Job and His Daughters

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf · April 2021 · revised in October 2026

A lecture series on the book of Job drew my attention to Job's daughters. They are only a small detail in a fascinating book from antiquity. It is one of the most impressive literary works in history. It is not easy to read, and quite long for a book of the Bible. Anyone who manages to read it in one sitting experiences a tsunami for head, heart, and spirit. After all, it deals with the question of why the righteous and blameless Job and his family have to go through such unjust suffering and such a fate. That is the great question, to this day, and the book of Job is a helpful contribution to this question in the form of wisdom literature. Job does not give a final answer either. The answer is not, as Job and his friends try to argue, a theology of retribution that simply states: the righteous will be blessed, the unrighteous punished. This principle is not the answer to the suffering in the world.

But that is not my topic at all. As I said, it is about a small detail, a "by-product," which has to do with the topic of the role of women in the Bible. Until now, neither in my book nor in the studies that followed have I looked at women in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament there are women who were prophets, kings, judges, and leaders (e.g., Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah as prophetesses, Deborah as a judge, Esther as a queen). Not as the norm, but as exceptions. To conclude from this, however, that this is a role model willed by God would require providing from the Old Testament the reason why men should lead and women should follow. The creation account itself cannot serve this purpose. Rather, the hierarchical imbalance between man and woman is the consequence of the Fall and has become a formative part of societies in all ages, in varying forms. ***Hierarchy appears not before, but only after the Fall.***

When Did Job and His Large Family Live?

Jewish tradition places Job in the time of Abraham (and Melchizedek). There are of course other theories about when this story took place, but it makes sense to think of this time and to compare the lives, the challenges, and the temptations of Abraham and Job.

So these two men lived before the giving of the law, before a sacrificial service regulated by law. The one becomes the father of a nation and, beyond that, the earthly father of all believers. Job, from the land of Uz, is not a Hebrew, not an Israelite. And yet he knew the living God. How, or on the basis of what revelation, he knew him, we do not know. In the last chapters of the book God spoke directly to Job. And Job even said: "But now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:5). That was his inner healing. Job is thought to have lived in Jordan, in a mixed area of settled land and desert.

The story of Job is well known. Satan has his own view of how faith in God works: it is a business deal, or even a dirty game. Without reward there is no loyalty toward God. Job, one of the richest men in the Near East, is the one who becomes a test case showing that Satan is mistaken. Perhaps not with everyone who believes God, but with Job. The price of this proof is high. But his end heals Job's wounds. An ending that is rather rare in real life. Many who suffer experience no deliverance like Job's in this life and in their suffering.

In the last chapter Job gets everything restored twice over. What Satan robbed him of, he gets back double. He lost 10 children; he receives 10 children after his suffering has ended:

Job 42:13 He also had seven sons and three daughters.

14 The first he named Jemimah, Turtledove, the second Keziah, Cinnamon Blossom, and the third Keren-Happuch, Little Horn of Eye Paint.

15 In all the land there were no women more beautiful than the daughters of Job. Their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers.

This special emphasis on the three daughters, indeed one that is virtually unique in the Old Testament, demonstrates the reversal of Job's fortunes. As special and extraordinary as this emphasis on the daughters is, so unique is the turn in Job's fortunes.

What Is Strange About It?

Well, that at this time of patriarchy, at a time when women were property and possessions like goods or things, two things stand out:

1. ***Only the three daughters are mentioned by name, not the sons.***
2. ***The daughters inherit just as their brothers do.***

It is Job himself who gives the names and allots them the inheritance, without favoring the brothers. In this one can recognize the great esteem of Job, the father, for his daughters, and this against the trend of his time and culture. It is only a supposition, to be understood not as proof but rather as an indication: did his sufferings change Job's view of women?

Like Abraham, and like us, he was a child of his time. He and we are shaped by the society in which we live. The view of women back then (as today) corresponded to the word of judgment spoken to Eve in Genesis 3:16: "Your desire will be for him (your husband), and he will rule over you." I have always said that this relationship of husband to wife and vice versa was not negative in every possible form, measured against how God had intended it. There were positive exceptions, but they proved the rule. Patriarchy is not a reflection of God's fatherhood over his family, but a worldly social structure of family and clan, in various forms on every continent, right into the conservative evangelical world.

In any case, Job sees something special not in the sons, but in the daughters.

We learn the most important lessons of life not through what is good and pleasant, but through suffering. Sufferings change us. But there is no certainty that they will always draw us toward God. Experiencing good as well as bad can draw us toward God, but it can also distance us from him if our reaction is anger and disappointment. Job emerges from his sufferings purified in a certain way. He is at peace with God, just as he is with his fellow human beings, beginning with his wife.

Today the view of many conservative Christians on the gender question is the hierarchical subordination of the woman, as well as the prohibition against speaking, teaching, and leading in the worship service. And the domestic sphere is considered her biblical field of activity. This view is so firmly rooted among today's pastors and elders or church leaders that something special has to happen for them to give up this worldly view and adopt the perspective of the Creator and Redeemer. No, I do not mean that this requires an individual story like Job's, only that a change of mind requires more than merely rearranging a formula. It goes much deeper, and it takes courage to rethink, to stand up for it, and to act accordingly.

By the way, it is not that men are not allowed to find women beautiful. After all, the three daughters were striking beauties, almost like three angels for Job. Men want to possess this beauty. They desire this beauty and are allowed to do so. But not as property freely at their disposal, but in order to protect it, to enjoy it, and to remain faithful to it. Just as Job himself lived (Job 31:1).

The Names

The names of the three daughters are unusual to our ears, but, as so often in the Old Testament, meaningful. Benedikt Peters explains them in his commentary on Job as follows:

"Verse 14. '***And he called the first ...***': We learn only the names of Job's daughters. The first was called ***Jemimah***, jəmîmâh, from jôm, 'day,' so roughly '***the one bright as day***'. That roughly corresponds to the Greek woman's name Helen, 'the brightly shining one'. After the night of suffering, a bright day of well-being has now dawned for Job. In line with an Arabic word root, the name can also mean 'dove'.

The second was called ***Keziah***, qəṣîʿâh, that is, the fragrant spice cassia (Exodus 30:24; Psalm 45:8). Keren-Happuch, qæræn happûk, is the horn in which stibium, women's black eye makeup, was kept."[1]

"Three names that point to his restored prosperity (Genesis 4:25; 5:29).

Jemimah - "daylight," after his "night" of misery; but MAURER, "a dove."

Keziah - "cassia," an aromatic herb (Psalm 45:8), in place of his offensive breath (19:17) and his sores.

Keren-Happuch - "horn of stibium," a color with which women dyed their eyelids; in contrast to his "horn defiled in the dust" (or: my pride and my honor lie in the dirt, Neues Leben [German Bible translation]) (Job 16:15).

The names also point to the beauty of his daughters."[2]

An Inheritance

"Verse 15. 'the inheritance among ... brothers' - a favor unusual in the East for daughters, who under Jewish law inherited only when there were no sons (Numbers 27:8), a proof of prosperity and unanimity."[3]

"And their father gave them their inheritance among their brothers. This action of Job's, which strictly violates the provisions of the Mosaic law (Numbers 27:8), but which has its parallel more in certain family customs of the Arabs than in specifically Hebrew practices, was meant to enable the daughters to continue living among their brothers even after their marriage; ***it is therefore mentioned as a sign of the brotherly and sisterly harmony that prevailed among these later children of Job as among the earlier ones (compare 1:4).***"[4]

In his commentary on Job, Benedikt Peters aptly writes: "When God calls us by name or gives us a name, he shows what we mean to him. Job's restoration is certainly a down payment on the restoration of all things at the end of the ages. Then women too will finally be raised to their rank, and they will finally receive the honor that has been denied them over the millennia of human history, the honor that men owe them: '***You husbands likewise, live with them according to knowledge, as with a weaker vessel, the female, and give them honor, since they too are co-heirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered***' (1 Peter 3:7). Men are to give their wives the honor that is

due to them as heirs, for '***their father***' has given them '***an inheritance among their brothers***' (compare Numbers 27:7)."[5]

In his male-dominated time, Peter considers it necessary to point out even to believing men that women now inherit just the same. Under the Mosaic law that was the case only when there were no brothers.

But in Christ there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28). And so it would be a blessing if Benedikt Peters, too, did not raise women only part of the way to the rank that in his opinion is due to them, but went the whole way. Imposing one-sided subordination on them, forbidding them to speak (to pray, preach, teach), and to lead, are precisely signs of the fallen world and not of the new creation, which is not still to come but has already begun with the church as the new humanity (Ephesians 2:15).

So much for Job's daughters, who stand out from the crowd like a lighthouse and were already in antiquity a pointer to how valuable women should be, and how equal to their brothers. If even back then, then all the more so today.

Notes

1. Benedikt Peters, Kommentar zum Buch Hiob (in German), Bielefeld: CLV 2020, p. 412.
2. Jamieson, R. / Fausset, A. R. / Brown, D., Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, I, Logos Research Systems, Inc., Oak Harbor, WA 1997, 344.
3. Jamieson, R. / Fausset, A. R. / Brown, D., Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, I, Logos Research Systems, Inc., Oak Harbor, WA 1997, 344.
4. Lange, J. P. / Schaff, P. / Lewis, T. / Zöckler, O. / Evans, L. J., A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Job, Logos Bible Software, Bellingham, WA 2008, 631.
5. Peters, Kommentar zum Buch Hiob, p. 412.