DIVERSE IMAGES OF GOD
IN THE BOOK OF JOB

By

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DECLARATION

I declare that this mini-dissertation is my work. No part of it has been submitted to, or is to be submitted to any other tertiary institution for a degree, except to the Rand Afrikaans University of which I am presently a candidate. The views expressed in this mini-dissertation are those of the student. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Faculty of Arts and the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies at the Rand Afrikaans University.
This mini-dissertation is gratefully dedicated to my late mother

Rita Dolores Johaar

who first taught me to apply the Word of God.
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*Soli Deo gloria!*
*To God be the glory!*
ABSTRACT

In this study Ideological and Sacred Textures from Robbins’ socio-rhetorical approach, were utilised in reading Job. The aim was to identify diverse images of God; those constructed by the author of Job as well as diverse images of God surfacing through the receipt of the Joban text by different interpreters.

It was found that adherents to different ideologies construct different sacred or God-images. The followers of the doctrine of retribution form God into a retributive God and those believing in protest wisdom make Him a sovereign God.

It was further found that the two mega-images of God should be regarded as complementary. Some extreme images of interpreters were discarded, while others were utilised to enrich our understanding of God. It is only through dialoguing that these diverse images of God can meaningfully interact and enrich each other.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This mini-thesis is about the diverse images of God to be found in the book of Job, in which all the texts have something to relate about God. God is a key character, but God’s role and character nevertheless surface in diverse images, and particularly so between the literary types (prose and poetry) of writing.

In exploring the nature of the diverse images of God in the book of Job, this mini-thesis places side by side these different - often contradictory - aspects of the deity, and allows them to comment on each other. In a context where all human activity is also the scene of divine interaction, the God thus revealed is a multifaceted character.

This challenges human beings to find, within the diversity of images and language, a fuller picture of God, offering each of us a means of communication with the sphere of transcendent order and unity.

Divergent images of God are projected in the Bible and especially in the book of Job. The book of Job is like a diamond with its many facets of the varying images of God. It is also like a rainbow with its various prismatic seven colours.
1.2 PROBLEM, AIM, AND HYPOTHESIS

What is an image of God? An image of God consists in how different people see or perceive God. Is it one image of God or many images of God? Christians have different images of God in the church. Males tend to think of God as the most esteemed man. Females would differ from males in the sense that God would be the most elegant woman. Children would also see another side of God which adults would not see. If they are step-children, their vision would depend on the acceptance of the step parent or step brothers or step sisters. The poor in Soweto would see God in yet a different light. The rich in Houghton would see God from a totally contrasting viewpoint to that of the poor in Soweto.

How does humanity form images of God? Our opinion of God depends on what happens to us. The circumstances people find themselves in determine their diverse images of God. What are the conflicting images of God? A child who is sexually molested by its father will not have the image of God that a well-adjusted child has, who was not abused by its father would have. If there are many diverse images of God, they must be seen as enriching and not as depriving. Although some people have only one image of God, we must admit that, that would be limiting God to our earthly perception of Him. Humanity forms its own diverse images of God.

There is an old fable which Donald E. Demaray depicts about six men blind from birth, beggars in a certain village in India, who requested to see an elephant. A generous elephant owner alighted from his gigantic creature to permit these six inquisitive individuals to engage with the beast. They began by feeling the animal and thought that they would have an idea of what it was like. The first person touched the body of the elephant and retorted:
"Now I know what an elephant is like, it seems to be a rough wall". The second person did not feel the beast's body, but its tusk. He proclaimed that his colleague had made a big mistake, that in fact the elephant is not like a rough wall since it is so smooth to touch and is edged like a spear. The third individual embraced the trunk of the elephant and asserted with a good deal of excitement in his voice: "Both of you are wrong; I perceive neither a wall nor a spear, but a python". The fourth got hold of the elephant's left front leg: "I cannot believe you men suffer such blindness", he fumed; "The animal is more like a tree trunk, tall, thick, and circular". The fifth person was very tall, tall enough to reach the elephant's floppy ear. "What makes you say he is this, that, or the other?" he questioned with a superior attitude; "Definitely, an elephant is like a big fan." The sixth person clutched the elephant's tail and immediately pronounced his five friends wrong: "The elephant is not a wall, nor a spear, not even a python; certainly he is not a tree", and, rejected the notion of it being a huge fan. "He is," said the last man emphatically, "a rope." At this, the owner of the elephant walked away with his animal, leaving the half dozen blind men to debate what an elephant is like (Demaray 1983:783).

What does an image of God look like? Well, it has a body, tusks, a trunk, legs, ears, and a tail. It has more: eyes, mouth, and feet. We want to observe all these and more, but especially to see the image of God as a whole. No, we will not be able to examine every part; God, after all, is majestic. We can only try to see a fuller picture of God. Bringing that analogy closer to home, we see that many people have misconceptions about the diverse images of God.

The diversity is enriching, sometimes even contradictory, but it must be discovered through dialogue wherein we see a broader portrayal of God.
The images of God vary, especially in the book of Job that we are considering. Robert P. Carroll observes the calibre of God in Job 1-2 as one who is condemning with conceit, and does not flinch from laying Job and his loved ones in the line of fire to save face before Satan (Carroll 1997: 38-39). There are different images of God according to the retributionists, feminists, and anthropomorphists. Which of these characteristics must we accept? Is it from ‘above’ or is it from ‘below’? Is it perhaps projections of our deepest human values? Hendrik Viviers discovers that God fares exceptionally well in the Divine Speeches of Job 38:1-42:6 (Viviers 1997:109-124). Do we find various ‘Gods’ or preferably diverse inferences of God?

In this mini-thesis the inference of the ideal ‘God’ within human erudition is examined (Kearney 1984). Our hypothesis is that the diverse images of God in the book of Job, even negative images, should be regarded as complementary; it is only through dialoguing that people discover a fuller picture of God. The complication of knowledge of the ontological God will inevitably also surface in this study.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The diverse images of God in the book of Job will be constructed within a rhetorical-critical framework. The approach that the writer will utilise is that of Robbins (1996b). Ideological Texture and Sacred Texture domains of the publication will be specifically expounded upon. The ideological perspective of the (implied) author about the divergent depictions of God will be examined as well as the (ideological) reception of various commentators. Contrasting portrayals of God in the prose framework as well as the poetic body of the book will be examined. These different images are engineered by the
author(s) through the divine projections of diverse characters as well as the ‘persuasion’ of the author, particularly in the Divine Speeches.

Daphne Mathebula also fruitfully employed Vernon K. Robbins’ *Sacred Texture* as a spring board for her mini-dissertation on “Jonah’s Attitude Towards Socio-Religious Change” (Mathebula 1999:33-43). Her purpose was to discover from the narrative how God and Jonah acted towards change and then see if there may be pointers for Christians to handle socio-religious change efficiently. Her helpful deductions were reached by studying the book of Jonah through a challenge-response contest between God and Jonah. The book of Jonah provides directives about God’s expectations of Christians in relation to socio-religious changes (human rights). She says that Jonah’s attitude towards a socio-religious change was generally negative (Mathebula 1999:68-70).

Another source that the writer found helpful was that of Vorster who deduced diverse portrayals of God from the use of language, especially through the utilisation of metaphors (1993:126-135). Vorster sets out six helpful guidelines on rhetoric and religion as follows: Firstly, although religions claim certainty and although religions constitute the so-called ultimate values of society, their symbolic universes not only expose the uncertainty underlying religious behaviour, but also make us aware of the necessity of uncertainty for the creation of religious discourse. Secondly, the shift in focus from language as representational and referential to the creative potential of language compels us to study the variety of gods, including the Judaeo-Christian god, as the result of human linguistic activity. Thirdly, we have a parenthesis, concerning the relationship between language and experience. Fourthly, given that religious experience can be symbolically created and mediated, various other media, such as story or narrative, drama, art, architecture, et cetera can shift into focus. Fifthly, if
we concede that the god or gods of any religion are symbolic actions, specifically linguistic creations, and if we agree that negativity is the culmination of our 'symbolicity', then our term 'god' depicts the ultimate negation. Sixthly, we have described rhetoric as an intersubjective process and as symbolic inducement to co-operation (1993:126-135).

The interpreters can utilise no substitute other than to assert themselves in the ideological systems of their own Sitz im Leben. For writers to express themselves in a conceptualised framework of the past would be out of date. A people's perceived system is specifically obvious in its religious and philosophical assertions, and these assertions most often are intertwined. An understanding of the ideological context that renders a text viable is crucial to a decisive reading of that text. This is not to hint that a writer is a captive of a specific ideological environment. A writer may adjust particular philosophical and religious concepts through redefinition or reapplication, but in order to comprehend the interpretation resulting from such an adjustment, readers must grasp the normal or accepted meaning or usage (Tate 1991:33).

A literary compilation of art may change the ideological framework of which it is a part, but it is still a part of that framework. Individuals live their lives in conjunction with societal roles in which ideas, values, and images bond them to specific social functions. Therefore, any literary assertion reflects the impression of its historical epoch, and the most plausible reading is a pivotal one that takes into account this ideological impression (Tate 1991:33).

Every interpreter has an individual psychology and is a product of society; every commentator reacts individually to a general history from a specific
viewpoint. Hence, it is an individual reaction marked by a common ideological context. A writer's present ideological context does not emerge instantly, but is moulded over a period of time, having a continuity with its pre-history. The pre-history that precedes each phase of a society's cultural development is influenced by previous phases. Consequently, to study the ideological context of a text, one must have a broad vision (Tate 1991:34).

Robbins' ideological texture refers to specific collaborators and clashes the *lingua franca* in a text with the semantics in a rendition which beckons and edifies. Ideological texture lies at the opposite extreme of the inner texture of a text and concerns human beings. It varies from cultural and social texture by the way it reaches past cultural and social restriction into unique ways, whereby individuals promote their fancies and progress through volition, intellect, and feelings. Ideological texture involves the text itself, the way in which a text may trigger contrasting viewpoints, the manner of interpretation, and the style of the connection of an interpreter with other interpreters (Robbins 1996:4).

Sacred texture is embedded in texts that portray the relationship of creation to the Creator. Sacred texts definitely comprise sacred texture, yet they differ from each other in the type of sacred texture they contain. Sacred texture suggests "...seeking the divine in a text..." and discovering solutions into the characteristics of the relationship between humanity and the divine. The emphasis is on God, holy persons, spirit beings, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community, and ethics (Robbins 1996:120-131). Numerous texts other than the Bible and scriptures of other devout institutions involve sacred texture. If we examine sacred texture it has to do with arranging deep layers across a cluster of connections between the creation and the Creator.
Ideological texture and sacred texture provide a superb domain of meaning (Robbins 1996:4) wherein the diverse images of God in the book of Job can be reasonably interpreted socio-culturally and theologically. What makes Robbins’ perspective so appealing is that he marries fresh insights from the realms of social-scientific criticism and rhetorical criticism in the reading of texts. He clarifies his overall stance: ‘...socio-rhetorical criticism integrates the ways people use language with the ways they live in the world’ (Robbins 1996:1). To formulate it another way: Ideological texture is concerned with the biases, opinions, preferences, and stereotypes of a specific writer and a specific reader. Ideological analysis is closer to intertextual analysis rather than inner textual analysis, thus the interpreter is interactively analysing two texts. A special characteristic of ideological analysis is its concentration on the relationship between individuals to groups (Robbins 1996:95).

The interpreters of texts commonly disclose (intentionally or unintentionally) their individual locations, relationship to certain groups as cliques, gangs, factions, corporate groups, and methodological institutions of intellectual discourse: historical-critical, social-scientific, or post-modern deconstructive. With groups, it seems the author of Job has utilised two main streams: the dominant seems to be the doctrine of retribution, or unproblematic wisdom found in the prose, and the minority stance, or protest wisdom is adopted by the author in the poetic body.

Job could be ascribed to a Challenge - Response (Riposte) cultural system, according to Robbins. The challenge was actually an attempt to deprive the reputation of another (Robbins 1996b: 81). The core members are Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, who interact often. There are primary members such as Job’s spouse, Elihu, and God, who meet occasionally with the core and infrequently alone. There are also secondary members like the servants
who are on the fringes and appear rarely.

In conclusion, an ideological and sacred reading of Job then focuses on the different ideologies of the different characters. The last-mentioned also have, accordingly, different sacred or God-images as part of their respective worldviews.

1.4 OUTLINE OF STUDY

Subsequent to the methodological introduction in Chapter 1 a concise *Forschungsgeschichte* or short research history of the issue at stake, will be presented in Chapter 2. Thereafter the crux of the investigation, namely the diverse images of God in the book of Job, as main topic, will be presented in Chapter 3. Finally, the summarised conclusion and applicational insights for today will appear in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER TWO

SHORT RESEARCH HISTORY (Forschungsgeschichte)

In my consultation of the enormous range of literary works done on the book of Job, I have selected only what was relevant to this mini-dissertation. What follows are some studies that introduce main problems in Job as well as the problem of the image of God.

2.1 David J A Clines on “Job”

David Clines wrote an essay on “Deconstructing the book of Job” in which he contends that the book sold itself short in two spheres (Clines 1990:65-80). Initially, section after section sets out to destroy the doctrine of moral retribution, only to find that the epilogue reconstructs it. Regardless of the insistent rejection throughout, in the conclusion blamelessness results in recompensation.

Subsequently, the book examines the catholic point of disagreement of human suffering, and further, establishes that Job’s dilemma is in fact incomparable. Job suffers so that God may be vindicated in the wager in heaven. In spite of emergences, the book does not give reason for human suffering. Clines remarks: “It looks as though this book of Job is another self deconstructing artifact” (Clines 1990:77). He then notes that, conversely, the book ironically is like an anvil that outlives the hammers that beat on it. What preserves it? Rhetoric, the ability to sway, was the solution. Myriads of interpreters have espoused the book, adopted its poetry, identifying with Job, and celebrated in his triumph. Contentions and faults within the saga
do not deter aligning with it. Most exquisitely, rhetoric prevails over reason and facts.

Whatever the credits of a deconstructionist interpretation, this focus on convincing rhetoric demonstrates its persuasive effect. Though some interpreters experiment with rhetoric in the scrupulous reading of texts, Clines attempted it in an all-embracing effect. Job is unanimously acknowledged as an outstanding literary work. Clines (1994:17) reinforces this by demonstrating that when a reader reads Job, the fascination of the book inhibits critique and induces one to accept inherent ideologies.

In summing up: these confusing and at times contradictory divergent images, and pictures of God, stimulate the question as to which image of God is acceptable?

2.2 Dale Patrick and Allen Scult on “Job”

Like Clines, yet with considerable precision and without a deconstructionist viewpoint, these authors offer a rhetorical panorama. Their essay on the book of Job presented point and counterpoint (Patrick & Scult 1990:81-102). The topic, “Finding the Best Job,” conformed to this maxim. They first applied it to selecting the text to be examined, but the problem remained unresolved. In its final form, Job reveals disputes and inconsistencies: the relationship between the prose and poetic portions, the interlude of the Elihu discourses in Job 33-37, and the perplexities within Job 23-28.

Patrick and Scult admitted that their maxim allowed no clear selection, even though they favoured the final form of the book. When they subsequently applied the maxim to aligning Job generically, they disclosed that it most
closely resembled classical laments. Complaints against God entail proper speech (Job 42:7). Still, the lament combines with complexities and enigmas. Instead of disputing, as Clines did, that the poetic discourses and the prose epilogue downplay each other, these interpreters viewed them as harmoniously amusing. They perceived the epilogue, much as the prologue, providing a range for the reader in comparison to the reader's compact closeness with the discourses. Additionally, they observed the uncertainties in Job's final discourse (40:2-6) as a clever move by the author that compels the reader to fill in the gaps. The involvement of the reader becomes the rhetorical act of persuasion.

This review of a harmonious God, despite all the contrasting images, allows us to fill in the blanks of who God is.

2.3 Tryggve N D Mettinger on “Job”

In “The enigma of Job: the deconstruction of God in intertextual perspective,” Mettinger declares that the book of Job comprises of three divergent representations of God: the God of Job's friends, namely the God of retribution; the God of Job, that is, the divine ruler usurping his authority; and the God of the author who preserves and controls his creation. There is a dual effect in the book of Job: the author of Job employs a linguistic proficiency in which the use of intertwining texts is significant. In the Joban discourses this presumes the calibre of a deconstructive dialogue with tradition (Mettinger 1997:4-14).

There is also an inner effect in the book. In the discourses of God, the dual wordplay is structured to point to a God who preserves his creation against the onslaughts of chaos. Mettinger concludes his essay with the
theodicy of the Job author. The book does not offer an amoral deity, nor a monistic kind of God. Nor does it depict an elementary kind of dualism. Instead it concludes in obscurity.

2.4 Athalya Brenner on “Job”

In “God’s answer to Job”, Athalya Brenner points out that it opens up a can of worms, rather than resolving the complexities (Brenner 1981:129). Scintillatingly, the revealed God figure is not different to humanity. Besides being presented as the immanent God subsequently to young Elihu’s ‘rejection’ of him to do so, he is formed in the likeness or image of humanity (Brenner 1981:135). Brenner demonstrates that this particular God is incapable of controlling disputes; he, like humanity, has to be content with living with dispute. In this respect he is transparent and naked before humanity (Brenner 1981:135).

2.5 M. J. Oosthuizen on “Job”

M. J. Oosthuizen, in his paper, contends that the fickle euphony of the narrative framework disguises an unsettled predicament of trust in the bond between God and Job, which is underpinned by the assumption of the doctrine of retribution (Oosthuizen 1991:295). He further states that the character of Job directs us to a latent division between his internal emotions and the external display of his piety (Oosthuizen 1991:296). Concerning the image of God, this is vague, supposing that he accepts Satan’s confrontations as the criteria of Job’s piety. Oosthuizen even goes as far as to ask whether God is naive or sceptical (Oosthuizen 1991:302).
2.6 Hendrik Viviers on "Job"

There are contrasting notions as to how God fares in the divine discourses. Viviers states that at the apex of the book of Job, God's response seems to be one of 'bullying' Job into submission (Viviers 1997:120). The readers of the book of Job, however, are left to fill in the gaps for themselves. The author's aim is for God to fare well in spite of surface impressions of the Divine address (Viviers 1997:122). The critical implied author is determined that God fares well in the divine discourses by way of his unrivalled rhetoric.

2.7 John Briggs Curtis on "Job"

J. B. Curtis suggested an extremely different interpretation of Job's responses to God (Curtis 1979:497-511). He disputed that Job did not repent, utterly and unquestionably rejecting God. He envisages Job here, ironically expressing his antagonism! Job states that it is futile attempting to talk to a God who is so bothered with great things that he is not even aware of the small problems, namely the suffering of the just and innocent. The character of Job is one that directly renounces God by verbalising exactly how he feels toward and about God (Curtis 1979:505). An intriguing question is posed whether God's answer to Job is inappropriate or viably 'open' (Curtis 1979:507).

The accomplishment of the divine discourses is definitively achieved by Job's response (42:1-6). If Job's riposte is elucidated as an astute sarcastic denouncement of God, then the implied reader has to improvise on the divine discourses (Curtis 1979:505). He sees Job as totally rejecting this indifferent, callous, and unsympathetic God (Curtis 1979:510).
This rather negative variety of opinions concerning Job’s response to God and particularly the extremely different interpretation by J. B. Curtis, obliges us to reinvestigate the Joban text.

2.8 R. A. F. MacKenzie on “Job”

Some critics argue that the divine discourse provides no solution to Job’s problem. An attitude of contempt is adopted, in that the divine discourse is regarded as negative: ‘In the context, it appears to be a huge irrelevance; it is like waving a rattle before a crying infant, to distract him from his hunger’ (MacKenzie 1959:436). In reality, this is an escape mechanism, rather than engaging in logical argument, since most of those who deny that the solution of the book of Job is conserved in its concluding chapters, contend that the book has no answer at all. MacKenzie states that we have to first ask ourselves: does the book have an answer?

This question we answer positively for the following reasons (MacKenzie 1959:437-441). First, if the book was to provide no solution, we should be confronted with a literary work bearing a dilemma of huge proportions without a present answer, without even attempting one. A further support for enforcing a solution to the dilemma of the suffering of the innocent and just in Job is the straightforward and overt plan of the book. A final reason for the dilemma of the book is to be found at the commencement of the epilogue.

We may conclude that God’s answer to a suffering, innocent, and just Job provides a solution to the problem of the book. The answer of the book is grounded in its blueprint.
2.9 Summarised conclusion

We already discover a positive as well as a negative image of God! It is clear that there are divergent images of God. What do we make of them?
CHAPTER THREE

MAIN TOPIC: DIVERSE IMAGES OF GOD IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The fear of people not wanting to commit ‘idolatry’ is found in not wanting to create an image that would represent God. The reason for this, is that God has prohibited images of strange gods and images of God, which both face the same condemnation (Preuss 1995:107). Although there is no outright citation of a sculpted or painted image of God, the Hebrew Bible furnishes abundant data about how the people perceived God anthropomorphically, theriomorphically, in metaphors and in symbols of the broadest possible diversity. This operation of picturing and imagining occurred in a context that was packed with literary and iconographic images. The images were subject to continual transformation, at times controlled by intrinsic issues and, at other times, by extrinsic factors (Keel 1998:407).

3.1 THE COMPOSITION OF JOB

3.1.1 Date and authorship of the book of Job

In the instance of the book of Job, debates about date and authorship have proven considerably unfruitful, with dates having been indicated as ranging anywhere between Moses and the Hasmoneans, a range of about 1200 years. The complication is that those accountable for the book have kept themselves concealed. Maybe the author also had an occurrence of suffering, but even that is a hypothesis.
The essential criterion for dating the book have been the semantics of the book and the overt assessment of a maltreatment of the book of Proverbs. None of these are conclusive. Some have derived that the earliest possible date for the semantics of the book is the sixth century (Habel 1985:40). On the other hand, others have contended that the semantics must be prior to the seventh century (Andersen 1976:62). Such proof is obviously dubious.

Although the Joban story is set in the patriarchal period, there is reasonable agreement that the book should be dated post-exillically, between 500 and 300 B.C. Language and style arguments (post-exillic Hebrew), the reference to Satan (especially in post-exillic books Zech 3:1; 1 Chron 21:1) and post-exillic protest wisdom appears in the book (Viviers 1999:562).

The “author” of Job must rather be understood as collective writers, who were one in mind and spirit. The singular “author” thus consequently also implies plurality. The writer came from a critical philosophical circle, drenched in the protest wisdom value-system, and wrote from the viewpoint of an affluent, well informed person. He could have been a wise counsellor in the king’s court, a scribe or a teacher. He was not only a teacher in the art of writing, but also particularly well informed concerning the then known world. He was literate and respected, and could have shared first hand knowledge of Israel and also other countries, nature, culture, and religion. He was a typical philosopher and had an outstanding knowledge of nature. He knew Israel’s history well (use of the patriarchal motif in the opening and the generic names for God, for example Almighty). Typical of philosophers, he is not much interested in the cultus or redemption history (heilsgeschichte), but is deeply committed and faithfully bound to God the Creator. Therefore, he tells us that Job found rest and peace with the Almighty and merciful God! (Viviers 1999:563)
3.1.2 An outline of the book of Job

An outline can reveal or hide as much of the essence of the diverse images of God in the book of Job. The book of Job comprises of a prologue (pre-dialogue), a dialogue, and an epilogue (post-dialogue), the dialogue being poetic and the other portions in prose (Bullock 1979:70-71). The outline that I found most helpful and relevant of John Phillips follows:

HOW HE FACED CALAMITIES (1:1-2:13)
(Job in the hands of Satan)
- Job Compassed with Blessings
- Job Crippled by Bankruptcy
- Job Covered with Boils
- Job Cursed with Bitterness

HOW HE FACED CRITICISM (3:1-37:24)
(Job in the hands of men)
Job and the Critics {Friends} (3:1-31:40)
- Eliphaz: The Man with the Exotic Experience
- Bildad: The Man with the Clever Clichés
- Zophar: The Man with the Made-up Mind
Job and the Comforter {Elihu} (32:1-37:24)

HOW HE FACED CONVICTION (38:1-42:17)
(Job in the hands of God)
- How He Was Rebuked (38:1-42:6)
- How He Was Released (42:7-10)
3.1.3 Audience and readers of the book of Job

The first readers or target audience were those who shared the value-system of the writer, namely that of protest wisdom. They are persuaded through the wit of the writer, to be self-critical concerning the value of the dogma of retribution. It assumes an enlightened, intelligent audience that would grasp and appreciate the fine nuances and argumentation of the literary genre. They were probably a small critical group which could afford to take the time to reflect over the life questions which the book of Job draws out (Viviers 1999:563). Clines says the book of Job speaks of and to a wealthy, ruling-class male audience (1994:4).

3.1.4 The growth of the book of Job

Like most other Old Testament books, the book of Job in its origin also went through a period of growth, which cannot be precisely recreated. The epical prose framework of the book possibly contained the original “story”. It was taken over and adapted to fit in with the poetry. But also in the poetry itself, there are sections which are probably later redactional additions. The Elihu Speeches (chapters 32-37) and also the “Hymn of incomprehensible wisdom” (chapter 28) does not contain a parody of stereotyped literary forms which is present in the “original poetry”. Most researchers also suppose that the present two God Speeches and Job’s two responses (38-42:6) was originally only one speech with a single response of Job. Still, the second is not only a mere repetition of the first one. Job’s second response lengthens and strengthens the first. However it may be, the final product of the book which lies before us, is a coherent whole. The final compilation and editing in the post-exillic era, was masterly done (Viviers 1999:562)
3.2 DIVERSE IMAGES OF GOD ACCORDING TO THE PROSE FRAMEWORK

The prologue and epilogue comprise two parallel lines framing the vast poetic compilation in between. The Joban interpreter has to face the reality of the relationship between the prologue and epilogue as it formulates the author’s intention in the dialogue.

3.2.1 LOOKING FROM ‘ABOVE’

The episodes between God and Satan ferments in suspense. Job is ignorant of the fervent fascination that he is fostering in the heavenly courts, when the sons of God (presumably angels) assemble before God (of appendix, plate 2; God as court deity). God even boasts about Job to Satan (1:7) as a distinctly righteous person. It is an indispensable ingredient of the view from ‘above’ that Job is absolutely ignorant of the dispute between God and Satan. As a matter of fact, some of the boundaries set by God cause some perplexing contradictions within the view from ‘above’. Job’s woes, for all that, are not some hypothetical occurrence. As we delve into the profundity and authenticity of Job’s experience, we will also explore deeply into God’s personality.

3.2.2 The inaugural image of God

The heavenly hosts were summoned before God for some particular reason beyond our comprehension. Satan was there among them (1:6). The suspense was at a climax between Satan and God. *Ipso facto*, the name Satan depicts “adversary”. The point of disagreement was God’s place in humanity’s heart. Satan had been roaming the earth, and we may assume
that he had examined the magnitude of humanity’s mutiny. Consequently, God diverted awareness to Job and signalled: “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8).

Hence, Satan condemned Job for being prosperous while at the same time serving God. He insinuated that God was his accomplice because he had blessed him: “But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has” he suggested, “…and he will surely curse you to your face” (1:11).

Satan had several tactics. Perhaps he wanted to sow doubt on Job’s motivation for righteousness. God was “bribing him”, he implied, just like a politician canvassing for votes in exchange for R200 notes. Satan was attacking God’s right to be served and obeyed. A servant who is bribed, after all, is not a genuine server at all. He is serving himself. If Satan could verify that Job was serving himself and not God, he assumed that he would have confirmation that no one serves God for His sake.

God responded to Satan’s challenge and commanded Job into Satan’s domain. The adversary was at liberty to torment Job, but he had to remain within certain boundaries: “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger …but you must spare his life” (1:12; 2:6). Satan must have been gratified as he left the heavenly court, he believed that he could easily persuade Job to renounce God. A sardonic view is held by Oosthuizen who accuses God of wilfully ensnaring Satan into testing Job. He further states that God is shrewd enough to doubt Job and to manipulate Satan (Oosthuizen 1991:302). In this wager between God and Satan we can clearly observe that God is a “gambler”. He puts Job’s life on the line, by betting against Satan with Job’s life.
3.2.3 Satan the ‘Adversary’

A deliberation that might aid us resolve some interpretative issues is that of Satan in chapters 1 and 2, which have been problematic for Joban exegetes. We do not have the whole picture of God’s adversary in Job 1 and 2. Satan’s function in the prologue of the book of Job is to interrogate God’s pious servant, and he is offensive and inimical toward God (1:12; 2:4 - 5).

The author was meticulous in that he painstakingly avoided two misrepresentations. First, that Satan was not to be identified along with “the sons of God” (1:6). Following a declaration about their conference with God, he added: “…and Satan also came with them” (2:1). Although “with them” could connect his status as one of them, the author did not want the implied readers to mistake Satan - “the accuser” - as one of the legitimate “sons of God”. The second notion that could surface was that Satan could be a worthy opponent of God’s sovereignty. In both Satan’s appearances before God, the author proves that he could not act without divine consent (1:12; 2:6). A double meaning is cleverly avoided by this consenting note and the fact that Satan’s threat that Job would curse God to His face backfired. Job cursed his date of birth (3:1), but he did not curse God.

The author has not set out to prove Satan wrong, but to prove Job right. He finds nothing within the structure of his narrative framework to entertain the persona of Satan. Satan is capriciously ignored in the epilogue.
3.2.4 Summarised conclusion

We may conclude that Satan in Job 1-2 is God's adversary, that he is His archrival. Satan cannot contend with God: he is like a shrimp trying to challenge a whale. He must operate within a framework of asking divine permission. Satan's character was an initiating role, not a conclusive role.

But still, as Oosthuizen has pointed out, God is a bit of a gambler! In Job 1 - 2 God allows Job's family to be obliterated. God is wagering with people's lives, as if they are pawns because he is settling a score with one of the members of the heavenly council (Carroll 1991:38-39).

3.2.5 LOOKING FROM 'BELOW'

3.2.6 Job's prose image of God

It is imperative that we examine the pious and tolerant Job of the prose narrative framework (1:21; 2:10), who has a tentatively positive view of God. As we focus our attention back to earth, we see an innocent Job who has begun his day in the manner he was accustomed to. He does not suspect that Satan has been authorised to attack him. Long before the day is over, he will come across heartfelt deprivation and bereavement.

A contingency of emissaries stormed Job relentlessly, each conveying disturbing news. First, Sabeans had looted all of Job's cattle and donkeys. All the livestock managers besides the bearer had been murdered (1:14,15). Furthermore, fire had descended from heaven and annihilated Job's sheep and all the shepherds, but the one who reported to him (1:16). Moreover, Chaldeans had raided his camels and murdered all the stewards except the
one who brought the tragic news (1:17). Fourthly, a devastating wind had
struck the home where Job's children were feasting, killing everyone except
the attendant who rendered the news (1:18,19). Job was traumatised,
without any warning. The bad news had engulfed him in swift progression.
While one bearer stopped speaking, another emerged. All that Job had
accumulated over the years, and all that he had cherished, was taken from
him. His mind went dazed, and his heart was shredded.

Yet, Job never lost his confidence in God. He had the right to undergo a
paradigm shift in his perspective as a result of his drastic circumstances.
How rapidly and obviously justifiably he could have expressed his disgust at
God and blasphemed against Him, but Job remained positive toward God.
As he agonised over his situation, Job's view of God did not change. To
demonstrate his sorrow, he grieved. He shaved his head and tore his
clothes (1:20), which was according to the custom of his time. Yet, he
continued to worship God and blessed his name, asserting: “The Lord gave
and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised”
(1:21). Even though his substance was depleted and his precious children
were dead, he continued to trust in God.

Satan is persistent: he returned to the heavenly court and confronted God
again, on the assumption that a person is able to resist all outward
assaults, but if an individual is impaired internally, such a one will turn away
from God. Subsequently, he requested consent from God to attack Job
again. In this instance Satan assaulted Job's body. He tormented him with
repellent sores that caused him much discomfort to the extent that he
isolated himself. His credibility, his eminence, and his status in society were
diminished. What else could affect him? Why should he endure all this
misery? Despite all this, Job did not protest against God. Instead, he
retorted:
“Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”
Then we are informed that, “In all this, Job did not sin in what he said” (2:10). The astonishing thing about this narrative prologue is that Job never blames God for his circumstances. This in itself would have been a shocking thing for humans, who believe in precise judgement, to hear.

3.2.7 Job’s wife’s image of God

Job’s wife may have vented the concerns of her grief, demanding that he (Job), “Curse God and die!” (2:9). There is no apparent reason to make the assumption that Mrs Job had any ulterior motive besides the well-being of her spouse. She could not differentiate between the far-fetched imagery of human afflictions and the physical and emotional proportions, which seemed more apparent than sensible. Job’s spouse was realistic, yet Job had the inner resources to repel her emotional discharge, realising that there was a mindset that aggravated her pangs of grief. The wife of Job had a very pessimistic view of God when she posed this question: “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9). We do not know much about Job’s spouse, other than her insistence that her spouse “must curse God and die!” She was in a sense playing the adiutrix diaboli, meaning the ‘Devil’s advocate’, by her outburst (Pope 1973:21; Janzen 1985:49). Job rebukes his spouse for verbalising her feelings, and tells her not to speak like a morally deficient person.

A helpful example of editorial modification is employed by Zuckerman, in that certain editors try, with good intention, to meddle with the text. He says instead of fabricating a blasphemous statement they euphemistically substitute ‘curse’ with ‘bless’ (Zuckerman 1991:169). The term ‘curse’ can also mean
‘bless’ in this particular context (Van Wolde 1995:203). Phyllis Trible refers to Job’s spouse as a paradigm of a wise spouse whose counsel (2:9) corresponds with the instruction given by Job’s companions (Trible 1975:7-13). One of the interesting images of God is that of divine wisdom, which Mills sees as a possibility: that of rooting the dignity of women in God’s own self (Mills 1998:99). The text inquires where wisdom is to be found. The answer given by Mills is that wisdom is not object but subject. Wisdom is a female who cries in the streets and accompanies God in creation (Mills 1998:99). The modern reader is challenged as to whether God can be imagined as woman? What is the place of femininity within the godhead? If god(s) present models for society, presenting images of sense of order and identity, what place has the feminine within such social/divine models? (Mills 1998:106).

3.2.8 Summarised conclusion

Job is positive towards God, but his spouse is negative towards God. Mrs Job insists that God is retributive! Job receives what he does not deserve. Therefore, Job’s spouse reprimanded him to: (2:9) “Curse God and die!”, and he piously retorted: (2:10) “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” Job’s volatile discarding of her pleas will be a boomerang to him when he too begins to lose his cool and utter sharp statements about God (Gibson 1985:24-25).
3.2.9 Prose epilogue

The epilogue manifests more of God's compassion, love, grace, benevolence, goodness, greatness, mercy, and providence than of His justice. God acknowledged Job, His servant, because Job understood that conduct in the world is real, part and parcel of human experience, which sometimes eludes our outlook. Job learnt that justice was only a facet of God's being. God's justice is authentic, human integrity is something that God will not, and cannot, be oblivious of. Job maintained his integrity, and by doing so, he had vindicated God's justice. God reimburses Job with double as before - a retributive God! This is quite surprising, following the poetic dialogue, which questions God of being a retributive God.

3.2.10 Prose conclusion

In his interaction with Satan, God seems like a "gambler". Job was wrongfully harmed by God, to save face before Satan. Job continued to be positive towards God, even though he had suffered the greatest losses imaginable. Job's spouse believed in an overall God of retribution who operated on cause and effect, and this is again demonstrated in the epilogue, although here in a positive way.

As Clines (1990:77) has pointed out above, the "re-instatement" of the retributive God in the epilogue, comes as a surprise. The God of the poetic body contradicts this God. We have here two opposing images of God. Is it a matter of choosing one or perhaps both?
3.3 THE DIVERSE IMAGES OF GOD ACCORDING TO THE POETIC FRAMEWORK

3.3.1 Job’s friends’ images of God

We will see that Job’s companions did not comfort him at all. Instead, they rubbed salt in his wounds. They were another facet of Job’s dilemma. Job had to deal with God concerning his anguish. In Job’s utterances we hear the distraught pleas of humanity which has been distressed; in his pleadings, and cries for mercy, in his interrogations, we discern pleas for solutions from God for the tribulations they are suffering. At the finale of the prologue, we see a preamble that is ushered in by the entrance of Job’s three companions, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, who come and grieve with him for a whole week of mourning. Given the latent obscurity of the book, we do not know if their speechlessness is in empathy with or retribution on Job (Clines 1989:55).

With Job’s inaugural gambit having been set in place, his companions then commence the assignment of volunteering him support, however, it soon becomes obvious that the support that they volunteer is not actually support but reproach. Their own dogmatic stance have been questioned by Job’s denial to confess any fault on his part. They, on the contrary, believe that if any one is suffering, then it must be proof of God’s annoyance with that person. Thus, they reason that Job must be a sinner of considerable consequence to be suffering in the manner that he has. This stance is rejected by Job.

This central conversation is constructed in three levels of discourses following a scrupulous progression. Each of the companions converses in
turn, in the sequence Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, with Job giving comments to each discourse in turn. Only in the third stage of discourses, 22-27, is the cycle disrupted, and there may be textual tampering at that point anyway. None of the companions are aware that there is a divine assessment going on; they are as innocent as Job of this situation, and each of them persists in summoning Job to repent for his sin. Although there is a pivotal theme to the overall sequence, there are still discrepancies that can be discerned between each companion, so that Eliphaz is a somewhat mild mystic, Bildad a rigid traditionalist and Zophar a hot-headed dogmatist (La Sor 1982:565).

As the dispute continues, the allegations against Job become progressively intense. In the first sequence of discourses, the companions communicate in customary style about the sins that they believe that Job is guilty of. By the time that we come to the third sequence, their allegations are blunt, and they impeach Job of definite sins, even though no exhibit is ever produced as to why they believe that Job has committed these things (22:5-11).

In spite of all this, Job conserves his faith, refusing to acknowledge that he has done anything sinful. He contends that he is in fact a virtuous person, and that his suffering must be for some other cause than those which his companions are insinuating (6:24-30). In fact, by the end of his discourses, he is expostulating his blamelessness as strongly as at the outset (27:2-6). The doctrine of divine retribution, which is operative in various sections of the book of Job, became the only doctrine for the friends. The premise of this dogma, that God the just judge, compensates the righteous with affluence, and penalises the evil with misfortune, had become an unrivalled doctrine which assumed that all suffering was due to sin.
3.3.2 Eliphaz’ image of God

Since Eliphaz was the initial responder, it is presupposed that he was the eldest. He descended from Teman, a place known for its wise persons. This philosophical theologian, who was the most compassionate of the three friends, advised from his vast wisdom and insight and experience of Yahweh, or so he thought.

Eliphaz’ main observation was that humanity does not suffer without cause. His experience taught him that suffering was God’s punishment for sin. The dogma of moral retribution is supported by Eliphaz with the maxim that: “... those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish” (4:7 - 9). He substantiates his view by referring to the destiny of lions who perish for a lack of prey, because of their ferocious dispositions (4:10 - 11). What Eliphaz contributed to the dialogue was possibly the all - encompassing precept that he propagated: the world functions according to the law of deed and consequence (4:7-11).

Eliphaz accused Job indirectly of hiding some wicked sin. Eliphaz call upon the aid of a dream that he believes that God gave him to substantiate that the innocent do not suffer (4:12-21). Eliphaz alleged that since God, who is an unbiased judge, did not penalise the righteous person, nor protected the wicked, and therefore Job’s suffering was a hint of secret sin (5:8-16). Perhaps that is the only deduction one could depict from his first speech. Eliphaz seems to contradict himself in 5:7, since it suggests that humanity’s problems are caused because of their existence instead from their lifestyle, thus blaming God.
However, in his second discourse, Eliphaz spoke more abruptly:
"Your sin prompts your mouth; you adopt the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, not mine; your own lips testify against you" (15:5-6). Eliphaz cynically cross-examined Job (15:7-14),

A later plea to an observation follows (15:17-18), and then assuming Job's guilt. The uninitiated seldom fail to follow the sequence of debate in wisdom discourses. Subsequently, they try to live by what was inferred to be understood as incorrect. To expand on this it is necessary to consider 15:20. Would we take this as an inspired dogma that wicked people cannot be happy? Job did not! Instead, he rigorously rejected it. This is a portion of Eliphaz' discourse, in which he is trying to persuade Job that the reason for his suffering is that he has been wicked. Eliphaz debated from experience and traditional wisdom that Job's rudimentary affluence was evident by the accepted notion, that the evil enjoy only temporary well-being and enjoyment, before God deals out retributive judgement (15:17-35).

Eliphaz' third discourse was a blatant accusation of being guilty of sin. Almost brutally, he charged Job of being engrossed with vileness. "Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?" he interrogated (22:5). Hence it seemed obvious to Eliphaz that Job was a sinner who needed to repent of his sins and to become obedient so that God would restore him again (22:4-11,21-30). He terminated this discourse by commanding Job's repentance (22:22-26).
3.3.3 Bildad’s image of God

Bildad who resided in Shuah, was a rigid traditionalist. He banished Job’s objections of blamelessness as “blustering wind” (8:2-3, 11-22). He even alluded to Job’s children who had died as penalty for sin. These were not consoling words to a person who had diligently suffered vicariously for his children (1:5). Bildad presumed Job’s horrific guilt on the basis of the past. This is his philosophy:

“Ask the former generations and find out what their fathers learned. Will they not instruct you and tell you? Will they not bring forth words from their understanding?” Bildad summons Job to look to history and show him a righteous individual that suffers (8:8-10). To clarify his uncompromising doctrine of God’s retribution, he showed Job the papyrus plant that flourishes in the swamp and withers as soon as it becomes luscious (8:11-13).

In his second discourse (18:5-21), Bildad bluntly pointed to acute repercussions of evil: “The lamp of the wicked is snuffed out (18:5); The light in his tent becomes dark (18:6); a trap lies in his path (18:10); It eats away parts of his skin” (18:13); a reference to Job’s physical predicament.

Bildad’s third discourse is very concise. It extols God and compares humanity to a maggot, suggesting openly what he thought of Job for persisting in his claim of integrity at the disbursement of God.
3.3.4 Zophar's image of God

Zophar inevitably held the same theological stance as his two colleagues, that the inescapable exhibits found Job guilty (11:6). Zophar asks Job a question that the Joban author would also later reiterate about knowing God (11:7). For whoever or whatever God may be, He is inaccessible to our comprehension. Indeed, Zophar who was from Naamah and an ethicist, was conceited in his orthodoxy. He argued that since God is fathomless and awesome: "Surely he recognises deceitful men" (11:11).

Therefore, if Job would shun his wicked ways, God would heal him (11:14). Zophar goes directly to the core of the issue: Job must repent for the sins that he has so evidently committed, at which point life would once again be liveable (11:13-20). His meticulous moral value is encapsulated in this excerpt from his second discourse:

"Surely you know how it has been from of old, ever since man was placed on the earth, that the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment" (20:4,5).

Zophar did not present a third discourse. He presumably simply rejected Job from his memory as a hopeless case. The author "ignores" him, for talking nonsense. He does not get another opportunity to speak.
3.3.5 Elihu’s image of God

Elihu, the last consoler, tries to protect God’s surpassing ways of wisdom. He imitates God in his approach. In Job 33:23, the conversation focuses on an angel as a heavenly protector, who perhaps was regarded as the opponent of the heavenly prosecutor, Satan, in Job 1 and 2 (Preuss 1995:166). A note of wilful irony is introduced with the entrance of Elihu on the scene. His name means “He is my God”, yet his view is very humanistic. He comes in as a reaction to Job’s plea for someone to monitor his case (31:35), and Elihu tries, however unsuccessfully, to attain just that end.

While all this was transpiring, a young lad sat still on the fringes. He listened attentively to all that was said. When the cycle of discourses was eventually completed, he arose to have his say. As the storm brewed, he expressed his viewpoint in four raging discourses in chapters 32-37.

Beginning with a prose preamble (32:1-5), Elihu embarks on an arrangement of discourses. While they are not presented as detached discourses as with the previous cycles, there are apparent developments of thought which permit us to attribute various discourses to him. At the core of Elihu’s view is an altercation aroused momentarily by Eliphaz, which is to hint that suffering may be a means whereby God disciplines or teaches people (33:14-30; 36:8-12; 5:17). Suffering as being didactic is perhaps Elihu’s most unique contribution.

In his first dialogue, the lad Elihu, affirmed that he was with elderly and experienced veterans (32:6-9). He showed that when Job had contended his innocence, not one had found him guilty (12). He indicated that a person
who is suffering may not be meeting a penalty, but may be summoned to uprightness (33:16-18). If humanity were to be penalised to the extent they warranted, no one would escape (34:10-15).

Elihu stopped, but Job did not reply as he had previously to the other three friends. He resumed and indicated that Job had made some impetuous utterances about God. Consequently, he inferred that Job's sin had caused his suffering (34:10-12,31-37). In chapters 36 and 37, Elihu reiterated his inherent premise that a just God would not allow a blameless person to suffer and then concluded by stating that God's ways of doing things is beyond human comprehension.

When Elihu concluded, all the interrogation was terminated. The wise sayings of humanity had not justified the circumstances of Job. Rather, the mood of Job had transcended with the brewing thunderous clouds. The reticence between these friends was reflected by the pre-storm tranquillity. There was an authoritative voice awaiting: the majestic voice of God that would speak from the storm.

Ironically, it was from the same storm from which Elihu inferred God's inability to communicate, that God in turn speaks to Job. Throughout the book, the implication has been that Job's difficulty has not been his companions, but rather God. This gives rise to some of the frustration that Job experiences, contrary to the comment by the apostle James in his general epistle (5:11)! In any case, none of his companions or Elihu have been able to persuade him that he is a sinner and that sin is the cause of his suffering.
Besides, Elihu also fails to solve the problem of Job's suffering, and eventually condemns Job for thinking that he could state his case before God. God is sovereign over all creation, but according to Elihu he is also distanced from our daily encounters. Meanwhile a storm passes by: Elihu points to the storm and insists that this is a close encounter with the divine voice of God (37:21-24). The magnificent irony for him is that the actual storm that is passing by is the one out of which God communicates to Job (38:1)!

3.3.6 Summarised conclusion

The three companions are off the mark in their predictable doctrine of God being retributive. According to them God operates only with cause and effect. This is in fact a rather minute God. In the epilogue, God condemns them all and vindicates Job, wipes their one-sided image of Him off the table. Elihu adds a nuance to the friends' view of God as retributive; to him suffering is also didactic, apart from being the consequence of sinning. Elihu is, however, completely ignored in the epilogue. Ironically, "sinful" Job has to intercede for the "miserable comforters" (of appendix, plate 18; and My servant Job shall pray for you).

3.3.7 Job's poetic images of God

Job's introductory lament is preceded by a whole week of silence, during which the persons of the East sat with Job (2:11-13). It seems that the culture required that the afflicted began speaking. Following the seven days of silence, Job unexpectedly commences the discourse by means of a cursing cry on himself. Sarcastically, though he has declined to heed the counsel of his spouse, his cry contains far more of the spirit of her counsel
than his open rejection of her stance might initially have indicated. Nevertheless, Job positively confesses that he wishes that he had never been born, in a spirit similar to that of the weeping prophet Jeremiah in chapter 20. Although, there may be a hint of a lament on the basis that he had even been conceived, the critical point of his words are to air his mourning at ever being born, or at best to have been permitted to live (3:11-13).

Undoubtedly, the only thing that Job asserts about God at this point is that he is too protective, refusing to permit those who suffer to go all the way to the grave. Job actually does not curse God, but it is his refusal to acknowledge that he is in any way accountable for what happens to him, that turns into the dispute.

Thus Job broke the cold solemnity in Chapter 3. His first discourse is asserted by two themes:

* Cursing his birthday, a kind of death wish (3:1-19).
* A restless life engrossed in turmoil (3:25,26).

Most of us, like Job, have entertained the thought that God faltered by creating us. How many times have we contemplated that the world would be better off if we were to die?

Job responds to his companions. At every opportunity one of Job's critical companions spoke, and he took them to task. Job answered his "counsellors" with mixed emotions regarding God and his situation. On the one hand, his death wish was expressed, and his defence mechanisms signified that he was perhaps self-righteous and rebellious. On the other hand, he exalted God and expressed deep faith in God's goodness and
greatness. Job reiterated his lament (6:4). His emotions are captured in chapter 6:4 where he responds to Eliphaz:
“The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God’s terrors are marshalled against me.”

The Job of the poetic discourses in chapters 3 - 27 revolts against God and sees God in a negative light. Job was under the impression that God had no need of him at all (7:7 - 20).

Job proclaims that he is an innocent victim who is hunted by God like a lion so that He can display his ability as a hunter (10:16). Creatures cannot see a pattern of a moral doctrine of retribution in the natural realm, though Job still presupposes there might be one (12:11). In God’s response concerning the needs of the lion, doubt is evident. God sustains the lion by providing an innocent victim like Job. God is described as a warrior or warlike opponent of human beings (16:12 - 14; 30:21) (Preuss 1995:129).

Job declares that trees are not like humanity. The plant with its roots may be cut off, but its trunk will grow again when its roots are exposed to water (14:7 - 9). The tree may die, but it has hope which allows it to flourish. Humans do not have the same hope. If they die, they never come back to life. Job asserts that God has uprooted him like a tree and denied the option of life or hope (19:10).

The rhetoric of Job’s discourses contains blasphemy. His introductory abruptness is a mouth full of curses; his conclusion incorporates a bold profanity (chapter 31). He indicts God of being a treacherous spy, a cold blooded hunter, and a formidable enemy. As we gaze into the wreck of Job’s suffering, he seems to portray God as an angry, unjust, uncaring, and
sadistic Creator.

An intriguing characteristic of Job’s discourses is his plea for a divine judicial hearing in which he will defend his case before God and thus prove himself to be innocent. In this context he wants to debate that God is, in fact, not fair in his dealings with humanity because there are, indeed, instances when it is the evildoers who succeed while the virtuous suffer on (21:7 - 16).

In this judicial drama that Job pleads for, he wishes above all else to exonerate himself. In chapter 9 he has accepted the fact that he cannot win an argument with God, but yield to his sovereignty (9:1 - 12). He, however, still craves a lawsuit (13:3, 13 - 19). The admission that he cannot win the case leads him to admit that there must be an advocate for him in heaven who will defend his case (16:18 - 22). This decisively leads to the solemn supplication of (19:23 - 29) where Job expresses his reliance that through this advocate, he will be finally acquitted.

This yearning for the court case has traditionally been interpreted in messianic terms. The messianic exposition is followed by Smick (1988:941-943), though it is God himself who is the redeemer (Hartley 1988:292-295). It is much more likely that Job has in mind some kind of spirit being in the divine court (Habel 1985:303-306). In any case, Job desires the privilege of having his case examined by God and so being able to prove his innocence, and consequently accuses God of injuring him without due reason for doing so. Therefore, Job objects and argues his innocence not only to his companions, but wishes to have the occasion to do so with God as well.
Job defended himself by responding to his critics' persistence that he must have been responsible for his sins, he consistently affirmed his innocence. Job never insisted that he was sinless. But he unswervingly reasoned that his suffering was out of proportion to any wickedness he may have committed (9:25-35; 13:1-28; 16:15-21; 27:2-6).

Job's replies to his critics encapsulated the following wishes:

* A continual wish to die (6:8-10; 7:15).
* His wish to be given a just hearing (16:18-22; 19:23,24).
* His wish to face God (23:3-12).

Despite his suffering, Job extolled God for his omniscience (9:4,10,11; 12:10,13); His providence of history (5:11-16; 12:14-25); His omnipotence as Creator (9:5-13; 10:8-12); and His marvellous work of creation (26:5-14).

In Job 28 we encounter an imagery of God depicted as divine wisdom. A pertinent observation by Wolfers is that wisdom cannot be detected or even spotted, only received. It is something way above our cognisance, in a sphere we cannot grasp. Therefore we must accept the instruction of the One Being who can grasp (Wolfers 1995:492).

In chapter 29, Job remembered his happiness prior the assault. In chapter 30, he reveals the abyss of his hurt. Consequently, Job confronted God by retorting:

"Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defence - let my accuser put his indictment in writing" (31:35).
After Job blurted out his emotions, he reserved his comments until later.

3.3.8 Summarised conclusion

Job's view of God in the poetry is quite negative, as opposed to the positive view of God in the prologue. Job has unconsciously assimilated the negative advice he received from his spouse and applied it. Job was negative and confused, but honestly searching for the right answers. His image of God was that of a prowling lion who preyed on him. Job portrayed God as a hunter who relentlessly tracked him down with the objective of Job being game. Job accused God of being a treacherous spy, and an evil enemy. Habel succinctly states that Job had a battered image of his potential as a human being (1981:51-53). Job insists on taking God to court for His injustice towards Job.

3.4 SUPPOSEDLY LOOKING FROM ‘ABOVE’: THE DIVINE DISCOURSES

Spectacularly, it is God who communicates. He does so by asking Job a sequence of rhetorical questions which are ultimately beyond his power to comprehend and are unanswerable (28:1-11). Viviers maintains that the poet of Job 28 proficiently utilises this hymn as an interlude or even prelude. Firstly, in retrospect, it negatively evaluates the dispute thus far. Furthermore, it also precedes the divine discourses. God is at this point still transcendent only to become immanent in the theophany (Viviers 1995:1-9).

All of this eventually fulfils Job's phobias about what may happen to him if he irrevocably has the opportunity to meet with God and present his case (9:3). Job is ultimately dumbstruck before God as he depicts the magnitude
of creation, before coming to focus on two animals, the Behemoth (hippopotamus?) and Leviathan (crocodile?). In the middle of God's discourses, Job confesses that he cannot answer all of these questions (40:1-5), but this also does not impede the line of questions that persist. In the discourses, the divine contest is never mentioned, perhaps because God was the one who had allowed the suffering. That is why Job must accept that there is something beyond description in the character of God, and thus admits his vulnerability and weakness.

3.4.1 The Joban author's images of God

The Joban author has obviously been active in representing the different characters' images of God thus far. He has presented different ideologies and consequently also different images of God. But here in the Divine discourses "he bears his heart" about his ideas of God. The Joban author generated diverse images of God within the extensive quantities of a wisdom cosmology. The images are intentionally employed from nature to add spice and sharpness to a distinctive discussion.

The Joban author in the God discourses (38:1 - 42:6) presents the most exhaustive testimony to God and his creation in the Old Testament. They are, however, muted, and deliberately so, concerning mortals and particularly Job. They communicate about God as creator (38:4 - 21) and sustainer (38:22 - 39:12 - 30) of this universe, magnifying his majesty and exaltation over all creation, and permitting God to exalt himself.

Preuss comments that distress comes from God, and that he also brings about evil, that pain involves him, and that it represents him tentatively. The Old Testament defends its faith from dichotomising its image of God and
from the disintegration of piety and trust, belief and experience, and God and reality (Preuss 1996:142).

According to the earliest and most recent evidence of the Old Testament, the theme of God working for the good of his own and that of the world through his justice is an essential, continuing structure of faith. This does not imply that God's works are put within a framework of deed and consequence, which leads to the questioning of divine justice when crisis is experienced, or when the innocent and the just suffer (Preuss 1995:171).

Preuss detects that the God who has finally turned now toward the suffering Job shows then who He is in the pre-eminence of His being God (Preuss 1995:229). God's initial summons to Job in 38:2 challenges him on his previous discourses which blurred the divine plan of the world. It is cardinal to observe how Job may have dimmed God's design in order to value the momentum of his consequential enlightenment after hearing God's discourse.

Job's accusation foiled God's plan, not because he willed for the darkness of obliteration (Job 3) after God bestowed life. As Robert Alter hints, this is a crucial intention of the poet's imagery of darkness (Alter 1985:35-36). Job eclipsed God's design by being myopic in seeing God's justice in human juridical terms (Scholnick 1987:434). The hazy universe that Job portrays is a wicked world in which the perverse are at liberty to function in the foggy night without being punished. Job's companions presume him to have been contaminated by sinfulness because of his loss by God's retribution. The poet employs the imagery of darkness on this gallery to depict the universe of the corrupted who loathe the light (24:13), using the darkness to mask their adultery and stealing.
Job remembers that his outlook, once lighted with God's lamp (29:3) has been ruined by darkness (23:17; 17:6 - 7). The darkness Job experienced was expounded by Eliphaz as exhibits of his sinfulness (22:9 - 11). Job saw that the only hope for light was to file a lawsuit that would justify his legal standing. God did not answer Job's accusations immediately (30:26). When God eventually testified before the court, Job was enlightened. Job perceived darkness on the one hand as the lapse of life which he longed for and on the other hand, as the gloomy world of the sinner into which he was cast by God's cruel mode of operation. God demonstrated to him how unenlightened he was as to the darkness (38:19 - 20).

In a dazzling application of a presented chaos analogy, the author has Job ask if he advances a serious threat like the Sea or a Dragon. According to Job, God was aggressively trying to suppress his statement of the truth about God's unjust treatment of a human (7:12). The Joban author was well informed pertaining to the sea as a symbol of devastation to the enemies of God and his people. This imagery into a symbol was changed of one impoverished person sitting among his potsherds. Diverse images, whatever their origin, are subject to application, exposition, and modification.

After quite some extensive deliberation, it is God Himself who speaks. Two discourses by God and two responses by Job follow. God's first discourse arises out of a thunderous storm and ended with a response to Job's counter-attack (38:2 - 40:2).

The theophany poses as a dominant image, supplied by its symbolic import the narrative infrastructure that undergirds Job's epistemological transformation (Dailey 1994:83). This storm pictures the immanency of God as obvious from the Joban author's usage of the imagery of a theophany.
The theophanic experience does meet the complainant’s immense urge to face his God and vent his anger, though not as he contemplated it (7:11-21; 13:20-27; 23:2-7; 31:35-37) (Swanepoel 1991:192-205).

According to Ricoeur’s four-fold criteria, first, the symbolic import of the ‘storm’ is structurally bound to its literary context, where previous texts allude to a similar event. Further, the ‘storm’ here brings the correct double-sense to symbols. Moreover, the image of the ‘storm’ becomes dogmatically evocative. Lastly, the ‘storm’ is donative in meaning, because of the symbolic sense obtained in and through the literal reference (Ricoeur 1982:37-61). The imagery of the ‘storm’ provides the context in which the God discourses will take place. Thus, as Ricoeur called a “rule of interpretation” which, in regard to religious imagination, “reanimates anterior experiences, reactivates dormant remembrances (and) irrigates the adjacent sensory fields” (Ricoeur 1982:50).

In a nutshell, God said, “I am on the verge of speaking, Job! When I am done, will you be able to say something?” That was referring to Job’s “...counsel without knowledge”; God bombarded him with an array of rhetorical questions. They forced Job to marvel at God’s awesomeness and the benevolence that encompassed him. Job was summoned to admit what he was familiar with exhibits from earth, not heaven. God spread the evidence before Job in a poem with two stanzas.

Firstly, evidence from the created (abiotic) world:
the earth (38:4-7,18),
the sea (38:8-11,16),
the sun (38:12-15),
the lower world (38:17),
the light and darkness (38:19,20),
the weather (38:22-30,34-38),
the constellations (38:31-33).

Secondly, evidence of the animal (biotic) kingdom:
the lion (38:39,40),
the raven (38:41),
the mountain goat and the deer (39:1-4),
the wild donkey (39:5-8),
the wild ox (39:9-12),
the ostrich and the stork (39:13-18),
the war horse (39:19-25),
the hawk (39:26),
the eagle (39:27).

Job's first encounter with God was an experience of being humbled and silenced. Job humbly replied:
"I am unworthy - how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth" (40:4). His encounter with God left him dumbfounded as witnessed in the natural realm, Job was confounded. In God's second discourse, Job is told to prepare himself for various complicated questions (40:7; 38:3). God refreshed Job's memory of his (in)ability to judge fairly (40:8-14). Job was forced to place himself in the centre of the circumference of God's concern and to allow His justice to take its course. Job did not need to defend himself any more. This was interluded by a dramatic depiction of two enormous creatures: behemoth (40:15-24) and leviathan (41:1-34). These could be references to the hippopotamus and the crocodile. Both are symbols of chaotic forces. What follows is a contest for humanity to capture these mighty beasts that reflected God's omnipotence (40:15-24; 41:1-10),
and so harness chaos.

In Job's second response to God, he acknowledged an even deeper understanding of God's might:

"I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted" (42:2).

Consequently, referring to what God had said previously (38:2,3; 40:7), Job admitted that he had been mistaken and repented of his prior outbursts:

"Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6).

Job testified that he was erratic to dispute with God and that he would never do it again. He admitted that an awesome God who was powerful to create everything is a sovereign to be trusted and loving enough to do what is right.

3.4.2 Summarised conclusion

The implied author has ultimately rejected Job's friends' God of retribution and comes to aid Job. For whoever or whatever God may be, He is way above our ken (11:7). His infinite magnitude is veiled from our eyes. We cannot discover Him by ourselves. If we are ever to know Him, He must make Himself known. But when He does that, even indirectly through creation, He proves to be a fair and loving God.

God vindicates Job and corrects his situation over the 'advice' of his friends (42:7 - 9). Regarding the question of whether life is fair or not, it is not, but Job had prevailed. Job wondered, "Why me?" God prevailed; His ways are beyond our ways, and His permittance of suffering does not imply that He does not know what He is doing, or that He should be questioned. A personal relationship with this God outweighs any rational answer on "unfair" suffering.
3.4.3 Final conclusion

Now that we have looked at these two mega-images of a retributive and a non-retributive God, how do we proceed? In the book of Job, we saw that the major proportion contains a dialogue between the grief-stricken Job and his three miserable ‘comforters’. Additionally a dialogue takes place with a fourth who appears much later. This transpired in chapters 3 to 37. Then God reveals Himself to Job in chapters 38 to 42. Some of what Job and his companions say about suffering in chapters 3 to 37 is mistaken. It is documented in order to be contradicted, not in order to be believed. We are told so at the conclusion of the book when Job says to God: ‘Surely I spoke of things I did not understand’ (42:3) and God says to Eliphaz: ‘You have not spoken of Me what is right’ (42:7). It would be quite impossible, therefore, to take any verse from the book of Job and present it as the truth about God, for it may not be so. The book of Job as a whole is God’s word, but the first 37 chapters can be understood only in the light of the final 5 chapters.

The implied reader of the book of Job is taught that the wisdom of the world seems logical, but can be misleading. The reader is also taught of God’s wisdom and that which fosters character in God’s righteousness and sovereignty. The discourses and the story are fused to make Job a personage of exemplary wisdom.

Why are the Divine discourses given as a solution to the friends discourses? It displays images of God being incomprehensible, but just and fair. God is cosmic, moral, caring, and special. What picture do we see of God? We see a different picture of God than that of Job’s friends. The negative rattle-waving-God of Mackenzie is not portrayed!
CHAPTER FOUR

FINAL SUMMARISED CONCLUSION AND APPLICATIONAL INSIGHTS FOR TODAY

4.1 ROBBINS’ APPROACH

Robbins says that commentators refrain from communicating about ideology in interpretation for the fear that it will generate into “simply” ideology. He declares that texts are not “only” ideological constructions, but also sites that invite us to utilise various skills of memory, reasoning, playing, working, hoping and feeling. He finally invites us as readers to fill in the blanks (Robbins 1996:132). We have been sensitised by Robbins’ ideological and sacred textures in this mini-dissertation. We have attempted to fill in the necessary blanks!

What Robbins and others have said about “ideologies”, have conspicuously surfaced in the diverse images of God (sacred texture) in Job. We have seen different views in the prose (doctrine of retribution) and poetry (protest wisdom) sections of the book. Different characters view God differently and the implied author has his own ideas about a sovereign, incomprehensible God. Modern interpreters of Job also receive the Joban text (and God) ideologically differently. Without Robbins’ focus on humans as functioning “ideologically,” this would probably not have been noticed so clearly. Robbins’ approach applied encompassingly (including all other textures) holds good promise for future research.
4.2 A BRIEF REVISIT OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

A brief revisit and evaluation of some scholars in chapter 2 will now be given.

Clines says the God discourses (chapters 38-41) are outstanding as much for what they overlook as for what they hold back. Firstly, there is no mentioning of the retributive doctrine here. This means that it is not so rudimentary to understanding the universe as all the friends have thought. But it must also mean that it is not entirely wrong, either. If God were intensely in favour of it or vehemently against it, would He not have had to refer to it? Secondly, the divine discourses are commonly known for their emphasis on question rather than supplying answers, quite different from the inappropriateness of the questions themselves to the basic issues of the book (38:4,16; 39:1,26). The objective of God's display of incomprehensible factors of the natural universe can hardly be to flabbergast Job with perplexing portrayals of his might and wisdom. Job has not for a moment hesitated that God is mighty and wise, indeed for human comfort and for his own benefit. God then welcomes Job to take into account the enigma and complication and the often sheer awesomeness of the universe that God has created. Job knows that the dogma of retribution is not completely true. But God never tells Job that He accepts Job's innocence; so Job never learns what God's view of the dogma of retribution is. All that Job learns from God is that the doctrine of retribution is not the issue, but whether God can be trusted to order his universe (Clines 1989:xxxiv-xlvi). Although the poetic body represents a non-retributive God, the prose epilogue does so, and links this contradiction with good rhetoric. I have to align with Clines on this matter. The book in its final form suggests that both images can “fit” God, but He is sovereign to work with or without
cause and effect.

Patrick and Scult says that some features of God's answer seem to reinforce Elihu's approach; other features to fortify the righteousness and honesty of Job. Only the pious receive a hearing from God (13:16); Job receives a hearing. God does not have to make a name for Himself for justice at the peril of human innocence (40:8). God is the only sovereign power of existence. The interrogations God poses to Job seeks not to humiliate him, but to evoke his exaltation of his Creator and God. God does not pamper Job, or admit the justification of his grievances, or offer any explanation. Instead, the mode is impersonal, censorious, and even sarcastic. Then the appearance of God ensures a sense of urgency; God is too real and inevitable to ignore. A God who overcame Job by His divinity, rather than persuading him of his worthiness, would not elicit haughtiness, either of wisdom or of righteousness. If we disregard the God who communicates from the whirlwind, we must discard the God who has swayed Job, a man of integrity, of his worthiness (Patrick & Scult 1990:101-102). I have to aside with this line of reasoning also.

I would like to take issue with Brenner for alluding that God may not, after all, be fully omnipotent. Brenner insists that God cannot eliminate the wicked and of evil, at least no more than Job can. If so, God is not ultimately omnipotent: he rules the universe he has created, but has minimal or no control over evil (Brenner 1981:133). In the urgency of the whirlwind the disputed are now revealed: the somewhat unapproachable God moves closer; the former veiled deity is unveiled; the hostile "seeing" of God will be substituted with "insight" into the divine (Brenner 1981:132-133). Notice how Brenner misses the point on Job's actual physical need which God had to provide. Brenner says that Job has attained an integration of all the
elements - emotional, spiritual, and intellectual - that make up his faith (Brenner 1981:136). It seems to me that the formulations has somewhat been exaggerated, therefore, I beg to differ with Brenner's overall portrayal of Job and Brenner's impotent "human God! The whole thrust of the Divine Speeches speaks against this.

Curtis says that God did not care for the well-being of Job at all, because He is a God, so conceived as loftier than all of man's thoughts and ways, simply cannot be bothered by so human a problem as the unmerited suffering of the innocent (Curtis 1979:511). God is depicted as unconcerned when Job with biting sarcasm and hostility, declares it senseless to attempt to speak to a god who is so concerned with great matters (like cosmology) that he does not even recognise that the small problems (like the suffering of the innocent) exist (Curtis 1979:507). The god who responds to the afflicted request of his most pious servant with contemptuous and arrogant boasting (Curtis 1979:505). Curtis has the most contemporary issue on the meaning of divine justice in the book of Job (Curtis 1979:498-511). Curtis translates Job (40:4) as "Although I was too light in what I answered you." He argues that "this is bitter sarcasm, slashing out against a god who is irrelevant". This rendition shifts toward a subjective interpretation (Curtis 1979:507). His conclusions are drawn from minimal evidence and tends toward a subjective bias. A typical example of this is that he declares "there can be little doubt that the unexpressed object of the loathing is God," with only feeble and fuzzy proposals as arguing his case (Curtis 1979:504). He says the book of Job presents God as capricious, chaotic and a jealous tyrant who abuses His power (Curtis 1979:498). His interpretations is not persuasive, therefore his case that Job did not repent, but only was sorry, crumbles.
Mackenzie insists that the book of Job without an answer to its dilemma would embody a literary mutilation, a selection of verbalised doubts; it would betray a lack of appreciation of the dominating ideas which are evident throughout the book of Job. To reject the concluding chapters as unoriginal is to deny the obvious when it appears (MacKenzie 1959:437-441). Neither this, nor the preceding contentions prove the authenticity of the current answer; they admit of the unlikely possibilities that the genuine answer of the poem was replaced by the present one. Whether an originally independent prose had a different dissension followed by a different Divine discourse need not detain us. Apart from questioning the integrity of the book, MacKenzie’s rattle - waving - God has been rejected. This picture certainly does not match the supreme God of the Divine Speeches!

4.3 WHO IS GOD?

4.3.1 People must understand that there are diverse images of God

We must accept that there are different images of God. Just as in the New Testament, the images portrayed of Jesus by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, the writer to the Hebrews, James, and Jude differ, so do they differ in the book of Job. There is not only one answer, there are many.

In the book of Job, we also find that no pigeon - holed answers are given to the ‘Why’ question of innocent suffering. Rather, a more meaningful response, that is, ‘For what purpose?’, is given. That is why so many have embraced Job, identifying with his innocent suffering and his triumph. The wager in the book of Job is not won to massage God’s ego, but rather that God may build character in us! Ultimately, it is a personal, intimate, vibrant, relationship with God that counts.
4.3.2 Retributive and sovereign God

It seems that we have two sides of the same coin: God can be retributive and non-retributive. That God is retributive has become clear in the light of the prose framework, and especially in the epilogue. The Satan, Job's wife and God Himself, through his reimbursement of Job at the end, testifies to this. We indeed know that life generally does work according to this principle: Good deeds are rewarded with good results and likewise bad actions with bad consequences. A drunk driver that makes a terrible accident illustrates this aptly.

The friends also adhered to this principle, as their dialogues proved. Why were they rejected? They were rejected because they confined God to work according to the cause-and-effect principle only, for Him to be a predictably small God. This had to be rejected! God is sovereign to work with this principle or without! And this brings us to the sovereign God of the Divine Speeches. There He proves that He is elevated above the cause-effect-scheme. He manages the universe without this principle, and it runs remarkably smoothly. An example from daily life where the doctrine of retribution does not apply is when a fit, healthy person dies of a heart-attack. No definite reason can be supplied for this. This is God's decision, whatever His reasons might be.

To return to the statement above - is God retributive or non-retributive (sovereign)? He is both, but it is for Him to decide which of the two principles He wants to utilise. And humans should be careful not as to fall into the trap of the simplistic answer, usually the doctrine of retribution.
4.3.3 Other images of God

Apart from the two mega-images of a retributive and sovereign God which people experience daily, we also see other images of God. For instance, the feministic viewpoint of God’s femaleness. Interestingly in Job, they accuse the author of being chauvinistic. They conclude that God is seen in a negative light in the book of Job, simply because Job’s spouse is deliberately shelved by the author, as being a morally deficient woman. Nowadays, a battered wife would not see God in the way in which a loved wife, who is not abused physically, psychologically, and verbally by her spouse, see God.

Abused children normally symbolise their traumatic encounters with their sadistic parents or authoritative figures in society, into distorted images of God (the ultimate Authority). Sometimes people blame God as an “avenger” (like Job earlier on) due to a freak accident, where they have been confined to a wheelchair, maimed, paralysed, an amputated limb, or losing their eyesight.

So there are various images of God, some are good, others not so good! These images have to interact, to at least dispose of those that do not fit God at all.
4.3.4 Personal relationship with God

God demands honesty, integrity, and morality in order to vindicate Job. Job experienced the living God who revealed Himself, not the God who won a philosophical debate (Atkinson 1991:154). If we have identified with Job, in his epistemological and empirical knowledge of God, the fibre of our beings will tell us that there are divergent images of God. Our findings of the God painted by the authors of the book of Job, demonstrate this variety of images. God released Job from the trap of the false images of Him, which have held him in their grip, and spoiled his relationship with Him.

The author's task has been to explore the ramifications of a faith and life which are focused on God, and to do so by way of the diverse images of God in the book of Job. In themselves images are insignificant, but in the book of Job they are also signposts to penetrate theological truths. Many images are brought into service to reflect the exquisiteness of a person's relation to God.

My objective is not just theoretical, but also, that we may come to value more fully the glory of God. It is also pastoral and pragmatical. How can we develop our relationship to Him? How can God become more real to us until he occupies the central place in our lives?

The diverse images of God can deepen and expand our understanding of Him. This must, however, happen within a personal relationship with God as Job has finally discovered. Each diverse image indicates a different kind of relationship and experience of God, but in each case God Himself is at the centre.
4.3.5 Summarised conclusion

Going back to our story of the elephant, and the different opinions the blind men had in chapter one, we conclude: because each person touched only a portion of the elephant, none of them could agree on what an elephant fully looked like. Bringing that analogy to our hypothesis, many people have misconceptions about what God is fully like, or have only a partial grasp of Him. We cannot absolutize our small views of Him as the only acceptable ones. It is imperative that our ideas of God are being put into dialogue with others. This happened with the blind men and the elephant. At this, the owner of the elephant walked away with his animal, leaving the half dozen blind men to debate what an elephant is like (Demaray 1983:783). And it happened throughout the book of Job. Even negative images of God should be drawn into the dialogue. People usually box God in, and our box is sometimes unbelievably small! Humanity have the tendency to let their culture and traditions determine what they value. Those values influence our mindset about God and form the manner in which we relate to Him in our daily experience (Cantelmo 1989:5). Images are complementary, and not either or! The fuller discovering of the ontological God, is an ongoing process!

The present mini-dissertation, then, hopefully stimulates the serious student or scholar of the book of Job, to engage much deeper into the diverse images of God. In future studies much needs to be discovered. Robbins' socio-rhetorical criticism (1996) and Vorster's rhetoric of symbolism (1993) can be utilised as fruitful methodological tools. The better we understand how cultures construct images of God, the further we will increase our knowledge of the ontological God.
APPENDIX

Plate 2: God as a court deity.
Plate 18: God's acceptance of Job.

William Blake’s picture of God vindicating Job and allowing him to pray for his friends (Raine 1982:115).
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