



The Taming of Job in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

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“CURSE GOD AND DIE”

“**D**o you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die,” Job’s wife tells him in her only speaking role in the entire book of Job (Job 2:9). It would be easy to overlook the significance of this short speech—easy, that is, if it wasn’t such a pointed, honest, accurate assessment of Job’s situation. Looking at her husband, a man beset by suffering, tragedy, and grief, Job’s wife lays bare the questions that are at the very heart of Job’s dilemma: Should he continue to be the kind of person that he has been—upright, honorable, righteous—even though there is apparently no reason to do so? Wouldn’t it be better, easier, or just plain fair to place the blame where it belongs, to point his finger at God? The rest of the biblical text is taken up with the responses of Job, his friends, and even God, to the issues that these questions raise, such as why a just God would allow his righteous servant to suffer so much.

The arguments and counterarguments that fill the pages of much of the book proved very troubling to ancient readers. Perhaps that is why, for at least the next millennium, most Jewish, Christian, and Muslim inheritors of the Joban tradition

The core of the book of Job raises haunting questions about why a righteous God allows the suffering of the just. By concentrating instead on the beginning and end of the book, however, most Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interpreters have focused not so much on the character of God as on the character of Job and his wife. The issue then becomes how the faithful should respond to terrible and undeserved suffering.

sidestepped the problems raised by these troubling questions, responding instead to a perhaps related, but essentially different kind of problem, namely, how the faithful should respond to overwhelming, even undeserved, suffering. Their nearly unanimous answer: with patience, like Job.

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What accounts for this seeming disjunction between the concern of the biblical text and what has occupied generations of Abrahamic interpreters? The first postbiblical treatments of the text, especially the *Testament of Job*, demonstrate that, very early on, interpreters began to focus primarily on the Job that appears in Job 1–2 and 42, the beginning and the end of the biblical text, passing over almost all of what happens in the intervening chapters. From there, it’s not quite so hard to figure out how Job emerged as a model of patience in the face of suffering, an image that still has a place in the minds of many of the faithful today. Fairly quickly then, in place of the extended disputes between Job and God and Job and his friends, the postbiblical interpretive tradition came to center around the contrast between Job, who demonstrates how to suffer well, and his wife, who shows just the opposite. As one scholar aptly observes, “the role of Job’s wife is inversely proportional to Job’s own role: as Job’s rebellion wanes, so, under the influence of Satan, his wife’s rebellion grows.”¹ In this article, I provide some insight into Job’s journey through the Abrahamic traditions in their early formations, showing how Job is transformed into a saint, a patriarch, and a prophet along the way, often at the expense of his wife.

IS JOB BLAMELESS?

The first postbiblical treatment of the book of Job appears in the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. While scholars don’t agree on the reason why the Septuagint translation differs so much from its Hebrew parent text (different version of the Hebrew text, different theological bias, or different translation style), it is clear that the Greek version tames Job’s character considerably.² Instead of the angry man who in the Hebrew Bible rails against his suffering and demands that God come forward to justify his actions, Job in the Greek version appears less confident before God and more tentative in asserting his innocence. For example, in the Hebrew text, Job proclaims his innocence with one breath and questions God’s justice in the next, claiming, “Though *I am innocent*, my own

¹Martin Parmentier, “Job the Rebel: From the Rabbis to the Church Fathers,” in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz (Boston: Brill, 2004) 231.

²Joel S. Allen, “Job 3: History of Interpretation,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008) 362.

mouth would condemn me; though *I am blameless*, he would prove me perverse” (9:20, emphasis mine). The Greek Job’s declarations are much more cautious, leaving open the possibility that he may not be entirely innocent or blameless, so he says instead, “For instance, should I be right, my mouth will turn out impious! And should I be blameless, I will prove to be perverse!” (9:20).³ The result of attempts such as these on the part of the Greek translator is that “Job is portrayed as more saintly and faithful than the Hebrew Bible strictly allows.”⁴

Not only is Job’s character more subdued in the Greek version, but the harsh speech attributed to Job’s wife in the Hebrew text is changed as well. Although the words she utters in 2:9 are generally translated into English in a fairly straightforward manner, they are a little more complicated in the original Hebrew where they literally read, “*Bless God and die!*” This has long been understood as a euphemism, thus the translation: “*Curse God and die!*” The Greek version seems to have been aware of the ambiguity of this phrase and provided a fairly significant addition to the words of Job’s wife, putting her words into a larger context and making allowance for the ambiguity in the Hebrew. In the Greek version, then, the scene begins with Job having lost everything and sitting on a rubbish heap outside the city, scraping away the pus of his wounds with a potsherd. After some time passes with Job in this state, his wife finally tells him,

How long will you persist and say, “Look, I will hang on a little longer, while I wait for the hope of my deliverance?” For look, your legacy has vanished from the earth—sons and daughters, my womb’s birth pangs and labors, for whom I wearied myself with hardships in vain. And you? You sit in the refuse of worms as you spend the night in the open air. As for me, I am one that wanders about and a hired servant—from place to place and house to house, waiting for when the sun will set, so I can rest from the distresses and griefs that now beset me. Now say some word to the Lord and die! (Job 2:9 LXX)

In one sense, this passage allows the reader to sympathize with the lot of Job’s wife, demonstrating that the tragedy that has befallen Job is not his alone, but also hers. In this rendering, we can understand why she is so angry. After all, she gave birth to and raised the children who were killed. At the same time, though, she comes off seeming perhaps even more shrewish than she does in the Hebrew text. Pointing out that she doesn’t even have the luxury of sitting on a pile of garbage—she has to go out each day, hiring herself out as a servant—Mrs. Job comes off as the complainer in contrast to her husband.

THE NEW JOB

The author of the *Testament of Job*, a text written in either the first century B.C.E. or the first century C.E., was an Egyptian Jew who had some familiarity with

³Job, trans. Claude E. Cox, in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 675 (hereafter, LXX).

⁴Allen, “Job 3,” 363.

the Greek translation of the Bible. Unlike the Septuagint, though, the *Testament of Job* is a complete reframing of the biblical story. Some scholars wonder whether it's a good idea even to call it an interpretation because it has so little in common with either the Greek or Hebrew versions of the biblical text. But the text is important because significant portions of it are found in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim treatments of Job. In fact, within the Islamic tradition, this text was much more influential in shaping Job's role than the biblical text, which may not have been available.

Job in the *Testament of Job* is an Egyptian king known for his generosity to the poor, his hospitality to strangers, and his intolerance of any kind of idol worship. He is, in effect, a Gentile Abraham. Job's suffering begins when he expresses concern about a local shrine in which an idol, not God, is the object of worship. When God gives Job permission to destroy the shrine, he also warns Job that by doing so, he will be entering into a battle with Satan. Satan will unleash plagues and, although Job's life will be spared, he will suffer terribly. If Job is able to endure, God tells him, "I will return you again to your goods. It will be repaid to you doubly, so you may know that the Lord is impartial—rendering good things to each one who obeys. *And you shall be raised up in the resurrection.*"⁵

In this story, Job actually has two wives. His first wife, Sitis (or Sitidos), plays the larger role, suffering alongside Job in his contest with Satan. Building on the role of Job's wife as she is depicted in the Septuagint, the *Testament of Job* describes how she hires herself out as a maid to wealthy women and struggles to earn enough to feed herself and her husband. She often has to resort to begging in the market in order to bring home bread. At every turn, Satan disguises himself to deceive those closest to Job, especially Job's wife. She first encounters him when she is begging for bread and he is disguised as a bread seller. When Satan learns that she doesn't have any money he tells her that he'll give her three loaves in exchange for her hair. She cuts her hair, takes the bread, and goes home humiliated. In this version, Sitis, following the Greek version, tells Job to "speak some word against the Lord and die." She adds, "Then I too shall be freed from the weariness that issues from the pain of your body" (25:10).⁶ Job responds to her by saying,

Look, I have lived seventeen years in these plagues submitting to the worms in my body, and my soul has never been depressed by my pains so much as by your statement....Do you not see the devil standing behind you and unsettling your reasoning so that he might deceive me too? (26:1–2, 6)⁷

The axis of the struggle in the *Testament of Job* is altered from one in which Job confronts God to one in which all of Job's energies are directed against Satan. But Job endures, and instead of asking questions about divine justice as he does in the Hebrew Bible, he repeatedly affirms his trust in God. The text concludes with

⁵*Testament of Job* 4:7–8, trans. R. P. Spittler, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 841 (italics original).

⁶*Ibid.*, 850.

⁷*Ibid.*, 851.

Satan in tears and Job encouraging his listeners: “Now then, my children, you also must be patient in everything that happens to you. For patience is better than anything” (27:7).⁸ The only one that seems to have lost in the end is Job’s wife Sitis, who turns out to be the ultimately tragic character. After struggling to endure the suffering intended for Job but that has included her, Sitis dies among the animals in a cow shed that had been confiscated from her family by the local rulers. Job, on the other hand, goes on to live a long life, vindicated and restored. He marries Dinah, daughter of the biblical patriarch Jacob, by whom he has another ten children.

JOB IN THE CHURCH: “YOU HAVE HEARD OF THE PATIENCE OF JOB...”

Job first surfaces in the Christian textual tradition in James 5:7–11, where the author, who was certainly familiar with the Septuagint and probably aware of the *Testament of Job*, urges his audience to “Be patient...until the coming of the Lord” (5:7). He then specifically points to Job, “You have heard of the endurance of Job,” as an example of one whose patience, suffering, and endurance should be imitated.⁹ This patient, long-suffering Job becomes the cornerstone of most patristic interpretations of Job. Didymus the Blind, for example, explains that Job’s undeserved suffering was significant in that it gave Job the opportunity to refute Satan, thus strengthening his faith, and it allowed Job to become an example for others. Aware of Job’s questions and complaints in the Bible, Didymus goes on to explain that they are actually metaphorical. Job was, after all, a wise man, who, “teaching how humanity is to dwell in this fallen state, demonstrated how to suffer and to conquer. He [was] a saint who triumphed by forbearing everything patiently, not by wrestling to find the truth or by insisting that God keep His word or by calling on God to give an account.”¹⁰

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Patristic writers also found in Job arguments that they used to support their (sometimes widely diverging) theological positions. In the controversy between Augustine and the Pelagians, for example, the book of Job was used on both sides.¹¹ While both parties agreed that Job was a model of patience and endurance in the face of suffering, and that he was a righteous Gentile—demonstrating that God was at work before the election of Israel and reflecting the gospel even before the birth of Christ—they disagreed about both the causes and implications of these stances. For Augustine, all humans, even Job, were sinful; therefore, Job was evi-

⁸Ibid.

⁹Allen, “Job 3,” 363.

¹⁰Parmentier, “Job the Rebel,” 234–235.

¹¹Allen, “Job 3,” 367–368.

dence that Christ had come to save all humans. The Pelagians, on the other hand, who were convinced that human nature was basically good, argued that Job, out of free will, made the choice not to sin and thereby provided proof that all humans, even without Christ, had this kind of potential within them.

The idea of Job as a type of Christ or as a precursor to Christ, which emerges on both sides of the debate between Augustine and the Pelagians, was more fully drawn out a few centuries later by Gregory the Great in his *Morals on the Book of Job*, one of the single largest influences on how Job was understood throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern period. In addition to depicting Job as the patient sufferer, Gregory also casts Job as both the “pre-figuration of Christ and of the Church as the body of Christ.” It was necessary, says Gregory,

for the blessed Job, who announced the greatest of all mysteries, the incarnation, to be a sign of him whom he proclaimed with his voice through his life, and for all that he underwent to show forth what were to be his sufferings; and so much the more to truly foretell the mysteries of his passion, as he prophesied not merely with his lips but also by suffering.¹²

Theodore of Mopsuestia was one of the few dissidents to the tradition that saw Job as a righteous Gentile and patient sufferer. He was concerned with Job’s attitude and the words that form the core of the biblical text, and he found Job lacking. For example, focusing on Job’s statement in Job 3:1, in which Job curses the day on which he was born, Theodore concluded that such behavior was, as Parmentier paraphrases, “incredible and unfitting for a righteous man.”¹³ Ultimately, Theodore rejected the book in its present form, indicating that the behavior of the main character was altogether inappropriate.¹⁴

JOB’S WIFE: THE DEVIL’S HELPER?

The higher Job climbed on the ladder of righteousness, the lower his wife fell. Following in the footsteps of the *Testament of Job*—that is, seeing Satan behind the actions and speech of Job’s wife—the early church fathers variously describe Job’s wife as “an unthinking fool, an irritating nag, a heretic, a temptor, an unwitting tool of the devil, or even a personification of the devil himself.”¹⁵ Ambrose, for example, noted that the devil destroyed everything that Job possessed, with the exception of his tongue and his wife, so that Job might be tempted by his wife to blaspheme against God.¹⁶ Augustine, famously describing Job’s wife as “the Devil’s helper,” went even further, explaining that God left Job’s wife unharmed because God knows that man is always tempted by woman, just like Adam was tempted by

¹²Quoted in Parmentier, “Job the Rebel,” 240.

¹³Ibid., 234.

¹⁴Ibid., 233–234.

¹⁵C. L. Seow, “Job’s Wife,” in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World*, ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006) 141.

¹⁶Ibid.

Eve. Job broke this cycle, though, by not yielding to his wife—not cursing God—becoming a new Adam of sorts.¹⁷ Jerome combined the characters of Job’s wife and Eve and contrasted them (the “old Eve”) with the Virgin Mary, “the new Eve.”¹⁸ Gregory the Great drew on many of these ideas in his more fully developed treatment of Job’s wife as an instrument of the devil, stating that Satan used her tongue as a powerful weapon.¹⁹ Due in large part to Gregory the Great’s influential commentary, Job’s wife’s reputation as the devil’s helper was firmly established throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

RABBINIC LITERATURE: JOB AMONG THE PATRIARCHS

Job was described in rabbinic literature as “the most pious Gentile that ever lived,” and later on, probably under the influence of Islamic interpretation, was one of the few to be described as “the servant of God.”²⁰ According to the rabbis, he was a grandson of Jacob’s brother Esau, as well as Jacob’s own son-in-law (through marriage to Dinah). Even with such praise, the rabbis placed Job a little lower than some of the biblical patriarchs, pointing out that Job indeed “murmured” in response to his suffering, unlike Adam, for example, who had every right to do so after being expelled from the garden for a single transgression, or Moses, who was not permitted to enter the Promised Land on account of one rebellious incident.²¹ So, Job was righteous, but not the most righteous, a title often conferred upon Abraham, whom the rabbis described as having withstood ten temptations without wavering.²²

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The rabbis, like the Christian Theodore of Mopsuestia, seemed particularly concerned about Job’s bold statements against God. Job, in one of their readings, accused God of making a mistake in sending such suffering upon a righteous individual, arguing that it was actually intended for someone else, someone who actually deserved it. God responds to Job’s charge by providing a long list of things that he has created—every raindrop from its own mold and every hair on the head of a human from its own follicle—without having ever erred. In fact, continues God:

¹⁷Ibid, 141–142.

¹⁸Ibid., 142.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909–1938) 2:225; 5:381 note 2.

²¹Ibid., 2:225–226.

²²Ibid., 5:383 note 5.

Many thunderbolts I hurl from the skies, but each one comes from its own path... It hath never happened that a path hath been misplaced. Should I, then, have mistaken Job for another?²³

The rabbis concluded that Job's audacity derived from the fact that, as a Gentile, he didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, and therefore "judged of the prosperity of the wicked and the woes of the pious only by their earthly fortunes."²⁴ Even so, God was unhappy with Job's friends for judging him so harshly, since "[a] man may not be held responsible for what he does in his anguish," and Job's agony was great, indeed."²⁵

In later texts from the rabbinic era, Job came to be seen as an Israelite rather than a Gentile. The transformation of Job from a Gentile into a Jew also allowed the rabbis to see Job's sufferings as a symbol for the sufferings of Israel.

The rabbis were significantly interested in Job's generosity and hospitality. They speculated as to the extent of his wealth, at one point noting that "he had no less than one hundred and thirty thousand [sheep], and he required eight hundred dogs to keep guard over them, not to mention the two hundred dogs needed to secure the safety of his house."²⁶ Job became famous for having doors on all four sides of his house so that those who passed by would be able to enter, regardless of the direction from which they came. The rabbis point to Job's relentless efforts to assist those in need, relating that "he even had to employ ships that carried supplies to all the cities and the dwelling-places of the destitute."²⁷

In later texts from the rabbinic era, Job came to be seen as an Israelite rather than a Gentile, thus removing some of the earlier hesitation about his character. Rather than the precursor to Christ that the Christian fathers were seeing, some rabbis claimed that Job, despite having lived before Moses and the giving of the law, was born circumcised, making him more of a precursor to Moses and the rabbis than a Messiah to the Christians. The transformation of Job from a Gentile into a Jew also allowed the rabbis to see Job's sufferings as a symbol for the sufferings of Israel.²⁸ In one comparison, both Job and Israel "lost sons and daughters, both were robbed of silver and gold, [and] both were cast upon a dung heap."²⁹ The rabbis saw hope in that Job's suffering was eventually relieved and that he was rewarded in the end.

²³Ibid., 2:227.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 2:228.

²⁶Ibid., 2:229.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Allen, "Job 3," 366, citing Judith Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counsellors: Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983) 25.

²⁹Ibid., 366.

JOB'S WIFE: A DANGEROUS TEMPTATION

While the rabbis put Job on a pedestal, albeit with some reservation, they were generally critical of Job's wife because of the counsel that she gave her husband. In one midrash, Job's wife, afraid that her husband will not be able to maintain his righteous behavior under the pressure of such suffering, urges him to pray to God for a quick end. He rejects her advice, saying, "If in the days of good fortune, which usually tempts men to deny God, I stood firm, and did not rebel against Him, surely I shall be able to remain steadfast under misfortune, which compels men to be obedient to God."³⁰ Genesis Rabbah 19:12, a midrashic text, compares the Genesis account of Adam and Eve's eating of the tree of knowledge with the relationship between Job and his wife. The rabbis saw parallels in these stories in that both Job and Adam received advice or counsel from their wives. But Job, the rabbis pointed out, said, "I am not like him [Adam]....He obeyed his wife's instructions, but I did not obey my wife." Instead, Job said to his wife, "You speak as one of the vile women speaks."³¹ Indirectly influenced by the *Testament of Job*, the rabbis elaborate on how Job's wife falls under Satan's power and becomes Job's most dangerous temptation.

AYYUB: PROPHET OF GOD

In the Qur'an, Job, or "Ayyub" as he is called, is considered one of the prophets of God. Some of these prophets, such as Abraham and Moses, play significant roles in the text of the Qur'an, while others, like Job and Jonah, are only mentioned briefly, appearing in vignettes that don't provide much information about them. According to A. H. Johns, "frequency of mention and length of pericope does not, however, always coincide with the hierarchical order in which some traditions place them."³² Job, for example, appears in four places in the Qur'an: two mention only his name among the prophets, while two others provide limited information about him in the space of a few verses. In the longest Qur'anic passage about Job, Sad 38:41–44, he is described as a servant of God whom Satan has visited with hardship and pain.

Bring to mind Our servant Job who cried to his Lord, 'Satan has afflicted me with weariness and suffering.' 'Stamp your foot! Here is cool water for you to wash in and drink,' and We restored his family to him, with many more like them: a sign of Our mercy and a lesson to all who understand. 'Take a small bunch of grass in your hand, and strike [her] with that so as not to break your oath.' We found him patient in adversity; an excellent servant! He, too, always turned to God.³³

³⁰Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2:235.

³¹Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation*, vol. 1 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985) 211.

³²A. H. Johns, "Narrative, Intertext and Allusion in the Qur'anic Presentation of Job," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1/1 (1999) 1.

³³*The Qur'an*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 292.

This passage summarizes Job's most important attribute and message as a prophet: patience in the face of undeserved suffering. In the context of this particular sura as well as elsewhere in the Qur'an, suffering is understood as a divine test that prophets such as Solomon and Job undergo to demonstrate their faithfulness in the face of adversity and to prove that they are worthy of their positions as prophets and their rewards.

In addition, the description of Job washing and then being made whole by healing waters gave rise to Job becoming the patron saint within Islam of leprosy, syphilis, and other skin diseases. Some medieval exegetes suggest that those afflicted with these types of illnesses should pray to Job who acts as an intercessor.³⁴ In addition, Job's healing powers became part of a tradition of "Job's well" or "Job's stream"—a sort of fountain of youth for which numerous Middle Eastern locations have been suggested in Islamic literature.³⁵

Most of the discussion about Job in Islam, however, appears in folkloric collections that provide much greater detail about the lives of the prophets. Some of these collections appear to have been heavily influenced by the *Testament of Job* tradition. In one such collection, *Tales of the Prophets (Qisas al-anbiya)*, the medieval commentator al-Kisai also identifies Job as a descendant of the biblical Esau who is married to Rahmah ("mercy"), the granddaughter of Joseph. He describes Job as a "wise, just and learned man," who gave to the "poor and unfortunate... a compassionate father to the orphan, an affectionate husband to the widow and a devoted brother to the weak," and hospitable to guests.³⁶ In this story, Satan or "Iblis" (as Satan is often called in Islamic literature) becomes jealous of Job and, with God's permission, sets his sights on the righteous man, hoping to tempt Job to turn away from God once he has lost everything. But Job, of course, never wavers. In fact, he is so pious that "whenever a worm fell from his body, he would pick it up and put it back, saying, 'Eat my flesh until God release me from suffering.'"³⁷

JOB'S WIFE BY ANOTHER NAME: RAHMAH

As in the *Testament of Job*, although with greater detail, Job's wife Rahmah plays a significant role in *Tales of the Prophets*. Instead of the one line assigned to her in the Hebrew Bible, Rahmah suffers alongside Job throughout and works tirelessly to feed and care for him, first working as a maid for people in the village and then resorting to begging when no one would hire her out of disgust for her "filthy, putrid husband." She goes from house to house saying, "O people of this dwelling, I am the wife of Job the prophet. Do you have any task that I might perform in re-

³⁴Stephen Vicchio, "The Image of Ayyub (Job) in the Qu'ran and Later Islam," *The Bible and Interpretation*, online at http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Vicchio_Image_Ayyub.shtml (accessed August 8, 2011).

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Muhammad ibn Abd Alla al-Kisai, *Tales of the Prophets (Qisas al-anbiya)*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston Jr. (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 1997) 192–193.

³⁷Ibid., 195.

turn for some food?” “Go away!” they say. “Your husband’s Lord is displeased with him.”³⁸ Finally, she resorts to selling her long hair in exchange for bread.

If things weren’t bad enough already, Iblis disguises himself in the form of a physician who offers to help her and to bring relief to her husband. She returns home to tell Job, who chastises her for not being able to see through the trickery. She apologizes, but, soon after, Iblis appears to her again, this time showing her a vision in which her children are alive. She returns home to tell Job, who becomes angry with her this time, “For shame, Rahmah! There is no other God but God, and he whom God causes to die cannot be brought back to life by anyone other than Him. The one who appeared to you was Iblis.”³⁹ Job then promises that if he ever attains health, he will give her a hundred lashes! As the story moves toward its conclusion, Rahmah, at her wit’s end, tells her husband, “Job, call upon your Lord to relieve you.” He responds by saying, “I am too ashamed to call upon Him. If I perish, God will provide you with another mate.”⁴⁰ Here, as in other traditions, Job’s wife is more fully developed in both her positive attributes of caring for Job, but also in her negative ones, especially her vulnerability to Satan’s disguises. She keeps Job alive physically, on the one hand, but her susceptibility to temptation nearly does Job in.

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One day, though, God decides that Job has had enough and sends the angel Gabriel to tell him the good news. As Gabriel helps Job to his feet, a spring of water that was “whiter than snow, sweeter than honey, more fragrant than camphor” flowed from where he stood, healing and cleansing Job.⁴¹ God restores all of their possessions and extends their lives. And Job fulfills his vow to beat his wife by using a bouquet of flowers instead of a whip.

CHOOSING THE GOOD

In looking at Job’s journey across the Abrahamic traditions, it is not particularly surprising that Job was reinvented so early on in history. The biblical text raises many disturbing questions and provides very few, if any, satisfying answers. By changing the questions, however, the *Testament of Job* and its offspring were able to provide more concrete answers. Rather than exploring the possibility that

³⁸Ibid., 196–197.

³⁹Ibid., 198–199.

⁴⁰Ibid., 201.

⁴¹Ibid., 202.

Job's suffering was random, unnecessary, or unjust, the interpretive tradition was able to turn Job's story into one that could be preached and taught. Instead of being the door to unanswerable questions, the "new Job" that came to life in the history of interpretation opened the door to a compelling drama about a man caught between good (obeying God, suffering patiently) and evil (listening to his wife under the power of Satan), and who ultimately chose the good. ⊕

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