

SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY

THE OLD TESTAMENT MOTIF OF GENERATIONAL CURSE:

AN ETHIOPIAN PERSPECTIVE

WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS OF EXODUS 20:5 AND EZEKIEL 18

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

(30 MPOG)

BY

ALEMU BERHANU WOYESSA

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR KNUT HOLTER

STAVANGER

MAY 2015

SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY

THE OLD TESTAMENT MOTIF OF GENERATIONAL CURSE:
AN ETHIOPIAN PERSPECTIVE
WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS OF EXODUS 20:5 AND EZEKIEL 18

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF THEOLOGY
(30 MPOG)

BY
ALEMU BERHANU WOYESSA

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR KNUT HOLTER

STAVANGER

MAY 2015

TABEL OF CONTENTS

Chapter One	6
INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 Cases of Generational Curse	6
1.2 Research Problem.....	7
1.3 Methodology and Sources	7
1.4 Plan of the Presentation.....	8
1.5 Scope and Limitation	9
Chapter Two.....	10
THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS	10
2.1 Introduction	10
2.2 Historical Critical Method.....	10
2.3 Contextual Method.....	13
2.4 Conclusion.....	15
Chapter Three.....	16
THE OLD TESTAMENT MOTIF OF GENERATIONAL CURSE	16
3.1 Introduction	16
3.2 Corporate Responsibility in the Old Testament	16
3.2.1 <i>Corporate Punishments</i>	17
3.2.2 <i>Examples of Corporate Punishments</i>	18
3.3 Individual Responsibility in the Old Testament.....	19
3.3.1 <i>Individual Punishment</i>	20
3.3.2 <i>Examples of Individual Punishments</i>	20
3.4 Conclusion.....	22
Chapter Four	23
ETHIOPIAN PERSPECTIVE OF GENERATIONAL CURSE	23
4.1 Introduction	23
4.2 General Notes.....	23

4.3 Corporate responsibility in the Western Oromo of Ethiopia.....	25
4.3.1 <i>Corporate punishments in the Oromo tradition</i>	25
4.3.2 <i>Corporate punishment in the Western Oromo Christianity</i>	30
4.4 Individual Responsibility	34
4.5 Conclusion.....	36
 Chapter Five.....	 38
EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS	38
5.1 Introduction	39
5.2 Relevant Concepts to Exod.20:5 and Ezek. 18	39
5.3 Exegetical Analysis of Exodus 20:5.....	42
5.3.1 <i>Historical and Literary Context</i>	42
5.3.2 <i>Structure and Brief Overview</i>	45
5.3.3 <i>The meaning of ገገጅ</i>	45
5.3.4 <i>Theological Reasons for Generational Punishments</i>	46
5.3.5 <i>Arguments for Generational Punishments</i>	50
5.3.6 <i>Arguments against Generational Punishments</i>	53
5.3.7 <i>Evaluation</i>	55
5.4 Exegetical Analysis of Ezekiel 18.....	56
5.4.1 <i>Historical and Literary Contexts</i>	56
5.4.2 <i>Structure and Brief Overview</i>	58
5.4.3 <i>The Meaning of the Proverb: 18:1-4</i>	60
5.4.4 <i>A righteous Inherits Guilt? 18:5-20</i>	61
5.4.5 <i>Arguments for Individual Responsibility</i>	62
5.4.6 <i>Arguments against Individual Responsibility?</i>	65
5.4.7 <i>Evaluation</i>	67
5.5 Conclusion.....	69
 Chapter Six.....	 71
CONCLUSION.....	71
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 73

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all I am thankful to God who called me to share in the ministry of his Church. My sincere thanks go to the School of Mission and Theology and the Norwegian Government Educational Fund who made my studies possible by allowing me come to Stavanger, Norway and offering me all necessary financial support otherwise it would have been impossible. I am also grateful to my Church, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, who recommended me continue the studies and who acted on behalf of me in the process of applications. I am also thankful to Aster Gano Literature Society: the joint programs of Western synod, Birbir Dilla synod, Gimbi Jorgo synod, Begi Gidami synod and Abay Dabus synod who during my stay in Stavanger offered financial support for my family.

My sincere thanks go to Knut Holter, an Old Testament professor at the School of Mission and Theology, who supervised my thesis. He used several red inks in order to urge me revise the thesis. But his encouragement, patience and persistence to guide and teach me has been great. Lastly, but not least, I am grateful to my wife Aberash Terfasa who became both father and mother to continue raising up our children: Bethel, Burka and Dandy. The prayer of my family has been great when I was alone. Finally, I thank Øyvind Eide (a former professor of theology at the School of Mission and Theology) who initiated me to research on the current topic and many others who gave me important insights.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Cases of Generational Curse

In Exod. 20:5 God warns saying:

You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

The second half of the clause in this statement is about God's punitive response to fathers who hate him – a punishment which could be extended to their children up to fourth generations.

But, does God really punish children because of the mistakes of their fathers? The Old Testament has several cases where people become victims of what we call “generational curses”. Generational curses in the current thesis refer to punishments assumed to be extended to some of the next generations because of individuals' errors within that group.

The idea of generational curse raises questions in the minds of some contemporary readers. For example, how do we react when reading the story of the Old Testament that makes King Manasseh to be responsible for the exile suffering of the nation of Israel (2 Kgs. 21); that Eli's descendants have been punished for Eli's own mistakes (1 Sam. 2:27-33) and about the story that tells us that “the LORD turned from his fierce anger” when Achan's family were killed because of Achan's sin (Joshua 7)? What do these stories mean and how do we understand them?

However, there is no uniformity within the Old Testament itself, as we can find some texts which seem to offer us a quite different concept to that of Exod. 20:5. For example, Ezek. 18:4 and 18: 20 say as follows respectively:

For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son – both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.

The readings in Ezekiel seem plain because they tell us that each person is liable to his/her own mistakes.

However, not all contemporary readers find the ideas of generational curse problematic. For instance, generational curse is a common phenomenon in a contemporary Oromo society of Ethiopia, particularly with “common” readers. Preaching about sin having consequences on the whole family and even on the whole nation is often heard. The subject of generational curse also became part of Christian hymns. Oromo Christian hymn composer and singer Kaba Fido sings saying “Waaqayyotu adaba jalloota hortee ishee lakkaa’ee”, i.e., “God punishes the wicked counting [or following] their descendants”.¹

Biblical scholars have been struggling in exploring the meaning of generational curse in the Hebrew Bible, where both Exod.20:5 and Ezek. 18 are parts of their studies.² Some technical terms have been used to signify the consequence of parental sin. The concepts of “corporate responsibility” and “individual responsibility” occupied the centre of their explorations where the relationship between sin of individuals and the fate of the whole group where the individuals become members have been addressed. However, these biblical scholars can hardly be said to have found a solution to the problem.

1.2 Research Problem

The fact that the concept of generational curse caught the minds of the contemporary Oromo readers will increase the need of researching the subject. The research study aims at answering the question: “How can Western Oromo perspectives add to our understanding of the Old Testament motif of generational curses?”

1.3 Methodology and Sources

The concept of “generational curses” is a huge theme that can be approached from various academic disciplines. However, my focus is on biblical interpretation. Even within biblical interpretation, several methods can be applied. Beyond focusing on the respective texts themselves (for example, the use of literary criticism focuses on the text itself), I want to focus on history behind the biblical texts of Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18 using the historical critical

¹ K. Fido, in his first volume VCD song entitled “Uleen nu harka jiru dhimma baasa”, Addis Ababa: Sabeh Film Production, 2010.

² In connection with the idea of corporate and individual responsibility, the work of three OT scholars could be examples. One is H. W. Robinson, *Corporate Responsibility in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, rev. edn., 1980); the second one is J. S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Journal for the study of the Old Testament series: Great Britain: Sheffield Academic, 1995); and the third one is G. H. Matties, *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.

method. This will guide me to investigate the setting or context and the biblical characters involved in the texts (author/ compiler/ community).

However, the historical critical method alone is not sufficient to offer a contextualized hermeneutics for the Oromo of Ethiopia.³ Therefore, along with the historical critical method, which questions “what, why and how” of the respective biblical subject⁴, I will also use a contextual method. The contextual method itself has various tools. For example, liberation theology approach and feminist approach, comparative approach, evaluative approach and inculturation approach. Each of these approaches could be applicable in the current thesis. However, as the inculturation approach is at the same time contextual and also strongly dependent on the historical critical method for the analysis of the context of the bible text,⁵ the approach is used in the study of the current thesis. Generally, both contextual method and historical critical method are used side by side in order to answer questions of *what, why, how, where* and *whom* around the theme of generational curse.

Concerning Bible sources, Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18:20 are not the only texts raise difficult question. They are only selected as examples because they can represent the Old Testament (OT) texts that can demonstrate the subject. Exodus.20:5 is selected because it is part of the Decalogue – a centre of the OT laws. Ezek. text is selected because Ezekiel is one of the prophetic literatures where the density of the concept of “individual responsibility” is easily indicated.

1.4 Plan of the Presentation

The purpose of the study will be accomplished in the follows ways. It begins with introductory issues where a presentation of cases of generational curse is followed by description of research problem, methodology, use of sources and brief discussion of theory used in the study. In chapter two, a brief overview of theoretical consideration will be dealt.

Then in chapter three, a brief textual over view of the Old Testament understanding of generational curse will follow. Special attention will be given to some texts with assume “corporate responsibility” and “individual responsibility”. Each section will be demonstrated by some examples. The Old Testament and some secondary literatures are used. The fourth

³ The historical critical approach, though very helpful, may not address the need of the Oromo “ordinary” readers.

⁴ Justin S. Ukpong, “Can African Old Testament scholarship escape the Historical critical approach?” (*Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship*, Issue 7, November 1999), 2-5.

⁵ Ibid. 3

chapter, explores an overview of an Ethiopian perspective with a special emphasis of Western Oromo of Ethiopia. Apart from few literatures, this chapter mostly depends on fieldwork report.

Chapter five is an exegetical analysis. Here I use some recent commentaries, relevant literature and field work from Ethiopia in order to interpret Exod. 20:5 and some verses from Ezek. 18. The process strongly focusses on the analysis of the chosen texts as well as the analysis of some examples that have been used in chapter three to demonstrate both corporate and individual responsibility. For this purpose I will select the account of sin of Achan in Josh. 7 and about the story of King Amaziah (2 Kgs.14:6). I selected these texts because they are often used to refer demonstrate corporate and individual responsibility respectively. Finally, the sixth chapter offers brief conclusion.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

Thematically, the scope of the study of generational curse is a wide and complex subject as it is interrelated with other Old Testament themes such as idolatry, violence, polemics against other deities and many others. Therefore, the study mostly falls in the contexts of Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18. Similarly, since Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country, I limited my study to the Western Oromo of Ethiopia only.

Chapter Two

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 Introduction

The current chapter is brief but equally important as the remaining chapters. Its purpose is to present which theoretical tools or approach will be used and why they are selected. In the critical study of Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18, various approaches could be used. But it is not my purpose to mention and discuss all the various approaches. I rather briefly describe two approaches which I will use as tools in order to accomplish my tasks. These are the historical critical and the contextual methods, particularly the inculturation hermeneutics – a tool which presupposes intercultural communication. I hope, the later one can have a role to let the Oromo traditional culture contribute to interpreting the ancient text of Israel in the Old Testament. Each approach has its own focus and history.

2.2. Historical Critical Method

Biblical scholars have been using the historical-critical method in the Old Testament studies since from the last 17th/18th century.⁶ The development of the scientific discoveries in Europe had questioned the message of the Bible and the dogmas of the church. If theology or biblical studies are to be accepted in the modern mind-set, it was argued, they have to follow certain academic principles. Therefore biblical scholars began to develop historically oriented approaches in the developments of biblical studies. The result of this movement was the introduction of what eventually was referred to as the historical critical method from the last a few century and a method which has been used since then up to now.⁷ The history behind texts and the historical developments of texts soon became major emphasis. This method had and still continues to have a global impact in the field of biblical studies.

In Africa too, the influence of the historical critical method is vivid until recent time as it has been the sole approach in African Old Testament hermeneutics. I agree with Justin S. Ukpong as he argues that an African hermeneutics cannot escape the historical critical method.⁸

⁶ For detail discussions, read: Louis Jonker and Douglas Lawrie (eds.), *Fishing for Jonah (anew): Various approaches to biblical interpretation* (Stellenbosch: Sun press, 2005, Study Guides in Religion and Theology 7), 22, 30.

⁷ Justin S. Ukpong, "Can African Old Testament scholarship escape the Historical critical approach?" (*Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship*, Issue 7, November 1999), p.2.

⁸ Ibid. For detail argument see Ukpong's full article.

I think, apart from understanding the origin and history of the development of texts, hermeneutics lacks grounds to answer some important questions that the approach usually seeks to answer.

What is the focus of the historical critical approach? J. S. Ukpong offers a clear statement concerning the main concern of this particular approach. He says, “historical criticism focuses on the history behind the biblical text” while literary criticism focuses on the biblical text itself.⁹ In other words, it is about history around the texts.

However, though the historical critical method continues to be useful in reading the Old, the need of the African “ordinary” readers is extended beyond the approach. J. S. Ukpong, for example, argues that besides the historical-critical method, the African “ordinary” readers need another contextual method that can fulfil their cultural situation. Noted that:

[T]he traditional way [the historical critical method] of reading the bible “is not capable of responding adequately to the question that African Christians are asking about their life [...] as they were unable to bring their own cultural perspectives to bear upon the text.”¹⁰

J. S. Ukpong was conscious of the continued role of the historical-critical method, as he has been arguing in one of his scholarly works: “Can African Old Testament Scholarship escape the historical critical approach?”¹¹

Indeed, though it is not an African in its origin the role of approach is great in Africa. But if it is not used consciously, the “ordinary” readers in Africa may not be able to be profited from it. Concerning this Holter argued:

As I see it, it is a set of experiences with Old Testament texts, experiences that originally grew out of other interpretive context, than those of Africa, but that nevertheless, when used consciously, may serve an African Old Testament interpretation that responds to contemporary African experiences and concerns.¹²

The history of a text is as equally important as what the texts narrate (the text itself). Hayes and Holladay distinguish the difference between history *of* the text and history *in* the

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ J. S. Ugkpong, *Reading the Bible with African Eyes: Inculturation and Hermeneutics* (Journal of Theology for South Africa, 1991 (1995), pp 3-14), 3-4.

¹¹ J. S. Ukpong (Edited by Holter, K), “can African Old Testament scholarship escape the historical critical approach?” (“Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship”, Stavanger: School of Mission and Theology, Issue 7, November 1999)

¹² Holter, K. «Historical-critical Methodology» (Old Testament Essays (24/2 (2011):377-389), 387.

text itself. History *of* the text is not concerned with what the text itself says or describes. It rather concerns:¹³

“with the story of the text [...] – its own history: how, why when, where, and in what circumstances it originated; by whom and for whom it was written, composed, edited, produced, and preserved; why it was produced and the various influences that affected its origin, formulation, development, preservation, and transmission.”

The history *in* the text is about what the text narrates and in this sense, a text may only serve as a window through which one can get into a historical period to understand what the text says about political, social, or religious aspects of that particular period.¹⁴

The historical critical method aims to answer critical questions of whose, what, why and how's of texts. If historical critical analysis is used to approach Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18, we can critically ask: whose history is being described? What events are important in these texts? Who and what are talked about in the texts? What sources of information contributed to these texts? Are there any roles of the author and /or editor to dominate and colour the information?

The historical critical method, according to Hayes, has a special concerns in four areas of critical interests.¹⁵ Firstly, it is interested in questions of *when* and by *whom* books were written; and *for whom* they were originally written. Secondly, it is also interested in the original meaning of the texts. Thirdly, it is interested to understand the historical development of the texts, and fourthly, it desires to approach the text in a neutral way without prejudice.

Concerning the fourth interest, it seems challenging for a reader to have neutral approach and to be free from prejudice because each reader starts from his/her own worldview. Some scholars would emphasizing this perspective that we don't have neutral theology as such, rather we have several theologies with various predicates: “African theology”, “Feminist theology”, “Liberation theology” “Black theology” and others. However, both the context of a text, context of its development and the context of a contemporary reader must be considered.

¹³J. H. Hayes and C. R Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Louisville: Westminster, Third edn., 2007), 53.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ J. Barton (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1998), 9-12.

2.3 Contextual Method

In the above discussions, I have described that the historical critical approach is aimed to answer critical questions of whose, what, why and how's of texts. However, in the light of contextual methods, this approach doesn't fully satisfy to focus the relationship (assumed points of contacts) between traditional African culture and the ancient texts in the Old Testament.

African culture is indeed reach of cultural concepts that could be used in the Old Testament theology as well as in the Old Testament hermeneutics. In some cases, the Africans lost their useful cultural potentials. One instance is the Oromo of Ethiopia who might have lost their own concepts which could have been exploited in reading and interpreting the Old Testament. Rather, they sought to do it through the eyes of the western missionaries.

One big question was whether it could have been possible to seek to understand the Bible through their own (the Oromo's) concepts. Thus, only little emphasis has been paid to the interrelationship between the traditional African culture and the ancient texts of Israelite in the Old Testament. For example, the traditional Oromo of Ethiopia has several laws which share similar concept with the Old Testament covenant laws in Exodus and Deuteronomy as well as the Holiness code in Leviticus. Similarly, the Oromo traditional culture have paralleling concepts of "generational curse" which can illuminate the understanding of the same subject in Exodus 20:5.

In spite of this gap, we have a few missionaries and indigenous African scholars who have observed some "assumed affinities" between the two areas. African culture is indeed rich of traditional concepts that could be used in the Old Testament theology as well as in the Old Testament hermeneutics. Yet, for many years, only a few emphasis has been paid to the interrelationship between traditional African culture and the ancient texts of Israelite in the Old Testament. Foreign missionaries and indigenous African scholars have observed some "assumed affinities" between the two areas.

Two cases, one from Nuer of Sudan and the other from Lamba of South Africa, can illustrate how African culture can interpret the Old Testament. The first one appears in an article contributed by Holter. The article is entitled "'Like Living in the Old Testament times': The Interpretation of Assumed Affinities between Traditional African Culture and the Old Testament". Holter notes how missionaries and some indigenous professionals realized assumed points of contacts between traditional African culture and echoes of ancient Israelites

in the Old Testament.¹⁶ He further notes that the case of Nuer is applicable to the whole Africa. The emphasis of Holter is that the affinities between traditional African culture and the textual echoes of ancient Israelite culture are still detectable this can be used in inculturation of the church in Africa.¹⁷ The second case is an article by Magdel le Roux concerning the Lamba people of South Africa. The central focus of the article is that after investigating some similarities between the traditional concepts of the people and that of ancient Israel, Roux argues that such relationship can contribute to interpret the Old Testament.¹⁸

Indeed the traditional Oromo culture has some insights which could be connected to the biblical myths thereby creating windows to interpret ancient Israelites texts in the Old Testament. One relevant example is Lambert Bartel's research. Two of Bartel's observations are relevant:¹⁹ First, the Christian message was not a threat to the Oromo's attitude to God; it rather they found it a support for their values. Second, "the holy book of Christians, particularly the life of the Jewish patriarchs the law of Moses, the activities of the early judges and kings, they saw their ancient way of life reflected".

To illuminate the Oromo's appropriation of biblical stories to their own life, Bartels offers some specific examples. The first example is that the Oromo regard Abraham their first ancestor; the second one is the story of the first man's ancestor in paradise and the fall of man becomes their own story.²⁰ Generally there are several more biblical stories which the Oromo regard as if they were their own accounts.

It sounds right when J. S. Ukpong noted that African Old Testament scholarship cannot escape historical critical approach and further arguing that besides using western approaches Africa has to develop its own strategy to do biblical research in such a way that it is related to specific issues and interests of African contexts.²¹ Thus, concerning the Western Oromo of Ethiopia, it is also important to search for an interpretive framework. Can the contemporary Oromo culture contribute in interpreting the Old Testament? I argue that, in as the Nuer of

¹⁶ K. Holter, "Like Living in Old Testament Times': The Interpretation of Assumed Affinities between Traditional African Culture and the Old Testament" in *Reading the Bible in Africa* (Yearbook of the Faculty of theology in Brussels, vol.11, 2006), 17.

¹⁷ Ibid, 26.

¹⁸ M. Roux, "Africa interpretes the Old Testament: The Lamba, the 'People of the Book' in South Africa" in *Reading the Bible in Africa* (Yearbook of the Faculty of theology in Brussels, vol.11, 2006), 51-66.

¹⁹ L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia – An Attempt to understand* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Vol. 8, 1983), 357-60.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Justin S. Ukpong, *Can African Old Testament scholarship escape the Historical critical approach?*(Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship, Issue 7, November 1999), p.2-4.

Sudan and Lamba of the South Africa have some potentials that can contribute to the interpretation of the ancient Israelite texts, the Oromo will have some points of contacts with the Old Testament texts and these points of contact can interpret the Old Testament.

Thus, in the current thesis, I use a double methodological approach. On the one hand the historical critical method attempts to study some aspects of the origin and historical developments behind Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18. In other words the history of these texts will be analysed by the Historical critical method. On the other hand, I will use (African) contextual criticism by letting the Oromo traditional culture interpret the selected texts.

2.4 Conclusion

As far as the question of methodology of the current thesis is concerned, the importance of methodological questions of what, why and how's of the focus texts (Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18) remains valuable. However, the traditional Oromo culture's potential to interpret the Old Testament must have an equal importance. Thus both approaches are used side by side.

Chapter Three

THE OLD TESTAMENT MOTIF OF GENERATIONAL CURSE

3.1 Introduction

In his well-known study of *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, Joel S. Kaminsky says,

Inasmuch as God relates to the community as a whole, he holds each member of the nation to some level of responsibility for the errors of any other member of that community. Not only is one responsible for one's own proper behavior but one must also actively prevent others from sinning.²²

As he investigates the corporate responsibility idea in the Hebrew Bible, one of Kaminsky's arguments is that since God relates himself to a community as a whole, the sin of an individual can have consequence on the whole group. Human-to-human relationship in the Old Testament could be observed as a nation, a tribe, a clan and a family. Father-children relationship is the primary focus of my exploration.

The primary task of this chapter is to give a brief survey of how the idea of generational curse is addressed in the Hebrew Bible. I will make use of Exodus 20:5 and Ezekiel 18 as points of departure and then explore further relevant texts. A rough look at the Exodus and Ezekiel texts may reveal that there is a tension regarding how generational curse has been portrayed in the Old Testament Bible. On the one hand, Exodus 20:5 seems to demonstrate the corporate nature of punishment that errors of *individuals* can lead to the punishment of the whole group where the erring individuals belong to. But on the other hand, Ezekiel 18 seems to deny the corporate nature of punishment rather arguing for its individualistic notion. Therefore, considering the tension between the above texts, the task of this chapter will be accomplished under two sections: the first part called corporate responsibility explores the corporate punishment conception whereas the second part called individual responsibility examines the personal (individual) accountability for sin.

3.2 Corporate Responsibility in the Old Testament

The discussion of the concepts of corporate responsibility can be traced back to long time ago. However, among those who began to discuss the subject is H. W. Robinson, an English biblical

²² J. S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Journal for the study of the Old Testament Series, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 11.

scholar. Robinson argued that the concept of corporate personality and individual personality can contribute to the Old Testament interpretation.²³ Then it gradually got a place in the history of biblical interpretation.

3.2.1 Corporate punishments

The origin of such conception might be traced back to the early years of the 20th century, particularly with H. W. Robinson. What Robinson meant by *corporate* idea in the Old Testament might be clear from his statements:

The larger or smaller group was accepted without question as a unity; [...].The whole group, including its past present and future members, might function as a single individual through any one of those members conceived as representative of it. Because it was not confined to the living, but included the dead and the unborn, the group could be conceived as living forever.²⁴

Robinson's idea of *corporate* is clear – the whole group will be responsible for the action of an individual who belongs to that particular group. Similarly, Joel S. Kaminsky defines *corporate responsibility* as “the way in which the community as a whole is liable for the actions committed by its individual members”²⁵ According to him, the Hebrew Bible demonstrates that the whole community is dependent on the actions committed by its individual members. It is possible to relate this concept to the idea of generational curse in Exodus 20:5 where children are assumed to be dependent on the actions of their fathers. Thus, corporate responsibility will be a ground for corporate punishment. Corporate punishment is when the members of a group (e.g., family members, clans, tribes, or even a nation) is punished because of the errors of an individual who belongs to that particular group.

Within the context of the Old Testament, Kaminsky mentions three basic types of corporate punishments:²⁶

1. God may inflict a corporate punishment on a given group of people either because (a) an individual within a group errs (Josh. 7; 2 Kgs 5.27), (b) several individuals within that group err (Num. 16; 1 Sam. 2:31), (c) because the ruler of that group errs (2 Sam. 24; 2 Kgs 21: 11), (d) or because earlier leaders or ancestors erred (Gen 9:20-27).
2. The nation as a whole may execute a corporate punishment against a particular group, often ordered by God (Deut. 13.13-18; Josh 7).

²³ H. W. Robinson, *Corporate Responsibility in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, rev. edn., 1980), 7.

²⁴ H. W. Robinson, *Corporate Responsibility in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, rev. edn., 1980), 7.

²⁵ J. S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible (Journal for the study of the Old Testament series: Great Britain: Sheffield Academic, 1995)*, 11. I have borrowed technical terms such as “corporate punishment” from this particular book.

²⁶ Kaminsky(1995), 30

3. Rulers often eliminate all their rivals in a corporate style. This may be associated with a divine oracle calling for the complete destruction of the last ruler's offspring.

Indeed there are a lot of other references beyond those which have been described by Kaminsky. Generally speaking, texts such as Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy, 5:9 and many other parallel texts seem to lay a basic "norm" under which Yahweh would exercise his punishment against those who fail to comply with his rule. The idea that God visits sins of the fathers upon children up to three and four generations is noted in the readings of each text.

3.2.2. *Examples of Corporate Punishments*

In this subtopic I will give a survey of some Old Testament examples which demonstrate the idea of corporate punishment in such a way that it could illuminate Exod. 20:5, Deut. 5:9 and other parallel texts. For the sake of narrowing, I will only consider examples that can demonstrate the sin of individuals which become consequences for the punishment of their respective descendants. There could be many instances but I will only pick up few of them.

1. *Noah-Ham story (Gen 9:24-27)*: We can read from the text itself that Canaan, the son of Ham became a victim of his father's error (Gen. 9:26). This text has historically been interpreted in such a way that it justifies slavery. For example, D. M. Goldenberg notes that, the account of the curse of Ham was one of the major texts assumed by some to be the biblical justification for the curse of eternal slavery imposed on the "black".²⁷ Kaminsky puts this texts along with other texts which he believed to demonstrate the corporate punishment idea of the Hebrew bible.²⁸ The idea is that Ham's descendants also share in the punishment of their father. Indeed, this story had several historical developments concerning its interpretation. Since it is beyond the limitation of this thesis, I don't follow that line. However, during the 19th and 20th century, it might be a key text to define Ham's family in general.

2. *Forbidden marriages (Deut. 23:1-4)*: This has been narrated as a divine oracle to assume a punishment up to a tenth generation. Because of the former errors of some individuals, those who are born from the "forbidden marriages" are prohibited not to enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. Few among Israelite made marital relationship with the Ammonite and the Moabite who "did not come to meet you [Israelite] with bread and water [instead] hired Balaam son of Beor [...] to pronounce a curse [on them]".

²⁷ D. M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in the Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (: Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 168

²⁸ J. S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*: 1995, 190.

3. *Achan's sin (Josh. 7)*: The account of Achan's family death could be one of the most important punishments of the innocents together with the wicked individual.

5. *Eli's sin (1 Sam. 2:31-34)*: Because Eli couldn't comply with the law of Yahweh, the Lord declared that all of his descendants will die in the prime of life. Corporate punishment with emphasis of parents and children has also to do with priestly and monarchical offices. Concerning the former one, the account of the family of Eli (1Sam 2:30-33) is a good example. Because Eli couldn't comply with the law of Yahweh (v.29), God announced him to cut short the strength of his father's house and he proclaimed that they will never be an old man in his family line" (v. 31).

4. *King Ahab's sin (2 Kgs 9:6-10)*: Concerning kings, the account of Ahab is important where the royal family as a whole have been punished because of the errors of the particular king. Elijah ordering Jehu under the Command of Yahweh, to destroy the house Ahab and to cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel – slave or free (vv.8-9).

Summing up, corporate punishment's frequency and centrality is a common phenomenon in the Old Testament. Exod. 20:5 which says "God [...] visiting the sin of the fathers up on children up to three and four generation" is not a "strange" text that stands alone within the pages of the Old Testament. Rather it is surrounded by several witnesses of references which are really strong to demonstrate the efficacy of the generational curse punishment inferred by the text.

3.3 Individual Responsibility in the Old Testament

In the above section, I have briefly presented the survey of how the Hebrew Bible addresses the idea of generational curse. However, one has to be aware that in contrary to Exod. 20:5 and Deut. 5:9, the Pentateuch itself has texts that demonstrate the individual responsibility concept. One example is Deut. 24:16 which says "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin."

This section attempts to examine the Old Testament concept of individual responsibility. I will make use of Ezek. 18 and then illuminate it with few parallel texts. I further describe some examples which indicate the individual responsibility notion.

3.3.1 Individual Punishments

Ezekiel. 18 is one of the texts advocating the individual responsibility for the consequence of sin. The other quite similar text is Jer. 31: 29-30. Both texts use a proverb to illustrate the “older” concept of the consequence of sin in relation to fathers and children. The proverb says “The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezek. 18:2b and Jer. 31:29b). Both also offer the meaning of the proverb that the soul who sins is the one who will die (Ezek. 18:4 and Jer. 31:30).

The proverb used by both prophets becomes an “old” saying alluding to corporative punishment because the phrases “You will no longer quote this proverb” (Ezek. 18: 3b) and “will no longer say” (Jer. 31: 29a) infer what the people of Israel understood concerning the consequence of sin of individuals on children. But now, both prophets teach against that “older” concept. Probably that concept was true in the “old covenant” but God “will make a new covenant with the house of Israel” (Jer. 31:31).

The idea that God will not spare the righteous together with the wicked is vivid in Ezekiel. For example, in chapter 9 we can read that some who have been marked on their foreheads (v.4) kept have been delivered from the when old men, young men, and maidens, women and children are ordered to be slaughtered (v.6).

However, we can also observe from Ezekiel that God sometimes punishes the righteous and the wicked alike. One key example is 21:4. It says, that God is “going to cut off the righteous and the wicked, my sword will be unsheathed against everyone from south to north.” Generally, it doesn’t seem right to conclude that Ezekiel only argues that God doesn’t punish the innocent ones together with sinners. But the idea that each will die because of his own sin has been strongly emphasized in the 18th chapter of Ezekiel (vv. 4, 17, 20). Furthermore, there are other text which demonstrate the individualistic notion for the consequence of sin (e.g., Job. 21:20; Isa. 3:11)

3.3.2 Examples of Individual Punishments

Ezek. 18 and Jer. 31:29-30 are not the only texts which advocate for the individual responsibility for sin. The idea has been already part of the Pentateuch. The first text might be in Genesis where Abraham pleads with God saying “Far be it from you to do such a thing--to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from

you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (18:25). God answered Abraham's prayer concerning Loth that he will not destroy the righteous with the wicked.

As part of the Second commandment, Deut. 5:9 indicates that children are punished for sin of fathers. However, Deuteronomy itself gives us a quite opposite idea to this text. In the book of the Law, God commanded: "Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin." (Deut. 24:16). It is surprising when this text commands against the consequences clauses in both versions of the Second Commandment (Exod.20:5 and Deut. 5:9) which narrates that children will be punished for sin of their fathers. Concerning this, G. H. Matties remarks that there is contradiction in the legislation of Deuteronomy tradition.²⁹ It might be possible to indicate both corporate and individual punishment idea in the Deuteronomist tradition.

The story of King Amaziah (2 Kgs.14:6) can be one example for the efficacy of Ezek. 18 and Jer. 31: 29-30. The reading says "Yet he did not put the children of the assassins to death, in accordance with what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses where the LORD commanded: 'Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.'"

Ezekiel also illuminates the concept of individual responsibility by a relevant example (18:14-18). Although this section is the elaboration of 18:4, it might be one example to show that generations who repent from their own sin will escape punishment. In the Old Testament, even it was sometimes common to confess the sin committed by forefathers. For example, in his prayers, Nehemiah pleads saying "I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you" (Neh. 1:6).

Summing up, there are several Old Testament references to demonstrate the reality of individual responsibility for the consequence of sin. Ezekiel and Jeremiah are not the only places where the Old Testament narrates the concept of individual responsibility; it was also part of the Pentateuch tradition. Deut. 24:16 says: "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin." Ezekiel 18 strongly argues for individual responsibility for sin. But the concept of corporate punishment could be also indicated from the same book (cf. 21:4). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that

²⁹ G. H. Matties, *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 129.

the Old Testament has both ideas of individual and corporate responsibility for the consequence of sin. Furthermore, tension persists within the Old Testament concerning the two areas.

3.4 Conclusion

The Old Testament motif of generational curse can be understood in two different ways from the perspective of Exodus and Ezekiel. On the one hand the final clause in the Second Commandment (Exod.20:5; Deut. 5:9) emphasizes the corporate punishment idea that sin of fathers can be the consequence for generational and trans-generational punishments. But on the other hand, Ezek. 18 together with several Old Testament references demonstrate the individual responsibility for the consequence of sin. As it has been shown above, the Old Testament has various examples for the efficacy of Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18.

However, concerning the corporate and individual responsibility concept in the Old Testament, it not possible to emphasize one of them and reject the other. Rather, they occur side by side, even some times within the same book as that of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel. A comparison of Deut.5:9 with 24:16 can indicate both corporate and individual concept of the consequence of sin are inferred. Furthermore, comparing Ezek. 18 with 21:4 can show that similar tension goes within Ezekiel tradition.

Chapter Four

WESTERN OROMO OF ETHIOPIAN PERSPECTIVE OF GENERATIONAL CURSE

4.1 Introduction

Chapter three of this thesis has offered a brief textual overview of the Old Testament understanding of generational curse. That chapter has come to a conclusion that the Old Testament seems to have two opposite poles – *for* and *against* a view that one can be a victim of generational curses. The purpose of the present chapter is to investigate how the Western Oromo of Ethiopia understand generational curses. The body of the chapter is organized in three major sections. The first one is general notes in order to give information of the focus group (the Oromo). The second section is about corporate punishment within the Oromo perspective – a section which has two sub sections focussing on tradition Oromo culture and Christianity. The third and final part is concerned with exploration of individual notion within the same people.

4.2 General Notes

1. Who are the Western Oromo? Ethiopia is a mixture of several ethnic groups. One of them is the Oromo, one of the Hamitic (Cushitic) peoples of Eastern Africa. The Oromo roughly make half of the population of the country (40 to 45 million). The majority of the eastern and southern Oromo are Muslims. But most of the Western Oromo are Christians due to the influence of missionaries from Europe and North America. Apart from five years of war with Italy, Ethiopia has never been colonized by foreign powers. My focus group is the Western Oromo of Ethiopia. How does this people respond to the idea of generational curses and generational punishments?

The majority of the population of the Western Oromo are Christians and denominationally they are Lutherans. They are known under the name “Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)” which was officially organized at a national level in 1959 with a membership of 25 thousand and now has grown nearly to 9 million. EECMY has clear statements of faith and terms of reference. According to her doctrinal statements, EECMY: (1) believes and accepts that both the Old Testament and the New Testament are “holy words” (2) follows the Apostolic creeds and (3) accepts the Augsburg Confessions and Luther’s

catechisms as documents which purely explains the word of God.³⁰ Following this her Church liturgy depends on texts from both testaments that either of them is used in sermons.

2. *Preliminary issues on references:* Researching about generational curses and generational punishments within the Western Oromo have several challenges. Except a few brief case studies on other themes, no research has ever been done in the area of the Old Testament and therefore written documents are hardly available. The few written documents I used focus on culture and religion of the Oromo. Therefore most of the study depends on fieldwork reports. I have conducted fieldwork during the last two months of 2014 (July-August). While those few literature lay background for the concept of generational curses, fieldwork reports offer more direct responses on questions of the specific subject and how some relevant Old Testament texts are interpreted.

Some sample groups were requested to respond to interview guide questions. The groups were organized in such a way that they can at least represent the whole Western Oromo traditional and Christian people. It has three groups with a total of eight members. Group “A” has two members. This group has a good traditional understanding of generational curse. The group is neither “ordinary” nor “professionals” who officially represent the traditional Oromo. They are rather samples who can represent “average” people.

Traditional Oromo rituals are not officially functioning in the area as it has been, I think, merged with concepts of the majority Christians.³¹ However, its echoes are still operating in the Christian society. I have decided to address this sample group because one of my hypothesis was that the traditional concept of generational curse is indirectly influencing the Christian way of reading the ancient Israelites texts of the Old Testament.

As far as the way they read the Old Testament is concerned, I generally assume that the attitudes of such “average” traditional Oromo will have, somehow, a tremendous impacts to direct the mind-sets of the “ordinary” Christians. It can also relate the subject to Christian understanding. The second group has three members with minimum of Bachelor of Theology holders so that it can represent the response of “professional” Bible readers. To hear the response from “ordinary” readers, the third group has members from “ordinary” people.

³⁰ The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Constitutions and Bylaws,(Addis Ababa :Artistic Press, sixth edition, approved by the 17th Church Council, January 2005 /1997), 8.

³¹ One example for the merging of the concepts of the traditional Oromo culture with the biblical myths is a research by L. Bartels entitled “Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia – An Attempt to Understand”(Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1983), 357-60.

Similarly, two sample groups are organized from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Church circle. They are termed as group “B” and “C” each having three members. Group “B” represents the so called “professional” readers whereas “C” represents “ordinary” readers. One of the main differences between these two groups is that unlike “B”, “C” has not been introduced to formal methodological approaches of reading the Bible. I am convinced that focussing on these groups can roughly help to understand how the whole “professional” and “ordinary” Western Oromo Christians contextually understand the subject of generational curses in the Old Testament texts.

4.3 Corporate Responsibility in the Western Oromo of Ethiopia

4.3.1 Corporate Punishments in the Oromo Tradition

The Oromo often use proverbs to convey messages. One of the Oromo proverbs concerning corporate punishment is about analogy of eye and nose. It says “the eyes weep that the nose does not keep quiet”.³² Eyes and nose of a person belong to one single group who make up the whole body of that person. So they share the same consequence.

Reading the Old Testament is always done within a context and one of the things that can shape a context is tradition itself. Thus, when it comes to the Oromo, I assume that traditional Oromo culture must have some impacts to shape the attitudes of the theme of generational curses in the Old Testament texts. Therefore, I have decided to include a brief study of the motif of traditional Oromo culture concerning generational curses.

The concept and experience of generational curse has been a common phenomenon in *Gada* system.³³ Apart from church meetings, discussions of generational sin often became the agenda of the Oromo gatherings. It was also part of a day-to-day speech of the traditional Oromo Culture. The past history of their forefathers, as they thought, had a role to determine the present life. What they often discussed was somehow similar to Biblical myths.

The Oromo’s life characteristics itself lays a base for their attitudes to interpret their ideology. The Oromo is a collective society and this bond of life is much stronger in the country side where Children are allowed to live under one roof up to three generations. Hence the relationships and responsibilities between fathers and children, husbands and wives are

³².C. Sumner, *Oromo Wisdom Literature: Proverbs Collection and Analysis* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 1995) 124

³³ Gada is an Oromo system which rules the social, economic, political and religious affairs.

probably stronger than cases in the Bible story.³⁴ One online Ethiopian official article also justifies the collective characteristics of the Oromo:³⁵

In rural areas three or more generations in the male line frequently live under one roof in one family compound [...] Age is highly respected in Ethiopia. The elderly are often consulted on family issues, and family members usually accept their leadership and advice. Adult children expected to care for their aging parents, who often move in with their oldest son's family [...] Rural families depend heavily on children to help on the farm, so many are unable to attend school. It is considered important for mothers to teach their daughters domestic skills, and girls generally have more responsibility at home than boys.

Concerning the traditional Oromo attitude of corporate punishment, the majority of sources are kept in oral tradition. However, I refer to two written sources: one from Lambert Bartels and the other from Negaso Gidada. Lambert Bartels, a late 20th century European anthropologist and theologian has made an extensive research to understand the Oromo religion. One of his findings is how the Oromo assume biblical myths as if it were their own story and how mistakes of the individuals in the Old Testament has been assumed to be affecting the them.

[...] the story of man's first ancestors in paradise and their first sin, which is an echo of their own tradition about the sins of their first ancestors [...] is related time and again when they are speaking of their present situations. In gatherings, they [the Oromo] tend, again and again, to explain the abuses and problems of their present condition by reference to the sins of the first men [both Adam and others]. In this they reveal their tendency to mythical patterns of thought which cause them to go back quite naturally to the first origin of things.³⁶

As described above, within the traditional Oromo culture, the idea of group responsibility had been a common phenomenon. Children are responsible for their fathers in the same way fathers do. Responsibilities are based up on mutuality and it is extended to three or four generation. Individualism hardly gets place in such social system.

Thus, punishments have also a corporate notion in the traditional Oromo culture, and the same notion is somehow applicable to the contemporary life. Negaso Gidada's study of Oromo penal laws reports one case of parental punishment as follows:

³⁴ L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia – An Attempt to Understand* [Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983], 360.

³⁵ See an article on www.culturegrams.com "Culture Grams World Edition: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2014", 4.

³⁶ L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia – An Attempt to Understand* [Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983], 360.

“A married woman discovered having intercourse in the bajii [in the open country] was sentenced to hard labour such as the digging of the roots of big trees. If she ran away and got married [to someone else], for three generations she and her offspring did not have the right of gumaa [i.e. no blood-wealth had to be paid if she, her children or her grandchildren were killed].³⁷

This quotation indicates that the mistake of the prescribed woman can make her generations victims of her mistakes. Sexual immorality, according to Oromo tradition, leads to generational punishment.

My fieldwork report also shows that the concept of generational curse has been within the Oromo tradition. Informant A1 who is a 76 years old and a well-known Oromo history writer reports that generational curse as something which can be transmitted from parents to children. According to him both punishment and blessing could be extended to the following generations. Part of the transcripts is as follows:³⁸

Question: Why do you think that both punishment and blessing can be transferred from parents to descendants?

Answer (A1): Well, *Waaka* [God] hates sin and is pleased with justice and good deeds. All evil deeds will lead to punishments – punishments which can be extended to children and at the same time good deeds whose rewards are transferred to children. Traditionally it is believed that the Oromo people had *safuu*. *Safuu* is an Oromo term for *moral law*. This law is brought by forefathers to their descendants. *Safuu* teach what the Oromo society *must do* and what it *must not do*. In *Gada* there are various laws on different subjects. There is an equivalent punishment for each kind of trespassing of the laws. The giver of this law is *Waaka* (God). *Waaka* cooperates with *ayyaana* [Spirits] in order to communicate with his people. But he does this mainly through selected people called *Qaalluu*. *Qaalluu* is a traditional Oromo *prophet* and *wise-man* who is filled with the spirit of wisdom. One of his roles is to teach the laws of *Waaka* to people. Very important thing is that a belief in parental sin is at the centre of an Oromo traditional society.

Similarly, informant A2 who always tends to appreciate the values in traditional Oromo attitude gave me his answers as follows:

Traditionally the Oromo society is afraid of some major sins otherwise they will be punished and there is a possibility of this punishment to be transferred to their descendants. Similarly, some Christians are also heard speaking the possibility of the transfer of sin from parents to their children.³⁹

³⁷ G. Negaso, *History of Sayo Oromo* (Frankfurt: 1984), 226.

³⁸ Informant A1, Oral interview, on July 02, 2014 at Aira, Western Wollega, Ethiopia.

³⁹ Informant A2, Oral interview, on July 10, 2014 at Aira, Western Wollega, Ethiopia.

After having explained the seriousness of generational punishment within the Oromo tradition, this informant quickly jumps to connect the Oromo mythical stories to the biblical texts.⁴⁰

The idea of God's counting parental sin up on children up to three and four generation seems parts of the teachings of the Bible. Probably the base for such position is the Christian Bible called the Old Testament itself as it clearly warns against breaking God's commandments otherwise they will be punished from generations to generations.

Indeed it seems that traditional Oromo culture has been partly informed from the Old Testament. Bartels observes that there is affinity between traditional Western Oromo of Ethiopia and the Biblical myths.⁴¹

When it comes to the attitudes towards "sin" and the kinds of sin that can have generational consequence, A2 reports as follows: "[...] God hates every sin; some sins are much serious than others. These include sexual intercourse with blood relatives, murder, exploitation of the poor and disobedience to elderly people and parents."⁴²

But why does the traditional Oromo culture understand that sins of parents can have consequences on children? To answer this question the Oromo commonly refer to the nature of *Waaqa* (God). As indicated above, God for the traditional Oromo is both a blessing God as well as a cursing God. He doesn't tolerate sin and would punish both parents and children alike. Gada Melba, an Oromo scholar writes: "*Waaqayyoo* [God] is intolerant of injustice, crime sin and all falsehood".⁴³ For God to judge between good and evil, the norm is indicated in *Gada laws*. What the Oromo are expected to do will be taught by an Oromo *wise men* called *Kallu* (Oromo – *Qaalluu*). *Waaqa* has granted *Kallu* the spirit of wisdom called *ayyaana* (equivalent to Spirit).⁴⁴ One of the roles of *Kalluu* is to teach the will of *Waaqa* according to *Gada* laws and the people are expected to obey his commandments. If the commandments are rejected, they would face judgements.

The traditional Oromo culture also respect some social and religious leaders. They are *Gada* leaders. In the Western Oromo, for example, in this regard, Mako Billi has been the most respected figure. He might be compared to Moses of the Old Testament who "gave the laws" to ancient Israel. It is beyond the scope of the current thesis to discuss Oromo traditional laws.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia – An Attempt to understand* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Vol. 8, 1983), 357-60.

⁴² Informant A2, July 10, 2014.

⁴³ Gadaa Melbaa, *Oromia: An Introduction*. [Khartoum, Sudan, 1988],10

⁴⁴ Informant A1, July 2, 2014.

However, for the purpose of reminding that the people also have some laws for punishing erring men and women, I will describe few of them.

Traditional Oromo laws might be divided into three:⁴⁵

1. *Sacred Laws*: Confession of ideology (Oromo: *Safuu*) which is “similar to the ten commandments of the ancient Hebrew”.⁴⁶ These laws are lists of things, people and classes which the Western Oromo believed antagonistic to each other (or different from each other); for example, father versus son, mother versus daughter, older versus younger, master versus slave.
2. *Makko Billi’s Farewell Speech* – a collection of the speeches of the “great law giver” called Makko Billi in a form of *Psaltery*. This law concerns land possession and marriage.
3. *The Law of the Gadaa of the Luba*⁴⁷ - also called *the beating of Makko Billi*. Negaso has renamed this law based on its function and he calls it “penal law”. The term “beating” is used because when the law is recited the ground is beaten either by sticks or by whips as a sign of explaining that who disobey these laws must expect the punishment. In other words, sticks and whips are metaphors of punishment.

Though the traditional Oromo culture often tends to justify generational punishment, it is also sometimes critical to it. As an indigenous, I used to hear a proverb from my childhood; it says “garraamiin lubbuu hin dheeratu” – meaning, “A life of a righteous is short”. The proverb reminds that sometimes even righteous people may suffer. Therefore, suffering was not necessarily a manifestation of generational punishments. A reason behind some sufferings and temptations might be connected to “seexana” (Satan). Concerning this, L. Bartels has relevant statements: “Satan who appears on the scene at the beginning reminds us of the story of Job where again Satan challenged God in regard to Job’s virtue. It is a story which appeals strongly to the Oromo.”⁴⁸

One of my informants evaluates the outcome of belief in generational course as follows:⁴⁹

⁴⁵ G. Negaso, *History of Sayo Oromo* (Frankfurt:1984), 219-28

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ *Luba* is an Oromo word for *priest*. Interestingly the same word is applied in the Oromo speaking regions for the word pastor/priest in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

⁴⁸ L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion* (1983), 359.

⁴⁹ A1, Interview, July 2, 2014.

Question: *Do you think that Oromo's thought of the transmission of parental sin to children has some impacts on the society?*

Answer: Yes! I think such belief has brought both positive and negative impacts to individuals and to a society as a whole.

1. Positively: the traditional Oromo Moral Law in *Gada* system has tremendous social value, for example, by creating a healthy relationship between the Oromo community. This moral law governs how parents and children are related; the way neighbours live together; how land and water is used; how to discipline those who commit crimes and how to reconcile those who are enemies of each other. Thus as far as the belief could bring a positive social change, it shall be encouraged.
2. Negatively: a belief in parental sin could have several problems if they are not handled wisely. Prejudices towards people is one the main problems they relate majority of sufferings as if it were the result of both personal and parental sin. For example, the Oromo farmers' family always need to keep home one of their boys that he will inherit his father's position and remain in his home especially when he dies. If this will not happen the house will be empty and regarded as a cursed family. If this farmer sends all of his boys to school they join universities and will remain far away from the family. On one hand some see this as a blessing because these boys got a good opportunity to live a better life. And on the other hand few see it as a curse because the family's house couldn't get one who continues to run the home. Generally the negative side of the Oromo belief on parental sin is that it generalizes sufferings to be the consequence of parental sin.

Summing up, according to the traditional Oromo culture generational, what we call corporate punishment become at the centre of Oromo ideology. God who is righteous will punish children up to some generations. There are a lot of instances that can demonstrate that traditional Oromo concepts of God's punishing people resembles the ancient Israel's texts in the Old Testament narrating about the same subject. But the idea that fathers could be punished for sins of children is not common phenomenon.

4.3.2 Corporate Punishment in the Western Oromo Christianity

The Bible in the Oromo vernacular and other related documents had significant contribution to strengthen the discussions of generational curse among the Oromo contemporary Christians. The Oromo Bible distribution began right after the first Old Testament Bible print in 1899.⁵⁰ Evangelical Christianity (Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus) soon started in the Western Oromo beginning from 1920s. Lutheran missionaries from Germany and Sweden came with Luther's catechisms to use them together with the vernacular Bible. In the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, the Bible soon became one of the most often read books.

⁵⁰ Gustav Aren, *Evangelical pioneers in Ethiopia: Origin of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1978), 385.

As a result, it impossible to underestimate its contribution to the development of the idea of generational curses.

Some of my informants give textual references to endorse the Old Testament justifies that parental punishment was a common phenomenon. The strength of this justification goes side by side with the traditionalists who sometimes refer to Christian scripture. A1, for example, tries to justify his belief in parental punishment in referring to Lam. 5:7 and Exod. 20:5.⁵¹ Indeed this is also true with the majority of “ordinary” readers. It is the “ordinary” readers who tend to justify generational punishments through the Old Testament texts.⁵²

The theme of generational curse was one of the contents of Luther’s catechisms. According to Luther’s order, it appeared in the First Commandment (Exod. 20:4-5). Attendants of confirmation classes have memorized the last clause in 20:5 which says “visiting sins of the fathers up on children up to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me,” A 76 years old man who attended confirmation class in the 1950s reports that he only memorized this clause literally.⁵³

How do the “ordinary” readers understand generational punishment? Generally speaking, Group C (meaning a sample group for “ordinary” readers) perceives the theme of parental sin as generational *curse*. It manifests itself through different forms of sufferings: mental problems, lack of success in life, diseases, divorces, and other similar problems. In other words, “ordinary” bible readers perceive that each human suffering is a result of a particular sin.

In relation to understanding some Old Testament texts, this group uses a special predicate of God – God as *jealous* (cf. Exod. 20:5) to assume that he won’t tolerate when his commandments are violated. What could be observed is that “ordinary” readers attempt to make use of key words in the Old Testament to draw the bases on which God punishes children for sin of their parents.

What is the source of the concept of generational curse for this sample group? The roots of the concept goes back to two areas.⁵⁴ The first one, according to the group, is the Old

⁵¹ What is special for A1 and A2 is that keeping their traditional religion ideology, they also became active participants of the church. Thus, they often read the Bible.

⁵² Group «C» who represent the «ordinary» readers are hardly critical to the Old Testament readings. The group reported me (Oral interview on Aug. 5, 2014) that it is part of the Old Testament motif.

⁵³ Informant A1, July 02, 2014.

⁵⁴ Interview with group C, August 5, 2014.

Testament texts themselves. In their own words, “the primary source which tells us about generational curse is the Holy Bible, especially the Old Testament”. The second one is Christian tradition: “When we have had our confirmation class, we have been taught that God will punish those who hate him up to three or four generations”. This group doesn’t make much reference to the Oromo tradition. In my opinion, this is because the group is made up of the younger generation (C1-48, C2-35 and C3- 19 years old respectively) who may not have direct exposure to Oromo Traditional Religion.

It has been obvious that the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) partly follows European missionary’s tradition. Missionaries from Germany and Sweden must have used Luther’s catechisms when they taught those first Christian converts. The first part of this education material was about the Ten Commandments. Exod. 20:5 appears as part of the First Commandment in Luther’s catechism. There, the theme of parental curse has been directly described.

“Ordinary” readers usually read “generational curse” texts without criticism.⁵⁵ Basically the above text is one of the several texts that may lay foundation for this readers to believe that the theme is a common phenomenon in the Old Testament. Group C (C1, C2, and C3) has forwarded its position in a simple proverb: “children will reap what their parents sow”.⁵⁶ The position of this group is clear – it understands that children will be victims of their parents’ mistakes.

The group didn’t explicitly give textual references in order to justify most of its arguments. This was partly because we couldn’t get enough time to deal with detail issues. But it is interesting when the group refer to some key words which alludes to Exod. 20:5. For example, it describes God as jealous. Hence, it might be possible to estimate how they literally read and understand “generational sin” texts within the Old Testament context.

When it comes to “professional” readers, the understanding of generational curse changes. The source of my investigation is one sample group named as group B. It is made up of three members B1, B2 and B3, all being ordained pastors of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. Among the members, two are female and they are engaged in the study of Master of theology. The third one is a bachelor degree holder in theology. They can represent

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid

the whole “professional” readers because of certain reasons. For example, they have better exposure to various “professional” readers at various seminars, meetings and conferences.

Group B observes generational curse as a common phenomenon deep-rooted in both Oromo tradition and Old Testament /ancient texts of Israelites. The group also illustrates this phenomenon with some cases by reflecting how the Oromo contemporary society understands the issue of parental punishments.

B1 reports that she has been hearing about generational sin as a curse which can be transferred from one generation to the following generations. She further adds that contemporary Oromo society commonly understands about generational curse as if it manifests itself in various forms of sufferings such as life-long diseases and mental problems. Thus, according to B1, a family who has experienced some long time sufferings is said to be a “cursed family”.⁵⁷ Similarly, apostasy is another manifestation of “curse”. B1 is a Christian convert from Islam. Being raised up by an Imam father, she has been aware of the idea of “curse” in relation to apostasy. Thus, she reports that understanding the subject has some problems.

Two incidents from B1 can illuminate the seriousness of the problem of generational curse among the contemporary Oromo Christian society. These incidents are in relation to the idea that marriages beyond a particular religious group was perceived as a manifestation of parental sin. The first one was that, her “brother [who was a Muslim] has made a relationship with a Christian by marrying a daughter of an Orthodox Church priest. Then the whole Muslim community said “the sin of the priest has attacked the family of the Imam”. The second incident was that B1 herself “in spite of [her] father’s advice, [she] became a Christian convert and later on married to a Christian boy. After some years [she] became a pastor. This became shame to [her] family being the second curse”.⁵⁸

The other informants, B2 and B3, more or less informed a similar position concerning how the Western Oromo of Ethiopia “ordinary” Christians perceive generational curse. Regarding this:⁵⁹

Question: Which group of the society are afraid the transmission of generational curse to children?

Answer: Both the traditional Oromo and some of the Christian community understand the reality of generational curse in relation to children...some ... resist such position

⁵⁷ B1, Oral interview, Aug. 5, 2014.

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Interview with B2 and B3, July 30, 2014

that texts such as exodus 20:5 could not be read literally[but] when common [“ordinary readers”] Christians read the Old Testament, they see each word as divine and accept it without criticism.

However, it is worthy to listen to what these “ordinary” readers say about the subject. For this purpose I would bring the information from an interview with an “ordinary” readers – group C. This sample group perceives generational curse as a curse which manifests itself through different forms of sufferings as a response from God to punish those who disobey his commandments.⁶⁰ After assuming that they [members of the group] have several witness as references, the group claimed that the Old Testament bible supports this position. The group also sees relationship between both the Oromo Traditional Religion and the Old Testament assuming “both support that what parents do can affect their children”. The group further used strong expression saying “children will reap what their parents sow... because the Old Testament tells us that the people of Israel suffered because of the sins of their for-fathers”.

4.4 Individual Responsibility

Are children not punished for sin of parents? So far we have seen the Western Oromo of Ethiopia’s understanding of *generational curse* from two angles: from traditional Oromo culture and from Christianity. The current section investigates the idea of individual responsibility among the Western Oromo of Ethiopia. Indeed we have no explicit discussion on individual values. This is because the Oromo is commonly known as a collective society with a few exceptions in bigger cities. Hence my presentation is very brief.

The traditional Oromo culture hardly thinks about individual punishment except a few cases. C. Sumner has collected 1095 Oromo proverbs among which only one may have an echo of individual responsibility. One says “It is the person himself who prepare his [for himself] bow and arrow”.⁶¹ The Oromo teach its society members that errors will attack the erring person himself.

But in the circle of Christianity, “professional” readers tend to hold both corporate and individual echoes of punishments. One example is a report from two of my informants:

Question: What do you think is the position of the OT Bible on the understanding of parental sin in relation to children? Do you think that parents’ sin can affect children?

Answer (B1 and B2): In the law, for example, in Exodus 20:5-6, it is written that God will be merciful up to thousand generations towards those who keep his commandment

⁶⁰ Group C, Oral interview, August 5, 2014

⁶¹ C. Sumner, *Oromo Wisdom Literature: Proverbs Collection and Analysis* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 1995), 170.

and at the same time he will punish up to the third and fourth generations those who hate him. Thus, on the one hand God might punish children because of parents' sin. But on the other hand, there are several texts such as Ezekiel 18, which tell us that each person is responsible for his/her own sin. Therefore such parallel texts need to be read in their own contexts. Texts such as Exodus 20: 5-6 might not be read literally. Even Luther's small catechism seems to lack enough explanation regarding such texts.⁶²

As indicated above, B2 and B3 observe both corporate and individual responsibilities within the ancient Israelites texts in the Old Testament. Both understand that each position has its own context. On the one hand they noted that Exod. 20:5 which seems to support the idea of corporate punishment has not to be understood literally. But on the other hand they seem to accept the individualistic notion of sin in Ezek. 18 without any criticism.

A more direct support for individual responsibility of sin is coming from B1. For emphasis I would like to quote the very words of the informant:

Question: How do you understand some texts of the Old Testament, for example, such as Exodus 20:5 which seem to support the idea of parental sin punishment in relation to children?

Answer (B1): As to me such texts cannot authorize the idea that what parents commit as sin will affect their descendants because sin is a personal and private problem. Belief in parental sin is only the problem of traditional Oromo society and as well as that of ancient Israelites' by which they have marginalized those who have been suffering – you may refer to the question of the disciples of Jesus in John chapter 9. On one hand I agree that it is necessary to obey God's commandment; but on the other hand God is a loving God who shows mercy up to thousand generations. Similarly, we are under the endless mercy of God than being frightened by God's judgement. Briefly I can say that belief in parental sin seems to be designed for the exploitation of others: as a means of enslaving people by showing superior over others. Thus any Old Testament scholar must say no to any form of the interpretation of biblical texts as if they support parental curses.⁶³

B1's position seems clear. First she admits that generational curse is at the centre of both the Old Testament and the traditional Oromo culture. Secondly, she understands that some texts such as Exod. 20:5 may reflect ancient Israelite's tool for exploitation: "a means of enslaving people by showing superior over others". Thirdly, she recommends that "any Old Testament scholar must say no to any form of biblical texts as they support parental curses".

⁶² B2 and B3, Oral interview, July 30, 2014.

⁶³ B1, Oral interview, August 5, 2014.

Other counter argument of B1 concerning generational punishment is by making reference to the New Testament where Jesus clearly ignores the attitude that one becomes victims of the sins of parents (cf. Jon. 9).⁶⁴

But in relation to the children's relationship to parents, she admits that parents could be victims of their children mistakes in a sense that such mistakes will have social and economic impact. Part of the interview is as follows:

Question: Do you think that children's sin can have consequence on their parents?

Answer (B1): No, it cannot: But what children do can only have a social and economic impact. For example, such parents could be dishonoured among the society and sometimes the condition may lead them into unplanned financial expense.⁶⁵

But when it comes to "ordinary" readers, their position concerning individual responsibility seems not clear. I can only realize that they often refer to texts that seem to support corporate punishments. One special insight they offer generational curse has limits in a sense that "repentance can break the curse of parental sin".

4.5 Conclusion

The concept of generational curse is a common phenomenon among the traditional Oromo culture and it dates to a long time ago. The attitude of corporate punishments has been reflected from the experiences of both the traditional and contemporary Oromo society in the Circle of both non-Christianity and Christianity. The fact that the Oromo publicly discuss the problem of sins of the former ancestors reminds us that the theme of generational curse has been central to the traditional Oromo society. Most of the concepts are parallel to the ancient Israelite texts in the Old Testament regarding "generational curse" texts. One can easily indicate points of contacts between these two areas and be able to compare both sides with each other. On the one hand there are only limited cases where generational curse is criticized in the traditional Oromo Culture. But on the other hand, individual responsibility hardly becomes the agenda of the society except very few cases that are used to warn individuals not to misbehave in such a way that it violates the social value of the group.

When it comes to a Christian understanding, the so called "professional" readers acknowledge the centrality of the concept of generational curse both in the traditional Oromo culture and in the ancient Israelite texts of the Old Testament. However, they critically see

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

“generational curse” texts such as Exod. 20:5. Furthermore, there might be a few cases where criticisms are beyond interpretative issues but also the texts themselves. One example is informant B1.⁶⁶ But generally, as far as “professional” readers are concerned, it could be summarized as follows: Firstly, some understand that both Exodus and Ezekiel must be read contextually; hence the focus of the former might not necessarily justify the efficacy of generational punishment. Secondly, others have a tendency to question the authority of such texts in a sense that they are only a personal motifs of ancient Israelite rather than that of Yahweh. Thirdly, the individual responsibility in Ezek. 18 is accepted without any criticism.

But the “ordinary” Christian readers have a slightly different position. First, they tend to be closer to the traditional Oromo culture as they acknowledge the idea that God would punish children for sin of parents. The base for their position is the justification of the literal readings of some Old Testament texts such as Exod. 20:5. Secondly, they suggest that the power of generational curse would be broken by repentance. In other words, they might have meant that the efficacy of generational curse is conditional. Thirdly, they are not in a position to offer an interaction between Exodus and Ezekiel texts. I don’t hear them bringing the individual responsibility theme to the centre of the Old Testament texts.

Summing up, there are some clues to assume as far as the contemporary Western Oromo Christians’ understanding of generational curse (in the Old Testament) is concerned. First, the “professional” readers seem to presuppose Ezek. 18’s attitude of individual responsibility to interpret Exod. 20:5. Secondly, the “ordinary” readers might have independently interpreted the later text to justify the efficacy of generational punishment and at the same time, I think, they resolved the issue of God’s righteousness by assuming that repentance breaks a generational curse.

⁶⁶ B1, Oral interview, Aug. 5, 2014.

Chapter Five

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of the current chapter is to investigate selected texts that are assumed to focus on corporate punishment (Exod.20:5) and on the individual accountability (Ezek.18:4, 20) through an exegetical investigation. Issues of theoretical tools or approaches in connection with the current essay has been presented in chapter two. However, for more clarity, I would like to briefly review them again in the current chapter.

I have described in chapter two that a leading African biblical scholar, J. S. Ukpong, noted that for certain reasons African biblical scholarship cannot escape the historical critical approach.⁶⁷ K. Holter argues that the approach “[...] originally grew out of other interpretive contexts than those of Africa, but that nevertheless, when used consciously, [it] may serve an African Old Testament interpretation that responds to contemporary African experience and concern.”⁶⁸

However, both the above figures and several others agree that this approach alone may not meet the special needs of the African “ordinary” readers that it also seeks for a “contextualized approach” which might be used besides approaches which have been developed outside Africa. For example, Ukpong noted that the traditional way of reading the Bible (by that, he meant the Western-oriented approach) “is not capable of responding adequately to the question that African Christians are asking about their life [...] as they were unable to bring their own cultural perspectives to bear upon the text.”⁶⁹

Letting the African “ordinary” readers participate in the reading of the Bible may contribute to solve the gap created by the historical-critical approach. Some have already begun to read and interpret the Old Testament in African popular contexts. For example, Madipoane Masenya of South Africa uses of the approach in analysing Job 3 could be described as one

⁶⁷ For detail discussions, see J. S. Ukpong, “Can African Old Testament Scholarship escape the historical critical method?” (in *Newsletter On African Old Testament Scholarship*, Issue 7, November 1999).

⁶⁸ K. Holter, “The Rolle of Historical-Critical Methodology in African Old Testament Studies”, (*Old Testament Essay*, 24/2, pp. 377-389, 2011), 387.

⁶⁹ J. S. Ugkpong, *Reading the Bible with African Eyes: Inculturation and Hermeneutics* (Journal of Theology for South Africa, 1991 (1995), pp 3-14), 3-4.

example.⁷⁰ Therefore, besides some of the Western leading Old Testament scholars, the current thesis also included some voices from “ordinary” and “professional” Oromo Christians. Thus, I will use both the historical-critical approach and a contextual method sensitive to the Oromo context.

5.2 Relevant Concepts to Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18

Among the most relevant themes in relation to the Old Testament understanding of corporate and individual accountabilities for sin are the concepts of group (or community), individual, and the synthesis of both. Most scholars have debated around these three concepts regarding how Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18 are to be read. Hence, before going to the details of the current chapter, I find it necessary to briefly present how they are understood in the context of the ancient Hebrew texts. The voices of several scholars will be soon heard in the next sections. However, in the current presentation, I mostly rely up on the first proponent of the concepts – W. H. Robinson, an Old Testament scholar from England.

1. The “group”

The basic concept of the *group* idea of the Hebrew society goes back to, and derives from its nomadic period.⁷¹ For example, as it has been recorded in Deuteronomy 26: “My father was a wanderer Aramean” (26:5), this nomadic life has links with the patriarchs. It is commonly known that nomads must live in a group so that they can protect themselves during the time of attack. The group was organized based on blood tie: as a clan (groups of families) and as a tribe (groups of clans). However, grouping as a clan was the usual one. Such groups were even common after the Israelite settlement in Canaan. For example, in 1 Sam. 20:6, David has attended the annual sacrifice of his clan in Bethlehem. An account of Samuel inviting Saul among those thirty guests in 1 Sam. 9:22 could be another example.

In its protective role, the clan follows a principle of blood-revenge, “by which each member of the group was pledged to exact vengeance for the wrong done to his fellow, from members of the group to which the offending man belonged”.⁷² Regarding this, it is possible to assume that the Hebrew society has preserved the song of Lamech in Gen. 4:23-24 where

⁷⁰ M. Masenya, “Her Appropriation of Job’s Lament? Her Lament of Job 3, From An African Story Telling Perspective” in *Postcolonial Perspectives In African Biblical Interpretations* (ed. by Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012, 13), pp. 285-296.

⁷¹ Robinson, 47-9.

⁷² Ibid

unlimited revenge was recorded. Another form of moral code, for example, “wound for wound, stripe for stripe [...]” (Exod. 21:24-25 might be a later advance in morality.⁷³

When it comes to the characteristics life of the Oromo of Ethiopia, one can easily observe similarities with those of the ancient Israelites and their nomadic life. Approximately eighty five percent of the Oromo population is a farmer who live on farming and livestock husbandry. Grouping is highly observed and sometimes becomes obligation. Grouping is done both according to neighbourhood and blood tie. In modern time, the government itself enforces grouping within society, not only to create an environment to assist each other but also to enforce corporate accountability for each other. Indeed members of each group know each other and usually work for the welfare of one another. One common Oromo proverb says “olla fi Waaqatti gadi ba’u”. It means “neighbour and God are close to [you for help]” unlike an idea of individualism in an individualistic society who may not even know a man living next to his home.

A group which presupposes a blood tie seems much stronger in the traditional and contemporary Oromo culture, and it is where corporate accountability and corporate punishments have been realized. A son is accountable is responsible for his father and his grandfather and vice versa. The relationship is based up on mutual benefits. The following quotation may demonstrate the characteristics of the Oromo blood tie where corporate responsibilities are much stronger:

In rural areas, three or more generations in the female line frequently live under one roof or in one family compound [...] Age is highly respected in Ethiopia. The elderly are often consulted on family issues, and family members usually accept their leadership and advice. Adult children expect to care for their aging parents, who often move in with their oldest son’s family [...] Rural families depend heavily on children to help on the farm, so many are unable to attend school. It is considered important mothers to teach their daughters domestic skills, and girls generally have more responsibilities at home than boys.⁷⁴

Generally, the Oromo work and eat together and share responsibilities among each other. The characteristic lives of the Oromo can contribute to the reading and interpretation of the Bible. I will soon argue that there are certain ways in which the Oromo traditional culture can contribute to the reading and interpreting of the Old Testament because the Oromo assume that some of the Old Testament stories are their own accounts.

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ An article taken from WWW.Cuturegrams.com , «Culture Grams World Edition: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2014 Edition, 4.

2. *The “individual”*

As it was a characteristic that unity in Israel has been created and sustained by its religion, characteristics of individuality was equally functioning in fuller sense. Robinson puts it as follows:

It was characteristic that the national unity of Israel should have been created and sustained by its religion. It was equally characteristic that the fuller sense of individuality should be a product of the prophetic consciousness [...] through religious experience of men who believed that they stood in an individual relation both to God and the mouth of God towards the people.⁷⁵

Robinson sees the individuality idea in the religion of Israel, and he relates the beginning of it to the emerging of the individual call – the prophets, whose experience and message somehow isolated them. For example, the prophet Jeremiah cries to God saying “I sat alone because your hand was on me” (15:7). Similarly, the feeling of isolation from a group has been echoed by the same prophet in 20:7-18, where the pronoun “I” has been repeatedly mentioned against “they”.

3. *Synthesis of the “group” and the “individual”*

According to Robinson, Judaism and Christianity has made the syntheses of the group and the individual. In his own words, “[f]rom this religious individualism, within the still retained group-consciousness there came in course of time a twofold syntheses, viz., that of Judaism and that of Christianity”.⁷⁶ Judaism is indeed visible after exile and return of some of the exiles. But Robinson describes that the syntheses of those individuals who were to shape a new future really began with such a group as the disciples who gathered around Isaiah (Isa.8:16). The development has a long process, but the Pharisees were descendants of such group to shape its religious future. In Judaism, “new doctrine” was developed.⁷⁷ For example, the belief in real life beyond death was developed by this group as a belief necessarily concerning individuals. Another example was that not all gentiles are excluded from and not all Jews included to the future life.

⁷⁵ Robinson, 53.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 56

⁷⁷ Ibid, 57

The Christian syntheses followed on the same line with that of Judaism, except it emphasized the prophetic and apocalyptic rather than the legalistic and moralistic features of that of Judaism; but belief in after death life has been retained⁷⁸. Robinson's understanding of the difference between Judaism and Christianity may lay a base for the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible – particularly the idea of parental sin punishment in Exodus 20:5 and Ezekiel 18:4.

[...] it [Christianity] emphasized the prophetic and apocalyptic rather than the legalistic features of that development, whilst sharing in the Jewish hope of life beyond death. The new fact, the crystallizing centre for Judaism, had been the Torah, the Law ascribed to Moses, both written (the Pentateuch) and unwritten (the Tradition of the elders," Mark 7:3). The present arrangement of the Old Testament literature reflects the later belief of Judaism [...] In that sense the Old Testament is a Jewish Book.⁷⁹

Generally, the Old Testament motif of corporate and individual responsibility must have shared some features of the idea of a group and an individual within the lives of ancient Israel. The above three positions will be analysed in the remaining sections of the current chapter.

5.3 Exegetical analysis of Exod. 20:5

5.3.1 Historical and Literary Context

“Professional” and “ordinary” readers approach the book of Exodus for its theological teaching about God and his relationship with his people. As we read the book, both historical and literary questions occupy our attention.⁸⁰ The first part of the book (Exod.1-15) is the story of Israel's rescue from Egypt, it invites us to historical questions. Indeed these historical questions can help us determine the meaning of a text. But as we read the book for these purposes we also come across to literary questions because “we must bear in mind that Exodus is a literary composition”.⁸¹ Concerning the history of Exodus 20, one is the discussion of the tradition-historical approach which deals with “the process of handing down information, beliefs, and customs from one generation to another and the information, customs and beliefs thus handed down.”⁸² Literary issues include the genre, style, composition and structure of the book. The

⁷⁸ Robinson, 57.

⁷⁹ Robinson, 57

⁸⁰ T. Longman III, *How to Read Exodus* (Down Grove, Illinois, 2009), 15.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² N. A. Laondoye, *The Theological bases of the Prohibitions of Idolatry: An Exegetical and Theological Study of the Second Commandment* (Michigan: A Bell and Howell Company, 1998) 34-5. Here, Laondoye refers to H. Norman: “Literary Criticism of the Old Testament” (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, 84).

study of these issues is beyond the scope of the current thesis. However, I would like to briefly describe them.

The historical background of this text shall be studied in the context of the Decalogue and in a narrower context, it falls within the shadow of the Second Commandment (20:4-5). It has been generally a wide consensus that the present form of the Decalogue is the product of a long historical development. Childs suggests that there are both expansion and contraction in the Decalogue. For example, he identifies that 20:8 might show its expansion beyond its original formulation and 20:13ff. indicating its contraction at other time.⁸³ Furthermore, he notes that the forces which gave the Decalogue its present shape were rooted in the institutional life of Israel. Similarly, about two decades ago Durham noted that the Ten Commandments went through developments and that identifying their original form might be difficult.⁸⁴ He also suggests that the original forms might have been very short and current longer forms are meant to explain the original version.⁸⁵ The Decalogue also had a significant place in the liturgy, preaching and teaching. Thus, such usage had contribution in shaping the form and the function of the commandments.

As far as the historical development of the Decalogue is concerned, Childs notes two things as problematic. First he suggests that “it remains difficult to trace with certainty the nature of all the forces at work and the exact history of its growth”; and secondly, “the relation of Decalogue to the large narrative setting of Sinai in which it is now found has become increasingly problematic”.⁸⁶

The Decalogue as a whole belongs to the Sinai tradition which focuses on Yahweh’s divine self-revelation where his divine justice and his covenant relationship with his people has been indicated. Yahweh himself has initiated the covenant relationship, “but that relationship could develop only if Israel committed themselves to Yahweh alone” who rescued and guided them.⁸⁷ Central to the Decalogue tradition are Yahweh’s *justice* and his *covenant* relationship

⁸³ B. S. Childs, *Exodus* (Bloomsbury Street: SCM Press, Second edition., 1977), 391.

⁸⁴ J. I. Durham, *Exodus* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, vol. 3, 1887), 280.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 191-2.

⁸⁷ J. I. Durham, *Exodus*, 285.

with Israel⁸⁸ Exodus 20:4-5 must also fall in the same setting. God wants Israel to be faithful towards himself – among many deities, they are only allowed to worship Yahweh alone.

The history of the function of Decalogue is also important. There is an assumption that the usage of the *Ten Words* could be indicated in the various places of the Old Testament. For example, C. Meyers notes that there is evidence their use in ancient Israel: for example, in psalms (e.g., Ps. 50; 81) and prophets (e.g., Hos. 4:1-2; Jer. 7:2).⁸⁹ He further notes that Israelites have recited them at times of their gatherings “to express their allegiance to Yahweh and their acceptance of a covenant relationship with their deity [...]”.⁹⁰

As far as the role of the Decalogue is concerned, it might not have a consistent role in post-biblical Judaism apart from the Sinai revelation as a whole. Meyers, describe that the Decalogue “is not depicted in the Jewish art until the Middle Ages (ca. 1300). As a Jewish scripture, it continued to function in a Christian scriptures.

In the Christian art, the Decalogue has a complex history in Christian thought and experience. On the one hand the New Testament shows the continued use of parts of the Decalogue (Matt. 19:16-19 and on the other hand some texts suggest “the end of the law” (Rom. 10:4).⁹¹ Positive attitude for the use of the Ten Commandments in early Christianity is reflected in different writings such as the *Didache* and *Shepherd of Hermes*.⁹² With the Reformation, it got a serious attention with Luther and Calvin. In Luther’s small and large catechisms, for example, the Ten Commandments are strongly presented.

For example, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has inherited the tradition from the European Lutheran missionaries that they have been using the Small Luther’s Catechism where the Decalogue was explained in brief statements. Specifically speaking, Exodus 20:5 has been recited in the Western Oromo of Ethiopia since 1920s. But the question of its interpretation remains a problem.

In a contemporary society, the use of Ten Commandments continued to be parts of the conservative Christian debate. In the United States for example, parts of the Commandments

⁸⁸ In his study of Exodus 20:4-5, Laondoye presupposes both Yahweh’s justice and his Covenant relationship with his people in order to research the theological bases of the prohibition of idolatry. For further discussion, see N. A. Laondoye, *The Theological Bases for the Prohibition of Idolatry*, 34-5.

⁸⁹ C. Meyers, *Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 166.

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Ibid, 167.

⁹² Ibid

(#1-4) have been posted in public places including courthouse and schools.⁹³ Following Luther's influence, the use of the Commandments are introduced to Ethiopia. Luther's catechisms are parts of the Christian teachings for the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Furthermore, part of the Ten Commandments (#8) is used in a courthouse.⁹⁴

The exegetical (interpretive) question of the Decalogue is very important. One of the roles of exegesis is indeed an attempt to seek the original meanings that becomes the decisive question of the Decalogue too.⁹⁵ But since it has been kept in oral tradition before it was written down, its meaning shall only presuppose mainly the written form. We don't have clear evidences to understand how Exod. 20:5 has been being interpreted through the past times. Most commentaries, including the *Africa Bible Commentary* over-sighted the interpretation of the last clause of the verse. However, we have few of them in the western scholarship that can be used in this study.

In relation to literary language, some of the commandments in Exod. 20 follow an *act - effect* formula. That means, obedience and disobedience of the laws have rewards and punishments respectively. For example, obeying the Second Commandment rewards in limitless blessing (up to thousand generation) and at the same time disobeying it will result in generational punishment up to three and four generation.

5. 3. 2 Structure and brief overview

The text I am focussing on is the final clause of 20:5 which says:

for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

The verse falls in the wider context of the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) (vv. 1-18). In a narrower context, it is part of the Second Commandment (vv. 4-6), a section which prohibits any attempt of making a פסל (curved image) from anything in heaven above or on the earth or in the water below (v.4). Similarly, it forbids against worshipping תמונה (images) (5a). Rejecting the commandment has consequences which will be assumed to be manifested as a trans-generational punishment (5b). But if it is obeyed, the reward is a trans-generational blessing up to thousand generations (6).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ The judge often orders people who come to give witnesses on some cases and before they gave their words, they must touch the Bible and take oath they tell a true witness. This is particularly related to the Eighth Commandment in Luther's catechism.

⁹⁵ N. A. Laondoye, *The Theological bases of the Prohibitions of Idolatry*, 34-5.

5. 3. 3 The meaning of עוון

There are three most important words that the Old Testament often uses in relation to the word “sin”. They are עוון, פשע and חטא. One of the references to עוון is in Exod. 20:5. Most of Bible versions (e.g., KJV, ESV, NASV, ISV, and WEB) translated this word as “iniquity”. NIV translated it as “sin”. It appears 229 times in the Old Testament with a general meaning of “error” or “iniquity” before God and human (e.g., Gen. 4:13; 1 Sam. 20:1, 8; 25:24).⁹⁶ The other two terms are חטא (595 times) and פשע (135 times). חטא means “to be mistaken, to be found deficient or lacking, to be at fault, to miss a specified goal or mark” (cf. Pr. 19:2; Job. 5:24; 2 Kgs. 18:14; Exod. 5:16 ;). and פשע (135 times) means “revolt”, which in a political sense implies a knowledgeable violation of a norm of a covenant (1 Kgs. 12:9; 2 Kgs. 1:1; 8:20, 22).⁹⁷

In Exod. 20:5, sin is inferred as an error which undergoes disobeying the Second Commandment. It is an inclination to the worship of images (תמונה) which, according to the literal reading of the current text, can end up with a consequence of generational curse. In the Oromo traditional culture, sin is the violation of cosmic orders which God has set them into their own loci:

The supreme being whom they call ‘Waq’ (sky/God), is the creator of all things and the source of life. Starting with water and rocks, going on through the vegetable and animal world to man, Waq’ has appointed to every being its own place in a cosmic order of which he is also the guardian. Sin is simply a breaking of this cosmic order.⁹⁸

God’s creative work is manifested in all things he has created and particularly in each individual person.⁹⁹ Hence, violation of human personal and social values is sin. The consequence of those violation are recorded in the *Gada* laws.

5.3.4 Theological Reasons for Generational Punishments

1. A Jealous God: אל קנא

The meaning of אל קנא (jealous God) is important in connection with the theme of generational curse in Exod.20:5. There is an evidence in this verse that one of the theological reasons for

⁹⁶ Cover, C. R. “Sin, Sinners (OT)”. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 6 pp.31-40. 1992), 31.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 32.

⁹⁸ See L Bartels, Oromo religion, 14.

⁹⁹ Ibid

Yahweh's warning to punish children for the sin of their fathers is behind God's jealous nature.¹⁰⁰ The causal particle כִּי introduces this particular nature of God that he effects generational curse. The Old Testament often refers to a jealous God, אל קנא . The root קנא occurs a total of 85 times in the OT referring to both human beings and God.

The etymological investigation of the root קנא might be difficult because of its lack of any semantic relationship. However, among proposed references are its possible relationship with the Ethiopic and the Amharic¹⁰¹. In Amharic, for example, the word *qinnat* means “jealous” and “envy”. Some argue that it means “zealous” or “impassioned” while others favour a positive emotion as in romantic love or marriage.¹⁰² As Propp notes, both meanings could be applicable in v.5: “Yahweh is jealous when Israel serves another god; he is zealous in his vengeance”.¹⁰³

In the Oromo vernacular Bible, God is referred to as *inaafaa* (jealous). In spite of the difficulty of an accurate background for this keyword, its role cannot be overlooked in the interpretation of our focus text. Following this, I will offer a detailed analysis of the term קנא both from the Old Testament contexts the and from Oromo.

I have already noted above that some of the Oromo ordinary readers talk about God as jealous. What is behind this predicate of God might have served as a base for the Oromo to understand him. Jealous for the Oromo is part of human nature. Jealous could have multiple motifs – negative and positive. The positive motif of it is aimed at guarding one's personal God's given right. For example, an Oromo husband is jealous of his wife when another man tries to make relationship with her. The negative concept might be, as described above, his zealous nature – but the Oromo might have been informed from the Old Testament. In Hosea, God is portrayed as a husband (Hos. 4). Probably this picture may illuminate the Oromo way of explain the idea of “jealous”.

In connection to its usage referring to human beings we have several stories from the Old Testament. In this usage קנא has three interrelated meanings.¹⁰⁴ The first one is used in connection with the husband-wife relationship where the husband becomes *jealous* to his wife.

¹⁰⁰ See N. A. Laondoye, *The Theological bases of the Prohibitions of Idolatry*, 231-6.

¹⁰¹ Cover, R. C. “Sin, Sinners (OT)”. *TDOT* 13 (2004), 31-40. This dictionary renders the adjective form of the root as *qannat*. I think the accurate form is *qinnat* because it means jealous.

¹⁰² For detail explanation, see W. H. C. Propp, *Ezekiel 19-40* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 171.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 49-53.

This might echo patriarchal ideology where the supremacy of husbands over wives has been reflected. For example, in Numbers chapter 5 only, the term occurs five times (5:14, 15, 18, 25, 29 and 30) in connection to the way a husband tests unfaithful wife. Thus, if a husband becomes jealous to his wife, it implies that she might have committed a sexual sin. In this testing practice a sacrifice for jealousy (קִנְיָה קָנָה) will be offered. The second secular meaning of קָנָה is *envy* (cf. Gen.31:1 and 37: 3-4, 11). In Gen. 37, Joseph's brothers were envy towards him. Here human's jealousy is also noted. The third one is *zeal*. For example, Joshua expresses his zeal stand to act in the place of Moses (Num. 11:29).

2. *No image of God: תמונה*

There are multiple but interrelated prohibitions in the Second Commandment (Exod. 20:4-5). One prohibits פסל (a curved images) and the other one prohibits to worship תמונה (images). Probably for the purpose of emphasis, these prohibitions are repeated in 20: 12-26. As issues around תמונה are the main consequence for generational curse in 20:5b, it is worthy to explore some theological reasons behind this Hebrew term.

תמונה occurs about ten times in the Old Testament. Some of them are in connection to Yahweh's "form" or "shape" (Num. 12:8; Ps. 17:15) where Yahweh's תמונה has been described in "seeing".¹⁰⁵ Moses saw a burning flame in the midst of the bush (Exod.3). In this regard, it seems possible to talk about Yahweh's "form" or "shape". But within the context of the second Commandment (Exod. 20:4-5; Deut. 4; and Deut. 5:8-9), any attempt to have a "form" or "shapes" of God is prohibited. Particularly in Deut. 4 (vv. 12 and 15) it has been noted that Israel saw no form/ did not see of any form during the theophany of Mt Sinai. Here the emphasis is that Yahweh's self-revelation was not in a visual way but in a "sound of words".¹⁰⁶

Whose image has been prohibited in the second Commandment? In relation to the meaning of תמונה, an analysis of כל-תמונה and its inverted form תמונת-כל may give us a possibility of assuming that what has been prohibited in this commandment was the image of idols.

¹⁰⁵ K. Holter, *Deuteronomy 4 and the Second Commandment*, 28.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 29.

But some argue that Yahweh's image itself has been prohibited. One of the strongest arguments for the ban of תמונה is in connection with Yahweh's "otherness". Yahweh is the Most High God, the sovereign, the creator and the Lord of nature that he wants to protect his identity. W. H. C. Propp offers the following suggestion behind the reasons why the Bible forbids the Israelites to make images, even of Yahweh.¹⁰⁷

1. Because Yahweh presents himself only by his own free will and a tendency to equate him to an idol may lead to a fragmentation of his divinity. To make Yahweh's image may have a multiple implications. First, it might be reducing his status by equating him to the visible nature. Second, it might imply to divide his essence into many places (like Hindu who divide gods into millions of creatures around us and assumed that God is ALL and All is God). But nothing on earth is divine except human beings at least are created in God's image (Genesis chapters 1 and 2)
2. The second reason Propp gives is somehow similar to the above, but focuses on worship. Image (idol) worship binds the divine essence to the lower realm. Israelite worship (i.e., prayer and sacrifice) is a vertical affair, with man on earth and Yahweh in heaven. But idolatry is a horizontal relation directed to God on earth. Moreover, all graphic representations are metaphors, not the thing itself. Idols are deaf, and dumb, unfeeling and unthinking, and fix God in time unlike Israelite's God who can hear, talk, feel, think and act.
3. The third reason is related to the Ancient Near Eastern polytheists' concept of human's creativity who believed that the creation of humanity involved divine craftsmen and/or mother goddesses. Unlike this the Israelites heaven holds no creator apart from Yahweh.

3. Yahweh as the Lord of Creation

The third reason could be in relation to Yahweh's transcendence. Exod. 20:5 has linguistic parallelism with the Genesis story of creation (Gen. 1: 1-2:3) where story narrates that God is the creator of the universe: heaven, earth and the sea.¹⁰⁸ Any carved images part of God's creation. To attempt to direct worship to such part of creation might be regarded as reducing Yahweh's transcendence.

¹⁰⁷ W.H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 167-70.

¹⁰⁸ Ndjerareou, *Theological Base for the Prohibition of Idolatry*, 90ff.

4. *Yahweh's judgement*

Yahweh's jealousy, some assume, leads him to punish those who hate him and disobey his commandments.¹⁰⁹ The word *זָכַר* - to visit, to remember has a multiple meaning: to visit for good and for judgement.¹¹⁰ Here it is used in the context of judgement as in Exod. 32:34, 34:7; Lev. 18: 25; Isa 13:11 and Amos 3:2.

5. 3. 5 *Arguments for generational punishments*

Now we come to the central focus of our study where the Old Testament understanding of corporate punishments and that of the Western Oromo's are to be analysed. In chapter three, we concluded that there are multiple understandings of the consequence of sin of the fathers. One of these understandings was that children could be victims of the mistakes of their fathers. In other words, God's response to the violation of his commandment is punishment up to the fourth generation.

The idea of corporate accountability is a common phenomenon in the Western Traditional Oromo culture and in an Oromo contemporary Christian society. In the fourth chapter of the current thesis, I used a typical Oromo proverb concerning corporate punishment: "the eyes weep that the nose does not keep quiet".¹¹¹ Eyes and nose of a person belong to one single group that makes up the whole body of that person. So they share the same consequence. The meaning of the proverb is that the whole group of a society is viewed as a single individual and hence each share in the same consequence.

One of the pioneers in observing corporate ideas in the Old Testament studies was H. W. Robinson. Robinson's argument is that in the Old Testament, the larger or the smaller group is accepted as a unity – including its past, present and future and each individual is a representative of the group where he belongs to.¹¹² In his own words:

The larger or smaller group was accepted without question as a unity; [...].The whole group, including its past present and future members, might function as a single individual through any one of those members conceived as representative of it. Because it was not confined to the living, but included the dead and the unborn, the group could be conceived as living forever.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 236.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹C. Sumner, *Oromo Wisdom Literature: Proverbs Collection and Analysis* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 1995) 124

¹¹² H. W. Robinson, *Corporate Responsibility in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, rev. edn., 1980), 7.

¹¹³ Ibid

Robinson's position of the Old Testament's corporate idea seems extremely strong because of a multiple of reasons. First, it binds the past, present and the future generation as a unity. Thus, his statements might imply that all the past generations are accountable for the present mistakes and at the same time the future also continue to be victims of the same fathers' mistakes. Second, each of an individual within the group is acting not only for himself, but also on behalf of his members.

Somehow, Robinson is not alone to offer a corporate idea. One of the recent proponents who argues for corporate responsibility idea in the Hebrew Bible is J. Kaminsky, a North American Old Testament scholar. In his book entitled *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, he argues that since God relates himself to a community as a whole, he holds each member of the nation to some level of responsibility for the errors of any members of that group; hence, he says, one is not only responsible for one's own proper behaviour but one must also actively prevent others from sinning.¹¹⁴ Kaminsky begins his arguments from an assumption that the theme of corporate responsibility and corporate punishment are central to the Old Testament and at the same time the ideas persist from beginning to an end throughout the pages of the Hebrew Bible.

Indeed Kaminsky went one step further than Robinson as he presents relevant cases from the Old Testament Bible that God himself has been punishing others because of mistakes of some individuals within that group. He used several Old Testament references and cases in order to justify his arguments. However one of his texts used in this regard was relevant to our focus – that is Exod. 20:5. For him, this particular text was among “generational curse” texts where God imposes punishment upon those who hate him up to three and four generations.¹¹⁵

A similar perspective could be observed in a traditional Oromo Culture. Lambert's observation in a traditional Oromo ideology is a relevant issue with that of Robinson and Kaminsky. Lambert hears from one of his traditional Oromo religion experts that they (the Oromo) raise again and again about the problem of sin of their fore-fathers in their meetings.¹¹⁶ In so doing they felt that the guilt of their former fathers has been transferred to the following generation. This may remind us the situation of the people of Israel in Lam. 5:7 who worried

¹¹⁴ J. S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Journal for the study of the Old Testament Series, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 11.

¹¹⁵ J. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 190.

¹¹⁶ L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia – An Attempt to Understand* [Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983], 360.

that they became victims of their fore-fathers' sin. It was three decades ago that Bartels observed the problem of the consequences of sin of the fathers among the then living Oromo generation.

Nearly three decades ago (1987) J. I. Durham also seconds the proposals of Robinson's concept and Kaminsky's justification of Exod. 20:5. Durham's exegesis presupposes a covenantal treaty idea between Yahweh and Israel. Starting with the meaning behind Yahweh's jealousy, he seeks to justify an extension of punishment across four generation for those who are not loyal to Yahweh's First commandment and to its further explanation in the Second Commandment.¹¹⁷ He also notes that those who are not loyal to God are seen as God-haters and it is they who face generational punishment.

A similar ideology continues among a contemporary Oromo culture until today that children are victims of their parents' sin. Regarding this, two of my informants, A1 and A2 report that what is read about generational punishment in the Old Testament is not a new phenomenon but talking the very story of the traditional Oromo. The Old Testament is retelling what they have already known and believed.¹¹⁸ The *Gada system* has a series of laws called sacred laws and penal laws.¹¹⁹ The sacred laws are called *safu* which is believed to be *Waka's* (God's) word. It is stronger than the penal laws. When the *Lubas* (priests) proclaim them the whole attendants will kneel down.¹²⁰ But when the other penal laws are proclaimed, they will stand and listen. The sacred law is directed to the relationship between human being and the deity (*Waka*) whereas the later one focuses on human-to-human relationship. I may argue that the context of Exod. 20: 5 which falls in the shadow of the prohibition of idolatry might be irrelevant to the Oromo. The Oromo do not often talk about worshipping images other than God. But missionaries might have perceived the Oromo as if they worshiped images – as soon as they gave the Oromo their Bible, they immediately abolished some rituals as if they were idols. For example, the Oromo lost the ritual of *guma* (a ritual which is used to reconcile people) and the ritual of bathing in order to get cleansed from sin of sex outside marriage. Decalogue.

To speak to the point, according to the Oromo culture, generational curse is not often related to idolatry but rather to violation of penal laws. For example, mistakes such as

¹¹⁷ J. I. Durham, *Exodus*, (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publishers, 1987), 287.

¹¹⁸ Informant A1 And A2, Oral interviews on July 2 and 10, 2014 respectively.

¹¹⁹ See Nagaso Gidada, *History of the Sayo Oromo of Southwest Ethiopia (1894)*, 220-28.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 221.

murdering, unlawful sexual relations, marriage between blood relatives, exploitation of the poor, thefts, and so on are believed to result in generational curse.

What Lambert observed from the traditional Oromo meeting need attention. Though the way they have been informed might need a further analysis, the traditional Oromo society refers to the ancestors in paradise which echoes the sin of Adam in Genesis chapter three. It is surprising when the Oromo construct Adam as their own ancestor. In doing so they have already put themselves in a genealogy of the Old Testament. The implication is that the problem of the fall of Adam is not only the problem of the ancient Israel, but also of the traditional Oromo too.

From the report of A1 and A2, it is possible to observe that the theme of generational curse is moving like a pendulum here and there between the Oromo tradition and Oromo Christians (the Old Testament) because both the Oromo culture and the texts of the ancient Israel inform the subject. Above all one thing is very important: there is a ground to indicate that the Oromo tradition can contribute to the way the Old Testament Bible will be interpreted. The traditional Oromo groups had several encounters with Exodus 20:5 according to my fieldwork result, they hardly interpret it in such a way that it opposes the corporate punishment idea.¹²¹ It is possible to assume that this understands the Old Testament as a literature that endorses their tradition.

The problem of the sin of fathers and its consequence becomes the agenda of the Oromo Christian ideology too. The ordinary readers in this regard are more direct and follow a literal way of readings of relevant Old Testament readings. I have already shown above that except a few points, no vivid difference is distinguished between the traditional Oromo culture and the contemporary common Christians' way of understanding the issue of generational curse. My informants in this regard report that they hear about the consequence of generational sin both from the Old Testament and from the Traditional Oromo culture.

5.3.6 Arguments against generational punishments

So far I have presented that there are some bases up on which the idea of children becoming victims of sin of their former ancestors. Among strong proponents I have noted figures such as Robinson and Kaminsky who openly argue that the whole group – the past, the present and the future bear the consequences for the mistakes of one or some of the members of that group.

¹²¹ Ibid

Through the eyes of the traditional Oromo and ordinary Oromo Christians, opinions such as Robinson and Kaminsky's are justified.

However, this position that looks up on the interpretation of Exod.20:5 as if it justifies generational curse is not free of critics. Let's have a look at some recent exegesis of this very text. William H. C. Propp presupposes an interpretive Hebrew key word פקד (reckoning/visiting), as an idea that God keeps records of sin and punishing. His view is as if God collects sins up to fourth generation until "sin is full" (cf. Gen. 15:16) and once it is full he justifies that the load is sufficient to eradicate.¹²² But he notes that the harsh language in Exod. 20:5 that demands transgenerational transmission of guilt was eventually denied by the Old Testament and Judaism.¹²³

The other argument against generational punishment comes from C. Meyers who published a commentary on Exodus in 2005. Meyers basically analyses the setting of the particular text and suggests that "it likely reflects the basic characteristics of the strong family lineage in premonarchic (twelfth – eleventh centuries BCE) and early monarchic Israel (tenth – eighth centuries BCE)".¹²⁴ Meyers admit that the idea of punishment of the succeeding ones up to the fourth generations because of the misdeeds of one generation has been a troubling to commentators. Beyond that he further refers to both Jeremiah (31:29-30) and Ezekiel (18:2-4) contesting cross-generational punitive measures; rather he describes "their emphasis on individual accountability" as parts of social change.¹²⁵ I find it important to bring the very words of him regarding his interpretation:¹²⁶

We can only wonder if this is the language of hyperbole, meant to emphasize the importance of obeying this structure, rather than an expression of belief that the innocent descendants of someone who disobeyed would have to pay the consequences. Support for such an understanding of a harsh language may lie in the even more exaggerated language describing what the result will be for contrasting behaviour [...] blessing will come to the "thousand generation" (20:6) of those who love for him [...].

It is clear from Meyer's statements that the use of contrasted numbers in 20: 5-6 (three/four/and thousand) are not necessarily read literally. For example, he translates the "thousand generation" to mean God's "everlasting covenant".

¹²² William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, (New York: Doubleday: 2006 (The Anchor Bible)), 171-2

¹²³ *Ibid*, 172-3.

¹²⁴ C. Meyers, *Exodus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 171.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 171-2.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 172.

Reports from my “professional” readers also deny the transmission of sin across many generations. B2 and B3 simply related the echo of generational punishment as a problem of literal way of reading outside its context. They rather focused on counter readings such as Ezek. 18 and the idea of the everlasting (“thousand”) mercy of God in Exod. 20:5.¹²⁷ While B2 and B3 denied the motifs of reading such texts, B1 seems to go beyond the problem of interpretation to question the motif of the text itself and concluded that “belief in parental sin is only the problem of Oromo traditional society and some of the ancient Israel’s understanding by which they have marginalized those who have been suffering”.¹²⁸

5. 3. 7 Evaluation

Let’s briefly reflect on arguments *against* corporate punishments by focussing on a few points only. I have brought into discussion three scholars who are nearly identical in their positions: Robinson, Kaminsky and Durham. Their views have much relevance with the Oromo “ordinary” readers understanding who tend to assume that “generational punishments” are common to the Old Testament and certain texts are applicable in a contemporary christianity. The former two scholars have a conviction that an erring individual represents the whole group where he/she is a member. In this regard, they assume that children become victims of their father and fore-fathers’ sin. Durham presupposes covenantal relationship between Yahweh and his people where unfaithfulness to the loyalty of the covenant on the side of Israel would result in generational punishment. How do the Oromo understand this?

All of the above figures, I think, nearly represent the Oromo “ordinary” readers’ perspective.¹²⁹ God who is righteous and just is characterized by his eternal mercy; but the same God is the one who punishes sinners up to the fourth generation.¹³⁰ According to my understanding, what makes the “ordinary” readers differ from the proponents of corporate responsibility is that they emphasize that repentance can break the power of generational curse. Hence, I think, their suggestion seems fair.

Most of the Old Testament texts that refer to generational punishments are related to idolatry.¹³¹ Nearly all of these punishments involve violence, an action which is not encouraged

¹²⁷ Interview, July 30, 2014.

¹²⁸ Interview, B1 August 5, 2014.

¹²⁹ Interview, C1, C2, and C3, August 5, 2014.

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ See chapter three.

in a modern era.¹³² Violence usually involves human initiatives though claimed to be acted under Yahweh's order. The fact that most of generational texts are related to idolatry, there is also a possibility of addressing the subject in a context of polemics between Yahweh and other deities.¹³³ Such discussion, is for example, vivid in J. Day's detail presentation of his book entitled *Yahweh and Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*. However, sin is mostly related to disordering the cosmic world (nature). Thus, it is not idolatry, but sinning against fellow humans and against the natural environment that which are mostly addressed in the theme of generational punishments.

What about scholars such as C. Meyers and the "professional" Oromo Christian readers who tends to reject the idea of corporate punishment? Meyers, sees key words (thousand, three/four) in Exod. 20: 5 as if they simply emphasize the idea of being faithful for God rather than merely implying generational punishment up to four generations? However, it doesn't seem fair to deny the other several cases which appeal to the efficacy of generational punishments.

Summing up, we have a few reasons to assume that generational punishments are observed in the Old Testament and in the Oromo traditional culture as well as in the contemporary Oromo Christian interpretation. However, it is difficult to read without criticism the several texts so far discussed. Tension between the Oromo "ordinary" and "professional" readers remains challenging.

5. 4 Exegetical Analysis of Ezek. 18

5. 4. 1 Historical and Literary Context

Historical investigations often depend on literary analysis. Ezekiel was among prophets who has spoken about exilic life situations (e.g., 3:22-5:17). Matties notes that "since we know little about the historical and socio-religious world of exilic Israel, we depend on textual witnesses for reconstructing the ancient context".¹³⁴ He further describes that in Ezekiel, the Priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions are reflected.

¹³² For discussion, see Collins. J. J., *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

¹³³ J. Day, *Yahweh and Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000 (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 265). In this book, polemics against Baal (s) is prominent. See, pp. 68-90.

¹³⁴ G. H. Matties, *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse*, 9.

Ezekiel is commonly assigned to the Priestly groups because the book which bears his name is filled with priestly terminology and forms.¹³⁵ As a product of a priestly (or Zadokite) work, the book reflects on theodicy concept and a program of restoration. At the same time, Ezekiel seems to break down social order and cultic practices. In Ezek. 18 particularly, the affinities with the Holiness Code and the Priestly tradition are vivid.¹³⁶ Sin has been viewed as the violation of sacral orders. However, “Ezekiel distinguishes between sacral and moral orders¹³⁷.”

The historical setting of Ezekiel 18 is very important to understand the contents of the message of the text itself. Scholars attempt to offer specific historical event as they seek to understand the setting of the chapter. Zimmerli notes that Ezekiel was speaking in the time of great crisis for Israel.¹³⁸ Similarly, Matties suggests that the book reflects the situation in Judah during the sixth century BCE. so Ezekiel possibly reflects the situation of Babylonian exiles.¹³⁹ Matties says, Ezekiel was “a prophet who championed a new development in Israelite religion.”¹⁴⁰

There is also an assumption that the book of Ezekiel has been shaped by the Deuteronomist thinking. Matties, for example argues for this position though such view was overlooked.¹⁴¹ Following E. Rohland’s examination, Zimmerli offers describes that the book is rather related to three traditions: Exodus from Egypt, Election of Zion, and Election of David and his dynasty.¹⁴² However Matties seems right that there are some literary parallelisms between Deuteronomy and Ezekiel. One example is noted by Moshe Greenberg particularly between Deut. 24:16 and Ezek. 18:20.¹⁴³

Deut. 24:16		Ezek. 18:20	
<i>not fathers for sons</i>	1	<i>who sins will die</i>	3
<i>not sons for fathers</i>	2	<i>not son for father</i>	2
<i>each dies for his own sin</i>	3	<i>not father for son</i>	1

¹³⁵ Ibid, 11.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 13.

¹³⁸ Zimmerli, Ezekiel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 386.

¹³⁹ See G. H. Matties, *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse*, (p. 11) where the detail discussion is presented following Clements.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 115

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 13.

¹⁴² W. Zimmerli, Ezekiel (1979), 41.

¹⁴³ M. Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983), 333.

The above inverted parallelism indeed indicates that there is a literary similarity between Ezekiel and Deuteronomy. Greenberg notes that Ezekiel was a borrower of Deuteronomy.¹⁴⁴

More specifically, attempts to seek to understand the historical situation of Ezek. 18 event for Ezek. 18 is in relation to the proverb quoted in v. 3. The quotation is a saying “in the land of Israel” which the community used to demonstrate that children are smitten because of their fathers’ sin. Some scholars note that the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B. C. stands behind the history of the text. Zimmerli suggests that the sayings quoted by Ezekiel points to the situation of the great collapse of the year.¹⁴⁵ He notes that the sayings against which Ezekiel reacted has been circulated in the land of Palestine (cf. 33:24). Furthermore, he describes that the book of Lamentation, which certainly belongs to the region of Palestine (e.g., 5:7), echoes the same time. Such sayings, according to him, “undoubtedly became a temptation and danger for many exiles whose ears they reached.”¹⁴⁶ Eichrodt also puts the setting of this chapter into the same context that “God calls the prophet’s attention to a winged word which is current word among the exiles”.¹⁴⁷ He further notes that the chapter is presented in a such a way that it it protests against the way God treats his people that Yahweh announces with a solemn oath that he will abolish this “blasphemous proverb” from the land of Israel.¹⁴⁸

The literary aspect of Ezek. 18 is also very important. The prophet uses a disputation formulae in order to abolish the “blasphemous proverb” mentioned above. Concerning its linguistic features, Ezekiel has relationship with some Old Testament areas where similarities could be observed, particularly with Leviticus and Deuteronomist traditions where there are several individual laws.¹⁴⁹

5.4.2 Structure and Brief Overview

Ezekiel 18 is a form of disputation which aims at answering a saying of people quoted at the beginning of the chapter (v.2).¹⁵⁰ The whole chapter is moved by the oracle of the disputation. But beside this disputation, the opponents speak against in verse 19 in a question, and in vv. 25 and 29, in expressing doubt about the righteousness of God.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ Zimmerli, Ezekiel 377.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 378.

¹⁴⁷ W. Eichrodt, Ezekiel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 234.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 238.

¹⁵⁰ W. Zimmerli, Ezekiel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 374.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 375.

The central idea of the chapter is located in the first section (vv. 1-4). An old proverb which says “parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children teeth are set on edge” (v. 3) basically conveys a general meaning that “Fathers sin and children are smitten”.¹⁵²

The following verses (5-20) deal with discussions around an old belief which has been noted in v. 3 that children become victims of the sin of parents up to three generations. In connection with a clause describing a *righteous* and *unrighteous* humans, Zimmerli sees legal pronouncements are at the centre of Ezek. 18 – as it could be indicated in vv. 10ff. and 14ff. and further reflect a classic form of legal commands in Exod. 20 and Deut. 5.¹⁵³

Ezek. 18:5-9 is about the promise of life – life as a gift from God which is actualized only by seeking God rather than by observing the *torah* (cf. Amos 5:4ff). Furthermore, this section echoes the liturgy of the temple worship where priests at the gate of the sanctuary of God proclaim the torah.

In connection to the setting of Ezek.18, Eichrodt notes that the content of the chapter echoes life during and after exile.¹⁵⁴ Exile life had special characteristics regarding the life of Israel and the special proverb in v. 3 shows one of that natures. Eichrodt calls a quoted proverb in v. 3 “a blasphemous proverb” and “it upsets a fundamental conviction in regard to his providential government, a conviction which Israel had so far successfully preserved inviolate in the face of all her temptation to think otherwise: the conviction that his retribution was always just”.¹⁵⁵ However, he also notes that what he calls a blasphemous proverb reminds the idea of inherited guilt as it has been explained in Exod.20 5 and Deut. 5:

It calls in question a conviction which had been taken for granted and never been questioned in early Israel, and had been already given clear expression in the explanations to the Decalogue (Ex. 20:5f; Deut. 5:9f) [...] Because the members of the people do not exist as isolated individuals, but stand together, being indissolubly connected by a solidarity which makes them able to fit in with and act on behalf of each other [...]¹⁵⁶

Such a collective retribution was widely distributed in ancient Israel. At the same time the fortune of an individual became neglected.

¹⁵² M. Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983), 327.

¹⁵³ W. Zimmerli, 375.

¹⁵⁴ W. Eichrodt, Ezekiel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 235.

But, Ezek. 18 highly disputes such belief in favour of individualistic notion for the consequence of sin. In Lam. 5:7, we can read that collective retribution is widely part of the conviction of those who suffer in exile. Thus Ezek.18 aims at looking a new perspective – that sin is a matter of personal phenomenon. “The individual had now come of age and asked questions about his own identity, a satisfactory answer to which could not be provided by going back to the common destiny of the whole people”.¹⁵⁷

Summing up Ezek. 18 might be historically connected to the life of Israel during and after the period of Exile where each has been invited to have a personal relationship with God. Neither the righteousness of the righteous fathers nor the unrighteousness of the wicked fathers affect the life of the future generation but each one is responsible for his/her own actions.

5. 4. 3 The meaning of the proverb: 18:1-4

After a brief introductory remark (v. 1), Ezekiel proceeds to dispute a proverb which might be well known to his contemporary audience that it will no more used in the land of Israel (v. 2). The proverb was this: “The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (v. 3). The “teeth being set on edges” may point to a popular superstition according to which the teeth of one who ate unripe sour grapes (בָּסֵר cf. Isa. 18: 5; Job 15: 33) quickly decayed (קָהָה in Eccl. 10: 10 refers to the blunting of an axe). The meaning of the proverb was that guilt was transferred across generations and it was such belief that Ezekiel challenged.

Zimmeli links Ezekiel’s disputation in this chapter to exile life experience that those who left in the land complain in their personal condition saying “Our fathers have sinned; they are no more, and we must bear their sin” (Lam. 5:7).¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, he sees the proverb laying guilt of the fathers upon the children to be a mockery against divine “righteousness”.¹⁵⁹

Relating exile to generational sin is also a common phenomenon in Ethiopia. In such case the term “exile” is often interpreted in connection to migration, a theme central to the Hebrew Bible. For example, we read migration to Egypt and to Moab as one form of movement from one place to the other. Israel’s life in Egypt could be one example of exilic life. But we also have another kind of migration in a form of deportation. The Old Testament tells us that Israelites have been deported to Babylon – the second exile. A famous Ethiopian Christian

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 336.

¹⁵⁸ W. Zimmerli, Ezekiel, 378.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

songs composer and singer Tamirat Haile relates the situation of the country during the last seventeen years of “Dergue Government” as follows: because of our sin we are under wrath; became hungry; became wonderers in foreign countries [...] ¹⁶⁰. Tamirat’s song reminds us the Oromo motif of migration as one form of exile which some relate it to one form of the manifestation of generational curse.

Most scholars interpret the proverb as a mockery against divine “righteousness”. Zimmerli for example says “it is in any case clear that we can see in it a mocking at the divine ‘righteousness’ which lays the guilt of the fathers upon the children”. The statements in v. 3 which reads “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel” suggests Yahweh’s oath to dispute the popular saying of the proverb that in the future children will not be responsible for the mistakes of their fathers

Ezek. 18:4 says “The soul who sins is the one who will die” and by this very verse Ezekiel begins his arguments against the widespread beliefs that children are smitten by the sin of the fathers (v. 3). Ezekiel’s statements explicitly react against the expression in Exod. 20:5 which appeals for corporate punishments. The verse is used by several modern Old Testament scholars to argue *for* individual responsibility. Presupposing Yahweh’s fundamental righteousness, Greenberg recognizes that God’s oracle in 18:4 denies that any person is morally an extension of another; God does not get at a sinner through his son, nor does he impose punishment on the son as a limb of his father. ¹⁶¹

5.4.4 A righteous Inherits Guilt? 18:5-20

Having introduced the idea that the soul who sin is the one who will die (v. 4), Ezekiel demonstrates his arguments with practical examples in vv. 5-20. In order to elaborate his central theme, he uses the language of the sanctuary as in chapter 15. Eichrodt indicates that the prophet deliberately used the language that imitates the promise of life and threat of death declared by the priest when he proclaims the temple torah, announcing the obligation imposed upon those who frequented the temple (cf. Pss. 15; 24: 3-6; 33: 14-16). ¹⁶² He also notes that Ezekiel might have imitated the promise of benefiting from obeying the laws and the judgements that follow disobeying them according to Deut. 28 and Lev. 26. ¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Tamirat Haile, *Songs*, Volume 5, 1988 (1980).

¹⁶¹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 328.

¹⁶² Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 238.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

How do the Oromo readers perceive the languages of Ezekiel in vv. 5-20? Eichrodt notes that Ezekiel imitates the languages of a priest in the sanctuary as he proclaims the torah. The ordinary Christian from an Oromo culture may perceive that Ezekiel is retelling what the traditional Oromo *luba* (priests) proclaim the *safu Waka* (the law of God) to his audiences who usually gathered under their sanctuary – under an *Oda* tree or by the side of a river. Most of the laws that Ezekiel describes in this section are parallel to the traditional Oromo penal laws.¹⁶⁴

The central message of Ezekiel in this section is that the righteous will not be punished together with the wicked. Vv. 5-9 is an instance of “a righteous man who does what is just and right” that the Lord declares “he will surely live”. Out of the Old Covenant law, following the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20), Deuteronomy and the Law of Holiness in Lev. 17, Ezekiel provides a basis for a norm for moral and social life.¹⁶⁵

The meaning of “righteous” is very important. In vv. 6-8, lists of some characteristics of a righteous man which reflects apodictic laws (i.e., ‘you shall not’ or ‘do not’ type) suggests what a righteous man looks like.¹⁶⁶ A man who fulfils certain laws is said to be righteous that he is free from punishment. According to Eichrodt, “righteous” does not mean that he is sinless – but who is willing to be member of the cultic community; who conforms with the ordinances of the community life and thus shows a right attitude towards the covenant relationship.¹⁶⁷

“He does not eat on the mountain” in v. 6 according to Wevers is a reference to partaking of sacrifices on the high places which has been prohibited and declared illegal in Deuteronomy (cf. Ezek.6:1-14). Eating on the mountain refers to partaking in the worship of idolatry. Similarly in v.6 parallels Exod. 20:4-5 that it also prohibits idolatry.

5.4.5 Arguments for individual responsibility

Ezekiel 18 is among the Old Testament texts which majority of biblical scholars refer to assume the idea of individual responsibility. The text falls in the context of the ancient Israelites time of catastrophe of exile. Many of the scholars probably recognized Ezekiel responding to his contemporary situation. The old proverb in 18:3 which was used by the people reflected the situation. The land of Israel echoed lamentations that the people were suffering because of the mistakes of their fathers who have then already passed away (Lam. 5:7). Two verses from the

¹⁶⁴ N. Gidada, *History of the Sayo Oromo of Southwester Wollega, Ethiopia*, from about 1730-1886 (Frankfurt: Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University, 1984), 221-28.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 239.

¹⁶⁶ John w. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (Bath Street, London: Grand rapids, 1972), 109.

¹⁶⁷ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 239-40.

chapter give a direct response to the proverb which made generations victims of the errors of the former fathers. They are 18:4 and 18:20.

In Num. 16:22, we read that God is the Lord of all flesh (אל אלהי הרוחה לכל בשר) the text is connected to Ezek. 18:4. The story is about Moses and Aron's cry to God and he turned away from punishing the whole group because of some wicked individuals of the group. Zimmerli argues for individual responsibility on the basis of Yahweh's fundamental righteousness. Yahweh is not unjust to punish the righteous with the wicked, instead the person who sins, he shall die.¹⁶⁸ Yahweh's righteousness is manifested through his being the Lord of life of every individual whether a father or a son. Following H. Haag, he also observes verbal connection of the statement with the formulation of the priestly law (cf. Lev. 4:2; 5:1, 17, 21; Num. 15:27).¹⁶⁹

W. Eichrodt argues that Ezek. 18 presupposes God's sovereign will or decision. He observes some developments: though collective accountability had been normative for the Israelites who lived as a group (cf. Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9), he argues, the disintegration of the bond by contemporary hardships has invited personal responsibility during the period of monarchy.¹⁷⁰ Though we may not be able to conclude that the origin of personal responsibility dates to the time of the monarchical period, Eichrodt's position seconds the idea that Ezekiel emphasized the concept of the individual notion sin.

M. Greenberg gives a clear interpretation of v. 4 "denying that any person is morally an extension of another."¹⁷¹ He explains that God does not impose punishment on the son as a "limb" of his father because the sinner, like everybody is a discrete moral entity in God's sight. Similarly in order to argue for the individual accountability for sin he comments on v. 2 which says: "The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son." This particular verse recalls the structure of the legal rule in Deuteronomy 24:16. Greenberg notes that the verse emphasizes the "dissociation of generations from each other's guilt".¹⁷²

A more recent argument comes from C. Meyers, who brought Jer. 31:29-30 and Ezek. 18:2-4 in order to dispute the corporate generational punishments in Exod. 20:5. He notes that

¹⁶⁸ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 378

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

¹⁷⁰ W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 236-7.

¹⁷¹ M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20* (New York, Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1983), 328.

¹⁷² Ibid, 333.

both Jeremiah and Ezekiel contest cross-generational punitive measures; “their emphasis on individual accountability is part of the societal change of the late monarchic period.”¹⁷³

When it comes to the Western Oromo readers, we can observe some arguments in favour of the individual accountability for sin. The so called “professional” readers acknowledge the centrality of the concept of generational curse both in the traditional Oromo culture and in the ancient Israelite texts of the Old Testament. However, they critically see “generational curse” texts such as Exod. 20:5. Furthermore, there might be a few cases where criticisms are beyond interpretative issues but they are extended to dispute certain texts which seem to be extremists.¹⁷⁴ The “professional” reader’s perspective of generational punishment, according to three of my informants, could be summarized as follows: (1) Exodus and Ezekiel must be read contextually; hence the focus of the former might not necessarily justify the efficacy of generational punishment. (2) A few readers have a tendency to question the authority texts like Exod. 20:5 which seem to emphasize corporate punishment in a sense that they are only human’s motifs of ancient Israelite rather than that of Yahweh. (3) The individual responsibility in Ezek. 18 is accepted without any criticism.

Summing up, almost all western biblical scholars read Ezek. 18 to be arguing for the individual responsibility of sin. Key verses in the chapter is vv. 4 and 20 that clearly indicate that the soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not bear the guilt of his father nor does the father do that of his son. Similarly, all of them emphasize that in Ezekiel, God is righteous and he will not let die those who seek him in repentance. Through repentance those who lament for the consequence of their father’s sin (Lam. 5:7) and those who have been frustrated by the proverb (Ezek. 18:3) will be restored. The Oromo “professional” readers, I think argued for the same position.

The above biblical scholars I have so far brought into this thesis are seeking to understand how Ezekiel wanted to respond to the contemporary situation of ancient Israel. Indeed Ezekiel’s messages fit with the exilic life of Israel that the people have been worried of the guilt of their ancestors. That understanding was not unusual for them because it was part of the Decalogue that sin has a consequence up to the following some generations. The Western Oromo “professional” readers also accept Ezek. 18 without criticism.

¹⁷³ C. Meyers, Exodus, 171-2.

¹⁷⁴ B1, Oral interview, Aug. 5, 2014.

It seems right that Ezekiel's central message in chapter 18 was against the corporate punishment, the usual norm with which Israelites have been familiar. As response to it he demonstrates that each will die for his own sin (vv.4, 20). The idea that God will not spare the righteous together with the wicked is vivid in Ezekiel. For example, in chapter 9 we can read that some who have been marked on their foreheads (v. 4) were kept save as they have been delivered from the punishment when old men, young men, and maidens, women and children are ordered to be slaughtered (v.6).

However, we can also observe from Ezekiel that God sometimes punishes the righteous and the wicked alike. One key example is 21:4. It says, that God is "going to cut off the righteous and the wicked, my sword will be unsheathed against everyone from south to north. Generally, it doesn't seem right to conclude that Ezekiel only argues that God doesn't punish the innocent ones together with sinners. But the idea that each will die because of his own sin has been strongly emphasized in the 18th chapter of Ezekiel (vv. 4, 17, 20).

5.4.6 Arguments against Individual Responsibility?

I have demonstrated above that the majority of biblical scholars argue for the individual responsibility based up on Ezekiel 18. Yet, we have few figures which dispute the idea that tends to a total rejection of corporate responsibility. One of the pioneers of the proponents was H. W. Robinson, an English Old Testament scholar. Robinson's corporate responsibility idea was not confined to the living, but included the dead and the unborn, the group could be conceived as living forever the past.¹⁷⁵ Each of the member is conceived as representative of the whole group he/she became a member.

At the beginning of the current chapter, I have presented how Robinson observes three levels of responsibilities in the Old Testament: group and individual responsibilities and synthesis of the two. Concerning Ezekiel, however, Robinson was critical. Concerning this, Matties refers to Robinson's "Christian doctrine of man", he asserted that Ezekiel's counter-proposal in 18:4 "is untrue to the facts of life".¹⁷⁶ From a common sense perspective, Robinson concluded that the only way to be true to life would be that both corporate personality and moral individualism must in some form combined.¹⁷⁷ He suggested that the corporate

¹⁷⁵ H. W. Robinson, *Corporate Responsibility in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, rev. edn., 1980), 7

¹⁷⁶ "The Christian Doctrine of Man" (Edinburg: T & T. Clark. 1911), 8 quoted in Matties, *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 118.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

personality persisted even after the moral individualism emphasis had developed. Robinson's critics to Ezekiel is that he felt the prophet has totally rejected the corporate concept.

One of the recent studies of Ezek. 18 is that of Matties, who notes that Ezekiel combined the corporate and individualistic language in attempt to reconstruct the future. He argued that "a self and a community cannot be fully independent"¹⁷⁸ and this was the way he understood the prophet Ezekiel. He adds, "Ezekiel is saying, I think, that there is no self apart from the moral community, just as there is no community apart from moral selves. The part of the whole are not separable [...] that is the function of his individual community motif. It is not to place religion on a new foundation of individualism, but to create a new interdependence that will create a community of character again."¹⁷⁹

The other figure whose opinion may criticize was J. S. Kaminsky, a North American Old Testament scholar. Kaminsky is one of the proponents of the corporate responsibility in the Hebrew bible of ancient Israel. He argues that "Not only one is responsible for one's own proper behaviour, but one must also actively prevent others from sinning".¹⁸⁰ He continues, "There has also been an equally problematic tendency to exaggerate the importance of certain late texts that give a greater emphasis to the place of individuals in their relation to God".¹⁸¹

Kaminsky's critics to Ezek. 18 is indicated in his analysis of the texts.¹⁸² Regarding Ezek.18, he argues two objections could be raised against the reading: one is the question of how the reading in the chapter be reconciled with the other texts within the same book that affirm corporate notions of punishment.¹⁸³

There are passages within Ezekiel that affirm that sometimes the innocent suffer along with the guilty of the community (9:5-6, 20:23-26, 21:8-9, 24:21), or that recognize that recognize that the guilty might escape the more severe forms of punishment (14:22; 33:21-29)[...] Ezekiel is, after all, addressing the called the House of Israel (vv. 25, 29, 30, 31). In order to elucidate the theology of the oracle more fully we must make sense of both the individualistic and the corporate interact with each other."

According to Kaminsky, I think, Ezekiel might have contradicted himself that on the one hand he affirmed that each one is liable to his/her own mistakes. But on the other hand, he also told us that the innocent may sometimes suffer together with the wicked. Hence,

¹⁷⁸ Matties, *Ezekiel 18*, 148.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 149-50.

¹⁸⁰ J. S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Journal for the study of the Old Testament Series, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 11.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 12.

¹⁸² Ibid, 162ff.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 162

Kaminsky's comment seems right concerning Ezek. 18: First, in reading the chapter, other texts in Ezekiel that tell us about corporate responsibility must be considered too. Second, "By demonstrating that guilt does not transfer across generations, Ezekiel is trying to persuade the current generation to admit its guilt and take responsibility for the current affairs".¹⁸⁴

If so what is new with Kaminsky? Basically, as he witnesses, he is in the same line with Matties that Ezek. 18, he thinks, shall be interpreted in such a way that a community and an individual are inseparable.¹⁸⁵ Then he continues arguing that:

Ezekiel had found himself with an audience of obstinately self-righteous people and therefore was compelled to force his audience to view differently the way that God operates in relation to humans. His model of divine retribution and forgiveness is constructed to fit the needs of the moment.¹⁸⁶

The Western Oromo of Ethiopia Christian readers' understanding of "generational curse" texts is equally important. As it was presented in chapter four above, while the "professional" readers tend to underemphasize Exod. 20:5 but instead show much interest to the assumed individualistic motif in Ezek. 18, the "ordinary" readers treat the texts in an opposite way. I have never heard from them arguing for the assumed individual responsibility in Ezek. 18. On the one hand, the "ordinary" readers acknowledge the corporate idea in Exod. 20:5 and elsewhere in the Old Testament. But on the other hand, I think, they emphasize the power of repentance that can break the power of cross-generational punishment.¹⁸⁷ However, they don't explicitly criticize Ezek. 18.

5.4.7 Evaluation

Now it is time to offer brief evaluations arguments *for* and *against* individual punishments. I haven't brought arguments because I have realized that the several arguments on the text are almost identical with that of Ezek. 18.

We hear the voices of the majority of biblical scholars assuming Ezek. 18 to endorse the new development in an individual relation to God and the individual responsibility for sin. Most of them didn't deny that the corporate idea in the Old Testament has been applicable. To review some of the suggestions of some of the above, for example, W. Eichrodt suggested the explanation concerning corporate responsibility in Exod. 20:5 and Deut.5:9 "never been

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 166.

¹⁸⁵ Kaminsky, Corporate Responsibility, 172.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 175.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with group C, August 5, 2014.

questioned in early Israel” but “had been taken for granted” until it came to its full development towards the end of the monarchy.¹⁸⁸

Eichrodt observes individual responsibility as a later development emerging with the monarchical rule in Israel. In one way he seems right as corporate responsibility is less frequent in later times. But there are some ways in which he cannot free of critics. One example is regarding questions of texts in the book of Ezekiel itself and elsewhere in the Old Testament that tell us the idea of corporate responsibility (for example, Ezek. 9:5-6, 20:23-26, 21:8-9, 24:21) that the innocent ones are also experiencing suffering together with the wicked.

Similarly, when M. Greenberg argues for individual responsibility denying that any person is not morally an extension of another but each takes the consequences only for himself. He further has strengthened his perspective by referring to a similar text, Deut. 26:16, which says: a soul who sins is the one who will die. But we don't hear from him who he could respond to Deut. 5:9 and Exod. 20:5 whose final clause argues for the opposite pole of Ezek. 18.

Zimmerli analyses Ezek. 18 comparatively with Exod. 20:5 and other parallel texts. He suggests that Exod. 20:5, 34:7, Num. 14:18 and Deut. 7:9 which echo transgenerational punishment are the “ancient liturgical prediction of Yahweh as the God who punishes sins until the third and fourth generations”.¹⁸⁹ Then he equates these texts to the proverb quoted by Jer. 31:29 (could also be applicable to Ezek.18:2).¹⁹⁰ The implication is that texts so far mentioned by him above are not Yahweh's motif. We can estimate his position from his own words: “The winged word, which must have enjoyed a wide currency (Jer 31:29), cannot have remained unheard by the exiles, as a word of human self-assertion over against the judgement of God”.¹⁹¹

Among the recent readers, Matties and Kaminsky interpret Ezek. 18 in a similar way assuming that Ezekiel was viewing that both the community and the individual are inseparable. As it was indicated in the first section of this chapter, Robinson also observe the interrelationship between the collective and individual personality.

Lastly, the Western Oromo way of reading must be very important. I think, it is not by accident that the “professional” readers criticize Exod. 20:5 and instead acknowledge Ezek. 18 assuming errors of fathers will not have consequences on children. More are less, they are in

¹⁸⁸ W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 235.

¹⁸⁹ W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 378.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

¹⁹¹ Ibid

the same line with the several voices I have noted above who tended to be inclined to individualistic notion of sin. Is it because they have been informed by westerns?

However, the “ordinary” readers are immersed into the atmosphere of a community. Their social environment is much influenced by the group values. Hence, I think, it is not surprising that they read their Bible through the eye glasses of their group values. Similarly, I assume that the way majority of the above scholars and the “professional” Oromo readers read the Old Testament can hardly fit to their context.

Summing up, there are strong voices that argue that Ezek. 18 is merely individualistic. However, equally there are recent scholarship that investigates both corporate and individual motif in the whole book of Ezekiel. Hence this later voice calls to read Ezek. 18 in the context of the whole book. Similarly, though the “professional” Oromo read the Old Testament through the eyes of some of the above readers, the “ordinary” ones read in the context of the strong community bond of their society that mostly invites for corporate responsibilities.

5.5 Conclusion

Regarding the exegetical analysis of Exod. 20:5 and Ezek. 18, one can indicate problems of interpretation. In connection to the interpretation of the final clause of the first text, C. Meyers is right when he noted that “the idea of punishment to the fourth generation has been troubling to commentators, who frequently suggest somewhat apologetically that the misdeeds of one generation often affect succeeding ones.”¹⁹² Some have restricted themselves to offer comments (for example, Childs¹⁹³ and *Africa Bible Commentary* edited by T. Adeyemo¹⁹⁴). Some others have disputed the literal meaning and tried to give meanings. For example, Meyers, understands the “up to four generation” punishment as simply meant to emphasize the prohibition of idolatry rather than literal reading.¹⁹⁵

Still few commentators (Robinson: 1988, Durham: 1987, Matties: 1990, Kaminsky: 1995) example, partially indorsed the literal reading – that God will effect generational punishment to some extent as the individual is the representative of the whole group he belongs.

¹⁹² C. Meyers, *Exodus*, 171-2.

¹⁹³ B. Childs, *Exodus*, 394.

¹⁹⁴ Abel, L. N. “Exodus” in *Africa Bible Commentary* (ed. Adeyemo, L.), Zondervan: World Alive publishers, 2006, 110.

¹⁹⁵ C. Meyers, *Exodus*, 152.

Furthermore we have some who don't acknowledge the corporate punishment in Exod. 20:5 (for example, Meyers: 2005).

The "professional" Oromo readers also will not acknowledge Exod. 20:5 to be interpreted in such a way that it indorses corporative punishment. We can indicate a few figures among them who tend to dispute the text itself. Whereas the "ordinary" readers accept it assuming it retells what the traditional Oromo believed about generational curse.

With Ezek. 18, we have several commentators who assumed that the text mainly emphasized the individual responsibility (for example, Eichrodt: 1970, Zimmerli: 1972, and my informants from "professional" readers: B1, B2, and B3). However, we have at the same time commentators who observed both corporate and individual concepts in the book of Ezekiel as well as in the current chapter (for example, Robinson: 1988, Matties: 1990, Kaminsky: 1995).

Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

The Old Testament has several texts about ideas of corporate and individual accountability. However, scholars struggle to understand those texts and they differed in their interpretations. On the one hand it seems that the Old Testament concept of generational punishment is central and persistent throughout the Old Testament. But on the other hand, it seems as if it is gradually replaced by personal/individual responsibility. Though its idea has been also part of the Pentateuch, the later view mostly depends on prophetic messages such as Ezek. 18:4, 20 and Jer. 31:29-30. However, the concept of individual responsibility in these texts has been disputed by some of the recent scholars. For example, J. S. Kaminsky noted that texts such as Ezek. 18 seem to fail to stand up to our common human experience.¹⁹⁶ But, at the same time we have serious disagreements on the concept of corporate punishments in Exod. 20:5. What we are sure about is that there is a tension concerning the understanding of generational curse, and the Old Testament has both corporate punishments and individual punishments side by side.

Contemporary Oromo “ordinary” readers who are characteristically collective society seem to keep silent to interpret Ezek. 18. But they said a lot on Exod. 20 and they perceived it as if it endorses corporate ideas. Hence, though it might be applicable in another context, the interpretation of many of the Oromo “professional” readers and that of the several leading (Western-oriented) scholars may not adequately satisfy the Oromo “ordinary” readers. However, it will contribute not to emphasize too much on the corporate values and to neglect the personal responsibility.

The Oromo “ordinary” readers understand Exod. 20: 5 as part of their common experience. But the “professional” readers of the same people seem to be inclined to the individual accountability idea in Ezek. 18. Similar tension goes among the leading Western scholars.

Among many, what this thesis observed is that the Oromo “ordinary” readers have inculturated their own traditional culture concepts into the Old Testament texts and read as if they were their own stories. It was true that L. Bartels observed that the Oromo have appropriated to themselves the story of the ancient Israelite for whom the idea of group

¹⁹⁶ See J. S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 189.

responsibility has been common.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, I think, what they saw as affinities with the Old Testament could be used as a potential and this could contribute to understand the Old Testament. Because of its several limitations, the current thesis might not sufficiently solve the problem of the subject. However, I hope, it can contribute to serve as a window for a further research.

¹⁹⁷ For detail discussion, see L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia – An Attempt to understand* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Vol. 8, 1983), 357-60.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abel, L. N. "Exodus" in *Africa Bible Commentary* (ed. Adeyemo, L.). Zondervan: World Alive Publishers, 2006
- Aren, G. *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origin of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus*. Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1978.
- Bartels, L. *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia – An Attempt to Understand*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983 (*Collctanea Instituti Antropos*, 8).
- Barton, J. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Childs, B. S. *Exodus*. Bloomsbury Street: SCM Press, Second edition, 1977.
- Collins, J. J. *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004
- Cover, C. R. "Sin, Sinners (OT)". *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6:31-40.
- Day, J. *Yahweh and Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000 (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 265).
- Durham, J. I. *Exodus*. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1887 (*Word Biblical Commentary*, 3).
- Eichrodt, W. *Ezekiel*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970 (Translated by Cosslett Quin from German *Der Prophet Hesekiel* (Das Alte Testament Deutsch 22/1-2).
- Fido, K. "Uleen nu harka jiru dhimma baasa" (VCD). Addis Ababa: Sabeh Film Production, 2010.
- Gidada, N. *History of Sayyo Oromoo of Southwestern Wollega, Ethiopia*. Frunkfurt: Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University, 1984.
- Goldenberg, D. M. *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in the Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Greenberg, M. *Ezekiel 1-20*. New York, Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1983.
- Haile, T. *Songs*, Volume 5, 1988 (1980).
- Hayes J. H and Holladay C. R. *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*. Louisville: Westminster, Third edition. 2007.
- Holter, K. "'Like Living in Old Testament Times': The Interpretation of Assumed Affinities Between Traditional African Culture and the Old Testament" in *Reading the Bible in Africa* (*Yearbook of the Faculty of Theology in Brussels*, 11, pp. 17-28), 2006.

- Holter, K. "The Role of Historical-Critical Methodology in African Old Testament Studies" (Old Testament Essay, 24/2, pp. 377-389), 2011.
- Jabessa, B. *Ye Oromo Biher Bahil Ina Achir, Tarik*. Addis Ababa: Artistic Press, 1991.
- Jonker, L. and Lawrie, D. (ed). *Fishing for Jonah (anew): Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005. (Study Guides in Religion and Theology, 7).
- Kaminsky, J. S. *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995. (Journal for the study of the Old Testament Series, 196).
- Laondoye, N. A. *The Theological bases of the Prohibitions of Idolatry: An Exegetical and Theological Study of the Second Commandment*. Michigan: Bell and Howell Company, 1998
- Le Roux M. "Africa Interprets the Old Testament: The Lamba, the 'People of the Book' in South Africa" in *Reading the Bible in Africa* (Yearbook of the Faculty of Theology in Brussels, 11: 51-68) 2006.
- Longman III, T. *How to Read Exodus*. Illinois: Down Grove, 2009.
- Masenya, M. "Her Appropriation of Job's Lament? Her Lament of Job 3, From An African Story Telling Perspective" in *Postcolonial Perspectives In African Biblical Interpretations* (ed. by Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012, 13), pp. 285-296.
- Matties G. H. *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.
- Melbaa G. *Oromia: An Introduction*. Khartoum, 1988.
- Meyers, C. *Exodus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Norman, H. "Literary Criticism of the Old Testament". Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.
- Propp, W. H. C. *Ezekiel 19-40*. New York: Doubleday, 2006.
- Robinson, W. H. "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality", in *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, revised edition, 1980.
- Sumner, C. *Oromo Wisdom Literature: Proverbs Collection and Analysis*. Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 1995.
- The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Constitutions and Bylaws*. Addis Ababa: Artistic Press, sixth edition, approved by the 17th Church Council, January 2005 /1997.
- Ukpong, J. S. "Can African Old Testament Scholarship Escape the Historical Critical

Method?” (*Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship*, Issue 7, November, pp. 1-16, 1999).

Ukpong, J. S. “Reading the Bible with African Eyes: Inculturation and Hermeneutics” (*Journal of Theology for South Africa*, pp 3-1), 1991 (1995).

Wevers, J.W. *Ezekiel*. Bath Street: Grand Rapids, 1972.

www.culturegrams.com “Culture Grams World Edition: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2014 edition”.

Zimmerli, W. *Ezekiel*. (Translated by Frank Moore Cross and Klaus Baltzer). Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.

Interviewees:

No	Code name	Age	Sex	Date of information	Place of Interview
1	A1	78	Male	July 02, 2015	Aira
2	A2	75	Male	July 10, 2015	Aira
3	B1	38	Female	August 5, 2015	Aira
4	B2	39	Female	July 30, 2015	Aira
5	B3	59	Male	July 30, 2015	Aira
6	C1	48	Female	August 5, 2015	Aira
7	C2	35	Female	August 5, 2015	Aira
8	C3	19	Male	August 5, 2015	Aira