

5 Mrs. Job—Can she get a little compassion?

“Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die.” *Job 2:9*

“The death of a beloved is an amputation.”

— C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*



Before we move on with the story of Job, I think we need to give some room for greater understanding to Job’s unnamed wife, who usually gets only a deserved reprimand for her cursing words. I call her Mrs. Job.

What was her life like? We can picture Mrs. Job as a mom who loved her ten children dearly. Interacting with her family, hosting people in their community while working with her husband, she also provided for the orphans and the foreign people who traveled through their lands. Most likely she maintained her large household with the help of many servants. It’s easy to picture Mrs. Job living a very busy and full life.

It also seems that her seven sons owned their own homes and are relationally close to their three sisters. She and Job must have been delighted to see the strong camaraderie between the children. There is no indication that any of their children were married or had children themselves. Mrs. Job’s children are simply described as “young.”

After Mrs. Job was slammed with the crushing news of the deaths of her ten children, she must have felt utterly destroyed. No, she wouldn’t die from the grief of losing her precious sons and daughters, but she now would have to live life with a shattered heart and perhaps wish she couldn’t feel such pain.

So when Mrs. Job discovers that her husband has become afflicted with boils, she wants to talk to him. He’s out there—sitting in ashes, scraping his wounds. She walks up to him and blurts out in anger and trauma, “Job, do you still hold fast your integrity? Just curse God and die!”

Her words are utterly wrong. They sting Job. They seem to have been spoken as if from the Devil himself. After all, wasn't that the dark angel's design for Job all along? Satan would have loved to hear Job declare in anger, "I curse you, God." But Job would not.

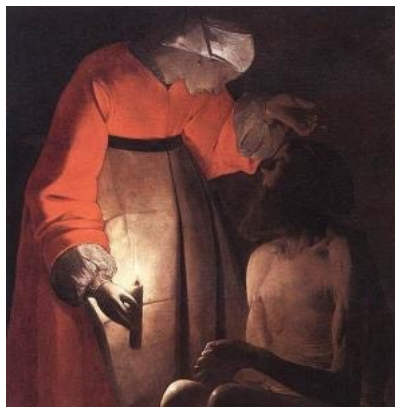
We may agree that Mrs. Job was speaking foolishly and with infamy. However, her words to Job most likely were not only a reflection of her anguish, but also a reflection of the religious views of her community.



We can assume that the belief in the dogma of divine retribution was central to the religious thinking of those in the world of Mrs. Job. In the interior chapters of the book of Job such assumptions become the major theme we will hear from Job's friends one after another.

It goes something like this, "Without exception, God punishes those who do wicked actions. In contrast, God always brings blessings to those who do righteous works." Mrs. Job understandably thinks like many in her community, "Job must have done something wrong although he lived a pretty impeccable life. There has to be a reason for so much evil to come to him, to our community, and to our family?"

Yes, if we read Deuteronomy chapter 28 God declares that blessings and cursings are directly related to obeying and disobeying him and his laws. It was assumed that God without exception punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. But if we look at the whole of scriptures God doesn't always work this way.



In many ways the book of Job is a living polemic against that assumed dogma. Yes, God does declare that blessings and cursing are linked to obeying and disobeying him, but have we not also observed that God's ways are not limited to nor stuck by such a pattern?

Have we not seen God graciously bless those who don't deserve it? Have we not also seen and experienced major trials and losses in the lives of many loving, kind, and righteous people?

In Job's case, he deserved wonderful blessings—being described by the God of the Universe as the most blameless and upright man on earth in his day. But Job now received the dark opposite—adversities of the worst kind.

As we look at God's work and ways throughout history, God's love and his will supersedes all systems.

The SOUND of MUSIC

Many of us can remember the romantic scene in the movie, *The Sound of Music*, when the nun named Maria (played by Julie Andrews) realizes that she is loved by Captain Von Trapp, the baron (played by Christopher Plummer). As she and the baron stand face to face and sing together, Maria reminisces. “Despite some of the bad things I did in my past childhood, ‘I must have done something good’ in order to receive the love of this man.”

“I must have done something good.”

Today, we see a similar view expounded by “spiritual karma.” It is viewed by many as follows:

If a person sends out good energy into the universe as evidenced by positive thoughts, words, and actions, then that positive energy will have a way of coming back to that person. It’s like a boomerang effect—throw out to the world good and then other good energies gather with it upon its return to its owner. And if a person sends out negative energy as evidenced by negative thoughts, words, or actions, the negative has a way of coming back to that person as well. This is an oversimplification—but basically like begets like.

So, Mrs. Job’s response to her husband, “Curse God and die,” seemed like a perfectly logical conclusion. She perhaps assumed that all the severe tragedies that had afflicted Job’s life and her world in such quick succession must surely be a result of God cursing her husband. Come on, no one had ever seen a single person cursed with so many massive and tragic losses in a day or two.

Especially when Job is afflicted with boils, she begins to wonder, “I don’t have boils. He does.” Perhaps she thought, “What’s the point of my husband continuing to live his life anymore? It is quite evident God has cursed him. He might as well curse God and die. There’s no hope for him now.”

Yet Job’s tight grip on God was based on a larger and truer view of God’s workings in the world. He made it quite clear to his wife.

“You are talking like a foolish woman! Shall we accept good from God, and not adversity?” *Job 2:10*

Job was right, but the extent of their adversity was of the severest kind.

Can we feel some empathy toward Mrs. Job?

A Mother's Severe Loss



On the unimaginably worst day of her life, Mrs. Job had to face the cruel reality that she and her husband had lost almost everything. The severest loss was the reality that all of her ten children lay dead in the collapsed home of their eldest son. Not even one child survived.

“All of my children are dead? No, no! This can't be!”

Crushed bodies, crushed dreams.

She would reflect on the lives of each child she had given birth to, whom she had nursed, cuddled, played together, taught, and laughed with. Each had given her great joy. While sharing life as part of one big family, she had enjoyed watching her sons and daughters expanding their wings, “They're growing up so fast.”

But now, as she looked at each lifeless child being brought back to her home that had been pulled out of the rubble, perhaps she felt forced to turn away. Or did she feel drawn to gaze at each of her battered and beloved children, wanting to stroke their hair, to touch their skin one last time, to remember their wonder? Would she tenderly say their names as she said her good-byes? Seven sons and three daughters would no longer be part of her life. The quiet was haunting.

Crumpled on the ground, she wailed. Inconsolable grief.

Each life gone now. All gone.

“Job, I’m devastated”



Mrs. Job would naturally would want to run to Job, to weep in his arms. But she could not. He was not able to comfort her now. His body was consumed with pain from grotesque boils. His suffering took him far away from her both physically and emotionally. He was on his own. She was on her own. Surely God was punishing Job. Unfortunately she and her entire family got caught in the crossfire.

Mrs. Job now had to deal with a very different man than she had known all her life. Did she feel repulsed at the sight of him? Her formally vibrant, robust husband was now consumed by a torturing disease. He was incapacitated. He was just trying to survive. The stench and disgusting elements of his boils made him offensive to be around. The smell!

Formerly a pillar of strength and action and stability, Job now only added to her burden. She felt frustrated, discouraged, depressed, helpless, and infuriated. “When will Job help me pick up the pieces of our lost life, and embrace my need to grieve with him over the the deaths of our children?”

We all have it bad. Where can we find work?



In one day, Mrs. Job’s entire world had literally crumbled into nothing. The debilitating losses ruined her once blessed life of prestige, security, respect, and bounty. Most likely she felt desolate even in her own household of servants. She lived in a close-knit community.

The community members who had survived Satan's savagery now prepared burial after burial for their family members and friends. As friends and relatives gathered the remains of the stabbed, maimed, and torched love ones, their wailing cries could be heard across the land. She shared their grief. Many families would have to adjust to life without a parent, spouse, sibling, relative, or friend. Individuals and households would never be fully free of pain, as they carried on with trying to figure out life in the midst of loss.

Their thriving and predictable world was instantly transformed into a grieving, broken community. How will we survive with all the livestock gone? How will we survive without Job's leadership and connections? Why is God attacking Job in so many ways? What did he do?

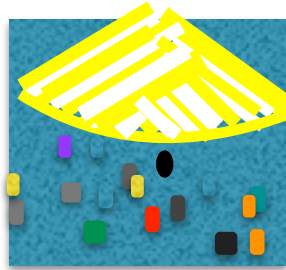
Mrs. Job would be forced to share in her husband's great humiliation. Her formerly esteemed husband now became an object of head wagging and finger pointing. Her close-knit community no longer seemed an asset. "Well, at least your husband is alive. My loved one is dead because of something your husband did!" Because Job was ostracized, deemed a man cursed by God, he became an embarrassment to her now.

Utter humiliation was added to her unbearable grief. She knew that her husband was mocked and spit upon. She by association felt their community's derision, their rejection.

We must also think about how the region's robust economy imploded. Job's and his wife's extreme losses remind us of those who have experienced entire communities decimated due to natural disasters, transmittable diseases, terrorist attacks, or acts of war. Not one person remains unaffected from such mass destruction touching the lives in these decimated communities. Because most of Job's sources of financial productivity were gone, people throughout their Eastern lands must have felt fear of how to survive, reeling from the fallout. The mammoth catastrophic tragedies of virtually no livestock and the loss of many workers would naturally cause widespread panic. It would take awhile to recover and replenish.

As the weeks went by, profound grief and suffering, combined with a multitude of fears, frustration, and anger increased tensions among the struggling families throughout Job's community. Although Job would take the lion's share of blame, Mrs. Job could not escape their judging eyes and words. Perhaps she wished she could just run away. But there was no place to go.

A Big Yellow Tent



A number of years ago, my husband and I had the privilege of working at a vision clinic in Haiti, just two years after the devastating earthquake of 2010. Their country's natural disaster took a staggering 230,000 lives. Compounding the difficult recovery, the earthquake destroyed local hospitals, killing a significant number of the trained medical staff. The associated dangers of remaining near the center of the devastation, the city of Port au Prince, forced the displacement of 900,000 people. Tom and I worked at a compound about 45 minutes from the epicenter of the earthquake.

As I sat and sweated under the bright yellow and white striped tent that spring, waiting for groups of men and women to line up for the vision tests, I engaged in a conversation with a lovely Haitian woman. Using my interpreter I began with simple questions to fill out forms.

"What is your name?"

"Jessanna."

"How old are you?" I asked as I began to fill out the medical form.

"I'm not sure. I was born in May 1955."

"Oh, you are 54 years old."

As Jessanna began to talk more personally, I realized she had a relationship with God. She then looked me straight in the eye, and spoke with intensity in her Haitian Creole. My young interpreter translated her words into English, "I want to run away."

She went on, "I have eleven children." Without much emotion she described the day of the earthquake, "My husband, my mother, and my aunt all died on that day." *How very sad. What could I possibly say in response?*

I thought about how this dear woman had lost her husband and did not even have her mom to hug, cry, and talk with because she died on that same day. Neither could her husband comfort her about the loss of her mom.

Placing her hand on her right hip, she winced, “A cinder block fell on my hip as I was fleeing from our collapsing house. It still hurts.” Our interpreter suggested a medical facility she might check out. I could see that Jessanna hurt emotionally and physically now for two years. And her pain would not end soon. I hoped she would continue to be engaged with her local church.

As we talked, all I could do was to encourage Jessanna to be honest with God with her darkest feelings. What else could I possibly say apart from, “I’m so sorry, Jessanna.” We prayed together, our eyes both misting with tears. Her parting words were, “My husband was a good provider and now I don’t know what to do.” As she stood up, she spoke again, “I just want to run away.”

After she left to get her eyesight checked. As I looked around I had a sinking feeling that many in Jessanna’s church were feeling shut down, and as disoriented and hopeless as she was. My heart broke and still aches for the deep pain so evident in the eyes of that beautiful Haitian widow and mother. Her community would recover, but the losses were permanent.

I was thinking about Job’s wife and her similar experience to Jessanna. Like this woman in Haiti devastated by tragic events, Mrs. Job’s world and that of the entire community was not going to return to any sense of normalcy. Not soon. Maybe not ever.

I will not Curse. No other place to Go.

When I think back to the long days of summer as my face remained a crusty mess, I felt and believed that there was nothing Satan would have liked better than for me to do than to “curse God,” and turn my back on him in anger. Job would not. I could not.

Perhaps it was due to my walk with God through decades, and my similar beliefs to Job’s. I knew that God was in control of all that had come and would come into my life—the good, the bad, and in my case the crusty. And I knew that if I left God I would have no where else to go. God never promised anyone that their life would avoid adversity. I pictured the disciples responding to Christ when he questioned their allegiance to follow him as many others had recently turned away. His message had become hard. The disciples’ natural response was the same as mine, “Where else would we go?”

So, let's wonder



How would we respond if, like Job and Mrs. Job, our entire world had been ripped away on every level in a short period of time? Grief? Terror? Fury?

What if our means of living throughout our entire community was destroyed in one day? What if there was no place for anyone to work? What if we got a phone call on that same day and heard someone say, "Many of your co-workers were been murdered today and many more were burned to death in a horrific fire." And how would we respond if a policeman and a chaplain showed up at our door saying, "We are sorry we have some sad news. All of your children were killed in a local storm that crushed the place they were enjoying dinner. We've identified their bodies. Yes, all of your children are dead."

Perhaps we can show Mrs. Job some grace and understanding. I suggest that we too might not speak with the right words if our entire world exploded and imploded, and all those we loved had died, and all our resources had vanished. We might not be patient with our primary support person when that person could no longer help us pick up the broken pieces and we feel they hold some blame. We might not say the right words.

C. S. Lewis speaks to the inward pain of a mother who loses the only child she has.

"If a mother is mourning not for what she has lost
but for what her dead child has lost,
it is a comfort to believe that the child has not lost the end for which it was created.

And it is a comfort to believe that she herself,
in losing her chief or only natural happiness, has not lost a greater thing,
that she may still hope to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever."
A comfort to the God-aimed, eternal spirit within her.

But not [a comfort] to her motherhood.
The specifically maternal happiness must be written off.
Never, in any place or time, will she have her son on her knees, or bathe him,

or tell him a story, or plan for his future, or see her grandchild.”

— C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*



Thought questions—

~List aspects that Mrs. Job lost through the calamities that affected her, her husband, and her community. (Read Job chapters 1, 2, 17, 19, 42).

~How do you think you would have responded to such a severe adversities?

~Mrs. Job taunted her husband about holding onto his integrity, challenging him to curse God and died (Job 2:9). Why do you think she said such ungodly, blasphemous, and cruel words? What is your personal reaction to the verbal response of Mrs. Job to her husband?

~Job spoke strongly back to his wife with truth, calling her foolish and claiming that they needed to accept blessings and adversity from God in Job 2:10-11. How does our Christian culture look at blessings and adversities that come to people?

~Describe a time when someone helped you to see the truth about God that you still needed to embrace during or after a time of trial?

Notes:

1. Karma, <http://www.ascendedmastersoflight.com/balancingkarma.php> The law of karma is exact and states that whatever energy is sent out goes around, gathers more of the same, and returns back to the sender either as positive or negative karma. Sometimes the return of karma is instantaneous but not always. Some of us are dealing with karma made lifetimes ago.” (accessed 2/22/2019).

Images:

1. Image of mother leaning over her child from ethnic conflict in Armenia related to Armenian genocide (1914-1923) wikimedia Syria - Aleppo - Armenian woman kneeling beside dead child in field "within sight of help and safety at Aleppo"File:Armenian woman kneeling beside dead

child in field.png Rights Information: No known restrictions on publication. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-48100 (b&w film copy neg.) Call Number: LOT 10898 [item] [P&P] Medium: 1 photographic print. This media file is in the public domain in the United States. This applies to U.S. works where the copyright has expired, often because its first publication occurred prior to January 1, 1923, (accessed 2/27/2019).

2. Image of painting of Job and his wife https://www.google.com/search?q=Job+and+his+wife&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjB-LHv6d_VAhUGJ-CYKHTH2DfAQ_AUICigB&biw=1243&bih=694#imgcr=RSfE_jjpeurC2M: (accessed 2/20/2019).

3. Image of women grieving in a group Israelite Women Mourn with Jephthah's Daughter Engraving. Bible Illustration by Gustave Dore. 19th century. Domain free, (accessed 2/27/2019).

4. English: "Woman with Dead Child" by Käthe Kollwitz, etching, 1903 National Gallery of Art, D.C. Commons wikipedia painting of woman grieving over dead child <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kollwitz.jpg>, (accessed 2/20/2019).

5. Job's wife in red "Job Mocked by his Wife" George de LA TOUR, painted in 1630s (b. 1593, Vic-sur-Seille, d. 1652, Luneville) Musée Départemental des Vosges, Épinal https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georges_de_La_Tour_-_Job_Mocked_by_his_Wife_-_WGA12340.jpg. Public Domain, (accessed 2/20/2019).

6. Image of yellow and white tent designed by Kristi Miller.

7. Image of collapsed house in Mena Arkansas Tornado outbreak of April 9–11, 2009 - Wikipedia wikipedia Commons wikipedia <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kollwitz.jpg> Public Domain https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tornado_outbreak_of_April_9%E2%80%9311,_2009#/media/File:Mena_tornado_damage.jpg (accessed 3/12/2019).