

## Chapter 11

## Perseverance in the Religious Life

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*I wonder what it is that makes one person push on in the face of difficulty and makes someone else crumble in helplessness.*—Fred Rogers<sup>1</sup>

In the movie *Rocky IV* (1985), heavyweight boxer Rocky Balboa reveals in a heart-to-heart talk with his son that sometimes in the ring he feels like giving up. But, he continues, “going that one more round when you don’t think you can—that’s what makes all the difference in your life.” Perseverance can be a difference-maker, for ill and for good, and when for good, it is widely prized and often the sine qua non of human survival and flourishing. However, understanding when and why perseverance is valuable requires an answer to Mr. Rogers’s question about what it is.

In section 11.1, we briefly answer that question, and we sketch a neo-Aristotelian view of when perseverance is a virtue. In section 11.2, we exhibit how perseverance shows up in the religious life, in the Hebrew and Christian traditions. In section 11.3, we show how perseverance infuses faith and faithfulness in the portrayal of both

*pistis* in the Christian New Testament, which was written in Greek, and *ʾemūnāh* in the Hebrew scriptures. We then articulate, in section 11.4, a theory of faith and faithfulness that accommodates this portrayal, before showing in section 11.5 how the theory handles other religious data related to the connection between faith and faithfulness, on the one hand, and perseverance, on the other.

### 11.1 PERSEVERANCE: WHAT IT IS AND WHEN IT’S A VIRTUE

For you to persevere in something is for you to keep at it in the face of challenges. Those challenges might include obstacles that are impediments to achieving short- or long-term goals, distractions from completing daily tasks and routines, or hindrances to meaningful relationships, among many, many other things. Notice that you can perform acts of perseverance (acts characteristic of the trait or virtue) even if you lack both the trait and the virtue, as when you freely choose to embark on a new jogging regimen and continue to make daily choices to stick with it, despite initially being strongly inclined not to keep at it. You can also persevere in a particular activity even if you lack perseverance as a global trait, as when you persevere in learning to solve a Rubik’s cube in under ten seconds, but you are disposed to shrink from learning to play the violin, completing a daunting school science project, or other challenges. Likewise, sticking with things isn’t always valuable, wise, or conducive to flourishing. You can have the trait of perseverance even if you lack perseverance as a virtue, a point we’ll develop in a moment.

But first: what is the *trait* of perseverance? Nathan King suggests it is a disposition to (try to) continue in our endeavors, with serious effort, despite the presence of obstacles, while Heather Battaly suggests it is a disposition to (try to) overcome obstacles, so as to

1. Fred Rogers, *Won’t You Be My Neighbor?*, directed by Morgan Neville (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2018), at 48 minutes 17 seconds.

continue to perform actions in pursuit of our goals. Both proposals are on the right track.<sup>2</sup> Why trying rather than succeeding? Because the Ironman triathlete who tries to push himself to finish only to collapse from exhaustion at mile 23 of the marathon does not thereby have less perseverance. Notice also that these theories allow the trait of perseverance to come in degrees since we can more or less continue or overcome, and we can continue or overcome in greater or fewer possible situations.<sup>3</sup> For example, we typically exhibit more perseverance in finishing half a marathon rather than stopping at five miles; and, a disposition to finish through snow, rain, heat, and gloom of night usually involves more perseverance than a disposition to finish only in ideal conditions. Moreover, these theories leave what counts as an obstacle open. Obstacles might be in the endeavor or goal itself, or not; and, they might be internal to a person, or not.<sup>4</sup> Crossing a rickety bridge over a vast chasm might be easy for some but a serious obstacle for the acrophobic. In addition, something, for example, tensor calculus, might be an obstacle for one person but not another, or for a person at one time but not another, for example, as an undergraduate but not as a physics Ph.D.<sup>5</sup> Further, the word "obstacle" suggests something that stands between you and your success, but not everything through which you persevere must be thought of in that way. You might be a quick study on the piano, but mastery still requires sustained practice. Perhaps "difficulty" or "challenge" is better. Finally, in what follows we'll say that for you to have the trait of perseverance is for you to be disposed to (try to)

2. King and Battaly focus on *intellectual* perseverance rather than perseverance *per se*, we've generalized from their focus. See Nathan King, "Erratum to: 'Perseverance as an Intellectual Virtue,'" *Synthese* 191 (2014): 3779–3801; Heather Battaly, "Intellectual Perseverance," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 14 (2017): 669–697.

3. King, "Erratum to," 3785; Battaly, "Intellectual Perseverance," 688.

4. King, "Erratum to," 3791.

5. King, "Erratum to," 3795.

overcome challenges to continuing with something—whether it is your endeavors, your actions in pursuit of your goals, your cherished relationships, or something else besides.

Perseverance as a trait can be a virtue under certain conditions. Theorists think of virtues in different ways. Here we assume they are traits of a person. Not all traits of a person are virtues, however; only those that contribute to their excellence as a person. The same goes for the trait of perseverance.

In particular, your perseverance is a virtue only if you are a good judge of how to stick with something or someone. If someone only tends to overcome challenges to continuing endeavors, goals, or relationships that are trivial, destructive, or evil, then, although they have the trait, they lack the virtue. Captain Ahab's relentless pursuit of Moby Dick in mad desire for revenge may display the trait, but in him it exhibits a tragic flaw. Alternatively, imagine a middle-aged man who, after a sobering look in the mirror on New Year's Eve, throws his sedentary self into a rigorous exercise regimen, consistently overcoming extreme pain, torn tissue, and illness to stick with the schedule—contrary to good judgment. If this disposition characterizes his response to challenges, then, although he has the trait of perseverance, he lacks the virtue. He has too much perseverance; perseverance to a fault; perseverance in excess. He lacks good judgment about how to commit himself to something or when to dial things back, and so his trait manifests intransigence, mulishness, or recalcitrance, which are vices.

For many of us, too much perseverance isn't a problem. Rather we tend to give up too readily. Our man's New Year's Eve experience with his mirror might get him to the gym, but suppose he rarely breaks a sweat, and he spends more time on a stool at the juice bar than on the stair-stepper. Before long, his five-day-a-week routine becomes three, then two, then none. If this disposition characterizes his response to challenges, you might say he has too little perseverance, a deficiency

of perseverance; he possesses the vice of irresolution, complacency, or capitulation. The virtue of perseverance lies in a mean between vices that involve being *over*disposed to overcoming challenges and corresponding vices that involve being *under*disposed to overcoming challenges.

In addition, someone's perseverance is a virtue only if it is grounded in good motivations and values. Those who are disposed to overcome challenges to continuing, but who are so disposed because of bad motivations or values, lack the virtue of perseverance. For example, imagine an ambitious young priest who recognizes that archbishops must have perseverance, and so he aims to get it. In due course, he succeeds, and he develops good judgment in its exercise. Even though he has perseverance, and good judgment, he lacks the virtue since his motivation for overcoming challenges is hunger for ecclesiastical power and its privileges. If instead he had aimed to become persevering so that he might better serve his parishioners, or if he had aimed to become persevering so that he might be a better person, then he would have had the virtue.

Summing up: we wouldn't be far off if we said that, as a virtue, perseverance is a disposition to *appropriately* (try to) overcome challenges to continuing in something, where "appropriately" points to the exercise of good judgment and grounding in good motivations and values. We now turn to perseverance in the religious life.

## 11.2 PERSEVERANCE IN THE HEBREW AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

We begin with how perseverance shows up in the Hebrew and Christian traditions, specifically their sacred writings. We focus on these traditions because we are most familiar with them. We will use their modes of expression in an effort to let them speak for themselves and to allow a glimpse into the form of life they inhabit.

### 11.2.1 *The Hebrew Scriptures*

In the world of the Hebrew scriptures, God exhibits perseverance in a variety of ways. Despite Israel's complaints, idolatry, and flaws, God's "steadfast love" of Israel "endures forever."<sup>6</sup> As a result, even though King Jehoram, as with other descendants of King David, "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD," "the LORD would not destroy the house of David because of the covenant that he had made with David," in which the LORD perseveres.<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah compares God's relationship with Israel to a potter who repeatedly shapes a sometimes-uncooperative vessel of clay.<sup>8</sup> Hosea compares Israel with a serial adulteress with whom God continually tries to restore a marriage.<sup>9</sup> Jonah protests God's forbearance in dealing with the people of Nineveh, which he takes to be a consequence of the fact that "you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing."<sup>10</sup>

In addition to portraying God as persevering, the Hebrew scriptures portray several characters in its narratives as exemplars of perseverance. Abraham overcomes difficulties in relying on God to lead him to the Promised Land and to give him an heir.<sup>11</sup> Moses doesn't give up on God's call for him to lead Israel out of slavery in Egypt and sticks with his calling through forty years in the wilderness, despite sometimes finding the hardships involved so burdensome that he asks God to end his life.<sup>12</sup> David triumphs over Goliath and

6. 2 Chronicles 5:13, 7:3, 7:6, 20:21; Esther 3:11; Jeremiah 33:11. We use the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

7. 2 Chronicles 21:1–67.

8. Jeremiah 18:1–11.

9. Cf. Hosea 1:2, 3:1, 6:10, 9:1, *passim*.

10. Jonah 4:2–4.

11. Genesis 12–25.

12. Numbers 11:14–15; cf. Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, *passim*.

evades enemies in his rise to kingship, and he tries to follow God's ways, with some measure of success.<sup>13</sup> As is well known, however, each of these three exemplars of perseverance in relationship with God were sometimes miserable failures, and so provided occasions for God to persevere in relationship with them, thereby underscoring God's steadfastness and faithfulness to them despite their failing. Job famously persists with integrity in relationship to God despite the afflictions and calamities he suffers, earning his reputation for perseverance.<sup>14</sup> Daniel and his friends persevere as captives in Babylon, enduring a fiery furnace and the lions' den out of allegiance to God; as with them, a final reward at "the end of days" awaits all "those who persevere."<sup>15</sup> Proverbs counsels the young to remain "steadfast in righteousness," holding fast the wisdom of their parents and heritage.<sup>16</sup>

Later generations looked to these and other stories to find "encouragement to persevere" through their own "times of oppression and disaster."<sup>17</sup> Consider the bold declaration of seven brothers facing a tyrant set on killing them:

[W]e are ready to die rather than transgress our ancestral commandments . . . . [I]f the aged men of the Hebrews because of their religion lived piously while enduring torture, it would be even more fitting that we young men should die despising your coercive tortures, which our aged instructor also overcame. Therefore, tyrant, put us to the test; and if you take our lives

13. 1 Samuel 16–31, 2 Samuel and 1 Kings 1–2, *passim*.

14. Job 2:9; cf. 17:1–16, 19:1–6. James regards Job as an exemplar: "As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about" (5:11, NIV).

15. Daniel 12:12–13.

16. Proverbs 11:19; cf. 1:8–19, 4:1–27.

17. R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Berdmans, 1995), 138.

because of our religion, do not suppose that you can injure us by torturing us. For we, through this severe suffering and endurance, shall have the prize of virtue and shall be with God, on whose account we suffer.<sup>18</sup>

Perseverance is also displayed in patiently waiting for God to act, a common theme in the Psalms and Prophets. "When will you comfort me?" "How long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me?"<sup>19</sup> Expressions of persevering trust and faith sometimes accompany these anxious cries and complaints:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? . . . . But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.<sup>20</sup>

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen . . . . For there is still a vision for the appointed time . . . . If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come . . . . the righteous live by their faith.<sup>21</sup>

### 11.2.2 *The Christian New Testament*

Early Christians also describe God as persevering. Peter informs his audience that "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all

18. 4 Maccabees 9:1–8; cf. 2 Maccabees 7:1–2. If this is a case of perseverance that is also a case of courage, it might lend mild support to the thesis that courage is a special kind of perseverance.

19. Psalm 119:82–83; cf. 6:3, 13, 89–96.

20. Psalm 13.

21. Habakkuk 2:1–4, which takes center stage in Paul (Galatians 3:11, Romans 1:17) and in Hebrews 10:37–38. For discussion of the relation between trust and faith, and of their relations to resilience, see Daniel J. McKaughan and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "How Does Trust Relate to Faith?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 52 (2022): 411–427.

to come to repentance.<sup>22</sup> To encourage the Romans, Paul reminds them of “the God of steadfastness,” while 2 Thessalonians points to “the steadfastness of Christ” in doing God’s will as an example to follow.<sup>23</sup>

Early Christian writers value perseverance in relation to God and/or Christ, as well as apostolic teaching.<sup>24</sup> Paul entreats the Romans to “be patient in suffering,” and he exhorts the Corinthians to “be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord,” commending himself and Timothy as exemplars of that work, “through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, [and] hunger,” even to the point of being “so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself.”<sup>25</sup> 2 Thessalonians praises its audience “for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring,” and urges them to “continue to stand firm in the Lord” and to stick to core teachings: “stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.”<sup>26</sup>

NT authors also encourage Christians to persevere for the sake of social and moral ends. Perseverance appears alongside faith, faithfulness, patience, gentleness, and love on short lists of virtues to which Jesus-followers ought aspire.<sup>27</sup> To the Corinthians, Paul commends love of others, emphasizing that the love of which he speaks “always

perseveres.”<sup>28</sup> With the Romans, he observes the role endurance can play in character development: “suffering produces endurance; endurance, character; and character, hope.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Paul enjoins the Thessalonians not only to “abstain from every kind of evil” but also to “hold fast to what is good,” while to the Galatians he writes, “Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.”<sup>30</sup> Ephesians directs its readers to “bear with one another,” tolerating annoyances with love and forgiveness for the sake of unity, as well as to “always persevere” in prayer for each other.<sup>31</sup> James bids Jesus-followers to endure “trials of any kind,” including temptation to wrongdoing: “Blessed is anyone who endures temptation.”<sup>32</sup> Metaphors of perseverance abound—tireless runners, well-trained boxers, soldiers fighting the good fight; press on for the prize; take up your cross—as do admonitions to finish your work on behalf of the kingdom of God.<sup>33</sup>

The Gospels portray Jesus extolling perseverance. The parable of the widow and the unjust judge encourages persistence in prayer.<sup>34</sup> The parable of the sower commends perseverance in response to “the word of God” preached by Jesus.<sup>35</sup> Of course, not everyone responds positively; some “fall away” in a time of testing,<sup>36</sup> while others are “choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life.” By contrast, those who “hold it fast in an honest and good heart” “bear fruit with patient endurance.”<sup>36</sup> Jesus warns his followers: “You will be hated by

22. 2 Peter 3:9; cf. Romans 9:22–23. We assume patience involves some degree of perseverance. On this assumption, see Chapter 3 by Josh Dolin and Jason Baehr in the present volume.

23. Romans 15:4–6; 2 Thessalonians 3:5.

24. They draw on several Greek word groups to express perseverance, endurance, patience, and steadfastness, prominent among which are cognates of the verbs *hypoménō* (*hypomenō* to endure), *proskartereía* (*proskartereō*, to persevere, be devoted to), *makrothymía* (*makrothymeō*, to be patient to forebear), and *trékheia* (*trékheiai*, to endure, to bear with).

25. Romans 12:9–12; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 1:8; 6:4–5.

26. 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 3:8; 2:15; 3:4.

27. Titus 2:2; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:10; Revelation 2:2, 2:19.

28. 1 Corinthians 13.

29. Romans 5:3–4.

30. 1 Thessalonians 5:21–22; Galatians 6:9. Cf. Romans 12:9: “Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.”

31. Ephesians 4:2, 6:18–20; cf. Colossians 3:12–13; Philippians 1:27–30.

32. James 1:2, 12.

33. 2 Timothy 4:7; 1 Timothy 6:12; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Galatians 5:7; Philippians 3:14; James 1:12; Mark 8:34; Colossians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 8:10–11; John 4:34, 17:4.

34. Luke 18:1–8; cf. 11:5–10.

35. Luke 8:4–15; Mark 4:1–20; Matthew 13:1–23; cf. John 15:4–10.

36. Luke 8:11–15; cf. Matthew 13:18–23; Mark 4:13–20.

all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved," and "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples."<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to say that perseverance occupies an important place in the religious life, as exhibited in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. But there's more. That's because something more familiar to a religious way of life essentially involves perseverance, namely faith in and faithfulness to God, both of which stand at the heart of the covenantal relationships to which God calls people.

### 1.1.3 PĪSTIS AND ʾĒMŪNĀH

To show how perseverance is essential to the faith and faithfulness to which the God of the Abrahamic tradition calls people, we begin with two items of data that forge a deep connection between faith and faithfulness, on the one hand, and perseverance, on the other: (i) *pīstis* in the *Gospel According to Mark* and other NT material and (ii) *ʾēmūnah* in the Hebrew scriptures and so-called intertestamental period (ca. 420 BCE–50 CE).

#### 1.1.3.1 *Pīstis* in *The Gospel According to Mark* and Other

##### NT Material

In the narrative of Mark's *Gospel*, Jesus explicitly commends someone's faith three times, and on each occasion their most salient feature is *persevering reliance*, a disposition to overcome challenges to relying on Jesus and/or God to be or do something that is important to those who place faith in them.

Consider the woman with a hemorrhage, whom we will call "Veronica," in accordance with tradition.<sup>38</sup> A synagogue leader

<sup>37</sup> Mark 13:5–23, John 8:31; cf. Matthew 10:16–25, 24:13, Luke 21:19, John 15:18–27.

<sup>38</sup> Mark 5:21–34.

named "Jairus" begs Jesus to come to his home to heal his dying daughter. Jesus consents and, as they walk together, a "large crowd" follows. At the rear of the crowd is Veronica, who suffers from "a flow of blood" (continuous uterine bleeding), unable to find a cure, and getting worse. Mark says that "she had heard about Jesus," and that she knew of his ability to heal. So, she weaves her way through the crowd, which is "pressed in on him" trying to get close. When she does, she secretly touches his cloak from behind. Immediately, she is healed. Jesus senses that "power [has] gone forth from him," stops, pivots, and asks who touched his cloak. The disciples balk at the question, given the size and nearness of the crowd. Jesus persists. Eventually Veronica falls down before Jesus, "in fear and trembling," and tells him "the whole truth." As she finishes, he says: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease."

The narrative emphasizes how she relied on Jesus to heal her despite numerous challenges to doing so. Mark says "[s]he had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse." Her condition, her feeling of hopelessness induced by twelve years of medical failure, her getting worse, and her anemia-burdened struggle to approach Jesus through the "large crowd" were all difficulties she overcame to get to Jesus. Moreover, the purity laws prohibited an unclean woman from mixing with the crowd and from touching nonfamilial men. In reaching out to Jesus, relying on him to heal her, she overcame her internalization of these prohibitions and fear of reprisal, and she may have even overcome a Torah-inspired fear that in touching a holy man she would die.

Now Jesus knew of her persevering reliance when, as she finished her story, he commended her faith. Indeed, persevering reliance seems the most evident fact about her. So, plausibly enough, Jesus fastened on it when he commended her faith. The same goes for the

characters in two other stories in which Jesus commends someone's faith: blind Bartimaeus and the friends of the paralytic.<sup>39</sup>

Very briefly, six considerations underscore the centrality of persevering reliance to faith in Mark's *Gospel*. First, as we just indicated, in three stories in which Jesus commends someone's faith, he fastens on their perseverance in the face of challenges to relying on him to heal on their behalf. Second, in no other story does Jesus commend someone's faith; persevering reliance always attends commendation. Third, on four other occasions that Mark uses the *πίστις* lexicon, he twice associates persevering reliance with faith—in the story of Jairus and the father of the demon-possessed son—and he twice associates a paucity of persevering reliance with a paucity of faith—in the disciples' lack of faith in him on the stormy sea and their lack of faith in God to heal the demon-possessed boy.<sup>40</sup> Fourth, in two other stories—the Syrophenician woman and the woman who anoints Jesus at Bethany—Mark does not use the *πίστις* lexicon but when Matthew and Luke, who relied on Mark as a source, retell these stories, they see them as exemplars of faith, having Jesus explicitly commend them for their faith and, when he commends them, he plausibly fastens on their persevering reliance on him.<sup>41</sup> Fifth, in presenting Jesus as a role model, Mark closely associates Jesus's faith with persevering reliance, for example, in his relationships with his disciples, his prayer in Gethsemane, and his execution on Golgotha.<sup>42</sup> Sixth, as Teresa Morgan argues, in the Greco-Roman world surrounding the early churches, *πίστις* and *fides* centrally involved persevering in the face of challenges—especially, she repeatedly notes—in the face of

39. Mark 10:46–52; Mark 2:1–12.

40. Mark 5:21–24, 35–43; 9:14–29; 4:40; 9:19.

41. Mark 7:24–30, 14:3–9; Matthew 15:21–28 and Luke 7:36–50.

42. Mark 14:32–42; 15:21–37. Cf. Christopher Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

fear, doubt, and skepticism.<sup>43</sup> As such, *πίστις* glued people together in times of crisis.<sup>44</sup> These six points together suggest that, in the words of Christopher Marshall, "Without doubt, the leading characteristic of Markan faith is sheer dogged perseverance" in the presence of challenges to relying on Jesus and/or God.<sup>45</sup>

Something similar can be said for the *πίστις* exhibited elsewhere in the NT.

For example, consider the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew's *Gospel*.<sup>46</sup> She approaches Jesus: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he doesn't answer her, and his disciples urge him to send her away. Eventually, Jesus does answer: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Kneeling, she persists: "Lord, help me." He answers again: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She persists: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." "Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your *πίστις*! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly." Plausibly enough, Jesus commends her for relying on him to heal her daughter; further, she overcomes several challenges in doing so: the historical hostility between Jews and Canaanites, Jesus's initial silence, the disciples' animosity, and both of Jesus's insults. And her *πίστις* is vindicated. The narrative structure here is typical of Gospel miracle stories: someone needs something,

43. Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 45, 63, 64, 75, 104, 121, 124, 154, 170, 180–181, 209–210, 502.

44. Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 7, 117, 120, 121.

45. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 237. For more on *πίστις* in Mark, see Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*; Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*; and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Markan Faith," in "Approaches to Faith," ed. Rebekah L. H. Rice, Daniel J. McKaughan, and Daniel Howard-Snyder (2017), *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81:1–31–60.

46. Matthew 15:21–28.

they or a proxy relies on Jesus to help, with perseverance in the face of challenges, Jesus recognizes their *πιστις*, Jesus performs a miracle, and they or others respond.<sup>47</sup> We expect a similar analysis of *πιστις* in other narratives could be justified.

The NT epistles also connect *πιστις* with perseverance. James says *πιστις* in the face of opposition is a mark of maturity.<sup>48</sup> Paul encourages the Corinthians to “stand firm in your *πιστις*.”<sup>49</sup> 2 Thessalonians praises Jesus-followers “for your steadfastness and *πιστις* during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.”<sup>50</sup> Colossians commends people for “your morale and the firmness of your *πιστις* in Christ.”<sup>51</sup> 1 Peter connects perseverance with authentic faith: “even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your *πιστις* . . . may be found to result in praise and glory and honor.”<sup>52</sup> Hebrews compares continuing in *πιστις* to perseverance in a race: “let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our *πιστις*.”<sup>53</sup> Hebrews connects *πιστις* and perseverance so tightly that, according to Dieter Lührmann, in it “*πιστις* means above all ‘perseverance,’ the holding fast to a promised hope; it is threatened by *απιστία* as the loss of such a hope.”<sup>54</sup> The famous characterization of faith in Hebrews 11:1 as “the substance [*ὑπόστασις*] of things hoped for, the evidence [*εἰdenchus*] of things not seen,” is preceded and followed by material that emphasizes perseverance:

For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet “in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live by *πιστις*. My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back.” But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have *πιστις* and so are saved.<sup>55</sup>

*Pis̄tis* is not only associated with perseverance but explicitly contrasted with “shrinking back.”

While we may seek a more thorough case for the NT connection between perseverance and *πιστις*, the data adduced here at least suggests the hypothesis that, according to many NT authors, *πιστις* essentially involves perseverance.<sup>56</sup>

### 11.3.2 *ʿEmūnāh* in the Hebrew Scriptures

Cognates in the Hebrew *ʿemūnāh* lexicon—which derive from the verbal root *ʾaman* (sometimes abbreviated *ʾmn*)—point to stability, firmness, loyalty, constancy, and reliability.<sup>57</sup> Moses’ raised hands are called *ʿemūnāh* because, though weary and in need of support from Aaron and Hur, they remain steady until sunset as the Israelites prevail in battle.<sup>58</sup> God promises to fasten Eliakim firmly

47. Leland Ryken, *Jesus the Hero: A Guided Literary Study of the Gospels* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 56–57.

48. James 1:2–4.

49. 1 Corinthians 16:13.

50. 2 Thessalonians 1:3–4.

51. Colossians 2:5.

52. 1 Peter 1:3–9.

53. Hebrews 12:1–2; cf. 2 Timothy 4:7–8.

54. Dieter Lührmann, “Faith: New Testament,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2, ed. D. N. Freedman, trans. F. W. Hughes (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 755.

55. Hebrews 10:36–39; cf. 12:1–4ff, 16:12.

56. Our theory of faith and faithfulness and its connection to resilience in the face of challenges is further developed and defended in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Daniel J. McKaughan, “Faith and Resilience,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 91 (2022): 205–241.

57. Tamar Sovran, *Relational Semantics and the Anatomy of Abstraction* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 91; cf. Alfred Jepsen, “[אָמַן] [ʾāman], תְּמוּנָה [ʿemūnāh]; תְּמוּנָה [ʿemūnāh]” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Revised Edition, Vols. 1–XV, 1977–2012, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green and John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 292–323.

58. Exodus 17:12.

into his ruling office like a tent peg driven into a secure (*ne'ēman*) place.<sup>59</sup>

Firm or steady with respect to *what*? As it turns out, the *ʿemūnāh* lexicon points to firmness both in faithfulness and in faith, depending on how its verb form, *ʾaman*, is conjugated, “from which derives the familiar word *Amen*, meaning ‘let it be established.’”<sup>60</sup>

The passive niph'al verb form, *ne'ēman*, is most often glossed “to be faithful” or “to endure,” and thus the participle means “enduring, lasting,” and when applied to persons “stable, reliable.”<sup>61</sup> Deuteronomy represents “the faithful (*ne'ēman*) God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,” while a Psalm says the covenant itself “will stand firm (*ne'ēman*).”<sup>62</sup> The niph'al can also express someone's faithfulness to God, as when Hosea says “Judah still walks with God, and is faithful (*ne'ēman*) to the Holy One,” and Nehemiah describes what pleased God about Abraham: “a faithful (*ne'ēman*) heart” in response to God.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast, the active hif'l verb form, *he'emin*, “has as its main meaning reliance on the reliable.”<sup>64</sup> It has to do with “holding secure,” for example, in describing the action of a person who “relies on the security, faithfulness, and reliability of God, and lives accordingly.”<sup>65</sup> From this core meaning of reliance on the reliable, the semantic range can extend from “to be firmly set in/on something, to hold firm” which “is used especially of a person or his word: to build steadfastly on someone, or to rely on his word,” to things like “to stand firm,” “to trust,” “to put/have/maintain faith in,” “believe in,” or “place confidence in.”<sup>66</sup> Isaiah portrays God as laying a stable foundation on which one can rely: “thus says the Lord God, ‘See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone . . . One who trusts (*he'emin*) will not panic.’”<sup>67</sup> Even the characteristically steady warhorse, which “does not turn back from the sword” on a chaotic battlefield, “cannot stand still (*he'emin*) at the sound of a trumpet.”<sup>68</sup> The active hif'l characterizes Abraham's exemplary response to God, “And he *wēhe'emin* (believed, relied on, or ‘faithed,’ to adopt an anthimeria) the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.”<sup>69</sup>

59. Isaiah 22:23; cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, Vol. 19) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 336; Jimmy J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary* (Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 295.

60. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, eds., “אָמַן” [*ʾaman*] and “אֱמֻנָה” [*ʿemūnāh*] in *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 5 vols. (1994–2000), trans. Mervyn E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 63; David J. A. Clines, ed., “אָמַן” [*ʾaman*] and “אֱמֻנָה” [*ʿemūnāh*] in *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 8 vols. (1993–2011) (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 193, 314–316; John Barton, “Faith in the Hebrew Bible,” unpublished, 4.

61. Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., “אָמַן” [*ʾaman*] and “אֱמֻנָה” [*ʿemūnāh*] in *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 52–53; R. Walter L. Moberly, “אָמַן” [*ʾaman*] in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 1, ed. William A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 427–433; Jepsen, “אָמַן” [*ʾaman*], 322–323.

62. Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 89:28.

63. Hosea 11:12; Nehemiah 9:8. Jubilees 17–23 celebrates Abraham for his *ne'ēman* (4Q226, fragment 7); see Dwight D. Swanson, “Faith, III. Judaism,” in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, Vol. 8, *Essenes-Fidelsim*, ed. C. M. Furey et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 701–702. Cf. 1 Samuel 2:25, 3:20; Psalm 101:6.

64. Barton, “Faith in the Hebrew Bible,” 8–9.  
65. Egon Pfeiffer, “Glaube im Alten Testament,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 71 (1959): 164.

66. Joseph P. Healey, “Faith: Old Testament,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 745; Jepsen, “אָמַן” [*ʾaman*], 322–323; Barton, “Faith in the Hebrew Bible,” 4; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 52–54; Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 314–317.

67. Isaiah 28:16; cf. 53:1. Paul quotes this twice, Romans 9:33 and 10:11; cf. Otto Betz, “Firmness in Faith: Hebrews 11:1 and Isaiah 28:16,” in Thompson, *Scripture: Meaning and Method*, 92–113.

68. Job 39:24.

69. Genesis 15:6. Barton, “Faith in the Hebrew Bible,” 4. Abraham “believed God, that is, entrusted his life and conduct to God.” Unlike the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, English lacks a simple verb form for “faith,” which allows English-speaking translators to import their theological biases into the text, such as the view that “faithing” is primarily a form of cognition, notably believing or knowing a proposition. An alternative view sees “faithing” as primarily a way of relating to a person, notably relying on or trusting them

Interestingly, the Hebrew noun *ʔimūnāh* more consistently connotes faithfulness than faith in each of its forty-nine occurrences in the Hebrew scriptures,<sup>70</sup> with one possible—though controversial—exception: “Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their *ʔimūnāh*,” which is often translated “faith.”<sup>71</sup> Edmund Perry writes:

The Gordian knot of the statement [“the righteous live by their faith”] is the word *ʔimūna*, translated “faith” here, but elsewhere and more often translated “faithfulness.” Is it the reliance or the reliability of the righteous which is intended in this passage?<sup>72</sup>

Or both at once? After all, as Perry continues, the *ʔimūnāh*-response to God involves both trust and obedience:

[T]he Old Testament does not set trust and obedience in contrast to each other as separate ways of satisfying the demands of God . . . [T]he one who pursues *ʔimūnāh* in a way that would be pleasing to God, as in Jeremiah 5:1, must seek to both trust and obey God.<sup>73</sup>

Of further interest, while twenty-four of the forty-nine occurrences of *ʔimūnāh* in the Hebrew scriptures attribute faithfulness to

for something, with perseverance in the face of challenges, and then extends that view to something cognitive, “faithing that p,” e.g., relying on a proposition’s being true, with perseverance in the face of challenges to doing so, leaving it open what cognitive state one might be in toward p.

70. Chines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 314–317; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 52–54.

71. Habakkuk 2:4, quoted by Paul from the LXX as *πιστις* in Galatians 3:11 and Romans 1:17.

72. Edmund Perry, “The Meaning of *ʔimūna* in the Old Testament,” *Journal of Bible and Religion* 21 (1953): 252.

73. Perry, “The Meaning of *ʔimūna* in the Old Testament,” 255.

God—for example, “Great is your faithfulness” and God acts “in faithfulness,” even when it is not apparent—Rabbi Samuel Levens argues that *ʔimūnāh* can point to the faith God had in creating the world.<sup>74</sup> *ʔimūnāh* can also characterize a more life-encompassing relation to God, as when King Jehoshaphat declares: “This is how you shall act: in the fear of the LORD, in *be ʔimūnāh* (faith/faithfulness), and with your whole heart.”<sup>75</sup>

In a famous wordplay, Isaiah issues the LORD’s warning to King Ahaz, using first the active hiplil and then the passive niphal form of the verb *ʔaman*. John Barton comments: “The NRSV renders, ‘If you do not stand firm in faith (*he ʔemin*), you shall not stand (*ne ʔimān*) at all,’ in an attempt to capture the pun: the sense is that those who do not rely on God will not be held firm by him.”<sup>76</sup> Similarly, in 2 Chronicles we find: “*he ʔemin* in the LORD your God and you will *ne ʔimān*; *he ʔemin* his prophets [and you will succeed],” with the JPS Tanakh using “stand firm” for the passive niphal and “trust firmly” for the active hiplil.<sup>77</sup>

Further evidence connecting *ʔimūnāh* and *πιστις*, on the one hand, to perseverance, on the other, comes from the so-called intertestamental period. Scores of bilingual Jewish scholars who produced the Septuagint used the *πιστις* lexicon to translate the *ʔimūnāh* lexicon from the Hebrew scriptures into Greek with a high degree of uniformity. Notably, they consistently render forms of the verb *ʔaman*, and the active hiplil *he ʔemin* in particular, with the verb *πιστεῖν*.<sup>78</sup>

74. Lamentations 3:22–23; Psalm 33:4, cf. 89:49; Samuel Levens, “The Life of Faith as a Work of Art: A Rabbinic Theology of Faith,” in “Approaches to Faith,” 61–81.

75. 2 Chronicles 19:9; cf. Jeremiah 7:28.

76. Isaiah 7:9; Barton, “Faith in the Hebrew Bible,” 6.

77. 2 Chronicles 20:20.

78. Rudolf Bultmann and Artur Weiser, “πιστεῖν, πιστός, πιστοῦ, πιστοῦ, ἀπιστοῦ, ἀπιστοῦ, ἀπιστοῦ, ἀπιστοῦ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 6, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 174–228; Perry, “The Meaning of *ʔimūna* in the Old Testament,” 252.

Apparently, they found that the *πιστις* lexicon best represented the perseverance evident in what the *ἑρμηνῆς* lexicon points to. Several notable scholars take the adjectives βέβαιος [*bebaios*, “firm,” “steadfast,” “secure”] and πιστός [*πιστός*] as virtually synonymous in the writings of the first-century Jewish thinker Philo of Alexandria, which suggests steadfastness belongs to πιστός (*πιστις*).<sup>79</sup> More generally, the ways Semitic theologies, narratives, and traditions shaped religious uses of Greek terms reinforces *πιστις* possessing perseverance.<sup>80</sup> In the same vein, Gerhard Barth concludes: “*πιστις*, with its meanings ‘acquire firmness/stability,’ ‘depend on someone without qualification,’ and ‘give credence to a message,’ strongly influenced the understanding of πιστ- [the *πιστ-* stem] both in Judaism and the NT.”<sup>81</sup>

The biblical data strongly suggests that faith and faithfulness essentially involve perseverance. With this in mind, we sketch a theory of faith and faithfulness.

#### 11.4 A THEORY OF FAITH AND FAITHFULNESS

When you put your faith in someone for something, you rely on them for it. Relying, however, is not enough for faith. That’s because, unlike mere reliance, faith has built-in to it both motivational and informational states. But not any old motivational and informational

states will do. Iman cannot have faith in Allah to reward her devotion if she wants Allah to reward it and she *dis*believes that Allah will do so, or if she believes that Allah will reward her devotion and she *wants* Allah *not* to do so. Disbelief and disdesire are too “negative” for faith, more “positive” informational and motivational states are required.

We mean nothing contentious in describing the informational state as *positive*. For you to be in a positive informational state toward a proposition *p* is for you to be in some state or other that (i) represents the world as being *p*, (ii) is how it ought to be only if *p* is true, (iii) responds to your grounds for the truth of *p*, and (iv) disposes you to take a stand on behalf of the truth of *p*. Propositional belief counts but—crucially—it is not the only positive informational state. Depending on the details, others might include those with propositional content, for example, acceptance, credence, confidence, trust, hope, imaginative assent, and beliefless assuming, as well as those that lack propositional content such as perceptual states or cognitions that represent the world imaginatively.<sup>82</sup> We hasten to add an important qualification. When propositional belief is the informational component of faith, faith does not preclude believing “thinner” propositions. For example, if Iman has faith in Allah to reward her devotion, instead of believing the thick proposition that

79. Erich Grässer, *Der Glaube im Hebräerbrief* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1965), 99, 144; quoted in Dennis R. Lindsay, “The Roots and Development of the πιστ- Word Group as Faith Terminology,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 49 (1993): 161.

80. See, e.g., James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); Barth, “πιστις, πιστεῖν, πιστός,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Vol. 3), 91–98; Betz, “Firmness in Faith,” 108–110; Dennis R. Lindsay, *Josephus and Faith: Πιστις and Πιστεῖν as Faith Terminology in the Writings of Flavius Josephus and in the NT* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993); Lindsay, “The Roots and Development of the πιστ- Word Group as Faith Terminology,” 103–118; Lüthmann, “Faith: New Testament”; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 296–298.

81. Barth, “πιστις, πιστεῖν, πιστός,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 92.

82. See William P. Alston, “Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith,” in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality*, ed. Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 3–27, 241–244 (acceptance); Robert Audi, *Rationality and Religious Commitment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) (trust); Louis Pojman, “Faith Without Belief,” *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 157–176 and Daniel J. McKaughan, 2013 “Authentic Faith and Acknowledged Risk: Dissolving the Problem of Faith and Reason,” *Religious Studies* 49: 101–124 (hope); Daniel J. McKaughan, “Action-Centered Faith, Doubt, and Rationality,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 41 (2016): 71–90 (credence); John L. Schellenberg, *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) (imaginative assent); and Daniel Howard-Snyder, “The Skeptical Christian,” in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* 8 (2017): 142–167; Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Can Fictionalists Have Faith? It All Depends,” *Religious Studies* 55 (2019): 447–468; and Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Three Arguments to Think That Faith Does Not Entail Belief,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 100 (2019): 114–128 (beliefless assuming).

he will reward her, she might believe the thinner proposition that he will *likely* reward her, or that he will *more likely than not* reward her, or that he is *likely enough* to reward her *for her to rely on its being true*, and so on. Belief in the thick proposition that he will reward her is optional. Nor do we mean anything contentious in describing the motivational state as *positive*. For you to be in a positive motivational state toward some proposition p is for you to be in some state or other in virtue of which you care (with positive valence) about p's being true or, to put it more colloquially, it matters to you whether p is true. Wanting p to be true is a positive motivational state, but it is not the only one. In the literature, the idea is put in terms of being *for* its truth, being *in favor of* it, and even wanting-to-want it to be true, among other possibilities.<sup>83</sup> We can group the positive informational and motivational states toward p under the label of *a positive stance toward p*.

However, you can rely on someone for something and also be in a positive stance toward their coming through, but lack faith in them because you are disinclined to continue relying on them when faced with the least bit of difficulty in doing so. Whatever else faith is, it isn't fickle or flighty, *especially* in the face of challenges, whether they are emotional, evidential, social, or something else besides. Fair-weather faith is no faith at all.

This is where perseverance enters the picture. English is profligate when it comes to items in the neighborhood of perseverance: endurance, firmness, fortitude, grit, steadfastness, tenacity, resilience, pluck,

83. Cf. Alston, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," 241–244; Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Audi, *Rationality and Religious Commitment*, 2011; Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Propositional Faith: What It Is and What It Is Not," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (2013): 357–372. Some faith-theorists include in the motivational state a positive evaluation of p's being true, anything in virtue of which you regard p's being true as a good or desirable thing. In addition to desires, other potential candidates for positive motivational states include volitions, affections, and emotions.

moxie, stick-to-itiveness, refusing to give up, persistence, resistance, determination, doggedness, resolve, indefatigability, diligence, tirelessness, drive, stamina, pertinacity, and so on. Perhaps there are subtle differences. For example, perhaps resilience necessarily involves "bouncing back" to a state one was in after initially giving way to adversity, while perseverance does not; or, perhaps grit necessarily involves a "passion for long-term goals," while resilience and perseverance do not; or, perhaps spiritual fortitude necessarily involves drawing on one's spiritual outlook to discover meaning and purpose, and to maintain integrity, in the face of adversity, while perseverance, grit, and resilience do not.<sup>84</sup> In our view, *anything* that disposes you to continue to rely on someone in the face of challenges will meet faith's perseverance requirement. To be clear: the perseverance involved in faith needs only to dispose you somewhat to overcome challenges to continue relying; moreover, it need not be unbreakable. Like faith itself, perseverance admits of degrees. In weak or immature faith, it might be small, like a mustard seed.

Along with the biblical material, these brief reflections suggest a theory of relational faith:

*Resilient Reliance.* For you to have faith in a person for something is for you to be disposed to rely on them to come through with respect to it, with resilience in the face of challenges to doing so, *because* of your positive stance toward their coming through.

84. Xinguang Chen, Yan Wang, and Xaqiong Yan, "The Essential Resilience Scale: Instrument Development and Prediction of Perceived Health and Behaviour," *Stress Health* 32 (2016): 534. A. L. Duckworth et al., "Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92 (2007): 1087; Daryl R. Van Tongeren et al., "Development and Validation of a Measure of Spiritual Fortitude," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 11 (2019): 588–590.

We choose “resilience” for its alliterative value and not to highlight any difference between it and other ways in which we might be disposed to rely on someone for something in the face of challenges.

Now consider relational faithfulness. To be a faithful person is *not* to be full of faith or especially “faithish.” Rather, as William Alston rightly observes, “[a] faithful person is one who is worthy of faith being reposed in [them], trustworthy, reliable, loyal, steadfast, constant, and so on.”<sup>85</sup> If faith is resilient reliance, a person is worthy of faith being reposed in them only if they are disposed to come through with respect to what you rely on them for, even in the face of challenges to doing so. Fair-weather faithfulness is no faithfulness at all. Put abstractly, our theory of relational faithfulness is this:

*Resilient Reliability.* For you to be faithful to someone for something is for you to be disposed to come through with respect to it, with resilience in the face of challenges to doing so, *because of* your positive stance toward your coming through.

On our theory, both faith and faithfulness can be viewed as role-functional psychological states. When you have faith in someone for something, your faith takes as input any of a wide variety of combinations of positive stances toward their coming through and gives as output a disposition to rely on them to do so, whereas when you are faithful to someone with respect to something, your faithfulness takes as input any of a wide variety of combinations of positive stances toward your coming through for them and gives as output a disposition to come through—all with some measure of resilience in the face of challenges to relying or coming through.

We submit that this is what a theory of relational faith and faithfulness might look like when it aims to accommodate biblical *pisits* and

85. Alston, “Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith,” 13.

*ʾimānāh*, both of which arguably involve perseverance. We now turn to other religious data such a theory should aim to accommodate.

### 11.5 OTHER RELIGIOUS DATA

A theory of faith and faithfulness should illuminate the roles these are assigned in the Abrahamic religions and explain why so many people have valued them in connection with central theological themes, such as covenant and salvation. Moreover, a theory should accommodate the range of experience of people of faith today as well as the experiences of a tradition’s exemplars. Here we explain, all too briefly, how these items are relevant to the connection between perseverance, on the one hand, and faith and faithfulness, on the other hand.

*Covenant.* In the ancient Near East, covenants emerged as a way of extending familial relationships. They “functioned as a legal means to integrate foreign individuals or groups,” receiving kin-in-law into a network of social privileges and obligations ordinarily reserved for blood relations.<sup>86</sup> Among Semitic tribes, as in many cultures, you have a range of responsibilities toward a father, mother, or brother. Kin rely on and are called upon to come through for each other in ways recognized as appropriate to those relationships. These and other ways of binding people together came to be extended to other parties via oaths and rituals that formalized expectations and set terms appropriate to relationships, for example, between marriage partners or a suzerain and his vassals. Even today some treaties and traditional wedding vows function similarly, as when partners solemnly promise to have and to hold each other “From this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, to

86. Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 3; cf. 28.

love and to cherish till death do us part.” To make such a vow is to undertake obligations that set up what it means to come through for your partner, and to lay down what they can rely on you for. Marriage covenants typically involve reciprocal responsibilities, where the marriage’s flourishing involves each partner relying on, and coming through for, the other—especially through difficulty. Whether explicitly identified or not, faith and faithfulness clearly play central roles in covenantal relations.

Similarly, the Abrahamic tradition takes God to enter into covenants with people. Their relational and indeed familial character is evident in the recurring declaration “I will be your God and you will be my people.”<sup>87</sup> In the Hebrew scriptures, God acts as the suzerain, unilaterally and unconditionally entering into covenants, as when God vows to Noah never again to destroy life on earth by a flood, or God promises to give Abraham descendants and to bless all nations through them.<sup>88</sup> Implicit in these covenants are obligations on the part of people and Abraham. Sometimes those obligations are made explicit, and the covenant is bilateral and conditional, holding only so long as the obligations are kept, as in God’s covenant with Israel, which occurs after God leads them out of slavery in Egypt, and promises them protection and prosperity *if* God alone is their God and they obey the Law.

Ideally, God relies on Israel to keep its terms of the covenant, and they come through for God, while Israel relies on God to keep God’s terms of the covenant, and God comes through for them—with perseverance in the face of challenges. In truth, however, the story of Israel in the Hebrew scriptures is a story of the waxing and waning of Israel’s faith in and faithfulness to God. Notably, the story has God continuing to rely on Israel despite their fits and starts in coming

87. Jeremiah 7:23, *passim*.

88. Genesis 9:8–17; Genesis 12:1–3, 7, 13:14–17, 15:4–21, 17:4–16; 22:15–18.

through, and it has God continuing to come through for Israel despite their failure to continue relying on God. Note well: absent perseverance in the face of challenges to relying on and coming through for each other, no covenantal relationship can survive much less flourish, whether it is a covenant between God and Israel or God and anyone else. Only perseverance in the face of emotional, evidential, social, and other difficulties can bestow on a covenantal relationship the stability required for it to continue and for those who are party to it to experience the support and security it can provide, and to reap its long-term rewards.

*Salvation.* According to the salvation stories of the Abrahamic traditions, humans tend to fail in multiple ways: we don’t live up to our own ideals, we seek our own power and interest over the common good, we squander our talents, we neglect to steward creation well, and by acts of commission and omission we undermine the establishment of a peaceful, just, and harmonious global community. These and other failures are at odds with God’s purposes, resulting in alienation from God and each other. At our best, we are aware of our failings and we own them, with regret, and we intend to improve. But improvement is difficult, fraught with setbacks, uncooperativeness, greed, malaise, disrespect, and other maladies. Left to our own devices, failure is not only our past, it is our future.

Fortunately, say these traditions, God has not left us to our own devices. God has provided a way to be reconciled with God and, as a result, with each other. Different traditions tell different stories about what that way is. Christianity, for instance, emphasizes the salvation of sinners by God’s grace “through faith,” in contrast with “works.” Such faith is plausibly understood as resilient reliance, in this case on God’s redemptive activity accomplished in Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>89</sup> Each of these traditions shares the idea that

89. Cf. Ephesians 2:8–9.

people can both individually and collectively align themselves with God's way through faith and faithfulness—relying on God for the resources to undo the alienation that plagues our relationships, and coming through for God in God's rescue project by obeying, following, and submitting to God's revealed way. Notably, such alignment requires that people be prepared to persevere through challenges along the way.

*The experience of people of faith today.* A theory of faith and faithfulness should try to explain the experience of people of faith today. In this connection, we note not only that people of faith report that they are disposed to rely on God in a variety of ways, and to come through for God, with varying degrees of success, but also that they often experience a variety of struggles in their efforts to do so, including intellectual doubt, even belief-canceling doubt. We focus on this last fact briefly.

On some theories of faith, you can't have faith in God for something unless you *believe* the thick proposition that God *will* come through for you with respect to it. No such theory can explain why so many people of faith lack that belief at some time in their journey, a fact confirmed by (i) frank conversations and interviews, (ii) the reports of their leaders, (iii) the many self-help books addressing religious doubt, and (iv) sociological research on religious struggle.<sup>90</sup> Our theory of faith, however, can explain this data since it does not require belief of a thick proposition. It only requires some positive informational state or other toward God's coming through—which could be belief of the thick proposition, but might be believing a thinner proposition, for example, that *it's likely enough* that God will come

through to *rely on God*, or some informational state other than belief, for example, propositional acceptance, trust, a high enough credence, or beliefless assumption. Indeed, our theory renders unsurprising a mix of informational states among people of faith today, which is what we in fact find.

*Exemplars.* A theory of faith and faithfulness is more satisfying to the extent that it can explain why certain people are regarded as exemplars of religious faith. Of course, different religious traditions put forward different exemplars. Since we are most familiar with exemplars in Judaism and Christianity, we will focus on Abraham, Jesus, and Mother Teresa. And, once again, we will focus not on the ways in which they rely on God, and come through for God, but on the cognitive component of their faith.

We begin with Abraham. Abraham's story begins with God showing up, promising to make him into a great nation, among other things, and commanding him to travel to a land God promises him. So he does. God's faithfulness involves keeping that promise. Abraham's faith involves relying on God to keep it. But that's hardly remarkable. What is remarkable, however, are the ways intellectual doubt pepper the story.

Right from the start, the story goes out of its way to illustrate how the odds are not good that God will come through on the promise of descendants. Abraham is old, and he has no offspring; his wife, Sarah, is barren. When God makes it clear that his promise will be fulfilled through offspring from Sarah, "Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?'"<sup>91</sup> Neither believe God *will* come through, and so Abraham fathers a child with a mistress, Hagar, as a backup plan. Sarah eventually gives birth to Isaac. But the biggest strain on Abraham's faith in God comes when

90. See Julie J. Exline et al., "The Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale: Development and Initial Validation," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 6 (2014): 208–222, and Kenneth I. Pargament and Julie J. Exline, *Working with Spiritual Struggles in Psychotherapy: From Research to Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2022), chapter 10.

91. Genesis 17:17.

God issues the terrifying command to sacrifice Isaac, an act that, on the face of it, further stacks the deck against God's coming through. When God sees that Abraham intends to rely on God to deliver on his promise—even if he sacrifices Isaac—God revokes the command just as Abraham raises his knife.<sup>92</sup>

Theories of faith according to which Abraham had faith in God to keep the promise only if Abraham *believed* the thick proposition that God *will* keep the promise cannot explain Abraham's expressions of intellectual doubt. Moreover, on such theories, when God commends Abraham for his faith, God commends him for having, among other things, belief of the thick proposition that God *will* deliver on the promise in the face of a massive amount of counterevidence—which makes Abraham irrational. But *he'emin* does not require belief of a thick proposition. There's no need, therefore, to treat Abraham as irrational, which would be uncharitable. Furthermore, God values Abraham's faith. That's why God commends it. So, on theories of faith that require belief of a thick proposition, we must understand God as valuing Abraham's irrationality. But in the world of Abraham's story, and in the Jewish tradition that preserved and shaped it, God never values irrationality. And why would God—who is unsurpassable in cognitive excellence on many Semitic theologies—value irrationality? It just doesn't make sense.

Our theory of faith, however, makes sense of Abraham as an exemplar of faith. After all, he continued to rely on God to keep the promise, and he did so by overcoming evidential challenges to doing so.

92. For a more detailed discussion of the nature of Abraham's faith and faithfulness in connection to perseverance in the face of challenges, see Michael Pace and Daniel J. McKaughan, "Judaic-Christian Faith as Trust and Loyalty," *Religious Studies* 38 (2020): 30–60; Daniel J. McKaughan and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Theorizing About Faith and Faithfulness with Jonathan Kvanvig," *Religious Studies* 58 (2022): 628–648; and Howard-Snyder and McKaughan, "Faith and Resilience," 205–241.

As we indicated earlier, Mark's *Gospel* presents Jesus as a role model, and so we should expect Jesus to model something as important as faith, especially since, right at the outset, Jesus proclaims that faith in the good news is central to the response that God desires from those who hear it.<sup>93</sup> We focus on two ways in which Jesus models faith, with an eye toward its cognitive dimension.

First, in the world of the story, Jesus has faith in Peter, James, John and the rest of the Twelve, as his disciples. This is important. That's because, although the Twelve try to follow Jesus, they often bungle it, and Jesus has to correct them, even to the point of becoming exasperated with them. However, the crucial test of Jesus's faith in them comes toward the end of Mark's *Gospel*.

Jesus is arrested by the authorities, brought before Pilate on a cooked-up charge, and then crucified. Crucially, in this part of the story, the disciples abandon him, and Peter even denies that he knows Jesus, three times. Jesus knows this. If Jesus could have any grounds for doubt about whether the Twelve would come through as disciples, this is it. Nevertheless, the story ends in a remarkable display of Jesus's faith in them. Mark says that, after Passover, when three women went to the tomb where Jesus was buried, they found that the stone had been rolled away:

As the women entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' " Trembling and bewildered, the women

93. Mark 1:14–15.

went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.<sup>94</sup>

In the world of the story, Jesus had told the disciples that after his death he would rise again and meet up with them in Galilee.<sup>95</sup> Of course, like any sensible person, they had no idea what he was talking about. But now, through the messenger, Jesus reissues the invitation to meet up in Galilee—even after they had deserted him. It looks as though Jesus continues to rely on them as his disciples, even though he has significant reason to be in doubt about whether they will come through. And notice: the messenger picks out Peter in particular. Jesus even continues to rely on unreliable Peter.

We now turn to a second way in which Jesus models faith. When he was being crucified, Mark says that, near the end, “at three o’clock,” Jesus screamed, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” In the world of Mark’s *Gospel*, Jesus has an explicit, conscious relationship of mutual faith and faithfulness with God. And, clearly enough, here on the cross, Jesus expected God to be present to him in his hour of need. But his expectation is crushed. “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?” Surely there is doubt here, perhaps even belief-canceling doubt about God’s faithfulness; a “teetering on the edge between disillusionment and faith,” in the words of one commentator.<sup>96</sup> And yet, Mark presents Jesus as an exemplar of what faith in God looks like in circumstances such as these. In that role, Jesus has faith in God even while being in doubt about God’s faithfulness.

Our theory of faith, unlike those that require belief of thick propositions, sheds light on why Jesus is an exemplar of faith despite his

94. Mark 16:5-8.

95. Mark 8:31-32.

96. Richard John Neuhaus, *Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 232.

belief-canceling doubt. After all, despite his doubt, he continued to rely on God to come through, as evidenced by his quoting the first words of Psalm 22, thereby appropriating the entire lament for himself. Near the end of the psalm, we find these words:

To [the LORD], indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the LORD, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

So in the world of the story, despite God’s apparent abandonment of Jesus when Jesus needed God most, and despite Jesus’s doubt of God’s faithfulness, Jesus exhibited faith in God, faith that, in the end, God will make all things well—even for those who “go down to the dust.” Even they will one day “live for him” and “proclaim his deliverance”; even they will one day say, “[the LORD] has done it.”

One last exemplar. In 1942, after what Mother Teresa took to be a call from God, she vowed to give herself completely to God, no matter what, and to serve God in the poorest of the poor. What she didn’t expect at the time was that the “no matter what” clause of her vow would include five decades of severe doubt. It appears from her private writings, published in 2007, ten years after her death, that she not only experienced the silence of God during that time; she also experienced belief-canceling doubt. “[T]here is no One to answer my prayers,” she wrote: “So many unanswered questions live within me—I am afraid to uncover them—because of the blasphemy.—If there be God, please forgive me.”<sup>97</sup> Later she wrote:

97. Brian Kolodiejchuk, ed., *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light. The Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta”* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 187.

In my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss—of God not wanting me—of God not being God—of God not really existing (Jesus, please forgive my blasphemies—I have been told to write everything). That darkness that surrounds me on all sides—I can't lift my soul to God—no light or inspiration enters my soul—I speak of love for souls—of tender love for God—words pass through my lips [*sic*, for "words"]—and I long with a deep longing to believe them.—What do I labour for? If there be no God—there can be no soul.—If there is no soul then Jesus—You also are not true.<sup>98</sup>

This was not a one-off occurrence. Toward the end of the period during which she wrote, her priest and confessor inquired about this aspect of her life, and she replied that it had seen no change.

How are we to understand this? Early on, she said she had lost her faith. "Where is my Faith?" she wrote.

Even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness and darkness.—My God—how painful is this unknown pain—I have no Faith—I dare not utter the words & thoughts that crowd in my heart—& make me suffer untold agony.<sup>99</sup>

If our only resources for understanding faith makes belief of thick propositions a requirement, this is the right thing to say. However, Mother Teresa later came to a different understanding of her situation when she described her faith with nine short words: "to live by faith and yet not to believe."<sup>100</sup>

98. Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, 192–193.

99. Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, 187; cf. 193.

100. Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, 248. For more on Mother Teresa, see Daniel J. McKaughan, "Faith through the Dark of Night: What Perseverance Amidst Doubt Can Teach Us About the Nature and Value of Religious Faith," *Faith and Philosophy* 35 (2018): 195–218.

It is not difficult to see here someone experiencing severe intellectual doubt, but who is nevertheless an exemplar of faith in and faithfulness to God. Our theory explains why: persevering through intellectual doubt can express exemplary faith and faithfulness.

## 11.6 LOOKING AHEAD

We have argued that perseverance is prized in the religious life commended by the Abrahamic tradition, according to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Further, perseverance is essential to the faith and faithfulness commended by that tradition, as evidenced by its close association with biblical *piests* and *ʿimānāh*, as well as the themes of covenant and salvation, the lived experience of people of faith, and exemplars of faith and faithfulness within those traditions.

We expect that investigation of the Qur'an might justify similar conclusions. We hope that our Muslim colleagues might be encouraged by what we have sketched in these pages to bring to light an understanding of perseverance and its relationship to faith and faithfulness that is informed by their tradition, its languages and themes, the lived experience of Muslims today, and exemplars within their tradition.<sup>101</sup>

Our focus here has been relational faith and faithfulness, faith in and faithfulness to a person, whether human or divine, and their relationship to perseverance. However, there are other manifestations of faith and faithfulness. These include faith in and

101. Some good work has already been done in this area. See Imran Aijaz's *Islam: A Contemporary Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Routledge, 2018), and "The sceptical Muslim," *Religious Studies* 59 (2023): 495–514. For an empirical study of American Muslim faith in God, see Youssef Chouhrouf, "What Causes Muslims to Doubt? A Qualitative Analysis," *Yaqeen Institute of Islamic Research*, Accessed January 17, 2024, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/what-causes-muslims-to-doubt-islam-a-quantitative-analysis>.

faithfulness to an ideal or cause, propositional faith and faithfulness (faith that *p* and faithfulness to *p*, for some proposition *p*). Further, there are the faith and faithfulness involved in the life-structuring-and-unifying faith and faithfulness of a person of faith—orientational faith and faithfulness. Further, there are the faith and faithfulness involved in the virtue of faith and the virtue of faithfulness. We might well wonder whether perseverance is related to these manifestations of faith and faithfulness in the way perseverance is related to relational faith and faithfulness. More specifically, we might wonder whether our proposed theory of relational faith and faithfulness—Resilient Reliance and Resilient Reliability—can be plausibly extended to these other manifestations of faith and faithfulness, thereby preserving and exhibiting the deep roots of perseverance in all these manifestations of faith and faithfulness. If such an extension can be plausibly made, we might further wonder whether there is anything that might be rightly and strictly called *faith simpliciter* and *faithfulness simpliciter* which underlie each of these various manifestations of faith and faithfulness and how perseverance is related to them.

We might wonder, further still, when faith and faithfulness—understood as essentially involving perseverance—are rational and irrational, valuable and disvaluable, and vicious as well as virtuous. In addition, we might wonder whether there are any useful guidelines to help us discern who and what to put our faith in and to be faithful to, and who and what *not* to put our faith in and to be faithful to. Perhaps an evidence-based empirical psychology and sociology of faith and faithfulness—so understood—can help on that score. We might also wonder whether faith and faithfulness play any role in the grand project of human inquiry—the project of understanding the world, ourselves, and our place in the world and, if so, what problems in ethics, epistemology, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, and so on might receive a fresh look and more satisfying solutions

with an adequate philosophy of faith and faithfulness—a *pistology*, if you like—in hand to deal with them.<sup>102</sup>

If reflection on perseverance in the religious life leads us to curiosity about things of this extent and magnitude, then our chapter has served not only its smaller purpose but a much greater purpose than that with which it started: a call for understanding the place of perseverance-infused faith and faithfulness in the whole of human life. Readers who have made it this far can also delight in having thereby displayed a measure of perseverance.

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102. For further discussion of when relational faith and faithfulness, on our theory, can be valuable or disvaluable and of how our theory can be extended to other manifestations of faith and faithfulness and a proposal for unifying them under a theory of faith and faithfulness simpliciter, see Daniel J. McKaughan and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Faith and Faithfulness," *Faith and Philosophy* 39 (2023): 1–25; see also Daniel J. McKaughan and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Faith," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Charles Talbot and Stewart Goetz (Hoboken: Wiley, 2021). On the difference that understanding faith as Resilient Reliance makes to questions about when faith might conflict with reason and how faith relates to doubt, see Daniel Howard-Snyder and Daniel J. McKaughan, "Theorizing About Faith with Lara Buchak," *Religious Studies* 58 (2022): 297–326 and Daniel Howard-Snyder and Daniel J. McKaughan, "The Problem of Faith and Reason," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Epistemology*, ed. Jonathan Fuqua, John Greco, and Tyler McNabb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 96–114.

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