

SICKNESS AND HEALING



WHAT THE BIBLE TELLS US

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Sickness is something everyone has had to deal with at one time or another, and to varying degrees—some don't seem to get sick very often, while others suffer from chronic illnesses. Still others are subjected to terminal disease.

Have you ever wondered whether it is “natural” to be sick? Have you wondered if there is a correlation between sin and illness? Is sickness the punishment that God brings on us because of sin?

What about healing? Do you know anyone who has actually been healed of an illness? Perhaps you yourself have experienced healing in your life. What do you think caused this healing? Was it a competent doctor or an appropriate medication? Are we to place our faith in doctors and medicines to heal our bodies? Did God have anything to do with this healing? Or does God even heal today?

If we have not been healed of a present illness, is it due to lack of faith? If so, what kind of faith would we be lacking? If faith in God is necessary, how do we acquire that faith, and even if we do place our faith in God to heal, is there anything we should do personally in order to have complete healing? Or, could there be other reasons that have delayed or prevented healing from taking place?

There are many concepts and deeply rooted beliefs when it comes to the subject of sickness and healing. Some feel that it is wrong to go to doctors. Some feel that, given enough faith, God will heal every sickness in this life and that going to doctors or taking medications always constitutes a lack of faith. Some feel that ONLY God can heal. Some feel that every sickness is the result of personal sin, thereby invoking direct punishment from God. Some feel that sickness is just a matter of time and chance, like the toss of a coin.

That's what some people may “feel.” But human feelings and human reasoning cannot be the basis on which we make our determination. In this important booklet, we will be discussing these issues and answering these and other questions that might have caused undue concern and misunderstanding. We are not interested in human *opinions* or *traditions*; rather, we will base our discussion strictly on the revealed Scriptures of the Holy Bible. God clearly shows us in His Word what sickness is and how we are to deal with it.

WHAT IS SICKNESS?

Where is the concept of “sickness” mentioned for the first time in the Holy Scriptures? This may come as a surprise to many, but the first reference to the concept of sickness is found in the third chapter of the book of Genesis.

After Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God pronounced judgment on both of them, as well as on Satan, who had deceived Eve to disregard God’s command. God had told Adam and Eve NOT to eat from that tree. They disobeyed God and submitted to Satan when they ate of that tree. This means that Satan, as well as Adam and Eve, had SINNED.

Let us now focus on the judgment that God pronounced on Eve. Genesis 3:16 reports that God rendered a judgment that would affect not only Eve, but also *her entire female offspring*. We read: “To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children...’”

PAIN AND SORROW DURING PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH

This pain and sorrow during pregnancy is in fact called “sickness” in the Bible. This “sickness” originated with, and was caused by, the sin of one woman, and it has affected all women since Eve. However, those women did not do anything, individually, that resulted in their pain and sorrow during pregnancy and childbirth.

Notice the following additional passages that deal with pregnancy and childbirth. Isaiah 26:17–18 states: “As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs [or, sharp pains], When she draws near the time of her delivery, So we have been in Your sight, O Lord.”

In John 16:21, Jesus Christ confirmed the known fact that women in pregnancy and at childbirth suffer pain: “A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.”

Jeremiah 4:31 adds: “For I have heard a voice as of a woman in labor [childbirth], the anguish as of her who brings forth her first child...”

The Hebrew words for “woman in labor” literally mean, “woman in sickness.” The *Authorized Version* has here, “woman in travail.” In the Hebrew, the word for “labor” or “travail” is “*chalah*.” It should be

translated as, “to be *sick* or weak.”

Let us note the following examples that prove this fact. 1 Samuel 19:14 states: “So when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, ‘He is sick [Hebrew, “*chalah*”].”

1 Samuel 30:13 points out: “Then David said to him, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you from?’ And he said, ‘I am a young man from Egypt, servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind, because three days ago I fell sick [Hebrew, “*chalah*”].”

Genesis 48:1 uses the word “*chalah*” in the same way: “Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, ‘Indeed your father is sick [Hebrew, “*chalah*”]’; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.”

In this context, let us read Isaiah 33:24, which contains a prophecy for the future: “And the inhabitant will not say, ‘I am sick [Hebrew, “*chalah*”]’; The people who dwell in it will be forgiven *their* iniquity.” We will discuss this Scripture in more detail later in this booklet. At this point, we conclude that the Hebrew word “*chalah*” means, literally, “*sick*.” We saw that this word is used for a woman in labor.

From this we learn important concepts relating to sickness: 1) sickness is not necessarily the result of individual sin, and 2) not every sickness is healed in this life.

First of all, pain, anguish and travail in pregnancy ARE the result of sin, but it was *Eve’s* sin. Eve’s female descendants have not brought this “sickness” on themselves because of individual sins committed *by them*.

Secondly, God has not removed or healed the pain and anguish of pregnancy and labor that is common to all pregnant women today.

Do we understand what this means?

The Bible calls pain and anguish during pregnancy “sickness.” This “sickness” affects all pregnant women when they bring forth children. But this “sickness” is NOT the result of individual sin of the pregnant woman, and this “sickness” is not “healed” in this life as long as the woman is able to bring forth offspring.

THE WOMAN’S MENSTRUATION

Let us review another important condition that is described as or associated with “sickness” in the Bible. It is mentioned in Isaiah 30:22: “You will also defile the covering of your images of silver, And the ornament of

your molded images of gold. You will throw them away as an *unclean thing*; You will say to them, ‘Get away!’”

The English words, “unclean thing,” are translated in the *Authorized Version* as “menstruous cloth.” In the Hebrew, the word for “menstruous” is “*daveh*” and means “sick.” Literally, then, this cloth is called in Hebrew a “sick cloth.” The reference here is to the blood of the woman that covers the cloth during the time of her menstruation.

Leviticus 20:18 confirms the foregoing, describing the time of the woman’s menstruation as “sickness.” We read: “If a man lies with a woman during her sickness [Hebrew, “*daveh*”; the margin adds here, “or customary impurity”] and uncovers her nakedness, he has exposed [literally, made bare] her flow, and she has uncovered the flow of her blood. Both of them shall be cut off from their people.”

Leviticus 15:32–33 adds the following: “This is the law for one who has a discharge, and for him who emits semen and is unclean thereby, and for her who is indisposed because of her customary impurity...”

The *Authorized Version* translates “indisposed” as “sick of her flowers.” In the Hebrew, the word for “indisposed” or “sick” is “*daveh*.”

That the Hebrew word “*daveh*” means, literally, “sick,” can also be seen from two passages in the book of Lamentations.

Lamentations 1:13 reads: “From above He has sent fire into my bones, And it overpowered them; He has spread a net for my feet And turned me back; He has made me desolate And faint all the day.”

The Hebrew word for “faint” is “*daveh*.” The *Living Bible* and the *New Jerusalem Bible* translate it correctly as “sick.” The *Revised English Bible* says, “He made me an example of desolation, racked with sickness all day long.”

Notice, too, Lamentations 5:16–17: “The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned! Because of this our heart is faint; Because of these things our eyes grow dim.”

The Hebrew word for “faint” is again “*daveh*.” The *Revised Standard Version* and several other translations render the phrase as, “our heart is sick.”

The fact that the Bible associates the woman’s menstruation with sickness may become more plausible when considering the following quote from a German Encyclopedia, the “*Grosse Brockhaus*”: “Menstruation, also period: It is *very rare* that women are *without pain* at the beginning or during their menstruation... Pain in the spine or a general feeling of sickness

are the most common side effects, that can still be called ‘normal.’”

What does the fact that the menstruation of a woman is associated with “sickness” (“*daveh*” in Hebrew) tell us about the concept of sickness and healing in general?

Every woman has menstrual periods. They are NOT the result of an individual sin that was committed by that particular woman. We also must acknowledge that God does not heal this “sickness,” at least not prior to the time of the woman’s menopause, which ends the woman’s periods and her ability to bear children.

We might feel a little bit puzzled by the fact that the Bible associates sickness with women having pain in pregnancy and child bearing, or women having periods, since it is considered a “normal” process. When we are faithful with the Biblical account, however, we must admit that the Bible is the Word of God, and that its teachings are not disputable (John 10:35).

BARREN WOMEN

This leads us to another interesting concept. Not every woman has the ability to bear children, even before the time she reaches menopause. (We might add here that even menopause could be, and often is, associated with “sickness.” The “*Grosse Brockhaus*” explains that many women suffer physical and psychological pain during menopause).

Let us notice several Biblical examples of women who were, at least temporarily, unable to bear children.

We read in Genesis 11:30 that “Sarai was barren; she had no child” (compare also Genesis 16:1–2). Sarai, Abram’s wife, was unable to bring forth offspring. She believed that God had restrained her from doing so (compare Genesis 16:2).

Two questions need to be asked and answered: Does the Bible refer to a woman’s inability to bear children as “sickness”? If so, does the Bible teach that this “sickness” is the result of individual sins of the barren woman?

We read in Genesis 20:17–18 that God had closed up all the wombs of the women of Abimelech’s house because of SIN. We also read that God HEALED Abimelech, his wife and his female servants. We don’t know what sickness Abimelech was afflicted with, but we are told that the women were unable to bring forth children, and that this inability *was* associated with sickness in the Bible, because, as the Bible points out, the women were *healed*.

This “sickness”—the inability of the women to bring forth children—was *not* the result of the individual sins of *the women*. It might have been caused by Abimelech’s intent to take Sarah as his wife, even though he did it *innocently*, believing Abraham, who actually had *lied* to him by telling him that Sarah was his sister. So we see that the inability of the women to bring forth children may have been caused by *Abraham’s* sinful conduct, not by any of the sinful conduct on the part of the women who were barren.

A woman’s inability to bring forth children, as well as her misfortune in having a miscarriage, or for the baby to die prematurely, is at least to an extent associated with “sickness” in Biblical terminology. Besides what we just read in Genesis, this fact is also hinted at in Exodus 23:25–26, where we read: “So you shall serve the LORD your God, and He shall bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.” This shows that God CAN and DOES heal those “sicknesses,” or that He can and does prevent them from occurring.

We need to reiterate here that to be barren is not necessarily the result of *individual* sin, although it can be, of course. Sarai was originally barren until God intervened and healed her. We are told that Rebekah, Isaac’s wife, was also originally barren, but that God heard Isaac’s pleas and Rebekah was then able to conceive (Genesis 25:21). Further, Jacob’s wives, Leah and Rachel, were both originally barren until God opened the womb of both women (Genesis 29:31 and 30:22).

Surely, Jacob, Rachel and Leah sinned (as Sarai had) when the women offered their maid servants to their husbands in order to bring forth offspring through them. But the Bible does not show that they had become barren *BECAUSE* of that sin. To the contrary, they were *ALREADY* barren when they promoted the idea of producing offspring through their maids. Again, we see that their “sickness” of being barren was *NOT* necessarily *the result* of their *individual* sins. At least, the Bible does not tell us that it was.

Let us note a New Testament example in Luke 1:6–7. We are told here that Zacharias and Elizabeth, the future parents of John the Baptist, “were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.”

We are specifically told that Elizabeth was righteous, walking blameless in all of God's commandments, but she was barren. There is not even a hint here that Elizabeth's "sickness"—her inability to bring forth offspring—was the result of individual sins on her part for which God had punished her by closing her womb.

SICKNESS NOT ALWAYS PUNISHMENT FOR INDIVIDUAL SIN

In the context of sickness not always being the result of punishment for sin, let us turn to John 9:1–3. In this passage, Jesus and the disciples observed a man who was blind from birth. His disciples, apparently believing that his blindness *had to be* the result of his individual sin and the punishment for it, asked a pointed question: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him." He then proceeded to heal the blind man.

Christ made it clear that the blindness of the person was NOT the result of individual sin of either the blind person or his parents. This passage proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that teaching that every sickness is the result of individual sin of the sick person is patently wrong and unbiblical.

LESSONS FROM DAVID'S LIFE

For further proof, let us turn to 2 Samuel 12. Here, David had greatly sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba, and then arranged the murder of Bathsheba's husband in battle. God was very displeased about David's terrible conduct and told him that his son by Bathsheba—the resulting offspring of their adulterous relationship—would die (2 Samuel 12:13–14). Although David pleaded with God, asking for the life of the innocent child, God's purpose in that matter was unalterable—the child first became ill, and then he died (2 Samuel 12:15, 18).

Clearly, the sickness and death of the child was NOT the result of the individual sin of the child. Sin was involved, but it was not the sin of the child that caused the child to become sick and to finally die.

Another mistake that David made was when he violated God's law against murder and war, showing lack of faith in God by counting his army to ascertain how strong he would be in battle. Again, God was very displeased with David's sinful conduct (compare 2 Samuel 24:10). "So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel," and "seventy thousand men of the people

died” (verse 15). David pleaded for the people, pointing out: “Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done?” (verse 17).

The plague was not the *immediate* result of the individual sins of the people. Although the people were guilty of wrongdoing as we see in verse 1, it was *David’s sin* and his subsequent choice of a plague that caused the death of the people through the plague.

This is not to say that sickness can never be the result of individual sin. There ARE quite a few examples where individual sin IS the cause for sickness. At the same time, we must also realize that sickness is not necessarily the result of individual sin. We need to read and study the Scriptures to understand the lesson to be learned from the examples.

BLINDNESS

To further prove the important point that sickness is not necessarily the punishment for individual sin, let us turn to Genesis 27:1: “Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see...” We learn from this Scripture that Isaac became blind. Notice, however, that it does not say that he became blind because he had sinned and God then inflicted him with blindness as a punishment. Rather, he became blind *because he had gotten old*. It is in the normal course of aging that the eyes of older people become weaker.

Sometimes, but not always, God intervenes and heals the eyes of a person or stops the process of deterioration of eyesight, as He did in Moses’ case: “Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished” (Deuteronomy 34:7). However, most people, including the righteous servants of God, have poorer eyesight in their old age and some have even turned blind.

We read, for example, that Eli, the priest, was blind in his old age (1 Samuel 3:2; 1 Samuel 4:15). It is true, of course, that Eli sinned when he failed to restrain his evil sons. But we don’t read that his blindness was a direct punishment for that sin.

We are also told in 1 Kings 14:4 that Ahijah the prophet was blind—not because of individual sin, but “by reason of his age.”

Herbert Armstrong, the late human leader of the Church of God in these last days, was almost blind when he died. He had to write in large letters in his later years until his eyesight got so bad that he could not even

read those large letters any more. We have no reason to believe that his blindness was caused by anything else but his old age (he was 93 years old when he died).

The eyes of Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, were very weak. He also had to write in large letters so that he could still read them, as Galatians 6:11 tells us.

Again, this is not to say that blindness can never be the result of individual sin and the consequence of God's direct punishment for sin. Remember that Saul, before he became Paul, was blinded by Jesus Christ because of his sinful ways. God allowed this to happen to Saul, to help him reflect on his need to repent and change (compare Acts 9:1–9, 17–18).

FURTHER LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF PAUL

Paul seems to have had another sickness that was not healed by God during his lifetime. We read in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10: “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations [Paul had just described how God let him see, in a vision, the third heaven, or paradise, where God dwells], a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet [beat] me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times [he asked God three times in a very formal way that he be healed from that sickness] that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities [or weaknesses or sicknesses], that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

We see from this passage that Paul’s sickness—some think it was malaria—was NOT the result of an individual sin of Paul. We can also see that this particular sickness was caused by Satan, not God, but God did allow it. Further, God chose not to heal Paul from this sickness during his life. The reason God allowed this sickness was so that Paul would NOT sin and so that he could more fully appreciate and recognize what it meant to suffer, just as Christ suffered. Christ said, when he called Saul, that Saul had to experience what it meant to suffer for Christ’s name (Acts 9:16). Paul later commented that he bore in his body “the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Galatians 6:17).

RIGHTEOUS DORCAS

In Acts 9:36 we are introduced to Tabitha, or Dorcas, a disciple “full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.” This righteous woman became sick and died (verse 37). It is obvious that she did not become sick due to sin and that God did not inflict her with sickness as a punishment. In fact, the Bible makes it very clear that her sickness was NOT a punishment for sin when it reports that Peter came and resurrected her from the dead (verse 40).

RIGHTEOUS DANIEL

Another remarkable example proving that sickness is not necessarily the result of individual sin can be found in the 8th chapter of the book of Daniel. Beginning in verse 15, Daniel saw, in a very powerful and vivid vision, a mighty angel in his glory who was sent from God to give Daniel special spiritual revelation and insight. This angel was none other than Gabriel (verse 16). When Daniel saw this angel and heard his voice he “fainted and was sick for days” (verse 27). The appearance was too overwhelming for Daniel. As we should clearly be able to see, Daniel’s resulting sickness did not occur because he had sinned and it was not punishment that had been inflicted on him by God. Rather, Daniel received this testimony from God through the mouth of the angel Gabriel: “. . . you are greatly beloved” (Daniel 9:23; compare, too, Daniel 10:11, 19).

RIGHTEOUS ISRAEL

Turning to the 47th chapter of the book of Genesis, we find in verse 29 that the time “drew near that Israel must die.” We then read, in Genesis 48:1–2, 10, that Israel became sick and blind, and that he died. Nothing is said here that his sickness, as well as his blindness and his resulting death, were a punishment for individual sins committed by him. And we don’t read that God healed Israel from his sickness and kept him alive. Rather, the Bible teaches that it is appointed to man once to die (Hebrews 9:27).

Back in the 32nd chapter of the book of Genesis, we find another remarkable episode in Israel’s life. At the brink of his conversion, Israel, who was also called Jacob, wrestled with a Man, who, as other Scriptures reveal, was Jesus Christ. When Christ—the God of the Old Testament Who directly and specifically dealt with man—saw Jacob’s tenacity and perseverance, He “touched the socket of his hip; and the

socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him" (verse 25). After God had blessed Jacob and departed from him, "he limped on his hip" (verse 31).

The Bible does not tell us whether this injury was ever healed. In any event, it was not the result of individual sins on Jacob's part. Quite to the contrary, God blessed Jacob for his perseverance.

DEATH OF RACHEL

We also find that Rachel—Jacob's beloved wife—died when she gave birth to her child Benjamin (Genesis 35:16–19). Nothing is said here that Rachel died because of individual sin. Further, we find that God did not heal her or keep her alive.

RIGHTEOUS ELISHA

It is interesting to read about the sickness and death of the prophet Elisha, one of the righteous and faithful servants of God. 2 Kings 13:14 tells us that "Elisha had become sick with the illness of which he would die." Verse 20 adds that "Elisha died, and they buried him." However, an event subsequent to his death proves that Elisha did not become sick and die because God punished him for sins that he had committed. Verse 21 informs us: "So it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders; and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet."

Even though Elisha was dead, God brought about this miracle to show the people that Elisha had died in the faith and that he was resting securely within the hands of God. He had *not* died because God had forsaken and punished him for sin. Rather, God had chosen to let him die instead of healing him from his sickness.

JESUS CHRIST

We understand from the Bible that Jesus Christ never sinned. Still, we find that He knew about sickness, having experienced it as a human being. It is true, of course, that He carried our sicknesses so that we today can be healed from them, but we must still say that Christ became sick, even though He never sinned. This again shows that not every sickness is the result of *individual* sin. We read in Isaiah 53:3–4: "He is despised and

rejected by men, A Man of sorrows [lit. pains] and acquainted with grief [lit. sickness; compare the margin of the *New King James Bible*]... Surely He has borne our griefs [lit. sicknesses] And carried our sorrows [lit. pains]." Also, we read in verse 10: "... Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief." The *Revised Standard Version* states in a footnote that the words, "He has put Him to grief," literally mean, "He has made Him sick."

As we already mentioned, this is not to say that sickness is never the result of individual sin or that God never heals sick people. Quite the contrary is true. The Bible teaches very clearly that God does heal people; that sickness can be the result of individual sins; and that when sins are involved, God forgives their sins at the time they repent, and He may also remove the consequence of their sins—their sickness—at that time or later.

What we need to fully realize is that these are *not necessarily equivalent*—that is, not every sick person has sinned and became sick as a consequence of his or her sin, and not every healed person has had to repent of individual sins that might have caused him or her to become sick.

Many who have embraced this wrong concept have brought upon themselves much unnecessary pain and misplaced guilt, thinking that God must have punished them for some horrible sins they must have committed, while trying to figure out what horrible sins these might have been. At the same time, some people who believe this wrong concept have become very judgmental toward sick people who were not healed, condemning them by assuming they must have sinned and that God must have refused to forgive them. Those judgmental people should have learned valuable lessons from the book of Job, where Job's three friends wrongfully condemned Job.

We must be careful not to judge the sickness of others—not to place ourselves in a position that only God is allowed to be in—and to say that we KNOW why this person is sick and we KNOW why this person is not healed. It would have been easy for people with such a mindset to condemn Paul for not being healed, believing that God had punished him for terrible individual sins. They would have totally missed the point, as Paul was not punished with sickness because of sin; in fact, God allowed Paul's sickness to afflict him, and to remain, in order to keep Paul from sinning.

RIGHTEOUS EPAPHRODITUS

Finally, let us note, in this same context, the example of the disciple Epaphroditus as described in Philippians 2:25–30. Paul reported that this loyal servant had become sick “almost unto death.” Again, he had not become sick because of punishment for personal individual sin. Rather, we read in verse 30: “[B]ecause for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.” He became sick when he tried to do God’s Work the best he could, not because God punished him for his sins. Paul tells us in verse 29 to “hold such men in esteem,” not to condemn them—even in our thoughts—because we are motivated by wrong ideas and beliefs.

WHAT ABOUT MEDICINES?

While some believe and teach that every sickness is the result of personal and individual sin, others claim that we must never use medicines when we are sick. They postulate that the use of medicines is always a sign of lack of faith in God, since, as the argument goes, God brought the sickness upon the ill person and only God can remove it again.

Regardless of what men may believe and teach, what does the Bible tell us about using medicines? Does the Bible teach that it is sin to use them or that their use constitutes a lack of faith?

To begin our survey, let us notice Genesis 37:25 where it is mentioned that the Ishmaelites were trading with “balm.” What is meant by the word “balm”? What is it and how is it used?

Exodus 30:34–35 gives us part of the answer. We are told in that Scripture that God instructed Moses to use “stacte” as one of the ingredients for incense, to be “holy for the Lord” (verse 37). The word for “stacte” describes a substance taken from the wood of the balsam or balm tree, according to the Hebrew Commentary *Soncino*. So balm was used for a holy purpose in connection with the holy anointing oil.

But that was not its only use. We read Jeremiah’s complaint in Jeremiah 8:22: “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery For the health of the daughter of my people?”

Jeremiah’s question is quite revealing. He knew that balm was used as a medicine to bring about comfort and recovery. He is using an analogy here, wondering why his people did not receive *spiritual* healing. The implication, however, is clear: Sick people can receive help through balm and a physician.

Continuing with our Biblical survey regarding *medicines*, we need to note Jeremiah 46:11, stating: “Go up to Gilead and take *balm*, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt; In vain you will use many *medicines*; You shall not be cured.”

First, we find that balm is indeed described in the Bible as a “medicine.” However, in this particular Scripture, Jeremiah is saying that the people cannot be cured by any medicines, including balm. Some have used this passage and similar passages like this and concluded that we should not take any medicines, such as balm, as they cannot bring about recovery, comfort or healing. The context of this passage, in light of other Scriptures that will be discussed in this booklet, does not allow for such a conclusion. Rather, God is merely saying that in THIS particular case, medicines like balm would not help because it was not God’s will that the people be (spiritually) cured, as they were not repentant. (Remember that Paul had asked God for physical healing three times, but in that particular case, God was not willing to heal Paul; therefore, he was not healed. If Paul had used medicines to obtain healing, he still would not have been healed, as it was against God’s will.) This does not mean, however, that medicines, like balm, should *never* be used.

For proof, notice Jeremiah 51:8–9: “Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed. Wail for her! Take balm for her pain; Perhaps she may be healed. [Menge: “perhaps healing is still possible.”] We would have healed Babylon, But she is not healed [Revised English Bible: “We tried to heal Babylon, but she is past healing.”]. Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country; For her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies.”

This is of course a symbolic and figurative statement. If Babylon would have been willing to repent and forsake her sins, she could have been spiritually healed. But Babylon refused and nothing could be done to heal her. God uses this analogy to point out a physical principle. It pictures God’s servants as following God’s instruction and being willing to heal Babylon with balm, but Babylon refused to accept such medication in order to be healed. This would be indeed a strange statement if it were sinful to use medicine like balm, and if such medicine could not help in the healing process.

So we see that end-time Babylon (comprised mainly of Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Spain, Poland, and other European Catholic nations) is

“beyond healing” or help. But not only her. God says the same about end-time Israel (the lost ten tribes of the ancient house of Israel who are mainly the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and certain other European nations) and Judah (mainly the state of Israel and the modern Jews). We find this strong and stern warning in Jeremiah 30:12–13: “For thus says the LORD: ‘Your affliction is incurable, Your wound is severe. There is no one to plead your cause, That you may be bound up; You have no healing medicines.’”

Since modern Israel and Judah are unable to use “healing medicines,” and since all of their “lovers” or political allies have “forgotten” them in their times of need (verse 14), God Himself will have to intervene and “restore health” to them and “heal” them of their “wounds” (verse 17).

Again, this is figurative language. God often uses physical concepts to convey the spiritual meaning. His use of the term, “healing medicines” is interesting. It is obvious that, in God’s eyes, “healing medicines” exist, and that it is not wrong to use them when they are available. In the case of modern Israel and Judah, the spiritual application of those “healing medicines” was not available.

We find an interesting prophecy in Ezekiel 47:12, describing the peaceful situation during the Millennium when Jesus Christ will rule on this earth. We read: “Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.”

The margin adds that the word for “medicine” could also be translated as “healing.” The Hebrew word translated as “medicine” conveys the meaning of “healing” or “healing medicine.” The context of the Scripture shows that physical sickness and physical healing are both addressed (compare especially verses 8–11). In Revelation 22:2, something similar is described, but in that case, a spiritual world with some kind of spiritual healing or refreshment is addressed. Even Spirit beings can be “refreshed,” as Exodus 31:17 reveals.

But how is it there will be “medicines” for physical healing in the Millennium? Doesn’t this contradict Scriptures such as Isaiah 33:24 (mentioned earlier), telling us that God will heal everyone in the Millennium as their sins will be forgiven? There is no contradiction when we understand

how God often chooses to heal today.

To continue with our survey regarding “medicines,” let us turn now to Proverbs 17:22. It reads: “A merry heart does good like medicine, But a broken spirit dries the bones.”

If we take God’s word for what it clearly says, there is no argument here against the use of medicine, per se.

ARE WE TO DO NOTHING?

The concept that we are to do *nothing* when we are sick and simply wait for God to do *everything* for us, is not supported in Scripture. Let us notice God’s words in Ezekiel 30:21: “Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and see, it has not been bandaged for healing, nor a splint put on to bind it, to make it strong enough to hold a sword.”

This passage, although it conveys a spiritual concept, uses a physical principle—when we are injured, we are to take action regarding our injury to obtain healing.

We find the same principle expressed in Isaiah 1:5–6, where God is addressing the modern tribes of the houses of Israel and Judah: “Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it, But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment.”

We read earlier that modern Israel and Judah can’t be spiritually healed because they have rejected their God. However, God WILL heal these nations later, AFTER Christ’s return. God is saying here that normal medical procedures, including the closing of the wounds, the binding them up, or the soothing of the wounds with ointment, all to give comfort and to assist in the healing process, are futile and useless in the case of modern Israel and Judah because they are “beyond healing.” But again, the principle is clear: It is not wrong to do something when we are sick.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

This principle is also expressed in the famous parable of the “good Samaritan” who had mercy and compassion for a man who had fallen into the hands of robbers. The robbers had wounded him, leaving him half dead. Luke 10:34–35 states: “So he went to him and bandaged his wounds,

pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denari, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you."

The good Samaritan is doing something to the injured person. He is not just praying that God would heal him, without helping the half-dead person in the healing process.

KING HEZEKIAH

We find another very convincing proof that God does not condemn us if we do something ourselves when we are sick. In the famous passage in the 38th chapter of the book of Isaiah, God used the prophet Isaiah to announce to a very sick King Hezekiah that he would die (verse 1). Hezekiah rendered a heartfelt prayer to God, pleading with Him for healing and recovery. God responded that He would add 15 years to his life (verses 2–5). God even gave him a sign to prove the accuracy of His promise (verses 7–8). We are then told, in verse 9, that Hezekiah "recovered from his sickness."

But now notice what Isaiah did to help in the healing process. Verse 21 informs us: "Now Isaiah had said, 'Let them take a lump of figs, and apply it as a poultice on the boil, AND HE SHALL RECOVER.'" (Compare, too, the parallel Scripture in 2 Kings 20:7.)

God wanted to heal Hezekiah. He had promised him already that He would heal him. If God had not wanted to heal Hezekiah, he would not have been healed. Still, God expected Isaiah to do something for the king, to apply some kind of a "healing medicine" that would assist in the healing process. Isaiah, himself, understood that he was to do something. There is not even a shred of evidence in the Bible that his command to apply the lump of figs as a poultice to assist in the healing process, was against God's will or constituted a lack of faith in God's healing powers.

But, you might ask, could God have healed Hezekiah without the lump of figs? Of course He **COULD HAVE!** However, God had this incident recorded to teach us a lesson. The lesson is that **WE** need to be part of the process. We need to do what **WE** can do, assuming we know what we can do, then God will do the rest. Sometimes it takes some work on our part, through research or through talking with **competent**

health advisors, to find out what we can do. It is interesting to note that James says faith *without works* is dead (compare James 2:17).

TIMOTHY

The same principle is expressed in Paul's words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:23: "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (or, as the margin has it, sicknesses). Paul did not say to Timothy to **ONLY** pray to God for healing of his frequent sicknesses while doing nothing himself. He advised him to drink a little wine to assist in the healing process and to strengthen his immune system. In regard to wine, the *Kalifornische Staatszeitung* published an article on March 5, 1998, discussing the health benefits of wine. The article stated: "We have always known it—wine is good for our health... Modest consumption of wine decreases the danger to die of a heart attack and of cancer."

LAODICEANS

In Revelation 3:18 we find another passage that uses physical principles to discuss a spiritual concept—the lukewarm attitude of the Laodiceans. Christ's words regarding the physical principles are quite revealing. We read: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and *anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*"

If it were wrong to anoint our eyes with eye salve or to use other methods to help our eyes, Christ would hardly have used this analogy. Further, no one would conclude from this example that it is wrong for a naked person to put on clothes or for a poor person to accept gold, if it is lawfully and properly offered to him.

WHAT ABOUT DOCTORS?

While some may concede that there might be certain "medicines" that can be used by sick people without constituting a lack of faith, they claim that we must never consult doctors, let alone receive treatment from them, as this would clearly mean that we place our trust in doctors, rather than in God. Yet, they don't seem to have a problem with consulting those who profess to have knowledge regarding "health foods" herbs or other

“natural” substances, and asking them for a “prescription” of numerous vitamins or vitamin supplements.

Then, there are those who would allow a doctor to conduct “repair surgery” but they would be strongly opposed against any operation going beyond such “repair surgery.” When those people are asked what they mean by “repair surgery,” the answers vary and are many times dependent on the “need” of the individual being asked. While they would perhaps agree that medical assistance regarding the healing of a fractured bone might be “repair surgery,” they would vehemently deny that “laser surgery” of an impaired eye would fall into that category, until they themselves are confronted with the question of whether or not to undergo such surgery themselves.

First of all, we need to categorically state that the Bible nowhere talks about the concept of “repair surgery.” This is strictly a term invented by man, for which there is no Scriptural basis. In addition, if consulting and accepting the help of doctors in going beyond “repair surgery” constitute lack of faith in God, why is it that “repair surgery” or the help of a “natural” consultant selling vitamins and supplements don’t constitute a lack of faith in God? Who draws the line between the two?

When looking strictly into the Bible for answers to our questions, we are reminded of Jeremiah 8:22 (mentioned before). This Scripture, as we saw, addresses the use of medicines and it also addresses the use of doctors or physicians. Jeremiah’s questions were: “Is there no balm in Gilead, Is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery For the health of the daughter of my people?”

The Hebrew for “physician” is “*rapha*.” It literally means, “who heals.” It is the same word used in Exodus 15:26, where God says to the ancient nation of Israel: “I am the Lord who heals [in Hebrew: “*rapha*”] you.” This word is also used in the famous passage of Isaiah 53:5 in addressing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, where we are told: “By His stripes we are healed [in Hebrew: “*rapha*”].”

We also find that this word is used in Genesis 50:2. We read: “And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel.” Both times, the word “*rapha*” (meaning, “those who heal”) is used in the Hebrew, which is translated as “physicians.”

The same Hebrew word is used in Job 13:4, where Job chides his “friends” for hurting, rather than helping him in his trial. He exclaimed: “But you

forgers of lies, You are all worthless physicians [in Hebrew “*rapha*,” that is, “those who heal”].” In this particular case, Job desired spiritual “healing” from his friends, but they were “worthless,” as they did not offer such healing.

We can deduce from those passages that physicians can “heal,” when we correctly understand what the Bible means by that terminology. We saw that the Bible describes “physicians” as those “who heal” but we need to analyze carefully in what way they “heal.”

THE HEALING PROCESS

In order to analyze how physicians “heal,” let us focus on the “healing process” of a sick person, as revealed in Scripture. We all know, from experience or observation, that a finger that has been cut with a knife heals in time, at least under normal circumstances. This shows that God has put into place certain “natural laws” that affect the human body and help to heal the sick or wounded person.

Also notice Exodus 21:18–19, where we find proof of the existence of such active laws of “healing” or recovery: “If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but is confined to his bed, if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who struck him shall be acquitted. He shall only pay for the loss of his time, and *shall provide for him to be thoroughly healed.*”

The assailant was to provide for the injured party to be thoroughly healed. Again, this is talking about *taking some sort of action* to help in the healing process. Note also that the Hebrew word for “healed” in this passage is “*rapha*.”

We can realize from these passages that God HAS provided for a healing process. God has created and set in motion physical laws that *bring about* healing. When a person is wounded with a knife, the wound will heal after a while. When a person becomes sick with a cold or flu, the person’s immune system will eventually overcome the cause of the illness and, under normal circumstances, the person will be healed. Of course, there is always a chance for complications, especially if the person has a suppressed immune system, but we are addressing normal circumstances here. God has created the human body in such a way that it will heal, to an extent and under normal circumstances, when it is sick or injured.

There are several Scriptures that address leprosy and its subsequent healing, in Leviticus 13:18, 37; 14:2–3: “If the body develops a boil in the

skin, and it is healed... But if the scale appears to be at a standstill, and there is black hair grown up in it, the scale has healed. He is clean, and the priest shall pronounce him clean... This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest. And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine him; and indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper..." then the person had to go through some ritual cleansing, which is no longer in force and effect today. (For a thorough discussion regarding those Old Testament laws that are still in effect today, and those that are not, read our free booklet, "*And Lawlessness Will Abound...*").

After the Israelites were circumcised, under Joshua, "they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed" (Joshua 5:8). Circumcision was ordained by God in the Old Testament (it is no longer commanded for Christians in the New Testament), but the Bible still calls it a "sickness" or an "injury" that needs to be "healed." It did heal "naturally," without requiring God's direct intervention, although some soothing "medication" might have been applied to the wound.

We see, in 2 Kings 8:29, that a wound is called, in Biblical terminology, "sickness." We read: "Then King Joram went back to Jezreel to *recover* from the wounds which the Syrians had inflicted on him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was *sick*."

The *Authorized Version* translates "to recover from the wounds" as "to be healed of the wounds." This translation is correct, as the Hebrew word for "recover" or "heal" is "*rapha*." We see that the Bible says that the king was "*sick*," waiting to be *healed* from his wounds.

The fact that God has set in motion physical laws to bring about healing of certain sicknesses under normal circumstances does not mean, as we have seen already, that we cannot support such a healing process with healing medications. The same must be said about physicians who understand God's health laws and who can therefore properly assist with the healing process.

IS GOD AGAINST PHYSICIANS?

When we carefully review the examples of Christ's supernatural healing in the New Testament, we find that in many cases, physicians could not help.

We read in Luke 8:43–44: “Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and *could not be healed by any*, came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped.”

This example shows the great power and might of God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, that far exceeds anything humans can do. But this passage does not say that physicians cannot “heal” or be of help, per se, or that they must never be consulted. Rather, it points out that the physicians at that time did not know how to help the woman with her particular sickness. It is true, of course, that this passage contains a similar warning for us today. We do need to use great discretion in the choice of a physician we may want to consult. Unfortunately, many today have also “spent all their livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any.” In many cases, they could not even receive appropriate advice as to what the cause or the nature of their sickness was.

SPIRITUAL HEALING OF DEPRESSION

The same must be said about those who claim they can help or can heal a patient who may be having *spiritual* problems. Today’s “science of psychology” is operating from a fundamentally wrong foundation, and as such, very few, if any, will receive lasting help from such treatment.

A recent article in a German magazine pointed out that five to ten percent of all people in the Western World suffer depression. In Germany alone, 12,000 people commit suicide each year because of depression, and 250,000 people are hospitalized because of depression-related suicide attempts (Online Focus, February 15, 2004).

Clinical depression may well be, amongst other things, the end result of a development beginning with feelings of temporary frustration and self-pity. Rather than fighting and overcoming those feelings, affected people are often told by medical “experts” to concentrate on their own selves and to bolster and inflate their ego—their inner self—thus developing a better “self-esteem.” At the same time, they are told to place the blame for their condition on others, including parents, friends, relatives, or society as a whole. THAT, however, is the surest way NOT to overcome depression!

The feeling of self-pity, the “woe-is-me syndrome,” may even lead to suicide if not overcome in time. Judas committed suicide when he realized what he had done. Rather than truly repent in a godly way and rather than

seek help from GOD to go on, he succumbed to his own grief and took his own life (see Matthew 27:3–5).

Paul, like Judas, had a lot to be sorry about. As Saul, he zealously persecuted the Church and caused true Christians to be killed. But, unlike Judas, he repented in a godly way. He never forgot what he had done nor did he blame others for his deeds. Rather, he looked to God for mercy and forgiveness and began to live a new life (compare Acts 26:9–18).

We ALL have sinned (see Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23). We ALL have done things in our lives that we are not proud of. We ALL could find fault in others, blaming them for what we have become, but such conduct is neither productive nor healthy. We are what we are, but we ALL must change, and that change must be continuous in order to become better persons. To do that, we must look to God for help and we must develop a love for others, the same kind of love God has for humanity.

Christ said that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). When we focus on others and how we can help them, we are less concerned about and occupied with ourselves—what WE are and what WE can get from others. It is in giving to others that we are “more blessed” and happier persons. Christ tells us that it is more rewarding, more profitable, more important, more productive and healthier to try to make others happy than it is to try to make ourselves happy. It may seem to be a contradiction, but if we concentrate on others and how we can help them, we WILL become happier persons ourselves. This is the godly way of overcoming depression. It includes forgiving others of what they might have done to us, recognizing that we have done wrong things to others as well (compare Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13). It includes an understanding that true love “covers all sins” (Proverbs 10:12).

God does not become depressed. He is a very happy Personage because HE IS LOVE (1 John 4:16). And love—true godly love—is outflowing. It shares and it is concerned about the welfare and benefit of others, seeking to make others happy. We need to leave the past behind us (compare Philippians 3:13) and begin a new life of hope and trust in God, realizing that God knows what He is doing.

Depressed or frustrated persons who practice these principles as a way of life will soon find that feelings of depression and frustration will leave him or her and they will see that there is hope for the future (Jeremiah 31:17). They will come to realize that we can, and must, love others as

ourselves (Matthew 19:19). They will learn that having an interest for others can become a new way of life, including praying for enemies (Matthew 5:44), with the understanding that Christ died for all of mankind while WE were still His enemies (Romans 4:25; 5:1; Colossians 1:21). And, finally, they will experience true happiness and joy, putting feelings of frustration and hopelessness in the past.

Depression originates from Satan. We are told to resist Satan, and he—with his destructive feelings—will flee from us (James 4:7). We must submit to God and He will lift us up (James 4:7–10), which is to say that He will give us comfort, consolation, happiness and hope for the future. Christ showed us how to do it. When Satan tempted Him to sin, to give up the purpose for His First Coming, Christ told him: “Away with you, Satan!” (Matthew 4:10). As a consequence, Satan had to leave. God’s angels then came to serve Christ (Matthew 4:11). Later, in the garden of Gethsemane, Christ prayed to God the Father for spiritual help and an angel came to strengthen Him (Luke 22:41–44). All the time, Christ had His great purpose in mind—that He had come to give His life for OTHERS so that OTHERS could live (compare John 10:10; 17:4; Matthew 16:21–23). God the Father and Jesus Christ loved us so much that They were willing to bring this supreme sacrifice for YOU and for me (John 3:16–17; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2). Christ never allowed Satan’s feelings of frustration, hopelessness and depression to find a place in His mind. Satan offered Him the kingdoms of this world, and he tried to bring Christ to the point where He would feel more important than was fitting (Compare Matthew 4:5–9). In effect, Satan was saying to Christ, “Prove to me that YOU are the Son of God! You don’t have to go through all these trials set before you. All you need to do is to worship me and all will be yours! Take the easy way out!”

But Christ rejected all of those feelings and temptations, which could have led to depression and frustration. Christ always upheld and maintained His love for God and man, thereby resisting the devil. He did not blame others for His situation, thus justifying “the easy way out.” He came to die for us because of His great love for us. He came to share His love with us so that we could overcome depression and become happier persons, ultimately entering into the very Kingdom of God, a kingdom of unspeakable happiness and joy (Matthew 25:21; Psalm 16:11). And so, the devil had to depart from Him. We must act the same.

This, however, is not the advice we would receive from most psychologists who claim that they can heal us from depression and frustration. God wants those who have the ability to “heal” physically and, more importantly, spiritually, to use that ability. But it must be used in the right way and it must be based on God’s premises and laws.

MINISTERS’ PART IN THE HEALING PROCESS

We read in Ezekiel 34:4 that ministers who were supposed to “heal” God’s sick flock, refused to do so: “The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.” Since His ministers failed to do so, God will do it Himself when He returns in the person of Jesus Christ: “I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment’” (Ezekiel 34:15–16).

We note, too, that Zechariah 11:16 prophesies that there will arise a very influential and powerful shepherd in the land “who will not care for those who are cut off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that are broken, nor feed those that still stand.”

God is displeased that His shepherds haven’t healed His flock. God WANTS the true shepherds to spiritually heal the sick and to bind up the broken. But since they haven’t, God will do it Himself, and only very few of the shepherds will be found worthy by actually doing the job they were given to do.

Something similar can be said, to an extent, when we look at the examples of Christ’s physical healing. It is correct, of course, that we always, when we are physically sick, must place our faith in God for our healing—but this does not mean that it is wrong to get help from physicians, and that seeking such help constitutes, *by necessity*, lack of faith in God’s power to heal. This is true in the spiritual realm as well. When we are in need of spiritual healing, we must understand that only God can provide such healing, but He does do so, many times, through His trusted and faithful ministers (James 5:14). We are not to place our faith in God’s faithful ministry, however, but we must place our faith in God. Still, God has established certain procedures, as we will see, that need to be applied and

that involve His ministry, when it comes to physical, as well as spiritual healing. For instance, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, one must be baptized by one of God’s ministers. Our faith is not to be placed in the baptizing minister, but in God who gives us His Holy Spirit, after repentance, belief, baptism, and the laying on of hands (see our free booklet, “*Baptism—a Requirement for Salvation?*”).

THE SICK DO NEED PHYSICIANS

Contrary to what some people believe, Christ did not teach that sick people don’t need physicians. In applying the physical concept of sickness and recovery to the spiritual realm, Christ stated in Matthew 9:12: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”

Paul later referred to Luke, the author of the third gospel record, as “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). This means that Luke was known as a *practicing* physician at the time Paul wrote this. It was not believed that Luke was acting against the law of God when he did so. If Luke had stopped practicing medicine many years before Paul’s writing, he could not have been referred to as the “beloved physician.” Further, since Paul was addressing the Church in Colossae, it may well be that Luke was providing medical services to Church brethren as well, and that they, too, knew him as their “beloved physician.”

The Greek word for “physician” is “*iatros*” and has the same meaning as the Hebrew word, “*rapha*,” that is, “a healer.” The *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* by W.F. Vine states that the word “*iatros*” is “akin to *iaomai*, to heal.” The Greek word “*iaomai*” is used many times in describing the healing of people through Christ (compare, Matthew 8:8, 13; Luke 5:17; 8:47). It also describes spiritual healing (compare John 12:40).

DOES 2 KINGS 1 CONDEMN PHYSICIANS?

Some who claim that consulting doctors or physicians is always wrong and constitutes a lack of faith in God have used 2 Kings 1 to try to prove their point. A careful analysis of that Scripture, however, shows that such a conclusion is not Biblically justified.

We read in 2 Kings 1:2–6: “Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was injured; so he sent messengers and said to them, ‘Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.’ But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite,

‘Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?”’ Now therefore, thus says the LORD: ‘You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.’ So Elijah departed. And when the messengers returned to him, he said to them, ‘Why have you come back?’ So they said to him, ‘A man came to meet us, and said to us, Go, return to the king who sent you, and say to him, Thus says the LORD: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.’”

In verse 16, God gives the king a third warning, through Elijah directly, but we don’t find that the king repented. We read in verse 17: “So Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken.”

Baal-Zebub, the “god of Ekron”—literally, the “Lord of Flies”—is later identified in the Bible as Satan the devil, the ruler of the demons (compare Matthew 12:24, spelled there as “Beelzebub.”). King Ahaziah died of his sickness because he asked Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, who was none other than Satan the devil, whether he would recover from his sickness. The context here is not necessarily healing at all but the foretelling of the future and the consulting of Satan and his demons (compare a similar passage describing the consultation of a witch in 1 Samuel 28:7). If one were to extend this Scripture to healing “methods,” one could list the superstitious belief in “holy water” from alleged “miraculous” places, or the trust in “witch doctors” that might be demonically influenced, or other alleged “healers” whose fraudulent public performances in so-called tent meetings and crusades, along with their demonic help, and this should be obvious to any objective Christian observer with a sound mind.

DOES 2 CHRONICLES 16 CONDEMN PHYSICIANS?

Some have used the following Scripture as proof that it is wrong to consult doctors. We read in 2 Chronicles 16:12–13: “And in the thirtieth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians. So Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of his reign.”

The problem was that Asa did NOT seek God. He placed his

confidence and trust in physicians, leaving God out of the picture. We read that Asa, in his sickness, did NOT seek the Lord, *but instead*, he sought physicians—“those who heal.” Leaving God out of the picture is a terrible mistake to make! Although this Scripture does not say that it is wrong to consult physicians, the Scripture does say that it is wrong to place our trust in physicians instead of God. Physicians can only “heal,” that is, assist in the healing process, within the parameters of God’s health laws and God’s will. As mentioned, no medicine and no physician can help us if it is not God’s will that we should be healed. We are told that in everything we do, we must acknowledge God first (Philippians 4:6).

On the other hand, the passage in 2 Chronicles 16 does not say that Asa died BECAUSE he went to doctors. Clearly, he died because he did NOT SEEK GOD in his sickness. The problem was that he had apparently forgotten God’s role in his life. God was no longer first in his life. Christ said that we cannot follow Him unless we consider Him as most important in our lives. We cannot serve both God and mammon—material wealth. This is not to say, of course, that we cannot use money, as long as it does not become more important to us than God. The same is true for using medicines and physicians. It is not a sin to use them, as long as we don’t forget that whatever we do physically, it MUST be subject to God’s will.

We are not to do ANYTHING in our lives by leaving God out of the picture!(1 Thessalonians 5:18). If we think that doctors or medicines can “heal” or help us without asking God first that His will and His healing be done in our lives, then we have missed the point and misplaced our trust.

NO ONE or NO THING can help us if it is AGAINST God’s will. And if we come to realize that it is against God’s will to heal us immediately, we must analyze the situation and examine our lives to see why it is against God’s will—whether the sickness is perhaps a direct punishment from God for spiritual sin—and we must make amends in our lives in order to reap the benefit of God’s healing.

SICKNESS CAUSED BY GOD’S PUNISHMENT

For a very powerful example of God’s direct intervention and infliction of a deadly sickness as punishment of sin, please note 2 Chronicles 21:12–20: “And a letter came to him [King Jehoram of Judah] from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus says the LORD God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways

of Asa king of Judah, but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father's household, who were better than yourself, behold, the LORD will strike your people with a serious affliction—your children, your wives, and all your possessions; and you will become very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day... After all this the LORD struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease. Then it happened in the course of time, after the end of two years, that his intestines came out because of his sickness; so he died in severe pain. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning for his fathers... He reigned in Jerusalem eight years and, to no one's sorrow, departed."

God pronounced the sickness and death of this evil king and He afflicted him, as punishment for his sins, with an INCURABLE DISEASE. God said that he would die of his sickness and that no human physician and no medicine could have changed the outcome. The only One who could have changed it would have been God, and God might have done that, IF the king had repented of his wicked deeds and had begun to humble himself before God. However, there is no indication at all that he was repentant.

On a larger scale, God proclaimed thousands of years ago that He would strike the modern houses of Israel and Judah with INCURABLE DISEASES for their individual and collective sins, unless they would repent. We are beginning to see those curses unfold in our modern nations—in front of our very eyes—and no vaccine or antibiotic or other medical intervention will be able to stop or heal those diseases. The reason is that God Himself is directly involved, and no human wisdom, knowledge or science can do anything against God's will.

Let us notice God's stirring prophecy for us today in Deuteronomy 28:27–28, 35: "The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, *from which you cannot be healed*. The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart... The LORD will strike you in the knees and on the legs with severe boils *which cannot be healed*, and from the sole of your foot to the top of your head."

But, although national punishment, sicknesses and disease epidemics

have been prophesied by God, this does not have to include YOU. The Bible tells us that God's faithful people may be spared from the terrible time to come (compare Luke 21:34–36).

SICKNESS CAUSED BY DEMONS

In the context of sickness and healing, we must recognize another spiritual element that can be a great influence on the cause for sickness and/or freedom from it, which is, unfortunately, completely ignored and overlooked in our Western civilized world. Without an understanding of this element and the necessity to look to God for answers, no human help can bring about lasting “healing.” We are addressing here the fact that Satan and his demons can cause sickness, and that those sicknesses can only be healed by the removal of the influence of the demonic spirit.

For instance, we read in Luke 13:10–13: “Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, ‘Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.’ And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” Here a demon caused the sickness of infirmity. Christ Himself reconfirmed that “Satan” had bound this woman for eighteen years (compare verse 16).

Apparently, in Paul's case, as mentioned earlier, a demon or Satan himself caused his infirmity. It should be obvious that no physician and no medicine could help or “heal” such a person from a sickness caused by Satan. Only God could because God is more powerful than Satan and his demons.

GOD'S SUPERNATURAL HEALINGS

The Bible tells us that God does heal! We are to rely on God for our healing, including especially *supernatural* healing, believing that God has the power and the might to supersede natural laws or accelerate their natural effects, if necessary, and to restrict and remove spiritual influences on our health and our bodies in general that stem from Satan and his demons.

However, when we turn to God for healing (which we should *always* do when we are sick), we are not to fold our hands in passive laziness without doing for ourselves what *we* are able to do.

Many Biblical examples show that when we are sick, God may expect, and even require us to do something to help ourselves get better. There is a very interesting and telling example in 2 Kings 5. We are told that Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a leper. He was advised that Elisha, prophet of Israel, might be able to heal him. Naaman traveled to Israel to meet with Elisha, but Elisha's response to Naaman's plea for healing was not quite what the commander had expected.

We read in 2 Kings 5:10–14: “And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, ‘Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.’ But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, ‘Indeed, I said to myself, He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy. Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?’ So he turned and went away in rage. And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, ‘My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, Wash, and be clean?’ So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”

God healed Naaman through Elisha the prophet but God also required Naaman to do something in the process. Though Naaman did not want to do it at first, he finally followed God's instruction and was completely healed. Sometimes, God requires us to do more than just passively wait. God most certainly could have healed Naaman without the requirement that he wash himself in the river, but He chose not to, just as He chose to inspire Isaiah to use a lump of figs when He healed Hezekiah.

HEALING THROUGH CHRIST AND THE EARLY APOSTLES

It is interesting to study how Jesus Christ and His disciples healed people. The Biblical record shows us that the “methods” used by them varied, according to individual circumstances. Many times sick people were already healed when Jesus just “spoke a word” to them (compare Mark 2:10–12; Mark 3:5; Luke 7:2–3, 7, 10). Sometimes healings occurred when people simply touched the “hem of His [Christ's] garment” (compare Mark 6:56).

We find that when Christ's disciples anointed a sick person with oil, the

sick person was healed (compare Mark 6:12–13). In order to receive the benefit of God’s healing today, God’s ministers are instructed by God to anoint sick persons with oil (James 5:14).

We read that God healed sick people when only the shadow of Peter fell upon them (Acts 5:12–16).

We are told that people were healed when they touched the aprons or handkerchiefs from Paul’s body (Acts 19:12). Based on this Biblical example, God’s ministers use a variation of that “method” today—they may anoint a cloth with oil, pray over it, and send it to the sick person who lives too far away from a minister to make a personal visit.

Many times, Christ touched sick persons and healed them by simply taking them by the hand (Mark 1:31, 41–42; Mark 5:40–42).

It is also recorded that He placed His hands on sick people when He healed them (Mark 6:5; Luke 4:40). God’s ministers today lay their hands on the sick person’s head, then they anoint him or her with oil, setting him or her apart to receive God’s power of healing. Christ said in Mark 16:18 that sick people will recover when His ministers lay their hands on the sick. When they send a cloth, they place their hands on the anointed cloth while praying to God for healing for the sick person.

On another occasion, Christ put His fingers in the ears of a person who could neither hear nor speak, and He spat and touched His tongue (Mark 7:32–35). We are also told that He spit on the eyes of a blind person and put His hands on him twice until the blind person could see clearly (Mark 8:22–25).

On still another occasion, He made clay from the ground with His saliva, anointed the eyes of a blind person with that clay, and commanded him to wash himself in the pool of Siloam. (This reminds us of God’s command, through Elisha, that Naaman wash himself in the river Jordan.) After the person had done that, he was able to see (John 9:6–7, 10–11, 14–15).

We see from the previous examples that Christ did not always heal in exactly the same way. Sometimes, the person to be healed had to do something.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

We can’t expect to be healed by God if we *refuse* to do what we CAN and ought to do for ourselves. For instance, somebody who is a diabetic and who needs insulin would act foolishly if he or she were to say: “I believe that God will heal me, so from this moment on I will stop taking

insulin.” Rather, a diabetic should continuously look to God to heal this terrible sickness in this life, asking God to prevent long-term complications from affecting the diabetic. In the meantime he or she must do what is necessary to stay alive. Any doctor will tell you that a person who takes insulin because of juvenile diabetes, for instance, is only trying to simulate what the pancreas of a healthy person does naturally. Taking insulin does not constitute healing in any way. It does not regenerate the pancreas nor induce it to start producing insulin again. But taking insulin is necessary to sustain the life of that person and it would be dangerous not to take it.

Although it is not inherently wrong to take medications, nor does it show a lack of faith, we must be very careful in the choice of the medications. A recent study published in the *Kalifornische Staatszeitung* on March 14, 1998, revealed that one-third of all medications offered in Germany do not help at all, and, in many cases, the medications produced harmful side-effects. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* pointed out in July, 2000, that “doctors are the third leading cause of death in the United States, causing 250,000 deaths every year... from correctly prescribed drugs.”

Whether or not to use doctors or medicines also raises conscientious issues and ethical issues. How far one wants to go in regard to doctors, medications, and operations must be an individual choice. If someone believes that he or she should not have an operation or an organ transplant, or that he or she should not take a particular medication, then that is his or her decision. Additionally, when we become aware that cells to be transplanted have been obtained from aborted fetuses, then the issue of ethics is raised.

In regard to what we can do to stay healthy or to correct poor health, God does expect us to make healthy choices in life, both in what we eat and how we live. Wrong diet is a leading cause for many sicknesses. It is true that God promised in Deuteronomy 7:15 and in Exodus 15:25–26 that none of the sicknesses that plagued the Egyptians would befall the ancient and modern Israelites if they would live righteously and obey Him. We saw earlier, however, that He *will bring* terrible and incurable diseases on the modern houses of Israel and Judah because they are *not* obeying Him. This is mainly talking about spiritual disobedience, but it does include, to an extent, violations of *physical* health laws that God put in place for our good.

Some might think that in Psalm 103:2–3, God gives us an *unconditional* promise to heal all of our sicknesses, whether or not we do something about it ourselves. God states in Psalm 103:3 that He “forgives all your iniquities” and “heals all your diseases.” But this is NOT an unconditional promise.

God expects us to do some things in our physical lives to avoid getting sick, and also if we do get sick, He expects us to do what we CAN to help with our recovery. God is NOT going to do for you what you CAN do for yourself! This is true both in physical and in spiritual matters. God gave us intelligence for a reason! He expects us to act and think as intelligent beings. If we know that our car is low on gas, we had better fill up the gas tank, rather than driving off, praying for a miracle that God will somehow “increase” the gas and bring us to our desired destination. We are to do what we reasonably can do to help ourselves.

We cannot expect that God will heal us every time we are sick if we continue to violate laws that God created to regulate our health and well-being. Some have drawn an *analogy* with spiritual sin and the penalty for spiritual sin; i.e. death, and have pointed out that the violation of God’s physical health laws could be compared with “physical sin,” which brings about the “physical penalty” of sickness. But this is strictly an *analogy*. Some have carried this analogy too far and have concluded that the Biblical use of the term “sin” would strictly apply and be limited to “physical” sin. Such conclusions are erroneous.

There are, however, certain “foods” that are not to be eaten because they are not made for human consumption. The most blatant example is pork, but it also includes other unclean animals, such as lobster, shellfish, and other seafood. A complete list of such “unclean” animals can be found in Leviticus 11:1–47 and Deuteronomy 14:3–21.

Some claim that these were ritual laws, and that they are no longer in effect today. Others state that these laws were only given to the Israelites to distinguish them from other nations but that they are not health laws that regulate what is good and what is bad for human health. All of these are false statements and are in violation of Scripture. Although the consumption of unclean meat is a physical matter and could be termed as “physical sin” that will eventually bring about the physical penalties of sickness, it also constitutes “spiritual” sin—or “sin” in Biblical terminology—as it violates God’s clear command prohibiting such consumption.

For more information on the validity of these health laws, please read our free booklet, *“And Lawlessness Will Abound...”*

Many doctors know today that pork and other “foods” derived from unclean animals, such as lobster or clam, are not healthy. But instead of making this universally known, they wait until a person gets sick and then tell them to avoid eating pork or shellfish or such unclean food, sometimes labeling it simply as an allergy.

Addictive vices, such as smoking, excessive consumption of alcohol, or the use of illicit or recreational drugs, such as marijuana or hashish, are sure to bring on sickness. If a person who smokes develops cancer, that person cannot expect God to heal him or her if he or she is determined to continue smoking. The same can be said about one who consumes an excessive amount of alcohol and who has been diagnosed with liver or kidney problems. Why should we expect God to honor our request for physical healing if we continue to abuse our bodies?

Some doctors or “health experts” have gone to the other extreme and prohibit foods that the Bible clearly reveals as being fit for human consumption. Some teach that we should not eat any meat, including fish or eggs, that we shouldn’t eat salt, or that we shouldn’t eat dairy products, such as milk, cheese or butter. They recommend that we strictly use margarine instead of butter, while others claim that the consumption of margarine is cancer-causing. Then there are some who prohibit the consumption of any alcohol, including the moderate use of beer or wine. Who can you believe?

God made sure to include principles of healthful living in the Bible. We can realize from reading His instructions that a little wine, a little salt, as well as clean meats, are appropriate for human consumption. The Bible also teaches that the moderate consumption of honey is healthy. The *Kalifornische Staatszeitung* wrote on April 23, 1998, that honey actually destroys and kills bacteria, and that it can help people with indigestion and diarrhea.

Some doctors may question these Biblical instructions, so we must be very careful in accepting research results from doctors. We should always try to determine their underlying philosophy or the nature of the companies for whom they work. One can hardly expect that a doctor working for the “Sugar Company” will publish findings stating that it may be harmful to eat a lot of sugar. There are other doctors who teach that we should eat

muesli, rather than eggs or meat for breakfast. Surely, the consumption of muesli is healthy, but when we find out that some of those doctors believe in the theory of evolution and base their ideas of what constitutes appropriate and healthy food on the concept that apes and monkeys did not originally eat meat (which assumption is incorrect), and that humans, who allegedly evolved from apes, should eat no meat either, we can clearly see the erroneous basis for their conclusions.

The mere fact, then, that the Bible does not prohibit the use of doctors or medicines, per se, does not mean that we can use any and all medications or that we should go to just any doctor that we can find, regardless of his or her competency or philosophical background. One is always well-advised to check out the physicians and the medications very carefully, and in a major case, to obtain more than one medical opinion.

RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS

If, as a parent, your individual conviction prohibits you from consulting doctors or taking medications, then you are not to violate your conviction (compare Romans 14:23). But it is always good to evaluate your conviction based on the Bible, to make sure that it is not the product of human reasoning or pre-conceived notions. In addition, the law in most countries prescribes that, as a parent, you are to seek medical help for your sick child. If you fail to do so, the government might take your child away from you, or, if the child should die, you may face charges of involuntary manslaughter, or worse.

Additionally, faith is necessary in order to be healed. But what if your child does not have the required faith? God does not transfer your faith to that of the child. The Bible clearly states that God does not apply the righteousness of the parents to the children (Ezekiel 14:19–20). Romans 14:22 asks, “Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God!”

This is not to say that parents are not to teach their children the necessity of having faith in God when they are sick. They are, in fact, supposed to encourage them to ask God for healing by asking the elders of the church to anoint them with oil and to pray over them. We are only addressing here those parents who, because of conscientious reasons, would refuse to consult and work with doctors and get medical help. Even though parents are to teach their children to place their faith in GOD for healing, they should not withhold medical help from them, if it is due (compare Proverbs 3:27).

SPIRITUAL HEALTH

God has revealed additional principles to us in the Bible that we need to follow if we want to live healthy and vigorous lives. These principles show the relationship between a healthy spiritual outlook and physical health, and vice-versa.

A famous German athlete and coach once said, “A sound spirit lives in a sound body.” This statement is not necessarily true at all, and, if used and applied the wrong way, can and does bring about much harm and misery. It is true, however, that an unsound or a sick spirit can make a body sick. We all know that stress can make us physically sick. Many doctors feel that certain allergies or skin problems are the result of stress, and that many sicknesses are psychosomatic. Tests have shown that the stomach of an angry person turns red and begins to shrink. It is therefore very important, even for our physical well-being, that we become spiritually healthy and see to it that we remain that way. Spiritual frustration and depression can and does affect our physical well-being. It may also reduce the effectiveness of our immune system. Likewise, the effects of a guilty conscience for unrepented sins can definitely affect our physical health.

OBEY GOD’S WORD

We read in Proverbs 3:7–8: “Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones.”

Proverbs 4:20–22 adds: “My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh.”

USE AND MISUSE OF THE TONGUE

The Bible teaches us that we can even afflict others with sickness if we are not careful, through the unrestrained use of our tongue. Conversely, we can help others, even contributing to their “healing” process by using kind and comforting words. Proverbs 12:18 points out: “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health.”

Proverbs 15:4 adds: “A wholesome tongue (literally, a healing tongue) is a tree of life, But perverseness in it breaks the spirit.” A healing tongue

can give encouragement and will actually help a person to feel better. On the other hand, a perverse tongue can make a person sick—psychologically and physically—since the psyche does have an effect on the body. When we end up in an angry shouting match with others, we might later feel physically sick as a result.

Proverbs 16:24 emphasizes the positive effect our tongue might have on others and on ourselves: “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.” Again, God tells us very clearly here that pleasant words can bring health or healing to a sick person.

From these scriptures, we can glean the following principles:

- (1) Avoid using piercing words that may inflict wounds on others.
- (2) Use comforting words that may help others to heal.
- (3) Avoid those who speak perverse words, as they can make us physically sick.

DEPRESSION

We have already discussed the terrible sickness of depression and frustration. One possible cause of depression is worry—worry about the future, worry about the present, worry about the past. Such worry is unwise and can make us physically ill. Proverbs 12:25 warns: “Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, But a good word makes it glad.” So we must be careful not to worry needlessly about things we can’t change. Most of our worries never even come to pass. There are actually some people who can’t be “happy” unless they can worry about something. This negative approach to life is unhealthy and in violation of Christ’s clear commands in Matthew 6:25–34.

The effect of a “heavy” or “broken” or “depressed” spirit on the body is also emphasized in Proverbs 17:22: “A merry heart does good like medicine [margin, “makes medicine even better”], But a broken spirit dries the bones.” Proverbs 18:14 elaborates: “The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, But who can bear a broken spirit?” This shows that a strong spirit can contribute to the healing process of a sick person, whereas a broken or depressed spirit might delay and even prevent healing.

ENVY

God tells us through His Word that certain ungodly feelings and desires can make us physically sick. For instance, Proverbs 14:30 points out: “A

sound heart is life to the body, But envy is rottenness to the bones.” Envy can make one sick. So we need to fight envy, which is against God’s law anyway, and replace it with the godly character trait of wanting and desiring the best for others.

So we see that God expects of us to do whatever we can do, and to avoid stressful situations or people that we *can* avoid, so that we don’t get sick, or so that our recovery can progress more smoothly.

GOD DOES HEAL TODAY!

Yes, God still heals today! He is our Healer! We have shown that this does not mean that God will do *everything* for us while we sit back and do nothing in the process. We also saw that sickness is not necessarily the result of individual sin and that God may decide not to heal a sick person right away for a very good reason. That reason is *not* necessarily lack of faith on the part of the sick person.

When somebody is sick, it is NOT our job to condemn that person by saying: “He or she is sick BECAUSE they must have sinned; or, he or she is NOT being healed right now BECAUSE he or she is not repentant of his or her sin; or, he or she does not have enough faith to be healed.” Only GOD has the right to condemn. We are NOT the judge of others, including our spiritual brothers and sisters.

The Bible gives us very stern warnings in this regard. We read in James 4:11–12: “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?”

Romans 14:4 adds: “Who are you to judge another’s [that is, God’s] servant? To his own master [God] he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be able to stand, for God is able to make him stand.”

The individual reader must personally answer these questions as they apply to HIM- or HERSELF: “Am I sick because I have sinned, or because I have not repented, or because I don’t have enough faith?” We are NOT to look at our neighbor and think that we know what their problem is, thus judging them. Remember, not every sickness is the result of sin (though a particular sickness can be the consequence of sin), and God is NOT healing every sickness immediately in this life, even if one had “perfect” faith that He would do so.

INDIVIDUAL SIN MAY BE THE CAUSE FOR SICKNESS

It is with this background that we will review some additional Biblical passages that describe sickness as being the result of individual sin of the sick person.

SICKNESS OF MIRIAM

We read in Numbers 12:1–2, 9–15 that Miriam and Aaron murmured against Moses by questioning his righteousness and condemning his conduct. Miriam was apparently the influential spokesperson, based on what we can learn from God's reaction. God became angry with Miriam and caused her to become a leper. The record is clear that Miriam became sick with leprosy because of her sin. After Moses and Aaron pleaded for Miriam, and, undoubtedly because Miriam was repentant, God healed this sickness after a short while by removing the leprosy.

SICKNESS OF DAVID

In Psalm 31:9–10, David is very aware of his own sins that had caused him to become sick. We read: "Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble; My eye wastes away with grief, Yes, my soul and my body! For my life is spent with grief, And my years with sighing; My strength fails *because of my iniquity*, And my bones waste away."

David realized that he had become sick because of iniquity. It is not revealed exactly what that iniquity was, but it is clear from David's words that he fell ill because of sins he had committed.

David gives us more details about the cause and the removal of his sickness in Psalm 32:1–5: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit. *When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.* Selah. I acknowledged my sin to You. And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the LORD.' And you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah."

As long as David tried to hide his sin, as long as he did not want to repent of it, he remained sick. We understand, of course, that David is speaking here of spiritual sin, not necessarily of physical violations of certain health laws. But once he repented of his sin or iniquity, God forgave

them, and the *implication* here is that David's sickness was removed as well since the *spiritual* cause for his *physical* sickness was removed!

Further details are revealed by David in Psalm 38:3–18: “There is no soundness in my flesh Because of Your anger, Nor any health in my bones *Because of my sin*. For my iniquities have gone over my head; Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering *Because of my foolishness*. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are full of inflammation, And there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart... My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague... For in You, O LORD, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God... For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin.”

Again, David became sick with a plague because of personal iniquity. In this psalm, he confesses his iniquity, asking God to forgive him. We don't know for sure what this plague was, and this psalm does not specifically say that he was healed from it, but again, the *implication* is there, considering why David became sick to begin with.

In Psalm 39:8–11, David, who became sick because of individual sin, adds some additional light on the reason why God inflicted him with sickness: “Deliver me from all my transgressions; Do not make me the reproach of the foolish. I was mute, I did not open my mouth, Because it was You who did it. Remove Your plague from me; I am consumed by the blow of Your hand. When with rebukes *You correct man for iniquity*, You make his beauty melt away like a moth; Surely every man is vapor. Selah.”

This psalm contains another example of sickness because of iniquity. But David is telling us, too, that God may bring sickness upon a sinning person to “*correct*” him for his iniquity. In doing so, God is trying to “wake up” the person so that he can see his sin and repent of it so that he *can* be healed from his sickness.

SICKNESS USED BY GOD AS CORRECTION

We find a clear connection between sickness brought about as correction and punishment for individual sin, and forgiveness of sin and healing, in Psalm 107:17–21: “Fools, because of their transgression, And because of their iniquities, were afflicted. Their soul abhorred all manner of food, And they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, And He saved them out of their distresses. He

sent His word and healed them, And delivered them from their destructions. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men!”

In this passage, a clear connection is being made between sickness as the result of individual sin, and healing as the result of repentance and forgiveness of sin. We already referred to a remarkable passage in Isaiah 33:24, which reads: “And the inhabitant will not say, ‘I am sick’; The people who dwell in it will be forgiven *their* iniquity.”

This is describing what will happen in the Millennium. It applies to individual and collective guilt. Note that the word “*their*” is in *italics*, which means that it is not found in the original Hebrew. The inspired text only says that iniquity will be forgiven. This applies, then, to the individual and/or collective guilt of sin. All of the collective consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve will be removed as much as the individual consequences of personal sin. Notice, too, that the word for “sick” here is the same word that is translated as “weak” in other places. But the intended meaning is clearly one of “sickness,” not just of “weariness.”

CHRIST FORGAVE SINS AND HEALED

As we saw, sickness may be the consequence of sin in general, and it may be, in certain circumstances, the consequence of individual personal sins of the sick person. For another example, let us notice Matthew 9:1–8: “So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.’ And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, ‘This Man blasphemes!’ But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Arise and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—then He said to the paralytic, ‘Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’ And he arose and departed to his house. Now when the multitude saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.”

We need to note that Christ first forgave the paralytic his sins. At that moment, he was not physically healed yet from his sickness. It appears, however, that his sickness was in some way caused by, or related to, individual sins that he had committed earlier in his life. In order to prove that

Christ had power to forgive sins, He healed the man and told him to get up. This is not to say, of course, that sins of sick people are only forgiven when they are also physically healed, and that the absence of healing is proof that their sins are not forgiven. First of all, not every sickness is the result of individual sin. Secondly, God may forgive sins, without immediately removing the physical penalty or consequence that a sin might have brought about. In this particular case, though, Christ *did* forgive the individual sin AND He removed the consequence or penalty of the sin—the sickness of the man.

Here Christ was forgiving individual *spiritual* sin. Some have argued that Christ was only forgiving some violations of physical health laws that had somehow brought about the injury and sickness of the person. This interpretation, which is based on a wrong understanding of the *analogy* of “physical sin,” cannot be supported by Scripture. Christ spoke about sin being the transgression of the law (compare 1 John 3:4), God’s spiritual law (compare Romans 7:14). Christ was not merely speaking here about the forgiveness of physical violations of physical health laws, while ignoring forgiveness of spiritual sin.

Let us note another, even more powerful and clear example of the relationship between individual (spiritual) sin and the resulting penalty of sickness in John 5:1–9, 14: “After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. . . . Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, ‘See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.’”

The clear implication is that the man had become sick because of

individual sin, and when Christ healed him, He forgave him his sins at the same time. He later warned him, though, not to continue sinning, as otherwise, a worse kind of sickness might come upon him. (Note, too, that Christ told the adulteress in John 8:11 to “sin no more”—He clearly was not talking here about “physical” sin or violations of physical health laws.) Just as sickness CAN be the result of sin, so righteousness CAN be a protection against sickness and plagues (compare Ezekiel 14:12–14). Remember though, this is not always the case. Sickness, or the lack of it, must not be looked upon as a measuring stick to determine whether someone is righteous or not. We have seen that even righteous people became sick.

CHRIST’S SACRIFICE INCLUDES PHYSICAL HEALING

We understand that Christ died for our sins and that we can have forgiveness of our sins by repenting, believing in God, and accepting the sacrifice of Christ as both necessary and sufficient payment for our sins. The sacrifice of Christ makes possible forgiveness of sins. It also restores a relationship between the Father and us, a relationship that has been alienated through our sins, essentially cutting us off from God. We understand that sin has penalties and consequences. When we sin—violating God’s law—we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). Sins of theft or adultery, for instance, would likely destroy the happiness of our relationship with a friend or our mate.

As we saw, spiritual sin may bring about physical sickness. God’s forgiveness of our sins may include removal of the penalty for our sins. Even though we might not have personally sinned and brought the sickness upon ourselves, others might have sinned. For instance, those who pollute our environment because of greed are guilty of sinning against God when they create unhealthy air that ultimately leads to people getting sick. Also, those who might have sinned against their body through pre- or extra-marital sex, the consumption of excessive alcohol, drugs or smoking, might have produced children with birth defects.

Remember the example of Adam and Eve who were driven out of the Garden of Eden by God after they sinned. God then prevented mankind from eating from the tree of life and living forever. Physical mankind would stay physical and would ultimately die. With a physical body, physical weaknesses would be acquired and passed on to future generations so that, in time, sicknesses would develop “quite naturally” based on the fact that

man, cut off from God, would continue to live in a world inspired by Satan—a world deprived of the knowledge of God’s health laws, including healthy food.

Ultimately, then, physical sickness was introduced into the world through the original sin of Adam and Eve. Christ’s sacrifice, which can be applied to obtain forgiveness of spiritual sin, can also be applied, then, to obtain freedom from the *consequences* of sin, two of which are physical and mental sickness.

The Bible teaches that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ clearly includes *physical healing*. To say that Christ’s sacrifice *only* deals with forgiveness of spiritual sin to bring about *spiritual* healing, overlooks and, in fact, negates the important aspect of Christ’s *broken body*. Christ shed His blood for the remission of our sins, but also He was beaten and tortured before He died. During the Passover evening, “Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body’” (Matthew 26:26). In 1 Corinthians 11:24, the following is added: “... when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body *which is broken for you*.’” Just as the wine, which the disciples were to drink during the Passover service, represented *Christ’s blood*, “which is shed for many for the *remission of sins*” (Matthew 26:28), so the broken bread represented *Christ’s body*, which would be *broken* for us.

The fact that Christ’s body would be broken for us is of specific importance and meaning. We already touched upon the pivotal Scripture of Isaiah 53:3–5. Let us read the key statements, in context: “A Man of sorrows [margin, pains] and acquainted with grief [margin, sickness]... Surely, He has borne our griefs [margin, sicknesses], And carried our sorrows [margin, pains]... He was wounded [margin, pierced through] for our transgressions, He was bruised [margin, crushed] for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes [margin, blows that cut in] we are healed.”

This aspect of Christ’s sacrifice, that His body was brutally beaten and crushed, pierced through and viciously wounded, deals with our physical healing. This fact is confirmed in Matthew 8:16–17 where we read: “When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses.’”

We find a remarkable forerunner or type of Christ's sacrifice in the Old Testament, in Numbers 21:6–9. Because of sin, God sent fiery serpents to bite and kill the Israelites. The Israelites acknowledged their sins and repented, asking Moses to pray to God for removal of the penalty. God instructed Moses to make a bronze fiery serpent and to set it on a pole, and “it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live” (verse 8).

We see in this account that the sickness of the Israelites was a consequence of their personal, individual sins. But upon repentance, they would be healed and would not die. This episode foreshadowed the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (compare John 3:14–15; 8:28). Today, when we look, **in spirit**, with deep and genuine repentance at Christ's suffering and death on the cross, we can obtain forgiveness and healing. We don't have to continue in sickness and fear of death, physically and, more importantly, spiritually.

The spiritual aspect of “healing” must not be overlooked. Christ suffered and died for us, so that we can have both physical *and* spiritual healing. In 1 Peter 2:21–25, the aspect of our spiritual healing is emphasized. We read: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in his mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

There is clearly a connection between physical and spiritual healing. Colossians 1:21–22 tells us: “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled *in the body of His flesh* through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.” Also, we read in Hebrews 10:10, that “we have been sanctified through the offering of the *body of Jesus Christ* once for all.”

What, then, is the connection between physical and spiritual healing? As we saw, the broken bread symbolizes our physical healing from sickness. At the same time, we must also be spiritually reconciled with God, having obtained spiritual healing from God (Acts 28:25–27). Further, we need to be reconciled with our fellow man. As Paul explains, if we devour each other, especially in the church, the “*body of Christ*” (compare

Colossians 1:18), we cannot expect to receive physical healing (1 Corinthians 10:16–17; Galatians 5:15). This is the reason why James tells us, in James 5:16, to “confess” our “trespasses to one another.”

Christ’s sacrifice—His broken body and His shed blood—did more for us than just heal us physically and preserve our physical lives. In referring to the bronze serpent in the wilderness as a type, Christ explained the ultimate purpose of His sacrifice on the cross. John 3:14–15 tells us: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have *eternal life*.”

Christ WANTS to give us eternal life. That is the ultimate goal! This means that if we are plagued with a sickness that is not being healed in this life, it may be necessary for us to suffer so that we can enter the kingdom of God. If this is the case, then we must accept this. Remember, Paul was not healed because God feared that he could become proud and haughty, and, in fact, may not make it into the kingdom.

IS HEALING AN ABSOLUTE PROMISE FROM GOD?

At this point, we need to address in detail whether God gives us an absolute, unconditional promise to heal us of EVERY sickness in this life if we only repent of our sins, believe in the sacrifice of Christ, and have faith in God’s healing. Some claim that such an unconditional promise is contained in Psalm 103:1–3, which we have briefly mentioned earlier. In verses 2 and 3, David says to his soul not to forget all of God’s benefits, “Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases.” This passage does not contain an absolute promise, neither for forgiveness of sin, nor for physical healing; instead, it clearly does include conditions.

God does NOT forgive our sins or iniquities unconditionally. God does require that we fulfill certain conditions, such as showing fruits worthy of repentance, having faith in the sacrifice of Christ, and forgiving those who have wronged us. One absolute requirement for healing today is faith, but faith is not the only condition.

Some say that if we only have enough faith in God to heal, then we have an unconditional promise for healing in each and every case. But even this is not correct. If it were so, why was the apostle Paul not healed? Why were righteous prophets, like Elisha, not healed? Let’s look closer at what the Bible tells us.

MEANING OF PSALM 103

When reading Psalm 103:3, very carefully, we discover that God does not use the common word for “sickness” here. He uses a different Hebrew word that is translated as “diseases.” The Hebrew word is “*tachalium*.” It is only used five times in the entire Old Testament. One use is here in Psalm 103:3.

Let us notice the other four occurrences:

- (1) One passage is found in 2 Chronicles 21:18–19, where God directly and specifically brought a disease upon King Jehoram, because the king was a sinful, unrepentant man (compare verses 4–6, 11–15).
- (2) Another passage is Deuteronomy 29:21–22. We read that God would bring “sicknesses” over Israel, because of their sins and their unwillingness to repent (compare verses 23–27). The word for “sicknesses” in the Hebrew is “*tachalium*.” So, we see again that these diseases were brought directly by God because of unrepented sin.
- (3) Another use of the word can be found in Jeremiah 14:18 (“...And if I enter the city, Then behold, those sick from famine!...”). The word “sick” in the phrase “sick from famine” is again a translation of the Hebrew word “*tachalium*.” God brought this sickness upon the people because they wickedly sinned against Him (compare verses 19–20).
- (4) Finally, the word “*tachalium*” can be found in Jeremiah 16:4 (“They shall die gruesome deaths...”). The word for “gruesome” in the phrase, “gruesome deaths,” is a translation of the Hebrew word, “*tachalium*.” The death, accompanied by sickness, occurred because of unrepented sins (compare verses 10–12).

With that background, let us return to Psalm 103. We note that David praised God in verse 2 for the BENEFITS that *HE, David—David’s soul*—obtained and would be obtaining from God. David did not say specifically *when* he would obtain God’s benefits. He told *his soul, that is, himself*, that he should give thanks to God for those benefits. But did David obtain healing from God of EVERY sickness that he has had in his life? The answer is NO!

Notice, for example, 1 Kings 1:1: “Now King David was old, advanced in years, and they put covers on him, but he could not get warm.” This lack of blood circulation leading to coldness was not healed! But again, we

don't read that David became sick with this lack of blood circulation because he had sinned. Rather, he could not get warm anymore because of his *old age*.

We saw that the word in Psalm 103, translated “disease,” had to do with a disease brought directly by God upon the person because of his or her unrepented sin. There was a direct correlation. Not every sickness is the result of personal sin, but the ones that are, will be removed by God upon repentance, *if the sickness was brought upon the person by God for the express purpose of leading him or her to genuine repentance.*

It is interesting that the *Ryrie Study Bible* defines “diseases” here with “spiritual afflictions, parallel with iniquities.” As God forgives all our iniquities upon repentance, so He removes, upon repentance, all our diseases from us that He brought upon us because of iniquity, to lead us to repentance. David did repent when he realized that he had done wrong, and so God removed from him those sicknesses that He had brought upon David to lead him to repentance. In other words, if the sole purpose for the disease, brought by God upon a person because of sin, was to bring the person to genuine repentance, and if the person repents, then God will remove the disease, as the purpose for the disease has been accomplished.

This passage does not apply to each and every sickness. Further, this passage does not even tell us WHEN God removes those diseases from us. God MAY just wait until the time of our resurrection to free us from those diseases; otherwise, our “repentance” might not be lasting and we might forfeit our entrance into the kingdom.

HEALING REQUIRES FAITH

God may very well heal in this life, and quickly. Although God may heal people with little or no faith in Him, He generally only does so, if we *believe* that He *can* and *will* heal us. But without faith, there is no reason to think that God will heal us.

Christ healed a blind man, saying to him: “according to your faith let it be to you” (Matthew 9:29). He healed the demon-possessed daughter of a Gentile woman when He saw the woman’s faith. He said to her: “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire!” (Matthew 15:28). He healed a blind man, telling him: “Your faith has made you well” (Luke 18:42).

Sarah was healed and received a child, “because she judged Him faithful

who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11).

Again, this does not mean that if we only have enough faith, we have an absolute unconditional promise that God will heal us immediately. More than faith may be involved. God may decide that it is best for us not to be healed right away. We need to always submit to the will of God, saying, as Christ did in the garden of Gethsemane: “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will... O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done” (Matthew 26:39, 42). Christ did not doubt God’s power to intervene; likewise, we must never doubt God’s power to heal. Still, Christ was willing to submit to the Father’s will. Christ prayed to the Father, as it says in Mark 14:36: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.”

Christ experienced what it was like to suffer in the flesh, so that He could become our merciful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17; 4:14–16; 5:6–8). All of us need to be compassionate and merciful toward others. In going through trials and suffering, including [a prolonged] sickness, we develop empathy for others who are also afflicted with sickness (compare 2 Corinthians 1:3–7). This may be, at times, one of the reasons why God may decide not to heal us right away.

Without faith, however, we have absolutely no guarantee that God will heal us, even though He otherwise might have done it. Notice the following revealing examples: We read that Christ “did not do many works” in Nazareth “because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58). We are even told in Mark 6:5–6 that He *could not* do mighty works there because of their unbelief.

If we do not have enough faith in God, then we are to pray and fast in order to GROW in faith. Christ said that given enough faith, “nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20). At the same time, He explained to His disciples that they needed to pray and fast MORE in order to be given the kind of faith that was necessary to cast out a powerful demon (verse 21).

WE MUST PLEASE GOD

Faith is necessary for healing, but faith alone is not enough. Our way of life has a great deal to do with whether God may choose to heal us or not. We read in 1 John 3:22: “And whatever we ask we receive from Him,

because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” (Compare, too, Matthew 21:22.)

If we please God, by keeping His commandments, then we CAN have confidence that God WILL heal us, in HIS time, and when it is BEST for us.

If we REALLY love God, then we will have developed such a close relationship with Him that we will understand and accept the fact that God may respond to our plea for healing with the words, “Not yet, My child.” God will make His Will known to us as He did to Christ in the garden, and to Paul, and we will accept it, knowing that God will never do anything that is bad for us. We will understand that “all things work together for good *to those who love God*” (Romans 8: 28). When Paul understood that God would not heal him from his sickness in this life, he said, “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities... for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

At the same time, we are not to give up. In Paul’s case, God revealed it very clearly to him, leaving no doubt that He would not heal him. But even Paul asked *three times* for healing before God made His will known to him. We must, therefore, in faith, continue to pray to God for healing when we are sick, never doubting that He can heal us and that He will do so (compare James 1:6–8), unless important reasons prevent Him from doing so. We must never have the frame of mind, “I will ask God for healing, but I’m not sure whether He will heal me, since He might not be able to, or want to.” Rather, we must be convinced that God WILL heal us, and we must ask Him in faith, while making sure that we do everything we can so that God is not prevented from healing us *by our conduct* (such as lack of faith, refusal to repent of sin, etc.).

This is the reason James says in chapter 5, verses 13–16: “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray... Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith *will save the sick*, and the Lord *will raise him up*. And *if* he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

We are being told in James 5:16 that we are to “confess [our] trespasses

to one another, and pray for one another, that [we] may be healed.” The Greek word for “trespass,” *paraptoma*, is used in numerous additional passages, for instance in Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 2:1; 2:5; or 2 Corinthians 5:19. It is consistently and correctly translated in the *New King James Bible* as “trespasses” in those passages. We are told in Colossians 2:13 that God, upon our repentance, forgives us all of our “trespasses.” We are also told that if we forgive men their “trespasses,” our Father will forgive us our “trespasses” as well, but if we do not forgive men their “trespasses,” our Father will not forgive us our “trespasses,” either (Matthew 6:14–15; compare Matthew 18:35).

The “trespasses” which we need to confess to our brother or sister, in order to obtain his or her “forgiveness,” are those that we have committed against our brother or our sister. Mark 11:25–26 tells us: “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

Unresolved problems between brethren might even prevent healing of physical sickness. James 5:16 tells us, “Confess your trespasses to one another [with the goal to “clear the air”], and pray for one another, THAT you may be healed.” After all, Christ told Peter to forgive his repenting brother “seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22). In Peter’s question, the brother had sinned against Peter and had come to him to express to him his sorrow—in other words, to “confess” to Peter his trespass or sin against Peter.

We also read in Luke 17:3, “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.” Notice, too, Matthew 5:23–24, “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

If we commit a sin or trespass against someone else, resulting in an offense and a problem within our relationship with that other person, we are to “confess” our sin or trespass to that person, asking him or her for forgiveness, with the goal of restoring our relationship. At the same time, we are NOT to “confess” or talk about our sin or trespass with others, unless a situation develops as described in Matthew 18:15–17. Notice, however, the very first step in the Matthew 18 process: “Moreover if your

brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him ALONE. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.” At that moment, the process is supposed to end, and the sin or trespass against the brother is supposed to be forgiven, buried and gone. It is not to be “resurrected” by the parties, and it is most certainly not to be talked about to others.

At the same time, the Bible does not teach that we should “confess” or tell others (including a minister) sins that we might have committed against God. God can forgive and forget (Hebrews 8:12)—people, though, being human, have a long memory many times when it comes to the sins of others.

The Scripture in James 5:14–16 is a command for us, that if we are sick, we are to ask for God’s true ministers to anoint us with oil [a symbol of God’s Holy Spirit of power] and to pray over us. We have to pray with faith, and we have to repent of our sins, *if* our sickness is a result of sin. This shows that not every sickness is the result of sin, but sin CAN be the cause of it. Further, we have to repent of our trespasses towards others, and we have to forgive others the trespasses committed against us. Then, we are told, God will heal us if we are sick. He might do it immediately, or within a short while. But then again, He might not do it in this life. He will, however, do it without question at the time of our resurrection. We read that God will raise up the sick person. The word for “raise up” is the same Greek word used when God talks about the resurrection from the dead.

The connection is clear: IF we fulfill the conditions mentioned in James 5, we WILL be in the resurrection, having had our sins and trespasses forgiven and our sicknesses healed. If, on the other hand, we do NOT repent of our sins AND of our trespasses committed against our brothers and sisters, and if we do not forgive our brothers and sisters their trespasses, we will NOT be in the resurrection, nor will we receive physical healing from God.

In effect, God is saying: “I will raise you up, perhaps right now to honor your faith in Me, but for sure at the time of Christ’s return, IF you have faith in Me and IF you repent of your sins and IF you confess your trespasses to your brother and sister, against whom you have sinned, thereby bringing about reconciliation between the two of you.” We are not to confess sins *against God* to others, but if we have wronged another human being, we must go to that person and bring about reconciliation.

DOES GOD HEAL OUTSIDE HIS CHURCH?

Some may wonder whether God has promised to heal only converted members of His church, and whether ministers of the *Church of the Eternal God* and its corporate affiliates, the *Church of God, a Christian Fellowship* in Canada, and the *Global Church of God* in the United Kingdom, will only anoint sick members of their organizations. The answer is “No” in both cases. The Bible is very clear that God heals sick people who try to obey God and who have faith that He will heal them. He tells us in Exodus 15:26, “If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you.”

We are also told how healing from sickness has been made possible. We are healed by the stripes of Jesus Christ who gave His life for us, and who was tortured and beaten so that we can obtain forgiveness of our sins and healing from our sicknesses and diseases (Psalm 103:1–3; Matthew 8:16–17; 1 Peter 2:21–25; Isaiah 53:5).

Generally, God tells us that when we are sick, we are to call for the elders of the Church of God—the body of Christ, a spiritual organism—to pray for us and to anoint us with oil (a symbol of the Holy Spirit) and to lay hands on us, so that we can be healed (James 5:14–15; Mark 16:18).

Many times, a ministerial visit may not be possible, as the sick person might live in a remote area. If this is the case, then elders are permitted to pray over a cloth, anointing it with a drop of oil as the symbol of the Holy Spirit and asking God to heal the sick person who will receive this cloth. This is based on numerous passages in the Bible, showing us that people were healed when they touched the garments of Christ (Mark 6:56) or the aprons or handkerchiefs from Paul’s body (Acts 19:12).

We understand, of course, that there is no magical importance attached to an anointed cloth. It cannot, and will not, heal anyone. Rather, it is through the stripes that Christ endured that we are healed.

When a person who is sick receives the anointed cloth, he is to place it on his head and pray to God (as the minister would have already done when anointing the cloth) that God would heal him or her from the sickness. Since our faith must be in God and not in any man or in the anointed cloth, the cloth should be destroyed immediately after it has been used.

As the Bible shows, the sick person does not have to be a baptized

member of the *Church of the Eternal God*, one of its corporate affiliates, or the spiritual body of Christ (of which the *Church of the Eternal God* and its corporate affiliates are a part). It is necessary, however, that the sick person *has faith in the sacrifice of Christ*, believing that he or she will be healed by God because of what Christ did for us.

We find that Christ healed many people who were not converted. In fact, when Christ was here on earth, prior to His death and resurrection, the Bible does not reveal that ANYBODY—other than Christ and John the Baptist—had the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. After the New Testament Church began in 31 A.D., as Acts 2 reports, God continued to use the apostles and elders to heal people who were not members of the body of Christ, some of whom were even demon-possessed (Acts 5:12–16; 8:5–8; 28:7–9). One incident that is recorded shows that a person was healed without asking for healing, so that the power of God the Father and Jesus Christ would be magnified (compare Acts 3:1–10, 12–16). It appears, however, that in that particular case, the sick person did have faith that God, through Christ, would heal him (compare verse 16). Paul later healed a man who had been a cripple from his mother’s womb, after Paul had observed him “intently,” seeing that “he had faith to be healed” (Acts 14:9).

Many times, healing may be one of the means for God to lead a person to total surrender to Him—or it might be a witness for others to turn to God (compare Acts 9:32–35). In particular, children of parents in the church, as well as unconverted mates, may experience healing, sometimes in unusual ways, so that their faith in God the Father and Jesus Christ may be strengthened. (Compare 1 Corinthians 7:14. Note that both the children and the unconverted mates are “sanctified” or “holy,” that is, they have access to God and can respond to God’s call. Also compare 1 Peter 3:1–2.)

If a sick person asks one of our ministers for anointing or an anointed cloth, believing that God will heal them, they will receive what they request. God commanded His servants to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God and to “heal the sick” (Matthew 10:8; Luke 9:2; 10:9).

If a sick person has the faith in God to be healed, they should take advantage of the tremendous *benefit* that God bestows on us to heal us from our sicknesses and diseases. Our sicknesses are important in God’s eyes. If we are suffering with a sickness, let us ask God for His intervention. After all, He is the God Who heals us!

LET GOD'S WILL BE DONE!

Whatever trials or sicknesses we have to deal with in our lives, let us ALWAYS be subject to God's Will, giving Him the honor, praise and thanks for whatever He does for us. God created us, and He knows what is best for us. When Job was plagued with sickness, he thanked God for it, knowing that God would not have allowed it unless there was a purpose. Job did not understand that purpose for a long time, and neither might we be able to see God's purpose clearly during a particular illness, but God knows, and that should ultimately be sufficient for us.

Once everything in God's plan for all of mankind has been accomplished, sickness and death will be a thing of the past. Let us always have this hope of a better future in mind when we go through trials and sicknesses, because the time will come when EVERYTHING will be different.

Revelation 21:3–4 prophesies about that future time: “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’”

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