

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

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I. INTRODUCTION

For many centuries, the concept of divine healing has been lost from the Christian Church. Theologians and philosophers have relegated it to another age or dispensation, asserting that God only healed in the Church's early history. According to these scholars, one cannot expect this blessing to be manifested today, because God simply does not move in such a way any longer. Yet, the Word of God has never changed. For all these centuries, it has proclaimed the same Gospel which Jesus and the apostles proclaimed in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. The Gospel which God has spoken through the Word is one of complete **salvation**. "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*" (Romans 1:16). Dr. C. I. Scofield, editor of *The Scofield Reference Bible*, declares: "The Hebrew and Greek words for salvation imply the ideas of **deliverance, safety, preservation, healing and soundness**. Salvation is the **great inclusive word** of the Gospel, gathering into itself all the redemptive acts and processes."¹

When Jesus came proclaiming the Gospel (good news), it was a gospel of deliverance from bondage of *every* kind. Thus we see that everywhere Jesus went, He healed the sick and set the captive free. When He commissioned His disciples, He charged them to do exactly the same, to preach and to heal the sick (Matthew 10:7,8). After Jesus' ascension, the apostles continued the same ministry of preaching and healing (Acts 5:12,15). In fact, wherever the New Testament records the proclaiming of the Gospel, either by Jesus Himself or by His disciples and apostles, it also records the healing of the sick (Luke 6:17-19; Luke 10:9; Acts 8:6,7).

Today, healing is just as much a part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it was in the days of the early church. Jesus proclaimed release to the captives, as did His disciples after Him. Although this part of the Gospel has faded from the thinking of many Christians, it has never faded from the pages of God's Word. The Word clearly records that the preaching of the Gospel was always accompanied by the healing power of God. Preaching the Gospel and healing the sick always went hand-in-hand. Any gospel which leaves out

"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give."
Matthew 10:7,8

And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. To such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.
Acts 5:12,15

And He descended with them, and stood on a level place; and there was a great multitude of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured. And all the multitude were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all.
Luke 6:17-19

"And heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"
Luke 10:9

And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.
Acts 8:6,7

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“And the Lord will remove from you all sickness; and He will not put on you any of the harmful diseases of Egypt which you have known, but He will lay them on all who hate you.”

Deuteronomy 7:15

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.”

Deuteronomy 30:19

healing is *less* than the gospel which Jesus preached. Preaching the full-gospel of Jesus must include proclaiming healing to those who are in need of that deliverance.

II. GOD’S WILL IS HEALING

God is a healing God, One whose perfect will is for His people to live in health. He has always made provision for healing and health among His people. This is true under both the New and Old Covenants. Under the Old Covenant, God promised to remove all sickness from the children of Israel, if they would remain faithful to Him (Deuteronomy 7:15). God placed before them a choice: life or death, blessing or cursing. The choice was theirs, but God made **His** will perfectly clear. He said, “*Choose life!*” (Deuteronomy 30:19). *No matter what they chose, God’s desire remained the same; He wanted the children of Israel to have healing and life instead of sickness and death.*

God’s will is healing. It is as much His will to heal sick bodies, as it is to save the lost. Healing of men’s bodies is as much a part of God’s redemptive action as the saving of men’s souls. It is never God’s perfect will for His people to experience sickness. Sometimes, men’s sin and disobedience will bring judgment in the form of sickness. But, this doesn’t change the fact that God’s perfect will is still healing and deliverance. God’s promise is that if a person will repent and turn, He will extend His healing power, as He had always wanted to, and bring deliverance.

The will of God with regard to healing and health is explicit in both the Old and New Testaments. God never changes. Healing was, is and will be His perfect will so long as men are in need of it. In the Old Testament, healing is found to be a part of God’s redemptive name, Jehovah-Rapha. In the New Testament, Jesus came showing exactly who God is and what He is like (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus healed the sick wherever He went, thus proclaiming to all that God’s will is healing.

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A. GOD'S REDEMPTIVE NAMES

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for "God" (**Jehovah**) expresses His redemptive character. "Jehovah" means "*the self-existent one*," and is used in those scriptures which refer to God's redemption of man. "Jehovah is distinctly the **redemption name of Deity.**"² Seven times in the Old Testament, the name "Jehovah" is joined with another Hebrew word, yielding a compound name which gives us a deeper insight into God's nature. These compound names of Jehovah each reveal a distinct aspect of God's redemptive nature. "In His redemptive relation to man, Jehovah has seven compound names which reveal Him as meeting every need of man from his lost state to the end."³

The seven redemptive compound names of God are:

- **Jehovah-Jireh** — "*the Lord will provide*" (Genesis 22:13,14). Reveals God's redemptive role as provider, especially with reference to His ultimate provision for man, Jesus Christ.
- **Jehovah-Rapha** — "*the Lord that heals*" (Exodus 15:26). The context of this verse shows clearly that this means physical healing.
- **Jehovah-Nissi** — "*the Lord our banner*" or "*victory*" (Exodus 17:15). Christ is our victory over the enemy, and the cross our banner.
- **Jehovah-Shalom** — "*the Lord our peace*" (Judges 6:24). God redeemed us from enmity with Him through Jesus Christ, so that we now have "*peace with God*" (Romans 5:1).
- **Jehovah-Raah** — "*the Lord my shepherd*" (Psalm 23:1). Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" who laid down His life for the sheep.
- **Jehovah-Tsidkenu** — "*the Lord our righteousness*" (Jeremiah 23:6). Through Jesus, we have become the righteousness of God in Him.
- **Jehovah-Shammah** — "*the Lord is present*" (Ezekiel 48:35). God's abiding presence is always with His people, for He has promised never to leave or forsake them.

Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place the LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided."

Genesis 22:13,14

And He said, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer."

Exodus 15:26

And Moses built an altar, and named it The LORD is My Banner.

Exodus 17:15

Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Judges 6:24

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Psalms 23:1

"In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, 'The LORD our righteousness.'"

Jeremiah 23:6

The city shall be 18,000 cubits round about; and the name of the city from that day shall be, 'The LORD is there.'

Ezekiel 48:35

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As we have said, each of these redemptive names shows us a distinct aspect of God in His relation to and dealings with men. While they are all equally important, here we will discuss specifically the name "Jehovah-Rapha," since healing is the subject at hand.

1. The unchanging nature of Jehovah-Rapha

When God named Himself "Jehovah-Rapha," He revealed an unchanging element of His character. Healing is in the very nature of God. There is perhaps no greater statement as to God's will in this matter, than that of His name. God is "the Lord that heals." As Jehovah-Rapha, His will is to see the sick healed and the maimed restored.

Thus it was that God promised the children of Israel, "But you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst. There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days" (Exodus 23:25,26). The children of Israel were promised the blessing of perfect health, if they would walk according to God's statutes. "You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall be no male or female barren among you or among your cattle. And the Lord will remove from you all sickness; and He will not put on you any of the harmful diseases of Egypt which you have known, but He will lay them on all who hate you" (Deuteronomy 7:14,15). This didn't pertain to some of the Israelites, but to all of them. As a nation and a people, the Israelites were provided with healing and health from Jehovah-Rapha. The Bible records that when Israel came out of Egypt, after years of oppression and physical abuse, there was not one feeble person among their tribes (Psalm 105:37). And even though future generations of Israelites didn't experience this blessing because of sin and disobedience, yet God remained Jehovah-Rapha, and His will for them was undeviating. God's desire was that His people would live their lives in health and strength and so "fulfill the number of their days."

"But you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst. There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days."

Exodus 23:25,26

"You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall be no male or female barren among you or among your cattle. And the LORD will remove from you all sickness; and He will not put on you any of the harmful diseases of Egypt which you have known, but He will lay them on all who hate you."

Deuteronomy 7:14,15

Then He brought them out with silver and gold; and among His tribes there was not one who stumbled.

Psalm 105:37

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2. The testimony of Jehovah-Rapha

Careful reading of the Old Testament will show that God moved in His capacity as Jehovah-Rapha many times during Israel's history. King Hezekiah was sick to the point of death; he prayed to the Lord, and God healed him (II Kings 20:1-5). The Shunammite woman received her son back from the dead because she interceded with Elisha, the man of God (II Kings 4). Even Naaman the Syrian (a Gentile) was able to avail himself of God's healing power to cure his leprosy (II Kings 5:1-3,14).

No matter what judgment the sin of Israel incurred for them, God's will to heal was always present. When repentance was made, healing came. Thus David could say, "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities; Who heals all your diseases*" (Psalm 103:2,3). "*Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His Word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions*" (Psalm 107:19,20). Under the Old Covenant, God's will was healing. Throughout the Old Testament, God proved Himself to be Jehovah-Rapha! His actions matched His redemptive name and were a testimony to His perfect will for men.

In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'" Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying, "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Thy sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And it came about before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, 'I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD.''"
II Kings 20:1-5

When Elisha came into the house, behold the lad was dead and laid on his bed. So he entered and shut the door behind them both, and prayed to the LORD. And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm. Then he returned and walked in the house once back and forth, and went up and stretched himself on him; and the lad sneezed seven times and the lad opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite." So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, "Take up your son." Then she went in and fell at his feet and bowed herself to the ground, and she took up her son and went out.

II Kings 4:32-37

(over)

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Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper. Now the Syrians had gone out in bands, and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said to her mistress, "I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy." So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

1 Kings 5:1-3,14

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities; Who heals all your diseases."

Psalms 103:2,3

Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

Psalms 107:19,20

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B. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

Jesus is in every way a reflection of the Father God. Everything Jesus did while conducting His earthly ministry, He did at the impulse and example of the Father. The Bible says that **Jesus exactly represents God** (Hebrews 1:3), because He is God. Thus, whatever Jesus did during His earthly ministry was an express manifestation of God's will. **Jesus was the will of God in action on the earth!**

Jesus' earthly ministry is a profound statement about the will of God in healing. The apostle Peter summed up Jesus' entire ministry by saying, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). Wherever Jesus went, He healed the sick. This was a major part of His ministry. Through Jesus, God was letting it be known that He wanted people free from the oppression of disease. Jesus treated disease as an enemy, because that is how God views it. All the miracles and healing wonders which Jesus performed by the power of the Holy Spirit, He did at the impulse of the heavenly Father.

And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. **Hebrews 1:3**

"You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him." **Acts 10:38**

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1. Motivated by His compassion

Jesus' motivation for healing the sick was more than just confirmation of His ministry. His ministry was indeed substantiated by the mighty works done at His hands, but a few spectacular miracles in key towns would have sufficed for that purpose. But Jesus healed the sick wherever He went. And repeatedly, the Gospel writers record that Jesus healed **all** that came to Him in need of deliverance (Matthew 12:15; 9:35; 14:35,36; Luke 6:19). If verification of His ministry were the only motivation behind the healings which Jesus accomplished, then He would not have needed to heal **all** in the vast multitudes that came to Him. But Jesus healed the sick because He had compassion on them, a compassion which flowed from the heart of God toward the sick and suffering. "*And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick*" (Matthew 14:14). It was His compassion for the sick that moved Jesus to heal (Matthew 20:33,34). It was His compassion for the oppressed multitude which prompted Him to send out His disciples equipped to preach and heal every kind of disease (Matthew 9:35-10:1). God's compassion and mercy are the underlying reasons for His willingness to heal. This Jesus demonstrated time and again during His earthly ministry.

But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed Him, and He healed them all.

Matthew 12:15

And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

Matthew 9:35

And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were ill; and they began to entreat Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were cured.

Matthew 14:35,36

and all the multitude were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all.

Luke 6:19

And when He came out, He saw a great multitude, and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick.

Matthew 14:14

They said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." And moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they received their sight, and followed Him.

Matthew 20:33,34

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And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

Matthew 9:35-10:1

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"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

Luke 4:18,19

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

John 6:38

Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner."

John 5:19

Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

John 14:9

2. Motivated by His mission

Jesus described His mission on the earth in one of the first sermons that He ever preached. He quoted the prophet Isaiah, saying of Himself, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord*" (Luke 4:18,19).

Both spiritually and temporally, Jesus came to free men from oppression and bondage. That is why God sent Him. Throughout the Gospels, we see that Jesus fulfilled that call. Everywhere He went, Jesus was willing to heal all those that came to Him. He simply carried out the will of the One who had sent Him. "*For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me*" (John 6:38). Jesus affirmed that He only did those things which He saw the Father doing (John 5:19).

Jesus was a living example of the will of God. "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9). Watching Jesus in action is watching God in action. Jesus' willingness to heal all who came to Him is an unmistakable expression of God's will for the sick. **God wants the sick to be healed!** He commissioned Jesus to release those who were bound and oppressed. This ministry Jesus began while on the earth and consummated on the cross. As we shall see, Jesus' atoning death made the way for all men to be free from the oppression of the devil, brought on by sin. Through His Son (who was God manifest in the flesh), the Father declared to the world His divine will. Jesus went about "*doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil,*" because **it is God's will that all men be free from the Satanic oppression of sickness.**

3. Motivated by His enemy

Jesus' ministry sheds light on another fact that greatly needs clarification: **Sickness is a curse from the devil — an enemy of God and man.** This fact is not seen clearly in the Old Testament, because the concept of the enemy (the devil, Satan) was not yet fully revealed to the people of God. References to Satan in the Old Testament are few. But in the

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New Testament, the fight against wicked spiritual forces is vividly portrayed. This is nowhere more evident than in Jesus' dealings with demons and with sickness. Jesus viewed sickness as oppression, from which He, in His compassion, desired to set men free. All during His earthly ministry, Jesus came against and destroyed the works which Satan had brought about in people's lives.

Once, in a synagogue, Jesus encountered a woman who was bent double with a condition caused by an evil spirit. After He had healed her, He said to those standing by, "*And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?*" (Luke 13:16). Jesus labeled sickness as **bondage**, caused by Satan. He emphatically asserted that this covenant woman of Israel had the right to be free from the enemy's bond. This was Jesus' attitude to all who came to Him in need of healing; they were satanically oppressed and needed to be released by the power of God. Thus, Peter summed up Jesus' ministry by saying that He did good and healed all that were **oppressed by the devil** (Acts 10:38).

And so it is today that anyone who is laboring under the bondage of sickness is being oppressed by the evil one, Satan. Sickness is not of God, nor has it ever been. It has never been God's will for His people to be sick. If sickness were from God and disease the will of the Father, then Jesus' entire ministry on the earth was counterproductive and contradictory. The Gospels would then be nothing more than an account of Jesus daily thwarting the will and purpose of the Father. The truth is, however, that Jesus only did the will of the Father. Jesus healed the sick, because **God sent Him to heal**.

Jesus said, "*The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly*" (John 10:10). He draws a clear line of demarcation. God's will is healing and blessing, and everything else that goes along with "*abundant life*." But if anything kills, steals, or destroys, then it has been labeled by Jesus as being from the enemy.

"And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

Luke 13:16

"You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him."

Acts 10:38

"The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.

John 10:10

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C. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The ministry of the New Testament Church differs little from that of Jesus Himself. The record of the Church's beginning, the Acts of the Apostles, shows that Jesus' followers continued the same ministry of preaching and healing that the Lord had begun. The healing power of God and God's willingness to heal didn't ascend into heaven with Jesus. Jesus said before He left, "*These signs will accompany those who have believed: . . . they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover*" (Mark 16:17,18). Careful study of the book of Acts will reveal that this is exactly what happened. Everywhere the Gospel was preached, miracles of healing were performed (Acts 5:12,15,16; 8:7; 9:33,34; 14:8-10; 19:11,12; 28:8,9).

"And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Mark 16:17,18

And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. To such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed.

Acts 5:12,15,16

For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

Acts 8:7

And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; arise, and make your bed." And immediately he arose.

Acts 9:33,34

And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, without strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul as he spoke,

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The Gospel which the early church preached was the same one that Jesus had preached. It proclaimed **release** from bondage and oppression and announced healing to those who were afflicted. Healing was an integral part of the Gospel of the early apostles, as the book of Acts shows. (Read Acts 14:8-10.) Paul was preaching the "Gospel" at Lystra. There was, in the crowd, a crippled man, who received faith to be healed as he heard Paul speak. It is obvious that what the man "heard" in the good news which Paul preached, was that God was willing and able to heal him. If Paul had not declared that healing was available through the Lord Jesus Christ, the man would not have had the faith to receive it. Faith comes by hearing, and the crippled man acquired faith for healing by hearing a gospel which proclaimed freedom from sickness.

Thus, even after Jesus' ascension, God's will was still healing. The reason for the healings which are recorded in the book of Acts was more than verification of the apostles' ministry. The Bible says that the people came to the apostles from all quarters and were healed **every one** by the power of God (Acts 5:15,16). Verification of ministry would only have required one or two spectacular healings. But the apostles carried out Jesus' commission to preach and to heal the sick, because it was still God's will to heal *all* those who were afflicted with sickness and disease.

who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk.

Acts 14:8-10

And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.

Acts 19:11,12

And it came about that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him. And after this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured.

Acts 28:8,9

And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, without strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk.

Acts 14:8-10

To such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed.

Acts 5:15,16

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday
and today, yes and forever.

Hebrews 13:8

And He Himself is the propitiation
for our sins; and not for ours only,
but also for those of the whole world.

I John 2:2

D. THE WILL OF GOD TODAY

God revealed His will for healing under the Old Covenant, telling the children of Israel, "*The Lord will remove from you all sickness.*" He also gave them His covenant redemptive name, **Jehovah-Rapha: the Lord that heals.** Jesus came to do the will of Jehovah-Rapha on the earth; He demonstrated to all that God is a healing God. The Bible says that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is still Jehovah-Rapha today under the New Covenant. It is as much His will for us, His covenant people, to walk in divine health as it was for the children of Israel to do so. The promise of health and healing still stands today. **God has not withdrawn it!**

It always has been, and always will be, God's will to heal the sick, as much as it is His will to save the lost. This fact must become firmly implanted in a person's thinking, if he wants to receive healing from the Lord. God hasn't withdrawn the physical benefits which He made available to the children of Israel. The New Covenant is a better covenant than the Old, more sure and steadfast. It is, therefore, absurd to think that God would withdraw this divine blessing when instituting a New Covenant with man. He hasn't changed since the days of Moses when He promised to "*remove all sickness*" from us, so that we could walk in perfect health.

III. HEALING IN THE ATONEMENT

The most profound statement as to God's will for healing is found in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that Jesus' substitutionary work on the cross includes the removal of sickness as well as the removal of sin. All will agree that whatever God has purchased on the cross, He wants all His children to possess. There is no Christian who would claim that God wants only *some* to be saved; Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2). What was done on Calvary was done for *all men*, not just for some. The blessings of God which are offered as a result of the cross are universal.

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

It is important to realize that the blessing of healing promised to the children of Israel under the Old Covenant was bestowed on the basis of Calvary. God was able to forgive sins under that Covenant because of what Jesus would do on the cross (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:15). In the same way, God healed under that Old Covenant because Jesus was going to bear sickness and disease. In fact, no redemptive blessing can be obtained apart from the redemptive work of God's Son. All of God's redemptive names bespeak a privilege which only the cross could purchase. Thus, God's activities as Jehovah-Rapha (the Lord that heals) are accomplished on the basis of Calvary's atoning work.

By linking bodily healing with the atonement, the Bible shows beyond doubt that **sickness is not the will of God**; He wants all to be well. Sickness is an oppressive result of man's fall, from which God in His mercy sent His Son to deliver us.

A. HEALING IN OLD TESTAMENT TYPES

Throughout the Old Testament, healing is linked to atonement. When the children of Israel were plagued because of their sin, Aaron made atonement, and the plague was checked (Numbers 16:46-48). The punishment for their sin was stayed by the work of atonement which Aaron wrought when he stood between the dead and the living. In the book of Leviticus, the law stated that the cleansing of a leper was not complete until atonement had been made by the High Priest (Leviticus 14:18-20).

All the sacrifices of the Old Covenant which effected atonement are types and symbols of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The people's sins were forgiven by these sacrifices because the animal sacrifices foreshadowed Christ's ultimate atoning work. In the same way, when atonement was made, the people were healed, because those atoning sacrifices which brought about healing also foreshadowed Christ's death at Calvary.

Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.
Romans 3:25

And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.
Hebrews 9:15

And Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, and lay incense on it; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone forth from the LORD, the plague has begun!" Then Aaron took it as Moses had spoken, and ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. And he took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked.
Numbers 16:46-48

While the rest of the oil that is in the priest's palm, he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD. "The priest shall next offer the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Then afterward, he shall slaughter the burnt offering. And the priest shall offer up the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean."
Leviticus 14:18-20

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

"You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family."

Leviticus 25:10

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

Luke 4:18,19

"You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land."

Leviticus 25:9

1. The Jubilee

The Jubilee was a time of restoration which God established in the Jewish calendar. It was a year-long period, occurring every fifty years, in which every man was returned to his original possessions, and all captives were set free (Leviticus 25): This was the time of liberty and restoration which Jesus proclaimed in Luke 4:18-19, quoting the prophet Isaiah, "*He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.*" The "*favorable year of the Lord*" is this year of Jubilee. Jesus came declaring that the Jubilee was a time of healing and restoration, both physically and spiritually.

But in the year of Jubilee, no blessing or restoration, no liberty or release was proclaimed *until* the blast of the trumpet on the Day of Atonement. Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 25:9). **No captives went free, and no one received his land back until the sacrifices of atonement had been made.** Even so today, no Gospel blessing is offered or bestowed irrespective of Jesus' atoning death. Jesus' Jubilee of release from sin, sickness and bondage of all forms is the direct result of His final atonement.

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

2. The bronze serpent

Read Numbers 21:5-9.

When the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against God, they were plagued with fiery serpents whose bites were fatal. But they were healed if they only looked upon the bronze serpent which Moses had fashioned at the Lord's command. Here we see that God's people were healed by looking upon a *type* of Jesus' death on the cross. (In John 3:14, Jesus made direct reference to this incident, saying that He was the fulfillment of that Old Testament type.) As the people looked steadfastly at the type of Jesus, they were made whole.

The same is figuratively true today. Those who look steadfastly at what Jesus accomplished on the cross and meditate on that sacrifice, will be made whole, just as the children of Israel were made whole. The bronze serpent on the staff was a symbol of atonement (i.e. Jesus' atonement), and that symbol of atonement brought about healing and deliverance for the afflicted Israelites.

And the people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he shall live." And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

Numbers 21:5-9

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

John 3:14

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

B. CHRIST'S ATONEMENT: PROPHESED AND FULFILLED

Read Isaiah 53.

Jesus' suffering and death at the hands of godless men were prophesied many hundreds of years before Jesus was even born. In the 22nd Psalm, David clearly depicts the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Numerous other Old Testament scriptures prophetically tell of the things which befell Jesus during His suffering and death (Psalm 41:9; Zechariah 11:12; Zechariah 12:10; Isaiah 50:6). But of all the prophecies describing the Lord's passion, one stands out in its detail and scope. The 53rd chapter of Isaiah is a graphic description of all that Jesus suffered and accomplished in His atoning work on the cross. This is known as the "Great Atonement Chapter" of the Old Testament, because it points directly to Calvary and what was accomplished there.

It is not surprising to find that in this great chapter about atonement, redemption from sickness is found side by side with forgiveness for and release from sin. Christ's death is seen as being effectual to release from both sin and sickness.

1. Grievs and sorrows/sickness and pain

Careful study of the 3rd, 4th, and 10th verses of this chapter will show that these particular passages refer directly to Jesus bearing and carrying away the *disease and sickness* which came as a result of sin. (A study Bible with a marginal reading will verify this fact.) The words which are translated "grievs" and "sorrows" are respectively the Hebrew words "*choli*" and "*makob*." "*Choli*" means "sickness" and is so translated predominantly throughout the New American Standard Version of the Old Testament. Only in Isaiah 53 is it rendered "grievs." "*Makob*" means "pain," and is translated this way in most instances in the New American Standard Version of the Old Testament. Only three times is it rendered "sorrows," two of those times in Isaiah 53.⁴

"Even my close friend, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

Psalm 41:9

And I said to them, "If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!" So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages.

Zechariah 11:12

"And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born."

Zechariah 12:10

I gave My back to those who strike Me, and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting."

Isaiah 50:6

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Thus, we could rightfully translate Isaiah 53:3,4,10 in the following way:

- 3 *He was despised, and forsaken of men,
A man of pains, and acquainted with sickness;
And like one from whom men hide their face,
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*
- 4 *Surely our sickness He Himself bore,
And our pains He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.*
- 10 *But the Lord was pleased
To crush Him, He made Him sick.*

(These are the marginal readings of both the King James and New American Standard Versions.)

That sickness and pain is part of what Jesus bore on the cross is indisputable, on the basis of this passage of scripture. Christ's atoning work on the cross covers all our sicknesses and diseases, as well as our sin.

2. Our diseases carried away

The New Testament itself verifies this translation of Isaiah 53:4, applying it directly to Jesus' ministry of healing those that were sick. We are told in the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus healed all who were ill "in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying 'He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases'" (Matthew 8:17). Jesus' earthly healing ministry was a forerunner of His bearing sickness on the cross, just as His forgiving of sins was a forerunner of His bearing sin on the cross (Matthew 9:2,6). The words of Isaiah were fulfilled on Calvary, when Jesus bore not only our sins, but also all of our diseases.

Jesus bore the full brunt of our sin — and the results of our sin. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). The curse of the Law, as listed in Deuteronomy, Chapter 28, includes every form of disease that exists. Christ redeemed us from sickness by having all our sickness and pains laid on Him; He bore the curse of sickness so that we wouldn't have to.

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

Isaiah 53:3,4,10

In order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES, AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES."

Matthew 8:17

And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven." "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic—"Rise, take up your bed, and go home."

Matthew 9:2,6

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERY ONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE."

Galatians 3:13

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And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

I Peter 2:24

And the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

James 5:15

For "WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

Romans 10:13

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

I Peter 3:9

3. Redemption from sin and sickness

Thus the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, bear witness to the fact that Calvary's redemption includes release from the oppression of sickness. The Jubilee which Jesus proclaimed was a Jubilee of release from sin, sickness, poverty, and from every other form of bondage which the devil had held man under for so many centuries. Release from sin and release from sickness cannot be separated; they are both part and parcel of the work of atonement. Thus Peter says, "*And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed*" (I Peter 2:24). Here, redemption from sin and sickness are found side by side. The same connection is made by the apostle James in his epistle. "*And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven*" (James 5:15 New International Version).

Both Peter and James saw forgiveness of sins and healing of the body as being accomplished by the same work of Jesus, His death on the cross. When Jesus redeemed us from sin, He also redeemed us from the curse of sickness and disease!

C. IS HEALING FOR ALL?

The answer to this question is an emphatic **Yes!** We have shown that God's will is to heal; He sent His only Son to die so that we could be freed from sin and sickness. Nothing speaks more strongly to the universality of God's will for healing (that is, that He offers it to all who are afflicted) than the atonement. As we have said, whatever was purchased on Calvary, was purchased for **all**. There is no discrimination at the foot of the cross. "*Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved*" (Romans 10:13), whether in spirit, mind or body.

Thus, to say that God will heal *some*, but not others, is tantamount to saying that God will save *some*, but not others. It is God's will that **all** be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (II Peter 3:9); this is so because spiritual salvation was purchased through the atonement. ***Physical healing is as much a part of the atonement as forgiveness of sin, and so is also offered to all who are in need.***

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

IV. SOME COMMON OBJECTIONS

We would do well to discuss some common misconceptions about healing which are prevalent among Christians today. It is widely accepted, today, that although God is *able* to heal, He many times withholds healing so that He may be glorified thereby. It is thought that sickness brings glory to God by the patient suffering of the one afflicted. Sickness is thus often viewed by these as a blessing from God, because good is sometimes the result of a person's illness. It is often said, "My illness made me turn to God!" or "While I was in the hospital, people were saved as a result of my witnessing!" Doubtless, good can come from illness, because God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). God is merciful, and can turn any situation around to blessing and good, if we allow Him. But, this does **not** mean that God is the one behind the sickness, or that disease is divinely appointed.

Two major scriptural passages are used in connection with this idea of divinely appointed illness: the story of Job and Paul's thorn in the flesh. These two accounts are often raised as objections to the teaching that God's will is healing for all. Ignorance and misunderstanding of these two scriptures have kept many under the bondage of disease, thinking that they were glorifying God because of their affliction. Closer examination of these scriptures, along with comparison of other scriptures on healing, will show that they do not teach sickness as a "blessing" from God. The Bible is clear in its labeling of sickness as a *curse*, and not a blessing.

A. WHAT ABOUT JOB?

One common objection to healing that arises is the idea that God afflicted righteous Job. Many Christians feel that they cannot be healed, because they are just like Job: suffering at the command of God for some unknown divine purpose. This is an unfortunate misinterpretation of the book of Job. Job's story is by no means simple; it has been wrestled with for centuries by Jews and Christians alike. No simplistic answer is sufficient to explain all that happened to him. Whatever one may conclude from Job's experience, it is not sufficient

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
Romans 8:28

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Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil.

Job 1:1

Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God. But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job 1:22; 2:10

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face." Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

Job 1:6-12

"However, put forth Thy hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse Thee to Thy face." So the LORD said to Satan,

"Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life."

Job 2:5,6

evidence from which to say that the will of God is sickness for anyone. To say that God wants people sick on the basis of Job's experience is an oversimplification, and denies what God has said elsewhere in the Word concerning healing.

1. The accusing afflicter — Satan

Job, according to the scriptures, was "blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning from evil" (Job 1:1). Yet, there befell him numerous grievous calamities. During all these calamities, Job did not curse God, as Satan said he would (Job 1:22; 2:10). Job's comforters judged that Job's calamity was the result of some hidden sin. Job steadfastly rejected this idea, always asserting his own uprightness before God. Yet both Job and his comforters were ignorant of what had transpired in heaven — between God and Satan (Job 1:6-12). Here we find that Satan was the one who accused Job, and Satan was also the one who afflicted him. Repeatedly, Satan said to God, "Put forth Your hand, and afflict him," but God responded, "He is in your hand" (Job 2:5,6). The trial which Job underwent was precipitated and administered by Satan. It was Satan's idea to test Job; he wanted to provoke Job into forsaking and cursing God.

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

2. The source of sickness — Satan

When calamity befell him, Job, in his ignorance of Satan's activity, said, "*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away*" (Job 1:21). Job said this because he was unaware of Satan's presence and activity. Unfortunately, many Christians erroneously quote this very verse in response to the satanic attack of sickness. Job could say this, because he did not have the revelation that is available today under the New Covenant. Christians today have the Word of Jesus declaring, "*The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly*" (John 10:10). Keep in mind that the Bible is a progressive revelation of God and His ways. We must interpret the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. God, under this New Covenant, has made it plain to us who the source of sickness and calamity is. In the New Testament, Satan is called the "*god of this world*" (II Corinthians 4:4). He is the one who causes calamity and destruction in peoples' lives. This is partially revealed in the opening chapters of the book of Job, although it is not fully elaborated.

3. Our redemption from sickness — Jesus

Thus, today, under this glorious New Covenant, none can claim to be "just like poor old Job." None can say, "The Lord is afflicting me!" or "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away," because God has shown us who the source of calamity is. To say that God will put sickness on us to test us or to purify us is contrary to the work of the cross. God will not place on His children what it cost the life of His Son to redeem us from. The idea that God places sickness on us is incompatible with the fact that God made healing a part of the atoning work of Jesus. The scriptures speak for themselves concerning sickness and disease. "*He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases*" (Matthew 8:17). "*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed*" (I Peter 2:24).

And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."
Job 1:21

"The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly."
John 10:10

In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
II Corinthians 4:4

In order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES, AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES."
Matthew 8:17

And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.
I Peter 2:24

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me — to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

II Corinthians 12:7-10

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

II Corinthians 12:9

B. PAUL'S THORN

Many are of the opinion that God sometimes says "No!" in answer to prayers for healing. This is often held forth as the reason why some don't receive healing when prayed for. It is thought that sickness is God's method of humbling us, and bringing us closer to Himself. The basis for this type of thinking is an erroneous concept of Paul's thorn in the flesh. Paul speaks of this thorn in his second letter to the Corinthians (II Corinthians 12:7-10).

Here, Paul declares that he received a messenger from Satan (a demon) to buffet him, so that he would not be puffed up with pride concerning the revelations which he had been given. His twice-repeated prayer for deliverance was met with God's answer, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for (My) power is perfected in weakness*" (II Corinthians 12:9). The "weakness" to which Paul refers is mistakenly thought to be physical sickness, thus leaving the impression that sickness is God's way of keeping His people humble. Much has been written and said on this theme, to the extent that it is now a prevalent idea in the Body of Christ.

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

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1. Persecution

Equating Paul's thorn in the flesh with disease is an assumption which the scriptures do not bear out. Paul enumerates just exactly what his "weakness" entailed. "*Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake*" (II Corinthians 12:10). In three other places within his epistles, Paul lists the difficulties which he faced as a result of his preaching the gospel. (Read I Corinthians 4:11-13; II Corinthians 6:4-5; II Corinthians 11:23-26.) In these references, Paul lists many troubles which he experienced as a servant of Christ, such as persecution, hunger, danger, etc. And yet nowhere, in any of these lists, does Paul ever mention sickness or disease.

Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

II Corinthians 12:10

To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

I Corinthians 4:11-13

But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger.

II Corinthians 6:4,5

Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren.

II Corinthians 11:23-26

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Lesson ELEVEN HEALING — THE WILL OF GOD

“But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land in which you live.”

Numbers 33:55

Know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they shall be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

Joshua 23:13

But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. But the Jews aroused the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

Acts 13:45,50

But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles, and embittered them against the brethren. But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

Acts 14:2,19

The weaknesses which Paul speaks of are the persecutions and trials he encountered at the hands of men because he was preaching the Gospel. In the Old Testament, God told the children of Israel that the Canaanites would become “*thorns in the side*,” if they didn’t utterly destroy them from off the land (Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13). The “thorns” to which God is referring were people, the Canaanites. In the same way, Paul suffered greatly at the hands of Jews who stirred up trouble for him wherever he went (Acts 13:45,50; 14:2,19; 17:5,13; 18:12; 21:27; 23:12). Paul suffered much from these “thorns” because he preached the Gospel, and it was this from which he sought to be delivered, not from a physical sickness.

God’s response to Paul, “*My grace is sufficient*,” is often misunderstood to mean that we are to “bear up” under sickness by the grace of God. But, we are not to “bear up” under anything from which God has redeemed us. God has not redeemed us from persecution (II Timothy 3:12), but He has redeemed us from all disease and illness. **God’s grace is sufficient to see us through persecution, but the stripes of Jesus are sufficient to take away all sickness from our bodies!**

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2. Suffering for Jesus?

It is obvious to see from the above that those who are bound with disease are *not* "suffering for Jesus' sake." Paul's lists of troubles for the sake of the Gospel are explicit, and sickness is conspicuous in its absence from these lists. Suffering for Christ's sake refers strictly to those trials which arise because a person is a believer and preaches the Gospel. Paul could have eliminated all those problems by simply returning to his home town, and making tents!

Being sick is not in any way, shape or form "suffering for Christ's sake"! If that were so, then only Christians would be sick, since only Christians will be persecuted for Christ's sake. However, anybody can be sick, Christian and non-Christian alike. Sickness was *not* a part of Paul's "troubles" for the sake of the Gospel. The same is true today. If a believer is sick or physically infirm, he is *not* suffering for Jesus' sake. He is being oppressed by the devil.

But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

Acts 17:5,13

But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat.

Acts 18:12

And when the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the multitude and laid hands on him.

Acts 21:27

And when it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.

Acts 23:12

And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

II Timothy 3:12

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V. SUMMARY — THE CURSE AND THE BLESSING — GETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT

Sickness is not the will of God; it is a work of Satan which came about as the result of man's fall. This fact must remain uppermost in a believer's mind if he wants to receive healing or remain healthy. The enemy for centuries has perpetrated the lie that God wants His obedient servants and children to be bound up with illness and disease, and unfortunately the Church at large has accepted that judgment.

But, the Bible declares that sickness is a curse, an enemy, and an attack from the enemy. Nowhere in the Old or New Testaments is sickness viewed as a blessing. It is always seen as something from which God wants to deliver man. So much is this so, that God placed physical healing within the mighty provision of the atoning work of Jesus. This alone in the scripture stands out as a statement of God's will. God's will is healing, and He proved that by laying on His Son all our sickness and disease.

Anyone who is suffering with disease can know that it is not God's will that he be so, neither is God the one afflicting him. Sickness is the work of Satan, an attack from without to kill, steal and destroy. With this in mind, we can move on to appropriate the divine health that God has provided, knowing that God is for us and not against us.