



## Healing in the Bible

The Psalmist asked, "Who pardons all your iniquities? Who heals all your diseases?" His response is, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits" (Psalm 103:3). It is the LORD who heals.

The word "heal" and "healing" means to make solid or whole. In the Bible it means the restoration of health, the making whole or well whether physically, mentally or spiritually.

In the Old Testament the LORD God (*Yahweh*) alone was the source of all healing. In every aspect of his life man is dependent on the LORD God alone.

The privilege of physical healing is governed by the will and sovereignty of God. The LORD God heals whomever He wills. It is His sovereign choice. Man has no basis for demanding that God intervene and heal him of an illness. Arrogance and presumption of sinful man is in stark contrast to the sovereign grace of God.

### Healing in the Old Testament

The Old Testament provides the proper background for understanding the Christian teaching on healing. As a sovereign God, He sustains His people in an eternal personal relationship with Himself.

The LORD God, *Yahweh* is the One who heals.

God delivered His people out of the land of Egypt. Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur for three days and found no drinking water. There were at least 600,000 people without water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, because they were bitter. So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" Moses cried out to the Lord, and "the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. And He said, 'If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer'" (Exodus 15:22-26, NASB95). (All Scriptures unless otherwise noted are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update).

"I *Yahweh* am your healer" (NET translation note). *Yahweh rofé'ekha*, is the LORD who restores, heals, cures. The LORD your God heals. The LORD is the physician. Every man is in the need of healing. "Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion? The

whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil" (Isaiah 1:5-6). "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). The LORD is the only One who can heal the sin sick soul. Yahweh who heals in the Old Testament is Jesus who heals in the New Testament.

The LORD God is revealing Himself as sovereign in the affairs of mankind. "See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39). Our relationship with Him affects every area of our personal lives.

In the Old Testament the priest was not a healer. He was the medical officer who authenticated that healing had taken place, for example when a person was cured of leprosy.

Sickness and death are the consequence of the fall when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's Word (Gen. 2:17; 3:19). Mankind is radically depraved and it has affected every area of our lives. Even Satan can get his dirty hands involved (Luke 13:16).

However, the Book of Job and the teachings of Jesus clearly demonstrate that sickness is not always divine punishment for man's sins. It is not normative for God to use sickness as punishment. God does use our sickness to discipline, chastise, develop our faith in Him. What was the outcome of Job's experiences? (Job 40:4; 42:6). What was the apostle Paul's response to his suffering? (2 Cor. 4:17). "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

The Psalmist pleads for the Lord to heal his depression and the physical effects of it in Psalm 6:2. "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am pining away; Heal me, O Lord, for my bones are dismayed" (Psalm 6:2).

The Lord heals the soul when we confess our sins to Him. "As for me, I said, 'O Lord, be gracious to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You'" (Psalm 41:4). When we are despondent, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3). The emphasis in the Psalms is on the physical, emotional and spiritual healing.

The Lord brings healing after judgment. "The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven days, on the day the Lord binds up the fracture of His people and heals the bruise He has inflicted" (Isaiah 30:26; cf. Egypt in Isa. 19:22). Isaiah even speaks of "the day when no resident will say, 'I am sick'; The people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity" (Isa. 33:24). There is healing in His wings.

The fixed point in the universe is the unchangeable throne of the LORD God. After describing the depravity of the human heart in Jeremiah 17:9, the Hebrew prophet went on to write: "A glorious throne on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. O Lord, the hope of Israel, All who forsake You will be put to shame. Those who turn away on earth will be written down, because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the Lord. Heal me,

O Lord, and I will be healed; Save me and I will be saved, for You are my praise" (Jeremiah 17:12-14). The healing of the nation, the broken in heart, sin sickness comes from the Lord. Jeremiah lamented in Jer. 8:22, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?" (Jeremiah 8:22). The "balm" was a resin derived from a special tree which grew in Gilead. It was known for its healing properties. It was a precious resin, extract which was produced 50 or 60 drops a day from the tree. It was a very costly method that possessed marvelous curative properties. It cleansed, soothed and healed. The medicine the Lord gives brings healing. How tragic when there is no hope, and a person is filled with despair. Like the prophet, I have been there as a pastor when the doctor calls the family in and says, "I am sorry, but there is no cure. There are no medicines available." I have also been there many times when a beloved medical missionary turns and says, "Call your missionary staff together and pray, that is our only hope. It is all in the Lord's hands." Sometimes, we see Him heal, at other times He chooses to heal by taking our loved one home to be with Him. Sometimes He uses the "Balm in Gilead," the medicines He has made available through modern science, and at other times He touches and heals. By both means He gets all the credit.

### **Healing in the New Testament**

The first three gospels or Synoptic Gospels, demonstrate the Old Testament emphasis of God as the healer of His people being fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. Immanuel has come and He dwells in the midst of His people. The kingdom of God has arrived.

Donald Guthrie observes "healing in the New Testament is of two kinds, (a) physical healing (Matt. 4:24; 10:8; Luke 5:17; John 4:47) and (b) spiritual healing (Heb. 12:13). . . . It is important to observe that our Lord's healings are never portrayed as mere wonders." Moreover, "In both the Old and New Testament the idea of physical healing readily lent itself to an application in a spiritual and therefore a fuller sense (cf. John 12:40; 1 Pet. 2:24)" (*Baker's Dict. Of Theology*, E. F. Harrison, editor, p. 261).

### **The Healing Ministry of Jesus**

In the New Testament Jesus is the healer. It is important to note that Jesus healed organic diseases, not psychosomatic illnesses. It was not a matter of mind over matter in His healings. He dealt with incurable diseases from birth and long standing illnesses. He was no modern day faith healer charlatan.

With the exception of two verses the writers in the Gospels and Acts use the Greek word *therapeuo* forty times meaning "to heal." It is used to describe the miraculous healings wrought by Jesus and His disciples. Healing is an important part of the ministry of Jesus, but it must be seen in the context of His teaching ministry if it is to be correctly understood. "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people" (Matthew 4:23). Jesus went about teaching and healing.

In rapid succession the Gospel writer Mark tells us Jesus began His ministry in Capernaum by casting out the demons, healing Peter's mother-in-law who was suffering from a high fever, a large group of sick people brought to him one afternoon, a leper, a paralytic, a man with a

withered hand, multitudes by the sea shore, a woman with a hemorrhage for 12 years, raising Jairus' daughter from the dead, the people in Gennesaret, demon possessed daughter of the Syrophenician women, the deaf and dumb man, the blind man of Bethsaida, demons possessed boy with a dumb spirit, blind Bartimaeus, the paralytic man, etc.

Matthew also presents Jesus' ministry of preaching, teaching and healing the sick. "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan" (Matthew 4:23-25). Matthew adds two more examples by including the healing of the demoniac in the synagogue (Matt. 1:23-28) and the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26). Matthew sees Jesus' healing as directly fulfilling the Old Testament.

The healing ministry of Jesus is a revelation of His person. Who is this man? How can He do these things? He is God with us. He heals the blind and raises the dead. Only God can do that.

In the four Gospels the healing ministry of Jesus is understood primarily as it relates to the spiritual proclamation of the kingdom of God, and its King.

The Gospel of Luke, written by an ancient physician, stresses the healing ministry of Jesus. He introduces the ministry of Jesus in Luke 4:18-21 when Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue at Nazareth. "'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.' And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 4:18-21).

Luke includes all of the healing events in Mark except Mark 6:45-8:26. The healing ministry of Jesus points to the arrival of the kingdom of God as promised in the Old Testament. Christ healed men not only of bodily diseases but also of demon possession. With the coming of Christ the Satanic powers were subject to His power and spoken word. We glimpse the splendor of Christ the King as He casts out demons. Here is evidence the kingdom has come.

Jesus trained His disciples, empowered them and sent them out to minister to the needy.

The Gospel of John has only four examples of Jesus' healing ministry even though John was with Jesus during the three year ministry. Jesus healed the royal official's sick son at Capernaum, the cripple who had been helpless for 38 years, the man blind from birth, and raising of Lazarus from the dead. These miracles were attesting signs pointing to Jesus as the Son of God. His whole point is, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

The healing ministry was a ministry of proclamation of the kingdom of God. The kingdom had arrived with the coming of the King. When Christ returns we will see the consummation of

the kingdom of God. There will be the manifestation of the glory of the King and His reign. The healing ministry of Jesus is simply the outworking of His majesty and power.

In Matthew 8:16-17, quoting Isaiah 53:4 we see the Suffering Servant of the LORD is fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies by His healing miracles. The healings give evidence that He is the Anointed of the LORD. This is a necessary element of His messianic work. This is why He has the authority to heal on the Sabbath.

### ***Acts and the Epistles***

What Jesus began to do in His first coming He continues to do through His Body, the church (Acts 1:1-8). This is the work of the Holy Spirit in the Body. The main emphasis of Acts is on proclamation.

The disciples of Jesus went about doing what Jesus was doing by proclaiming the good news of Jesus and calling men to put their faith in the risen Christ. People were healed in the name of Jesus. The apostles Peter and John healed a poor lame beggar. "But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, 'Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all'" (Acts 3:12-16). This is the thrust of the healing done by the apostles in Acts. The stress is upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The risen Christ is doing these things. The authorities could not silence the apostles. They wouldn't shut up talking about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29-30). Peter healed Aeneas and raised Tabitha from the dead.

Philip, the lay evangelist went about preaching the gospel and healing the sick and the unclean spirits. Remember, he was one of the first deacons in Acts 6.

The apostle Paul went about preaching and establishing new churches, healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised Eutychus from dead after he went to sleep and fell out a window and died during Paul's sermon. I think it is important to note that Paul says very little about healings in his letters.

In 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28 Paul wrote about the gift of healing. The word "healing," literally "healings" (plural) can refer to various healings such as emotional as well as physical ailments by natural as well as miraculous means. The context determines the interpretation. The context of this passage teaches that not every believer is given all these gifts, and that God is sovereign in His distribution of gifts for the edification of the body.

Some spiritual gifts are no longer in existence today. For example, the gift of apostleship and prophecy no longer occur according to their biblical definition. The gifts of healing and miracles could also be understood in the same manner.

On the other hand, the gift of evangelism, teaching, pastor-teacher, discernment, helps and faith continue to exist in our day and will until Jesus comes.

Some teach that healings, miracles and tongues will not cease. Other scholars stress that they have ceased.

James Montgomery Boice writes, "We dare not put God in a box on this matter, saying that He cannot give the gifts of healing or miracles today. He can. On the other hand, to say that is not the same thing as saying we have a right to expect healings or that what passes for the miraculous today is authentic" (*Foundations of the Christian Faith*, p. 614).

We should be careful to note that in the New Testament Christians were not always healed. The apostle Paul wrote of his friend and co-worker Trophimus, "Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus" (2 Timothy 4:20). Paul had healed other people, why not Trophimus? Did Paul lose his gift? Did he not have faith to trust the Lord to heal Trophimus? The answers are found only in our understanding of the sovereign will of God.

The apostle James placed emphasis on the sick person requesting the church to pray for his healing. "Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:14-16).

In the New Testament all recorded healings were virtually instantaneous, and patients did not need after-treatment.

The emphasis in Revelation is there is coming a day when there will be no more crying, "and there shall be no longer any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain" (Rev. 21:4-5). What a day that will be. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

### **Do these gifts exist today?**

These "gifts of healings" are not for self-exaltation of the faith healers. They are for the glory of the Lord and the building up of the Body of Christ. We live in a narcissist ego-centric society.

Every healing is the result of the sovereign will of God. No one has the authority to demand that God heal them, or use them to bring healing to others. Even the apostle Paul could not heal himself from the thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:8-9), or from the ailment he suffered when he preached in Galatia (Gal. 4:13-14). He was unable to heal his colleague Timothy of his stomach ailments (1 Tim. 5:23), or Epaphroditus from his life threatening illness (2 Tim. 4:20). God is sovereign when it comes to healing and He can give or withhold a gift of healing for His eternal purpose.

Healing is not among the greater gifts like pastor-teacher, apostle or prophet.

In John 5:1-18 Jesus walked into a huge multitude of people who were "sick, blind, lame withered." The amazing thing is not everyone was healed that day. Only a "certain man was there, who had been thirty-eight years in his sickness" (v. 5), and this was the person Jesus chose to heal. He healed just one man, and then disappeared without even him knowing who healed him. This is definitely not the scene you see on faith healers TV programs. Jesus left hundreds of invalid individuals behind unhealed. A little later Jesus found the man by himself and told him to put his eyes on holiness. "Sin no more."

The full healing of all His people and their diseases awaits the second coming of Jesus Christ. In His first coming the people received the foretastes of His divine healing power. Healing is the exception, not the rule until Jesus comes again. Jesus had all the power to heal anyone, and everyone, but He did not usher in the final day of perfect wholeness at His first coming. The apostle Paul said the whole creation groans waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23). Healing is the exception, not the rule in our day. Jesus was not weak in faith. He had all the power and all the perfection of the Triune God, but He chose to leave hundreds unhealed at the pool of Bethesda.

I believe in miracles. I have seen God's hand at work time and again. But most people who suffer from illnesses in this life will have them until they die. They love the Lord God, they are faithful servants, and many have given their lives until death serving Him. All of us, unless Jesus returns, will die of some illness. Some are healed along the way, but they too will die eventually.

A highly regarded strong Bible-believing evangelical Christian medical doctor, and professor of pediatric surgery at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, and surgeon in chief of Children's Hospital in Philadelphia, Dr. C. Everett Koop makes a candid observation. Dr. Koop is a deeply committed Christian who believes in miracles. He has spent a lifetime working with families who have prayed in faith that God would heal their deformed or child suffering from incurable cancer or other life-threatening childhood diseases. Dr. Koop writes, "I believe in miracles. I understand that all healing comes from God. I would love to see a miracle of healing where God supervenes his natural law and heals by miracle. If I were to see such a miracle, I would be overjoyed. I would give God the praise. But now, in spite of believing that all healing comes from God and in spite of believing in miracles, I have never seen one" (As quoted by Boice, *ibid*, p. 615). Boice concludes, "His experience had led him to conclude that truly supernatural healings are not occurring in our time. . . . his experience and opinion should be a warning to those who talk loosely about this matter and even claim miracles in questionable cases."

Those of us who have buried our infants and small children understand the depth of this man of God. We have been there with him. There is a glorious day coming when all of that will change.

Chuck Swindoll in a message on "Suffering, Sickness, Sin and Healing" has an excellent statement:

"I believe in divine healing. I do not believe in divine healers. I believe in faith healing. I do not believe in faith healers. There is a great difference. I believe that God in His sovereign grace

and power will in fact reach down in some cases and change a condition . . . . And I am of the conviction that God does that apart from any individual who claims to have certain powers" (as quoted in *James, Practical and Authentic Living*, p. 194).

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