

Original Paper

The Bible, In-Laws and Family in Africa

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Abstract

The rolelessness of in-laws in the family structure makes in-law and family relationships a difficult problem in Africa. This article investigated the Bible, in-laws and the family in Africa, as well as how Scriptures address in-laws and families in connection to African culture. The research is supported by existing literature by researchers in the research field. It examines relevant Bible material, investigates how the Bible treats the problematic topic of in-laws and situates it in the African setting. The focus of the research is to determine if the Bible's stance on in-laws conforms to family structure in the African environment by analysing the interaction between them. It establishes that the Bible instructs us to respect and care for our in-laws. The couples consequently must pursue the well-being of their in-laws, as there is a connection between the Bible, in-laws and the family in Africa.

Keywords

Bible, in-law and family, relationship, Africa

1. Introduction

In-law and family relationship has been a thorny issue in the family system due to the associated challenges and pressures it brings. According to Prentice (2005), existing studies on the subject reveal that in-laws are complex and therefore, often problematic. He adds that in-law and family relationships are full of difficult dynamics simply because of the nature of the relationships, which is due to a variety of reasons (Prentice, 2005). Duvall (1954, in Prentice, 2005) reveals that mothers-in-law are the most problematic of in-laws, followed by daughters-in-law because they are both seen as intruding in the affairs of married couples. Prentice (2005) quoting Duvall (1954) theorises that these challenging dynamics exist because of the three families married couples belong to—their two families of origin

and the family they make together, and the pursuit for the couple to feel the strongest tie to their own new family rather than their families-of-origin. In other words, couples experience problems with in-laws as they struggle to find the balance between independence and dependence (Duvall, 1954, in Prentice, 2005). In explaining further, in-laws try to interfere with the independence of their children's (Note 1) marriage which brings about challenges.

Why there seem to be these challenges in such relationships comprises of power struggles, loyalty issues, independence issues, and nerve-wracking life events (Prentice, 2005). These matters of concern, according to Prentice (2005) create complex tensions in families; in-laws enter into non-voluntary relationships that require a process of assimilation into the family. Each of the family members may have different expectations for in-law relationships, both positive and negative, which affect their willingness to adjust their routines. Moreover, couples experience the pull of the dialectical tensions of allegiance and emotional connection to both families and their spouses, as well as the need for autonomy and distance.

Lopata (1999) believes that in-law relationships are worth studying today because our heterogeneous society leads to marital matches of diverse couples, mixed in background, socio-economic status, religion, education etc., who may have divergent expectations for in-law relationships. Notwithstanding, the Bible discusses several themes on various issues which enable married couples to live right with all manner of persons, including their in-laws.

What is Scripture's view on in-laws' relationship to family structure? What are some of the thorny issues in in-law and family relationships? How the Bible does address the thorny issues of in-laws, and situate it in the African context? How should in-laws and family relationships in the light of the Bible help married couples to live in peace and harmony with their in-laws?

2. Methodology

This work employs inductive, biographical study, and phenomenological approaches to study. The inductive approach, also known as inductive reasoning seeks to look for patterns in observing in-law relationships in the Bible and develop ideas to explain those patterns through a sequence of hypotheses. The biographical research technique investigates the lives and relationships of in-laws in the Bible to highlight behaviours for emulation and flaws to avoid. The phenomenological approach looks into the human experiences of in-laws and family relationships through the descriptions provided by the Africans. The research has the underpinning of existing literature by scholars in the research area.

3. The Bible

According to Aigbekaen (2021), the English word "Bible" comes from the Greek word "biblion" which meant "roll" or "book". The Bible was usually a roll of papyrus or reed-like plant that grew along the Nile River in Egypt around the Eleventh Century B.C. (Dickson, 2013). This was dried and fashioned

into writing material, which later was used for production. To Aigbekaen (2021), “biblion” occurs in the Septuagint (LXX) copy of Daniel 9:2, and Revelation 10:2. But today the word “Bible” means much more than just a book. It carries a sense of majesty as being the ultimate book par excellence. The Bible is always referred to as “Holy Scripture”, “Holy Writings”, “Oracle of God”, “Sacred Writings”, “Book of the Lord”, “Word of God” etc. It is divided into two parts: the Old and the New Testaments. The word “Testament” means “covenant”, “agreement” or “pact”. The Bible was originally written in three languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, with some parts of the book of Daniel written in Aramaic, while the New Testament was written in Greek.

The Bible is a compilation of more than sixty separate works that were created by several writers over a long period. It took several centuries to compile the numerous works into one book, and there was much debate and thinking that went into choosing which books would make up the Bible. But in the end, it was the twenty-seven books of the New Testament and the thirty-nine books of the Protestant Old Testament that the faith communities recognised as authoritative sources for their lives and beliefs. Through these works, the faith communities were able to hear the voice of God in a particular way.

Arguably, the Bible has been and continues to be one of the most significant resources in our world today; it describes God’s work in the world and his unwavering commitment to all creation (Asamoah, 2020). This aids in understanding who God is, how the universe and humans came into being, and how God’s people should spend their lives on earth to reap more blessings in the future. It also tells how the country of Israel was created, how they were selected by God to proclaim his character and intentions to the world, and how Jesus Christ—the Messiah—came from the descendants of King David to fulfil the Israelites’ aspirations and establish the Christian church.

Different topics in the Bible strive to address certain issues. The central concept of the Bible is “redemption through Christ’s blood” (Jn 3:16; Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7; Gal 4:4-5). The Old Testament describes God’s relationship with our fallen human race via Israel. Israel’s sacrifices, feasts, and offerings all foreshadowed, in some manner, Christ the Saviour to come. He arrived at the appropriate moment (Gal 4:4). The New Testament provides a chronicle of His appearance. It describes the events that occurred after His arrival as well as those that will occur in the future. Creation, discipleship, divorce, fasting, money, leadership, marriage, in-laws and family etc. are all themes in the Bible.

3.1 The Meaning of In-Law Relationship

According to Prentice (2005), the term “in-law” mirrors the bilateral family system in which both the husband and wife maintain ties with their families of origin. Thus, in-law relationship talks about married couples who are still having relations with their parents and siblings. Prentice (2005), quoting Lopata (1999) explains that an in-law relationship is not biological but a legal relationship through the institution of marriage. According to him, the definition of an in-law relationship originally included what we now call step-relationships, which are also created through marriage (Lopata, 1999). But this is no more regarded as part because step-relationships involve no blood ties across generations. In-laws

can be acquired at almost any stage in one's life when parents, siblings, or children forge new marriage bonds (Lopata, 1999). This helps in forming a family. The family of a couple including the in-laws is made up of the children (or married couple, or son-in-law & daughter-in-law), mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, and sister-in-law.

3.2 Biblical basis for In-laws and Family

The Bible is replete with in-law teachings. Stories about Judah and his daughter-in-law (Gen 38:11, 16), Moses and his father-in-law (Exo 3:1; 4:18; 18:1-2, 5, 12), Ruth and her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:1-22), Eli and his daughter-in-law (1 Sam 4:19), and Peter and his mother-in-law (Mk 1:29-31; Lk 4:38-40) are examples of in-laws mentioned in the Bible. Others are Caiaphas and his father-in-law (Jn 18:13), and David and his father-in-law (1 Sam 18:17-27).

The Bible talks about how children should live with their in-laws. It begins by saying, a man should leave his parents (father and mother) and cleave to his wife (Gen 2:24). The father and mother described above become the in-laws of the woman with whom the man marries. The Scripture above clearly shows that in-laws are on God's agenda for every marriage and should not be overlooked because God values the unity of the spouses, in-laws, and their relationship. God created humans to be in a relationship with Him (1 Jn 1:3). He (God) has so established humans in a family through marriage for us to live in harmony. God delights in healthy relationships and togetherness because this is His will (Psa 133:1). This is seen by the relationships of Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:1-22), Moses and Jethro (Exo 3:1; 4:18; 18:1-2, 5, 12), Peter and the mother-in-law (Mk 1:29-31; Lk 4:38-40).

The instruction to married couples to "leave and cleave" is to leave their biological families and start a new family. This demonstrates that a distinction has been made between the married couples' new family and their biological family. As a result, there is a noticeable distinction between married couples and their in-laws. It does not, however, imply that the man and woman must cut ties with their in-laws to the point of abandonment. Rather, they should honour their in-laws (Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16) and treat them well, because they are members of the family of faith (Gal 6:10). This is because in-laws are related to married couples by marriage and are part of God's family.

3.3 Biblical Outlook for In-law and Family

In the Bible, the ideal relationship that may exist between married spouses and their in-laws is one of friendship. Regardless, some in-law relationships in the Bible were quite stressful. One example is David's relationship with his father-in-law, King Saul (1 Sam 18:17-27). Their connection was not amicable, but animosity. "Saul was even more terrified of him, and he remained David's adversary for the rest of his life" (1 Sam 18:29, NLT). The hatred grew to the point that he wanted to murder his son-in-law, leaving his daughter a widow. David and his family were burdened by Saul. Such an attitude of in-laws makes it difficult for married couples to live at peace with their in-laws; they seek their downfall and death. But no matter how difficult in-laws would become, the Bible expects married couples to live at peace and in cordial relationships with them for a better family set-up. "If it is possible, as far as it

depends on you, live at peace with *everyone*” (Rom 12:18, NIV, Emphasis mine). The Greek word translated as “everyone” or “all people” (NASB) refers to every kind of male and female, including in-laws. Hence, in-laws must be respected, loved, and cared for no matter who they are and how they behave.

3.4 In-Law and Family: The Case of Naomi and Ruth

The Bible recounts some cordial in-law relationships. Naomi and Ruth are one of them (Note 2). The Book of Ruth, credited to Samuel and published during the era of Israel’s judges (Ruth 1:1; 4:7), tells the narrative of two Judean couples named Elimelech and Naomi who migrated to Moab to escape a famine in Judah, and two Moabite women named Ruth and Orpah married two of their sons—Mahlon and Chilion. All three women’s husbands die, and Naomi plans to return to Bethlehem while begging her daughters-in-law to see their family. Orpah does so, but Ruth abandons her own culture out of love for her widowed mother-in-law, stating, “Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!” (Ruth 1:16-17, NLT). Ruth journeys to Bethlehem with Naomi and marries Boaz, a distant relative of her deceased father-in-law. She represents steadfast loyalty and dedication.

Naomi was very kind to Ruth. Ruth also returned the favour by treating her as she would have treated her real mother (Ruth 1:6-22). In addition to her devotion, she displayed respect, love, friendship, and humility. Both were so intimate that they shared thoughts (Ruth 2:2-3, 19-22). Scripture never tells that Ruth struggled to assimilate Naomi into their family—Mahlon and Ruth; they may have understood themselves, and Ruth accepted Naomi as her mother (Ruth 3:18). Even when Ruth could not give birth to her husband before he passed on, Scripture did not tell us Naomi complained. The daughter felt safe since both had a good relationship, and she allowed her mother-in-law to take on the position of “roleless leader” in the family; she was not confined to a specific duty. Ruth’s life revolved around Naomi. This greatly aided Naomi in providing support to Ruth, allowing them to eat. Naomi had a beneficial impact on Ruth because of her obedience and humility, which led to her marriage with Boaz; she also provided her wise advice (Ruth 3:3-4). In the same vein, the Bible exhorts married couples to respect their in-laws as if they were blood relatives and to live in harmony with them.

4. In-Laws And Family In Africa

4.1 African Family System

Among African cultures, the family is the most significant institution. This is affirmed by Patterson, who believes that in all societies it is the basic social structure within which the individual establishes identity, develops a sense of belonging, and learns their responsibilities to themselves and the group to which they belong (Patterson, 1978). In return, the family provides the individual with security, protection, sustenance, and love. These, among other reasons, make Africans proud of their family to

the extent of tracing their relations from their parents to aunts and their children's children and referring to them as family. And it explains why marriage—the structure by which family is extended and preserved—in Africa is contracted not just between two individuals but their respective families.

The African family is a network of relatives who are related by blood and acquired from both (father and mother) sides. It is largely because their membership is open-ended to include all persons believed to belong to the lineage of a particular family or clan. In effect, the African family system consists of a husband, wife, and children, and other relations such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, and sisters who may have their children and other immediate relatives in its complex and most common form. This travels to include the unborn ones. This is corroborated by Asamoah (2020) who submits that family in an African setup is “a descendant from a common ancestor and not the make-up of parents and their biological children.” The African family extends to include in-laws when marriages are contracted, for in Africa “failure to get married often means that the individual has rejected the family, and the family, in turn, will reject the individual” (Patterson, 1978).

Africans in general ascribe to the importance of family as a support base for every couple and to some extent provide the needed support for the young couple. Since every couple once lived with their parents, it is natural for that attraction to remain even after one is married. Thus, married couples maintain a good relationship with their relatives—father, mother, siblings, and others; the “closer the kinship bond, the greater the commitment and the higher the degree of reciprocity it is expected to be” (Awedoba, 2016). These relatives become in-laws to the married couples.

4.2 In-laws and Family Relationships in Africa

Affram and Osei Tutu (2021) opine that in-law relationships have been described as delicate and complex, especially in Africa. This is because in-law relationships are involuntary relationships created through formal/legal or cultural ties between two parties—parents-in-law and children-in-law—which are linked by a linchpin (the spouse/child) through marriage. This, according to them, creates a triadic relationship that leads to relational uncertainties. The relationship one has with their in-laws influences how joyful and peaceful their marriage may be, and the opposite is also true. As a result, in-laws have a voice in African marriages. However, the extent of this intrusion has always been a source of worry for most couples. Some parents believe that once their son marries, their daughter-in-law must kowtow to their whims and caprices. Others still are of the view that God was clear when He said “a man shall leave his mother and father...” Finding a clear balance has always been a challenge. While the former breeds relational challenges, the latter promotes cordiality with in-law and family relationships.

4.3 Thorny Issues with In-laws and Family Relationships in Africa

Parents-in-law play vital responsibilities in the family's development. These duties include advising their children-in-law on how to be successful in marriage. Some also provide physical assistance, such as bathing and caring for their grandkids. Children that are obedient and courteous might reap the benefits of their in-laws. Others, on the other hand, face the penalties of disrespecting their in-laws. This essay

focuses on a few thorny issues that arise in the African family structure between parents-in-law and children-in-law.

4.3.1 Lack of Intimacy

Affram and Osei Tutu (2021) reveal insecure intimacy as one of the reasons why relationships between some parents-in-law and children-in-law are not cordial in Africa. This, according to them, is influenced by the belief that only biological parents could love their children without reservations at the detriment of their in-laws' children. With this, parents try to maintain the security and stability of the kin relationship, especially between a mother and a child, as a standard of true intimacy, forgetting that the child-in-law is also a member of the family. This makes it difficult for a good in-law relationship to be established. Some parents also demonstrate their love and care to their children explicitly in the presence of their children-in-law, while they fail to show their in-laws love. These among others make it difficult for a good in-law relationship to be established. On the other hand, where there is intimacy, married couples can relate very well with their in-laws.

4.3.2 Failing to assimilate in-laws into the family

As a communal group, Africans would always want to know how each family member is faring. This makes in-laws travel to find out how their children and grandchildren are doing, for their kids will forever be their babies no matter how grown up they are now when even no official information has been sent for their coming. The rift between parents-in-law and children-in-law surfaces when parents are prevented by their in-laws from visiting their children. This causes relational challenges. When they manage to get access to their children, in-laws would want their children-in-law to receive them hospitably, and not to be identified as strangers in their children's homes. Mothers-in-law especially would want to have the best of services from daughters-in-law, for they have toiled much on their son.

4.3.3 Defining a specific position for in-laws in the family

In-law's position in the family has been described as roleless (Affram & Osei-Tutu, 2021). This makes it difficult for children to define specific roles for their in-laws, for any attempt will lead to family crises. Because of their roleless positions, in-laws tend to intrude in the affairs of their children, holding that everything belongs to their son. Some even assume the role of leadership in the family at the expense of their children. This makes it difficult to have a peaceful home, especially when the children are not at peace; there would always be challenges. As a "roleless leader", some mothers-in-law would want to dictate to their children-in-law what they must do, even in their husband's homes. This has become a tag of war between wives and mothers-in-law.

4.3.4 Problem of Insecurity

Some children feel insecure and inadequate in marriage especially when they get to know their in-laws dislike them. The child develops the feeling of competition to fight back, especially if she cannot handle the feeling to impress her in-laws. Another situation where insecurity happens is when the child is unable to give birth. Some mothers-in-law use derogatory names for their children, calling them

witches and barren women, for not being able to conceive. They even go ahead to push their daughter-in-law from the marriage with the hope of finding someone who can give birth to her son. Such attitudes from the in-laws at times make the children suspect them as part of their problems.

4.3.5 Exerting of strong influence on the family

In Africa, some in-laws exert a very strong influence on their children's marriages so high that the influences has on many occasions had a bad effect on the marriages, resulting in either sadness, regret, or even a total disintegration of the marriage. In some instances, adult children are cautioned against forming close bonds with their spouses. This happens when children prioritize maintaining solidarity with their family of birth over other relationships, including in-law relationships (Affram & Osei-Tutu, 2021).

Despite these thorny issues in the family system of the Africans, is there any relationship between the Bible, in-laws and the family in Africa?

5. The Bible, In-Laws And Family In Africa: A Relationship

From the discussions so far, it has been identified that in-laws play significant roles in marriages, and the best relationship that should exist between themselves and their children must be a cordial one. Both the Bible and the African family system recognise in-laws. Whereas the Bible see them as part of God's agenda for every marriage and should not be neglected (Gen. 2:24), for God appreciates the union between the couples, in-laws and their relationship (Ps 133:1-3), Africans also recognize the importance of in-laws in their family setup.

In both the Bible and the family system in Africa, in-laws are seen as parents who support their children in so many ways, including giving advice and seeking the welfare of their children. In-laws such as Naomi and Jethro were seen as mother and father to Ruth and Moses respectively, hence, offered them physical assistance and godly advice. In both the Bible and African setup, in-laws must be respected and supported, for they are seen as fathers and mothers to their children, and they form part of the larger family.

It is identified that one's relationship with their in-laws to some extent can determine how joyous and peaceful their marriage can be, in both the Bible and the family system in Africa, and the opposite is also true. From the Bible, it is seen that the determination of Ruth to succeed was paramount to Naomi to the extent that she arranged and supported her to marry Boaz. Even before that when Ruth could not give birth to her former husband, Naomi never complained. Like Naomi, in-laws in African family setup wish their children's marriage to become joyous. But when there are relational challenges, the other side suffices like King Saul against David.

As there are bad nuts in every society, both the Bible and African society identify some in-laws whose activities have serious repercussions on their children-in-laws. For example, King Saul sought to kill his in-law in the Bible. And in the African system, some in-laws do not seek the welfare of their children. All

these stem from thorny issues that exist among children and in-laws. How these issues should be addressed so that in-laws will relate cordially with their children as Bible teaches children to take proper care of their in-laws.

6. Addressing The Thorny Issues Of In-Laws And Family In Africa: The Bible Way

The Bible is explicit in matters of in-law and family issues. Since the thorny issues involve two parties—the children (the new family) and in-laws (the family of origin), this paper addresses the challenges in two fronds. The first part relates to children (spouse/children-in-law) and the other part relates to parents-in-law; what both must do to promote a cordial relationship. The following are some ways of addressing the thorny issues about in-laws and family in African setup.

6.1 The Role of Children

6.1.1 Children must assimilate newcomers into the family

Newcomers must be assimilated into the family for peaceful co-existence. In this context, newcomers refer to in-laws (father-in-law and mother-in-law). Parents-in-law should be accepted by their children as part of the newly founded family of the children. Children have to relate with them with an open mind without prejudices (Rom. 12:10, 16; 1 Pet. 3:8, 1 Cor. 13:1-6). This avoids in-laws acting like strangers to their children's home or family (Prov. 18:24; Jn. 15:15). The children must not set rules that can destroy the relationship with their in-laws (1 Tim. 5:1-2). Rather, must be wise in all their decisions relating to them, especially in speech (Ps. 34:13; Col. 4:6). Children must also remain humble and encourage mutual submission with their in-laws (1 Pet. 5:5; Eph. 5:21), as well as to seek and pursue peace at all times with them (Ps. 34:14; Rom. 12:18).

6.1.2 Children should help in-laws to operate freely

In the book of Ruth, we see Ruth and Orpah helping their mother-in-law to feel comfortable at Moab, even after her children and husband had passed on (Ruth 1:5). The Bible does not tell us, Naomi, immediately decided to live when she lost her family but left Moab when she heard the food was abundant in Jerusalem (Ruth 1:6). This presupposes that Ruth and Orpah supported their in-law to operate fully in their home country. In like manner, the mother also related very well with the two daughters-in-law. This cordial relationship that existed between them called for the daughters-in-law (Orpah and Ruth) to vacate their home country for Bethlehem in Judah for Naomi's sake (Ruth 1:6-14). Children must work at supporting their in-laws to operate freely in their homes when they come for visit.

6.1.3 Children must exhibit a godly attitude towards in-laws

Children must display a godly attitude towards their in-laws, and not speak evil of them. Ruth remained a faithful and obedient daughter to her mother-in-law. She always did what Naomi told her to do which was an acceptable practice. Children must obey their parents (in-laws) in the Lord (Eph 6:1). They must not look down on them, nor dishonour them. Rather, must honour them for this is the first

commandment with a promise (Eph 6:2). In so doing, “things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth” (Eph 6:3, NLT).

6.1.4 Children must recognize in-laws as parents

Ruth recognised the efforts Naomi has made in her life and so decided to follow her to Jerusalem. Ruth’s relationship with her in-law went beyond a child/in-law relationship to a daughter-mother one; she went the extra mile to even change her religion for Naomi’s sake (Ruth 1:16-18). For her selflessness and determination to follow Naomi to Judah as well as to change her religion, God recognised her effort and rewarded her. She is one of the five women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:5). Naomi, possibly prayed for Ruth to be successful in how she related with her. Peter also supported her mother-in-law to be healed (Mk 1: 29-31; Lk 4:38-40). Peter never abandoned her in-law to perish; he gave all that he had for her healing. This testifies that he acknowledged her as a parent. Children must recognise their in-laws as parents, for the Africans “honour anyone eligible to be a father and mother irrespective of whether the individual is known or not” (Asamoah, 2020).

6.2 *The Role of In-laws*

6.2.1 In-laws must avoid being “busybodies”

A meddling in-law (mother, father, brother, or sister) who is demanding, controlling, and intrudes into the lives of her son/daughter’s marriage is what the Bible calls a “busybody” (1 Tim 5:13). The meaning of the Greek word that is translated “busybody” in the 1 Timothy passage means “a self-appointed overseer in other men’s matters” or “about meddling in someone else’s business”. It also means witchcraft or magic. Overseeing or behaving like using a spell/magic is what some in-laws are engaged in, or at least accused of. This kind of behaviour is annoying, very frustrating, and contrary to God’s plan for the family. It creates tension in a family which makes married couples hostile to their in-laws; thereby making it difficult for them to live together as a family. In-laws must desist from this behaviour to live in peace with their children.

6.2.2 In-laws must allow Children to make their choice

Naomi allowed both Ruth and Orpah to decide by themselves to either follow her or go back home. Naomi never forced it on them. She did so out of love. While Orpah turned back to her home country, Ruth continued with the journey to Judah. Naomi never interfered in their choices but allowed them to decide for themselves, possibly trusting that God is leading them. Jethro, a father-in-law to Moses also advised Moses on leadership issues and did not force it on him, but gave him the freedom to operate (Exo. 18:14-26). In as much as in-laws are allowed to operate, they should do so in a dignified manner. In like manner, in-laws in Africa should not interfere in their children’s choices. Rather, must support them to make their choices become reality.

6.2.3 In-laws must support children in times of difficulties

Naomi was there with Ruth and Orpah as they both suffered a childless marriage, lost their husband, and then had to decide whether to leave Moab with Naomi. Through it all, Naomi walked with them. It

was never recorded that Naomi ever insulted her daughters-in-law for not conceiving or calling them names as “childless people”. Rather, she lived well with them till she decided to return to her home country. Naomi probably assured them the struggles they are going through have been faced by each generation before them, and that God is faithful, and will see them through. This possibly led to Ruth’s decision to follow her, for Naomi had supported them in times of difficulties, and there was no way to turn her back on her. In-laws in Africa should make it a practice to support their children in prayers and other godly practices to succeed in times of difficulties, especially when they are unable to conceive. In-laws should not call their children names for not being able to give birth and should not force them to leave their marriage for another person.

6.2.4 In-laws must wish the best for their children

One remarkable thing Naomi did to help her daughter-in-law (Ruth) was to help her marry again. Naomi initiated and supported her wholeheartedly for a husband because that was best for her in that culture. This was the highest form of blessing a mother could give to her daughter-in-law. Naomi never rained insults on her daughter-in-law nor did she call her names, but rather blessed her with a husband. Naomi helped Ruth find a nobleman who was the kinsman redeemer (Ruth 4:1-10). In-laws in Africa should emulate this godly practice by wishing their children successes in their endeavours. They must bless their children and not curse them.

7. Conclusion

The issue of in-laws in the Bible relates to that of the Africans; in-laws to some extent can determine how joyous and peaceful their marriage can be, and the opposite is also true. As a manual, the Bible addresses all issues in the world. The thorny issues of in-laws and family are not excluded. As a guide, the Bible clarifies how children-in-law should live in peace and harmony with their parents-in-laws no matter how difficult they may be in every context. In the African family system, children are to relate well with their in-laws in love and as light/salt of the world (Matt. 5:13-14). They must live at peace and remain humble at all times (Heb. 12:14). Children must take good care of their in-laws, for they form part of their family which is biblical and upheld by the African family system. This will make parents bless their children by offering love, wisdom, and encouragement. In-laws will go all out to ensure that these blessings are fulfilled in the lives of their children. As fathers and mothers to couples, in-laws must be respected and cared for as the Bible admonishes. It is the responsibility, therefore, of the couples to seek the welfare of their in-laws, for there is a relationship between the Bible, in-laws and the family in Africa. In like manner, in-laws must also do the needful for their children to ensure both live well for peaceful co-existence, for are vital in determining the success and stability of Ghanaian in particular, and African in general, marriages (Affram & Osei-Tutu, 2021).

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Notes

Note 1. Children in this paper refers to married couples—a man and wife. Married couples are still identified as children by their parents, no matter the age they have attained.

Note 2. This is chosen because, Bible directs to follow only what is good (3 Jn 1:11).