


Anonymity and Marital Voice in Job 2:9-10: A Rabbinic Reconsideration of Job’s Wife

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ABSTRACT

This article challenged long-standing assumptions regarding the omission of Job’s wife’s name in the biblical narrative, arguing that such an omission does not necessarily imply insignificance. While the lives of women and laypersons are often absent from ancient Jewish literature, this paper contends that such cultural omissions do not fully explain the anonymity of Job’s wife. The article also interrogates the common depiction of her as a “temptress,” suggesting instead that her actions may reflect a compassionate—if flawed—marital response during suffering. Drawing on rabbinic commentary, narrative criticism, historical criticism, and gender-aware hermeneutics, this article reconsiders her role in Job 2:9–10 and argues for a more empathetic reading informed by Jewish, Christian, and Islamic interpretive traditions.

Keywords: *The Book of Job, Job’s wife, marital voice, gender-awareness, curse.*

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to challenge some assumptions that underlie suggestions made by some commentators for the omission of the name of Job’s wife from the book of Job and to suggest that the narrator of the book in no way set a goal of making her insignificant. Even though the lives of women and those of the ordinary Jewish people do not generally feature in Jewish literature as do the educated elites,¹ it does not mean that this was the reason for the omission of her name from the book. Following on from this, the article also addresses some underlying assumptions concerning how the suggestion that she made to her husband has been understood by some commentators. Some have preferred to call her a ‘temptress’; consequently, she presented her husband with a ‘temptation’. Marital communication especially when one of the partners is a victim or is in pain, is not uncommon but the case of Job’s wife must be read and interpreted at least in the context of the preceding verses (Job 1-2:8). It appears that she was tempted to offer the advice to her husband, therefore, she should not be portrayed as some commentators have chosen to do. To achieve the objectives set out above, the opinions of Jewish and non-Jewish scholars will be considered. Even though some of the Jewish commentators lived in the days when anti-Christian polemics influenced the writings of Jewish scholars,² there is no evidence that their opinions about the wife of Job had anything to do with their defence of Judaism against the so-called Christian arguments. There are relevant contributions in some rabbinic writings, as will be discussed in the article.

¹ C. Weissler, “Women and Jewish Spirituality,” in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Green (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987).

² K.N. Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics of the “Happy” Ending in Job 42:7–17* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a non-empirical, literature-based methodology that integrates multiple interpretive approaches. Rabbinic commentaries are consulted to situate the text within the continuum of Jewish exegetical tradition and to highlight how medieval voices have shaped interpretive possibilities. Narrative criticism was applied to examine the literary structure, plot, and characterisation, revealing how the text communicates meaning through its storytelling dynamics. It also provided an insight into the interaction between the biblical texts and their readers. Historical criticism provides contextual grounding by exploring the cultural, political, and religious setting in which the text emerged; that is, it attempts to interpret the texts in the context of their *sitz in leben*. Gender-aware hermeneutics was employed to interrogate the text and its reception for assumptions about gender roles, visibility, and power, thus amplifying perspectives that might otherwise be marginalised. Using critical interpretive analysis, these strands were synthesised into a conceptual framework for understanding the text's theological, pedagogical and literary dimensions. This approach was appropriate as the study sought to examine interpretive insights rather than generate new empirical findings.

DISCUSSION

The Omission of her Name

The wife of Job, whose name was omitted by the author of the book which bears the name of her husband, has been a subject of scholarly interest for several centuries. Whilst some scholars have made ingenious guesses about her name, others have chosen to question why her name was not mentioned at all in the forty-two (42) chapters of the book.³ The ingenious guesses appear to be based on the hermeneutical approaches adopted by the commentators concerned. For example, Jewish commentators who adopted a text-centred interpretation, that is, finding the meaning of the text within the text, have identified her as Dinah,⁴ the daughter of Jacob, because of the Hebrew word '*nabal*' (foolish) in Job 2:10 and '*nebalah*' (abomination) in Gen. 34:7. On the basis of this textual allusion, rabbinic tradition claims that Job lived in the days of Jacob and that he married the daughter of Jacob named Dinah (Gen. 34:1). The attempt to identify other unnamed individuals in the scriptures is not new in rabbinic tradition. The Tannaitic and Amoraic rabbis made attempts to identify unnamed individuals in the Bible. For example, Yose bar Abin, an Amoraic rabbi of the Fifth generation, identified Nebuchadnezzar's wife as Semiramis. Other rabbis suggested that her name was Semiram and Semira'am respectively, because she was born in *ra'am*.⁵ In rabbinic tradition, Noah's wife had a name. She was identified as Naamah, the sister of Tubal Cain (Gen. 4: 22). This homiletic approach, which also involved the introduction of folklore, appealed to their audiences. According to Elman, the purpose of the rabbis in bringing in folklore into their preaching was to attract people and also to inculcate religious values.

Speculative Identifications and the Limits of Textual Silence

There is no scriptural evidence to substantiate the various claims regarding the identities of unnamed biblical figures; such assertions remain, at best, speculative and often reflect interpretative ingenuity rather than textual grounding. The identification of Job's wife as Dinah for instance, carries significant implications for how her suffering is understood.⁶ The Genesis narrative portrays Dinah as a victim of sexual violence (Gen. 34:2), while the Book of Job presents a woman who endures the loss of her children and material security. It is conceivable that emotional exhaustion—perhaps indicative of psychological burnout—combined with the influence of Satan, led her to momentarily forget the priestly role her husband had assumed on behalf of their children. Job, fearing that his children might have 'cursed' God in their hearts, offered burnt offerings for them (Job 1). Ironically, this is the very transgression she appears to suggest to her husband.

That she proposed such a course of action at a time when the possibility of ritual atonement was likely unavailable—given the loss of livestock—renders her counsel all the more tragic. Although the

³ E.V. Wolde, *Mr and Mrs Job* (London: SCM Press, 1997).

⁴ E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1967).

⁵ Y. Elman, "Classical Rabbinic Interpretation," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. A. Berlin and M.Z. Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶ E.C. Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993).

narrator remains silent regarding her internal motivations, the textual evidence suggests that her words may have been prompted by satanic temptation. The interpretative landscape becomes further complicated when viewed through the lens of other religious traditions. Islamic sources identify her as ‘Rahmat’, daughter of Ephraim (son of Joseph), while others name her ‘Makhir’, daughter of Manasseh.⁷ The apocryphal Testament of Job refers to her as ‘Sitis’ or ‘Sitidos’.⁸ These diverse identifications, often shaped by homiletical or theological agendas, underscore the extent to which interpretative traditions have sought to fill the narrative silences with imaginative reconstructions.

Interpretative Silence and Rabbinic Possibilities

The omission of Job’s wife’s name from the narrative is undoubtedly unhelpful for interpretative clarity; however, this absence should not serve as justification for speculative identifications or for attributing blame to the author or narrator. A reader adopting a reader-response hermeneutic might conclude that the omission signals her insignificance. Yet, it is important to recognise that the omission of names is not unique to this text. Internal evidence from the Book of Job reveals that the names of Job’s children are also withheld in chapter 1. Similarly, the Book of Esther omits the name of God entirely. According to Chavel, Ibn Ezra explained this absence by suggesting that Mordecai feared the Persians might substitute the divine name with that of their own idolatrous deity.⁹ Chavel, however, offers an alternative view, proposing that Esther’s request to King Ahasuerus to host a banquet for Haman subtly alludes to the divine through an acrostic formed by the initial letters of the Hebrew phrase, which spell the Tetragrammaton in sequence. While this may be regarded as conjectural, there is no definitive indication that the author intended to encode the divine name in this manner. The absence of God’s name in Esther does not imply divine irrelevance, just as the omission of Job’s wife’s name does not necessarily denote her insignificance.

Assuming that Job’s wife was a Jewess, it is worth noting that women and ordinary individuals were often excluded from the public religious life of ancient Israel. Nonetheless, this cultural context does not fully explain the author’s decision to omit her name without comment. Whereas medieval Jewish exegetes sought to identify her with historical figures, contemporary scholars have instead questioned the implications of her anonymity. Whether those earlier scholars would interpret the text in the same way as a conscientious modern reader remains uncertain. As Rosenberg argues, a conscientious modern reader is guided by critical methodologies and is content with the interpretative outcomes they yield.¹⁰

It may be fruitful to consider the interpretative community to which the author belonged in order to explore alternative hermeneutical frameworks for understanding the omission. One plausible explanation may lie in the rabbinic prohibition against public shaming.¹¹ Notably, the rabbinic commentaries reviewed thus far have not applied this halakhic principle to the text. In Talmudic tradition, *lashon hara* (evil speech) and *motzi shem ra* (defamation) are equated with bloodshed, as articulated by Rabbi Nachman.¹² The Book of Job, as sacred scripture (*kitvey ha-qodesh*), shapes the religious consciousness of the Jewish people and should be interpreted within that sacred framework. It is conceivable that the author sought to avoid the sin of *lashon hara*, which Rabbi Chanina teaches consigns a person to Gehenna without return.¹³ This halakhic principle, though post-biblical, is derived from Genesis 38:25, where Tamar refrains from naming Judah as the father of her child, thereby preserving his dignity. While this interpretation is not universally accepted, it remains a plausible rationale for the narrative silence.

Finally, the text itself does not suggest that the author intended to portray Job’s wife as insignificant. She is explicitly referred to as Job’s “wife” (Job 2:9), a designation that carries theological and relational weight. In the Genesis account, the wife is described as a “help meet” or “sustainer beside him.” Although the narrator has been criticised for omitting her name, he nonetheless affirms her relational

⁷ M.H. Pope, *Job* (New York: Doubleday, 1980).

⁸ R. Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

⁹ C.B. Chavel, *Encyclopedia of Torah Thoughts* (New York: Shilo Publishing House, Inc., 1980).

¹⁰ J. Rosenberg, “Jewish Spirituality,” in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Green (London: Routledge, 1987).

¹¹ Chavel, *Encyclopedia of Torah Thoughts*.

¹² M. L. Mendel, *Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1995).

¹³ Chavel, *Encyclopedia of Torah Thoughts*, 208.

identity. In Genesis 2:18, God declares that it is not good for man to be alone and creates a helper suitable for him (*ezer kenegdo*). Alter contends that the term “help” is too weak a translation:

“Help is too weak because it suggests a merely auxiliary function, whereas *ezer* elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts, as often in Psalms.”¹⁴

In light of this understanding, it is entirely consistent that Job’s wife would intervene on behalf of her suffering husband. The issue is not her intervention per se, but rather the influence of Satan, who sought to exploit her role to achieve his objective (Job 2:5).

Marital Communication: The Words of Job’s Wife

The repetition of the catastrophes in Job’s family (Job 1-2) and how scholars from different religious backgrounds (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) have interpreted them generally fall into two broad categories. The first set of interpretations takes the form of theodicies.¹⁵ Some scholars question what they see as ‘panetic acts’ of God in inflicting sufferings on Job and his ‘innocent’ children. Depending on who the interpreter regards as the author of the book, he is blamed for not telling the Reader the name of Job’s wife.¹⁶ An example of the former is the way that the Midrashim blame Job for failing to stop or prevent the sufferings that the children of Israel experienced when they were in Egypt. In Sotah, Jewish Sages presented Job as a man who knew about Pharaoh’s plan to destroy Israel but was silent, hence justifying the suffering that was inflicted on him. An important member of his family, that is, his wife, received a mixed verdict for communicating with her husband (Job 2: 9-10) or for what could be described in the Twenty-First Century as her ‘panetic crisis intervention.’¹⁷ Job’s wife is blamed for suggesting to her husband to take an action which she saw as the way out of his sufferings. According to Islamic tradition, she was to be disciplined by her husband with a hundred (100) strokes for embodying an alternative solution to that of her husband.

Considering how the text was understood by various commentators (*rezeptionsästhetik*), it seems that the context in which the dialogue took place is constantly ignored. It is important not to ignore the context in which Job’s wife made the suggestion to her husband because it makes the cautious reader read the ‘text’ or ‘scripture’ with ‘sympathy’ towards Job’s wife. It must be remembered that she also suffered the loss of children and wealth, yet Church Fathers and scholars have described her negatively as the ‘intermediary’ between Job and Satan;¹⁸ therefore, she was a ‘Temptress’,¹⁹ and the ‘mouthpiece of Satan’.²⁰ Augustine said that she played the role of *diaboli adjutrix*.²¹ Calvin called her *organum satanae*.²² Assuming that she lived in the patriarchal period or even as a contemporary of Sarah, children or ‘seeds’ were considered as the offspring of the previous generation as well as the continuation of the future generation. The loss of children affected her, and the narrator revealed that Satan was responsible for the woes. Comparing her with Naomi (Ruth 1), one can understand the pain that a mother feels when she loses all her children. According to Whybray, she was directly and drastically affected by what had happened.²³ Different recipient communities of Readers tend to associate Job’s wife with the devil, whilst some are more sympathetic towards her.²⁴ The difference is primarily due to the exegetical approach adopted by the interpreters. For example, Saadia who was a Jewish commentator and opponent of the Karaites, defended Jewish oral tradition. He polemised against the Karaites ‘...who advocated a return to

¹⁴ R. Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (W.W. Norton & Company: New York: 2004), 22.

¹⁵ L.E. Goodman, *The Book of Theodicy: Translation and Commentary on the Theodicy of Sa’adiah Ben Yosef* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

¹⁶ Wolde, *Mr and Mrs Job*.

¹⁷ R.G.H. Siu, *Understanding and Minimizing the Infliction of Suffering* (Washington, D.C.: The International Society for Panetics, 1998).

¹⁸ Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*.

¹⁹ C.A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁰ N. Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988).

²¹ N.C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1985).

²² M.H. Pope, *Job: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1982).

²³ Whybray, *Job*.

²⁴ Goodman, *The Book of Theodicy: Translation and Commentary on the Theodicy of Sa’adiah Ben Yosef*.

Scripture and ridiculed the rabbinic readings of the text, which indeed were often difficult to justify on rational grounds.’²⁵

According to Ngwa, early Christian interpretations were also influenced by a number of factors: First, the text that many Christians used (LXX-Job) was in no small way different from the MT. Secondly, the Hellenistic world, where early Christianity flourished, provided an intellectual climate that helped to shape the understanding of Job. Finally, the fact that Job was immediately understood to be a non-Israelite allowed Christians to focus on him as a model for Jewish and especially non-Jewish audiences.²⁶

Following on from this, it is possible to begin to examine the words that are attributed to Job’s wife in Job 2: 9 in the context of her solution to suffering, that is, ‘...Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die.’ The fact that she embodied an alternative solution to the suffering of her husband has earned her mixed verdicts from various scholars. Some have used pejorative nomenclature to describe her, and others have been sympathetic in their verdicts.²⁷ However, there are questions about some of the underlying assumptions about the kind of person that she was. For example, it is unclear if her action was simply an emancipatory praxis which was acceptable in the society and culture in which she lived, but unacceptable in the context of what is known about Job. There are still questions about when Job lived. Some say that he lived in the days of Moses, Queen of Sheba, Ahasuerus, Jacob and the period of the Judges. Some claim that he lived in the pre-patriarchal world.²⁸ Scholars have attempted to answer the question about the date of its composition on the basis of linguistic criteria and historical allusions,²⁹ but according to Gruber:

‘The BABYLONIAN TALMUD, b. Bava Batra 15a shows that on the basis of linguistic criteria and historical allusions, there is hardly a period of biblical literature to which the book of Job does not have affinities. Because of the abundance of allusions to the exilic and post-exilic Isaiah chs 40-66 and the use of the Hebrew ha-satan, “the Adversary”, in a manner very similar to that in which the term is employed in the postexilic Zechariah ch3, it is generally agreed that the book of Job was composed sometime during the period from the mid-6th century, the Persian (Achaemenid) period (539-332 BCE).³⁰

This makes it challenging to correctly identify the social world in which the wife of Job lived. There is also insufficient evidence to identify named biblical characters who were her contemporaries. However, verse 10 gives the reader an idea of how some of her unnamed contemporaries (described by Job as ‘foolish women’) spoke. From verse 10, it does not say that it was her usual way of speaking. Rather, it shows that she was different from her contemporaries in a way, that is, she did not always speak like them. There was something else that must also be mentioned about Job’s wife to prove her own piety, until she yielded to Satan’s temptation to utter the words or advice to her husband, for instance, her husband did not offer burnt offerings on her behalf as he did for his children in Job 1. By implication, therefore, she was not as bad as she is sometimes portrayed. She is not the only biblical example of a wife who has spoken to their husbands when there was a crisis in the family. Sarah advised Abraham to cast out Hagar (Gen. 21: 10), Sarah denied that she laughed (Gen. 18: 13-15), and Achsah influenced Othniel to demand extra land for the family (Josh. 15: 17-19). Comparing her advice to that of her husband with that which Peter gave to the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16: 22, she deserves the same sympathy as Peter received ‘Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee’. Assuming that she was the same Job’s wife whom he referred to in Job 31: 10, it shows that she still maintained her integrity even after what she said and the correction that she received. This view about her love and loyalty is expressed in the midrash.³¹

Habel has also described her as an impatient comforter, but it must be remembered that she was a victim as well as her husband. The friends of Job who Habel describes as patient comforters did not experience what she experienced, that is, the loss of children, wealth and presently a severe affliction on

²⁵ B.D. Walfish, “Medieval Jewish Interpretation,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. A. Berlin and M.Z. Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). 1877.

²⁶ Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics of the “Happy” Ending in Job 42:7–17.50*.

²⁷ Goodman, *The Book of Theodicy: Translation and Commentary on the Theodicy of Sa’adiah Ben Yosef*.

²⁸ Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*.

²⁹ Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*; M. Gruber, “Job,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. A. Berlin and M.Z. Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁰ Gruber, “Job.”1520.

³¹ Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job*.

her husband. A fair comparison would have been possible if Job's three friends experienced the same calamities, and how the available evidence permits a critical examination of how their wives reacted, given the same conditions. Jewish sources describe Job's condition as severe; for instance, Ibn Ezra understands Job 2: 8 as a sign of mourning. Metzudos understands it as his strategy for cooling the inflammation. Malbim understands it as two kinds of boils, that is, dry and moist varieties. Seeing her husband in pain and observing a period of silence would have been an unkind gesture from a wife. It must be remembered that Job did not blame her for speaking, but he disagreed with the content of her speech.

As the focus of this article is on the dialogue between Job and his wife (Job 2: 9-10), it would be necessary to consider her statement in the context of her solution to suffering. Suffering of this magnitude was an experience which was strange to this family, as can be critically deduced from the response of Job to his wife's advice. Some commentators, such as Gutierrez, describe the suffering as an 'unjust suffering'.³² What appears to be ignored by most commentators is that the dialogue took place when the couple was experiencing unusual catastrophes, for example, the loss of wealth, loss of children and health. Freehof describes the pain as one that Job's wife could not endure.³³ She wanted it to end and advised her husband to 'bless 'God. Some Jewish translators use the word 'blaspheme', but Malbim sees a 'biting and bitter sarcasm 'in what she said. He argued that the word is 'bless 'and expected that God would react to his blessing by killing him:

Let him once more maintain his integrity, let him again bless God. What reward will there be left to give? Surely the next thing that God can do in reaction to his constancy will be to kill him.

It is evident that her solution to bodily affliction differs from what is found in rabbinic tradition on suffering. Perhaps, this will also help to locate the setting and composition of the text during the pre-exilic period. Rabbinic tradition teaches that suffering causes submission and atones for sins.³⁴ Suffering can come to the body or on one's property. According to Chavel, a second-generation Tannaitic rabbi, Akiba, said that suffering is beloved. While a fourth-generation Tannaitic rabbi, Hanasi, is said to have received healing for a toothache which he suffered for six years because he showed tender mercies to some kittens. These contrasts with the advice given by Job's wife, and it explains why some commentators who approached the text with Tannaitic persuasion may deliver a guilty verdict on the wife of Job. Her husband is portrayed as the hero, and she does not win.

Equating Job's wife with Eve is equally inappropriate, as some commentators have done.³⁵ According to Eisemann, Rabbi Zerachiah describes both wives as temptresses who wished to introduce death. In the Genesis account of the fall of man, Eve dialogued with Satan, but there is no indication that a similar dialogue took place in the case of Job's wife. What the narrator tells the reader is that Satan inflicted calamities on Job, his children and his possessions. She was not even aware of the source of the family problems. She could probably have acted in a different manner if she were aware of the source or sources of the family problems. Adam was not suffering at all, but Job did, so a comparative analysis which does not take into consideration all necessary factors cannot be used to determine how both women responded to Satanic temptations. In contrast to the Edenic temptation in Genesis 3, Job's wife experienced suffering, and her advice to her husband was a solution, even though it was wrong. The immediate challenge here is that of explaining the link (if any) between Satan's goal in Job 2: 5 and the role of Job's wife in Job 2: 9. It could be argued that the text presents a '*Leerstellen* 'or 'gap'.³⁶ The implication derived from the two statements is that she was tempted, though the text does not explicitly say so. This technique of biblical criticism is quite appropriate from a Reader-response approach.³⁷ It should be remembered that she was a 'victim 'herself and she became an 'observer 'in what looks like a 'panetic cycle or triangle'. She observed the visible bodily harm that Satan inflicted on her husband and could not bear it. Her role arguably changed to that of a 'Rescuer', and the only thing that was appropriate

³² G. Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992).

³³ S.B. Freehof, *The Book of Job* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1958).

³⁴ Chavel, *Encyclopedia of Torah Thoughts*.

³⁵ M. Weiss, *The Story of Job's Beginning* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1983).

³⁶ J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1996).

³⁷ Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*.

was to intervene. Unfortunately, her 'Panetic Crisis Intervention' was influenced by what Satan did to her husband (Job 2: 7).

There are also psychological factors that have been neglected, which could be helpful in understanding the personality traits of the couple. What the narrator did not tell the reader is the difference that an extroverted kind of Job could have made on his wife. Why did Job not tell his wife how he felt about his calamities, especially his response to his wife in Job 2:10 prior to when he disclosed it to her? It remains unclear if this could have prevented her from giving him the advice. The situation surrounding her comment, which has earned her a pejorative name, was probably caused by her husband's failure to disclose his inner feelings. It appears that Job's comment in Job 2: 10 was his personal conviction, which, of course, he held prior to when his wife presented an alternative approach to dealing with the problem. Perhaps, if he had disclosed this to his wife, it could have prevented Satan with difficulty. His attitude to his recent problem was formed before his wife spoke. It could be argued that Job was probably an 'introvert' whilst his wife's comment shows that she was probably an 'extrovert'. The application of psychological categories to Job and his wife follows the suggestion of Beck and Demarest that:

'The human person is an incredibly complex organism requiring the joint contributions of infallible Scripture, the wisdom of leading Christian theologians, and valid insights from psychological science'³⁸

From the Joban response that is found in verse 10, he spent less time (one verse) responding to his wife. It raises questions about his reason for spending a longer time talking to his friends. Only one verse in the Hebrew version is shorter than its Septuagint account. Why did the author or narrator not devote a few chapters to marital communication? The author did not say why, but from the perspective of a conscientious modern reader, it could be described as the influence of patriarchy. This assessment gains support as the interpreter applies the rabbinic teaching on communication between men and women. The Pirkei Avos, or Ethics of the Fathers, warns against excessive conversation with a woman. A man who does that in this present world (*olam hazeh*) will neglect the study of the Torah and in the coming world (*olam haba*) will eventually inherit Gehinnom. However, difficulties arise in an attempt to avoid eisegesis because Job was a Gentile, and also the setting and the composition of the text predates the Mishnaic era. Job's wife appears to have endured much and should actually be commended for even daring to speak out during family crises.

In contrast to the negative views on Job's wife presented in most commentaries, it appears that Job's appraisal of his wife's past conduct was that she did not always 'speak' as one of the 'foolish women' of her days (Job 2: 10). This single instance of making this kind of statement was not characteristic of how she always spoke to her husband. Even though it is difficult to know when she actually lived or who her contemporaries were, it is evident from her husband's response that she was not like the foolish women of her time. This difficulty is exegetical.

There are questions about how the Hebrew sentence of the verse should be rendered. Jerome's Latin Vulgate renders the Hebrew word '*barak*' as '*benedic*', that is, '*benedic Deo et morere*'. Wycliffe's translation of the Hebrew word '*barak*' is 'curse', and the Bishops' bible follows Wycliffe's translation in rendering the word as 'curse'. The Geneva Bible renders the word as 'blaspheme'. The Hebrew word (*barak*), which was translated as 'curse' in some translations, is the same word for 'bless', that is, she said 'bless God and die'. In Rabbinic tradition, curses come from the greater to the lesser. By implication, therefore, man cannot 'curse' God. Young's Literal Translation of 1898 renders the word as 'bless'. It is not known if the translators of the Authorised Version retained the Wycliffite rendering of the word '*barak*' because of the strong emphasis on marriage in the seventeenth century. Was it in any way to suppress the role of women? This is beyond the scope of this article and will not be explored. However, what it reveals is that the Authorised Version sometimes adopts a 'dynamic equivalence' and is not completely a 'Literal translation'. It could also mean that Job's wife asked her husband to pray to God that he be allowed to die.³⁹

³⁸ James R Beck and Bruce A Demarest, *The Human Person in Theology and Psychology: A Biblical Anthropology for the Twenty-First Century* (Kregel, 2005). 399.

³⁹ Freehof, *The Book of Job*.

The Hebrew word rendered ‘curse’ in Leviticus 24: 15 is ‘qâlal’, which is different from the word used by the author of the book of Job. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word ‘curse’ held a meaning that extended far beyond modern associations with swearing or profanity. It also meant railing against a deity in early modern English, which was viewed as a theological transgression. Various commentators have described the word as a euphemism.⁴⁰ There is no scholarly consensus on the understanding of when she expected her husband to die. Weiss understands the imperative as ‘...for then you will die’. Tur-Sinai also understands it as an imperative.⁴¹ However, according to Eisemann, Ramban disagrees and argues that immediate death will not necessarily follow the action that she proposed. It is clear that Eisemann understands that she meant that an immediate death will follow the action. There are bound to be different interpretations if the exegetical problem is not overcome. It is only logical to say that her comment, though unacceptable, was influenced by Satan, and she should be judged on that basis. This phrase is not different from the suggestions made by many sympathetic observers of sufferers to those experiencing serious pains today. It is common to hear people who console the bereaved that the death of their loved ones was the best solution, especially if such died after experiencing much pain and suffering. In contemporary terms, she suggested voluntary euthanasia, which he rejected. It was obvious that the quality of life had deteriorated, and something needed to be done about it. This is exactly similar to what people see and say today.

Was she right to suggest voluntary euthanasia? Could she have committed involuntary euthanasia if her husband were senile? What if her husband deteriorated into a Persistent Vegetative State (PVS)? Did Job have the right to bring his life to an end by voluntarily taking an action that would result in his death? What did it mean for Job’s wife to become a widow? These are questions raised by the text when approached from the perspective of medical ethics.

In order to begin to answer some of these questions, some admissions have to be made. It is difficult to tell if she could have committed involuntary euthanasia if her husband were in PVS. It will be difficult to know if the Mosaic Law was already operative. If she lived in the days of Abraham, it is evident that Abraham tried to kill his son on God’s instruction (Gen.22). Could Abraham’s action be interpreted as attempted murder, and what was the consequence?

It should be mentioned that the medical situation judged from the horizon of the interpreter is completely different from what existed in the horizon of the text. There are better medical facilities today compared to what existed in the days of Job. The expertise in Medicine far exceeds what existed in their days. Making an anachronistic projection does injustice to Job and his wife.

Pedagogy of Suffering and the Silenced Voice of Job’s Wife

This subsection examines the role of suffering as divine pedagogy in the opening chapters of the Book of Job, with particular focus on the contested figure of Job’s wife. Drawing on narrative, theological, and ethical insights, it explores the interwoven themes of *tummāh* (integrity), moral formation, and relational tension under divine testing. Often marginalised in interpretive history, Job’s wife is reconsidered here as a theologically significant character whose speech reflects not blasphemy but lament. Her isolation, emotional grief, and theological protest are read empathetically within the broader context of covenantal suffering, divine silence, and cosmic conflict.

Perhaps the counsel of Job’s wife—and Job’s response to it—should be interpreted within the broader framework of a pedagogy of suffering, particularly in contexts where there is no immediate human support. In Job’s experience, suffering becomes a mode of divine instruction, teaching him, above all, the necessity of holding fast (*hāzaq*) to his *tummāh* (integrity) amid unspeakable anguish. Though deprived of material goods, social standing, and the companionship of his spouse, Job retains that which proves most enduring: an inner integrity. This theme is forcefully affirmed in God’s declaration that Job “still holds fast his integrity” (*vayyahzēq b’tummātō*; Job 2:3), and it is ironically mirrored in his wife’s rhetorical question: “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die” (Job 2:9). In both instances, *tummāh* is revealed not simply as a personal virtue, but as the covenantal core of Job’s theological identity in the midst of divine testing.

⁴⁰ M. Hanson, *Job* (London: SCM Press, 1976).

⁴¹ N.H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher Ltd., 1967).

Sacred texts bear a rich *Wirkungsgeschichte*—a history of reception shaped by the interpretive communities that engage them. Within that history, Job’s wife has frequently been reduced to a theological caricature. Yet she should be recognised for affirming her husband’s integrity—an insight she shares with God. Her proximity to Job, emotionally and narratively, positions her as a witness to his character both before and during his afflictions. Her words, therefore, should not be hastily dismissed; they have elicited interpretive reactions ranging from the acerbic to the vitriolic, and at times even the caustic. For example, Willmington describes her as a foolish woman who simply urged her husband to curse God and die.⁴² A more balanced reading invites theological and ethical reconsideration of her role.

The term *tam* (commonly translated “blameless” or “perfect”) in Job 1 is far from superfluous. Used by God to describe Job, *tam* functions as a signal word—a narrative device that alerts the reader to thematic continuity. The implied reader is expected to trace Job’s moral consistency across the narrative. A *tam* is one who remains unswerving in loyalty to God, resistant to any inducement toward unfaithfulness. Job’s wife was familiar with this aspect of her husband’s piety during their prosperity and saw its continuity through catastrophe. Another significant descriptor is *yashar* (“upright”), which denotes one “whose intellect directs his steps and human qualities into the straight and virtuous paths laid down by God.” Observations from both rabbinic and modern sources suggest that Job’s wife expresses astonishment at her husband’s continued piety—a reaction that carries particular weight given how few of the wealthy respond to ruin with theological resilience.

Viewed through the lens of empathetic reading, Job’s wife emerges not as a temptress or antagonist to her husband’s righteousness, but as a solitary figure in mourning—bereft of female companionship, communal consolation, or narrative support. The text is conspicuously silent on the presence of other women: no neighbours, no kin, not even the “foolish women” Job later references appear to offer her solidarity. This narrative omission underscores her isolation and opens space for a more compassionate assessment of her speech—not as blasphemy, but as lament.

From a narrative-ethical perspective, her voice parallels Job’s own lament, carrying emotional and theological weight reflective of shared suffering. Feminist and reader-response approaches suggest that Job’s wife functions as a mirror of grief and theological protest. Her utterance, far from undermining orthodoxy, reveals a profoundly human—and theologically nuanced—response to catastrophe. Her marginalisation in traditional interpretation may reflect more about the posture of the interpreter than the intention of the text itself.

Job chapter 1 sets the interpretive context for chapter 2. The apparent absence of *ha-satan* in the latter chapter does not signal a departure from the narrative’s theological tension; rather, his influence lingers as an invisible undertone shaping the plot’s trajectory. A theologically and ethically attuned reading invites compassion for Job’s wife, whose suffering—though unnamed—is unmistakably inscribed within the cosmic affliction set in motion earlier in the prologue. Her speech does not emerge in a vacuum but is part of a broader dialogical and theological struggle initiated by forces beyond her comprehension.

Seen from this perspective, Job is distinguished not only by his perseverance but also by his relational posture as a husband. In stark contrast to Adam, who “listened to the voice of his wife” (*ki shama ‘ta le-qol ishtekha*, Gen. 3:17), Job resists capitulating to his wife’s despair. This intertextual echo prompts deeper reflection on the themes of obedience, discernment, and spousal solidarity in moments of theological crisis. While Job’s refusal has traditionally been read as a mark of righteousness, it may also be viewed empathetically: as a moment of shared suffering, divine silence, and fragile faith navigating moral ambiguity.

A Humble Wife: An Obscured Virtue

Interpretative bias has frequently contributed to the marginalisation of virtues in overlooked biblical figures, and the wife of Job is no exception. Among the most neglected of these is humility—an ethical and spiritual disposition often disregarded in readings of her counsel and her husband’s subsequent response. Within rabbinic tradition, this virtue is termed *anavah* (humility). Job’s wife, it may be argued, embodied *anavah* amidst profound humiliation. Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, a sage of the Second Temple

⁴² H. Willmington, “Article 18: Job at a Glance,” The Owner’s Manual File - Liberty University, 2017, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/owners_manual/28.

period, positioned humility between *chassidut* (piety) and *yirat chet* (fear of sin), thereby underscoring its foundational role in spiritual formation. According to Chavel's explanation of this triad 'A person who hears himself being humiliated and remains silent is called 'humble. Her silence should be seen as ⁴³' evidence of a trait that has remained obscure to interpreters. This has a Christological significance because Jesus Christ demonstrated this trait when He was before the High Priests and on the Cross, 1 Peter 2: 23.

Her silence following Job's rebuke may be interpreted as an act of self-restraint and a refusal to be governed by ego or pride. Despite the potential for relational rupture, she did not respond with vituperation—a reaction that might have been expected under such emotional duress. Rather, her restraint may reflect a deeper trust in divine justice and a deliberate choice of peace over conflict. This compassionate posture, however, has often been eclipsed by interpretative traditions that focus narrowly on perceived communicative failure. In contemporary discourse, poor communication is frequently cited as grounds for marital dissolution; yet such a lens risks obscuring the theological and emotional depth of her response. Notably, she is rebuked in the prologue, yet appears again in the epilogue—assuming Job did not remarry—suggesting a continuity of marital presence. Her humility, though historically obscured, invites a more nuanced and empathetic reading.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are several factors to be considered when interpreting the book of Job. Habel says it is a difficult book to interpret. However, a hasty assessment of the author's or narrator's reasons for omitting the name of Job's wife obviously leaves many other questions unanswered. Secondly, there are psychological, exegetical, cultural and social factors which are relevant to interpreting the suggestion made by Job's wife. In her state, it is not illogical for her to make the kind of comment that is found in the book, given that she was also a victim and to witness her husband's suffering helplessly was enough to cause her world to implode on her. However, Satan's role and his tactics in other parts of the bible need to be considered when interpreting her advice. A sympathetic reading of the text will obviously produce a different understanding of events from those that have been previously written by several commentators. In reassessing Job's wife through the lens of narrative empathy and theological nuance, one finds not a figure of reproach, but one who shares in the weight of covenantal suffering. Her voice, though brief, deepens the moral and relational complexity of the prologue and invites a more compassionate reading of divine testing, human grief, and faith under pressure.

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⁴³ Chavel, *Encyclopedia of Torah Thoughts*. 271.

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