

ABSTRACT

A Faithful Man Suffering in Illness: Religious and Medical Perspectives on the Book of Job

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Many works have examined the sufferings of Job in the Bible, but few have focused specifically on Job's disease. To gain insight into the relationship between religion and illness, this thesis looks at Job as a religious man struggling with sickness. First, I use the text of Job to determine what physical and mental diseases could have plagued Job. Next, I conduct an interdisciplinary analysis on the relationship between religion and health in Job from medical, religious coping, psychosocial, neurobiological, and theological perspectives to consider why Job turns to God in illness and how religious beliefs and illness influence each other in Job. Lastly, I apply these findings to the contemporary world. Major conclusions include that Job could be diagnosed with depression, that hope in illness is found not in understanding the meaning behind disease but in reaching for a transcendent being or purpose, and that a biopsychosocial-spiritual model is integral to understanding health. The implications of this thesis are relevant to suffering patients, health care providers, scholars of religion and disease, and anyone supporting a loved one through illness.

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A FAITHFUL MAN SUFFERING IN ILLNESS:
RELIGIOUS AND MEDICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE BOOK OF JOB

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PREFACE

I have an innate desire to walk with those who are suffering and to help them find peace regardless of their circumstances. It is this passion that draws me both to the medical field and to the Book of Job. Throughout my undergraduate career, I have had pursued studies in both the sciences and humanities, as I believe that much can be learned from these individual disciplines, but more can be gleaned by combining knowledge from both areas. I will be entering medical school in the fall, and I hope to be a doctor who views and treats people wholistically and considers the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual influences on patient's health. All these interests guided me to pursue a thesis studying the relationship between religious belief in health. I realized that Job provided an in-depth record of a man of faith struggling with illness and could be an excellent resource for studying this relationship.

In writing this thesis, I have learned the great value of interdisciplinary studies considering both the science and humanities, and I have learned that health really is best understood through the combination of multiple disciplines. I will carry these lessons with me as I begin medical school this fall, remembering that the science I learn in class is important, but it is not all that I need to develop and practice as I learn how to provide the best possible care for my future patients. Because of this thesis, I will be more intentional about considering the perspectives of multiple disciplines when treating my patients, and I will make sure to be the kind of compassionate and humble listener Job so desperately desired.

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DEDICATION

To my loved ones and to all those who are on the verge of relinquishing hope

“And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

Romans 5:3-5, *NRSV*

CHAPTER ONE

Background and the Diseases of Job

Introduction

In the Biblical text, the story of Job is recognized as narrating the story of a man who is blameless and incredibly faithful to God but endures great illness and suffering. The beginning of the book highlights these traits of Job and shows him as a man who has many children and possessions, establishing him as the greatest man in the East. In a conversation with Satan, God recognizes Job's uprightness. Satan questions the sincerity of Job's loyalty to God based on God's material blessing of Job, so God gives control of Job's assets, family, and health to Satan. After losing much of his possessions and his family, Job is struck with great sickness and suffering. Job's friends come to mourn with and comfort him, but as his maladies continue, they turn against Job and accuse him of sinning and bringing suffering and disease upon himself. Job maintains his innocence, calling his friends "worthless physicians." The story ends abruptly as God interrupts, calling from a whirlwind, and asks a series of rhetorical questions showing his omniscience, sovereignty, and power, and Job recognizes his lack of knowledge and God's greatness. God is pleased with Job and condemns his friends, whom Job intercedes for and God forgives. God then blesses Job with children, twice the possessions he had before, and a long life.

Though Job is restored to health and wealth at the end of the book, most of his time in this story is spent in a state of illness and suffering. Satan first strikes Job in Job 1, and God does not restore Job until the end of the last chapter in Job 42. Therefore, Job

is experiencing adversity during every chapter of the book. Like a suffering medical patient, Job encounters much pain due to his illness, and life circumstances such as loss of monetary goods and relationships further contribute to his affliction.

Many works have examined the story of Job as one of suffering and faith, but this thesis will look at Job specifically through the lens of a suffering patient. The following pages will explain possible explanations for Job's illness and examine his experience as a suffering patient with comparisons to the narratives of other patients. The discussion will then turn to an evaluation of models of faith and illness through Job as a case study. Applications to modern life will also be considered.

Context

Historical and Literary Context

In examining Job's story, it is important to understand the historical and cultural context within which the Book of Job takes place. This will lead to a better understanding of Job's narrative and how its original audience might have reacted. It will also aid in comprehending why other characters in the story such as Job's friends respond as they do. First, the Book of Job itself is believed to be one of the oldest in the Bible, predating only by the first eleven chapters of Genesis. There are arguments about its exact placement, but it is generally agreed that Job's story occurred around or just after the time of Moses, placing it around the 13th-10th Century BCE, though some believe it occurred before the time of Moses (Andersen, 2008; p. 23; Walton, 2012, p. 23). Additionally, Job is not an Israelite but is instead from the land of Uz (Job 1:1). This makes him a foreigner, but it is still clear that he followed the God of the Israelites, and the main

audience of this book was made of Israelites. This makes understanding the Israelite culture incredibly important.

Additionally, the language of the book of Job is widely recognized as difficult to understand. The exact meaning of the Hebrew is unclear in many places, the text contains many rare words, and many scholars believe that the language used in Job is either a specific dialect of Hebrew, a mix of Hebrew with another language, or a translation from Hebrew (Andersen, p. 58; Walton, 2012, p. 24). Furthermore, some scholars believe that Job was completed over many generations due to its length and complexity, and some believe that those who copied down Job over the years made additions to the text (Andersen, 2008, pp. 44, 52). The format is a mix of most kinds of literature that can be found in the Old Testament, making the literary genre ambiguous, though Job is recognized as part of the wisdom literature of the Bible (Andersen, 2008, p. 26). The book is also poetic in nature, and some scholars believe that this indicates Job is meant to be interpreted as a metaphorical drama. The result of all of this is a Biblical text which scholars are unable to precisely date and have difficulty in understanding and translating (Walton, 2012, p. 23).

Similar to the narrative of Job's story, the text of Job itself and the way it was written makes it difficult to answer some of the basic questions the audience desires to ask, but just as the story indicates that the reader may be asking the wrong questions to obtain the truth at which the story is aimed, these details of writing of Job need not bother us too much. As John Walton says in his commentary on Job, "The short answer is that while we do not know the author or the date, this lack of information does not affect our interpretation of the book" (Walton, 2012, p. 23). What is true for this Biblical scholar

holds for the present examination as well. The struggles of illness and suffering are timeless, and people throughout history have looked to spiritual resources in their suffering. In examining the text of Job as the narrative of a suffering patient, the details of time and location do not alter the narrative of Job's struggle. At most, a context of *when* would help determine the exact cultural context to provide an understanding of why Job and his friends react to his illness as they do and how the originally intended audience might have received this text.

Cultural Context

In the Old Testament, healthy people are characterized by well-being, righteousness, obedience, strength, fertility, & longevity (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 11). The Old Testament does not use a word that directly translates to physical health, and even the word "body" appears infrequently (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 11). Instead, in the Old Testament "[health] is not concerned simply with the health of the body but with the whole human being of which the body is but the physical aspect" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 11). The Hebrew word used to describe health is *shalom*, which describes a life of wholeness and well-being (Hasel, 1983, p. 191; Wilkinson, 1998, pp. 11-12). In comparing this definition to modern day ideas of health, it aligns well with the definition of health first set forth by the World Health Organization in 1948: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" ("Constitution," 2021).

A common theme in the Old Testament is the sovereignty of God over all things, including health. As one author states, "all functioning life was considered under the care

and direction of YHWH" (Uitti, 1991, p. 49), YHWH being an English-language translation of the tetragrammaton, a Hebrew proxy term used for the name of the Lord. As such, the Lord is seen as the ultimate source of healing (Hasel, 1983, p. 197; Uitti, 1991, p. 49). Furthermore, in the text of the Old Testament, obedience to God is identified as protective for health¹ and disobedience to Him is identified as a cause of disease on multiple occasions.² In this light, it is not a great surprise that upon seeing Job in a diseased and suffering state, some of Job's friends urge him to identify and confess any sin that may have brought calamity upon him. In fact, most of the religious explanations for suffering from the time are heard through Job's friends, and some scholars hypothesize that the purpose of the speeches of Job's friends are to present all the current explanations for suffering and show them all to be ultimately inadequate (Andersen, 2008, p. 70).

In upholding Job as righteous, this narrative clearly disconnects Job's illness from any causative wrongdoing. There are other places in the Old Testament text that evidence against the idea that suffering necessarily means a sin has been committed, but Job makes the break in this association so clear that one commentator has suggested that "the purpose of the Book of Job...is to show that this teaching in the Jewish doctrine on hamartiology is wholly inadequate to the explanation of the facts of human experience" (Craig, 1899, p. 489). In other words, Job illustrates that the traditional Jewish idea that suffering is caused directly by a sin may apply in some cases, but it is not wholly

¹See Exodus 18:5, Deuteronomy 11:27, 1 Samuel 12:14, Psalm 34:12-14, 85:8, 199:65; Isaiah 48:18; Jeremiah 7:23, 42:6; Zechariah 6:15.

²See Exodus 15:26 Leviticus 26:25, Deuteronomy 28:56-62, 7:15, 28:21-8, 32:39; 2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chronicles 7:13, 21:18, 26:20; Psalm 39:11; Jeremiah 8:14.

sufficient to explain every case of human suffering. It is not that Job precludes any connection between suffering and sin. Rather, Job shows us that the relationship is not as simple as many believe, as highlighted in the Tyndale commentary on Job:

God's moral administration of the world requires that the rightness of right should lead to well-being, and the wrongness of wrong should lead to disaster. But the connection is not often obvious, and life is much more complex than this simple formula. Human suffering is more than a system of rewards and punishments. (Andersen, 2008, p. 70)

Understanding the concepts of health, disease, and suffering within an ancient Jewish frame of reference aids in effectively and properly considering Job's account of his illness and his friends' responses to it.

Examination of Job's Illness

Symptoms and Signs

In order to determine what syndromes Job could have experienced and to describe the nature of his suffering, it is important to know what the Biblical text describes about his experiences. In the text, Job is described as experiencing bowel problems, deep-set pain, a depressed and anxious mood, dysphagia, fever, halitosis, skin hyperpigmentation, insomnia, kidney pain, loss of appetite, periorbital dark circles, skin problems, and weight loss. A full list of these symptoms and signs³ and their Biblical references are

³Signs, such as weight loss, are objective and observable. Symptoms, such as kidney pain, are subjective and cannot be measured by others.

listed in the table below.⁴ The following section will cover Job’s physical symptoms and signs in greater depth. Job’s mental depression will be covered in the subsequent section.

Table 1

Symptom or Sign	Reference (all in the Book of Job)
Bowel Problems	30:27
Deep-set pain	16:6, 30:17
Depressed or Anxious Mood	2:12, 3:3-5, 3:11, 3:24-6, 6:2-3, 7:6-7, 9:21, 10:1, 30:15, 30:31
Dysphagia	7:19
Fever	30:30
Halitosis	19:17
Hyperpigmentation of the skin, necrosis	30:30
Insomnia	7:4, 7:14, 30:17
Kidney pain	16:13, 19:27
Loss of appetite	6:7
Periorbital dark circles	16:16
Sores, Pruritus, Boils, and/or Sores	2:7-8, 7:5
Weight loss	16:8, 17:7, 19:20, 33:21

Skin Symptoms and Signs. A major facet of Job’s symptoms is those affecting the skin. In the Biblical text, the first symptoms that Job experiences are “severe boils from the sole of his foot to the top of his head” which he scrapes with broken pottery (Job 2:7-8, *NRSV*). Later, Job says that his “skin hardens and oozes” (Job 7:5, *NRSV*). The word for

⁴Job is described as being poisoned in 6:4, but this seems to be a metaphor and not literal, so it won’t be covered here.

“boils” here is *Shechin*, and it is also used to refer to boils as one of the ten plagues of Egypt in Exodus 9, an affliction of boils the prophet Isaiah healed, and a type of leprosy in Leviticus 13 (Strong, 1890, “Strong’s Hebrew: 7822”). In the context of all these uses, boils could be taken to refer to literal boils or to skin inflammation more generally. Boils are infections of hair follicles and skin caused by a variety of bacteria and fungi, and they can appear anywhere on the body. They swell painfully as they fill with pus and dead skin, and they usually need to be opened and drained in order to heal (“Boils,” 2020). As he scrapes his boils, Job is “sitting in the ashes,” which were like a garbage dump outside of town (Job 2:8, *NRSV*). Sitting here would label a person as an outcast (Andersen, 2008, p. 102). From the beginning, Job is not only forced to bear pain, but he is also forced to do it as someone outcast and shamed by society.

Job also says that his skin “turns black and falls from” him (Job 30:30, *NRSV*). This darkening of the skin could be hyperpigmentation, which is a darkening of the skin as a result of excess melanin. Hyperpigmentation can be caused by a variety of sources, including skin diseases and injury to the skin, but it is not usually painful or a cause of concern (“Hyperpigmentation,” 2020). It has been proposed that this falling off of the skin is indicative of exfoliative dermatitis, which can occur with severe skin inflammation (Gorman & Kaplan, 1999). Exfoliative dermatitis can be caused by skin infections, cancer, and certain medications, and it is usually treated by removing the underlying cause of inflammation if possible and by using heated blankets, cool baths, petroleum jelly, and hydration. In exfoliative dermatitis, the skin reddens, scales, and falls off, beginning in patches and then spreading. This can also be accompanied by itching, fever, malaise, fluid loss, and secondary infections and can lead to issues with

temperature regulation, nutrition, and metabolism (“Generalized Exfoliative Dermatitis,” 2020).

Job’s darkened and peeling skin is also characteristic of gangrene, which is a serious condition caused by the breakdown and death of skin tissue caused by lack of blood flow or bacterial invasion of tissue. Gangrene causes the skin to turn a greenish-black color, and, depending on the type of gangrene, can cause the skin to shrink and dry or swell and drain with foul-smelling fluid. This is also often accompanied by fever and pain to the affected and surrounding areas. Gangrene can be caused by infection, injury, or some types of chronic diseases, and it can lead to scarring, amputation, or even death in serious cases. Currently gangrene is usually treated with antibiotics, removal of dead tissue, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, or vascular surgery (“Gangrene,” 2020).

Gastrointestinal Symptoms and Signs. Job also experiences gastrointestinal and digestive symptoms and signs. Job refuses to touch his food and says that it makes him feel ill, indicating a reduced appetite, which is medically referred to as anorexia (Job 6:7, *NRSV*). Any illness can cause a decreased appetite, with appetite usually returning after recovery from the illness, but an extended period of anorexia can lead to nutritional deficits (“Appetite- decreased,” 2020). Job also asks people to leave him alone until he swallows his spittle (Job 7:19, *NRSV*), which could be indicative of dysphagia, or difficulty swallowing. Occasional dysphagia is no cause for concern, but a persistent difficulty in swallowing can be painful and point to a gastrointestinal or neurological condition, and it can lead to not being able to eat foods for adequate nutrition (“Dysphagia,” 2020).

Job also says that his “inward parts are in turmoil and are never still” (Job 30:27, *NRSV*). The word here for Job’s “inward parts” is *meeh*, which can be translated in other parts of the Bible as bowels, referring to inner organs, or as heart or soul (Strong, 1890, “Strong’s Hebrew: 4578”).⁵ This means that Job could be suffering from physical discomfort of his inner organs or from emotional pain in his heart or soul. If the translation of “inward parts” is taken literally, Job could be suffering from gastrointestinal issues. There are many different types of gastrointestinal disorders resulting from multiple factors, including diet, stress, and underlying physical issues or diseases, and many can cause a great deal of discomfort (“Gastrointestinal Disorders,” 2020). Job experiences kidney pain, saying he feels like someone has slashed open his kidneys (Job 16:13, *NRSV*).⁶ Kidney pain usually occurs in the lower back and can progress to other areas caused by swelling or obstruction of the kidneys or urinary tract. Underlying conditions include kidney stones, a urinary tract infection, kidney infection, injury, or other diseases of the kidney (“Kidney Pain,” 2020). Job also presents with halitosis (Job 19:17, *NRSV*), or bad breath, which can be caused by bacteria in the mouth, infections, and kidney or liver malfunctioning (“What is Halitosis?,” 2020).

⁵See Psalm 22:14, Psalm 40:8, Isaiah 16:11, Jeremiah 4:19, Jeremiah 31:20, Lamentation 1:20, Lamentations 2:11.

⁶The Hebrew word used is *mererah*, which literally means “gall” and is usually taken to refer to the kidneys (“Strong’s Hebrew 4845”). This word only appears once in this verse of Job and nowhere else in the Bible. Job also refers to pain in his *kilyah* in Job 19:27, and this word is sometimes translated as kidneys but can also be taken to mean the heart or inmost parts (“Strong’s Hebrew 3629”). Additionally, in the Bible, the kidneys are often referred to as the seat of the conscience, emotions, and wisdom and were sometimes viewed in parallel with the heart and as mirror of the psyche (Enkoyan, 2005). Thus, it is possible that Job is referring here not to pain in his literal kidneys but to a psychological or emotional injury.

Other Physical Symptoms and Signs. Furthermore, Job experiences a variety of other issues, some of which could be associated with conditions previously mentioned. Job describes his nights as “long” and “full of tossing” (Job 7:4, *NRSV*). Insomnia can cause issues with memory and concentration and increase one’s risk for other diseases (“Insomnia,” 2020). This trouble sleeping likely results from the pain Job says he experiences both day and night, which could result from a diversity of causes (Job 30:17, *NRSV*). It can also lead to the dark circles that Job describes himself as having in Job 16:16 (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2020, “Dark circles under eyes”). Job says that his “bones burn with heat,” which could be indicative of a fever⁷ (Job 30:30, *NRSV*). Infections are the most common cause of fever and result from the body’s attempt to fight off disease (“Fever,” 2020). Lastly, Job describes himself as experiencing excessive “leanness” and loss of weight (Job 16:8,17:7, *NRSV*) and says that his “bones cling to [his] skin and to [his] flesh” (Job 19:20, *NRSV*). In addition to the aforementioned dysphagia, weight loss can be caused by a variety of medical and nonmedical issues (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2020, “Unexplained Weight Loss”).

Possible Physical Diagnoses for Job. From descriptions of these signs and symptoms, many previous authors have argued for a specific diagnosis of Job’s maladies. Pellagra, leprosy, syphilis, variola, and scabies have all been suggested as diseases explaining Job’s cutaneous symptoms (Brim, 1942, Appelboom et al., 2007; Gorman & Kaplan, 1999). Pemphigus vulgaris, elephantiasis, and cancer have also been proposed (Marco, 1995). There is even a genetically caused syndrome nicknamed Job’s Syndrome, also

⁷“Bones” can be taken to refer to the whole of the body, and the Hebrew word translated as “heat” here can also be translated as “fever” (“Strong’s Hebrew 6106,” “Strong’s Hebrew 2721”).

called Hyper IgE Syndrome, characterized by skin symptoms like those described in Job (Milner, 2018). However, due to one reason or another, these diseases all fail to paint a comprehensive picture of Job's illness, and many fail to explain the acute beginnings to Job's maladies.⁸

Possibly the most comprehensive diagnosis of Job was made by Gorman and Kaplan (1999), who proposed that Job suffered from arsenic poisoning. They pointed to the signs of boils (Job 2:7), exfoliative dermatitis (Job 7:5), weight loss (Job 16:8, 19:20, 33:21), hyperpigmentation (Job 30:30), fever (30:30), and dysphagia (7:19) and to the symptoms of pruritus (Job 2:8), insomnia (Job 7:4, 30:17), halitosis (Job 19:17), nocturnal deep-seated pain Job (30:17, 33:19), gastrointestinal disease, abdominal cramps, and hyperperistalsis Job (30:27), and loss of appetite (Job 33:20). They hypothesized that Satan, an experienced poisoner, may have given Job arsenic.

Resende et al. (2009) argued that the skin symptoms proposed here do not adequately represent the skin symptoms presented in Job, which are unspecific. They instead proposed that Job suffered from chronic renal failure, pointing to symptoms of pruritus, skin problems that could be indicative of uremic frost (Job 30:19), hardened skin, visual hallucinations (Job 7:13-14), visual alterations, sleep disturbances, symptoms consistent with peripheral neuropathy, digestive symptoms, and possible use of a hyponatremic diet. They propose that kidney failure could also be responsible for some of Job's psychological symptoms, as these are common in patients experiencing kidney disease.

⁸See Gorman & Kaplan (1999) for a fuller description of why some of these diagnoses fall short.

However, there are issues with all these specific diagnoses of Job. Any diagnosis that can be made of Job must be retrospective, relying entirely upon descriptions in the Biblical text (which, as had already been mentioned, has been difficult to interpret in places) and the cultural and historical context without any information from direct observation. Retrospective diagnosis, also called posthumous diagnosis or retrodiagnosis, of multiple historical and literary figures has been attempted; however, there are many arguments against this practice, and some authors have recommended against the acceptance of papers discussing retrospective diagnoses into journals for publication (Karenburg, 2009). Muramoto recognized two main challenges regarding retrospective diagnosis: the ontological and the epistemic. The ontological challenge considers the possibility that diseases and the understanding of them change over time, and the epistemic challenge considers how possible it is to empirically verify a disease retrospectively (Muramoto, 2014). Both of these issues are relevant to the discussion of a retrospective diagnosis of Job.

Furthermore, the purpose of making a clinical diagnosis for a living patient is often to further the treatment of that disease and gain a better understanding of what the next best step is for the patient. The purpose of examining Job's disease in this thesis is to evaluate how spirituality mediates his illness. It may be interesting to think of what exact disease Job may have had, but the possibility of treating him is far gone, and making a specific diagnosis does not aid in understanding Job's suffering in illness, as his experience is already described as fully as it can be within the text. In making a retrospective diagnosis, Muramoto suggested that it is best to keep it syndromic (recognizing a specific set of symptoms and signs indicative of a condition without

identifying a specific cause), as such a diagnosis is helpful in grasping what it may have been like to live with a person's illness. For the present discussion, a more general syndromic diagnosis will be helpful in understanding the nature of Job's suffering, relating his story to modern-day experiences, and understanding how faith mediates illness in his case. Additionally, one study found that a correct syndromic diagnosis could be reached 80% of the time from patient history alone, so this diagnosis may be the most accurate in looking at Job's case, where all we have is a textual description of the patient's history (Hampton et al., 1975). In light of the discussion above, one could say that Job presents with a disease that has signs and symptoms consistent with a skin disorder.

Job and Mental Illness. Job's mental symptoms must also be considered. Job's suffering with any of the aforementioned illnesses could lead to depression. Unlike retrospective diagnosis of a disease with physical symptoms, pathography, "the retrospective diagnosis of mental disorders using phenomenological and psychopathological analysis of written texts," is regarded as "well established and uncontroversial" (Muramoto, 2014). Thus, the text of Job can be examined for signs of mental illness. It is clear that Job experiences much loss, suffering, and grief, but further analysis is required to determine whether his symptoms meet the diagnostic criteria for depression. The DSM-5 criteria for Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) are outlined below, and occurrences of these signs that appear in Job appear in the adjoining column (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

To meet criteria for MDD, a person must experience five or more of the below symptoms nearly daily for a period of at least two weeks. These symptoms must include a (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of pleasure in daily activities.

Table 2

1. Depressed mood most of the day	3:20-24, 6:2-3, 7:6-7, 7:16, 9:27-28, 10:22, 16:16, 19:10, 30:28, 30:31
2. Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day	7:6-7, 6:11, 7:16, 9:21, 9:25
3. Significant weight changes or decrease/increase in appetite	6:7, 13:28, 16:8, 17:7, 18:13, 19:20, 33:21
4. A slowing down of thought/movement (observable by others, not merely subjective)	
5. Fatigue or loss of energy	3:26, 6:11, 30:16
6. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive/inappropriate guilt	7:7
7. Diminished ability to think/concentrate, indecisiveness	
8. Recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal ideation/attempt with or without a plan	3:3, 3:11, 3:20-22, 6:8-9, 7:15-16, 7:21, 9:21, 10:1, 10:18-21, 16:22, 17:13, 17:16

First episodes of depression are frequently caused by significant psychosocial stress, and Job's loss of family members and property and the loss of social respect due to suffering and labeling as a sinner would certainly qualify as such a stressor (Hegadoren et al., 2009). One would expect Job to grieve at his loss, and he certainly does. After Job loses his children and property and is inflicted with sores, his friends come to him:

“When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads” (Job 2:12, *NRSV*). An expression of grief is normal in response to the tragedy that Job has experienced, and Job’s grief is so severe that his friends can no longer recognize him.

However, there is a difference between grief and depression. Those experiencing grief and those battling depression may both display intense sadness and a withdrawal from normal activities. However, those with grief usually experience waves of sadness mixed with positive memories, usually maintain their self-esteem, and, if they have thoughts of death, the thoughts are more focused on joining a dead loved one than on ending one’s life due to feelings of worthlessness or inability to cope with the pain of depression (as is the case in MDD). These differences were acknowledged by the DSM-IV, but this bereavement exclusion was actually removed in the DSM-5 to ensure that cases of MDD would not be overlooked, though the decision is considered controversial (Pies, 2014).

There is abundant textual evidence to support a prolonged depressed mood in Job. Many chapters after his first expression of mourning, Job still says that his “face is red with weeping, and deep darkness is on [his] eyelids” (Job 16:16, *NRSV*). Job also describes his “vexation” and “calamity” as “heavier than the sand of the sea” (Job 6:2-3, *NRSV*). The word for “vexation” is *ka’ac*, which is translated in other locations as grief, anger, sorrow, or provocation and describes a deep frustration or worry, especially one caused by unmerited treatment (Strong, 1890, “Strong’s Hebrew 3708”). This could be taken as an expression of a depressed and/or anxious mood. As Job continues to endure great suffering without explanation, frustration and sorrow weigh more heavily upon him.

Job describes his days as “without hope”⁹ and thinks that his “eye will never again see good” (Job 7:6-7, *NRSV*). Job continues to display a depressed mood and display feelings of hopelessness (Job 19:10, 30:28, 30:31, *NRSV*).

Even comfort and good things only exacerbate Job’s misery: “Why is light given to one in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death, but it does not come, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they find the grave?” (Job 3:3, 3:20-22, *NRSV*). For Job, “light is like darkness” (Job 10:22, *NRSV*). Job also describes himself as “sighing” and “groaning” deeply and continually and living without ease or rest (Job 3:3, 3:24-26, *NRSV*).

Job’s pleasure in activities also decreases. When Job says, “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and come to their end without hope,” and “My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away, they see no good,” he expresses a fast passing of days without pleasure (Job 7:6-7, 9:25, *NRSV*). He voices nothing to look forward to when he comments, “And what is my end, that I should be patient?” and “I loathe my life; I would not live forever” (Job 6:11, 7:16, *NRSV*).

Furthermore, Job experiences changes in weight and appetite, which have already been discussed in the physical symptoms section of this thesis. Job also experiences fatigue, saying, “I have no rest” and asking, “What is my strength, that I should wait?” (Job 3:26, 6:11, *NRSV*). One could also argue that Job presents with feelings of worthlessness based on his comment, “Remember that my life is a breath” (Job 7:7, *NRSV*). However, Job also expresses, “I am blameless,” and reminds his friends, “I am not inferior to you,” on multiple occasions (Job 9:21, 12:3, 13:2, *NRSV*). These phrases

⁹The word for “hope” is *tiqvah*, which literally means “cord” and figuratively means longing, hope, or expectation (Strong’s Hebrew 8615).

would suggest that Job does not in fact display feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt.

Job does display a clear and recurrent preoccupation with death and repeatedly expresses a desire to die. Job curses the day he was born, saying, “let the day perish in which I was born,” and asking, “why did I not die at birth” (Job 3:3 and Job 3:11, *NRSV*). Throughout the book, Job continues to describe his misery and to wish that he were dead or was never born (Job 10:18-19). Later Job describes his “request” and “desire” as this: “that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!” (Job 6:8-9, *NRSV*). Furthermore, Job says that he “would choose strangling and death rather than [his] body” and says that he loathes his life (Job 7:15-16, 9:21, 10:1, *NRSV*). Job also fantasizes about his death, saying, “For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be” (Job 7:21, *NRSV*). These phrases all display a fixation on death and suicidal ideation.

The presentation of depressive symptoms also varies across cultures, genders, and ages (Kokanovic et al., 2008, Hergadoren et al. 2009). Instead of a slowing of movement, psychomotor agitation has been observed in ancient Sumerian and Hebrew cultures as associated with depression (Barré, 2001). Job does display this “wandering” Job 7:4, 15:23, and 7:11. Sleeplessness, loss of appetite, and intense loneliness have also been observed as indicative factors for depression in Hebrew culture, all of which can be observed in Job 30 (Kruger, 2005).

Job displays a depressed mood, loss of pleasure, fatigue, weight and appetite changes, and fixation on death. These five symptoms would meet the DSM criteria for depression if they lasted for at least two weeks. Additionally, psychomotor agitation

could be considered a culturally-relevant sixth symptom of depression. Since there are no explicit time markers in Job, it is difficult to know how long these symptoms last. However, the length of the narrative seems to suggest that many days have passed, possibly many weeks, months, or even years. It was certainly enough time for Job's friends to mourn with him and then tire of comforting him and instead accuse him of sin. If the length of Job's depressive symptoms is indeed least two weeks, then one could diagnose him with depression.

The Suffering Patient

It may be easy to brush over these symptoms and signs while disregarding the human experience of both physical and emotional pain that they cause. It is easy to see from earlier references to the Biblical text the great suffering that Job's illness causes.¹⁰ For Job, his suffering is caused not only directly by the signs and symptoms of his illness but also by other events that exacerbate his suffering and by factors in his personal life that change because of his illness. For example, Job's friends repeatedly accuse him of sin because of his illness, which only increases Job's misery. The same can be said of many people throughout history and in the modern day who are battling a disease.

The *NIV Application Commentary* on Job describes one modern-day experience of a patient who suffered greatly and found similarities between herself and Job. This book includes the narrative of a woman named Kelly who suffered from a vehicular accident which she says "broke my left collarbone (in addition to shattering the right), punctured my liver and spleen, broke all the bones in the left side of my face, and

¹⁰Job's suffering is evident throughout the text and can be found almost any time Job speaks. See, for example, Job 7.

paralyzed one fourth of my body” (Walton, 2012, p. 89). Failed surgeries, high medical bill costs, and inability to function as she once had because of this life-changing incident led Kelly through intense suffering that caused her to question her faith and to wish for death (Walton, 2012, p. 139). She also encountered many people who hurt her with possibly well-intentioned but ignorant speeches about the cause of her illness or messages of her immediate healing they had “received” from God. In this struggle, Kelly learned to cope with her illness and continued to turn to God in her suffering, even though her illness had complicated her faith (Walton, 2012, pp. 196-8). Just like Kelly, many patients look to spiritual resources in their suffering. Job provides a rich narrative of the spiritual struggles of a man suffering through illness and is therefore an excellent resource for examining how a relationship with God may ameliorate the suffering of a patient.

Methods

The present thesis examines Job and his illness from a variety of perspectives. The Biblical text of the book of Job will be used as a basis for understanding the story, thoughts, and actions of Job. To gain a fuller understanding of the Biblical text, historical, literary, and cultural context will be considered alongside commentaries on Job and on health in the Old Testament and Ancient Near East. Commentaries will be chosen from varied but recognized sources.

When referring to the Biblical text in English translation, the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)* will be used. This translation aims to be as literal and word-for-word as possible and is frequently utilized for scholarly study of the Biblical text

(“New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) - Version Information,” 2020). The meaning of words in the original Hebrew dialect will be considered when this is helpful for clarification using Strong’s concordance, which is an exhaustive concordance of the Bible indexing every word from the King James Version.

Job’s symptoms and signs are considered through a close reading of the Biblical text of his story and clinical descriptions of the causes, characterization, and outlook of these signs and symptoms. Previous studies presenting hypotheses about his illness are considered. Clinical descriptions and patient accounts of these illnesses are also examined. In analyzing the relationship between religious belief and health in Job, medical, religious coping, psychosocial, neurobiological, and theological perspectives are consulted individually, and their findings are combined for a more wholistic view. These sources were chosen to gain a diverse and deep view of this relationship.

For this thesis, relevant literature and scientific studies were found using carefully crafted keywords searches in the Baylor University library database and other online databases for finding scholarly texts. Both foundational and more recent scientific studies are consulted for a comprehensive but updated review if thought in the literature. When referring to clinical symptoms or diseases, only authoritative and established sources of medical information, such as educational resources from top hospitals and national health organizations, are considered in order to ensure accuracy of information.

CHAPTER TWO

Modeling Religion and Illness in Job

Introduction

As proposed in the previous chapter, Job can be seen as a suffering patient whose faith in God mediates his experience with illness. This idea reinforces contemporary research on models of illness, as evidence suggests that religious beliefs impact the experience and outcomes of illness. Religious practices and beliefs are associated with a longer lifespan, lower rates of suicide, decreased anxiety, less substance abuse, lower rates of depression and faster recovery from depression, greater well-being, a more optimistic outlook, a greater sense of life purpose, and higher social support (Koenig et al., 2004). Additionally, religious people have lower rates of chronic pain and fatigue and lower levels of markers for stress (Baetz & Bowen, 2008; Koenig et al., 1997). Religion is widely used to mediate illness, and one study found that the most common non-drug management of pain in hospitalized patients was prayer, though the effectiveness of prayer in improving health outcomes is debated (Jors et al., 2014; McNeill et al., 1998).

The question remains of how religious beliefs engender these effects. Multiple models of the relationship between spiritual beliefs and illness have been proposed. To understand them, it is important to distinguish what is meant by “spirituality,” “religious belief,” and “health.” Religion is usually recognized as an organized system of beliefs and practices, while spirituality is more of an individual way to connect with the world and find purpose or peace (Koenig et al., 2012). For the purposes of this thesis, sources using perspectives on both areas combined will be considered, as many studies consider

the effects of spirituality/religiousness as a single factor. Since Job followed the Hebrew Deity, the application of these sources will be to the relationship between religion and health.

The other part of this relationship is health, but what is meant in this thesis by health? During the discussion of Job's illness, physical and mental health were examined separately with the acknowledgment that these two facets of health interact and mutually influence each other. Looking at how religious belief directly influences physical health would be difficult, as that would require assessing Job's symptoms and tracking their improvement as a direct result of God's intervention. There is no suggestion of divine healing in the text, and any evidence related to such healing could not be empirically examined, only trusted in as an act of faith. Thus, the direct effects of religion on physical health will not receive much attention in the following pages.

Models of mental health and religion can be considered in relation to Job more easily. The World Health Organization defines mental health as "more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities" and as a "state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" ("Mental Health: Strengthening Our Response," 2018). Mechanisms explaining the effects of religion on mental health are more readily available and more feasible to analyze in the case of Job. Since mental health has been shown to affect physical health, these indirect effects of religion on physical health can be considered by looking at how religion impacts mental health (Ohrnberger et al., 2017).

A variety of disciplines speak to the question of how religious belief impacts health, each promoting different perspectives on this issue. Among these perspectives are theories of religious coping, as well as perspectives invoking theological, neurobiological, psychosocial, and medical concepts and mechanisms. Some of these perspectives overlap, but each also brings a unique view to bear on the complicated relationship between religion and health. The following pages will be dedicated to looking at each of these perspectives more closely, pondering what each one can tell us about the relationship between religion and health in Job's life and considering how each is or is not represented in the story of Job. Examining a variety of perspectives will lead to a more holistic understanding of the relationship between religion and illness in Job and provide a basis for applying these perspectives to modern-day suffering patients.

Medical and Public Health Perspectives

As previously mentioned, medical research has found a link between religious belief and health. In medical and public health research, mechanisms popularly proposed to mediate the relationship between spirituality and mental health include health behaviors,¹ coping styles, locus of control, beliefs and attitudes, and social support mechanisms (Chatters, 2000; Cornah, 2006; Koenig et al., 2004; Park, 2005; Puchalski, 2001).

Religion can help people cope with the stresses of illness and thus lead to an improved quality of life. (The theme of religious coping is be discussed later in its own

¹Although one could assume health behaviors about Job from his cultural context, this context is unclear, and the text itself does not describe specific health behaviors of Job, so this mediating factor will not be included in this study of Job.

section.) In terms of locus of control, an event can be seen either as externally caused and uncontrollable or as something that an individual has a measure of power over. An internal locus of control, the sense of power or control over a situation, is usually associated with better mental health outcomes. Religion may help people to reframe events perceived as uncontrollable and interpret the event as less stressful or more meaningful, such as by providing the means to see the uncontrollable event as something that can be overcome with the help of a caring, omniscient, omnipotent God. It is important to note, though, that this religious reframing can also be negative in some cases, such as when one associates an uncontrollable event with a capricious deity. This negative framing leads to worse health outcomes (Cornah, 2006; Park, 2005).

Religious beliefs can also impact health by fostering hope and positive thinking. Beliefs are incredibly powerful, as evidenced by observations that about 35% of people respond to placebos during clinical trials (Cornah, 2006). In these cases, the belief that one will get better has observable and advantageous results. Thus, positive beliefs can have a large influence over improving a patient's physical and mental well-being. Many religious belief systems encourage positive thinking or reframing and help members reach towards a greater sense of hope, which may produce similar benefits. Religious beliefs can also lead to higher self-esteem and less anxiety, both of which are favorable to health (Puchalski, 2001).

Furthermore, religion often takes place within a community, and religiousness is generally associated with greater social support. Social support has been shown as protective for health, so participation in a religious social community may improve health (Reblin & Uchino, 2008). On the other hand, deviance from the norms or expectations of

a religious community may negatively affect health (Chatters, 2000). Overall, medical research has found religion to be protective for health, though religion can have a positive or negative influence on the health of an individual based on their beliefs, circumstances, and application of religious belief.

Medical and public health research suggest that Job's faith may have impacted his health through coping, locus of control, beliefs and attitudes, and social support. An internal locus of control describes a personal belief that a one has control over one's own life, and an external locus of control describes the belief that one's life is controlled by factors outside of one's control. According to locus of control research, religious beliefs promoting an internal locus of control would be beneficial to his health, but religious beliefs that lent themselves to an external locus of control would worsen Job's health outcomes. The question here is whether the text suggests that Job's belief in God made him feel that the situation was more under control or more uncontrollable. In Job's case, he believed that his God was in control, but just could not comprehend why God was directing his life along the path of suffering.

Faith also impacts health through beliefs and attitudes. It was established in the first chapter that Job displays many negative and hopeless thoughts characteristic of depression. It is important to determine whether Job's faith in God furthers these negative feelings or helps him to foster more positive beliefs. In some cases, Job does find hope in looking to God: "Even now, in fact, my witness is in heaven, and he that vouches for me is on high" (Job 16:19, *NRSV*). However, there are other times when it sounds like Job is

blaming God for a loss of hope: “He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone, he has uprooted my hope like a tree” (Job 19:10, *NRSV*).²

Just like any human, Job has a range of emotions and thoughts, so it is important to look at a bigger picture of how faith impacts Job’s hope instead of only focusing on every small moment. A few lines down from where Job says that God uproots his hope, he comments, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God (Job 19:25-6, *NRSV*). Earlier, Job also says, “For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease” (Job 14:7, *NRSV*). If Job is like a tree in having his hope cut off in the present world, this verse reveals that it will surely spring forth again in another life. Upon looking at the text as a whole, it is clear that Job’s losses of hope occur when he is focusing on his immediate circumstances and his temporal and physical life.³ His hope in his earthly life is uprooted, and he has no control over his current circumstances, but he still retains hope in an eternal life in Heaven and an assurance in the good God he will see there.

It is not clear from research whether hope must have a certain object to be beneficial to health. In other words, it is not evident whether the type of hope that improves health is placed in an assurance that circumstances will improve in this life or in an assurance of a better life to come. All that has been observed is that religion can lead to hope and positive beliefs that improve health (Park 2005; Puchalski, 2001). Job has no hope for the present life but holds on to positive beliefs about his life after death. However, the future is the future, whether it takes place in this world or another. and

²See also Job 14:19-22.

³See also Job 13:14-16.

Job's ability to see a future hope no matter the circumstances may help him form positive beliefs and improve his health.

In terms of social support, the text makes it clear that Job receives support early in his illness, but it diminishes over time, and his friends turn against him.⁴ As mentioned in the previous chapter, a widely held belief during the time of Job was that suffering was a result of sin. In response to Job's suffering, his community shunned him as a sinner, and his friends continually admonished Job for the sin they believed he had committed but was unwilling to confess. Medical and public health research have shown that condemnation from a religious community often worsens health, so Job's community would likely negatively affect his health (Chatters, 2000).

Religious Coping

Pargament first proposed the idea that religion can frame responses to stress and provide avenues to meaning, restraint, and closeness with God and others, especially when stressors test the limits of our personal capability. Pargament said that people look for significance in times of suffering, and religion is one of the ways people search for meaning. Coping helps a person to mitigate or manage stress, and coping can be defined as "religious only when the sacred is woven into the person's aspirations and responses" (Pargament, 1997, p. 32). Religion helps a person create, maintain, and transform meaning in the face of stress, and those who have a more strongly religious orientation are more likely to use religious coping (Pargament, 1997; Pargament et al., 2001).

⁴See Job 16:1-3, 16:7-10, 16:20, 17:2-16, 17, 19:5, 19:13-19, 30:1-10. This is nowhere near an exhaustive list, and there are ample examples of Job's loss of community as a result of his illness and the religious culture of his time throughout the text of Job.

Pargament suggested that religion serves five key functions in the response to stress by providing meaning, a sense of control, comfort, intimacy (with others and with a higher power), and transformation (giving up old and finding new sources of value and significance) (Pargament et al., 2000). This idea of religious coping has continued to develop over time and can now be defined as “religiously framed cognitive, emotional, or behavioral responses to stress, encompassing multiple methods and purposes as well as positive and negative dimensions” (Wortmann, 2013).

Illness is a stressor, and religious coping is associated with a greater quality of life in cancer patients, those with advanced diseases, and those with chronic illness (Cohen et al, 1995; Roger & Hatala, 2018; Tarakeshwar et al., 2006). Park (2005) studied college students coping with adversity and proposed that religion helps people cope with suffering by serving as a meaning-making framework. Within the structure of religion, people can attribute suffering to a loving or punishing God, allowing people to connect their experience with a greater meaning (e.g., This suffering is from a loving God who will help me through this, and I will grow; or, this suffering is a result of my wrongdoing and is a sign from God that I need to change my life). Additionally, Park suggested that religious beliefs may emphasize positive aspects of stressful situations, allowing for a more optimistic outlook on adversity. Park said that suffering could cause disruption of belief frameworks and lead to more immediate stress for those with religious beliefs, but positive appraisal of the situation because of a religious framework would decrease long-term stress.

This is all contingent on associating positive aspects of suffering with a god. Pargament proposed that there are two types of religious coping: positive and negative.

Better health outcomes come from positive religious coping that involves a “secure relationship with a transcendent force, a sense of spiritual connectedness with others, and a benevolent world view” (Pargament et al., 2001). Those who use negative religious coping and attribute their suffering to an evil religious figure or an abandoning God are found to experience worse health outcomes (O’Brien et al., 2018; Pargament et al., 2001).

This mechanism suggests that Job would experience better outcomes and stress coping if he had positive beliefs in God that helped him evaluate the situation in a hopeful light, and his suffering would be worsened if he associated his predicament with negative aspects of God. There are occasions when Job responds to his suffering by recognizing positive character traits of God: “With God are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding” (Job 12:13, *NRSV*). As has already been discussed, Job’s faith in God helps him evaluate his situation to find hope beyond his human life. This would qualify as positive religious coping.

However, there are also moments that Job associates his suffering with negative aspects of God. Job says that God has a heavy hand, has abandoned him, has become cruel to him, is not bringing him justice, targets him, and terrifies him (Job 16:11-14, 19:7, 23:2, 23:15-16, 30:20-1). Job 23:8-10 may provide a good summary of how Job thinks about God and his situation: “If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold” (*NRSV*). Job feels that God is absent in his suffering, but he also recognizes that this feeling is shortsighted and that God is in control and will ultimately prove good in his life. Thus, Job applies negative religious coping in some moments of distress, and

he does waver in his confidence, but he is able to reconsider his situation and employ positive religious coping mechanisms.

According to the principles of religious coping, positive religious coping would help Job find meaning in his suffering, feel a sense of control over his suffering, find comfort and meaning from intimacy with God amidst his pain, and transform his thoughts and values to come to terms with his experience. As has already been discussed, Job's illness causes him to feel distant both from others and from God. However, Job continues to speak to God even when God does not answer, which implies a sort of trust and intimacy in their relationship. After God speaks to Job, Job says, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you," which shows that a greater level of intimacy is reached (Job 42:5, *NRSV*). However, this greater closeness to God is not developed until after God speaks to Job, and during his suffering Job feels distant from God. Additionally, Job's spiritual beliefs sometimes cause him despair, but they also bring him hope at times. Through his faith in God, Job is able to transform his focus on present suffering and loss of hope into more positive thoughts about Heaven.

One significant point is that Job's religious tenants do not help him find meaning in his suffering and illness. Job constantly searches for meaning in his adversity, and much of his agony comes from his inability to find meaning to his suffering. In response to the cultural belief that suffering means sin and the blame of his friends, Job wonders "How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin. Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy?" (Job 13:23-4, *NRSV*).⁵ Job cannot think of a sin he has committed, and God does not speak to Job until the end of the

⁵See also Job 7:20-1, 10:2, 19:22.

book. Once God does speak, he does not answer any of Job's questions. Instead, he proclaims his power and sovereignty and reveals Job's ignorance.⁶ Job repents and says, "I have uttered what I did not understand" (Job 42:3, *NRSV*). Job recognizes that God's knowledge is superior to his, and the message of the text seems to be that looking for meaning in suffering is a fruitless approach. Job should not be asking why but recognizing God's greatness. In the case of Job, religious belief does not provide a framework for meaning in suffering.

Job does utilize religious coping in response to his illness and suffering, and the effects are sometimes positive and sometimes negative. His faith contributes both to despair and to comfort at different times, brings him eventual but not immediate intimacy, and helps him recognize that he is not in control, but God is. He tries to use religious coping to find meaning, but he is not able to, and this increases his sense of suffering until he realizes that his questions are asked in ignorance.

Psychosocial Perspective

Scholars and writers in other fields also have weighed in with psychosocial explanations. From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, religious belief must have been preserved because it provided a reproductive advantage. But what is this advantage? Sociologists and psychologists, from Emile Durkheim to Crystal Park, have proposed that religion helps people make meaning of and cope with suffering.

Psychological studies have found that finding and restoring meaning in the face of stressful situations is incredibly important (Park, 2010). Biologist Richard Dawkins

⁶See Job 38-41.

(Dawkins, 2016) proposed that God is a “meme” who benefits society by providing answers to questions about transcendence and comfort during difficulties, even though he is only a product of the imagination. Karl Marx suggested that humans project an image of themselves onto a supernatural figure by creating God to compensate for problems without really addressing them. Marx sees this as a form of disillusionment, and his theory attempts to account for “the persistence of the social conditions of suffering and to the comforts of holding to illusions” alongside the continuation of religion (Little, 2016).

The opinions of Dawkins and Marx could account for a story in which Job uses religion to mentally resolve his problems even though his physical situation does not improve. In the text, Job’s concern continues to build until God speaks to Job. At this point, Job recognizes his own ignorance and repents even though no reason for or resolution to his suffering has been provided, which could be seen as compensation for his problems without resolution of them. However, God does then rebuke Job’s friends and restore Job’s health and material possessions, so the problems are physically resolved after Job accepts God's continued sovereignty even in the absence of improving circumstances.

Weber (2013) suggested that religion functions as theodicy, an explanation of why evil and suffering exist. According to Weber, Job would look to God because this resolved questions about why he was suffering despite being a faithful servant. Similarly, in *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger (1967) says that religion resolves the threat of instability by providing a fixed and consistent framework with a supernatural agency at work. When no explanation of distressing events (such as illness) is available through human logic, religion offers an explanation by divine will. Ultimately, both of these

explanations fall short in explaining Job's actions because, as previously discussed, his religious belief offers no explanation of why he is suffering. Job does indeed ask about why suffers; however, God does not answer questions of theodicy. Rather, he seems to ignore Job's many questions and instead proclaims his power and sovereignty. Contrary to Weber's theory, Job seeks out God to explain his suffering, but he continues to believe in him despite God's refusal to answer the question of theodicy.

Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (2000) proposed the "rational choice theory of religion" or "religious economy," the idea that people use religion to maximize rewards and minimize costs. Stark and Finke say that the rewards people most want, such as eternal life and the end of suffering, are scarce or unavailable, so people use religion to make and exchange "compensators" for rewards that could not be gained in any other way (Little, 2016). For example, someone might accept an incurable illness in the present in exchange for the promise of eternal happiness in Heaven.

According to Stark's theory, Job would accept his disease and its accompanying suffering if he could gain an eternal life of peace and happiness in Heaven. When calamity first comes upon Job, he does accept his suffering.⁷ However, as Job's pain continues, his situation becomes more difficult to endure, and he questions God about it. In Job's last words before God speaks, he says, "O that I had one to hear me!...O that I had the indictment written by my adversary!" (Job 31:35, *NRSV*). Here, Job is still feeling unheard and wondering what he has done to deserve his present circumstances, which does not sound like an acceptance of them. However, Job does display acceptance in the form of being resigned to death and believing that he will have a new life in Heaven: "I

⁷See Job 2:10.

know that you will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23). Job’s pain because of his illness and calamity is so great that he cannot be satisfied in his current circumstances or ignore his troubles, but he does accept that his pain may continue until death, and he still believes that God has good for him after death. Additionally, after God directly addresses Job, he repents for questioning God,⁸ which displays an acceptance of his current circumstances. Job’s situation soon improves, so he does receive the reward of ended suffering, and the text even says that “the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10, *NRSV*). In line with Stark’s hypothesis, Job is willing to live with his suffering because he has no control over it, and he believes that he will be met with the reward of a new life after his life on earth ends. He is prepared to make the exchange but is not forced to, as God restores Job to health and prosperity.

Other studies have found that spirituality leads to higher levels of patience, defined as “the propensity of a person to wait calmly in the face of frustration, adversity, or suffering” (Schnitker, 2012, p. 263). Studies have suggested that self-transcendence helps in developing virtues (such as patience), and religion is one the most effective ways to foster self-transcendence. According to this evidence, Job’s belief in God may have helped him to experience self-transcendence and to develop greater patience. Job does look beyond himself and to God continually throughout the text, even when he does not understand God’s works. However, he is also preoccupied with his present hardship, and it would be a stretch to say that Job waits calmly in his adversity. It would be better to say that Job displays endurance or perseverance than patience,⁹ but these are also virtues

⁸See Job 42:1-6.

⁹James 5:11 in the New Testament refers to Job’s virtue. Some translations, such as the KJV, translate this word as “patience.” However, this word is probably better translated as “endurance,” as in the NRSV.

which the self-transcendence of religion can cultivate and virtues which help in the recovery from mental disorders such as depression (Newman, 2019).

Neurobiological Perspective

The field of neurotheology studies neural correlates of religious belief.

Understanding findings in the field of neurotheology may illuminate the neurological basis for Job looking to God and relying on him during his illness. Newberg and d'Aquili studied monks, nuns, and others in during religious meditation and experiences of religious transcendence and found that repetitive rhythms, deep contemplation, and other common religious practices can cause increased activation of the hypothalamus, increased activity in a part of the frontal lobe that is in charge of concentration, and deprivation of input from an area of the parietal lobe that determines the limits of the self. The result of all of this is increased concentration, an almost simultaneous experience of both ecstasy and peace, and a sense of unity with one's surroundings or with the rest of existence¹⁰ (Newberg & d'Aquili, 2002).

According to Newberg's theory, approaching God in prayer or meditating on God in his suffering could have caused increased hypothalamus activation and led Job to a greater state of peace and unity with God. As indicated in other sections of this thesis, a

¹⁰Readers may be interested to know that Newberg does not automatically assume that a scientific explanation for religious behavior is evidence that religious experience is purely in the mind. Instead, he argues that since people are naturally wired for religious experience, it makes sense that a God exists who created humans to be able to experience him. It is important to recognize that while Newberg's theory is based on neurobiological evidence, his jump from neurological evidence to a religious supposition is not scientifically based. Scientific hypotheses must be able to be disproved, and the existence of God cannot be proven false, so Newberg's neuroscientific observations cannot explain God or fully account for human interactions with God.

greater sense of peace and unity with the divine can lead to improved health outcomes. In the text, Job repeatedly presents his complaints to God, but it is unclear whether this was done in a meditative way that aligns with the behavior Newburg observed. As previously noted, Job is sometimes comforted in looking to God, but looking to God also increases his vexation at times.

Multiple studies have tried to locate a “God spot,” a distinct part of the brain responsible for religious belief. However, most studies have concluded that no single such place exists. Rather, multiple parts of the brain work in unison during religious experiences. Abnormal electrical activity, temporal lobe and limbic system as well as epileptic seizures are associated with strong faith, visual and auditory hallucinations of supernatural figures, and out-of-body feelings (Shukla et al., 2013). Persinger (1983) suggested that “God” is just a description of emotions and interactions based on a neurological accident caused by this abnormal activity. However, some have suggested that this electrical activity follows, not precedes, religious experiences. While temporal lobe transients can lead to auditory and visual hallucinations, authors have pointed out that it is unlikely that every person who has ever described having a religious experience had epilepsy.

It has also been suggested that spirituality may have been genetically preserved because it provided a reproductive benefit. Dean Hamer found that the VMAT2 gene sequence, which is involved in the transport of neurochemicals called monoamines that link to a positive outlook and self-transcendence, may be partially responsible for religious experiences (Little, 2016). Thus, Job’s genetic makeup could have led to the

expression of neurotransmitter involved both in his religious experience and in his ability to experience self-transcendence and a positive outlook on his suffering.

One study found reduced brain volume in the orbitofrontal cortex (OFC) of those with higher intrinsic religiosity. These researchers also noted a negative relationship between OFC volume and depressive symptoms, meaning that those with a lower OFC volume may have more severe depressive symptoms (Pelletier-Baldelli et al., 2014). These two observations indicate that brain abnormalities leading to depressive symptoms may also be associated with religiosity. The structure of Job's brain could have led him both to have higher intrinsic religiosity and to experience more severe depressive symptoms. However, this relationship is complicated, and this perspective does speak to how Job's belief in God may have helped him persevere through depression.

In reviewing these studies, it seems that due to the complicated nature of both religion and neuroscience, neurobiological studies fall short of explaining religious experience generally, and Job's experiences in particular. This point is further exemplified in one review of studies on the neurobiological correlates of religion, which commented, "The fact that R/S [religion/spirituality] is observed through such a widespread distribution in the brain further strengthens the notion that R/S is a multifaceted construct that should not be separated from its biological, environmental, and social contexts" (Rim et al., 2019). Neurobiology can explain part of the relationship between religion and spirituality and Job, but other perspectives must be considered along with it to attain a complete and accurate understanding.

Theological Perspectives

Brief Overview of Religious Perspectives on Suffering and Illness

Suffering is a common aspect of human life, so it is no surprise that the major religions address the theme of suffering. The Buddhist perspective says that suffering exists as a result of various causes, and an effort should be made to prevent and relieve all types of suffering through a rightly conducted life and mindfulness. There is no value in suffering itself, but suffering is necessary for higher attainments, as freedom from suffering is necessary for liberation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Additionally, some Buddhists believe that a person focused on spiritual things can respond to sickness more peacefully and that pain will eventually be eliminated once a state of *nirvana* is attained (“Health Care and Religious Beliefs,” n.d.). Buddhists might say that Job should take special care to speak, think, and act rightly and lean deep into mindfulness to gain a greater understanding of his illness. They would also say that Job could reach greater peace in his illness if he focused on the spiritual and that Job could achieve liberation if he endured his suffering well. As has been previously mentioned, Job has difficulty reaching a state of peace in his suffering. Often, when Job brings his complaints to God, he is focusing on his current circumstances, and he does seem to derive more comfort during times he is thinking of his new spiritual life after death. Perhaps Job could have attained a greater sense of peace if he had focused more on spiritual principles and less on the pain he was experiencing because of his illness.

From a Hindu perspective, suffering is inevitable, linked to the consequences of *karma* for one’s actions, can come from both human and nonhuman sources, and ends after escaping the cycle of *samsara* (birth and rebirth). Many Hindus ascribe the cause of

sickness to *karma*, either resulting as a consequence of one's own thoughts and actions or from actions in a past life ("Health Care and Religious Belief," n.d.). As a result of believing that suffering is a natural part of life that must be endured, a Hindu perspective on pain may welcome suffering instead of trying to relieve it (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Hindus might suggest that if Job could not think of a bad action in this life that led to his suffering, he should consider the possibility that his illness was the result of evils committed in a past life or evil from a non-human source. This insight may have helped Job, as the text says that Job was righteous and that the actions of Satan were the cause of Job's suffering (Job 2:1-10). A Hindu perspective might encourage Job to accept his suffering, whatever its cause, and know that he would one day find an end to his suffering after being released from the cycle of *samsara*.

From an Islamic perspective, suffering is seen to happen with the permission of an omniscient and omnipotent God. People are sometimes responsible for their own suffering, but suffering can also just happen (still with God's permission). Suffering is ordained, temporary, and potentially purposeful in producing virtues such as patience or leading one to submit to God's will. Muslims also see their bodies as gifts from God that should be used in a proper way to attain salvation, and illness is frequently seen as a trial from God (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Additionally, Muslims believe that there is a cure for every illness, even if the medical treatment is not yet known, so they encourage praying for healing in addition to seeking medical care ("Health Care and Religious Belief," n.d.). Muslims would claim that Job's illness was a trial ordained by God and could have happened without any relation to Job's sin, and this idea is supported by the text of Job in which God allows Satan to attack Job (Job 2:1-6). A Muslim perspective would say that

Job should practice *Islam* (lit. submission) to God's will and use his suffering as an opportunity to develop patience and discipline. This theology is supported by the fact that God does not answer Job's many questions but rather responds to Job by proclaiming his sovereignty, after which Job recognizes his ignorance and submits to God's will.

Jewish Perspectives

There is a rich and complex history of Jewish thought surrounding suffering, all of which cannot be covered here. In the Babylonian Talmud, suffering is seen as undesired and unhelpful in some areas of the text: "Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward" (*Talmud Bavli Berachot*, 5b). In many places the Talmud presents suffering and illness as punishments for sin.¹¹ In other places, however, the rabbis also acknowledge the existence of "sufferings of love" as a form of purification (Kohler & Lauterbach, 2011). Illness is thus seen as ordained by God, not necessarily as punishment but as a means to eventually draw one closer to a religiously observant life. Therefore, regardless of perspective, sickness should be approached both with the acceptance of God's will and with a recognition of a responsibility to serve as an agent of compassionate healing toward others, which can be complicated (Reisner, 1990).

Since Job followed the Hebrew God, an understanding of Judaism sheds light on why Job constantly felt the need to argue his righteousness and question God about why he was experiencing suffering despite living in a way that was honorable to God. Being in the middle of such pain and being surrounded by those who emphasized the part of Jewish theology that saw illness as a punishment for sin, Job may have not realized that

¹¹Much of this has already been discussed in the "Cultural Context" section in Chapter One of this thesis.

his sufferings might not indicate sin and could be purposeful for purification. As part of the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Job also informs Jewish theology surrounding suffering and illness, indicating firmly that suffering is not always a punishment for sin, the righteous do suffer, God's workings are beyond the human moral realm, and the one who suffers should look to God and recognize his greatness and character to find a reward in fellowship with God.

Christian Perspectives

Christianity, Health, and Suffering. There are many branches of Christianity, but most take a perspective on suffering that focuses on Christ. For example, Roman Catholicism sees a mirror between Christ's suffering and human suffering (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Christ endured death on a cross to redeem all suffering, and when humans take on his suffering they also partake in his redemption and have an eternity of peace and joy to look forward to in Heaven. In Anglicanism, suffering is seen as a perversion and disruption (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Human suffering is a sign that something is not right with how things stand and should prompt us to look to God and to Christ's model of suffering while knowing that no suffering exists in Heaven. Since Jesus was a healer, Christians have a duty to prevent and relieve suffering, but suffering can also be useful in achieving the redemption of humanity.

Regarding the Book of Job, some Christian commentaries point out that, in the story of Job, any search for understanding why suffering occurs returns empty:

[The Book of Job] does not offer a reason for suffering and does not try to defend God's justice. It does not answer the 'why question' that we are so prone to ask when things go wrong. Instead, we are to trust God's wisdom and, in the process

to conclude by faith that he is also just.... It does not tell us why Job or any of us suffer, but it does tell us a bit about how we should think about God when we are suffering. (Walton, 2012, p. 22)

For Christians, the Book of Job cannot teach us about why good people get sick. It cannot explain how God is just in difficult situations. It can only tell readers that God is just even when human reason fails to understand. It asks readers to have faith like Job and to learn from Job's revelation of God's justice and supremacy and to trust God in the midst of suffering.

Aquinas. A Medieval perspective on Job comes from theologian Thomas Aquinas. In commenting on Job's original affliction with disease, Aquinas says, "There remained then to show for perfect demonstration of Job's virtue that his intention was not bent crooked for the health of his own body, and therefore divine judgment is invoked again to prove this" (Aquinas, 2002, "The First Lesson: Satan Tried Job in His Flesh"). In other words, Job and his bodily health are not an indicators of his goodness or wrongdoing. Rather, Job's disease is a test and an opportunity for his commitment to God to be demonstrated.

When Job falls ill, he sits in a dung heap outside the town as an outcast and scrapes his diseased skin with a shard. From this evidence, Aquinas notes that the following:

In this the text shows that [Job] did not restore himself to health in a pleasant place, or in the gentleness of straw or with some pleasant smell, but he more used their opposite. This can have happened in two ways: either because after he was struck by the Lord, he voluntarily afflicted and humiliated himself even more to more easily obtain mercy, or because he lost everything he had, and so he could not afford suitable cures for himself. (Aquinas, 2002, "The Second Lesson: Job Humbled")

In response to Job's illness, Aquinas observes that Job, as a man grounded firmly in faith in God, may have isolated himself and used harsh treatments either because he thought that these acts would highlight his hardship and increase the likelihood that God would have mercy on him and heal him or because his destitution had left him no other option. It is either a cry for help or a resignation to the only available choices after great material loss in a society who made the diseased into outcasts. Job may walk to the dung heap and pick up a shard to scrape his skin, but that does not mean he wants to be in that situation. His mental state and social circumstances impact the physical situation in which he places himself after becoming sick, and this physical situation in which he places himself affects his illness experience.

Aquinas also acknowledges two battling natures within Job as he deals with his illness, saying, "Reason alone apprehends what good can be expected in some misery. The sensitive power does not perceive it. For example, the sense of taste perceives the bitterness of the medicine, but reason alone enjoys the purpose of health" (Aquinas, 2002, "The First Lesson: Job Curses His Life"). It has already been noted in other sections of this thesis that Job fluctuates between hope and despair. Perhaps part of the reason for this is that his rational mind knows trials can be useful for purification and growth, but his physical and emotional pain only point to his misery. His disease is directly in front of him as something unwelcome, and thinking of the potentially positive aspects of his suffering requires a long-term focus, which is difficult to achieve. Additionally, if Job is a patient receiving bitter medicine, then God is the physician. In this way, Job is also a spiritual patient, and God allows discomfort to come upon Job so that he can become even more spiritually informed and healthy than he was before.

After God speaks to Job, Job verbally recognizes his foolishness and says he can now see God (Job 42:3-5). As a result, Aquinas posits that Job “truly has grown both from his suffering and from divine revelation. The more one considers the justice of God, the more he sees his own fault” (Aquinas, 2002, “Chapter Forty Two: Job’s Repentance”). The bitter medicine has worked effectively, and now that Job has now seen God and knows him more fully, he recognizes that his spiritual treatment was working for good. A reader might be tempted to ask why God brought about growth through such a bitter medicine, but the lesson of the text is that God’s thoughts and justice are beyond that of humans and questioning his methods does us no good. In the end, what we know is that Job was healed physically and spiritually, and he sees that good has come from his pain. Since his physical suffering brought him spiritual revelation, Job’s reward is not only in this physical and temporal life but also in the spiritual and eternal realm of Heaven.

Expositor's Bible. The Expositor’s Bible is widely respected and is frequently used for modern scholarly exposition of the Biblical text from a mainstream evangelical perspective. From the beginning, this commentary recognizes that Job’s suffering came not from his sin but as a trying test willed by God through the hands of Satan: “The test of sore disease is more trying than loss of wealth at least. And, besides, bodily affliction, added to the rest, will carry Job into yet another region of vital experience. Therefore, it is the will of God to send it” (Watson, 2012, p. 71). Here, illness is presented as a facet of suffering that is especially trying. The commentary also makes it clear that Satan acts as an intermediary who brings illness upon Job and then disappears from the story. However, God allows Job’s suffering to be enacted through Satan, so “God is acknowledged to have sent the disease as well as all the other afflictions to His servant”

(Watson, 2012, p. 71). Disease is part of the test of Job's faithfulness. Though it is not necessarily the case in every situation, this commentary proposes that for Job, physical disease has a spiritual origin in effect caused by God.

Though Christian theology would say that an omnipotent Divine will would be sufficient for causing illness, this is not all that factors into Job becoming sick. In speaking about Job falling ill, Watson comments, "In sympathy with the exhausted mind, the body has become languid, and the change from sufficiency of the best food to something like starvation gives the germs of disease an easy hold" (Watson, 2012, p. 72). An undernourished body and a mind exhausted by grief and desolation make it easier for disease to overcome Job's body. Thus, Job's sickness has spiritual, mental, and physical causes.

Just as the origins of Job's disease are multifaceted, so too are the ways in which he suffers from it. In a comment on Job 6:4,¹² Expositor's points out the following:

We need not fall into the mistake of supposing that it is only the pain of his disease which makes Job's misery so heavy. Rather is it that his troubles have come from God; they are 'the arrows of the Almighty.' Mere suffering and loss, even to the extremity of death, he could have borne without a murmur. But he had thought God to be his friend. Why on a sudden have those darts been launched against him by the hand he trusted? (Watson, 2012, p. 120)

The physical pains of his illness are not all that Job suffers. His deepest pain springs from belief that his own God, his protector and friend, has turned against him. Since Job has learned that suffering comes from sin and cannot find himself guilty of sin, he has no other option but to believe that God has become his adversary. Once he feels abandoned by God and by his friends who have accused him of sin, Job is left without social and

¹²For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me. (Job 6:4, *NRSV*).

spiritual support. His illness weighs upon him physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Like any other person, Job had a set of beliefs, and his illness challenged his constructs, introducing not only a physical but also a mental and formational challenge. This perspective recognizes Job as a biopsychosocial-spiritual being, a perspective which is currently being recognized as important in health care.

Even though Job recognizes that it is God who willed his illness and he feels emotionally hurt by this, he still has enough trust built into his relationship with God to be totally honest with God. Job asks God what he has done to offend God and bring suffering upon himself, wonders why God will not forgive his transgressions and ease his pain if he has sinned, and confesses that he believes he will soon die if his pain does not end (Job 7:20-21). According to Expositor's, "More daring words were never put by a pious man into the mouth of one represented as pious; and the whole passage shows how daring piety may be. The inspired writer of this book knows God too well, honours Him too profoundly to be afraid" (Watson, 2012, p. 134). Even in the depths of his suffering, Job has such a firm belief that he serves a God who is not vindictive and whom he can trust, so he is not afraid to voice his doubts and his pain. In illness, God is someone with whom Job can entrust with an expression of his anguish.

Job's pain and confusion are further deepened by friends who turn against him in his afflictions. Job's friends relentlessly accuse him of hidden sin, yet Job knows he is not guilty. This causes Job to say that God "mocks at the calamity of the innocent" (Job 9:23). "Thus, after the arguments of his friends, Job is compelled to see wrong everywhere, and to say that it is the doing of God" (Watson, 2012, p. 146). After listening to his friends, Job becomes increasingly bitter towards God. He is weakened by his

suffering, and illness lays out an opportunity for the unmasking of the ways in which Job and his friends do not see God rightly. Since in his weakness Job is surrounded by a community with limited understanding who fills him with harsh and inaccurate words, Job's friends increase his susceptibility to inaccurate belief and sway Job's faith, therefore heightening his distress and anguish. An unsupportive community worsens Job's social and spiritual pain in his illness.

In the end Job sees the righteousness of God, and all he once had is restored double fold. Like many Christian theologians, Watson sees Job's suffering and redemption as something that points towards Christ: "Christ has to overcome not only doubt and fear, but the devastating godlessness of man, the strange sad enmity of the carnal mind. His triumph in the sacrifice of the cross leads religion forth beyond all difficulties and dangers into eternal purity and calm" (Watson, 2012, p. 404). Just as the righteous Job suffered socially, physically, and spiritually through his disease, Christ the sinless man and Savior took upon himself all the pain and suffering of humanity and bore it to death on a cross as those who once admired him surrounded him with cries of hate. And as Job was redeemed two-fold, Christ in the Christian tradition conquered death was raised again to life, forging a path for the redemption of all humanity. In his time, Job only knew of a coming Savior, but looking back we can now see the whole story and how Job points to Jesus. Thus, a Christian perspective on the Book of Job teaches that suffering patients who relate to Job can fix their eyes upon the righteousness of God, the sufferings of Christ, and the promised deliverance from all misery that Christ provided through his sacrifice.

Maimonides

Maimonides was a Medieval Jewish physician, theologian, and philosopher. Since his background includes a couple of the perspectives discussed in this chapter, his views may help to show one way these disciplines can combine to inform a multidimensional view of the suffering patient and spiritual belief. His *Guide for the Perplexed* aims to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with Jewish theology. In this work, he states that God can commit no evil, defines evil as privation, and describes three types of evils: those coming from having a body that may become diseased, those coming from humans committing evils against one another, and those men bring upon themselves as a result of their sin. He also writes on Job, positing that the responses of Job's friends represent varied theological and philosophical responses to suffering, most of which ultimately fall short. Job himself believes he is suffering unfairly because, like his friends, he associated suffering with preceding sin. Maimonides proposes that Elihu's advice to Job to look to nature and to acknowledge God's sovereignty is correct and that the whole point of Job is that human understanding is limited and that we must look to God and acknowledge his sovereignty amid our suffering.¹³

This lesson is the principal object of the whole Book of Job; it lays down this principle of faith, and recommends us to derive a proof from nature, that we should not fall into the error of imagining His knowledge to be similar to ours, or His intention, providence, and rule similar to ours. When we know this we shall find everything that may befall us easy to bear; mishap will create no doubts in our hearts concerning God, whether He knows our affairs or not, whether He provides for us or abandons us. On the contrary, our fate will increase our love of God. (*Maimonides*, 1904, p. 303)

¹³Interestingly, Maimonides describes a realization of God's sovereignty as the same result of studying the natural sciences (Gesundheit, 2011).

Maimonides proposes that looking to God amidst suffering and acknowledging his supremacy and sovereignty eases the burden of suffering and increases one's faith. In response to the commentary of Maimonides, Eisen noted that though Maimonides acknowledges the existence of physical suffering, he identifies Job's ability to find relief from suffering as possible at a psychological but not a physical level:

Most interpreters seem to agree on Job's ultimate lesson. Job learns that one can guard oneself from suffering; however, that protection is not physical, only psychological. This psychological immunity from suffering is achieved when Job perfects his intellect, contemplates God, and detaches himself from the material concerns of this world so that he is entirely caught up with the pleasure of focusing all his thoughts on the Deity." (Eisen, 2004)

According to Eisen, Job's faith cannot relieve his physical suffering, but provides psychological respite and recovery. Applying ideas of Maimonides and Eisen to the view of Job as a suffering patient, one sees that faith cannot protect one from physical suffering or lead to physical recovery. Rather, the belief in a great and all-powerful God whose knowledge transcends any human's understanding allows a person to detach from the physical aspects of suffering and from the manifested results of illness and find a sense of psychological peace or recovery. It is important to note here that Maimonides establishes first that God is good and that not evil can come from him. If God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and fully good, the realization of his character brings peace. The same might not be true if one believed God was omniscient and omnipotent but not good. Thus, what can be learned from Maimonides about Job as a suffering patient is specific to the character of Job's God. The psychological relief from suffering cannot necessarily be expanded to apply to any spiritual belief, only that in a God who is good and possesses transcendent knowledge.

Maimonides also writes of “physicians of the soul” and says, “go to the wise men—who are physicians of the soul—and they will cure their disease by means of the character traits that they shall teach them, until they make them return to the middle way” (“Laws Concerning Character Traits,” p. 31). In applying this line of thought to Job, one could see Job’s physical sickness leading to a sickness of the soul that must be treated by wisdom. In looking to God, he looks to the divine source of all wisdom, and this teaching heals the disease of his soul.

Maimonides was also a practicing physician, and one of his writings describes his approach to the treatment of depression for a Muslim patient with manic-depressive disorder. In this patient encounter, Maimonides acknowledges his patient’s spiritual beliefs and his and his patient’s shared belief in God. The only treatment for depression at the time was alcohol, and Maimonides offers this treatment option to his patient, acknowledging that this treatment conflicts with his patient’s religious beliefs but maintaining that his role as a physician is to inform the patient of the best available option and allow his patient the free will to choose his preferred line of action (Gesundheit et al., 2008).

In Maimonides’ patient encounter, he acts in accordance with the belief that faith may provide psychological but not physical relief to a patient. He uses faith to find common ground with his patient and acknowledges the sovereignty of God that may provide some psychological benefit to his patient. However, when it comes to treating the physical disease, he uses a medical treatment, and he realizes that his patient's faith has the potential to interfere with his patient’s physical recovery (if one truly believed that alcohol was a good treatment for depression). If Maimonides were to apply the same

logic to treating Job's depression, he would likely speak to Job about their common belief and encourage him to look to God for some psychological respite, but he would also recommend a physical treatment for Job's disease.

In reading the theological writing of Maimonides and observing his interaction with a patient, his understanding of the relationship between medicine and faith is intriguing. He separates the spiritual and physical sides of a person while still acknowledging that both aspects are part of a whole person. He treats physical diseases with medical treatments and uses spirituality more as a form of encouragement than a form of healing. Much of what Maimonides says aligns with the perspective of religious coping. The psychological relief derived from faith is contingent upon belief in a God who possesses positive traits. The other perspectives help expand the view of Maimonides because they extend psychological benefits to physical benefits. They suggest that faith is protective not only to one's mind but also to one's health and body. They might contradict Maimonides' theological perspective yet map well onto how he practices as a physician who addresses both the spiritual and physical sides of a patient.

Analysis

In analyzing all these perspectives on religion and illness in the Book of Job, it is clear that people and suffering are each multifaceted, and we cannot expect to learn everything by looking through the lens of one single perspective. Though they arise from different ways of thinking, much of what these disciplines have to say overlaps and speaks to three main questions: (1) Why does Job turn to God in his illness?, (2) How do Job's religious beliefs influence his experience with illness?, and (3) How does illness influence Job's religious beliefs?

Why does Job turn to God in his illness?

The medical, religious coping, and psychosocial perspectives all proposed that those experiencing disease may look to religion to find meaning in their suffering. The text of Job makes it clear that Job turns to religion to find meaning in his suffering but is unable to find a religious meaning for his suffering.¹⁴ Jewish and Christian analyses of Job both suggest that “why am I suffering?” is the wrong question for Job to ask. These perspectives suggest that turning to God in illness is a good thing to do; however, this should be done with a posture of recognizing God’s righteousness and omniscience over all things instead of asking for a revelation of meaning. Meaning may eventually be realized, but from a theological perspective it is not the proper purpose of turning to God in one’s illness. In the middle of his sickness, Job turns to God for meaning and relief from his pain, but by the end of the story he realizes that his disease is an opportunity to press into a deeper realization of God’s character.

These perspectives also relay that Job looks to God for intimacy. The religious coping perspective suggests that those experiencing hardship look to a higher power for intimacy, and the perspective of Christian theology submits that Job’s bold questioning of God indicated that Job had a deep level of intimacy with God in his suffering. Generally, isolation increases the pain of suffering, so it makes sense that Job would seek a relationship with his God in his situation, especially since his social circle turns against him.

But does religion help Job to achieve a greater sense of intimacy as he experiences disease? I would posit yes. Job’s words indicate that he does not always feel

¹⁴See more about this discussion under the “Religious Coping” section of this thesis.

close to God emotionally, but the way he interacts with God demonstrates closeness in their relationship. With his friends and his wife turned against him, Job cannot find intimacy with the humans who surround him, and he physically draws himself away from people by sitting on a dung heap (which would be outside a town). Therefore, Job would have intimacy with no one if it were not for his relationship with God, and he addresses his concerns to God throughout his illness, so his relationship with God is the closest one he has. Since Job feels distant from God, it must be admitted that he may not find intimacy to the full extent he desires, but his relationship with God nevertheless increases Job's intimacy.

How do Job's religious beliefs influence his experience with illness?

Religion creates a framework that can lead to both positive and negative beliefs about the world. From a medical perspective, religion can help foster hope and positive thinking and lead to positive beliefs by transforming an external locus of control to an internal locus of control. According to the view of religious coping, positive religious beliefs lessen pain and negative religious beliefs worsen it. Psychological evidence indicated that religion could lead to self-transcendence and the development of virtues such as patience. Newburg's neurological studies suggested that deep religious focus can activate the hypothalamus and lead to a sense of peace and unity. Other neurobiological evidence suggests a link between religious belief and neurochemicals involved in self-transcendence and a positive outlook. However, another neurological study found a link between brain changes in depression and in those with a strong religious commitment.

All these results combined clearly illustrate that the relationship between religious belief and disease is complicated. I think that Job's faith in God gives him someone to look to as a source of steadiness when all else around him is uncontrollable. Since illness challenges his religious beliefs about suffering, Job's framework causes him to despair and wonder if his God has turned against him, which worsens his suffering. However, since Job believes in a good God, he is able to find hope in God, which is reflected in the thinking of religious coping and of Maimonides. Thus, Job's religious beliefs worsen his pain more immediately but give him long-term relief. This is similar to the results Park found when studying college students facing adversity.

Part of this is related to whether Job's thoughts are directed towards the present moment or towards the future. Rodney Stark introduced the idea that religion could be used to exchange compensators, such as present suffering for eternal life. Part of positive religious coping is the transformation of beliefs about what is important. For Job, religious beliefs relieve his suffering by helping him transform his focus from his immediately pressing pain to the hope that waits for him in the future, even if that hope lies in Heaven after he dies. This is evident in Job 30:23, which is further discussed in the sections of psychosocial perspectives: "I know that you will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living" (*NRSV*).

How does illness influence Job's religious beliefs?

Since Job fell ill despite being righteous and much of the culture of Job's time believed that suffering was the result of sin, Job's disease provided the opportunity for the development of a more complex view on religion and adversity. It is because of his

suffering and his illness that Job begins to question God and Job's friends present varying theologies of suffering. The fact that these ideas do not hold up to Job circumstances¹⁵ stirs an anguish inside of Job that recognizes the inadequacy of all available human views on religion and suffering. In line with Jewish and Christian commentary on Job, Job realizes after God speaks to him that a righteous God may allow a good man to suffer, and the proper response is not to despair or to question God but to press into a deeper realization of God's sovereignty. This is an evident shift in Job's religious framework. Job's transformation is also in line with Islamic belief and psychological studies that suggest suffering can produce virtue as well as the part of religious coping about transformation of belief.

Religion is also a social institution, and social influences are prevalent in Job, so it is important to consider how the social aspects of Job's religion impact his illness. The medical and theological perspectives touch on how social factors play into the relationship between faith and suffering in Job. Job defies the expectations of his faith community by claiming to suffer righteously, and he does not receive social support. According to the medical perspective, deviance from the norms of a religious community negatively affects health. The Expositor's commentary discussed the social burden that Job's illness brings upon him, worsening his suffering. The only social respite for Job is his relationship with God, though this relationship is complicated. Though a supportive religious community can be protective for health, Job's religious community negatively impacts his experience with sickness.

¹⁵As noted previously, Maimonides would argue that Elihu was accurate in his advice to Job, but the more general consensus is that there are inaccuracies in the ideas of all of Job's friends. Furthermore, Job himself cannot accept any of the frameworks his friends present, thus leading to the transformation of his belief, which is what we are examining here.

Conclusions of Analysis

Examining Job's illness through the lens of multiple perspectives clarifies the relationship between religion and disease in his story. To be fully understood, Job's disease must be seen as a biological, psychological, social, and spiritual entity. When he is afflicted with infirmity, Job looks to God for meaning and social support. Job is challenged in finding these things, worsening his pain. Job's disease challenges his beliefs about God, and his community furthers his religious confusion and despair. Though religious beliefs worsen Job's experience with illness in some ways, the hope for the future and the trusting relationship with the divine that religious belief provides Job help him endure incredibly trying conditions. In the end, Job's disease provides a path for him to transform his beliefs about God and strengthen his religious convictions

CHAPTER THREE

Contemporary Applications

Generalizing Ideas from the Individual Narrative of Job

In distinguishing between nomothetic and ideographic knowledge, nomothetic knowledge looks at generalizations or laws that can be applied to all people (Cobb et al., 2012). This approach is closely aligned with the scientific. Since it is more generalizable, this type of knowledge may be more helpful in informing us about how Job's suffering can be applied in our own lives. However, explaining brain chemistry to a patient suffering from depression does not negate that person's experience of suffering. There is more to every story than what can be generalized. Suffering is also something deeply personal, and even two patients whose suffering looks similar on paper have a very personal suffering narrative that cannot maintain its full quality when generalized. Nevertheless, we can examine common threads in these narratives while still recognizing that each narrative is an individual and personal experience. In fact, one important part of walking with someone through suffering is recognizing their personal suffering narrative. We can analyze Job's story through the lens of general laws, and we can use his story to try to create or support general laws, but this does not tell us all that can be known about a suffering patient. Nevertheless, lessons from Job can be applied to help understand more about religion and illness in our modern world.

Implications for Religion and Health

Many disciplines previously mentioned recognize that religion is often used to find meaning in the face of disease. Job himself looks to God to understand the cause and progression of his disease and finds no answers. It has been found that those who are ill and suffering turn to despair when they cannot find meaning and that finding meaning ameliorates their anguish (Boston et al., 2011). Job receives no comfort in seeking the meaning of his suffering itself, but he does find peace in recognizing the righteousness of God and the good waiting for him in Heaven. Thus, The Book of Job indicates that looking for the immediate purpose of or reasons for suffering while experiencing it is a disappointing and fruitless approach. Instead, recognizing a transcendent meaning to one's life, especially a spiritual one, may be helpful.

The Book of Job also demonstrates the importance of a biopsychosocial-spiritual approach to health. A biopsychosocial model is supported by many clinicians, but it has also received criticism (Papadimitriou, 2017). Furthermore, some have suggested that the spiritual dimension should be included in the model as well, but many are unsure what exactly the spiritual dimension encompasses or how to incorporate it into care, resulting in a spiritual aspect of care that is generally not well developed. An understanding of the many aspects of health, including the spiritual, is important to effectively treating patients, as patient suffering has been found to “arise due to healthcare actions that neglected a holistic and patient-centered approach to care” (Burglund et al., 2012).

When examining the text of Job, we see that Job's suffering originates largely in physical disease, but spiritual agony and lack of support from his spiritual community are what elevate Job's suffering to a level that is unendurable. Job attempts to find meaning

in his sickness through a religious framework, and his inability to do so significantly worsens his suffering. His friends' advice from a place of spiritual misunderstanding worsens Job's pain and leaves him without a community to support him. When he is left without human support and understanding, Job looks to God for a friend and to the promise of a future life in Heaven for hope.

As has already been shown in this thesis, religious beliefs impact Job's psychological health and his access to social support in illness, and it is possible that religious beliefs directly impact his biological health through something like the placebo effect. Religious belief plays a large part in Job's experience with disease, and his sickness cannot be understood apart from its spiritual contribution. The spiritual dimension is complicated, but its impact on the illness of Job provides a strong case for the need for religion to be incorporated into the understanding and treatment of disease. The Book of Job cannot instruct on how exactly to do this for each individual, but it demonstrates the importance of pursuing a greater understanding of spirituality and illness and incorporating it into our understanding of health and medical treatment.

Implications for End-of-Life Care

The primary goals in palliative care are to reduce suffering and improve quality of life. Existential and spiritual suffering are common but relatively poorly understood and neglected conditions in dying patients (Boston et al., 2011). A review of suffering in palliative care concluded that, when non-physical aspects of suffering were recognized in medical treatment, they were "understood as pathological symptoms, to be reduced by therapeutical interventions as much as possible," even though psychological and spiritual

anguish are and expected and appropriate responses to the circumstances of hurting and dying patients (Hartogh et al., 2017). The authors were conflicted about how to view non-physical aspects of suffering since palliative care aims to reduce suffering, but psychological and spiritual anguish were normal and possibly necessary parts of the process of working through pain.

Job, like a patient in palliative care, experienced pain in many ways as he expected death. His negative emotions were appropriate responses to suffering. Even so, can we not still view them as entities that should be reduced? Obviously, we cannot go back and reduce the suffering of Job, but answering this question helps in informing how we should view non-physical aspects of suffering (especially religious aspects) in others.

In addressing this question, it may be important to acknowledge the place of God and consider his actions. If God is the Great Healer, why then does He not relieve Job's suffering in his illness? This is the same question that Job asks God, and since God does not directly answer this theological question in the text, it cannot be answered here either. But just because God does not heal Job does not mean that a health care provider following God should not seek to relieve the suffering of the sick. There are many times where God heals people in the rest of the Biblical text, and a major part of Christ's ministry was to remove sickness. From a theological point of view, the text of Job says that God is sovereign, and his ways are beyond our understanding. Therefore, He is just even in allowing Job to suffer, and through his pain, Job is able to develop a more accurate knowledge of God, which is to his ultimate benefit.

In terms of the human supporters present in the story, God condemns Job's friends for speaking out of ignorance, which is what led them to fail in their support of

Job and to worsen his suffering. From this information, we can conclude that Job's friends had the responsibility to support him in his suffering while acknowledging that God has allowed pain to occur as part of his sovereign plan for Job's life and that Job's response is natural.¹ Thus, The Book of Job suggests that humans are to understand that suffering may be an appropriate part of the plan of a sovereign God and that man may not be able to completely remove suffering, but he should still do his best to relieve the suffering of others.

Another interesting point brought up in the article was that the non-physical aspects of suffering are often seen as symptoms of physical suffering. This seems to imply that if the disease disappeared, so too would the non-physical aspects of suffering. Yet, diseases can bring out social or existential tensions that do not subside if an illness resolves. Perhaps this is because illness just provides an opportunity for these tensions to be revealed and drawn out.

In Job, it is true that Job's friends do not condemn him until his disease progresses, but they would not have maligned Job if they had a proper understanding of God and the situation. Job's illness causes him to question God, but if he fully understood God, illness would not have brought up these questions inside of him. This is shown by Job recognizing his ignorance and accepting God's ways after God speaks to him but before God heals him. Illness raises spiritual questions and social tension, but it is only because these issues and inaccuracies in belief already exist, bubbling under the surface. Therefore, Job's disease and suffering provide an opportunity for these issues to come to

¹This is further demonstrated in Job 42:8 in which God says to Job's friends, "...for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done. God does not condemn Job for his suffering, but he does reprimand Job's friends for criticizing Job out of an inaccurate view of God.

light and be corrected, and it is possible that without suffering these problems would not have the opportunity to be revealed, worked through, and resolved. In this way, suffering, though difficult, is a transformative experience in a beneficial way. Applying this idea to end-of-life care, the suffering of a patient may help them transform their life narrative to gain a healthier or more accurate understanding themselves and the world.

Implications for the Treatment of Depression

The moral stigmatization of depression remains a large issue in society, is a barrier to people seeking treatment for depression, can worsen the severity of depression, and reduces the quality of life for a person experiencing depression (Brijnath & Antoniadis, 2018; Brown Johnson et al, 2014; Connor et al., 2010; Greener and Moth, 2020; Scrutton, 2015; Snell-Rood & Carpenter-Song 2018). As established in Chapter One of this thesis, Job can be viewed as a man struggling with depression. Job's friends assume that his disease and depression are indicative of sin, which is a negative moralization of his illness. God clearly condemns this view and even claims that is blasphemous (Job 42:7). The text of Job is a reminder that depression is not sin and that it is dangerous for anyone to treat it as such.

In religious communities, there can be a similar issue of believing that a struggle with depression indicates a lack of faith and that if one just prayed harder and believed in God, the depression would go away. From a theological standpoint, the text of Job contests this view. After God speaks to him, Job says, "I have uttered what I did not understand," and God responds to Job's friends saying, "for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:3, 42:7, *NRSV*). In his struggle, Job still

speaks rightly of God, but he speaks rightly out of a place of limited understanding. Job had faith in God, but his knowledge was incomplete, which is just a part of being human. God does not condemn the man struggling with depression for his lack of obedience but Job's healthy friends who speak wrongly and hurt Job out of their lack of understanding. While the confines on Job's knowledge cause him despair, he believes that God is good and has hope waiting for him, even if it is in Heaven, and his depression is not associated with a lack of faith.

Implications for the Doctor-Patient Relationship

Job's friends can be seen as healers who are unable to recognize Job's needs, blame him for his "failure" in becoming ill, and fail to be empathetic. This relationship was examined in a paper that proposed that Job's friends fail to recognise their own fear of helplessness and their own defensiveness (Kutz, 2000). The authors concluded that this same problem is common in many modern physicians and said that since God reprimands Job's friends, failures of doctor-patient relationships, according to the Book of Job, can be seen as a form of ethical malpractice needing correction.

Job's friends have a different concept of what is occurring than Job himself does. Generally speaking, Job's friends believe that Job has sinned and is receiving his due punishment but continues to suffer because he refuses to acknowledge his wrongdoing. His friends come their conclusions through their own mindset about how God operates in the world. To them, their own ideas seem accurate, but they make the prideful mistake of refusing to acknowledge the possibility that they have a limited understanding of God and the world. In doing so, they speak wrongly of both God and Job (Job 42:7).

Just as Job's friends misunderstood him, doctors may have difficulty in truly understanding or being empathetic towards their patients. They may have good intentions but be separated from their patient by different beliefs or worldviews. Health care providers must recognize that their knowledge is not all-encompassing and humble themselves to understand differing perspectives coming from their patients. For example, a physician may have trouble understanding why a patient is having trouble following a diet regimen they have prescribed and assume that the patient is lazy or just does not care about being healthy. In reality, the patient may have financial, social, time, psychological, or other barriers keeping them from being able to effectively adhere to the doctor's treatment. It is not that the provider is wrong about the importance of a healthy diet, but they have an incomplete understanding of the patient's situation and how other factors influence the patient's health. This situation is quite like the misunderstanding of Job's friends, so health care providers may be able to learn from the Book of Job, act differently than Job's friends, and provide better support for their patients by recognizing their own limited understanding.

Now, many health professions programs are trying to address this issue by training members in cultural and socioeconomic differences to provide more competent care. However, this cannot completely bridge the gap, and every person has a unique outlook on the world that is difficult to understand completely even when trying to ask questions to get to know that person. Job's relationship with God may help inform what doctors should do in areas where complete understanding is not possible.

While ravaged with disease, Job is looking for someone to walk with him in his sufferings without condemning him out of ignorance. He can find a deeper social

relationship with God because he can trust God, even though he does not completely understand God. We are not informed about how Job has already come to a place of deep relational trust in God, but we can observe their interactions within the book to see how God and Job interact within this relationship of trust and what habits have been built within it. Job sees God as absent at times, but he continues speaking to God, and God eventually answers. Perhaps God is just listening silently and waiting for the right moment to intervene. Job does not reach out the friends who respond to him and blame him, but to the God who listens silently. Perhaps a lesson from this is that quiet listening and a few informed words spoken at the right time can build more trust and be more beneficial to patients than offering a plethora of well-meaning advice under the false assumption that one understands the situation.

The fact that Job learns from his suffering and the sovereign God does not intervene makes many help health care professionals be more at peace about not being able to relieve the suffering of all their patients. Since they come in daily contact with the suffering, health care providers cannot realistically carry the burdens of every person with whom they come into contact, though they may feel an urge to do so. Tasked with too many problems to solve and too little time, physicians may either feel an incredible weight from their burdens or distance themselves from caring relationships with their patients so that the burdens do not weigh on them so heavily. The former results in being overwhelmed, and the latter makes it easy for the physician to feel like a cog in the wheel by missing out on relationships. Both can lead to burnout, which is a major issue in the healthcare industry that was experienced by 42% of physicians in 2020 (Kane, 2021). Job teaches that suffering in illness is a normal and part of a process that as difficult as it is,

has ultimate benefits, and humans are asked to step into this process to bring healing while still recognizing their limited understanding and ability. Working through these ideas may ease mental apprehensions for providers in dealing with the suffering of their patients.

Implications for Contemporary Patients

Most modern patients experience suffering that is multifaceted. Studies have suggested that suffering results from “perceptions of a threat to the integrity of personhood, relates to the meaning patients ascribe to their illness experience, and is conveyed as an intensely personal narrative” (Egnew, 2009). Patients’ suffering is derived from threats not just to their bodies but to their identities, and this perception is impacted by the patient’s individual experiences and worldview. A large part of this worldview is a patient’s views on the spiritual world. Patient suffering has also been proposed to consist in four facets: “to be mistreated; to struggle for one's healthcare needs and autonomy; to feel powerless; and to feel fragmented and objectified” (Berglund et al., 2012). Illness challenged Job’s social and spiritual identities and threatened him with a sense of powerlessness and fragmented knowledge of the world and his future. As was discussed previously, Job’s belief in God initially increased his suffering by providing a worldview that illness challenged, but Job’s faith in God also sustained him and provided him with social support (not from his faith community but from God) and a source of transcendent hope.

In a similar way, looking to a Deity may help relieve the suffering of those who are sick by providing a supernatural source of support and hope and by providing a path

for the patient to transform their life narrative in a way that is beneficial both to their spiritual outlook and their mental health. One important point that Job raises is that even if looking to illness initially increases one's sense of angst, religious perspectives should not be immediately discarded or criticized, as religious beliefs may increase short-term suffering while improving long-term well-being.

One thing that helps Job recover from the suffering caused by his disease is changing his understanding of God and God's place in his illness. This impacts his beliefs about how God has treated him in the past, what his present circumstances call him to do, and what lies for him in the future. This is a transformation of Job's disease narrative. It is important to note that Job was not able to transform his understanding until after God spoke to him. Job needed someone to speak into his life to help him renew his understanding and transform his views to achieve greater well-being. Patients suffering in the face of disease would likely benefit from a counselor to help them renew their perspective. One person who make take on this role is a "physician healer," a doctor who use the power of her doctor-patient relationship to help people create new illness narratives to transcend suffering and experience healing (Egnew, 2009). This is not a formal title but a mindset that any physician can adopt to improve patient well-being. A health care provider is not the only person who can assist a patient in this way. It is possible that a wiser, more helpful companion that Job's friends might be able to help people through this transformation process as well.

The social relationships in Job are powerful and have a negative impact on Job. When Job's friends declare him guilty, his despair increases, and his friends' comments even cause him to question God. This fact is unfortunate, but it demonstrates the

profound influence that social relationships have on the experience of the sick. While it is not always the case, patients should be aware that well-meaning friends have the potential to speak out of ignorance and influence them deeply in a harmful way. In situations where this does happen, patients can be careful to reaffirm where their identity comes from and not be swayed by hurtful words. Friends of patients would be wise to be aware of their power and to speak carefully, even if they mean well.

One more issue facing patients that Job's story is relevant to is that of meaning. Many patients respond to a diagnosis with a question of that they have done to deserve this "punishment," imbuing their disease with punitive significance. This does not just apply to those with strong spiritual beliefs. In one study, over half of fifty agnostic men and women diagnosed with cancer responded to their illness by asking what they had done to deserve their seeming punishment (Kutz, 2000). The story of Job indicates that disease is not a form of punishment. Though sickness certainly leads to suffering in multiple ways, Job shows that it is unhealthy to view illness as a type of reparation for bad behavior. This view is the one that Job's friends take, and it is denounced in Job 42.

According to Job, a focus in disease as punishment results in unnecessarily increased despair, as when Job focuses on what he could have done to deserve punishment, he cannot pinpoint any action that led to his calamity, which causes him to feel unheard by God and increases his angst.² It is important to note that Job is in fact righteous and therefore has no act which he could possibly identify as deserving of punishment. Other people may be able to find a great wrongdoing in their life, in which case it would be easier to identify an act as the origin of disease. In such as case, the

²An example of one such interaction can be found in Job 31.

theological relationship between presented between disease and sin is complex.³

According to Religious Coping theory, attributing illness to a punishing God would worsen health outcomes whether a causal sin can be identified.⁴ What is evident in Job is that a focus on sin as punishment intensifies confusion and misery, and there is no necessary causal relationship between sin and sickness or suffering.

Job suggests that a better view of suffering and disease is one that recognizes that sickness can arise from sources beyond our understanding and can lead to physical, mental, social, and spiritual suffering. No individual is be condemned for the presence of illness or for recognizing the pain it causes. Attempting to existentially understand why a malady has occurred can be incredibly harmful, whether one is coming from the perspective of the ill person or is simply an onlooker. Instead, one does well recognize the limited and often faulty nature of human perception.⁵ After seeing their own finitude, it may be helpful for people to reach out to a higher power, provided that the power is good and all-knowing.⁶ This choice may not immediately decrease suffering or cure sickness, but it fosters hope and provides a source of support.

³In the Old Testament, there are occasions when sin seems to be associated with disease. In the New Testament Bible, Jesus' disciples ask him who sinned to make a man blind, to which he responds that no one sinned, but the man has been made blind so God's works could be revealed in him (John 9:1-3). This passage affirms the ideas presented in Job about a lack of connection between sin and punishment but also demonstrates the lack of clarity on this issue through the disciples' confusion.

⁴More information in Religious Coping theory can be found in Chapter Two of this thesis.

⁵This idea is also supported by neuroscience research, which research has revealed that human perception is not an exact representation of the world but only our interpretation of it. Sensory information is integrated and processed by our brains before entering our consciousness, and prior knowledge and experiences have a powerful influence over perception. Thus, perception is relative and leaves room for error, and two different people can perceive the same situation in vastly different ways.

⁶The position of a Deity with limited understanding is no better than that of a human, as that power could also err out of a lack of knowledge. From both theological and religious coping perspectives, belief in a benevolent Deity is key to improved well-being. Job has hope in God and his future because he believes

Blaming the higher power for not immediately improving one's circumstances provides no benefit. One must instead recognize the supremacy of the supernatural power, trust in their goodness, and lean on their strength in one's own weakness. Job teaches that the result of doing so is increased peace and a revelation of understanding that increases faith. Job also suggests that perseverance in this manner is rewarded, as Job is healed and receives a double-fold rewards in place of what he lost,⁷ and he gains greater spiritual understanding for which he is thankful.

In relating the story of Job to the lives of current patients, it is also helpful to recognize the multifaceted nature of Job's suffering. Job not only suffers through an infliction with illness, which itself brings pain in multiple ways, but he also loses his children and his possessions. Similarly, disease is usually not the sole issue plaguing sick people today. They too have tension with or losses of loved ones that cause them grief. They too may lose their monetary holdings while they are ill, and the cost of health care in fact makes this situation more likely. For many people, sickness just adds another layer to already-present suffering and presents opportunities for further issues to arise. Those interacting with the ill must recognize that these various sources of suffering likely exist while also realizing that one person may not be able to address every source of pain in a person's life, nor should one human take on all the burdens of individual.

that God is good, and scientific research has indicated that belief in a benevolent God improves health outcomes, but associating disease with negative spiritual forces worsens health outcomes.

⁷It must be acknowledged that Job's blessings do not negate the suffering he experienced. In addition to being ill, Job lost members of his family, and new children cannot replace lives lost. Suffering narratives are complex both historically and in the present day, but the Judeo-Christian tradition calls people to find comfort in a good God who heals and restores, even if His ways are difficult to comprehend.

Conclusion

It is evident that Job faced both physical and psychological forms of illness that caused him to suffer physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Job's religious beliefs increased his suffering momentarily but gave him a transcendent and sustaining source of hope and support. It is clear in Job that spiritual elements have a profound impact on the illness experience, thus supporting the importance of a biopsychosocial-spiritual model health. In the end, Job found peace once he transformed his understanding and illness narrative, but this was possible only with outside intervention, indicating the necessity of sources of wise and spiritual counsel for the psychological, and resulting physical, well-being of those who are ill. Job also displays the importance of recognizing limits on our own understanding and shows how assumptions about the accuracy of our own knowledge can add to the burden of the ill. Particularly, Job demonstrates the detrimental nature of assuming a necessary link between sin and disease. Additionally, Job shows that reaching out to an omniscient and benevolent God may help the sick find a sort of healing even in the absence of being physically cured.

The Book of Job tells the story of one man, but his illness and sufferings were so varied that he can also be a representation of all men. In his malady, Job asks the same question that many of us would and do pose if we encounter similar pain: "Why is this happening to me?" In the end, no one source can answer this question. Job cannot reason his way to an answer within himself, Job's friends cannot propose a logical reasoning, and Job's God refuses to answer his question. Perhaps the best advice that the Book of Job can offer a suffering patient is that the question of "why me?" that they may most desire to ask cannot or should not be answered. Attempts to answer this seemingly

necessary question may only further one's despair. Instead, patients may find comfort in seeking intimacy with those who are truly wise and by turning in their lack of understanding to a higher power who comprehends all things, who is good, who has power over the forces causing suffering, and who can act as a friend.

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