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## Diseases in the Bible and Quran: differences between grace or punishment from the Jerusalem God

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### **Abstract**

*Health and religion are strongly connected. This study aims primarily to compile the diseases described in the Bible and Quran with a secondary aim to group the diseases in punishment or blessing. Diseases mentioned in the Bible and Quran were compiled by manual review and grouped as punishment if imposed by the deity as penance; blessing if cured by grace or neutral. The results show difference among the books in the distribution of the diseases as associated to punishment (more prevalent in the first testament), blessing (more prevalent in the second testament) or neutral (more prevalent in the Quran).*

**Keywords:** *History of religions; Diseases; Bible; Quran*

### **Introduction**

Health and religion are strongly connected. The three most important Western religions centered in Jerusalem (Judaism, Christianity, Islamism) described diseases in their sacred books. These diseases affected the characters as punishment or blessing by the supreme deity. There are some compilations on the diseases of these books (mostly non-scientific) and some medical reports, but most reports focused on specific medical specialties trying to attribute diagnosis to vague or shortly described symptoms (Feinsod, 2010; Appelboom et al., 2007). The division between blessing or punishment has not been described to the best of our knowledge.

Different diseases burden variably quality of life. The diseases described in the scriptures should intuitively include those that load heavily on quality of life intensifying the benefits to the graced pious or the harm to those punished.

The study of diseases described by religions is thus a stimulating topic for investigation. This study aims primarily to compile the diseases described in the Bible and Quran with a secondary aim to group the diseases in punishment or blessing.

### **Methods**

Diseases mentioned in the Bible (The New King James Version) and Quran (version translated to English by Talal Itani) were compiled by manual review by a theologian and physician researcher. The Bible was subdivided in first and second testament.

Diseases were grouped as:

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- (a) **punishment:** diseases imposed or bullied by the deity to a personage or mankind as penance or chastise for wrongdoing or as an example to others;
- (b) **blessing:** diseases that were cured by the deity;
- (c) **neutral:** if not fitting in the previous definitions, such as diseases present in personages but not linked to punishment or blessing or diseases used with metaphorical meaning.

Unspecified conditions - such as “diseases”, “sick”, “ill”, “injury”, “wound”, “pain”, “plague”, etcetera - or trauma were not included in the lists.

## Results

The diseases found in the first testament of the Bible are shown in table 1. There were 22 different diseases cited in 22 books (out of 39: 56%). A total of 16 (48%) diseases were cited as punishment, 7 (21%) as blessing, and 10 (30%) were neutral (some diseases may figure in more than one category).

The diseases found in the second testament of the Bible are shown in table 2. There were 15 different diseases cited in 11 books (out of 27: 41%). A total of 13 (54%) were cited as blessing 1 (4%) as punishment, and 10 (42%) were neutral.

The diseases found in the Quran are shown in table 3. There were 6 different diseases cited in 28 chapters (Surah) (out of 114: 25%). A total of 3 diseases were cited as blessing (43%) and 4 (57%) were neutral. There was no disease associated to punishment.

## Discussion

Health and religion are firmly connected. The first and most intuitive correlation between the two is certainly mental health *versus* religiosity, both from the beneficial point of view - some studies show that spirituality favors the treatment of drug addiction e.g. (Beraldo et al., 2019) or treatment of psychiatric diseases (Weber & Pargament, 2014) - but also from the deleterious perspective, with mental damage due to poor understanding of religiosity (Weber & Pargament, 2014).

Modern science, however, correlates health and religion much more broadly. Countless studies show the effect of religiosity on the promotion of diseases such as cardiac health (Ahrenfeldt et al., 2019), cancer (Koenig, 2015), sexually transmitted diseases (Churchil et al., 2021), infection (Koenig, 2001), etcetera.

Historically, the association between religion and health was stronger. The Shaman, essentially a religious who exercised healing power through his mediation of supernatural powers and humanity, exists since the Paleolithic era (Hultkrantz, 1985). In addition, diseases have been understood as punishment, education, purification or sacrifice since the dawn of the human civilization (Sevensky, 1981). Not that this has ceased to be believed in current creed (Selman et al., 2018). Thus, the historical-cultural concept of the moment of writing of the codices must be remembered. The first testament of the Bible was written probably between 1200 – 165 A. C.; the second testament in the first century and the Quran in the VII Century.

Medicine, despite the already ubiquitous presence of medical science well developed by the Romans/Greeks at the time of Christ and Arabs at the time of the Quran, was widely seen as religion applied to healing and not science applied to healing. Some excerpts from the sacred books show that religious men were the first source of healing in detriment of physicians (“Yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but sought help from physicians”: First testament 2 Chronicles 16; “Is any



one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord”: Second testament James 5; ““And if I am sick, He is the One who cures me.”: Quran The Poets 26).

Murdock (1980) in his interesting book on anthropology of falling ill, studied 139 societies, from primitive to modern ones, classifying beliefs in the origins of diseases as natural or supernatural, the latter of our interest. Supernatural theories are further divided into: (1) mystical cause – it occurs by indirect influence of a deity, such as fate, contagion of something or someone unblemished, sinister sensations such as dreams or mystical retribution; (2) animist cause – occurs by the behavior of divinity, such as loss of soul or spiritual aggression; and (3) magical cause – occurs by human action through aggression (witchcraft, magic) or sense of sin or guilt. We realize that perhaps the three forms are present in the religions of Jerusalem.

### **First testament**

We found in the first testament the highest absolute and relative number of diseases cited. Judaism is a religion that combines social and religious rules. Thus, the presence of social rules of disease prevention and health promotion was expected to figure in the Old Testament. It has been said that: "Today we are able to understand and appreciate the *sound principles* of diet, hygiene and medicine which these laws express" (Alexander et al., 1973). In fact, there is a predominance of infectious diseases (leprosy, boils, scabs, fever) or diseases of the senses (blindness, muteness, deafness) and locomotion (lameness). This represents not only the diseases known and prevalent at the time, but they clear have external signs to show physical impairment, inability to work and accentuated loss of quality of life as well (Dawes et al., 2021). This is true for both punishment and blessing. Curiously, punishment is determined frequently not by specific diseases but by mass killing due to natural disasters, plague to humans, plague to livestock or to crofts. Similarly, blessing is determined by mass-killing victorious battle campaigns. God has even been accused of genocide (Copan et al., 2014).

Neutral presentation of diseases is more related to metaphorical meaning (especially loss of senses); simple citation of conditions not related to blessing or punishment; or related to public health laws.

### **Second testament**

Half of the diseases cited in the second testament are the same referred in the first testament as most of the precepts previously discussed also apply here. There is, however, a clear predominance of blessing over punishment in the second testament with a single reference of castigation. This single reference is actually imposed by Paul, not Jesus. This finding is in accordance with the change in God’s behavior from the first to the second testament, from the leader of powerful military conquests to the father of a merciful Messiah (Miles, 2002). This is clearly represented in the moments when Jesus showed frustration or anger, as at the incident at the temple e.g., but never punished a character with a disease. The only time that Jesus directly cursed, the imprecation was directed towards a fig tree (Mark 11:12-25). Human punishment is always linked to afterlife.

### **Quran**

There is a paucity of diseases described in the Quran with most of the conditions classified as neutral and used as metaphors since the it is a sapiential book. Curiously, there is no disease associated to punishment even though torment is frequently promised to those who do not believe, but similar to the bible’s second testament this is linked to afterlife. More curiously is that diseases linked to blessing are associated to Jesus, a prophet in the Quran. There are other probable reasons for the low number

of diseases described: (1) the high development of Arabic medicine (Brewer, 2004); and (2) the literary arrangement of the Quran with few narratives and short verses.

## Study Limitations

This review does not intend to be an analysis of the diseases and conditions, i.e., attribute modern diagnosis to vague terms attempting to diagnose sicknesses, but we performed a systematic compilation of clear stated diseases in the analyzed books used to send messages of the power of God as punisher or healer.

Other diseases that could lead to unbearable loss of quality of life, such as those coursing with dysphagia (Kim et al. 2020), could have been used by the deities but not remembered or noticed by the writers of the books.

Texts were not read in the original languages as this was not intended to be an exegetic work.

## Conclusions

The diseases referred in the sacred books of the West religions are very similar despite the fact that they comprised 19 centuries of time. There is, however, a remarkable difference among the books in the distribution of the diseases as associated to punishment (more prevalent in the first testament), blessing (more prevalent in the second testament) or neutral (more prevalent in the Quran) according to the principles of each book. Most of the diseases have external signs that show physical impairment, inability to work and accentuated loss of quality of life.

These findings may help medical scholars better understand the relationship between religiousness and sickening that may alter treatment outcomes (Ahrenfeldt et al., 2019). Moreover, it may shed some light on how patients and society interpret the origin for diseases, either as the result of divine punishment, such as during AIDS era (Kopelman, 2002) or even longevity as a sign of blessing (von Schwarz et al., 2022). On the theological side, the findings of this classification of diseases show how they reflect the theology of each religion. Thus, Judaism is a religion of social rules and obedience (Nir, 2022) and a punisher God is reasonable. Christianity is a religion of faith (Bçanco-Sarto, 2021) and a God that blesses the faithful is reasonable. Islamism is a religion where faith is considered an instinct of the human soul and thus a neutral God is reasonable.

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## Tables

**Table 1. Diseases in the First testament of the Bible**

| Disease                         | Reference       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Punishment</b>               |                 |
| Incurable disease of the bowels | 2 Chronicles 21 |
| No health in bones              | Psalms 38       |
| Madness                         | Deuteronomy 28  |
| Lameness                        | Genesis 32      |
| Infertility                     | Jeremiah 22     |
| Inflammation                    | Deuteronomy 28  |
| Tumors                          | Deuteronomy 28  |
| Belly swell                     | Numbers 5       |
| Thigh rot                       | Numbers 5       |

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Muteness                | Ezekiel 3   |
| Scab                    | Deuteronomy 28<br>Isaiah 3  |
| Consumption             | Deuteronomy 28<br>Leviticus 26  |
| Fever                   | Deuteronomy 28<br>Job 30<br>Leviticus 26  |
| Boils                   | Deuteronomy 28<br>Exodus 9<br>Job 2   |
| Leprosy                 | 2 Chronicles 26<br>2 Kings 5<br>Numbers 5; 12; 15   |
| Blindness               | Deuteronomy 28<br>Genesis 19<br>2 Kings 6<br>Lamentations 4<br>Tobit 2; 14<br>Zechariah 11<br>Zephaniah 1 |
| <b>Blessing</b>         |   |
| Presbyopia              | Deuteronomy 34  |
| Deafness                | Isaiah 35   |
| Lameness                | Isaiah 33; 35   |
| Madness                 | Isaiah 35   |
| Muteness                | Ezekiel 3   |
| Blindness               | Psalms 146<br>Tobit 11; 14  |
| Infertility             | Deuteronomy 7<br>Genesis 15; 17; 18; 20; 25; 29<br>Judges 13<br>Psalm 113<br>1 Samuel 1                   |
| <b>Neutral</b>          |   |
| Humpback                | Leviticus 21  |
| Presbyopia              | Genesis 27  |
| Scab                    | Leviticus 13  |
| Nanism                  | Leviticus 21  |
| Sickness in the feet    | 2 Chronicles 16   |
| Death at birth (mother) | Genesis 35  |
| Madness                 | 1 Samuel 21   |
| Infertility             | Genesis 11; 16<br>Isaiah 54<br>Proverbs 30  |
| Boils                   | Isaiah 38<br>2 Kings 20   |
| Leprosy                 | Deuteronomy 17<br>Leviticus 13-14<br>2 Kings 3; 7   |



|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Deafness / Muteness | Exodus 4<br>Isaiah 29; 42; 43<br>Leviticus 19<br>Proverbs 31<br>Psalm 38  |
| Blindness           | Deuteronomy 27; 28<br>Exodus 4; 23<br>Isaiah 29; 42; 43; 56; 59<br>Jeremiah 31<br>Job 29<br>2 Kings 5<br>Lamentations 4<br>Leviticus 19; 21<br>Malachi 1<br>1 Samuel 12<br>2 Samuel 5<br>Zechariah 12 |
| Lameness            | Jeremiah 31<br>Job 29<br>2 Kings 5<br>Leviticus 21<br>Malachi 1<br>Proverbs 26<br>2 Samuel 4; 5<br>Sophonias 3  |

**Table 2.** Diseases in the Second testament of the Bible

| <b>Disease</b>      | <b>Reference</b>  |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Punishment</b>   |   |
| Blindness           | Acts 13   |
| <b>Blessing</b>     |   |
| Dropsy              | Luke 14   |
| Invalidness         | John 5  |
| Madness             | Matthew 17  |
| Dysentery           | Acts 28   |
| Infertility         | Hebrews 11<br>Luke 1  |
| Leprosy             | Luke 1; 5; 7; 16; 17<br>Matthew 8; 10; 11   |
| Blindness           | John 5; 9; 10; 11; 12<br>Luke 4; 7; 18<br>Mark 8; 10<br>Matthew 9; 11; 12; 15; 20; 21 |
| Deafness / muteness | Mark 7<br>Matthew 9; 11; 12; 15   |
| Epilepsy            | Luke 9<br>Mark 9<br>Mathew 4; 17  |
| Bleeding            | Luke 8  |

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
|                | Mark 5<br>Matthew 9   |
| Lameness       | Acts 3; 8; 14<br>John 5<br>Luke 7<br>Matthew 11; 15; 21   |
| Paralysis      | Acts 8; 9<br>Luke 2; 5; 6<br>Mark 2<br>Matthew 4; 8; 9  |
| Fever          | Acts 28<br>John 4<br>Luke 4<br>Mark 1<br>Matthew 8  |
| <b>Neutral</b> |   |
| Paralysis      | John 5  |
| Fever          | Acts 28   |
| Infertility    | Galatians 4   |
| Dysentery      | Acts 28   |
| Dyspepsia      | 1 Timothy 5   |
| Muteness       | Matthew 15  |
| Aphasia        | Luke 1  |
| Leprosy        | Luke 4<br>Matthew 26  |
| Lameness       | John 5<br>Luke 14<br>Mark 9<br>Matthew 15; 18   |
| Blindness      | Acts 22<br>John 5; 10; 12<br>Luke 6; 14<br>Matthew 15; 23<br>II Peter<br>Revelation 3<br>Romans 2; 11 |

**Table 3.** Diseases in the Quran

| <b>Disease</b>  | <b>Reference (surah, verse)</b>                        |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>Blessing</b> |  |
| Blindness       | Family of Imran, 49<br>The Table, 110                  |
| Leprosy         | Family of Imran, 49<br>The Table, 110                  |
| Infertility     | Family of Imran, 40<br>Mary, 5, 8<br>The Spreaders, 29 |
| <b>Neutral</b>  |  |





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|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Headache          | The Inevitable, 19  |
| Mental deficiency | Livestock, 39<br>The Bee, 76<br>The Heifer, 18, 171, 282<br>The Night Journey, 97<br>The Spoils, 22   |
| Deafness          | Decorations, 40<br>Hud, 24<br>Jonah, 42<br>Livestock, 39<br>Muhammad, 23<br>The Ant, 80<br>The Criterion, 73<br>The Heifer, 18, 171<br>The Night Journey, 97<br>The Prophets, 45<br>The Romans, 52<br>The Spoils, 22<br>The Table, 71   |
| Blindness         | Decorations, 40<br>Forgiver, 58<br>He Frowned, 2<br>Hud, 24, 28<br>Jonah, 43<br>Livestock, 50, 104<br>Muhammad, 23<br>Originator, 19<br>Taha, 124, 125<br>The Ant, 66, 81<br>The Criterion, 73<br>The Elevations, 64<br>The Heifer, 18, 171<br>The Light, 61<br>The Night Journey, 72, 97<br>The Pilgrimage, 46<br>The Table, 72<br>Thunder 16, 19<br>Victory ,17 |

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