

Remember Job's Wife

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Did Job's wife say to him, "Curse God, and die" (Job 2:9)? Recently I was informed that the original text reads "Bless God, and die." Which one is right?

Yes, the Hebrew text uses the verb "bless" (*bērak*) and not the verb "curse" (*qillēl* or *'ārar*). But in this case a short answer is not enough.

When studying the meaning of a biblical word, we have to examine its different usages within its specific context. What complicates your question is that "curse" is not one of the meanings of the verb *bērak* ("to bless"). Yet in some passages the verb "to bless" seems to mean "to curse" or "to blaspheme." Bible students refer to this as the euphemistic use of the verb.

Apparently, for the biblical writer the combination of the verb "to curse/blaspheme" and "God" ("to curse God") was offensive to his or her religious sensitivity, making it necessary to paraphrase the concept using one that sounded less offensive. The result was the substitution of the verb "bless" for the verb "curse."

Euphemistic expressions are common in all languages, and Hebrew is no exception. The question is whether in some cases the verb "to bless" is used euphemistically. Let's examine some texts.

1. *Euphemistic Usage Outside Job*: The number of passages in which we find the phenomenon just described is very limited. One of the best examples is recorded in 1 Kings 21:10, 13. Jezebel asked for false witnesses to testify against Naboth saying that they heard him "cursing [blessing]" God and the king. On that basis Naboth received the death penalty. Obviously, no one is to be stoned for blessing God; therefore the verb "to bless" is used here as a euphemism.

2. *Euphemistic Usage in Job*: It was Job's practice to offer sacrifices on behalf of his children because, he thought, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed [blessed] God in their hearts" (Job 1:5, NIV). No sacrifice is needed for blessing God. Job moves from sin in general to the most radical expression of it in cursing God.

Next we find Satan saying to God, "Stretch out your hand and strike everything [Job] has, and he will surely curse [bless] you to your face" (Job 1:11, NIV; see also Job 2:5). This is not a sarcastic expression—"He will surely bless you!"—but an expression of certainty. The phrase "to your face" expresses open contempt. The euphemistic use of the verb "bless" seems to fit the context very well.

3. *Euphemistic Usage in the Speech of Job's Wife*: Did Job's wife say "Curse" or "Bless God and die"? Job's answer seems to support the idea that "bless" is being used here as a euphemism for "curse." If she is encouraging him to bless God and die, why did Job say to her "You are talking like a foolish woman" (Job 2:10, NIV)? Whatever she was trying to say, Job found it inconsistent with devotion to God.

We know very little about this woman, and the tendency has been to consider her an evil woman. Undoubtedly Job's suffering caused her to suffer as well. Losing all her wealth was painful, but even more emotionally and psychologically devastating would have been losing all her children. Her pain may have been even more intense than her husband's. Yet in the story she bears her pain quietly. She loved Job. It must have been extremely painful for her to see her husband going through excruciating physical, psychological, and spiritual pain and be unable to do anything to bring relief.

There seems to be only one way left for her. She speaks to Job from the depth of her love and concern for him. She doesn't realize that, like Peter, she is echoing Satan's words. No, she is not a foolish woman, but that day she spoke "*like*" one.

Job realizes her deep pain and says to her, "Shall *we* accept good from God, and not trouble?" (verse 10). He seems to be saying, "God has given us good things to administer for Him, and we did it joyfully; now we have become stewards of pain for Him; hold on to your faith." It may be that at that moment she embraced him and they both cried together.

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