents what it means when God says that Job is “a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 1:8 RSV). Blank's argument is important: literary devices used in this story indicate a very serious concern of the author to demonstrate the seriousness of the case and the charge. From here we can discern the values of the Joban poet.

²² Dick, “Legal Metaphor,” 48-49. Dick has a full discussion of all of the potential issues and parallels of the book as a trial. He points out another issue of looking at Job as a trial – that of God being the defendant and judge. This is something that Job points to as well in 9:33, “If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both,”

CHAPTER 3

ETHICAL CONTENT OF CHAPTER 31

After looking at the setting and several understandings of the purpose of the 31st chapter of Job, it is now important that we analyze the content of the text. In this chapter of this paper, we are going to look at how some scholars address and approach this chapter – how they sort and group the moral issues presented by Job. First we will look at two very different methods of addressing and processing this text, then we will put together a method of grouping for the purposes of this paper. Finally, we will enumerate and explore three of the sins that Job speaks to so that we can compare the biblical voices across the entire canon.

Grouping Strategies

There are many differing opinions on how to arrange and categorize the claims and the sins and promises that are made by Job 31. What makes it confusing is discerning what we are looking at. Should we split the issues apart by individual “sins” or “virtues” or even the types of sins listed in this chapter? Phillip the Priest is quoted as saying: “[Job] describes his justice, and especially his mercifulness and virtues, which he enumerates to fifteen in all...”¹ Fohrer enumerates 12 virtues in his essay on “The

¹ Philip the Priest, “On Job,” in *Job Ancient Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Manilo Simonetti and Marco Conti (Illinois: InterVarsity, 2006): 159.

Righteous Man in Job 31”.² Newsom actually states that there are five groups of oaths in Job’s larger oath.³

The numbers that one ends up with have a lot to do with how one looks at the text. This paper will address two methods of organizing the text. The first we will look at is the one Norman Habel uses in his commentary on Job. It is a very detailed line-by-line exposition of the chapter, looking at all the elements of the oath structure. The second process will be Carol Newsom’s grouping of the text into five larger sets of oaths. Using these concepts we should be able to examine the contents of the chapter, and compare them with other parts of the Bible.

Habel

Norman Habel, in his commentary on Job, breaks apart the categories and issues of Job 31 quite well, categorizing each verse. Newsom’s method paints with much broader strokes, while Habel’s method gives us pause to look at the structure of the chapter in detail. Each verse is categorized as sin, sanction, or comment.⁴ Habel uses the word “sanction” to talk about the element that Blank refers to as an “apodosis.”⁵ The pattern is thus: Job will name a sin, and he will either comment on why he would never do it, or he will talk about the sanction or punishment that he should get if he does commit it. Habel’s outline, modified slightly to include vv. 1-6 and 35-40, is as follows:

² Fohrer, “Righteous Man,” 7.

³ Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University, 2003), 195.

⁴ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 430.

⁵ Blank, “Literary Device,” 107.

| | |
|---|--------|
| Covenant oath and opening challenge | 31:1-4 |
| Sin: Lying and deception | 5 |
| Comment: Request for weighing in scales of righteousness (צדק) | 6 |
| Sin: Impurity of heart and hand | 7 |
| Sanction: Loss of progeny | 8 |
| Sin: Adultery in thought and deed. | 9 |
| Sanction: Abuse of Wife by others | 10 |
| Comment: a. Sin identified as criminal offence | 11 |
| b. Sin as inherently destructive | 12 |
| Sin: Dismissing slaves' rights (משפּט) | 13 |
| Comment: a. Same standard for judge and accused | 14 |
| b. Common origin as ground for equality | 15 |
| Sin: Hardheartedness to the poor | 16-17 |
| Comment: Job as father to orphans | 18 |
| Sin: Callousness to the unclothed | 19 |
| Comment: Blessings from those Job clothed | 20 |
| Sin: Perversion of Justice for Orphans | 21 |
| Sanction: Broken Arm | 22 |
| Comment: Fear of God's punishment is reason for the behavior. | 23 |
| Sin: Trust in riches | 24-25 |
| Sin: Worship sun and moon | 26-27 |
| Comment: Sin identified as criminal offense and betrayal of El | 28 |
| Sin: Cursing foes and rejoicing in their fall | 29-30 |
| Comment: Job's household harbored no hatred. | 31 |
| Sin: Inhospitality | 32 |
| Sin: Hypocrisy | 33 |
| Comment: Fear of public reaction | 34 |
| Request for trial and challenge | 35-37 |
| Sin: Abuse of land and Owners of land | 39 |
| Sanction: Corruption of the crops | 40 |
| “The words of Job are completed” | 40 |

Figure 2 - Habel's Outline of Job 31.⁶

Using Habel's method, with the additional sins listed in verses 5 and 39, we get 13 unique “sins” enumerated in Job's oath of purity. This is a good starting point for us to build on. Newsom will add some additional insight to this listing of sins.

⁶ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 429.

Newsom

Newsom uses far broader strokes to categorize the issues of righteousness that are contained in Job 31. She puts everything into five categories, following the textual order as we have it:

Considered topically, there are five groups of oaths, interrupted by Job's wish for a hearing in verses 35-37. The topics covered include sexual ethics and general morality (vv. 1-12), justice and social obligation (vv. 13-23), ultimate allegiance (vv. 24-28), social relations (vv. 29-34), and land ethics (vv. 38-40).⁷

Now we can draw this out against the sins that we have looked at with Habel above:

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Sexual Ethics and Morality | 31:1-12 |
| Sin: Lying and deception | 5-6 |
| Sin: Impurity of heart and hand | 7-8 |
| Sin: Adultery in thought and deed. | 9-12 |
| Justice and Social Obligation | 12-23 |
| Sin: Dismissing slaves' rights | 13-15 |
| Sin: Hardheartedness to the poor | 16-18 |
| Sin: Callousness to the unclothed | 19-20 |
| Sin: Perversion of Justice for Orphans | 21-23 |
| Ultimate Allegiance | 24-28 |
| Sin: Trust in riches | 24-25 |
| Sin: Worship sun and moon | 26-28 |
| Social Relations | 29-34 |
| Sin: Cursing foes and rejoicing in their fall | 29-31 |
| Sin: Inhospitality | 32 |
| Sin: Hypocrisy | 33-34 |
| Request for trial and challenge | 35-37 |
| Land Ethics | 38-40 |
| Sin: Abuse of land and Owners of land | 38-40 |

Figure 3 – Habel and Newsom Combined Outline, Job 31.

Combining Newsom's and Habel's analyses, we start to see an overall structure of the document, and we also get to see what the ethical issues of interest are. We see what Job is calling out as a sin – or as some offence to God. Using Newsom's categories we

⁷ Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 195.

start to see that these issues fit together with a certain level of coherence. With these tools and figures as reference points, let us begin looking at how to take on these issues in the remainder of the paper.

Issues to Be Focused on in This Paper

As stated in the previous chapter, what we have in the 31st chapter of Job is something we do not see very much of in the rest of the Bible. Many scholars agree that there is a sort of “raising of the ethical bar” by Job in his testimony. He has made claims for righteousness that no other biblical individual makes. This gives us a sort of ethical groundwork of the Joban poet from which to make some comparisons with the rest of the biblical testimony as to what is required of a righteous man, focusing beyond legal statutes to ethical standards.

I contend that there is a level of intensity in this chapter that makes it stand above any others in the Old Testament. The severity also makes it stand above and beyond what is expected of Job. Job 31 does not speak to matters that are legally prosecutable. The sins that we have listed are generally ethical issues, and not issues of legal ramification.⁸ Job makes it clear that in his mind, these are all punishable offences by God. However it is clear that most of these things are not punishable through the legal system. Job appears to go beyond the requirements of the day for righteousness. Job seems to move beyond the way of judging people’s action only by its result, and instead focuses on the intention of the action.⁹ Let us look a little more in depth at some of the sins that we have isolated from this text.

⁸ Fohrer, “Righteous Man,” 13.

⁹ Ibid., 13.

As we go through these sins, it becomes obvious that the issues are not related to the actions alone. They point toward the attitude, which would bring about such an action. When Job talks about adultery, he deals with “lurking and coveting” – not with the action of adultery, just the thought of it. Some Jewish scholars even suggest that verse 32 indicates that Job has designed his house in such a way as to keep the door always open for visitors.¹⁰ He goes so far as to ask God to weigh him, to show God that he is blameless in verse six. When Job talks about the perversion of justice for orphans, not only is Job caring for the orphan, but he acts as a father to them. His motivation and desire is wholeness in the world. Citing callousness to the unclothed as an offence that could be held against him - Job clothes the naked. “The focus of Job’s oath of purity therefore, is not primarily on sins against the letter of the law, but on the motivations and attitudes of the person taking the oath.”¹¹

It is not within the scope of this paper to go into detail about all of the assertions of what it means to be righteous in Job 31. Instead this paper uses the three claims that Job makes which appear to be more radical than the others. Issues have been chosen also because of their presence in other Old Testament and New Testament texts - which will allow us to compare and reflect on these texts. First, we will consider Job’s commitment to his slaves, and their case (משפּט) (31:13-15). Secondly, we will consider his actions towards the fatherless and the widow (vv.16-18). Finally we will look at Job’s refusal to curse his enemies (vv.29-30). Examining Job’s responses to these issues will illustrate the exceptional nature of his claims.

¹⁰ Moshe Eisemann, *Job* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1994), 270.

¹¹ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 430.

Treatment of Slaves

Many scholars point towards Job's opinion on treatment of slaves in verses 13-15 to set new standards for the treatment of slaves. Job actually makes it clear that he would not deny justice to his slaves if they brought charges against him – and that the same God formed them both in the womb. Job first grants these slaves justice, which is a rare thing in the ancient world.¹² The truly remarkable statement, however, comes in verses 14 and 15:

What then would I do when El rises in court?
When he examines me, how will I answer?
Did not he who made me in the belly make them,
The One fashion us both in the womb? (Job 31:14-15)¹³

Job makes himself equal in the eyes of God with his slaves, even seeking justice for the maidservant. This claim stands out in the Old Testament.¹⁴

Richard Neville calls the uniqueness of these three verses on slavery into question. While disagreeing mainly with the majority opinion of verses 13-15 as landmark in the treatment of slaves – Neville still agrees that Job is going above and beyond his legal requirements.¹⁵ Neville makes the contention against the radical nature of the oath by saying: “It makes little sense for [Job] to claim that he is innocent of breaking a standard of ethical conduct that was unknown to his contemporaries...”¹⁶ This

¹² Marvin H. Pope, *Job: The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1965), 203-204.

¹³ Habel, *Job*, 423.

¹⁴ There are some texts that hint at this in Proverbs: See Prov 14:31; 17:5; 20:12; 22:2; and 29:13. These texts address the equality of the impoverished among the community. They do not go so far as to address the servants as equals. Pope in his Job commentary mentions that Malachi 2:10 also points to this idea of universal fatherhood, but again falls short by only addressing the nation of Israel: Pope, *Job*, 204.

¹⁵ Richard W. Neville, “A Reassessment of the Radical Nature of Job's Ethic in Job xxxi 13-15,” *VT* 53.2 (2003): 181-200.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

seems to neglect the setting and purpose of the oath that Job is swearing: its purpose is the extremity of the oath. It is more severe than what anyone would expect. This is why the inclusions of sanctions against Job for failing to meet these criteria are included. The sanctions are uncommon and shocking – just as is the claim that the slave and the free man are on equal footing.¹⁷

Care for the Orphan and the Widow

Verses 16 and 17 of chapter 31 appear to be a direct response to Eliphaz's accusations in 22:9.¹⁸ Here Eliphaz make the claim that: “[Job] sent widows away empty handed and broke the strength of the fatherless” (Job 22:9 NIV). Job makes his innocence as clear as he possibly could. The call of God to God's people is clear: we are to care for the poor. This is not something unique that Job has put forward.¹⁹ And in fact that is why Eliphaz makes the accusation.

Job makes an emphatic claim that points towards a far deeper concern for the underprivileged than we see anywhere else in the Old Testament. Job says about the orphan and the widow: “from my youth I reared him like a father, from infancy I guided her” (31:18).²⁰ Job has not only provided food for these people, but has opened his table to them (v.17) and has made an effort to be a part of their lives. He has offered not only food, but also guidance and compassion for these people who have struggled so hard. This is a continuation of Job's practice of protecting and nurturing the less privileged in

¹⁷ Blank, “Literary Device,” 107.

¹⁸ Pope, *Job*, 204.

¹⁹ For texts calling on God's people to care for the poor see: Isa 58:7; Prv 22:9; Jas 1:27.

²⁰ Taken from Pope, *Job*, 198.

the community.²¹ It is clear that giving food and clothing to the impoverished is not enough for Job. His holistic response to the suffering calls on him to provide more than food alone.

Attitude Toward Enemies

The Old Testament is replete with disdain for enemies – from the stories of Joshua to the retribution in the imprecatory Psalms.²² Job makes a huge step towards the loving of one's neighbor that is called for in the Sermon on the Mount.²³ The statement has a powerful ring to it:

Did I rejoice at my enemy's ruin?
 Did I celebrate when evil befell him?
 Never did I let my mouth sin
 By asking for his life with a curse. (Job 31:29-30)²⁴

Here Job makes it clear that he never cursed his enemy. Not only did he love and support his neighbor, but refrained from even cursing his enemy. This goes far beyond any expectations that are noted in the Pentateuch and beyond what even the prophets call for. Job has moved past asking God to “break the teeth in [the enemies'] mouth” (Psalm 58:6 NIV).

As we look at all that Job has presented in chapter 31, we see a text that stands out, and looks forward to the ethical standards of the New Testament. We see promise of new ways to relate to our world that will allow us to grow and work for wholeness. We are no longer cursing our enemies, no longer considering slaves to be of lesser creation,

²¹ See other sections of Job, e.g.: 24:1-5; 29:11-17; 31:17-20.

²² Some of the imprecatory Psalms are 58, 109, or 137.

²³ There are some similar points to this made in Proverbs (24:17-18 and 25:21-22).

²⁴ Habel, *Job*, 424.

and no longer considering our obligation to the poor filled by simply sending money or food.

It is important to note that our 21st century moral constructs are very much different from what is going on in Job's oath. We cannot miss the misogyny of the oath. For example, in verses 9 and 10, though Job is ready to be punished for being seduced only in his heart – the sanction that he requests is that other men would have their way with his wife. Carol Newsom addresses this issue:

For readers whose own moral worlds are constructed quite differently than Job's, it is easy to point out the dark undersides of the values he so prizes: the misogyny that underlies his sexual ethics and the necessary structural inequalities that fund the paternalistic social system.²⁵

Having acknowledged this fact, we should still recognize that these are texts that are meant to provoke a response. “No Biblical audience could have heard Job speak in this fashion without shudders and astonishment.”²⁶ These are severe requirements for a man to meet, and even more severe sanctions should Job fail to meet the ethical standards that he has set. Job sets his case before the world and before God with no reservations. He has put forth new measures and new standards within our scripture that guide us forward in our mission to expand God's Kingdom.

²⁵ Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 198.

²⁶ Blank, “Literary Device,” 107.

CHAPTER 4

THE TORAH AND THE PROPHETS

We turn now to other texts in the Old Testament for a brief survey of the same ethical issues we highlighted in Job 31. Both Torah and the prophets are concerned with Israel's life as a community, as Christopher Wright argues:

The purpose of their historical experience and of their religious faith and observance was to nourish a national system of social life that was consistent with God's own character and in contrast to the ways of the 'unredeemed' nations round about.¹

Wright gives further context for the ethical texts of the Old Testament:

[Important] for our ethical understanding of the Old Testament is that we...take account of the fact that so much of its ethical thrust is necessarily social. It is not simply a compendium of moral teaching to enable the individual to lead a privately upright life before God.²

Both biblical and archeological evidence suggests that Israel failed to live up to the ethical standards of God's law. God made calls for justice amongst the poor – for equitable distribution of resources. It seems that at least for a time these desires were respected. God's Torah and God's prophets were sent to teach Israel how to treat their neighbor, how to be moral, and how to care for each other. When excavations show the injustice of Israel, it would seem that the land does "cry out against" (Job 31:38) the Israelites:

¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 37.

² *Ibid.*, 35.

Excavations in Israelite towns bear witness to this equality in standards of living. At Tirsah, the modern Tell el-Farah near Nablus, the houses of the tenth century B.C. are all of the same size and arrangement. Each represents the dwelling of a family which lived in the same way as its neighbors. The contrast is striking when we pass to the eighth century houses on the same site: the rich houses are bigger and better built and in a different quarter from that where the poor houses are huddled together.³

It is not important to ask how this happened, but more important to note that it did happen. It might be possible to argue that Job, though a man of steadfast faith (James 5:11), is portrayed as part of that upper crust of society. All of his possessions (Job 1:3), and his high status in society (Job 29:7-8) are things that point to some level of separation from the lower class. However, looking at chapters 29 through 31 we see that Job is both active in, and concerned with justice for those of lower social status.

Using both the Pentateuch and the prophetic books, this paper is going to touch on some of the moral expectations for God's people concerning the topics that we have chosen from Job's oath. We will be as thorough as is possible in a paper of this length. The paper will take a brief look at each book's setting and function, then go through some of the moral and ethical statements that one can compare with Job. The later chapters will spend more time in comparison. For now let us outline the issues in each book as they stand.

Pentateuch

Our picture of God's relationship with God's people starts here – it is the foundation of the rest of the Old Testament. The first five books are also called the Torah. Torah (תורה) is a Hebrew word that means more than just law. This central word can refer to teaching, instruction and the law. We cannot unilaterally equate Torah to law. This

³ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, (London: McGraw Hill, 1961), 72-73.

foundation of the OT and consequently the rest of the Bible sets up a very interesting format, where the lines between laws and narratives are blurred. Narratives lead up to laws, and at other times, the narratives illustrate the law in personal terms.

Exodus

This is the story of Moses leading God's people out of slavery. Exodus tells the story of Moses' call to lead Israel out of Egypt, the Passover and Exodus from Egypt, and the reception of God's commands for Israel. It is an essential book in the identity of Israel. It defines the people by its extensive laws and covenants, by the anecdotes about Moses' call and with Israel's impatience. Here we find out so much about the relationship of God with God's people.

Exodus also speaks to all of the issues that we are attempting to cover in this paper: slaves' rights and status, treatment of the poor and the correct attitude towards enemies. As this paper expounds on the righteousness at issue, it will highlight some texts and their settings that talk about each of these issues. In this, the first exploration of the texts of the OT, we will look at the Hebrew vocabulary more in depth. This is one of the main ways to see what the OT says about these ethical issues.

Treatment of Slaves

Vocabulary

There are two Hebrew words that Job 31 uses for slave. There is one for female slave (אמה) and a different word for male slave (עבד). The word for male slave is a very common word in the Old Testament. It is used to designate Moses as a "servant" of God

(Exodus 14:31) as well as to talk about “slaves” (Ex 12:44). The word “slave” certainly did not have the same stigma in ancient Israel that it does for us today.

The word for female slave (אמה) shows up far less. In a different context, it also means cubit. When the word is used to speak of a female slave, it can mean a “maiden”, or a concubine.⁴ In Exodus, this word (אמה) always shows up in conjunction with male slave (עבד), with only one exception.⁵ So one can assume a certain grouping of “owned people” or indentured servants is implied by both of these words, with similar function.⁶ For the purpose of this paper, the two words will be interchangeable.

Texts

Exodus speaks about slaves many times. The requirement for them to rest on the Sabbath is included in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:10). Immediately following the Ten Commandments is a large list of laws (Ex 20:22-23:33) which are commonly called the Book of the Covenant. This section is concerned with ordering a great deal of daily life, from “sexual ethics (22:19) to care of the disadvantaged (22:21-27) to worship

⁴ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A Briggs, *The New Brown – Driver – Briggs – Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 51.

⁵ Exodus 23:12 is the only place that the word for female slave (אמה) occurs in Exodus without the word for male slave (עבד). This verse is focused on the son of the female slave, and not the female slave herself.

⁶ Examples of where the two are placed together are numerous within Exodus, (e.g.: Exodus 20:10; 21:10; 21:26) and in other books. (e.g.: Deut 12:18; 28:68; Job 31:13) The one example where the two sexes of slaves are contrasted to each other is in Exodus 21:7-11. This is the protocol for selling your daughter into slavery. Here the female slave does not go free like the male slave, every seven years. The right to release after six years labor is given to the female slave also in Deut 15:12. The caveat of this rule in Exodus is that if the female slave is taken as a wife, then she has full status as a wife. For a longer discussion of this issue, see Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1991), 120-121.

calendars (23:14-17) to loyalty to YHWH (20:23).⁷ Chapter 21 is almost entirely concerned with protecting the rights of slaves and of their owners.

As already stated, slaves were to take part in the day of rest. In Exodus 21 many things are said about slaves. Verse 2 states that a Hebrew slave must be set free after six years of service. It gets a little complicated here. If he came with his own wife, then the wife shall go free at the same time. However, if his master gave him a female slave as a wife, the woman is not freed (21:3-4). If the slave wishes to stay with his wife, and any potential children, he must make a vow to stay in slavery with his wife forever (21:5-6).⁸

The second section that speaks about slaves is Exodus 21:20-32. This section seems to be focused on the concept of righting wrongs inflicted mainly on property. Slaves are mainly listed here in the same way that livestock are listed.⁹ There are reimbursements required for their injury or death. However, there is a definite acknowledgement of their difference from livestock in these same passages. Firstly, in verse 20 and 21 we see a petition for slaves' rights that "is found nowhere else in the entire existing corpus of existing ancient Near Eastern legislation...[this law] represents a qualitative transformation in social and human values and expresses itself once again in the provisions of verses 26-27."¹⁰ Verse 20 says that if a man kills his slave, the slave must be "avenged" (נָקַם). Rabbinic tradition suggests that the word for avenged prescribes

⁷ Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus. Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1991), 239.

⁸ John I. Durham, *World Biblical Commentary: Exodus*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 321.

⁹ Compare the implications of a bull with a habit of the goring of a man or woman, to the repercussions of the same bull goring a slave in Exodus 21:30-32.

¹⁰ Sarna, *Exodus*, 124.

decapitation. This reading is also supported by the Samaritan tradition, which states instead: “He must be put to death.”¹¹

Verses 26 and 27 also provide for a slave’s release if the slave is subject to harm that cannot be righted: the loss of a tooth, or the loss of an eye. The eye and the tooth are very representative of the issues of bodily damage in Ancient Israel.¹² The seriousness of these injuries comes from the fact that they cannot be healed. “Rabbinic law lists twenty-four [injuries], including the fingers, toes, tips of the ears, and the tip of the nose. Should the master injure any of these, the slave is given his freedom.”¹³

Care for the Orphan and the Widow

Vocabulary

Job uses several words in 31:16-18 to talk about the underprivileged. We want to address specifically in this section the way that Job speaks about the widow (אַלְמָנָה) and the orphan (יָתוֹם). These are specific words. The word for widow “should be translated ‘widow’ in all its occurrences; it describes a woman who loses her social and economic support through the death of her husband...”¹⁴ The orphan is simply a fatherless child, as we can see from Exodus 22:24: by killing a man, the man’s children will become orphans (יָתוֹם). It is not clear in ancient Israel that to be an orphan both parents must be

¹¹ Ibid., 124.

¹² See also Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21.

¹³ Sarna, *Exodus*, 127.

¹⁴ Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 128.

dead.¹⁵ Similar to the different words for slave, these two words are used together very commonly. “As a rule, widows are mentioned in one breath with those who bear a similarly hard lot: orphans, outcasts, sojourners, poor, destitute, childless...”¹⁶ As we look at the texts in the Torah and in the prophets we will see more about how these two are connected and the social context that they share.

Texts

Care for the orphan and the widow is addressed in a very short and concise portion of Exodus, 22:22-24 in most English translations:

You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans. (Ex 22:21-23 NJPS)

God makes it clear that he will answer the cries of the poor and the widow with nothing less than death for the oppressor. The presence of this law implies that human protection for the orphan and the widow was not always present in ancient Israel. This lack of human retaliation “should not delude the unscrupulous or the society that tolerates them. God himself champions the cause of the downtrodden.”¹⁷ This passage demonstrates the seriousness of the offense, but leaves out a large aspect of the treatment of the orphan and the widow called for by the Torah. Deuteronomy, on the other hand, says a great deal about caring for these people, and that is the reason to look at the provisions for the orphan and the widow included in this book.

¹⁵ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 450.

¹⁶ Jenni and Westermann, *Theological Lexicon*, 128.

¹⁷ Sarna, *Exodus*, 138.

The final book of the Torah speaks volumes about the orphan and widow, and all the other downtrodden people mentioned previously. It is first made clear that God “executes justice for the fatherless and the widow” (Deut 10:18).¹⁸ After this first section we have provision after provision for the underprivileged. There are several feasts thrown in God’s honor, to which the widow and the fatherless are required invitees: the Feast of Weeks (Deut 16:9-12) and the Feast of Booths (16:13-17). Also, every third year, the entire tithe went to the poor. This was done with the understanding that faithful participation in this practice would allow God to bless your undertakings (14:28-29, 26:12-13). The last set of practices called for are very interesting. These stipulations ask that farmers not harvest their entire crop, but leave some for the widow and the fatherless. (Deut 24:19-21) Biddle raises an important point about this process: “Would it not have been easier simply to harvest thoroughly and to *give* a portion to the needy? Perhaps. But the biblical method allows the needy the satisfaction of work.”¹⁹ God is determined not to allow the humanity of these people to be lost in the desire to make money. There is a respect for the needs of these people beyond only their physical needs.

Attitude Toward Enemies

Vocabulary

There are two words that are used to speak about enemies in the Old Testament and in Job. The first is a participle form of the word hate (שָׂנֵא). There is a more common

¹⁸ See Deut 24:17 and 27:19 for examples of God’s care for the underprivileged, and the curse put on those who abuse them.

¹⁹ Mark E. Biddle, *Deuteronomy*, (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 365.

word for enemy in Hebrew, which is a noun form (אֹיֵב).²⁰ The word שָׁנִי is used in the specific verses that we are looking at in Job (31:29-30). Job also uses the word for enemy in his dialogues (13:24; 27:7). There are several times when these two words are equated with each other in the Bible (Psalm 55:12; 2 Sam 22:41), and they are generally accepted to be equivalent in meaning.²¹ In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek word ἐχθρός, is the word for enemy that is used in most cases in the LXX. This is the word that is used to translate hated (שָׁנִי) and enemy (אֹיֵב) except where both Hebrew words show up, then the participle form of μισῶ is used to translate שָׁנִי. For the purpose of this paper, these two Hebrew words will be considered primarily interchangeable.

Texts

Exodus has texts that speak in the same way as the imprecatory psalms about the enemies of God's people (Ex 23:27). Even more common talk about enemies comes from God's mouth – about God's enemies. These are very stern words: "...I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Ex 20:5 RSV). There is also God's promise to be an "enemy to your enemies" (Ex 23:22).

There is an exceptional passage in Exodus that stands out in our discussion:

If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it. (Ex 23:4-5 NIV)

²⁰ While addressing vocabulary, it should be noted that Job's name in Hebrew (יֹב) bears a striking resemblance to the word for enemy (אֹיֵב). It is not clear that Job's name is from the same origin as enemy (See Jenni and Westermann, *Theological Lexicon*, 89.), but it is interesting to note the sonic similarity that is unavoidable in the Hebrew.

²¹ Jenni and Westermann, *Theological Lexicon*, 89-92.

This passage is “a prohibition against permitting one’s hostile and vindictive emotions to overcome one’s humanity.”²² Here we see that the laws that require one to return lost property (Deut 22:1-3) extend beyond the service of one’s friends and loved ones to those who are one’s enemies.

The Prophets

The situation that the prophets speak to is described well by von Rad: “Israel’s sin consisted in the fact that she had paid no heed to the way in which her God had led her, and had despised his gifts.”²³ We are no longer looking at the situation into which the Law of Moses was originally spoken, but into a new time and a new way of thinking about and understanding our relation with God. The society that Moses had led, and that was set out in the Torah was a relatively socialistic and community concerned society. However, the establishment of the monarchy had created a major societal shift in Israel’s understanding of the function of their community. “Covenanting that takes brothers and sisters seriously had been replaced by consuming, which regards brothers and sisters as products to be used.”²⁴

These major shifts are a great part of the biblical explanation for the repeated military defeats of Israel, which happen all around the prophets. They foretell captivity, destruction, exile, and return from exile. These issues that surround the prophets create the persona of the prophet described by Heschel:

²² Sarna, *Deuteronomy*, 142.

²³ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2, trans. by D. M. G. Stalker (San Francisco: Harper, 1965), 397.

²⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 27.

The prophet was an individual who said No to his society, condemning its habits and assumptions, its complacency, waywardness, and syncretism. He was often compelled to proclaim the very opposite of what his heart expected. His fundamental objective was to reconcile man and God.²⁵

Because of this setting and purpose, righteousness is a very important and pertinent issue in most of the prophetic books. Most of the prophetic books consist of the prophets speaking God's words to the nation of Israel. There are messages of how Israel has failed the covenant (Is 1:2-3), and how God will remain faithful through all the failings of God's people (Is 40:1). For the purpose of this paper, we will look at the book of Jeremiah for our prophetic voice on the issues of righteousness raised by Job. Jeremiah is an exemplary book because of its status as one of the major prophetic books, and the fact that he speaks to all three issues: slavery, treatment of orphans and widows, and relations with enemies.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is the prophet that we get to know the most on a personal level through his book. There are many stories about Jeremiah's actions and his struggles. David Petersen sums up the situation:

Of the major prophets, Jeremiah is the most palpable character. Here is someone who suffered house arrest, was thrown into a muddy cistern, and apparently died in exile. His compatriots thought he was a deserter and traitor.... Jeremiah complained bitterly – to the king, and even more to God.²⁶

Though this all seems severe, Petersen has not touched on Jeremiah's God/self-inflicted public ridicule (Jer 27) or the death threats (11:18) or the many other struggles that Jeremiah faces in his ministry.

²⁵ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), xxix.

²⁶ David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) 97.

To Jeremiah his time was an emergency, one instant away from a cataclysmic event... [He] hurled a dreadful word at his people, accusing them of provoking or exciting God's anger, an expression not used by earlier prophets.²⁷

Jeremiah was a prophet in the southern kingdom of Israel, Judah. We will now look at the specific texts within Jeremiah that provide insight into the issues that we are examining in this paper.

Treatment of Slaves

The one trouble with looking at the treatment of slaves in the Old Testament is the use of the same word for so many other concepts. It is clear that there are servants of God (Jer 7:25) and that slavery is a punishment that God feels very appropriate and even unavoidable for Judah (5:19; 17:4; 25:14; 27:7; 27:11). Through this, there is a very specific section where God speaks to Judah about its abuse and maltreatment of Hebrew slaves, and ignorance of God's covenant:

I told them that every Hebrew slave must be freed after serving six years. But your ancestors paid no attention to me. Recently you repented and did what was right, following my command. You freed your slaves and made a solemn covenant with me in the Temple that bears my name. But now you have shrugged off your oath and defiled my name by taking back the men and women you had freed... Since you have not obeyed me by setting your country men free, I will set you free to be destroyed by war, disease, and famine. (Jer 34:14-17 NLT)

This entire incident speaks to the cruelty and self-interest of Judah.²⁸ It is very important for us to look at this text and the events that it documents. God called for a release of all Hebrew slaves. These slaves were released, probably for several reasons. First, this was a time of war, and having more mouths to feed is a burden. Also, there was no harvesting to do during this time of war. Although one would like to believe that

²⁷ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 134.

²⁸ R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah. Interpretation*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 206.

God's request made the impact – it is nearly impossible to assume that pleasing God was a major part of their decision process. Once the time of war had ended, these Israelite property owners reclaimed the Hebrew men and women they had freed.²⁹

We see God's anger, as God explains how the slaves will be vindicated: "The men who have violated my covenant...I will treat like the calf they cut in two..." (Jer 34:18 NIV). This is the same covenant symbolism used in God's covenant with Abram in Genesis 15. In these kinds of covenant ceremonies, the person making the covenant would cut a calf in half, with the fate of the calf being "a picture of the fate that would befall them if they broke the covenant."³⁰ Even the severity of this extreme oath apparently did not stop the greed of the Israelites.

Care for the Orphan and the Widow

Jeremiah says similar things to what was voiced in both Exodus and Deuteronomy. There are some very harsh statements. We see those who exploit the widow and orphan condemned (Jer 5:28). God talks about God's past faithfulness: God made widows and orphans out of the women and children of Judah's enemies (Jer 18:21). God goes so far as to condemn the women and children of Israel to be widows and orphans because of the unfaithfulness of their husbands and fathers (Jer 15:8).

Jeremiah also continues to offer the same concern and compassion for the widow and the orphan. In Jeremiah's Temple Sermon (7:1-15), God makes it clear this is

²⁹ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980) 610-612.

³⁰Ibid., 613.

important to God.³¹ There is an outline of the issues and failings of Judah. Jeremiah makes it clear that the care of the underprivileged is part of Judah's side of this covenant:

For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. (Jer 7:5-7)

Later, Jeremiah makes a threat to the royal household, and expounds on the king's duties (22:1-9). In this section, the king is to do justice (משפט) and righteousness (צדק) and to not do wrong or violence to the widow, orphan, or the alien. God's concern for those who lack representation in society is put on the table once more before the royal house of Judah.³²

Attitude Toward Enemies

Jeremiah has no text like that of Exodus showing any sort of concern for the enemy. Enemies in Jeremiah hardly appear to be humans. In this book, God is involved in a battle with the Israelites of Judah. Enemies and those who hate and oppose are a large, frightful, and difficult part of this book.

Jeremiah speaks of the enemy in confronting and frightening ways: "the enemy has a sword, terror is on every side" (Jer 6:25 RSV). God makes it clear that because of their lack of obedience, God will make Judah serve their enemies in a land that they do not know (17:4). Again and again the enemy is represented as a conduit for divine justice. Judah will be given over by God to the hands of their enemies. (Jer 12:7; 15:9; 15:14;

³¹ Ibid., 273.

³² Clements, *Jeremiah*, 130-131.

19:7-9; 20:4-5; 21:7; 30:14; 34:20; 49:37) The king's family is not spared (34:21). Egyptian rulers are not even spared from their enemies (44:30).

In the midst of Jeremiah's complaint about his own enemies, God does offer care and salvation to Jeremiah for his service (Jer 15:11).³³ God also seems to promise future freedom from enemies to Judah (Jer 31:16). We are still left, in all of these cases, with a dehumanized enemy who seeks our blood and our suffering. We are still left with enemies that are not a part of our lives or part of our concerns.

Having looked briefly at the Pentateuch's and the Prophets' perspective on these issues, let us move on to the Gospel of Matthew and see what Jesus says about these issues.

³³ This is a very difficult section to both translate and interpret. There are severe differences between the Hebrew Masoretic Texts and the Greek Septuagint. For a detailed discussion see Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 392-393.

CHAPTER 5

JESUS IN MATTHEW

There are many reasons to look at the Gospel of Matthew for this paper, and not a different Gospel. Matthew is a Synoptic Gospel, and bears a great resemblance to both Mark and Luke in its content. Matthew also contains a great deal of “red text,” or words of Jesus. This gives a larger picture of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Another important reason is the focus of Matthew’s Gospel on the law and legal expressions:

| Legal Expressions in Matthew | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| | Mt 18 times | Mk 2 times | Lk 11 times |
| ‘justice’ | | | |
| ‘just’ | 7 | 0 | 1 |
| ‘lawlessness’ | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| ‘worthy’ | 9 | 0 | 8 |
| ‘judgment’ | 12 | 0 | 4 |

Table 1¹

For these reasons, we will now explore Matthew’s Gospel, and what Jesus says within it about how we as followers of the one true God are to treat slaves, orphans and widows, and our enemies.

Setting and Context

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full analysis of the data that we have concerning the setting and origin of Matthew’s Gospel. There are many theories of authorship, date, source and the original intended audience. It is best if we stick with the more certain information to help us delve into this book. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all

¹ Modified from: Henry Wansbrough, “St Matthew,” *NCCHS*, 903.

have a lot of stories and language in common.² Matthew was probably written to an early church to flesh out some understanding of Christ's Lordship, within a generation of Jesus' death. There are many textual clues that point toward an audience familiar with Jewish laws and customs. These references to Jewish law will hopefully be apparent as we delve into Matthew for this discussion.

Textual Analysis

Treatment of Slaves

Vocabulary

There is not a one to one relationship of Hebrew vocabulary to Greek vocabulary about slaves. While the Hebrew Scriptures mainly use one word to speak of all types of slaves (עֶבֶד) the Septuagint (LXX) has a plethora of words, each with different nuances of meaning. It is not the easiest task to map these different languages against each other. For instance, the words that Job uses to talk about slaves (θεράπων and θεράπαινής) in chapter 31 of the LXX do not show up in the New Testament at all. These words are also used several times in Exodus when "male or female slaves" are talked about (Ex 11:5; 21:26-27). We now move on to the words for slaves that are used by the New Testament authors, and specifically by the author of Matthew.

There are several words that are translated as slave or servant in English. Each has a slightly different meaning and purpose in Greek. Most of these have feminine forms, and some have verb forms. This paper will first talk about the vocabulary, and then

² For a detailed discussion of source criticism see: David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (London: Oliphants, 1972), 22-37.

explore the implications of the words for this paper later. One common word in Greek is δοῦλος (fem.: δούλη, verb: δουλεία). This word refers to a slave or a perpetual servant and is commonly used by Jesus in parables about the Kingdom (Matt 22:1-14; 24:45-51; 25:14-30). In the LXX God asks Job if he can make Leviathan his δοῦλος (Job 41:4).

Another important word is παῖς or παιδός (fem.: παιδίσκη), which looks very similar to the word for child (παιδίον). The word παῖς can also mean child, adding to the confusion. A definition of παῖς that incorporates both of these meanings is: “one who is committed to total obedience to another.”³ The word is used extensively in the Old Testament to speak mainly of servants.⁴ This word is used a great deal by Jesus in Matthew, and seems to mean either servant or slave. It is used when Herod speaks of killing all the two year olds (Matt 2:16), then again when the Centurion asks to have his servant/child healed (8:6-13). The word is used both ways. In his commentary on Matthew, Thomas Long points toward the connection. Long’s conversation on Matthew 18:1-5, where Jesus tells the disciples they must be like children, speaks to the similarities between children and slaves: “Indeed, a child was a ‘nobody,’ the social equal of a slave, and had to achieve adulthood before being considered a free person eligible to inherit the family estate.”⁵ This points towards the interrelation of the words for slave and child.

The final word to look at that is translated as servant is διάκονος. This word is where the English word “deacon” came from. The King James Version renders this word

³ Bauer, “παῖς” *BDAG*, (2000), 750.

⁴ For use of this word as servant see: LXX Exodus 5:16; 11:18; 20:10; 20:17; 21:2; 21:20; 21:32; Job 1:15,17; 4:18; 29:5; and many more instances in Jeremiah.

⁵ Thomas C. Long, *Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 204.

as “minister.” In the Gospel of Matthew it seems that this may not be the best translation, looking only at the parable of the wedding banquet where the king asks his δῆκονος to throw out the poorly dressed man (Matt 22:13). The definition seems to be something like servant, or as Long puts it: “those who wait on tables.”⁶ In the LXX this word is used to speak of servants: “A son who is instructed shall be wise and shall use the fool as a servant (δῆκονος)” (Proverbs 10:4 LXE).⁷ It is also used when Jesus talks about who will lead the Church (Matt 20:25-29; 23:11-12). This is how the term deacons came into church practice.⁸

Texts

After looking at the vocabulary, there are several texts in Matthew where Jesus speaks about slaves. There are varied contexts and purposes. Unlike the Old Testament, there are very few references within Matthew to slaves that do not relate in some way to Jesus’ relations with them.⁹ For clarity, the texts that we are looking at are divided into three categories: Jesus healing slaves, Jesus’ parables involving slaves, and Jesus’ conversations about the headship of the Church with the disciples.

Jesus heals in the Gospel of Matthew. Two of these healings are carried out on παῖς. In the story of 8:5-13, Jesus heals the centurion’s servant. In the story of 17:14-18 Jesus heals an “epileptic” boy. Both of these stories are about παῖς in the original Greek

⁶ Ibid., 229.

⁷ The word is also used to speak of servants/attendants in the book of Esther (LXX): 2:2; 6:3; 6:5.

⁸ The current *BDAG* definition of this word does not speak of ministering or leading, see: Bauer, “δῆκονος,” *BDAG*, 231.

⁹ There are three references to these vocabulary words that will not be addressed in more detail: Matthew 2:16; 12:18; 14:2; 21:15.

even though normally the first is rendered “servant” and the second rendered “boy,” based on the context. The first story speaks volumes to God’s concern for slaves. Not only is Jesus willing to help, but also Jesus’ first response with no apparent hesitation is “I will go and heal him” (Matt 8:7 NIV). Jesus heals the slave.

Parables make up a very large portion of Jesus’ teachings in the Gospel of Matthew. Many of these stories speak of slaves and servants. In these stories it is clear that the slaves have an essential role in the work of God. These slaves appear to be a representation of the followers of Christ, and their work for the Kingdom of God. There are several parables where this can be inferred, but for our purposes we will only look at one story – the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30).¹⁰

There are many interpretations of this famous story, but most revolve around a condemnation of those who are not putting to use the gifts of God.¹¹ It is not an easy story to be sure. A master gives money to his slaves while he is gone, and punishes the slave who does nothing with the money. This is not a small sum of money; a talent is equivalent to about 6,000 days wages or nearly 20 years wages.¹² “The parable is about the wise and foolish disciples—those who live the gospel now and those who do not.”¹³ This section speaks to God’s treatment of God’s disciples, God’s servants: “in a culture where slaves were expected to do their duty without receiving praise...astonishingly this master gives them extravagant tribute.”¹⁴ Though in the past the slave analogy has been

¹⁰ Other parables with central slave figures are: Matthew 13:24-29; 18:21-35; 22:1-14; 24:45-51.

¹¹ David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (London: Oliphants, 1972), 328.

¹² *Ibid.*, 329.

¹³ Long, *Matthew*, 282.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

used for prophets and leaders (e.g. Exodus 4:10; Jeremiah 33:26), this analogy elevates the slaves in very strong ways.

Jesus also makes a very strong case for the servanthood of his own disciples. The lesson of humility in leadership is repeated three times in this gospel (18:1-5; 20:20-29; 23:5-12).¹⁵ All of these sections address matters of social status and prestige. The first section (18:1-5) uses children (παιδίον) as examples of humility. In the second two of these sections where Jesus addresses the disciples' positions in the Church, he uses specific slave language: 20:20-28 and 23:5-12.

The second section (23:5-12) is at the end of Jesus' rebuking of prestigious titles for the religious leaders of the day. Jesus says that the disciples are not to be called 'teacher' and they are neither to call any one 'father.' It seems that Jesus' anger is not aimed at the titles specifically, but at the way that they are used: "they love the place of honor at banquets, the most important seats in the synagogues...to have men call them 'Rabbi'" (Matt 23:6-7 NIV). Jesus then appears to turn to the disciples in verse nine to say: "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi'...the greatest among you will be your servant (διάκονος)" (23:8,11 NIV). Earthly honors are not part of Jesus' teaching.

In Matthew 20 Jesus offers an extended explanation of the servanthood his followers are called to:

Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant (διάκονος), and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave (δοῦλος); just as the Son of Man did not come to be served (διακονέω), but to serve (διακονέω), and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matt 20:25-28 NASB)

¹⁵ Wansbrough, "St Matthew," 20.

Jesus is speaking to this topic just after the mother of James and John has made a petition for her children to sit at Jesus' right and left (20:21) – positions of honor in that society.¹⁶ The “greatest” will be “servants/deacons,” and the “first” will be “slaves.” The term deacon is one that refers to a sort of “waiter,” and even the “Son of Man” is “arranging things for the benefit of others” just as the deacon at a party would.¹⁷ Jesus not only uses servanthood as an analogy, but says plainly that he is here to serve. Surely the stigma of slavery is not gone, but Jesus is flipping the concepts of both leadership and servanthood upside down.

Care for the Orphan and the Widow

Vocabulary

Matthew does not speak of orphans or widows in the same terms as Job. The Greek words used in the LXX version of Job (31:16-17) for orphan (ὀρφανός) and widow (χήρα) do not show up in most Greek editions of Matthew. Unlike terms for slavery, the Greek vocabulary does not provide a myriad of new words, but rather a condensing of words. As we saw in the last chapter, the grouping of underprivileged together was part of Hebrew Scriptures (widows, orphans, travelers, etc.). In first century Jerusalem and in the Greek language, the term “poor” began to represent this group and all who were in it – not only those lacking financially:

People who are maimed, lame, blind and the like are “poor”...a widow owning millions of denarii worth of anything, yet having no son...is always a “poor

¹⁶ Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 288.

¹⁷ Bruce J. Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 127.

widow.” It is social misfortune rather than economic misfortune that makes a person poor.¹⁸

Regardless of their economic status, what they lack socially will keep orphans and widows “poor”. The only word that we find in Matthew to describe “poor” is πτωχός.

Texts

The Majority text, used for the King James Version, does contain one reference to widow. In Matthew 23 Jesus says: “Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows’ (χήρα) houses and for a pretence make a long prayer: therefore ye shall receive greater damnation” (23:14 KJV). This is part of a series of woes that Jesus pronounces on the Pharisees (23:13-39). Because of the King James Version’s importance in our English experience of the Bible, at least a footnote is provided in most modern translations stating: “Some manuscripts say...” What must be noted about this text is that it is contained in the other two Synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47). It should not be disputed that Jesus preaches damnation for those who take advantage of widows.

There are several places in Matthew where Jesus speaks about the “poor” (πτωχός). We are focusing here on how Jesus wishes us to care for the poor, including the widow and the orphan. There are two texts that speak towards treatment of those who are poor because of their life circumstances (Matt 11:2-6 and 19:16-30).¹⁹ The first section starts with one of John the Baptizer’s disciples coming on John’s behalf to find out if

¹⁸ Ibid., 48.

¹⁹ There are two other sections where Jesus uses the word πτωχός. In the Sermon on the Mount, he speaks to the “poor (πτωχός) in spirit” (Matt 5:3). It is not clear that this text speaks to the social outcasts that we are speaking of, and even if it does, it says little about their treatment. The other uses of the word occur when Jesus is anointed (26:6-13). This is not a story about treatment of poor, but rather a story about honoring God. See Long, *Matthew*, 292-293.

Jesus is the foretold Messiah (11:2-3). This question comes from the same man who has already said that Jesus “will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (3:11 NIV). John apparently expected far more fire and brimstone of the Messiah.²⁰ What Jesus offers of proof and testimony to his Messiahship is this: “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed...and the poor (πτωχός) have good news brought to them” (11:5 NRSV). It speaks volumes that proof of Messiahship is offered in Jesus’ deeds for the underprivileged.

In the second story a young man (he is called a “ruler” in Luke’s version of the story) approaches Jesus seeking to know how to enter into eternal life. Jesus responds that he must follow the commandments. This young man persists, and Jesus says that he must sell all his possessions and give them to the poor. There are two perspectives on this story to look at. One is the idea of “limited good”: People with great wealth were thought of as either thieves or heirs of thieves, because good things were viewed as limited.²¹ Knowing this, we can see the stigma of wealth and the struggle of the man. The second perspective is that this conversation is meant to completely disrupt this young man’s understanding of being blessed by and living with God.

Does this man want to know how to cross over the bridge to the kingdom of heaven, or does he merely want to add one more possession to his already large collection? ...Jesus wants this man...not to ask about the “right thing” to do but to hunger and thirst for righteousness.²²

Understanding the motives of Jesus’ replies, we can see two things: living in God’s kingdom requires us to put the underprivileged first, and serving others allows us

²⁰ Long, *Matthew*, 125.

²¹ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science*, 123.

²² Long, *Matthew*, 220-221.

to grow in our relationship with God. Worrying about our own prosperity will disrupt our ability to see what God is doing in the world and to be a part in it. Also, when we take care of those who cannot care for themselves (i.e. the orphan and the widow) we grow closer to being “perfect” (Matt 19:21).

Attitude Towards Enemies

Vocabulary

In Hebrew the words for hated and enemy were used interchangeably.²³ This word is replaced primarily in the LXX by the Greek ἐχθρός. The Greek for “hated” or “hate” (μισέω) is used very rarely in the LXX, primarily when ἐχθρός has already been used in the sentence. The Greek word (ἐχθρός) encapsulates all these understandings of those opposed to us: hostile, hated, hating, or a personal enemy.²⁴

There are some instances of impersonal enemies in Matthew, similar to those of Jeremiah. The main example of this is the parable of the weeds (13:24-29), which Jesus later explains (vs. 36-40). Here the enemy sows weeds, and the enemy is the devil. These are not the stories that we are interested in.²⁵ The section we are interested in is part of the Sermon on the Mount (5:43-48). It is part of a series of six antitheses, where Jesus

²³ This issue was spoken to in detail in the Vocabulary section on Exodus, also see Jenni and Westermann, *Theological Lexicon*, 89.

²⁴ Bauer, “ἐχθρός” *BDAG*, 419.

²⁵ There are two other references to ἐχθρός that will not be examined: 10:34-30 and 22:41-46. The first text speaks of the radical nature of Jesus’ ministry, and the unexpected enemies that one may gain through following him. Though this personalizes our enemies, we are better served by looking at Jesus’ comments in the Sermon on the Mount. In the second, Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1 as part of an argument about the sonship of the Messiah.

presents an Old Testament law and a narrow interpretation of it, then turns around to present a wider application.²⁶

You have heard the law that says, “Love your neighbor” and “hate your enemy.” But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as your Father in heaven. For he gives sunlight to both the evil and the good... (Matt 5:43-45 NLT)

It is not clear where “hate your enemy” comes from. It is not found in the canon as we have it.²⁷ “Love your neighbor” is from Leviticus 19:18. When Jesus reframes the understanding of the law, it seems that “the heart of the law [of Leviticus]...was to love even your enemies and pray even for those who persecute you.”²⁸ It also seems that the persecution that Jesus speaks of is religious in nature; that the neighbor would be one of the same religion as you, and your enemy would be one of different faith who derides yours.²⁹ In light of all this, we are called to model God as best we can. Loving the enemy may seem outrageous, but it is the way God would have it. This call from Jesus is a far cry from the imprecatory psalms, and bears no similarity to language about enemies that is used by the prophets. We are called not to pray only for those whom we know, or whom we think deserve it, but in our prayer and in our lives, we are to seek good for the entire world.

The actions of God’s loving concern are not calculated according to worth or merit, but are generously given to all.... The emphasis is not on flawless moral character, but on whole-hearted devotion to the imitation of God—not in the perfection of his being, but of his ways.³⁰

²⁶ See Wansbrough, “St Matthew,” 913-915, for a full exploration of this concept.

²⁷ Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 130.

²⁸ Long, *Matthew*, 64.

²⁹ Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 130.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-132.

Having looked at how Jesus speaks to these issues, we see the new light that has been shed on the laws and issues that we have looked at throughout the Bible. We can see that Jesus has re-cast the “purpose” statements of the laws laid out in the Torah. Jesus has made some clarifications about the treatment of slaves, widows and orphans and the enemy. From here we will compare these issues side by side, looking at the different books of the Bible, and how they line up with the ethic that Job portrays in his oath of righteousness.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to look at a variety of expositions of what it means to be righteous in the Bible concerning a few specific topics. Up to this point, we have been doing the groundwork necessary to compare these texts. As stated in the introduction, when one reads Chapter 31 of Job, this section strikes one as a text that stands out in the Old Testament. If one were to spend time with the Sermon on the Mount, the words of Job would ring with a similar testament to God's greater righteousness. Job is calling himself to a standard that may not have been taught by the Torah instructors of the day. Job is not only speaking to issues that are legally prosecutable, but is making it clear that he has gone far beyond his legal requirements to provide and secure justice for those around him. It is also clear in Job's speech that God demands more than meeting the legal requirements. Jesus does this same thing: he spells out deep desires of God that go far beyond staying out of jail.

Dallas Willard spends a large chunk of *The Divine Conspiracy* comparing Jesus' righteousness to that of the Old Testament, highlighting the six antitheses in Matthew 5 that we touched on in the last chapter. He uses a chart to illustrate the way that Jesus is calling for a re-examination of moral and ethical situations. This chart is based on understandings of "*Dikaiosune*," (righteousness), and will give us an understanding of the paradigm shifts that Jesus was preaching about and modeling. In the Sermon on the

Mount, there is clearly an existing understanding of righteousness, and then a novel way that comes from seeking the Kingdom of God:

Jesus' Six Antitheses

| Situation | Old Dikaiosune | Kingdom Dikaiosune |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Irritation with one's associates. (Matt 5:21-26) | No Murder. | Intense desire to be of help. |
| 2. Sexual Attraction (vv. 27-30) | No intercourse. | No cultivation of lust. |
| 3. Unhappiness with marriage partner. (vv. 31-32) | If you divorce, give "pink slip." | No divorce as then practiced. |
| 4. Wanting someone to believe something. (vv. 33-37) | Keep vows or oaths made to convince. | Only say how things are or are not. No verbal manipulation. |
| 5. Being personally injured. (vv. 38-42) | Inflict exactly the same injury on the offender. | Don't harm, but help, the one who has damaged you. |
| 6. Having an enemy. (vv. 43-48) | Hate your enemy. | Love and bless your enemy, as the heavenly Father does. |

Table 2¹

Jesus is not setting himself against the Torah or the Prophets, he has "not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them" (Matt 5:17 NIV). Jesus desires a social and theological change. Job does not show the same desire for transformation that Jesus demonstrates in this passage – Job is seeking to prove himself righteous and undeserving of his suffering. Though the intention is different, it seems that Job says something radical about what it means to be righteous. Job claims that God's demands might not match up with what our understanding of what the Law and the Prophets teach us.

¹ Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 146.

This chapter will take the issues we have been looking at all along (slaves' status, treatment of orphans and widows, and our attitude towards the enemy) and place them side by side with each other. After the in-depth discussions about settings, vocabulary and context of these various texts, we can now take a look at how they line up.

Comparison of Issues

Now that we have done the background work we can do the work of the thesis to align the biblical texts and look at the patterns and variances on these issues of righteousness. These books cover many hundreds of years in the history of the Jewish people, and reflect a range of views on similar issues.

The following chart juxtaposes the conversations about each of the three topics from each of the four books explored in the previous chapters. Laying these concepts side by side will allow us to examine the movement among the texts on these various ethical issues. The use of a chart for the issues that we extracted from these books of the Bible will add a great deal more than a prose explanation can provide alone.

Four Books on Three Topics

| | Exodus | Jeremiah | Job | Matthew |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Slaves' Rights | Israelite male slaves must be freed after six years of service. While in bondage, their lives are valued similar to livestock. | Israelite slaves must be freed per Torah covenant. | Slaves' concerns and charges must be taken seriously, both slaves and masters come from the same Creator. | The disciples and even Jesus are the slaves. |
| Treatment of the Orphan and the Widow | Must not take advantage – for God will heed their cries. (Deuteronomy) Must leave remnant of crops for less fortunate and invite them to tithing feasts. | Care for the widow and orphan are of utmost concern, even the king of Judah is charged with this task. | Care for the orphan and the widow as your own children and family. | Concern for underprivileged is put before riches, and their joy is a sign of the coming Kingdom of Heaven. |
| Attitude Towards Enemies | Enemies are generally an object of scorn, but if you see an enemy's animal lost or overburdened, you must care for it. | Enemies are faceless attackers who seek Judah's demise. | Do not celebrate your enemy's failure. Not even a curse should be uttered against your enemies. | Love and pray for your enemy, even those who persecute you for your faith. |

Table 3²

Job's Forward Slant

Looking at these differing voices on the same topic, one sees more commonality between Matthew and Job than between Job and either the Prophets or the Torah. The prophets and the Torah are very related. The prophets wanted to retell the story of God

² These are summaries based on the work done in previous chapters.

from the Torah for the people of a time that appeared to have forgotten them. In Job 31 something else is the point: a conversation about what is possible for us as followers of God. Jesus is also speaking about what is possible. Not merely what is required, but how good God's creation (humans) can be when they seek God's Kingdom.

Exodus and Jeremiah are pleading with Israel to free their slaves after six years of service. In the same sentence, Exodus names a price for the loss of a slave's life. Job claims equality with the slaves when God's justice (משפט) is rendered, and the Son of God says "I have come here to serve" (Matt 20:28). Job states that the same God created him and his slave. Neither the Torah nor the Prophets speak against this. It is not that Job is speaking against the Torah, but he is speaking towards something the teachers of the Torah have yet to grasp; just as Jesus is teaching against the common interpretations and understandings of the Torah.

While the Torah and Jeremiah are condemning those who exploit the orphan and widow, Job is caring for them. He is not only giving them food, but also loving them like a father (Job 31:18). Jesus then lists the care for the downtrodden as a sign of God's coming Kingdom (Matt 11:5). Jesus is not looking at the letter of the law, but the essence. Job points toward the fact that those who are outcast by society must be cared for. The Torah provides for their care in feasts and tithing. Job makes it clear that he has gone beyond these legal requirements, and even calls judgment on himself if he has abused their rights:

If I have raised my hand against the orphan,
because I saw I had supporters at the gate;
then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder
and let my arm be broken from my socket. (Job 31:21-22)

Jeremiah paints a one dimensional, non-human picture of the enemies. Exodus goes further, making a giant step to ensure that one shows concern for the animals of one's enemy. It could be argued that the motivation for these sanctions of Exodus are based more in the immorality of stealing and the importance of care for God's creation, than in care for the enemy.³ Though Job questions and laments the success of his enemies (Job 27:7-10), he swears that he has never once cursed them. This is a piety that even the psalmist could not claim: "Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked" (Psalms 3:7).⁴ Jesus takes another step in the Torah understanding to argue that we must have concern for our enemies, love them, and pray for them. It can be misleading to read Jesus' words, "You have heard it said, 'love your neighbor and hate your enemy'" (Matthew 5:43 NIV). These words are tricky because, as stated before, 'hate your enemy' is not part of the Torah. This animosity may have been implied through some of the imprecatory psalms, or through the constant occupations that Israel had experienced, but wherever it comes from, Jesus speaks against it.

Through this analysis of several biblical texts, one can see the exceptional nature of Job's ethics in chapter 31. This paper is not arguing that the Sermon on the Mount was derived from Job 31. Neither is this paper arguing for any sort of direct inspiration from Job to Jesus. Because of this, issues of authorship, date or source of the various books we have explored are not relevant to this thesis. There are many competing scholarly theories

³ Ex 23:4 seems to speak to theft: "If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him." Ex 23:5 seems to speak about caring for the donkey rather than caring for the enemy: "If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it." (NIV)

⁴ This is one example of a very strong retributive leaning within some Psalms. For several more examples see also: Ps 59:6; 89:23; 137:8-9.

of the dates and authors of the present form of the Pentateuch.⁵ There are many debates about what the original book of Jeremiah looked like, and what sections are the result of redaction due to inconsistencies between the LXX, the Masoretic Texts, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁶ Job's authorship and date are generally accepted as being late in Israel's history, but there is no authoritative and conclusive data on this issue.⁷ Theories on Matthew's authorship and sources are debated often.⁸ Due to the interdependent nature of most of these theories, a discussion of dates could take up most of this paper. This information is also not necessary or pertinent to this paper. The thesis of this paper posits that the exemplary nature of Job 31's ethics points toward Jesus' exposition of God's desires for God's people. Jesus and Job are pushing beyond legal requirements and towards the fulfillment of God's righteous Kingdom here on earth.

Conclusions

Jesus and Job speak of what is possible for those who live in righteousness. The issues they speak to are not ancient issues. One might classify Job's righteousness as something to be admired but never attained. Contrary to that, Jesus teaches his disciples that the things that Job states as his righteousness are things that his followers are to

⁵ Questions about the sources of the Pentateuch have been around since medieval and Reformation times. There are many theories that have fallen in and out of favor over the last several hundred years. For a basic conversation about these issues see: Terence E. Freheim, *The Pentateuch*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 25-26, 29-30.

⁶ The issues and implications of the textual variances are discussed in Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 117-120.

⁷ Dates of authorship range from 2100 – 500 B.C., and scholarship is at a loss to even prove that the book was written by an Israelite. For more detailed discussions see Pope, *Job*, XXX-XXXVII.

⁸ Theories of source affect the understanding of when and who composed this Gospel: the dominant theory currently cites Mark as a source for much of Matthew's Gospel, which implies that composition could not happen until after A.D. 65, when most scholars agree that Mark was written. For an example of how these theories play off of each other see Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 29-38, 48-55.

emulate. One must remember that Job's friends were the ones whom God asks to repent, and not Job. It seems that Job has spoken correctly of God, and the others have not (Job 42:7). There is truth in Job's understanding of God to learn from.

After reading Job 31 one might start to consider: What sins are we committing that Job has vowed not to? Are we lying and deceiving (Job 31:5), cultivating impure hearts (v. 7), practicing adultery in our minds (v. 9)? It seems to me that many of us are truly guilty of hardheartedness to the poor (v. 16), callousness to the unclothed (vv. 19-20) and especially trust in riches (vv. 24-25). Have we become callous to those who are poor and who seek food and shelter? Do we serve those in need as desperate people who are lower than us - serving the hungry lesser food instead of serving them "our meat" (v. 31)? Do we commonly curse our foes and rejoice at the discomfort of those with whom we struggle in our lives (vv. 29-30), wishing not that a misbehaving co-worker would find a path of success, but that they would get their punishment?

Not too many Christians would take an oath such as this with all of the repercussions that Job names. At the end Job even requests a list of the wrongs he has done. If one were to receive this list of their wrongs, it would most probably be kept private. However, Job offers to wear it on his shoulder (31:36-37). In some ways, this points towards the call of the New Testament for confession (Ja 5:16).

The book of Job as a whole speaks volumes about one's relationship with God, where honesty and trust are valuable things. God does not rebuke Job for his honest questioning of justice. God honors Job. There is a window into God offered in the Divine Speeches that conclude this book, even if they do leave one remembering that God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8).

Just as the Sermon on the Mount is convicting, Job 31 points towards some of the ways in which Christians and Jews may have failed to fulfill the promise of Abraham. Looking at Job 31 this way, we see that there is a precedent in Jewish literature for the type of speech about righteousness that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount. While Jesus' speech goes far beyond Job's both in scope and in content, there are obvious similarities between the two. Job sets a high standard for Israel in righteousness, in clear and precise terms for a life that is "blameless." Jesus again and again calls us to standards beyond what we may expect to be reasonable or desired. God's voice rings through the societal standards, still seeking that his people would be a blessing to all the world (Gen 12:3).

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