


The Healing Ministry of Jesus of Nazareth

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Abstract




- While we Christians often associate Jesus with miraculous healings, what exactly do we imagine? Whom did Jesus heal and why? Can we say what really happened? And was Jesus really that unique? Or was he one of many who “healed” as a sign of his authority as a religious leader? And ultimately, what does any of that have to say about the healing ministry of Christians in the 21st century?

Jesus, the healer

Healing miracles and the modern mind




There is no easy correspondence between sickness as it was viewed in the ancient world and the way that it is viewed in contemporary society

Competing world views?



- The ancient world** believed that all that happened, including illness, was directly related to the will of the fates or the gods
- The modern world** believes that much of what happens, including illness, is directly related to understandable causes, such as viruses, physical conditions, or other external causes

A helpful bibliography




- Malina, Bruce. **The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology.** Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001.
- Neyrey, Jerome H., editor. **The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation.** Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991.
- Pilch, John J. and Bruce Malina. **Handbook of Biblical Social Values.** Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993, 1998.

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Definition of General concepts


Human wellbeing is a concept in every age, but how it is defined differs from culture to culture and age to age.



Sickness

Sickness is defined in its broadest terms as “real misfortune in the realm of human wellbeing.” (“Healing” in **Handbook of Biblical Social Values**, p. 103)

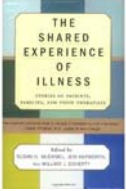
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Disease

Disease is a modern concept that “reflects the Western, scientific perspective and describes abnormalities in the structure or function of organ systems. These pathological states do exist, whether or not cultures recognize them...To cure the disease one employs scientific interventions by specialists.” (“Healing” in **Handbook of Biblical Social Values**, p. 103)

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Illness



Illness is another way to describe the pathological state, but it now serves as an umbrella term to “interpret misfortunes in human wellbeing beyond pathological states.” In this way, “illness...reflects a social and cultural view of socially disvalued states and includes more than what science identifies as disease.” (“Healing,” in **Handbook of Biblical Social Values**, p. 103)

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Cure

- Cure is a term used by medical anthropologists who “define cure as the elimination of disease.” A cure is a very rare occurrence. (“Healing” in **Handbook of Biblical Social Values**, p. 102)

Healing

Healing is defined “as the restoration of meaning in life whether or not the disease is affected, that is, whether or not the physical condition is improved.” (“Healing” in **Handbook of Biblical Social Values**, p. 103)

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Windows to Wellbeing

Proper Human Wellbeing

Proper human wellbeing (aka "health") "is a condition that allows a person to fully participate in cultural activities." ("Healing," in **Handbook of Biblical Social Values**, p. 102)

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Two different world views

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NT World

- Human activity – state of being
- Relationships – communal
- Time – present oriented
- Humanity and the forces of nature – at their mercy
- Human nature – mixture of good and evil

Modern World

- Human activity – state of activity
- Relationships – individual
- Time – future oriented
- Humanity and the forces of nature – to be mastered
- Human nature – neutral or correctable

Healing and Healers in the Biblical World

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- Who heals?
- How do they heal?
- Whom do they heal?
- What does the healing mean?

Honi, the Circle Drawer

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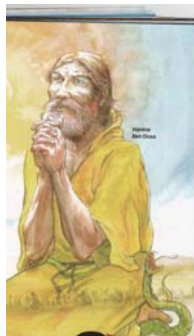
Honi was a Galilean teacher of the century before Jesus' birth. He was famous for his prayer for rain



Hanina ben Dosa

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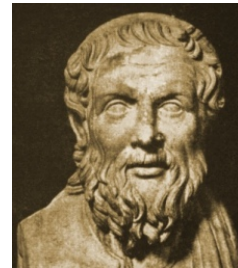
Living just after the time of Jesus, Hanina ben Dosa caused the rain to fall, healed the sick, and confronted demons. He was called the Son of God.



Apollonius of Tyana

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A contemporary of Jesus, Apollonius was a neo-Pythagorean teacher who healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead



Jesus, the Healer

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In speaking of Jesus' healing ministry, we must distinguish between different types of healing: exorcisms, healings, and raising from the dead



Exorcisms

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The demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum

The Gerasene demoniac

The possessed boy

The mute (and blind?) demoniac

The mute demoniac

Mary Magdalene

The daughter of the Syrophenician woman



Healings

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Healings of those who suffer from paralysis or withered limbs (4-5 stories)

Healings of the blind (3 stories)

Healings of lepers (2 stories)

Various individual healings: a fever; a hemorrhage; dropsy; deafness; the healing of severed ear

The healing of the centurion's servant



Raising from the dead

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The raising of Jairus' daughter

The raising of the son of the widow on Nain

The raising of Lazarus

The affirmation that the "dead are raised"



Conclusion on Jesus' healing technique

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In contrast to other "healers" whose healing ministry was usually described as "intercessory prayer," Jesus' healing ministry was marked by vivid action.

Whom did Jesus heal?

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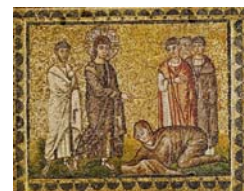
Those whose proper human wellbeing had been compromised

Those reduced to begging

Those perceived as sinners

Those who were feared

Those unable to join the community in worship



The collateral effects of Jesus' healing

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- To heal society
- To confront the religious authorities
- To teach the disciples

Why did Jesus heal?

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- It was expected of every great religious leader
- It was a manifestation of the Kingdom and a prophetic sign
- It was the embodiment of God's compassion

The Healing Ministry of Jesus

Session II

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Jesus' Healing Ministry

Old Testament antecedents:
Abraham, Moses, Elijah and Elisha,
and the prophetic tradition

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Abraham: an example of intercessory prayer?

Genesis 18:16-33 and
Genesis 20:1-18

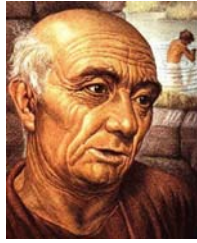
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Moses, the healer of a leper?

Numbers 12:13

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Elijah and Elisha: God's warrior prophets

1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 13

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Isaiah's vision of God's new creation

Isaiah 40-55; the
songs of the Servant;
Isaiah 65

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Samples of Jesus' healing ministry

The demoniac in the Synagogue
at Capernaum

The woman bent over

Blind Bartimaeus

The healing of 10 Lepers

The woman with the hemorrhage

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Healing of the demoniac in the Synagogue at Capernaum

...Jesus rebuked him,
saying, "Be silent, and
come out of him! And
the unclean spirit,
convulsing him and
crying with a loud
voice, came out of
him. And all were
amazed...(Mark 1:23-
28; Luke 4:33-37)



Healing Of A Demoniac in the Synagogue by James Tissot

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The healing of the woman bent over

And when Jesus saw
her, he called her and
said to her, "Woman,
you are freed from
your infirmity." And he
laid his hands upon
her, and immediately
she was made
straight, and she
praised God." (Luke
13:10-17)



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The healing of blind Bartimaeus

And Jesus stopped and said,
"Call him." And they called the
blind man, saying to him, "Take
heart; rise, he is calling you."
And throwing off his mantle he
sprang up and came to Jesus.
And Jesus said to him, "What do
you want me to do for you?"
And the blind man said to him,
"Master, let me receive my
sight." And Jesus said to him,
"Go your way; your faith has
made you well." (Mark 1:46-52;
Matt 9:27-31; 20:29-34; Luke
18:35-43)



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The cleansing of ten lepers

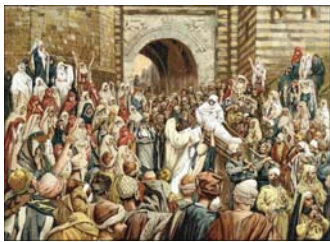
As he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "God and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. (Luke 17:11-19)



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Healing of the woman with a hemorrhage

She had heard reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well." And immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. (Mark 5:21-43; Matt 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56)



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Raising from the dead

Raising the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:21-43); raising the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17); raising Lazarus (John 11:1-45)

Conclusions regarding Jesus' healing ministry I

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- A. Jesus' healings flowed from his message of the Kingdom of God
- B. Jesus did not just intercede through prayer, his healing ministry was filled with action and physicality
- C. Jesus mostly healed as the result of faith on the part of the one who sought to be healed, or sought healing on behalf of another

Conclusions regarding Jesus' healing ministry II

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- D. Jesus' healing did more than simply eliminate illness; it restored the individual to a state of proper human wellbeing
- E. Jesus healing extended to the larger context of the community, with a special emphasis on worship (glorifying God)
- F. Jesus rarely healed in private contexts, emphasizing the proper communal nature of healing

Healing within the Christian community

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The Gospels; the Letters of Paul; the Letter of James



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Jesus sent out his disciples to prepare the way

Sent out in pairs, he gave them "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity." This healing ministry was closely associated with their preaching ministry: "And preach as you go, saying, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons." (Matt 10:1.7-8)

Paul's gifts of the Holy Spirit

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- "there are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit...to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; (1 Cor 12:4-7.9)
- "Does then the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works mighty deeds among you do so from works of the law or from faith in what you have heard?" (Gal 3:5)
- "By the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God..." (Romans 15:19)



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James 5:14-16

"Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful."



Lessons from Jesus' healing ministry for a Christian ministry of healing

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Insights gained

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- Learn from the differences between the perceptions of illness as held by ancient societies and those held by modern societies
- Take account of how the "sick" are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves
- Focus on the broader context

Insights gained II

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- Rituals and circumstances that engage the public nature of healing can emphasize the interconnection and "heal" both parties
- There is a constant need for catechesis among the faithful
- Just as Jesus' healing ministry constantly ran up against societal boundaries and taboos, so too Christian ministry today will likely run up against modern boundaries and taboos

Insights gained III

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- Christian ministry needs to be rooted in the same kind of motivation and reason for being as was the ministry of Jesus: compassion, Kingdom values, and a response to faith
- Christian ministry of healing, which is an extension of Jesus' own ministry needs to train its eye on the broader agenda, especially when there is no "cure" to be had