What is Divine Healing?

Summary

Isaac, Jacob, Job, Hezekiah, Timothy — even Elisha died of illness. This article confronts the uncomfortable biblical evidence against any guaranteed "faith healing" formula, and offers a more grounded understanding in its place.

- Counterexamples across both Covenants to any single faith/righteousness/obedience formula for healing.
- The spiritual healing of Isaiah 53:5 distinguished from physical healing.
- The Messiah's healings as proof of identity and authority to forgive sins, not ends in themselves.
- Answered prayer for healing subject to the same conditions as any other prayer: faith, obedience, alignment with Yahweh's purpose.

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What is Divine Healing?

It is a fact of life that most people will be ill at least once in their lives. Experience proves this. So does the Bible. But why?

Could Yahweh not have designed the human body to remain healthy up till the last moment and then just quit without pain or warning? Certainly He could have, but He didn't!

He didn't for a number of reasons. One reason is so that we will be alarmed into spiritual action by our obvious mortality. For example, David was dismayed by the frailty of human life and was moved to seek Yahweh *(Ps. 103:13-22)*. Solomon also saw life's tenuous balance and therefore counselled the wise to seek Yahweh and eternal life *(Eccl. 12:1)*.

The main reason Yahweh made us subject to sickness is the same reason we are subject to any trial. It is so we may build righteous character as we struggle against the frailty of the flesh *(Rom. 8:18-23)*.

Yahweh values perfect character more than perfect bodies *(1 Peter 1:6,7)*. Trials build character. And He has provided, in the physical world itself, the seeds of trials that can build that character. Within this simple truth lie the simple and obvious answers to what illness is, and what causes it.

Illness; the interruption of physical, emotional or mental balances, can be caused by different factors. At times it is the direct result of violating one or more of the basic principles of good health. This is only common sense. Or it may be the result of the sin of breaking one of Yahweh's commands *(1 John 3:4)*. Both venereal disease, caused by promiscuity, and liver damage, caused by excessive alcohol consumption, are good examples of illnesses resulting from sin.

Physical illness is an indirect, although perhaps inevitable, result of sin. It is not caused directly by sin or spiritual things in the same way, say, as a virus or germ causes illness. Sin is not a virus or germ. Sin does bring the ultimate penalty of spiritual death, and in the here and now, it opens the doors to illnesses and suffering.

At other times, the illness or infirmity may be inherited *(John 9:1-3)*. or the result of unintentional injury or accident *(Luke 13:1-5)*. It is often not possible to tell whether or not sin caused a particular illness.

Yahweh knows that our bodies will break down, and has allowed for the probability of it - even though He desires the opposite *(3 John 2*). He has subjected us to this reality in the hope that character will result *(Rom. 8:19-23)*. Sickness, should it occur, may build character - whether we like it or not.

The first thing to clarify, is that not everyone is healed every time, regardless of their faith or what some "faith healing" ministry might suggest. Jacob was blind at the last of his life *(Gen. 48:10)*, while Job *(2:1-8)*, and Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1-7), Timothy *(1 Tim. 5:23)* and others *(Phil. 2:25-27; 2 Tim. 4:20)* suffered illness.

Yah'shua fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy about taking our infirmities and bearing our sicknesses by personally using His power to heal all who were sick, as PROOF of the cleansing power of His forthcoming personal sacrifice. "When evening had come, they brought to Him many that 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.'" *(Matt. 8:16,17).*

Now turn to Isaiah 53:4-6, *(verse 4 of which is quoted by Matthew above)*. Verse 5 says "with His stripes we are healed". But the healing spoken of here is SPIRITUAL, not physical - it refers to our reconciliation to Yahweh. "All like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" *(v. 6).* Clearly the metaphor for our being "like sheep gone astray", is referring to our total spiritual condition.

Disease and healing are mentioned a few times in the Old Covenant. The examples of healing are not doctrinal dissertations, and this fact hints at the truth that healing is not a mysterious, highly complex subject - if it were, we would find much more detail on the subject.

One of the most beloved Bible stories is of the healing of Sarah's barren womb *(Gen. 17:17; 18:14),* and her subsequent joyous birth of Isaac in her old age, heralding the eventual spiritual healing of the world through Yah'shua the Messiah, a descendant of Isaac. Her example clearly teaches that Yahweh's healing may be delayed for quite some time. And that in certain cases, Yahweh has overriding purposes that go beyond the immediate physical - that in many cases may transcend the physical and the temporary.

Genesis 27:1 and 48:1,10 tell us respectively, that the patriarch Isaac was blind for many years, and that Jacob was "sick" at the time of his old age as well as blind. They were not healed of these afflictions - a fact surprising to those who equate righteousness to instant healing or excellent health. Clearly, the lessons to be learned by these handicaps must have been more important in Yahweh's master plan, than the physical health of the individuals.

Exodus 15:26 lists an important and much quoted promise of Yahweh: "If you diligently heed the voice of Yahweh 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". This is NOT a promise to heal, rather it is a CONDITIONAL promise not to afflict illness.

Chapter 13 to 15 of Leviticus are very informative. They discuss the plague of leprosy and give rules of quarantine - clearly refuting any notion that the children of Israel lived devoid of illness, or were instantly healed.

Deuteronomy 7:15 likewise says Yahweh, contingent again on obedience, would take away sickness. And in 32:39 Yahweh confirms that "I heal" in the spiritual context, and in 28:21,22; 60,61 Yahweh gives the converse of 32:39, proclaiming illness as a curse for disobedience.

In 1 Kings 17:17-24 and 2 Kings 4, Elijah is shown to have healed the dead son of a widow and performed another resurrection as a show of Yahweh's power and mercy.

Job's famous sickness-and-healing episodes teach that sickness may befall even a righteous man in order to learn more lessons or to be "tested" by the devil.

The Psalms contain numerous appeals by David for healing, as well as thanks for healing. Clearly, David did not enjoy perfect health nor instant healing every time he became sick *(Psalm 30:1-3; 38:1-22; 41:4-8)*. The death of David's son, born of adultery with Bathsheba, is a powerful example of illness without healing. Yahweh decided the child would die - and no amount of prayer would change what Yahweh deemed best.

Elisha, a great servant of Yahweh - upon whom the Spirit of Yahweh dwelt in double portion - became sick and died from an illness! Whereas Hezekiah prayed in earnest and was healed of a sickness that Yahweh had previously said would kill him!

The vast majority of New Covenant healings are those of the Messiah, and they ring loudly with certain common traits. Although the Messiah at times healed simply out of His great compassion *(Matt. 20:34)*, His ultimate purpose was much more universal. His healings were directly coupled with His teaching of the Gospel message. Matthew 9:35 cites that the Messiah "went about all the cities and villages, teaching...preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people". Matthew 4:23 notes the same thing, and Luke 6:17 testifies of the large crowd that "came to HEAR Him, AND to be healed of their diseases".

It takes little imagination to understand one important purpose of the Messiah's public healings: Such healings would attract great attention and thus provide a large audience for His teaching of the Gospel message. But the healings had other effects much more profound than merely drawing listeners.

Dramatic healings lent PROOF that He was the Messiah. Thus Matthew pointed to the Isaiah prophecy predicting the Messiah's coming and His healing of the sick. Yah'shua Himself pointed to His healings as evidence of His Messiahship when speaking to the doubting disciples of John the Baptist, whom John sent to the Messiah when he was in prison *(Matt. 11:2-6)*.

Yah'shua displayed such healing power not for its own sake, as some modern-day "faith healers", but for a far more transcendent purpose: By showing His power to heal, He showed His power to forgive sins. This is the whole point of the story of the paralytic man lowered through the roof as described in Matt. 9, Mark 2 and Luke 5.

Yah'shua' healings were of young people, old people, male, female, and were nearly always public, virtually all immediate or nearly so, and dramatic, but not in the nature of spectacles. No one doubted whether His healings had occurred *(Matt. 15:21-31)*.

The apostles Peter and John report their healing of a lame man, with no mention of the man's faith. The man was not asking or expecting to be healed - he was begging for money *(Acts 3:1-16)*. Peter performed outstanding healings: "They brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some" *(Acts 5:15).* Peter also raised Tabitha from the dead *(Acts 9:36-42)*.

Acts 19:11-12 shows how "handkerchiefs" or "aprons" sent from Paul worked great healings. Acts 20:7-12 describes Paul resurrecting a young man who fell from a balcony.

1 Corinthians 12:9-10, 28-30 lists the "gifts of healing" among the spiritual gifts of Israelites. The New Covenant record continues with examples showing that even some of the apostles, including Paul had health problems from time to time *(2 Cor. 12:7)*. Then James gives one of the few doctrinal instructions on healing: He advises that the sick should seek the elders of the Church - the called out ones; not the elders of some man-made "church" or religious organization! *(5:14,15)*.

This summary of Bible healing is not exhaustive, but one thing is undeniable - there is no one common set of circumstances nor special formula that runs through these cases which stamps illness or the process of healing as any different than any other kind of trial!

Some who were healed had faith - some did not. Some were righteous - some were not. Yahweh sometimes healed - sometimes He did not. Sometimes healings were instant - sometimes there were years of delay. Sometimes sickness was a punishment from Yahweh - sometimes it was as a result of sin - sometimes it was from a physical cause, accident, or injury - sometimes it was from an undisclosed cause. ALL Yahweh's servants eventually died - and many, if not most, died of an illness Yahweh did not heal!

Divine healing does not entail a spiritual process in any way different from that required for any other trial! Sickness sometimes results from time and chance. The connection of the sacrifice of the Messiah with healing is IDENTICAL as with ALL miraculous interventions.

ALL ANSWERED PRAYER is linked to the Messiah's sacrifice and to our obedience to Yahweh. Answered prayer for healing is exactly the same as answered prayer for anything else - subject to the same conditions.

There are many Bible verses that sound like absolute promises to heal every man or woman every time - but none of them actually mean that. The Bible itself, proves that this expectation of being healed every time is not the case.

There are two obvious conditions to Yahweh's promise to heal. First is faith. "The prayer of faith shall save the sick" *(James 5:15).* Yahweh certainly will not heal someone who does not have faith to ask for the healing. The second is obedience, "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" *(1 John 3:22)*. No one would even suspect Yahweh has bound Himself to heal all unrepentant sinners!

There is another, less obvious condition to Yahweh answering ALL prayer, including prayer for healing. Yahweh heals *(or answers any prayer)* IMMEDIATELY UPON THE CONDITION THAT SUCH HEALING IS GOOD FOR YOU IN TERMS OF HIS OVERALL PLAN for your life. Yahweh's great purpose for you is to give you eternal life as His child in His great Kingdom. He will do nothing to you or for you that will in any way jeopardize that, or reduce your potential rewards in that Kingdom.

Remember, 1 John 5:14 states that Yahweh hears us whenever we ask anything in prayer "according to His Will". Sometimes there is an overriding purpose in our life that only Yahweh knows. To gain eternal life takes character - character, sometimes comes from suffering illness or other difficulties. Yah'shua Himself suffered in excruciating pain and humiliation to become the firstborn among many brethren. As Hebrews 2:9-10 makes it clear, He became "perfect through sufferings". This is why James advises us to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" *(1:2-4).*

Any statements in the Bible implying absolute healing must be read in context with the rest of the Bible - not in isolation. Although many verses taken on their own, appear to be written without qualification, they all sit amidst the rest of the Bible, and of course are qualified by it. In the case of healing, like many other prayer requests, it is an implied condition that the healing is in the best long term interest of the individual. It is an implied condition, but one nonetheless expressly stated by the Bible to apply to ALL PRAYER.

We can utterly trust Yahweh not to let us suffer more than we can bear and to give us salvation to eternal life - but only after we have "suffered a while" *(1 Pet. 5:10)* and endured. Faith in Yahweh means believing Yahweh will heal us or answer our prayers EVERY TIME according to His Will for us. It is more expansive and trusting than many realize. It is the faith to trust Yahweh even when He does not heal or directly answer us.

Further, if Yahweh healed every man or woman every time, He would be in effect removing all health problems from the list of trials which Israelites suffer - which is something He has not promised or chosen to do.

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