

“Speak to the Earth”: An Ecological and Literary Reading of Job 12:7-10

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I hereby declare and assure, Harlon T. Budikey, that this thesis has been drawn up independently by me, that no sources and tools other than those mentioned by me have been used and that the passages in the work whose verbatim content or meaning from other works – including electronic media – has been taken by citing the source are made known as borrowing.

Summary:

This thesis responds to the proposition that the Christian interpretation of creation that positions humans as central and superior to all other creatures has partly led to today's ecological crisis by justifying unreserved exploitation of earth's resources. It argues that not all scriptures, including Job 12:7–10, support this human-centric view. Using ecological hermeneutics and literary analysis, the thesis shows that Job presents the non-human creatures as important sources of divine knowledge and not just secondary to humans. Job implies that all creation has a purpose beyond serving human needs. This paper further contends that Job 12:7-10 highlights the interconnectedness of all creation, a critical factor in understanding the relationship between all creation and God.

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a result of the escalating ecological crises that we are experiencing today, much attention has been given to assess and study how to remedy it and determine the possible reasons that led to it. Thus, the consequences of human actions and attitudes towards the environment have come under scrutiny. Within Christian traditions, there are people who argue that our views and behaviors towards the environment are heavily influenced by our deeply rooted religious and philosophical beliefs including how we interpret the scriptures.

Lynn White Jr., for instance, in his 1967 article, "The Historical roots of our Ecological Crisis," argued that the attitudes and behaviors leading to the environmental crises have their roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition. He suggests that Christianity promotes an anthropocentric worldview and asserts that the Christian interpretation of the Bible, especially Gen. 1:28 where God gives humans dominion over the earth, has led to a sense of superiority over nature and a belief that the natural world is merely a resource to be exploited.¹

White's arguments have prompted Christian biblical scholars to delve into a significant part of Christian tradition's scriptural interpretations and attitudes towards the environment. Either in support of White's arguments or in defense of Christian biblical interpretative history, Christian biblical scholars turned their interest in offering interpretations and readings of the scriptures in relation to the environment.

It is from this context that ecological hermeneutics arose as a tool in Biblical scholarship. It is a method that counters the anthropocentric approach to the bible and the consequent assumptions about human's superiority to the rest of creation. Moreover, ecological hermeneutics attempts to uncover ecological wisdom in the scriptures which may have been hidden or disregarded because of the interpreters' focus on the human characters and affairs in the scriptures. In other words, ecological hermeneutics acknowledges that not all scriptures, nor their interpretive histories, support an anthropocentric interpretation of the scriptures. Moreover, a

¹ See Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-7.

careful and nuanced reading of the Christian tradition reveals alternative interpretations that promote a more harmonious relationship between humans and the rest of creation.

Job 12:7-10 becomes a perfect passage to offer such counter-narrative. The book of Job, a book identified as wisdom literature of the Old Testament, is commonly known to navigate deep questions about the nature of suffering, divine justice, and the mystery of creation. Yet within this context, in 12:7–10, Job offers a counter-narrative to the anthropocentric interpretation of the creation account. This passage from Job has great implications for our understanding of human-nature relations. This paper will therefore undertake a rigorous analysis of this passage, guided by the principles of ecological hermeneutics and detailed literary analysis.

This paper will show how Job 12:7-10 challenges the anthropocentric premise. A careful reading of this passage reveals that, rather than rendering other creatures as secondary to man, Job elevates them to be sources of divine knowledge. The perspective offered by Job extends the function of creation beyond merely being a source of sustenance for humans, hinting at a greater, more profound role that creation plays within the divine order. For Job, the non-human creatures of the Earth bear their own intrinsic worth and possess a wisdom that humans might seek. In recognizing this wisdom and the non-human creatures' individual value, Job is clearly not treating them as subservient to man.

Moreover, this thesis will argue that within 12:7-10, Job brings into the fore the interconnectedness of all the members of creation. Job suggests an inherent connection among all creation, wherein humans, animals, and the earth itself are all inextricably linked, underscoring the inherent dignity and value of every creature. This interconnectedness is fundamental in reimagining the relationship between all creation and God. The underlying assumption is that God's relationship with the world extends beyond humans, encompassing the entire creation.

Through this work, I hope to promote a shift towards seeing all creatures as valuable in their own right and acknowledging that everything in nature is linked. The ultimate goal is to establish a basis for a more sustainable and respectful interaction with our environment.

While there have been studies on the book of Job and its relation to creation or ecology, most of them have concentrated on the final chapters of the book, particularly chapters 38-41, which features the Yahweh speeches where God confronts Job with a series of questions about the processes of the natural world. Nevertheless, some scholars have discussed the creation themes in Job 12.

Antonine DeGuglielmo wrote one of the earliest ecologically minded studies of Job 12:7-9, whose findings included the notion that we have the capability of knowing God through animated creation or by observing the living world around us. For him, this is natural revelation.² He further argued that "all biblical or theological discussions concerning the knowability of God from natural sources should begin from Job 12:7-9."³ Nature, according to DeGuglielmo, has a significant role as a conduit for divine understanding.

² See Antonine DeGuglielmo, "Job 12:7-9 and the Knowability of God," *CBQ* 6 (1994): 476-82, at 482.

³ *Ibid.*

A more recent work is that of Hendrik Bosman who, in his 2021 article, tried to find out what the animals, earth, birds, and fishes could teach us and whether they really could teach us something about God. For Bosman, these texts must be understood from the perspective of parody and irony. In other words, that the animals, birds, earth, and fish can teach us about God is a part of the parody and irony speeches of Job more broadly. He says, “with dramatic and disconcerting irony and parody, Job’s reference to the teaching of the animals indicates that the hand of YHWH’ is responsible for the suffering of ‘every living creature’ and of ‘all humankind,’ including Job, of course (12:9–10).”⁴ In sum, Bosman does not take seriously Job’s words for Zophar to speak to the non-human creatures that he may learn from them. For him, Job really did not mean that Zophar should inquire and speak to the non-human creatures.

Another interesting series of readings of the text is from the Earth Bible scholars.⁵ They present a compelling interpretation of the text in Job 12. They argue that “The irony in Job’s speech in Job 12 is that God’s high-handed ways can also be learned by asking Earth and the community of Earth. Or, as Sinnot says, the silenced Earth becomes the teacher.”⁶ For the Earth Bible scholars, one can learn about God’s domineering actions by querying the Earth and its community. These scholars also suggest that the earth’s subjugation is so intense that if humans dare to inquire, the beleaguered Earth community will not remain quiet but will corroborate Job’s experiences. In extreme situations, the voice of the Earth makes itself heard. In this interpretation, Job appears to function as a representative for the silenced Earth. Indeed, the Earth Bible scholars emphasize that Job is one of the characters in the bible who appreciates the Earth’s value and accentuates its ability to instruct us about God.

In summary, we could say that the book of Job, particularly 12:7–10, has the potential of becoming a significant focus within this eco-theological discourse. While a few scholars have examined this passage’s literary structure and its context within the book of Job, fewer have explored its ecological implications in depth. Studies have touched upon Job’s description of learning from the natural world, but comprehensive analysis of how this passage challenges anthropocentric creation views and illustrates the interconnectedness of creation is still lacking. This thesis aims to contribute to filling this gap.

1.1. Thesis Statement

Using ecological hermeneutics and literary analysis, this thesis will explore how Job 12:7–10 counters the human-centered interpretation of creation, treating other

⁴ Hendrik Bosman, “Creation Proclaiming Knowledge About God: Animals and Ironic Critique in Job 12:7-10,” *JSem* 30 (2021): 1-15, at 11.

⁵ The Earth Bible team consists of a group of international scholars- largely from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States, and Canada- committed to rereading the biblical tradition from the perspective of Earth. In The Earth Bible volumes, they challenge traditional, anthropocentric strategies of reading the Bible.

⁶ See Norman C. Habel, “Where is the Voice of Earth in Wisdom Literature?” in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions: The Earth Bible*, vol. 3, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 31.

creatures as sources of divine knowledge rather than as subordinates. It will further argue that this text points to a broader function of creation beyond serving man's needs and highlights the interconnectedness of all creation. This investigation will help deepen our understanding of the relationship between all creation and God and contribute to the ongoing dialogue on religion's role in our ecological future.

1.2. Objectives

The objective of this study is to challenge the anthropocentric reading of the Bible, specifically through Ecological Hermeneutics and a literary analysis of Job 12:7-10. The study then aims to offer an alternative interpretation of this passage that underscores the interconnectedness and the inherent worth of all creation. Furthermore, this study seeks to explore how non-human creatures can be viewed as sources of divine knowledge rather than mere human source of sustenance, thereby promoting a more sustainable, respectful interaction with our environment. To obtain these objectives, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1.2.1. What does the text (Job 12:7-10) reveal about the understanding of humanity's relationship with non-human creatures? Does it suggest an anthropocentric view where humans are superior, or does it convey a perspective where all of creation has an inherent worth and an integral part to play ?

There are two things then that I want to point out here. First, this study will argue that the anthropocentric reading may not necessarily be the only interpretation of Job 12:7-10, and secondly, that a careful analysis of the text could lead to a recognition of the inherent worth of non-human creatures and the interconnectedness of all creation.

1.2.2. How does ecological hermeneutics and literary analysis apply to Job 12:7-10? What alternative insights can be drawn out of these methodologies?

I will utilize the principles of ecological hermeneutics with the aid of literary analysis to study Job 12:7-10. This study will attempt to show that applying these principles can reveal new dimensions to the relationship between humans and the non-human creatures in the Biblical context, thereby challenging dominant anthropocentric interpretations.

1.2.3. How does Job view the non-human creatures as sources of divine knowledge? Are they portrayed as secondary to humans, or do they serve a greater purpose?

In this study, I aim to illustrate that Job perceives the non-human creatures as bearers and teachers of divine wisdom, hence they should not be regarded as merely subordinate to humans.

1.2.4. What function does the non-human creation serve beyond just being a source of sustenance for humans?

The study will underscore the deeper meaning and purpose of creation beyond just serving humans' needs. I will argue that creation is not merely a resource for human exploitation but has intrinsic worth. We will do this by considering the role and value assigned to non-human creatures in the passage, examining if there's an implication of their intrinsic worth beyond their utility to humans.

1.2.5. What does the text reveal about the interconnectedness of all creation? How is this concept central to understanding the relationship between all creation and God?

The study aims to highlight the complex interdependence of all creation, asserting that such interconnectedness is fundamental in understanding our relationship with the non-human creatures and ultimately to God. We shall draw out this theme by looking closely at Job's dialogues, his treatment of non-human creatures and how he sees the role of God within and among creation, aiming to construct a more holistic understanding of creation in the Biblical narrative.

1.3. Narrative Outline

In order for us to be able to accomplish the objectives that I have stated above, this thesis will take the following steps. In the next chapter (Chapter 2), I will be discussing the methodologies that I will be using in this thesis, i.e., ecological hermeneutics and literary analysis. It shall introduce us, therefore, to the nature of these methodologies and how are they used in the study of the scriptures. The chapter will also discuss why these methodologies are the most appropriate for this kind of study.

The employment of these methodologies, i.e., ecological hermeneutics and literary analysis, to examine Job 12:7-9 shall be done in the third chapter. Here, I shall also be consulting commentaries, articles, books and other scholarly works done that are related to this study and integrate or put them into dialogue with our own readings of Job 12:7-10.

Chapter four will be the main discussion part of this study. In this chapter, based on our exegetical analysis of the text and readings from the different scholarly works related to it, I will discuss how Job 12:7-10 challenges the anthropocentric reading of the scriptures and recognizes the inherent worth among non-human creatures. In other words, it is here where I will try to argue to attain our objectives.

Finally, in chapter five, I shall try to summarize what I have discussed in this paper and how we were able to reach at our conclusion. I will also offer here my reflection on the topic and speak of the limitations of this study. Some of my recommendations regarding the study can also be found here and the possible contributions that this study could offer in various areas.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1. Ecological Hermeneutics

The attention given to the environment in the field of biblical scholarship, strictly speaking, is quite new. This sudden concern is mainly due to the current ecological crises that the world is experiencing. Moreover, this approach arose from several recent claims, especially emphasized by Lynn White Jr., that the “traditional” interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 that emphasized human dominion over creation legitimized the exploitation of the environment and has led to our current ecological problems. Ecological hermeneutics, therefore, developed as a method to counter this claim and also challenge the anthropocentric approach to the Bible. Thus, more positively put, the emergence of an ecological approach to biblical studies rests on the assumption, according to theologian Ernst M. Conradie, that “the bible can indeed offer profound ecological wisdom but that this has all too often remained hidden or implicit. The task of new exegetical studies is therefore to uncover such ecological wisdom.”⁷

The term “Ecological Hermeneutics” may remind us of other theories associated with hermeneutics in general. Before the emergence of ecological hermeneutics specifically, theories such as feminist hermeneutics, liberation hermeneutics and African hermeneutics had already been used in theological scholarship and exegesis. According to Kavusa, “They propose to reread and understand the text from the perspective of the marginalised and oppressed groups by searching to discover voices in biblical texts that might have been ignored, suppressed or hidden by established interpretations.”⁸ Thus, what is common to them is the attempt to look into perspectives that have been either suppressed, marginalized or simply seen as trivial in biblical interpretation.

We could say that the various hermeneutics that I have listed above were, in part, developed in response to the “traditional” theological (Protestant) hermeneutic lens. And indeed, these various hermeneutics have widened the horizon of perspectives from which the Bible could be read and understood. For quite a time, this horizon was limited to a certain perspective, i.e., a perspective that has focused on understanding the bible as a story of human salvation and has sidelined the non-human creation. As Kivatsi J. Kavusa puts it, “For years, Biblical theology simply meant history of salvation (in German: *Heilsgeschichte*) where creation stories were read not for their own sake, but for their usefulness for Israel’s people (humans) and Christian belief.”⁹

Thus, from this perspective, “the redemption of humans and of Israel in particular, surpasses all other interests and thereby, the realm of non-human beings appears as background and becomes less important.”¹⁰ Until recently, then, man or humankind has always been the main focus of biblical interpretation and from whom the perspectives are taken into consideration. As to the rest of creation, they are seen as accessories that do not really play a major role in the story of God and his people.

⁷ Ernst M. Conradie, “Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: A Review Essay on the Earth Bible Project,” *Scriptura* 85 (2004): 123-35, at 126.

⁸ Kivatsi J. Kavusa, “Ecological Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Biblical Texts Yesterday, Today and Onwards: Critical Reflection and Assessment,” *OTE* 32 (2019): 229-55, at 231.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 235.

Therefore, as a response to this sidelining of the non-human creatures, Ecological hermeneutics attempts to propose an understanding of texts from the perspective of ecology or the non-human creatures. It offers a perspective of biblical interpretation from which non-human creatures are heard and their roles are recognized just as the human characters are.

As it developed, Ecological hermeneutics and its advocates have come up with various complementary methodologies.¹¹ However, the differences of these methodologies are not really that much that they needed to be further identified and classified in this paper.

In this study, I will make use of the method of Ecological hermeneutics that largely emerged from the Earth Bible Team of the Earth Bible Project¹². They were responsible for the Earth Bible Series which was launched in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa in the year 2000 and was then headed by Norman C. Habel. It is therefore best to mention here the six principles from which the Earth Bible team have developed this hermeneutic:

1. The principle of intrinsic worth: The universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value.
2. The principle of interconnectedness: Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.
3. The principle of voice: Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.

¹¹ David Horell identifies three major approaches to ecological hermeneutics in his article, i.e., (1) An approach of which he labels as 'recovery', (2) ecological hermeneutics which he preferred to as a more critical and hermeneutically explicit approach developed in the earth bible project and (3) the Exeter project which he referred to as one that seeks to position itself between the two existing approaches. (See David Horell, "Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Methods and prospects for the Future," *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* (2015), 3) Another classification of Approaches to Ecological Hermeneutics was enumerated by Kivatsi Kavusa from the University of Pretoria. According to her the approaches could be classified according to their purpose; (1) Recovering ecological wisdom from the bible which he also termed as Apologetic reading that attempts to respond to Lyn White's accusations, (2) Resisting biblical texts in favor of the earth which is an approach that is fundamentally earth-centric rejecting both the anthropocentric reading and the stewardship model. It is under this approach where he puts the Earth Bible project method as an example, (3) Resisting ecological focus in favor of biblical authority which is exactly the opposite of the ecological hermeneutics of the Earth Bible project, (4) Revisionist ecological hermeneutics which he situates between recovery and resistance readings, (5) Eco-feminist and African eco-theologians which he claims is a kind of convergence of ecology and feminism into a new social theory and political movement, (7) Eco-theological voices from Africa which developed from trying to defend the Bible against Lyn White's accusations into a more challenging approach in which the text is given its respect while interacting with contemporary issues (Kavusa, "Ecological Hermeneutics," 238-48).

¹² The Earth Bible team consists of a group of international scholars- largely from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States, and Canada- committed to rereading the biblical tradition from the perspective of Earth. In The Earth Bible volumes, they challenge traditional, anthropocentric strategies of reading the Bible. (Habel, "Where is the Voice of Earth," 31.)

4. The principle of purpose: The universe, Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.
5. The principle of mutual custodianship: Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners with, rather than rulers over, Earth to sustain its balance and a diverse Earth community.
6. The principle of resistance: Earth and its components not only suffer from human injustices but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.¹³

While these principles are not a set of rules that needed to be followed, they are considered guidelines in the interpretation of texts. Therefore, Habel claims, that “an ecological hermeneutic demands a radical change of posture in relation to Earth as a subject in the text. (Here the term “Earth” refers to the total ecosystem, that is, the web of life—the domain of nature with which we are familiar, of which we are an integral part, and in which we face the future.)”¹⁴ In other words, ecological hermeneutics does not demand that we change our understanding of the text, or to critique the present understanding. It simply proposes to look into the text from the perspective of Earth and the non-human creatures with the hope of discovering new insights from the text.

The Earth Bible Team’s Ecological hermeneutics follows three major hermeneutical processes of approaching the texts, i.e., Suspicion, Identification and Retrieval. I shall now discuss them individually.

2.1.1. Suspicion

The hermeneutics of suspicion is used to unravel meanings or messages from texts which may have been hidden or disguised. It presupposes that as readers, we must think that “the text presents us with a challenge to believe that the true meaning of the text emerges only through interpretation.”¹⁵ It suggests that the text may offer meanings other than the meanings that it seems to offer as it is read. In Biblical interpretation, it has been widely used by feminist scholars to decode texts and reveal meanings that may have been suppressed or unnoticed by male interpreters.

In Ecological hermeneutics, it presupposes that the text must have been interpreted from the perspective of man or that the focus of the text is on the human characters and that the non-human characters are seen as mere accessories to establish the background of what the text says. As Kristin M. Swenson puts it, this approach “requires suspicion that the texts focus primarily on human beings as unique within the world and the center of all purposeful activity.”¹⁶

Tina Dykesteen Nilsen and Anna Rebecca Solevag likewise maintain that in Ecological hermeneutics, our reading must begin with a predisposition that “The

¹³ Norman C. Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics,” in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman C. Habel (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 3.

¹⁴ Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics,” 3.

¹⁵ David Stewart, “The Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” *Journal of Literature and Theology* 3 (1989): 296-307, at 296.

¹⁶ Kristin M. Swenson, “Earth Tells the Lessons of Cain,” in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman C. Habel (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 31.

texts or the interpretations of the texts are likely to be anthropocentric, viewing human beings as superior to nature, which is regarded as an object rather than as having intrinsic value.”¹⁷ In other words, there must be a suspicion that there has been an anthropocentric bias in the interpretation of the text. It is mainly from this perspective then that, in a way, this method is a challenge to anthropocentrism.

According to Habel, this anthropocentric bias can be seen in two perspectives. The first is the assumption “that we are beings of a totally different order than all other creatures in nature. In other words, the hierarchy of things is god, human beings, and the rest.”¹⁸ Being placed in the lower order next to man, the role of the non-human creatures is always seen as of lesser importance and just helpers for the role of man.

The second perspective deals with the manner in which nature has been commonly perceived and treated, i.e., as an object. Rather than subjects themselves, nature or the earth and the non-human creatures are seen as mere objects and do not really need special attention and interpretation. Both biases are highlighted by the fact that in the creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, man was created in the image and likeness of God and only after all other creatures were created.

In summary, this first phase is related to the first principle of the Earth Bible Team which is the principle of intrinsic worth. It was meant to counter the traditional anthropocentric bias in reading and interpreting texts and seeks to give the non-human creature the same attention that is given to the human characters in the text. Because by treating them always as mere objects and sidelining them, we are suppressing the message of the text.

2.1.2. Identification

As readers, we have the capacity to see ourselves in the situation and experiences of the characters of the texts that we read and relate with them. So that while we read, we actually feel that we are actively taking part in the story of the text and share in the emotions or feelings brought about by it. It is this human capacity that this hermeneutic of identification wants us to use not only to the human characters but also to the non-human characters.

And according to Habel, it does not matter if this identification is empathetic or antipathetic or the characters we identify with are those that we admire or emulate.¹⁹ What matters is that we identify ourselves with them. This process is indeed necessary for us to be able to finally bring to the stage the non-human characters that have been put on the sides for a long time. And for Swenson, this identification is required so that later on, in the process of retrieval, we will be able to give voice to the earth.²⁰

¹⁷ Tina Dykestee Nilsen and Anna Rebecca Solevag, “Expanding Ecological Hermeneutic,” *JBL* 135 (2016): 665-83, at 667.

¹⁸ Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics,” 4.

¹⁹ See *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰ See Swenson, “Earth Tells the Lessons of Cain,” 31.

In Ecological hermeneutics, then, we must also identify ourselves with the earth and the rest of creation. As Habel points out, “Before we begin reading and seek to identify with Earth in the text, we need to face the prior ecological reality of our kinship with Earth: that we are born of Earth, and that we are living expressions of the ecosystem that has emerged on this planet.”²¹ We have to recognize our connection with the earth and the non-human creatures.

As Nilsen and Solevag put it, we must “identify with earth in the text (rather than automatically identifying with the human characters), seek how Earth has suffered, and discern how Earth has resisted wrongs.”²² In other words, we must try to challenge our natural instincts or usual ways of identifying with the human characters of the text.

The process of identification will lead us into the realization of the interconnectedness between and among creation which is the second principle of the Earth Bible team. Thus, rather than understanding the order of creation in the first creation account as a manifestation of the superiority of man among all other creatures for being the last creature to be created, it could instead be a hint to the interdependence of creation, i.e., man cannot exist without these creatures being created prior to him.

2.1.3. Retrieval

This hermeneutical process comes as a result of suspicion and identification. Or to put in another way, retrieval builds on suspicion and identification as foundations and without them, it simply cannot stand. Thus, according to Habel, the process of retrieval has two basic characteristics, “one related to the prior process of suspicion and the other to the process of identification.”²³

Firstly, “As the interpreter exposes the various anthropocentric dimensions of the text—the ways in which the human agenda and bias are sustained either by the reader or the implied author—the text may reveal a number of surprises about the nonhuman characters in the story.”²⁴ In other words, when through suspicion, we are able to treat the non-human characters not as objects but subjects themselves, we may be able to find out more about the role that they play in the story and eventually come up with a more meaningful understanding of the text which may have been hidden and ignored.

Secondly, the process of retrieval also helps us to discern the voice of the earth and the non-human creatures. Again, because of our biases and influences of mainstream scholarship, we tend to look into the non-human characters of the text not as subjects and so we fail to listen to their voice, especially the voice of the earth. As Nilsen and Solevag explain, “This voice has been ignored or suppressed in Western scholarship, for example, by being interpreted as anthropomorphism.

²¹ Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics,” 4-5.

²² Nilsen and Solevag, “Expanding Ecological Hermeneutics,” 667.

²³ Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics,” 5.

²⁴ Ibid.

This voice must now be retrieved, for instance, by reconstructing the narrative so that Earth is the narrator and the interpreter.”²⁵

However, we may ask, could this be possible? As for Swenson, “It’s a bit presumptuous to assume that any of us know the thoughts, feelings, questions, and dreams of another—much less Earth herself. Yet we are connected; we are members of Earth community; we are Earth-stuff.”²⁶ In other words, we are interconnected because we belong to the same Earth community, and it is this interconnectedness that enables us to give voice to the earth. And as we have mentioned earlier, this can only be possible if we are able to identify ourselves with the earth.

We could say, therefore, that through the process of retrieval, Ecological hermeneutics tries to give earth and the non-human creatures a chance to be a character of their own right and an opportunity for their voice to be heard and recognized even in those instances where they may be vague or unclear. Indeed, often times, when human characteristics and activities are attributed to non-human creatures, we simply see them as some form of poetry, symbolism or anthropomorphism. And so, we are always detached from them and their role in the stories that we read. And this is what the process of retrieval tries to counter.

2.1.4. Summary

In summary, ecological hermeneutics is not about creation or the care for the environment per se. Rather, it is about a re-orientation of perspective. It challenges us to go against the stream by not going into the usual way of looking at earth and the non-human characters in the texts that we read. The approaches it tries to make use may not be new, as they have been widely used in Feminist biblical interpretations, especially that of ‘suspicion’ and ‘retrieval’.²⁷ Obviously, however, the big difference is on the subject and the perspective being emphasized. Indeed, Ecological hermeneutics reads and interprets the text from the perspective of earth, of the non-human creation.

2.2. Literary and Rhetorical Criticism

Literary criticism in itself is a broad term as it covers a wide range of methods and approaches of analyzing the literary aspects of a certain text and the literary devices employed to it. Specifically, it includes the analyzation of the literary structure, style, purpose, mood, strategy and imagination that were used in a text.²⁸

In biblical interpretation, literary criticism treats the bible as a literary work and therefore analyzes its literary structures and forms as such. As Dennis T. Olson

²⁵ Nilsen and Solevag, “Expanding Ecological Hermeneutics,” 668.

²⁶ Swenson, “Earth Tells the Lessons of Cain,” 31.

²⁷ See Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics,” 3. Also Nilsen and Solevag, claims that ecological hermeneutics’ basic direction of “reading against the grain,” coupled with “suspicion” and “retrieval,” is inspired by the feminist biblical hermeneutics developed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, among others, in the 1980s.” (Nilsen and Solevag, “Expanding Ecological Hermeneutics,” 671.)

²⁸ See John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2022), 94.

explains, “Literary methods involve close readings of biblical texts with careful attention to their literary contours and textures. The questions that arise in literary approaches range widely from detailed attention to the meaning of individual words and sentences to the significance and shape of successively larger literary contexts in which the given text is situated.”²⁹

A Literary analysis presumes that the manner in which the texts were written, the way the words were used and structured and in the way in which they were placed or positioned were intentional and has something to do with how the text must be understood, whether as a part of a larger text or as an independent unit. Literary criticism then considers the overall syntax of the text and looks for patterns and structures within them. Because indeed, these details, when extracted and properly identified, can be indications of how the text must be interpreted or how they were intended to be understood.

Moreover, literary criticism also presupposes that as readers, we tend to read and understand the texts that we read depending on how we classify them literally, whether as stories, prose, poetry or other works of literature. Thus, for instance, we may give more attention to symbolisms and idioms when reading a prose or poetry, or to the characters and plot when reading a story.

Finally, our text of study is a part of the speech of Job. It could be said then that its literary presentation is that of oral communication, i.e., the text is a part of a speech between two parties. Therefore, the text can be approached through rhetorical criticism which is a method used to examine the strategies and tools employed in a piece of communication to convey, persuade, or influence its audience.

It is therefore important to bear in mind the purpose of the speaker or writer and his intended audience in order to understand the text or speech. As Hayes and Holladay explain, “Emphasis on compositional techniques and rhetorical features aids in understanding how a writing has been developed, how its structure and style contribute to its presentation, and what objectives the writer may have had in mind.”³⁰

In other words, by employing rhetorical criticism and by focusing on compositional techniques and rhetorical features in the speech of the speaker, we can gain a deeper understanding of the text. We can determine how the speech was developed, how its structure and style contribute to its presentation, and what objectives the speaker might have in mind. In turn, these can provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the text.

2.3. Chapter Summary

Through Ecological hermeneutics and its three processes of suspicion, identification and retrieval, I will try to analyze and interpret Job 12:7-10. By using its principles and perspective, I intend to give an ecological reading of our text and

²⁹ Dennis T. Olson, “Literary and Rhetorical Criticism,” in *Methods in Biblical Interpretation: Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13.

³⁰ Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 97.

answer the questions that we have set for this study. However, in itself, this method is not sufficient especially in the close and in depth study of our text. Thus, I will also be using literary and rhetorical method to analyze our text of concern. I have chosen to employ literary and rhetorical method because of the nature of our text, and it is through this method that we can maximize our ecological reading. By looking into the overall syntax and literary features of our text and analyzing them carefully, I hope to establish a good and sufficient foundation for our ecological reading.

Chapter 3: Exegetical Analysis and Summary of Related Commentaries

Using ecological hermeneutics and literary criticism, I shall now try to have a closer look at our text, i.e., Job 12:7–10. I shall do this by considering first the wider context and structure of our text and followed by a verse-by-verse analysis. An ecological approach seeks to find the voices of the non-human characters of our text. The literary analysis attends to the patterns, structures and literary features that are evident in the text and that can help us better understand its meaning.

3.1. Context

For many, the Book of Job, which is a part of the Wisdom literature of the Bible, explores questions about human suffering, God's justice, and the mystery of divine providence. It is a book composed as a dramatic dialogue between Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, followed by Elihu and the divine speeches and a prose epilogue.

The book tells the story of Job characterized as a righteous and prosperous man from the land of Uz who suddenly loses his wealth, children, and health as part of a heavenly wager between God and Satan. Satan challenges Job's integrity, arguing that Job is righteous only because God has blessed him abundantly. And so, God allows Satan to take away Job's blessings to test this claim, but Job remains steadfast in his integrity and faith, despite his immense suffering.

The main body of the book is a cycle of speeches between Job and his three friends (Job 3–42:6). During his suffering (Job 3–27), Job was visited by his friends, i.e., Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, who intended to console and comfort him. However, after seven days of not talking and consoling him by simply sitting with him, they responded to Job's cursing of himself. According to Alice M. Sinnott, in their responses, these three friends "have paid little attention to Job's plight but have opted for the accepted belief in their world that the righteous are rewarded and the wicked suffer."³¹ They insist that Job's suffering must be a punishment for his sins, reflecting a traditional theology that equates suffering with divine retribution and prosperity with divine reward.

³¹ Alice M. Sinnott, "Job 12: Cosmic Devastation and Social Turmoil," in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 78.

However, Job rejects this interpretation and asserts his innocence and even demands an explanation from God for his suffering that he calls as unjust.

With increasing intensity, beginning with Eliphaz's speech and reaching its climax in Zophar's, Job's friends insist that such sufferings could only be caused by sin, and it is impossible for God to allow him to suffer without any reasons at all. Therefore, Job must have sinned to experience such punishment from God, and so they try their best to encourage Job to admit these sins and accept that God was just in punishing him.

Zophar, in particular, starkly insists that Job's suffering must be due to some hidden sin. Compared to Eliphaz (4-5) and Bildad (8) who were quite hesitant in directly accusing Job of committing sin, Zophar's speech (Job 11:2-20) is much more direct and critical and tries to teach Job about how he should respond to such punishment from God. He even describes Job's speeches as mere babbles (11:3). He believes that Job is justifying himself and accusing God of being unjust, and this for him seems like a disrespectful prattle or babble. In 11:3, Zophar tells Job, "Should your babble put others to silence, and when you mock, shall no one shame you?"³² Then, in 11:6c, he continues, "Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves." In other words, Zophar accuses Job of claiming to be pure in God's sight and advises him to repent so that he can once again enjoy God's favor.

After challenging Job's lengthy discourses (שפתי) and what he refers to as "babblings," Zophar asserts that he would rather prefer for God to open His lips (שפתיו) and divulge the "secrets of wisdom" (Job 11:5) to him. In here, we can see a contrast between Job's repeated claims of suffering unjustly and Zophar's insistence on the unfathomable wisdom of God. In other words, Zophar was trying to convince Job, who claims that his suffering is unjust, that he simply lacks the capacity to understand the wisdom of God behind these events in his life. Zophar is essentially suggesting that the apparent unjust sufferings of Job could be a manifestation of God's unfathomable wisdom which is beyond human understanding.

Moreover Zophar further emphasizes this unfathomable divine wisdom by using a blend of spatial terms and metaphoric analogues to underscore God's infinitude. He makes use of four spatial terms, i.e., height, depth, length, and breadth, alongside with four elemental metaphors, i.e., the heavens, the netherworld, the earth, and the sea. According to him, these together symbolize the expansive dimensions of a divine realm that transcends human comprehension (Job 11:8-9).

By redirecting Job's focus from his own suffering to God's infinite wisdom and power, Zophar tries to give emphasis to the limitations of human understanding, while attempting to contextualize Job's suffering within the broader, unfathomable wisdom of God.

In Job 12, Job responds to Zophar's speech. He begins with a sarcastic retort, "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you (12:2)." With this, he was implying that his friends think that they have a monopoly of wisdom.

³² Except for Job 12:7-10 or unless otherwise indicated, the English scriptural passages used within the discussions in this paper were taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Catholic Edition Bible.

In Job 12:7-10, Job offers some advice to his friends. He tells his friends to ask the animals, the birds of the sky, the earth and the fishes of the sea, who will teach them that it is God who is in charge of every creature and has hand in every occurrence. He tells them:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; Also, speak to the earth, and she will teach you, and the fish of the sea will explain to you.

Who among these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In whose hand is the life of every living creature and the life of all mankind.³³

Job is challenging the theological assumptions of his friends by stating that all of creation points to the fact that God is the sovereign architect of all things, both in the natural world and human affairs. Job's argument refutes his friends' oversimplified theology that all suffering is punitive.

The book concludes with divine speeches revealing that God's wisdom and purposes are inscrutable to humans. God doesn't directly answer Job's questions about suffering but underscores his divine wisdom and control over the universe. Job repents for his presumptuous questioning, and God restores his fortunes, doubling his previous wealth, and granting him more children.

We could say then that Job 12, and particularly 12:7-10, reflects a shift from the dialogue about retribution theology towards an acknowledgement of God's incomprehensible wisdom and the capability of the animals, birds, fishes and the earth to have a share in this wisdom and also the capacity to share this wisdom to humans.

3.2. Structure of Job 12

Job 12 is a complex chapter that can be quite difficult to interpret because of its unclear aspects. It can be interpreted from various perspectives, which makes it a fascinating part of the Book of Job. Its multiple layers of meaning lead to various interpretations and ongoing discussions among scholars.

One of the enduring debates concerns the structural division of the chapter into strophes or poetic units. There is no consensus among Job scholars as to how the chapter could be divided, thus further highlighting the complex and nuanced nature of the text. It remains a matter of interpretation as to which verse belongs to which strophe, indicating the fluidity of the text and its resistance to rigid categorization.

According to Seow, for instance, Job's long speech from 12:2-14:22 can be divided into three portions: (1) 12:2-25, (2) 13:1-28, and (3) 14:1-22. Since v. 1 is merely an introduction, practically the whole of chapter 12 then becomes a single entity or subsection of the threefold speech. He further divides the chapter into two parts: vv. 2-10 and vv. 11-25. He explains that the first part, to which our passage belongs, stresses Job's commonality with his friends, i.e., that they are equal in

³³ Job 12:7-10 (My own translation).

knowledge, while the second part speaks about their different subjective experiences.³⁴

Sinnott further suggests of subdividing Job 12 rather than treating it as a single unit. She suggests that the chapter can be divided into three distinct strophes: verses 1-6, 7-11, and 12-25, with the first verse included in the initial strophe. The second strophe, 7-11, contains the verses that we are studying in this paper. According to Sinnott, in this strophe, “Job uses the command ‘ask’ to advance his parody of the friends’ complacent view of Earth and Earth’s relationship to her creator.”³⁵

In essence, Seow suggests that when Job tells his friends to “ask” the non-human creatures, he is not just encouraging them to learn from these non-human creatures. He is also making fun of and criticizing their overconfidence and simplistic views about divine order.

Furthermore, when reading the passage, one immediately notices the sudden change of tone or subject of the chapter in verse 7. Up until verse 6, Job maintains a more confrontational stance, accusing his friends of lacking true insight and claiming that he also has the same wisdom as his friends have. However, in verse 7, there is a sudden shift in tone. Suddenly, in verse 7-10, Job directs his friends to the animals, birds of the air, the earth and the fishes of the sea. This marks a transition from the debate with his friends to a broader reflection on the wisdom of God that is manifest in creation.

In the following verses (12-25), Job outlines how God’s wisdom is ultimate, and that His power affects all levels of society, both the great and the lowly. Job states that with God are wisdom and power, counsel and understanding (v. 13). He describes how God can overturn societal order. In verse 14 he says, “If he tears down, no one can rebuild; if he shuts someone in, no one can open up.” He also mentions how God makes an impact to both the leaders and nations: “He makes nations great, then destroys them; he enlarges nations, then leads them away (v. 23).”

Through this structure, Job 12 presents a critique of his friends’ wisdom and then presents the overwhelming wisdom and power of God, underscoring the limitations of human understanding and traditional wisdom.

3.2.1. Job 12:7-10: Translation and Commentary through Literary Analysis and Ecological Hermeneutics

I shall now attempt to provide a personal translation, analysis and a summary of relevant commentaries on Job 12:7-10 by employing the methodologies of Literary Analysis and Ecological Hermeneutics, with a particular focus on the text’s recognition of a non-hierarchical creation and interconnectedness among all beings. Indeed, it is an exploration into a rich biblical text that challenges traditional anthropocentric interpretations and invites us to rethink our understanding of our place within the larger creation.

³⁴ See C.L. Seow, *Job 1-21: Interpretation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 619.

³⁵ Sinnott, “Job 12,” 80.

Placed within the Wisdom Literature of the Bible, the book of Job offers deep insights into human suffering, divine providence, and our relationship with the natural world. Within this context, Job 12:7-10 stands out as a passage that encourages the reader to seek wisdom from the very heart of creation itself. Therefore, while the anthropocentric interpretation of Genesis 1 might encourage a view of humans as superior beings with a divine mandate to rule over the rest of creation, Job's discourse here alludes to the theology of Genesis 2 by emphasizing a symbiotic relationship between humans and the rest of creation, much like the human's relationship to the Garden in Genesis 2.

By utilizing a literary analysis, I intend to delve into the text's intricate narrative structures, rhetorical devices, and argumentative strategies. This process will help us better understand the ways in which the text communicates its profound insights, including its presentation of a non-hierarchical view of creation, where humans are not placed above other beings but are part of a complex web of life. And through the lens of ecological hermeneutics, I will explore and interpret the passage from the perspective of the non-human creatures and let them be heard and recognized as characters of the text. By merging these two approaches, I hope to unravel the richness of Job 12:7-10.

3.2.2. 12:7: ואולם שאל-נא בהמות ותרך ועוף השמים ויגד-לך:

*But ask the animals and (she) they will teach you, and the birds of the air and they will tell you;*³⁶

ואולם, which was used to introduce our text, appears nine times in Job in direct discourse. It is an adversative conjunction which could be translated as 'but indeed' or simply 'but.' According to DeGuglielmo, ואולם, as a conjunction "is used to mark a contrast with the preceding. Hence, the three verses it serves to introduce must be in direct contrast with some thought expressed previously, either in this answer of Job or in the preceding discourse of Sophar."³⁷ This then suggests that its use in this verse could hint that in our text, Job tries to make a contrast on the wisdom that he and his friends share with the wisdom of the animals, birds of the air, earth and the fishes of the sea.

The first question that may come into our mind in this verse would be, in asking Zophar to inquire and speak to the non-human creatures, did Job expected Zophar to receive an answer from them? Or was Job directing Zophar to a dead-end by directing him to the non-human creatures? We will try to answer this question by studying Job's choice of words.

Perhaps, we can be able to find answer to these questions by taking a closer look at the verb שאל which could be literally translated as 'to request,' 'to beg' or 'to ask.' The use of the imperative form of the verb שאל (to ask) directly involves the audience or the recipient, making the learning process active rather than passive. Moreover, the animals and the birds are treated as teachers, capable of imparting wisdom. In other words, Job was not directing Zophar to a dead-end, instead, he

³⁶ The English translation of Job 12:7-10 that is used in this paper is my personal translation.

³⁷ DeGuglielmo, "Job 12:7-9," 477-478.

was directing him to teachers who are capable of imparting him wisdom. This not only challenges the conventional human-animal hierarchy but also opens up new possibilities for knowledge and wisdom.

Furthermore, the parallel structure of the verse—“But ask the animals, and they will teach you; also speak to the birds of the air, and they will tell you”—emphasizes the similar roles of the animals and the birds of the sky as sources of wisdom. The literary technique that has been employed in this text, known as parallelism, is common in Hebrew poetry and is used to enhance the importance and impact of the message. In fact, some would call it as a means to express a single thought in two lines.³⁸ In this text then, the author is trying to emphasize that wisdom can be learned from the non-human creatures.

We could say then that this verse highlights the value and wisdom of non-human creation. It suggests that non-human creatures are not just passive but in fact active participants in the divine order and are capable of instructing humans about the wisdom of God.

Another detail that is worthy of further examination in this verse is how Job orders or put into sequence the non-human creatures in vv. 7-8. Job 12:7, begins with an imperative directed towards Job’s friend: “Ask the בהמות,” which could be translated to “beasts” or “animals.” This initial reference is noteworthy, especially when it is put into dialogue with the first creation account of Genesis. In Genesis 1-2:4, among the non-human creatures, the חיות הארץ (living creatures of the earth) and the בהמה (animals) were the last to be created by God and preceded by the birds of the air and the fishes of the sea.

Evidently then, Job seems to be deliberately challenging this Genesis’ ordering of creation by first mentioning the בהמות and then turning Zophar’s attention to the birds of the air. This inversion of the creation order may be understood as Job’s way of subtly critiquing or reinterpreting the first creation account that treats human beings as the highlight of God’s creation, thereby challenging an anthropocentric or human-centered understanding of the creation account.

By presenting the animals as the first source of wisdom and knowledge about God, Job is implying that the order of creation does not necessarily equate to a hierarchy of importance or wisdom. Instead, Job is advocating for a non-hierarchical view of creation, where all creatures possess inherent value and wisdom. Furthermore, by urging Zophar to seek wisdom from these non-human creatures, Job emphasizes the idea that non-human creatures are not merely subordinates to humans but are active participants in the divine order, worthy of respect and are capable of instructing humanity.

In addition, while in Genesis, there is a clear distinction between the חיות הארץ (living creatures) and the בהמה (animals), Job simply makes use of בהמות in our text, which could be translated as “beasts” or simply “animals.” However, the mention of other animals suggests that it was meant for a specific group of animals. The designation of the other animals according to their abodes then suggests that we

³⁸ See David Toshio Tsumura, “Vertical Grammar of Parallelism in Hebrew Poetry,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 167-181, at 169.

may translate it as ‘land-animals’ or ‘four-footed animals’ as the Septuagint also does.³⁹

Finally, in a sarcastic manner, Job seems to parody some biblical passages in his response to his friends. It could be the reason why this verse finds similarity with Deut. 32:7b: “Ask your father, and he will tell you; your elders, and they will instruct you.” Greenstein argues that it must have been patterned after it to establish a “parody of conventional wisdom” as articulated by the friends of Job by replacing the reference to fathers and elders with animals and birds of the air.⁴⁰

In Deut. 32:7b, the speaker tells his audience to ask his father and his elders so that they might tell and instruct him. In other words, it highlights the idea that wisdom and knowledge is passed down from one generation to another among humans, i.e., from fathers and elders to the younger generation. This supports the conventional understanding of wisdom that it is limited within the human realm and is transmitted within the human realm. Thus, Job’s attempt to replace father and elders with animals and birds is his critique to this traditional or conventional understanding of wisdom, i.e., that it is only passed down from generation to generation and is limited within the human realm.

Yet, it could also be understood as Job’s way of saying that just like our fathers and elders do, the animals and the birds are also capable of handing down wisdom to humans. In other words, he wishes to tell his friends that the value of wisdom that they can receive from their fathers and elders are of the same value to the wisdom that the animals and birds can provide. Nevertheless, in both instances, Job once again emphasizes his notion of an equality of value among creation and a non-hierarchical order in creation.

3.2.3. 12:8: או שיה לארץ ותרך ויספרו לך דגי הים:

Also, speak to the earth and she will teach you and the fish of the sea will explain to you.

While in the previous verse Job uses the verb שאל, in this verse, he makes use of another verb for the earth and the fishes of the sea which is שיה. This verb could be translated as ‘to complain,’ ‘to lament’ or ‘to talk (of)’ or ‘to speak’.⁴¹ In the context of this verse, it is more proper to translate it as ‘to speak.’ While שאל is more active in sense and could be an invitation for a conversation, the case seems to be different with שיה as its mood is more middle and connotes an interiorization aspect. Compared to the more active indication of שאל, שיה connotes, but is not limited to, “an activity of the soul or learned wisdom in the sense of meditation.”⁴²

³⁹ The Septuagint (LXX) translates בַּהֲמַיִם in 12:7 as τετράπους which means “four-footed” beasts or animals.

⁴⁰ See Edward L. Greenstein, “Parody as a Challenge to Tradition: The Use of Deuteronomy 32 in the Book of Job,” in *Reading Job Intertextually*, ed. K. Dell and W. Kynes (London: Bloomsbury T and T Clark, 2013), 74–75.

⁴¹ See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, Study Edition*, Vol. II (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1319-1320.

⁴² Ibid., 1320.

Job's usage of different verbs indicates that **וְ**, which is commonly treated as an article of choice and therefore translated as 'or' and 'either,' should rather be treated as an article that indicates a series, thus as 'also' or 'and'. Otherwise, to treat it as an article of choice would mean that Job gives Zophar two choices to choose from, i.e., to ask the animals and the birds of the sky or to speak to the earth and the fishes of the sea. And as I have already discussed in our analysis of the previous verse, to interpret it as an article that indicates a series because it emphasizes the similar roles of these different non-human creatures as sources of wisdom. As I have initially mentioned, vv. 7-8 form a structural pattern and is considered as a parallel. As such, these two verses complement one another. Moreover, as I have also said, Job's usage of two different verbs to describe the manner in which Zophar should approach the non-human creatures indicates that Job actually wants Zophar to both engage in an active conversation with them as well as to simply ask and meditate with them.

Thus, in using the verbs **שאל** and **שיח** to describe how Zophar should interact with the non-human creatures, Job was telling him to both actively interact with these non-human creatures to pursue wisdom and at the same time to engage in a contemplative or reflective communication with them. In other words, for Job, both ways indicated by these verbs **שאל** (to speak) and **שיח** (to ask) are means of seeking wisdom from the non-human creatures. And in the same manner, Job also recognizes that as teachers, the non-human creatures are also capable of responding to humans in both ways, i.e., active interaction and reflective communication.

I have also been referencing Job 12:7-8 to the creation account in Genesis especially on how Job seems to have deliberately inverted the order of creation. However, the inclusion of 'Earth' and its placing in this verse seem to put into question our argument that Job was indeed referencing his speech to the creation account. Had Job strictly followed the inverted order, the "fishes of the sea" should have come before the "earth."

Nevertheless, Job's vocabulary still reecho much of the creation story in Genesis. The terms that he used to name the non-human creatures specifically reecho Gen 1:26, i.e., fish of the sea, birds of the air, and the cattle and all the wild animals of the earth, a manner in which the creatures are distinguished according to their abodes.

Perhaps it will help us understand this further by studying 12:7-8 as a structural pattern. A more in-depth analysis of the words, especially the verbs used in verses 7-8, such as **שאל**, **שיח**, **ותרך**, **ויגד** and **ויספרו** suggests a connection to the speeches made by Job's friends.

According to Seow, these verses could be interpreted as Job's response to his friends' speeches. First, vv. 7-8 is a response to Bildad, who urged Job to ask (**שאל**) the past generation in order for them to teach (**יירוך**) him (8:8-10). Then second, it is a response to Zophar, who previously spoke of God's unsearchable wisdom, describing it as high as the heavens, as deep as Sheol, as long as the earth, and as broad as the sea (11:7-9).⁴³ Job replies by telling them to ask (**שאל**) and learn from

⁴³ Seow, "Job 1-21," 623.

the animals and the birds of the sky and to speak to the earth and the fishes of the sea that they may teach (וּתְרַךְ) him.

The table below further illustrates the literary structure of vv. 7-8 and therefore also shows how they are evidently structured as a pattern. This table also clearly shows how the author made use of parallelism in these verses.

	V 7	V 8
Verb	שאל (Qal, Imperative, Masculine, Singular)	שיה (Qal, Imperative, Masculine, Singular)
Object	בהמות (Feminine, Plural- Four footed animals)	לארץ (Feminine, Singular- to the Earth)
Verb	וּתְרַךְ (Hiphil, Conjunction waw + Imperfect-Jussive, Third person feminine singular + Second person masculine singular suffix)	
Verb	ויגד (Hiphil, Conjunction waw + Imperfect, Third person masculine Singular)	ויספרו (Piel, Conjunction waw + Imperfect, Third person, Masculine, Plural)
Object	ועוף השמים (Masculine, Singular-Bird of the air)	דגי הים (Masculine, plural- Fishes of the sea)

In terms of general Hebrew poetry structure, vv. 7-8 use parallelism which is a common feature of Hebrew poetry. Parallelism is usually employed to make an emphasis on certain concepts or to elaborate on a certain idea or subject. It has various forms which depend on how it should be interpreted. These forms include (1) synonymous parallelism (where the second line expresses the same or similar meaning of the first line in a different form), (2) antithetical parallelism (where the second line contrasts or inverts the idea or meaning expressed in the first), and (3) synthetic parallelism (where the second line completes, expands, or further illuminates in various ways the meaning expressed in the first line).⁴⁴ Thus, from this classifications, we could say that vv. 7-8 is a form of synonymous parallelism as each line essentially expresses the idea of the first line but using different metaphors.

Moreover, such parallelism is made obvious by the verbs that were used in these verses and the objects of these verbs. Both verses begin with an imperative verb (שאל and שיה respectively) followed by a third person verb (ויגד and ויספרו respectively). Both verses also use the same verb (וּתְרַךְ)⁴⁵ with the same syntax at

⁴⁴ See John Bergsma and Brant Pitre, *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible: The Old Testament*, Vol. I (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013), 562.

⁴⁵ This verb וּתְרַךְ, which is literally translated as “and she will instruct you” and is repeated in verses 7 and 8 may have a further significance in the understanding of this verse. This verb shares a meaningful linguistic relationship with the well-known noun for “law” or “instruction” within the legal tradition, which is תורה (torah). The semantic and lexical association between the two

the middle. Moreover, both the objects of the first verbs (לֶאֱרֹץ and בְּהֵמָה respectively) are feminine independent nouns with no qualifiers while both the object of the third verbs are masculine nouns with qualifiers (דְּגַיִם and עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם respectively), i.e., both mention the abode of the animals they mention.

Some scholars who take vv. 7-8 as a single entity proposed that שִׁיחַ should be emended to complete the symmetry in these verse. The earth seems to be illogical to pair with the beasts or animals in 7a, the birds in 7b and the fishes in 8c as they are all living things. Thus, they proposed that שִׁיחַ must be emended into a living creature. For instance, some proposed that rather than “to speak,” שִׁיחַ should be emended to mean “shrubs,” or “reptiles.”⁴⁶

However, there is no need for such emendations to complete such symmetry. As Seow explains:

Instead of emending the text or inventing another hapax legomenon, however, one should simply assume a structural parallel to v. 7: “ask...that it may teach you that...” (v. 7), “speak to ... that it may teach you that...” (v. 8). All the ancient Vrss translate *siah* as a verb, as do early Jewish and Christian interpreters. In this case, “the earth” is used in the pregnant sense of “the earth and all that are on it” (Saadiah, Malbim). Indeed, given the structural similarity between v. 7a and v. 8a, “earth” in the latter stands in the place of “beasts” in the former, though “earth” is far more inclusive than “beasts”.⁴⁷

In other words, the proposed emendation is not needed and baseless as there is already a visible structural parallel. Moreover, this could also further our case that in this verse, the Earth is taken as a co-equal with other living creatures.

Another way of interpreting the structural parallel is to interpret it as Job’s way of completing the non-human creatures created by God on the first six days of creation in Gen. 1:1-25 minus the human. As I have already mentioned earlier in my analysis of verse 7, Job seems to have deliberately inverted the sequence of creation in Genesis 1 by mentioning first the animals which in Genesis 1 were the last non-human creatures to be created by God. Although the sequence was not strictly followed, the point of inverting the sequence of creation could still be valid. Especially if we interpret this parallel as Job’s way of completing the whole non-human creatures. Job reechoes how God created the different animals by classifying them according to their abode. And the earth is not lost but it represents the first four days of creation where God forms day and night, sky and seas, the dry land and vegetation, and the two great lights and the stars (1:1-19). In other words, Job is not only re-interpreting the sequence of creation but also on how day and night, sky and seas, the dry land and vegetation should be perceived simply as the unified earth.

terms appears too significant to disregard, as it may hint at deeper layers of meaning within the context of these verses. Especially so that it is attributed to non-human creatures.

⁴⁶ For further discussions of these suggested emendations, see Seow, “Job 1-21,” 632.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 632-633.

Later on in 12:9, this interpretation would be supported by Job's usage of כל which means whole and indicates totality and completeness when he pertains to these non-human creatures in vv. 7-8. I shall discuss more about this in my analysis of 12:9.

And most importantly, based on our analysis of the pattern and on our interpretations, it is impossible for the placing of the earth to be problematic. The words were carefully and intelligently chosen and put together to form the parallelism to emphasize Job's point that indeed, wisdom can be learned from the non-human creatures.

3.2.4. 12:9: מי לא־ידע בכל־אלה כי יד־יהוה עשתה זאת

Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?

After telling his friend to inquire from the non-human creatures and speak to them, Job poses a question. This question is quite interesting as it contains terms and connotations that may emphasize further Job's point of view.

The first is בכל־אלה (in all these). From its context this may refer to the non-human creatures mentioned in vv. 7-8. This then makes our text more interesting because it would mean that Job is attributing an intellectual activity ("knowing") to non-human creatures. Job is attributing to them the capacity to know and obtain knowledge of the hand of the Lord. While the attributions in vv. 7-8 (teaching, telling and explaining) could be considered as common forms of personification, the capacity to know is not usually attributed to these non-human creatures including even the earth as it entails an activity of the mind.

As I have mentioned earlier, Job's usage of כל to pertain to the non-human creatures rings a bell as it re-echoes Genesis 1:31a when after creating everything, God refers to them as כל. It says, "God saw everything (כל) that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." And in the following verse, in Genesis 2:1 it says: "Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished (ויכלו) from כלה which means to complete or to accomplish) and all (כל which means whole or total) their multitude." In these instances, כל connotes completeness and totality of the object they are pertaining to, and in this instance, the creation of God. Thus, we could say that by using such word to describe the non-human creatures he previously mentioned, he was hinting at their completeness or totality. Again, this supports the interpretation of the parallelism in vv. 7-8.

The phrase 'hand of the Lord has done this' finds a resemblance to Isa. 41:20b, "that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy one of Israel has created it." Moreover, the use of the tetragrammaton to refer to God in Job here is quite interesting because its placing is unusual. As Seow explains, "The name YHWH here is the only occurrence of this divine name outside the prose framework (1:1-2:13; 42:7-17) and the YHWH speeches (38:1-42:6)."⁴⁸ In other words, the usage of the name YHWH at this particular part of Job is a rare occurrence within the book of Job. For this reason, there is a suggestion that the whole phrase must have been borrowed from Isa. 41:20b.

⁴⁸ Seow, "Job 1-21," 624.

However, I do not agree to this suggestion as I would like to argue that the use of the tetragrammaton in this verse was deliberate and intentional. As we shall see later on, 12:9-10 seem to allude to the second account creation which is also known as the Yahwistic account. It was called as such because of its usage of the tetragrammaton (יהוה אלהים) to pertain to God as compared to the first account that simply uses אלהים (Elohim) to pertain to God. Job uses the tetragrammaton to emphasize his opposition to the first Genesis account and his allusion to the second account of creation.

As I have noted earlier in my analysis of vv. 7-8, Job seems to mock the first creation account (Gen. 1-2:4a) by using the same words that it used to name the different creatures, i.e., naming and distinguishing them according to their abode, but deliberately inverting the ordering of creation. However, in this case, Job makes use of the same words used in the second creation account not to mock it but to emphasize his allusion to it.

“The hand of the Lord” could be interpreted as God’s power and wisdom. In the Old Testament, it has been commonly used to pertain to divine activity. In other words, this statement pertains to the idea that God’s power and wisdom is recognized by the totality of creation.

3.2.5. 12:10: אשר בידו נפש כל־חַי ורוח כל־בשר־אִישׁ:

In whose hand is the life of every living creature, and the life of all humankind.

This verse has no verb and subject of its own, but it carries the ‘hand’ from the previous verse. It is therefore a continuation of the previous verse. Moreover, our final verse seemingly attempts to differentiate the members of creation, i.e., all creation share the same life, but only the “the flesh of a person” has a spirit. As Bosman puts it, “both humans and animals are incorporated in the phrase “all living creatures” (נפש כל־חַי) consisting of flesh (בשר), but humans are unique in having spirit (רוח).”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, this verse furthers our case that indeed, Job does not consider the non-human creatures as subordinate to the humans as he refers to them as both in the hand of God, i.e., under the sovereign power of God.

By describing all creatures as נפש כל־חַי (all living creature), Job also echoes how the book of Genesis (1:20, 24; 2:7; 9:10, 12, 15-16; also, in Lev. 11:10, 46 and Ezek. 47:9) describes humans and animals as both נפש הַיָּה (a living being), i.e., they are both animated by the same נפש (breath) that came from God. Indeed, it is Job’s affirmation that God is not only the God of human beings but of all living creatures.

However, I would like to argue that Job’s usage of נפש כל־חַי here must be understood within the context of the second creation account. While נפש הַיָּה is also used in the first creation account, i.e., 1:20 (fifth day of creation), 1:24 (sixth day of creation but before the creation of man), it was used to pertain to all living creatures that were created before the creation of man. On the second account of creation (Gen. 2:4bff), נפש הַיָּה was used in 2:7 to refer to the human being created by God (Adam) and in 2:19 to describe all creatures that Adam was asked by God to give names.

⁴⁹ Bosman, “Creation Proclaiming Knowledge About God,” 9.

Thus, while in the first account of creation (Gen. 1-2:4a), נפש הטהרה explicitly pertains to non-humans creatures, its usage in the second account of creation is more inclusive as it is used to pertain both to humans and the non-human creatures. In other words, Job makes no distinction between human beings and the non-human creatures. This is also supported by our earlier assertion that vv. 9-10 make use of terms typical to the second creation account to emphasize Job's allusion to it.

It is not surprising therefore that in 12:10, Job makes use of the term איש rather than אדם to pertain to humans. Generally, both could be translated in English as "man." However, their nuance comes when they are used within certain contexts. On the one hand, within family context, איש could mean "husband" or a man in a particular role or function but primarily it refers to an adult male. אדם, on the other hand is more general and can refer to a human being of either gender. Thus, it could be translated as mankind or people.

In both creation accounts, אדם was used to pertain to the human being created by God. איש only appears in the second creation account in Gen. 2:23 when after God forms a woman from the rib of the man (האדם), the man (האדם) exclaims, "This at last is the bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called woman (אשה), for out of man (איש) this one was taken." In other words, איש was used to emphasize the man and woman's shared origin and mutual relationship. It is also quite interesting that despite being mentioned in Gen. 2:20 that man gave names to all the creatures that God has created, this statement from Gen. 2:23 becomes the very first recorded words that Adam has uttered since his creation.

Finally if we are to consider the creatures that Job mentioned earlier in vv. 7-8 as the living creatures that he refers to in this verse, then it is interesting that even the earth is considered to have life. Earlier, in my analysis of vv. 7-8, I have also mentioned that the placement of the earth in the parallelism implies that just like the animals, the birds of the air and the fishes of the sea, Job treats the earth as living. Thus, even the life of the earth is in the hand of the Lord.

3.3. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, through ecological hermeneutics and literary criticism, we have noted some of the important points in our text that will help us in our further discussions. We have seen how the non-human creatures were treated by Job not as secondary to human beings and not only sources of knowledge but indeed as knowing and speaking subjects. By studying its literary structures, we have also seen how Job brings us back to the creation account in Genesis and thereby direct our attention to these non-human creatures. And the most important that we have noticed is how Job includes the Earth in his enumeration of the living beings.

Chapter 4: Job 12:7-10: Job's Non-hierarchical View of Creation and their Interconnectedness

The traditional human-centered reading of the Bible places humanity at the forefront of interpretation, often neglecting other perspectives found within the

Hebrew Bible. This approach tends to view the entire biblical narrative as primarily centered around humanity's relationship with God, giving priority to human characters and only considering non-human creatures in relation to their impact on the human narrative. One prevalent view within this perspective is to perceive humans as superior beings with dominion over the rest of creation.⁵⁰ While it may not completely dismiss the presence of non-human characters, such a perspective fails to fully acknowledge their significance within the text.

It is important to note that in this chapter, I am not asserting that the human-centered approach is inherently wrong. However, its widespread adoption has resulted in the overshadowing of non-human characters in the Hebrew Bible, leading to missed opportunities for fruitful interpretations and messages of the text.

Thus, in this chapter, I am not asserting that the human centered reading of Job 12:7-10 is inherently wrong. Rather, I will discuss how a reading of Job 12:7-10 through the lens of Ecological hermeneutics and literary analysis does not conform to the traditional human centered reading of the Bible. I will show this in three ways: first, by discussing the indications of how Job alludes to the wisdom of the non-human creatures and the earth; second by asserting Job's reference to the second account of creation; and finally, by having a closer look at Job 12:9: "Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?"

4.1. Job's Allusion to Earth and the non-human creatures as sources of wisdom

In Job 12, Job finds himself in a situation where he needs to defend his wisdom due to the arguments and accusations made by his friends. Throughout the book, Job has been experiencing immense suffering, and his friends have come to offer him comfort and counsel. However, instead of doing so, they assert that Job must have committed some sin to deserve such afflictions.⁵¹ Most notable of his friends' speech in our study is Zophar's. According to DeGuglielmo, in Job 11, Zophar "rebukes Job for having dared to speak presumptuously of divine wisdom, the profound and impenetrable wisdom of God, which is so worthy of praise."⁵² Zophar tells Job that he is not in a position to question or challenge the wisdom of God which we can never be able to grasp as it is higher than heaven, deeper than Sheol,

⁵⁰ The most common passages that are used to support this reading includes Gen. 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let us them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth,'" and Gen. 1:28: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'"

⁵¹ Job's friends believe that his sufferings are a direct result of his wrongdoings. In Job 4-5, Eliphaz suggests that Job's suffering must be due to some sin that he committed and advises him to seek God's favor; in Job 8, Bildad suggests that Job's children may have brought their deaths upon themselves and encourages him to commit himself to God; and in Job 11, Zophar implies that whatever wrong Job has done probably deserved greater punishment than what he has received. These accusations of his friends reflect the traditional wisdom that righteousness leads to reward and sinfulness leads to suffering. In other words, Job's friends are trying to make sense of his suffering from the perspective of retributive suffering.

⁵² DeGuglielmo, "Job 12:7-9," 477.

longer than the earth and broader than the sea (Job 11:8-9). Furthermore, in Job 11:5-6, Zophar tells Job that if only God would speak to him, then he would be able to know the wisdom of God. In other words, Zophar tells Job that the only way to penetrate and understand the wisdom of God is through direct revelation.

Job, feeling unjustly accused and misunderstood, begins to defend his righteousness and wisdom. In Job 12, he responds to his friends' claims by asserting that he too possesses wisdom and understanding just like them (12:3). What is more interesting here is that he argues that wisdom is not exclusively limited to his friends or to the human realm but can also be possessed by non-human creatures. Job points out that the animals and the birds (12:7), and the fishes and even the earth (12:8) itself possess wisdom from which humans can learn. He thus tells his friends to consult these non-human creatures, including the earth to understand his sufferings saying: "But ask the animals and they will teach you, and the birds of the air and they will tell you. Also, speak to the earth and she will tell you and the fish of the sea will explain to you (12:7-8)." According to Gerhard von Rad, Job is invoking a widely recognized tradition, which posits that wisdom is gained through understanding the primordial structure disclosed via the natural world.⁵³ Thus, the wisdom books often portray the natural world as sources of wisdom. Proverbs 30:18:31, for instance, presents observations about the natural world that are meant to convey lessons about life and wisdom.

In doing so, Job was both acknowledging the limitations of human wisdom and at the same time recognizing the capacity of the non-human creatures to possess knowledge. Certain forms of knowledge are accessible to these non-human creatures which may not be immediately accessible to humans and thus can be easily accessed through them. As Seow explains, "Zophar's point is that divine wisdom is unsearchable, for God is wholly other, utterly transcendental. Yet Job argues from the wisdom tradition itself that the mysteries of the world are revealed by nature."⁵⁴ In other words, Job 12:7-8 argues for a more accessible understanding of divine wisdom and the mysteries of the world by speaking with and asking the non-human creatures. However, despite such acknowledgement, Job neither speaks of a more superior or inferior creature when it comes to possession of knowledge. In other words, he does not speak about a hierarchy of those who possess wisdom and knowledge.

Moreover, our exegetical analysis of Job 12:7-8 in the previous chapter revealed a compelling structural pattern that shed light on the nature of the interaction between the speaker and the non-human creatures. The structural pattern evident in the verbs used in these verses, such as שאל (to ask) and שיה (to complain/lament/talk/speak) on the part of Zophar and ותרך (from 'to teach'), ויגד (originating from 'to tell') and ויספרו (from 'to declare') on the part of the non-human creatures, underscores a profound dialogue or exchange of knowledge that takes place between the two parties. These verbs serve as a testament to the role played by the non-human creatures as teachers.

⁵³ See Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 162-163.

⁵⁴ Seow, "Job 1-21," 623.

Rather than merely being seen as sources of knowledge, Job's reference to these non-human creatures conveys their active role as educators themselves. They possess the ability to impart knowledge to their human counterparts, making us, as humans, their students in this profound exchange. As Sinnott argues, "Job's recommendation that they learn from Earth and her inhabitants suggest that he is not only an advocate for Earth, but also listens to and learns from Earth."⁵⁵ Thus, these non-human creatures not only provide knowledge, but they fulfill the role of teachers who facilitate the acquisition of wisdom.

In essence, Job acknowledges and embraces the idea that we, as humans, have much to learn from the non-human creatures. They serve as invaluable sources of wisdom and understanding, transcending their mere existence as objects or entities in the world. Instead, they become our esteemed mentors, guiding us towards a deeper comprehension of the wisdom of God and the mysteries of the world.

We could say also that the verbs used to describe how the non-human creatures would respond to Zophar's query, i.e., ותרך (to teach), ויגד (to tell) and ויספרו (to declare), suggest forms of communication. This implies that for the non-human creatures to fulfill the actions of teaching, telling, and instructing, they must possess the capability to communicate with humans. As Mark Brett convincingly puts it,

If context is the primary guide, then 'speak to the earth' in this verse would need to imply the peculiar kind of speech that always remains open to being instructed by a conversation partner. Rather than focusing on self-expression, this kind of speaking would entail meditation on what exactly the earth might be disclosing. The parallelism with 12.7 suggests that speaking with the earth might be a more of a case of 'asking', and then through dialogue with nature arriving at wisdom.⁵⁶

Job's narrative, therefore, seems to acknowledge the communicative capacity of these non-human creatures, i.e., the animals, birds, fishes, and even the Earth itself. The use of these specific verbs suggests that Job accepts and acknowledges that these non-human creatures have their own voices to express their own perspectives and wisdom. In essence, by ascribing actions such as teaching, telling, and declaring to these entities, Job affords them agency to convey messages and communicate their insights, effectively giving them a 'voice.'

Furthermore, Job in 12:8, particularly its conceptualization of the Earth in the discourse, holds significant interest. Here, Job doesn't merely regard the Earth as a physical habitat or as a provider of sustenance, nor simply as a stage for human events to unfold. His treatment of the Earth in the text suggests a nuanced understanding that encompasses two key ideas, enriching our interpretation of his viewpoint.

⁵⁵ Sinnott, "Job 12," 81.

⁵⁶ Mark Brett, "Speak to the earth, and she will instruct you' (Job 12.8): An Intersection of Ecological and Indigenous Hermeneutics," in *Where the Wild Ox Roams: Biblical Essays in Honour of Norman C. Habel*, ed. Alan H. Cadwallader and Peter L. Trudinger (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 8.

Firstly, Job treats the earth as living. As we have seen in our exegetical analysis of 12:7-8 as a structural pattern, the earth seems to be in an awkward position because Job was speaking of animals and differentiates them according to their abode. More so, the earth, usually considered as non-living, is positioned alongside animals, birds and fishes, all of which are considered as living creatures. For this reason, there is a suggestion to emend the text to solve the awkwardness of the placement of the earth in the structural pattern. As Norman C. Habel points out, “Some scholars see ‘earth’ (*'eres*) as an elliptical expression for *remes 'eres*, ‘the creeping things of earth’ (cf. Gen 1:24, 25; 7:21; Gordis), thereby suggesting a clear parallel with ‘fish of the sea’ (8b.)”⁵⁷

However, as I have said there is no need for emendation. If we read it as it is, we will understand that for Job, just like the animals, the birds and the fishes, the Earth is also a living creature. Not only that, as I have just discussed, just like the other living creatures, the earth also has its own voice which it can use to teach or communicate to impart its wisdom.

Secondly, Job also treats the earth as source of wisdom. Job’s call to his friend Zophar to *דבר לארץ* (speak to the earth) in verse 8 emphasizes his recognition of the Earth as a teacher. Job’s language implies that the Earth possesses wisdom and understanding that can be imparted to humans. Furthermore, by using the verb *דבר* (*dabar*), which means “to speak,” Job attributes the capacity for communication and teaching to the Earth itself. This suggests that Job sees the Earth as more than an inanimate object but as a living entity with knowledge and insights to offer.

Stephen Grosse, in his ecological reading of Genesis 1, proposes that it was God himself who first spoke to the Earth during the creation event. According to him, “After its appearance, the earth is activated; Elohim speaks to the earth on the fourth day and it brings forth vegetation and seeds. It is not the command of God that is the primary catalyst for this creation event but the earth itself that is the source for its plant life.”⁵⁸ From this perspective, it is then no surprising that Job tells his friends to speak to the Earth because from the very beginning, the Earth had been playing an active part in creation. Stephen Grosse even calls the Earth as co-creator. Musa W. Dube also made the same argument when he said, “it is a notable point that Earth is invited on stage to become co-creator with God. Earth is, therefore, not a passive host of the created members, but an active subject that produces all vegetation and living.”⁵⁹ As a co-creator, the earth is not just a passive witness or a part of creation. From the very beginning the earth was spoken to by God and they were having interactions. It is no surprising therefore that Job treats the earth as such, i.e., living and a source of wisdom.

We have seen in our passage how Job offers a fascinating reorientation of traditional perspectives regarding humanity’s place in creation. Instead of focusing on humans as the central entity, Job positions man as just one member within the broader tapestry of creation. He implies that wisdom and knowledge are not solely

⁵⁷ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 213.

⁵⁸ Stephen Grosse, “Building Relationship with the Earth: Humans and Ecology in Genesis 1-3,” *Denison Journal of Religion* 5 (2005): 22-35, at 27.

⁵⁹ Musa W. Dube, ““And God Saw that it was Very Good”: An Earth-friendly Theatrical Reading of Genesis 1,” *Black Theology* 13 (2015): 230-246, at 239.

human domains, but qualities inherent in all aspects of creation. In Job's view, creatures such as animals, birds, and fish, along with the Earth itself, are not merely subservient components in the hierarchy of creation. Instead, they are depicted as beings with their unique wisdom to impart. This perspective underscores their capability to both possess and share knowledge. Through this lens, Job promotes the idea that humans are integrated parts of a greater, interconnected whole. It also emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all beings, recognizing that the Earth and the non-human creatures, as part of the broader ecological community, hold valuable knowledge and understanding.

4.2. Reading Job 12:7-10 alongside Genesis 1-3

There is no doubt, as M. G. Swanepoel claims, that the main theme of Job 12:7-12 is the creation.⁶⁰ Much of the words found in this passage are found in the two creation accounts in Genesis 1-3. In our previous exegetical analysis, I have discussed how some scholars considered Job's usage of the tetragrammaton (Yahweh) to refer to God in our text as an editorial error or a direct borrowing from Isaiah 41:20. However, between Isaiah and Job, there is still no definite answer as to whose text depended on whom due to conflicts on the proposed dates that they may have been written.⁶¹ I then propose that this unique usage of the tetragrammaton in 12:9, be interpreted as Job aligning himself with the creation theology presented in the second account of creation, which stems from the Yahwistic tradition.

The book of Genesis contains two distinct accounts of creation: Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Genesis 2:4bff. Each of these accounts provide us with unique insights into the origins of humanity and the natural world. Traditional scholarship has attributed these accounts to different sources, namely the Priestly tradition and the Yahwistic tradition. One noticeable distinction between the two accounts lies in the terms used to name God, i.e., Elohim (Priestly tradition) and Yahweh (Yahwistic tradition). However, despite the traditional scholarship's differentiation of the two accounts, through Job 12:7-10 we can see how the two accounts can be read in a complementary way. In other words, our reading of Job 12:7-10 can align with the creation theology of both accounts.

In the first account, which is traditionally attributed to the Priestly tradition, "God's creative work is a matter of bringing order, form and life to what was previously formless."⁶² In here, the order of creation places humans as the last living beings to be brought forth. The sequence of creation begins with vegetation (verses 11-12), followed by sea creatures and birds (verses 20-21), and then land animals (verses 24-25). Finally, on the last day, Adam (אָדָם), which translates to 'human being' in Hebrew, is created.

⁶⁰ M. G. Swanepoel, "Job 12- An(other) anticipation of the Voice from the Whirlwind?," *OTE* 4 (1991): 192-205, at 197.

⁶¹ See Will Kynes, "Job and Isaiah 40-55: Intertextualities in Dialogue," in *Reading Job Intertextually*, ed. Katherine Dell and Will Kynes (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 96.

⁶² David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology*, (London: Equinox, 2010), 24.

The Priestly tradition's creation account may seem to underscore the significance of human creation as the pinnacle of God's creative act. In this account, the creation of humankind is further highlighted by being made in the image and likeness of God (verses 26-27). Notably, in addition to the general blessing and command to multiply bestowed also on the sea creatures and the birds of the air (1:22), humans receive a distinct blessing and commission to 'subdue' (וּכְבַּשׁהּ) the earth and 'rule' or 'have dominion' (וַיִּרְדּוּ) over the fish, birds, and other living beings that moves upon the earth (verse 28).

In other words, the first creation account (Genesis 1:1-2:3) seems to portray a narrative where human beings are placed at the center of creation. There has been an assumption that the account highlights the dominion and stewardship granted to humanity over the earth and its creatures. While this emphasis is crucial in understanding human responsibility, it does not fully capture the interdependent relationship between humans, animals, and the earth.

However, new ecological readings on Genesis 1-2:3's creation account suggests an alternative way of interpreting it. In a compelling manner, Stephen Grosse counters the misinterpretations on Genesis 1 and argues that the primary focus of the story is the revelation of the earth and not the creation of humans and that it presents a view of the world that emphasizes the inherent value of all creation and the interrelatedness of all creatures. Furthermore, according to him, the commandment to subdue and have dominion over the earth should be interpreted within the context of a monarchical language that is associated to kings. Thus, to multiply and subdue is God's call to humanity to rule over the earth like an ideal Israelite King, i.e., they must become stewards of the earth and care for it as a King would do to his land and his people. Grosse further discusses that this is supported by the inclusion of the earth in the commandment to rest on the Sabbath.⁶³

A noticeable refrain in the first creation account is God's pronouncement of what he has made as 'good' (Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31). In this comment from God, it is interesting that the goodness of creation is not dependent on this utterance of God. As Strosse says, "God has 'seen' the earth to be good, signifying the intrinsic value of the world is not a divine mandate but a pre-existing condition that has been experienced by God."⁶⁴ In other words, God was just uttering an observance and not a command. Creation is good not because God says that they are such but instead, they have always been good.

Yet, this is not the sole creation account found in the book of Genesis and as mentioned earlier these two accounts must be read in a complementary way. However, unlike the first account which is more systematic and structured, the second creation account from the Yahwistic tradition (Genesis 2:4b-25) is more narrative. Moreover, while the first account speaks of how God created everything by speaking, the second account describes how both humans and animals were created from the ground (אֲדָמָה) and how God made every tree grow from the same ground.

⁶³ See Strosse, "Building Relationship with the Earth," 29-30.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 28. See also, Norman C. Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 44.

Rather than emphasizing the hierarchical structure of creation, the Yahwistic or second creation account underscores the shared connection between humans, animals, and the earth itself. Genesis 2:7 describes how God formed the first man (אָדָם) from the dust of the ground (אֲדָמָה) and breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living being (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה). And from the same ground (אֲדָמָה), the Lord made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food (2:9). Then still from the same ground (אֲדָמָה), the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air (2:19). After which, God brought all the living creatures (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה) to the “human” (אָדָם) so that he could name all of them.

To put it in another way, the second account tells us that humans and animals were formed from the ground (אֲדָמָה) or *adamah* and even the plants grew from the same ground, underscoring their intimate relationship with the earth. As Philip Sherman puts it, “Both Adam and the other creatures are made of the same substance (the ‘*adamah*’ or ‘common ground’) and are animated by the same ‘breath’ (*nephesh*) of divine origin. Such kinship between human beings and the other nonhuman animals is central to the Yahwist creation account.”⁶⁵ This emphasis on shared origins highlights the interdependence and interconnectedness of all beings, illustrating a relational framework rather than a hierarchical one. Because rather than distinguishing man from the rest of creation, the Yahwistic tradition puts emphasis on what makes all creation the same. It brings us and all creation to the most basic element that composes us all, i.e., the ground or ‘*adamah*’ (אֲדָמָה) which could also be translated as the earth. Perhaps, this could also be the reason why God calls the first man as “Adam,” to remind him of his origins and his connection with the rest of creation.

It is this creation account from the Yahwistic tradition that Job wishes to emphasize by employing the tetragrammaton in addressing God. Job aligns himself with the notion that there is a commonality among all aspects of God’s creation, rather than a strict hierarchical order. Job also signifies his adherence to the Yahwistic tradition’s perspective on creation, which highlights the interconnectedness and shared origins of humans, animals, and the earth.

Another phrase that connects Job to the Yahwistic account of creation is his description of the living creatures in 12:10. Notice that in Gen. 2:7, the author describes the human being created by God as נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה, which literally means a living creature. Later on, in Gen. 2:19, all the living creatures were also described by the author as נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה. In other words, the Yahwistic tradition uses the same term, i.e., נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה, to describe both human and all the other living creatures. Again, this is because the Yahwistic tradition emphasizes shared existence and interconnectedness among all creation. Thus, to put it simply, the second creation account points out that both the human and the non-human creatures were created from the same ground and were both called נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.

Job, in his speech in Job 12:10, continues this shared understanding by referring to all living creatures, both the human and the non-human creatures, as נֶפֶשׁ כָּל-חַי, which is derived from נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה. Job’s use of this term aligns with the Yahwistic

⁶⁵ Phillip Sherman, “The Hebrew Bible and the ‘Animal Turn,’” *Currents in Biblical Research* 19 (2020): 36-63, at 40.

tradition and further emphasizes the equality and shared essence among humans and all living creatures. It underscores the fundamental unity and interdependence within the web of life. This portrayal further challenges any notion of human centrality or hierarchical separation from the rest of creation.

The problem, however, in our translations is that humanity has consistently striven to distinguish themselves from the remainder of creation. Humanity wanted to be perceived as an extraordinary entity, a ‘unique’ product of divine creation. This sentiment is underscored by the disparity in translations of Genesis 2:7 and 2:19, both of which use the Hebrew term *נפש חיה* to describe humans and animals alike, yet they are often translated differently.

In Genesis 2:7, when referring to humans, *נפש חיה* is typically interpreted as ‘living soul,’⁶⁶ whereas in Genesis 2:19, where it pertains to animals, it is commonly rendered as ‘living creature.’⁶⁷ Essentially, if we are to adhere to these standard translations, both humans and animals can be referred to as either ‘living creature’ or ‘living soul’ in the second creation narrative or the Yahwistic tradition account. This was pointed out by Robert Gnuse and according to him, the Hebrew authors used the same terminology to describe both humans and animals; the differentiation was introduced by the translators.⁶⁸

Indeed, such arguments tell us that Job undermines the view that the animals and the earth are simply subservient to the human rule or dominion. In fact, he even emphasizes the idea that humans and the animals are from the same component, i.e., the ground (*אדמה*). Even the trees of all forms sprouted from the ground. And it is this ground (*אדמה*) that connects all the living creatures, including the earth. Furthermore, in reechoing the Yahwistic account of creation by simply calling all living creatures as *נפש כל-חי*, Job, in his speech in 12:10 does not make a distinction between humans and the non-human creatures. He even makes this clearer when he acknowledges the capacity of the non-human creatures to speak and possess knowledge just like human beings and thus directed his human friends to inquire from them.

4.3. Job 12:9 and the Yahweh Speeches (Job 38-41)

In Job 12:9, the phrase *בכל-אלה* (among all these), refers back to the non-human creatures that Job previously mentioned in vv. 7-8. Job uses rhetorical questions throughout his speech in chapter 12, and verse 9 is an example of such a question. Job asks the question in a way that he expects a negative answer, implying that all the non-human creatures (animals, birds, and the earth) mentioned in the previous verses (7-8) indeed know that the hand of the Lord has done this- referring to the creation and sustaining of the natural world.

⁶⁶ The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV): Catholic Edition translates it as ‘living being,’ while The King James Version (KJV), American Standard version (ASV) and Douay-Reims Bible translate it as ‘living soul.’

⁶⁷ The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV): Catholic Edition, The King James Version (KJV), the American Standard version (ASV) and Douay-Reims Bible translate it as ‘living creature.’

⁶⁸ See Robert K. Gnuse, “The ‘Living Soul’ in People and Animals: Environmental Themes from Genesis 2.” *BTB* 51 (2021): 168-74, at 169.

In here, Job's question reflects his belief in God's sovereignty and the recognition that all creatures, which includes humans and non-humans alike, have an innate understanding of God's involvement in the world. This recognition by all of nature implies that humans are not the only sentient beings, or the only ones capable of understanding or acknowledging God's work. It underscores a shared awareness of God's handiwork among all living beings. And by doing so, Job affirms the value and significance of the non-human creatures, acknowledging their participation in the divine order.

We could say, therefore, that in 12:9, Job points to God as the source of creation. It suggests that humans are a part of God's creation, just like any other creature, especially the non-human creature. We are all creations of God, not the central figure of creation. It also further suggests then that just like the rest of creation, humans are also dependent on God, who is the ultimate source of life and sustenance.

Job 12:9 becomes more interesting in our study when we read it along the Yahweh speeches in Job 38-41. This rhetorical question in 12:9, according to Swanepoel, anticipates the speeches of God in Job 38-41. He says, "In the Yahweh speech God gives an answer to Job's problems by pointing to the glory of his providence that sustains all of his creation (including Job). I have argued in this article that in 12:7-12 Job anticipates this answer by calling on creation as evidence against his friends."⁶⁹ In Job 38-41, God throws series of questions to Job, each meant to underline God's ultimate control over all creation. These questions span a wide range of natural phenomena, from the cosmos to individual animals. In other words, God answers the question of Job by referring him back to creation whom he used as the basis for his argument in Job 12:7-10.

I would say that by doing so, Job 38-41 affirms the claims of Job 12:7-10, i.e., by highlighting the complexity and wonders of the universe through series of questions, God in 38-41 supports Job's idea that nature testifies to God's wisdom and sovereignty. However, at the same time, these speeches also emphasize the gap between human understanding and divine wisdom. As Mark Brett puts it, "The opening list of rhetorical questions in Job 38 implies that beyond the limitations of human wisdom lies a hidden order of creation that is governed by divine commands and statutes."⁷⁰ There is an existing structure or order to the universe that exists beyond human understanding and is maintained by divine laws. Thus, when asked about what he knows about creation and how the universe works, Job humbles himself and answers, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted (Job 42:2)." In the end, Job accepts this lesson from God, i.e., that he himself has limited knowledge.

Moreover, it is therefore right to say that Job 38-41 also affirms Job 12:7-10 in countering the view that nature is subservient to human desire or dominion. As David Clines compellingly says it,

⁶⁹ Swanepoel, "Job 12," 202.

⁷⁰ Brett, "Speak to the Earth," 5.

Together, the divine speeches implicitly proffer a key to the meaning of the universe: in the design of its creator it is a vast, infinitely varied array of structures and mechanisms and creatures each with its own quiddity. As it exists, it is as he intended in his design for it; there is nothing amiss, and his role is to sustain and maintain it (and certainly not to judge or correct or police it). And the animals form a major part (if not the major part) of the attestation of such a perspective.⁷¹

The series of rhetorical questions from God that highlights the complexity and grandeur of the natural world and its creatures which is far beyond human understanding reinforces the idea that nature is not just simply subservient to human will, but instead operates under its own divine order. It attests that every aspect of creation has its own unique essence or nature. Each member of creation has its own specific characteristic and role within the totality of creation. Furthermore, according to this divine perspective, the universe is exactly as God intended it to be in its design. There is nothing wrong or out of place in it.

It is therefore ironic because Job has called for these non-human creatures to testify for him against the injustice of God. As Sinnott argues, “Earth and her inhabitants reveal the unpredictability of God’s conduct.”⁷² He envisions that the stories of these non-human creatures can curb the arrogance of human wisdom and thus offer his friends a lesson on the unpredictable nature of divine governance. And yet, in the end, God uses Job’s premise, i.e., the non-human creatures, in order to prove him wrong, i.e., there is a divine order behind the workings of the natural world and there is nothing wrong with it.

4.4. Chapter Summary

In Job 12:7-10, Job counters the belief that non-human creatures and the earth are purely subservient to human dominion. His emphasis on the wisdom inherent in non-human creatures and the recognition of God’s hand in their existence challenges an exclusively anthropocentric perspective that perceives non-human creatures and the earth as mere resources. This insight encourages a balanced, respectful relationship that acknowledges the intrinsic value and interdependence of all living beings within the divine order. Further evidence for this viewpoint comes from Job’s allusion to the Yahwistic creation narrative, which underscores the interconnectedness of all creation.

I have suggested that Job’s use of the Tetragrammaton (Yahweh) in Job 12:9 aligns with the Yahwistic tradition of creation. This tradition emphasizes the shared origin of humans, animals, and the entirety of creation, all were formed or arose from the ground. The term *נפש כל-חי* used by Job, derived from *נפש חיה*, conveys a shared existence that disputes the concept of human superiority in creation.

⁷¹ David J.A. Clines, “The Worth of Animals in the Divine Speeches of the Book of Job,” in *Where the Wild Ox Roams: Biblical Essays in Honour of Norman C. Habel*, ed. Alan H. Cadwallader and Peter L. Trudinger (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 103.

⁷² Sinnott, “Job 12,” 82.

Moreover, criticism has been directed at the inconsistent translations of **נפש חיה**, arguing that they reinforce false distinctions between humans and other creatures.

Job's rhetorical question in Job 12:9 suggests that all creatures, both human and non-human, acknowledge God's hand in creation. It also anticipates the God speeches in Job 38-41, where God affirms His sovereignty over all creation, encompassing both human and non-human creatures. These speeches validate Job's arguments yet at the same time underline the gap between human comprehension and divine wisdom, hinting at an intricate divine order beyond human understanding.

This view challenges the idea of nature being subservient to humans, emphasizing that nature follows its divine order. Every element of creation holds unique significance and purpose. Therefore, Job's plea for non-human creatures to testify against God's perceived injustice is ironic as God employs the same premise to explain the divine order.

Finally, the declaration "in his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind" in 12:10 amplifies the shared divine essence permeating all life forms, conveying the profound interconnectedness of creation. This view reshapes our perception of creation, replacing separation with unity and division with an interrelated continuity of life, thereby challenging the human-centric view of the world.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1. Summary

We began this study with the aim of addressing the alleged Christian tradition's human-centered approach to the scriptures that have promoted the destruction of the non-human creatures as they have been placed in the sidelines. We wanted to show, however, that Christian tradition also offers interpretations that promote a harmonious relationship between humans and the non-human creatures. We have done this by reading Job 12:7-10 through the lens of ecological hermeneutics and applying a close literary analysis. In this study we have arrived at a number of conclusions.

Firstly, we have concluded that indeed Job 12:7-10 challenges an anthropocentric perspective that sees humans as superior to non-human creatures and the notion that wisdom and intellect is limited to humans. When Job tells his friend Zophar to speak and ask the animals, birds, fishes and the earth that they may teach him, he was drawing Zophar's attention to the wisdom and intellect inherent in non-human creatures and the earth itself, thereby disputing the idea of human uniqueness and superiority vis-à-vis wisdom or intellect. This implies that for Job, the speaker in this text, these non-human creatures can be considered as active teachers capable of imparting valuable lessons. Job 12:7-10 then presents a worldview where all of creation has inherent worth and plays a critical role in the divine order.

Secondly, basing on our first conclusion that Job 12:7-10 depicts that non-human creatures also have intellect and wisdom, we also conclude that Job sees these non-human creatures as sources of divine knowledge and, further, have access to knowledge and wisdom that is, at least initially, unavailable to humans. Through the specific choice of verbs used in Job 12:7-10 such as שאל (to ask), שיה (to speak), ותרך (from 'to teach'), ויגד (from 'to tell') and ויספרו (from 'to explain'), Job implies an intense dialogue with non-human creatures who are capable of teaching humans. They serve a greater purpose beyond being mere sources of human sustenance.

Thirdly, we have also concluded that Job 12:7-10 reveals a profound interconnectedness of all creation. The non-human creatures mentioned in these verses are given inherent value and significance, placing them alongside humans in the divine order. This concept is central to understanding the relationship between all creation and God. Job's use of the Tetragrammaton (Yahweh) to refer to God and calling all creatures, humans and non-humans, as נפש כל-הי further signifies his recognition of this interconnectedness. These terms are also used in the second account of creation which puts emphasis on shared origins and interconnection of all creatures. This implies that for Job, humans and non-human creatures share the same origin and have an inherent value in the divine order.

Finally, we have concluded that Job 12:7-10 recognizes, not only their interconnectedness but also creation's shared dependence on God as the ultimate source of life. Job 12:7-10 affirms that each member of God's creation is a testament to God's creative and sustaining power. When Job directed Zophar's attention to the non-human creatures and told him to speak and ask them, he implies that all elements of creation possess an innate understanding of God's involvement in the world. The verses suggest that all of creation, both human and non-human, share in God's life-giving sustenance. Furthermore, these verses affirm that every aspect of creation, whether human or not, has its unique essence or role within the totality of God's creation. Thus, Job 12:7-10 is not just about the individual parts of creation but rather an evocative testament to the intricately interwoven tapestry of existence.

5.2. Reflections

In a world where the effects of ecological crises are becoming increasingly apparent, we find ourselves blaming the interpretation of the scriptures and yet at the same time we also find ourselves seeking wisdom from the scriptures, particularly the book of Job. The paradoxical nature of our approach towards these sacred texts suggests a certain level of dissonance; a tension between our need to understand our place in the world and our tendency to shift the blame away from ourselves. It is within this tension that Job 12:7-10 becomes particularly enlightening.

While Job 12:7-10 may not directly counter the anthropocentric view of creation one might see in passages such as Gen 1:26, a close reading of the Joban passage that considers its underlying view of creation and rhetorical implications reveals a rejection of such view. The passage rather leads us to an appreciation of the role that the non-human creatures play in our lives as humans. It also reveals to us our limitations in terms of wisdom and thus leads us to recognize our dependence on

the non-human creatures as they are capable of filling into our limitations. By doing so, Job teaches us to be humble and accept that even as we may have the capacity to have knowledge, it is not without limit; and whether we accept it or not, wisdom is not exclusive within the realms of humans. The capacity to gain knowledge and wisdom is something that we share with our fellow creation. This suggests a broader, more humble view of humanity's place in the divine order.

This broader view also underscores our interconnection and mutual interdependence as creations of the same God. This interdependence is not only in terms of physical survival but also in terms of knowledge and understanding. As an example, it has been a common knowledge that some of the most sophisticated aircrafts were created and designed after carefully studying the anatomy of birds and their nature or behavior in certain conditions. The same is also true to other non-human creatures. Indeed, humans can learn much by simply observing how the natural world works. Yet for Job, it is not only simple knowledge that these non-human creatures can teach us. What they are capable of sharing with us is the knowledge of God. This knowledge includes the natural law, i.e., the natural ordering and processes that nature demonstrates. As the book of Ecclesiastes would say, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven, a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted," (Ecclesiastes 3:1-3). Nature has its own laws that when disrupted leads to chaos. When nature does not behave in the manner that it should, then something wrong or unusual must have happened or someone must have done something that disrupted the natural processes and ordering of nature. Indeed, these non-human creatures teaches us to respect the laws that govern us and our natural world.

The interconnection and interdependence among creation imply a sense of equality or having to have something in common to which no one is more essential than the others. It encourages the notion that every creature, including humans, are all part of the same ecological network. This interconnectedness teaches that all beings are equal participants in the divine order and emphasizes our shared dependence on God. His allusions to the Yahwistic account of creation that emphasizes the common ground among all creation and by calling all creatures simply as *נפש כל-חי* (all living creatures) without making a distinction among the human and the non-human creatures even emphasizes this more as it underscores our shared essence.

Furthermore, Job makes us realize that as humans, we are a part of the community of creation. While it is indeed important for us to affirm our uniqueness as humans and how we have been created by God in a special way, perhaps it is also good to learn how are we not unique and special with regard to the other creatures. This idea challenges us to rather think of what we share in common with these non-human creatures and how we should be able to sustain them. And more importantly, to de-emphasize our uniqueness among creation challenges us to think what we can do as a part of this creation community.

Job 12:7-10 is also a great reminder that there exists an interrelationship and interconnection not only among the members of creation but also between God, humans and the non-human creatures. Humans are not the only ones whom God cares and who can communicate with God. Apparently this interconnection and

interdependence have been more felt in recent times as we experience global warming and ecological problems, i.e., that if we continue to exploit the non-human creation, the effect is not limited to them. Thus, as we exploit them we are exploiting humanity. Ecological crisis is a crisis for humanity. It is a communal problem within the creation community.

The challenge therefore to respond to this ecological crisis is not simply to save and preserve humanity but to maintain the order within the community where we belong. While self-preservation could be a natural instinct, to care for the other is a recognition of the value of each creature and respect to the complex ecological systems that make up our environment. Thus, our response to the ecological crisis must not be about preserving humanity, but about respecting the Creator and his intention and preserving the balance of all life within and among all creations. This approach respects the inherent dignity of all living creatures and recognizes that our life and our future is intrinsically tied to the well-being of our ecological community as a whole.

In addition, by emphasizing the capacity of the non-human creatures, Job recognizes that even they have an intrinsic value. They were created not just for human sustenance and their purpose goes beyond their physical utility. The value of the non-human creatures is not dependent on how they could be useful to humans. In other words, their value has nothing to do with their utility or even their role. Rather, in themselves, these non-human creatures have their own value and worth. Thus, whether they become useful to humans or not, or no matter how they are seen and treated by humans, they have this intrinsic value.

This reminds us of Gen. 1:31: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” All creatures have been deemed by God to be inherently good. God found them to have been already good, i.e., it was not by God’s pronouncement that they became good. In other words, in themselves and even if left to themselves, everything that God has created is good. It would be awful on our part, as humans, to be destroying the inherently good creation of God.

5.3. Limitations and Recommendations

In this endeavor, our primary task was not to prove that the anthropocentric interpretation of the scriptures is entirely wrong and therefore must be totally rejected. Similarly, it is not our intention to put this particular view or interpretation of the scriptures into bad light. Our aim is primarily to offer a reading of Job 12:7-10 that does not undermine the non-human creatures and take a closer look at the role that they play in the passage. Thus, our first limitation is not to have been able to have a thorough discussion on the anthropocentric view or human-centered interpretation of the scriptures. Although we have mentioned it many times in our paper, we may have assumed that our reader has sufficient knowledge about it.

Moreover, while the book of Job is rich in insights about ecology or the environment, this paper has been limited to 12:7-10. This limitation refers not only to our sources, but also to the fact that we haven’t extensively examined how Job 12:7-10 fits into the overall narrative of the Book of Job. Specifically, we have yet

to fully explore its contribution to the book's view on non-human creatures, a theme that is particularly emphasized in God's speeches in the concluding chapters (38-41). In essence, our focus has largely been on Job's speech and his personal narrative. We may not have extensively ventured beyond this to investigate how God responds in his dialogues. We therefore recommend further study of this passage in conjunction with the overall ecological themes within the book of Job, particularly in relation to God's speeches in chapters 38-41. These chapters also present a constellation of related themes, including creation, non-human creatures, and the limitations of human knowledge.

Finally, while we may have taken notice of some other ecological wisdom or insights in our exegetical analysis, we only have focused on how our passage disregards the anthropocentric view of creation and how it recognizes the interconnection among all creation in our main discussion. There are other interesting topics which could be further elaborated and studied upon however, due to the nature of this paper and the limited time and resources, they have not been included in this paper.

For future research then, it is our recommendation to also look at other passages outside Job where Job 12:7-10 may have used as a reference or passages where Job may have referenced this particular part of his speech. Perhaps by doing this, a further insight and understanding could be gathered and therefore lead to a more holistic understanding of the passage.

5.4. Contributions

Generally, this study will contribute to the studies on the book of Job, especially those studies that deal with its Ecological implications. The book of Job is rich as a resource for texts that could be used in order to better understand the relationship between and among creation. However, the book of Job is composed of different speeches, i.e., the speeches Job himself, the speeches of his friends and the speech of God. As such, our study will be especially helpful in the study and interpretation of the speeches of Job and his view of the non-human creatures.

This study will be able to provide an alternative reading of Job 12:7-10 which challenges the traditional anthropocentric readings and applies ecological hermeneutics to it. This study has shown how Job's belief in the shared wisdom of all creatures challenges traditional readings of the book of Job. It is an attempt to reinterpret the narrative as an affirmation of the interconnectedness of all beings, and thus providing a richer understanding of Job's (eco-) theology and worldview. And by doing so, this study tries to portray Job as an advocate for the recognition of the role of the non-human creatures as teachers, and thereby challenging anthropocentric hierarchies. Indeed, through these arguments, this study can widen our knowledge and understanding of the person of Job.

This paper would also be able to contribute to Ecological Biblical Traditions, especially on the on-going eco-theological discourse by demonstrating how religious texts can promote sustainable attitude towards the environment. This study also explores the theme of interconnectedness among all creations and thereby

contributing to the enrichment of theological understanding of creation and God's relationship with it.

On the field of Ecological Hermeneutics, this study will also be one of its products and a contribution to the growing number of studies that uses it as a method of interpreting the scriptures. This paper can be an example on how the method is used side by side with Literary analysis and how ecological wisdom is brought out from the scriptures through this method. This study has shown, that when used together with other methods of analysis, especially Literary analysis, the arguments become richer and meaningful.

This study will also be beneficial to Environmental studies in general as it reimagines the role of non-human creatures in the biblical context and promotes a more respectful and sustainable human interaction with the environment. Moreover, by highlighting the importance of considering all creatures as valuable in their own right, this study can contribute to the discussions around biodiversity and conservation.

For teachers and students, this study can provide a valuable resource for those teaching or studying religious texts and theology in relation to the environment by offering a fresh perspective on a biblical passage from Job.

Finally, this study will captivate those individuals who are passionate about environmental stewardship or the care and protection of the natural world. It introduces a perspective from the Book of Job that can significantly contribute to environmental discussions, as it highlights the value and wisdom of the non-human creatures. This viewpoint supports the recognition of the mutual dependency of all life, advocating a holistic and inclusive perspective of the entire natural world. It also encourages humans to have a sense of duty to care and respect all creatures, de-emphasizing human centrality and underscoring our role as part of a vast ecological network. As the teachings of Job stress a common origin and divine nature shared among all living beings, this study also challenges each of us to think and act more as a member of the larger ecological community rather than as unique creatures that is superior to the rest of creation.

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