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An Overview on the Uses of Medicine in the Bible

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Abstract

Different religious groups have different concept and teaching on sickness and disease. Christians in their religious book, “The Bible” pointed out clearly that the problem of sickness and disease is closely associated with sin and death. The fall of mankind brought sin, sickness and death. Since then, people have tried different ways to get relief if they are plagued with sickness and disease over the centuries. However, dependence on God for healing and cure by the people of God (in the Bible) is the expected approach for the people as God is the ultimate Healer. People in different stages in the history of Israel approach medicine in different ways. The paper discussed the usages of medicine by the people of the Bible since the days of Moses till Jesus Christ and apostles’ period.

Keywords: Medicine, Healing, Old Testament, New Testament, Inter-testamental Periods, Bible.

Introduction

The problem of sickness and disease is closely associated with sin and death. Thus, pointing its origin to the history of the creation accounts in the first pages of the Genesis record. Genesis recorded that not long after the creations of man and the world and everything therein, the fall of man took place with which suffering, and sickness, and death enter the world. And as such disease can be seen as God’s punishment upon man for his sin. This is because when God created the world and man, His intention was that man should enjoy all the fullness of life abundantly, without any sickness or diseases. God intended man to eat the fruit of life and should have eternal life, a life free from all sickness, suffering, worries, and diseases. For this very reason, God created man in a special way, distinct from any other creations. God created man in His own image. Nevertheless, man fails the test of obeying the commands of God by eating the fruit God had forbidden him to eat. Thus, death along with all toils, suffering, trials, sickness, and diseases became part and parcel of mankind. Scripture also indicates in several places different causes of sickness and diseases people suffered in life. We find that disease can be the work of adversary (Job 2:7), or to what was called as spirits of dumbness or uncleanness (Mark 9:17, 25). So basically what is clear is that sickness is not just a biological and medical phenomenon, but it is also a spiritual one related very much to the works in the world by the devil (Acts 10:36). Olojede quoted Sussman¹ that the range of sicknesses or diseases in the ancient Israelite world includes infectious and communicable diseases which may include fevers, plagues, and parasitic diseases, and skin and hair diseases as in Job’s diseases, Naaman or Miriam’s leprosy, or the white hand of Moses. Others are diseases of the nervous system such as stroke (I Samuel 25:36), sunstroke (II Kings. 4:18-20) or epilepsy (I Samuel 19:23); diseases of the eyes and ears; psychological diseases; and gynecology and obstetrics. Several causes of sickness in the Bible include transgression and iniquity (Psalm 107:17); rejection of the Word of God (Psalm 107:20); misuse of the tongue (Numbers 12:2,9,10); touching the Lord’s anointed (Psalm 105:12-15); refusal to worship the Lord in the beauty of his holiness (Zech. 14:18-20) and marital infidelity (Numbers 5:27).² Jealousy and self-indulgence (Job 5:2 & Ecclesiasticus³ 37:30-31) were also seen as causes of disease.⁴ A fear which can cause destruction and decays in one’s health as it torments

¹ Funlola Olojede, “Women and the Task of Caregiving in the Old Testament,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 149 (July 2014): 49.

² P A Oguntoye, “A Theological Evaluation of Medication and Healing in the Old Testament and Its Implications for African Indigenous Churches (AICs),” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (2013): 31.

³ This is an Apocryphal book not accepted in the Protestant Canon though the Roman Catholic Church accepted in their Canon of Scripture. It is also known as book of Sirach, wisdom of Sirach or simply Sirach or even Ben Sirach.

⁴ M.M. Mulemfo, “Traditional and Christian Concepts of Disease and Healing among the Manianga,” *HTS* 51, no. 2 (1995): 351.

the person causing the person to be depressed, sick, and even death, is very much a cause of sickness in the olden days as it is today. This is very easy to be understood: if there is sorrow in one's heart, the spirit can be broken ultimately leading the person to be sick. This is not to attribute all sickness to fear or sin or curse by an enemy or other similar things, but it must be accepted since there was less knowledge about the nature of the disease and its effect on the body, no one can be dogmatic in what they claimed or said. Perhaps no one knew exactly what bacteria or viruses are. Hence it hampered diagnosis for the main diagnostic tools were observation and superficial examination only. The so-called medical practitioners or physicians if available had few aids to use in their work. No doubt the use of medicine in the Bible is not a very highly emphasized subject since the Bible speaks of God as the Healer and hence truthfully, there is no need for medicine or physician as such.

While it may be true that one does not find the mention of physicians and their practices so much in the Bible but that does not make their profession less important or insignificant. In fact, one can point out clearly where scripture clearly outlines the existence and perhaps very significant role physicians play in society. It is interesting to note that two physicians mentioned in the Hebrew Bible practiced medicine on a part-time basis, and as only a sideline to an all-encompassing religious concern. Moses was more of a preventive medicinal practitioner, while Elisha seemed to be focused on curative medicine. There are also legendary tales of other unnamed physicians of the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha and numbers of Talmudic⁵ rabbis feature as doctors in Jewish literature. Talmud holds physicians in very high esteem and even urges the physicians to charge for their services because 'a doctor for nothing is worth nothing.' So important in the thoughts of a Jew that the Babylonian Talmud lists the presence of a physician among the ten things needed to be found for a Jew to reside.⁶ No doubt the worth of physicians from ancient times cannot be underestimated. However, it is without a doubt that the Jewish medical knowledge is inferior to that of the Ancient Near Eastern Civilization like the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and particularly the Grecians. In fact, the Israelites contributed nothing significant to the patrimony of humanity respecting the scientific diagnosis of diseases. Nevertheless, it must be accepted that certain general patterns can be observed in Hebrew concern for health which went far beyond the dietary portions of the Law of Moses and led ultimately to moral principles that helped lay the foundation for modern medicine. Ancient New Eastern literature contains numerous references to physicians and medical practices. Well known among many include the likes of Lulu, the Sumerian physician who lived in Mesopotamia in about 2700 B.C., and Imhotep of Egypt who lived some decades later, served as priest and architect apart from being a physician. The Code of Hammurabi contains several laws regulating the practice of medicine and surgery by physicians in the Old Babylonian Kingdom. It is possible that the office of the physician in the ancient world was generally the prerogative of the priesthood as numerous incantations which have survived on clay tablets and manuscript form testify to the place which they held in medical function due to their supposed ability to fulfill disease at the spiritual level at which it absolutely was thought to originate. The Israelites saw illness as both the natural result of mortality and as punishment for sin. God was the supreme physician, sending both sickness and cure in response to sin and repentance. Moses wrote in Deut. 32:39, 'I kill and make alive; I wound, and that I heal; neither is there any that may deliver out of my hand.'

Uses of Medicine in the Old Testament

While the Bible is replete with cases of disease and illness, it was not intended to serve as a medical text. Hence most sicknesses were probably treated at home as several stories in the Bible would illustrate. There is no evidence of an organized medical system in the Bible days. Physicians do exist but Jews believed the only true healer was God. Hebrews believed that health and sickness came alike from Jehovah, and hence one's physical condition was correlative to one's spiritual relationship with God. This is actually an important therapeutic principle that has been recognized by modern

⁵ Talmud is a Jewish commentary on the Bible and also an encyclopaedia. It includes portions on jurisprudence, history, ethics, mythology, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, theology, medicine, anatomy and botany. It was compiled by a number of Jewish scholars.

⁶ "Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin 17," accessed October 26, 2020, https://halakhah.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_17.html.

psychosomatic medical studies.⁷ In fact, there is no evidence in the Old Testament that the Hebrews knew of secondary causes for illness. And since there was no concept of a cause and effect relationship in the progress of the disease, there was little use for the physician during the Old Testament periods. On top of this medical intervention is seen as usurping the divine prerogative.⁸ The use and reference to the use of medicine in the Old Testament are being studied under three headings with reference to the days of kings in Israel as explained in the following pages.

Israel in Antiquity till the Periods of Kings

The reference or implication of physicians appears in the Hebrew Bible without any indication that this profession was considered legitimate or vice versa. Mentioned may be made here of Joseph asking the physician in Genesis 50:2 to embalm his father. We also see Job referring to his slanderous friends as worthless physicians (cf. Job 13:4). Similarly mentioned of the physician is seen in Jeremiah's prophesy where he laments the absence of a physician in Gilead to heal the wounds of the people (cf. Jeremiah 8:22).⁹ So though many scholars point to Exodus 15:26 as an explanation for the biblical silence on physicians and medical treatment, it did not prohibit the very existence of human physicians either. Perhaps it is plausible to argue that Exodus was meant to reinforce the notion that healing requires allegiance to the Lord. No doubt God is identified as the Healer of His people and hence healing can be taken as a divine prerogative. This is opposite to the culture of the entire Near Eastern world where people mainly relied on medicine and magic in their treatment of physical disorders. Perhaps a scant reference to the physicians in the Hebrew Bible can be explained from the observation that it was written to outline the history and origin of a nation and its relationship to its deity rather than passing down a specialized knowledge intended for professional usage. Hence, consulting physicians as a legitimate treatment option was not without risk. It needs to be noted here that "while the cure of disease is left to the divine physician, the prevention of disease is very much the province of human beings."¹⁰ This is made clear by searching through different laws God gave to the Hebrews through Moses. Several of them are very much preventive medicine as can be seen in Torah.

The use of mandrakes¹¹ by Rachel and Leah as mentioned in Genesis 30:14-16 clearly indicate that the Jews were aware of the mandrakes usage early on for treating barren women. Mandrakes since time immemorial was deemed a mystic plant by Eastern world possessing the power to remove sterility and able to stimulate the passion of love. Traditionally only dog was used to pull out its root in fear of getting mad.¹² Many Bible commentators wrote not only mandrake was believed to stimulate love making because of its odor, it also was thought as medicinal for fruitfulness.¹³ Mandrake is known to excite

⁷ Roland Kenneth Harrison, "Disease, Bible and Spade," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 16, no. 4 (December 1953): 90.

⁸ Paul W Walaskay, "Biblical and Classical Foundations of the Healing Ministries," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 37, no. 3 (September 1983): 197.

⁹ Isabel Cranz, "Advice for a Successful Doctor's Visit: King Asa Meets Ben Sira," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (2018): 234.

¹⁰ Walaskay, "Biblical and Classical Foundations of the Healing Ministries," 197.

¹¹ Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Magic in Biblical World," *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983): 180. Mandrake grows plenty in Palestine and Syria and are popularly known as 'love apple.' Garlic, onions, myrrh, mallows and love potion are also thought to serve as aphrodisiacs by Egyptians, Grecian and Romans (See P. 180,181)

¹² "Society for Reproductive Anachronisms," accessed January 1, 2021, <http://critical-art.net/Original/sra/SRAweb/fertility.htm>.

¹³ "Genesis 30:14 Commentaries: Now in the Days of Wheat Harvest Reuben Went and Found Mandrakes in the Field, and Brought Them to His Mother Leah. Then Rachel Said to Leah, 'Please Give Me Some of Your Son's Mandrakes.'" accessed September 21, 2020, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/30-14.htm>. Important commentary that espoused mandrakes as cure for fertility include: Ellicott's Commentary, Barne's Note on the Bible, Matthew Poole's Commentary, Gill's Exposition of the entire Bible, Pulpit Commentary and Bible.Org. See also "Fertility and Mandrakes," *God as a Gardener*, April 24, 2011, accessed September 21, 2020, <https://godasagardener.com/2011/04/24/jacob-the-mandrakes/>.

sexual desire, encourage sexual activity and help in achieving sexual orgasm. Several other benefits of it are well documented by Mou, Parvin and Dash in *Phytochemistry and medicinal properties of Mandragora officinarum*.¹⁴ People are said to have kept them under their pillow believing it has reproductive power while some are said to have even wear them as good luck charms. But since the church frowned upon this practice, Joan of Arc was said to have been accused of having a mandrake leading to her burning at the stake in 1431. There is no doubt it is possible that it can act by stimulating ovulation. Nevertheless, as one reads on, the Bible clearly records in Genesis 30:22 that it is not the mandrake that made Rachel bore sons but that God listened to her prayer. This then tells us there were superstitious beliefs and practices prevalent, which did affect the Jews of the day. There is no reason why we cannot accept this truth!

The priests in the OT acted as health officers for the diagnosis and treatment of sicknesses like leprosy and others. Leviticus gives us a detailed explanation of it. However, there is no mention of priests giving any treatment or medicine, or exorcism.¹⁵ In fact, the Mosaic health practices focus on prevention which is, in fact, a conceptual leap, whether conscious or not. It must be kept in mind that preventive medical techniques in the Bible were never meant to be absolute cures for underlying illness. Rather, they provided the means of living a more abundant and healthy life. God's instruction to the Israelites through Moses as in Leviticus 3:17 is clearly preventive in nature and it was meant to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. This preventive measure of public health and hygiene should perhaps, rank as the greatest achievement in all medical history.¹⁶ This is because Mosaic Law was way ahead of its time in regards to the laws which touch issues of health, hygiene, and sanitation. The prohibitions and provisions mentioned are all medically inclined.

Moses is said to have been educated in all the wisdom of Egyptians (Acts 7:22) but he didn't follow what his teachers taught him. In Exodus 15:26 Israelites were told if they followed and do all that they were told, God will not bring about diseases they had seen while in Egypt. So it is obvious that what he wrote is not what he learned in Egypt. Mosaic preventive medicine can be divided into dietary and sanitary provisions. It is worth noting that of 613 commandments, 213 are said to be of medical nature!¹⁷ Preventive medicine consists of measures taken to avert disease or injuries rather than curing them or treating their symptoms. The end is to guard and maintain health and wellbeing and to prevent disease and death. Medical science had verified the hazards of excessive fatty intake which the Lord had cautioned the Jews some 3500 years ago. Not only Moses gave what is harmful to them but also listed which type of meat can be eaten by them. With medical input today it is very clear those excluded from the Israelites provisions are basically predators and carriers of parasites. Leviticus dietary provisions also include many diets from fruits which are excellent sources of fibers needed in our body. The sanitary provisions were also given by God to Abraham as He gave to Moses later on. They are precise and consistently accurate throughout the Old Testament and there is not even a single verse of the Scripture which had been found medically hazardous, which speaks volumes of the provision God gave to the Israelites.¹⁸ Mosaic health system stress on cleanliness which included frequent washing, especially before meals, the cleansing of cooking vessels or their

¹⁴ Kanzil Mowla Mou, Most Nazma Parvin, and Pritesh Ranjan Dash, "Phytochemistry and Medicinal Properties of Mandragora Officinarum: A Review" 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 8.

¹⁵ John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 57.

¹⁶ Olaomo Yetunde Abolaji, "Preventive Medicine: God's Original Method and Implications for the Church," *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 18, no. 3 (2013): 91, accessed November 5, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001998648&site=ehost-live>.

¹⁷ "Medicine," accessed January 1, 2021, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/medicine>.

¹⁸ Jay D Fawver and R Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca sacra* 147, no. 587 (July 1990): 275, accessed November 5, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0000827910&site=ehost-live>.

destruction of the same (Leviticus 11:33).¹⁹ Perhaps Moses was influenced to a certain extent by Egyptians as well as the Canaanites practices of the day for the prohibitions such as one given to pork and eating meat cooked in milk. The Jews were to be different and distinct from any neighboring nations' practices. But in many aspects, it can be pointed also that he is not at all influenced by his earthly wisdom too as many of the Egyptian medical practices were reported to be very harmful. For example, they are said to have used donkey feces for the treatment of splinters, which instead of curing can increase the incidence of tetanus. Medically crocodile feces had not been proven for birth control either.²⁰ Rather, Moses wrote as inspired by the Holy Spirit what was the best possible option for the wellbeing of the Israelites.

Abolaji pointed out rightly when he said, "The role played by adequate rest in preventive medicine cannot be overemphasized because physical and mental activity both require energy and create waste products, energy is however restored and waste build up diminished during rest."²¹ This is crucial as medical science has proven; rest is a vital thing to health. No doubt an Omniscient God strictly commanded the Israelites to have one complete day set aside a day of rest when he said, 'six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death.' Passages like Exodus 20:8-11, 23:12, 31:15, 34:21, 35:2; Leviticus 16:31, 23:3 give strong instruction on this truth. Medical scientists after thorough studies have demonstrated that weekly rest is as important as daily rest for each individual's wellbeing. Abolaji quoted Neil Nedley on some important yet scientifically proven examples to authenticate the above truth. Accordingly, it says that a person will tend to have an increase in swelling on the seventh and then on the fourteenth day after surgery, likewise a person with a kidney transplant is more likely to reject the organ seven days and then fourteen days after surgery.²²

Regarding circumcision, Fawyer and Overstreet went on to explained that the very act of circumcision on the eighth day was medically healthy as the baby's prothrombin²³ actually would overshoots to 110% of the normal and hence circumcision would level things off by ninth day. Therefore medically to perform circumcision on the eighth day was the healthiest and safest day to do any sort of surgery as the clotting factor is at 110%, the highest ever.²⁴ God, the all-wise one did prescribe for the circumcision on the eighth day, not on any other days! It must be also noted that the very instrument the Lord permitted for circumcision was the flint knife (Exodus 4:25 cf. Joshua. 5:2) which is sharpened by chipping away at the edge of the stone not in any other surface thereby reducing the possibility of contacting viruses or bacteria. Studies have shown that circumcision reduces the incidence of sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, human Papilloma virus infection, Syphilis, Chancroid, and even genital herpes. It also has a protective effect against the risks of penile cancer in men and cervical cancer in the female sexual partners of circumcised men.²⁵

The Lord's prescription of treating a leper or leprosy²⁶ is another classic example of purely a preventive measure He gave to the people of Jews. The separation of lepers from the camp as seen in Leviticus 14:8 was to prevent the spread of

¹⁹ Roderick Saxey, "A Physician's Reflections on Old Testament Medicine," *Dialogue* 17, no. 3 (1984): 124–125, accessed November 24, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0000947815&site=ehost-live>.

²⁰ Fawyer and Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," 275.

²¹ Abolaji, "Preventive Medicine," 92.

²² *Ibid.*, 93.

²³ Prothrombin is a protein made by the liver and is one of the several factors known as clotting factors. They are dependent upon vitamin K for its production and hence after birth prothrombin decrease so much so that by third day the child would be having only 30% of normal.

²⁴ Fawyer and Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," 277.

²⁵ Abolaji, "Preventive Medicine," 99–100.

²⁶ Interestingly, Josephus was quoted as saying that along with tabes, asthma, cardiac diseases and especially nervous diseases, leprosy were regarded as the work of the devils. Oguntoye, "A Theological Evaluation of Medication and Healing in the Old Testament and Its Implications for African Indigenous Churches (AICs)," 34.

leprosy. Shaving of hair, beard, eyebrows, and washing of clothes, and bathing in water are all preventive measures of God's diagnosis for leprosy. Washing up is described as the single most effective measure one can take to prevent the spread of infections.

It is interesting that the Old Testament mentioned several types of medico-magico-religious purification as per Levitical law. They include puerperal which are related to or occurring during the childbirth or the period immediately following it (Leviticus 12:1ff.), dermatological are all dealing with the skin, its structure and disease (Leviticus 13:1ff.), venereal is related to or resulted from or affected with venereal disease (Leviticus 15:1ff.), spermatorrhea is related to abnormally frequent or excessive emission of semen without orgasm (Leviticus 15:16f.), menstrual are cyclical discharge of blood and secretions in nonpregnant breeding-age primate females at approximately monthly intervals (Leviticus 15:19ff.), and cadaveric are related to a dead body (Leviticus 21:1ff.). Mosaic Law clearly states how to deal with a married woman suspected of adultery. The suspect could be made to drink a special concoction mixed by an ordained priest (Numbers 5:11-28). Interestingly this is the only Old Testament instance of the oral administration of a potion or medicament.

Whether one wants it or not but it is a fact that the text of Exodus 15:25-26 seems to imply that the diagnosis of disease was predominantly governed by ethico-religious considerations: the afflicted patient must have committed some sin, some offence against one or other of the divine commandments.²⁷ However this argument cannot stand the test seen in the book of Job wherein the principal character, despite the severity of his dermatological malady, forcibly protests his innocence of any grave sin.

It can be summarized here that Israel since antiquity was governed by Mosaic Laws and regulations in all of their day-to-day affairs including how a sick person or people suffering from certain infirmities and ailments are to be taken care of. Mosaic Laws stipulate regulations to prevent the spread of epidemics or infectious maladies by providing series of sanitary regulations such as precautionary or temporary isolation, quarantine, burning or scalding of infected garments and utensils, thorough scrubbing and smoking out of houses, and scrupulous inspection and purification of the diseased person after recovery. Without a doubt, they are also affected by the practices of their pagan neighbors which include uses of magic, superstitious beliefs, and practices before Moses comes into the picture. Though the principles set forth by Moses were way ahead of the time, the people perhaps still adulated what they were commanded with what they saw their neighbors practicing. Nevertheless, all prohibitions and provisions mentioned are all medically inclined and had been proven accurate by medical science in the later centuries.

Israel under Kings

Israel under the reign of kings continues to be governed by prohibitions and provisions set forth by Moses but perhaps with many of the kings leading the Israelites astray, there is a high probability that the practices of the pagan neighbors increased too. It is interesting how the writer of Kings recorded certain forms of degenerative diseases that accompanied old age as in the case of David. In the narrative of 1 Kings 1:1-4, the writer said as David was old (though not very old as he was around 70 years) though the servants put cover upon him he could not get warm therefore they decided that a young woman, a virgin take care of the ailing king. The reason for David not getting heat could be because his "strength was impaired, and his natural force abated by his many wars, fatigues by night and day in campaigns, and the many sorrows and afflictions he met with from his family and his friends. As well as enemies: which exhausted his natural moisture, weakened his nerves, and drank up his spirits, and brought upon him the infirmities of a decrepit old age very soon."²⁸ She was to lie in the bosom of King David. Now, this act or suggestion seems immoral but this was very much a

²⁷ T. A. Burkill, "Medicine in Ancient Israel," *The Central African Journal of Medicine* 23, no. 7 (July 1977): 154.

²⁸ "1 Kings Chapter 1 Explained Explained," accessed December 30, 2020, <https://bible-studys.org/Bible%20Books/1%20Kings/1%20Kings%20Chapter%201.html>.

recognized medical treatment in the ancient world which was mentioned by ancient Greek doctor Galen. Josephus described the incident by calling the servants in the passage ‘physician’.²⁹ Another commentator said the prescription of a virgin attending the aged David was actually done in a hygienic point of view for the prolongation of his valuable life and not merely for the comfort to be derived from the natural warmth imparted to his withered frame.³⁰ The problem David was facing could well be as Cogan was quoted by Olojade an ‘advanced atherosclerosis’.³¹ Atherosclerosis is a medical term used to refer to the narrowing of the arteries due to a build-up of plaque. As we get older, fats, cholesterol, and calcium can get collected in our arteries forming plaque. We can perhaps conclude that the advised given was common medical practices of the day as pointed earlier, from the fact that David has no objection to the prescription at all and that no one would have dared to suggest such advice if it was immoral. Verse 4 also makes it plain that David did not have any sexual relationship with her either.

Nabal the husband of Abigail was spoken as had a heart attack or stroke (1 Samuel 25:37) when he was told of David’s intention to finish him off except for the timely intervention of Abigail. Commentators disagree as to what could be the actual reason behind his heart dying within him and he became as a stone. Two possible immediate causes are presented³²: It was brought on by fear, hearing to what a terrible danger he had been, through his reckless, unguarded language and churlish conduct, exposed. Or it could have been a furious burst of anger at his wife’s intelligence swept over him: that his wife has humiliated herself before his enemy was unbearable to him or that his wife made him humbles himself in such a manner. It is interesting that the writer was well aware of where the heart was and that it plays an important role to play in one’s life in staying alive or dead. Nabal dying after ten days perhaps indicate that he succumbed to his stroke which is reasonable perhaps to think that it reaches his brain and hence died.

The author of Chronicles being very critical of Asa consulting physician when he got diseased on his feet (2 Chronicles.16:12)³³ while the author of Kings choose to remain silent (1 Kings 15:23) is debated among commentators. Perhaps as Cranz³⁴ mentioned, Asa was criticised because the Hellenistic attitude toward medicine was considered too secularized and rational to be practiced in Jewish circles. It is also without doubt Hellenistic healers would surely be praying and offering sacrifices to foreign gods and practicing magic which is not acceptable to the Jews. Ellicott’s Commentary for English readers adds that the art of the healers in Asa’s days probably consisted in the use of magical appliances, such as amulets, charms, and exorcisms.³⁵ It is also highly probable that Asa consulted Egyptian physicians who were anciently in high repute at foreign courts and who are well known to be able to expel diseases by charms, incantations, and mystics arts.³⁶

²⁹ “1 Kings Chapter 1,” *Enduring Word*, December 28, 2015, 1, accessed December 30, 2020, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-kings-1/>. Bullinger in his Companion Bible Notes and several commentators also hinted that the servants were probably physicians.

³⁰ “1 Kings 1 Commentary - Jamieson, Fausset and Brown’s Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible,” *StudyLight.Org*, accessed December 30, 2020, [//www.studylight.org/commentaries/jfb/1-kings-1.html](http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/jfb/1-kings-1.html).

³¹ Olojede, “Women and the Task of Caregiving in the Old Testament,” 50.

³² “1 Samuel 25 Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers,” accessed January 6, 2021, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ellicott/1_samuel/25.htm.

³³ Benson Commentary identified Asa’s sickness as gout which is a kind of arthritis caused by a build-up of uric acid crystals in the joints while Gill’s Exposition of the entire Bible contend that it is an ‘aedematous’ swelling of the feet which gets up into the bowels. “2 Chronicles 16:12 Commentaries: In the Thirty-Ninth Year of His Reign Asa Became Diseased in His Feet. His Disease Was Severe, yet Even in His Disease He Did Not Seek the LORD, but the Physicians.,” accessed December 30, 2020, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_chronicles/16-12.htm.

³⁴ Cranz, “Advice for a Successful Doctor’s Visit,” 237. 237.

³⁵ “2 Chronicles 16:12 Commentaries: In the Thirty-Ninth Year of His Reign Asa Became Diseased in His Feet. His Disease Was Severe, yet Even in His Disease He Did Not Seek the LORD, but the Physicians.”

³⁶ “2 Chronicles 16 Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary,” accessed December 30, 2020, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/jfb/2_chronicles/16.htm.

Matthew Henry argues rightly so that it was Asa's duty to consult physicians but he errs in trusting and expecting that they would be able to cure him. Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament pointed out that it was not just mere consulting Asa did, but also the godless manner in which Asa trusted in the physicians which were his.³⁷ Perhaps the answer is to be found in 1 Kings 22:46 where we are allowed to infer that Asa, notwithstanding his reforming zeal (1 Kings 15:9-24), failed to eliminate all the male cultic prostitutes from the sanctuaries of Judah.

So important to the Jew is saving a life so much so that all commandments can be set aside if has a chance of being saved though there is an exception. This truth is exemplified well in the actions of Elijah in lying over the dead son of the widow of Zarephath and Elisha over the dead son of the Shunammite woman. These exceptions are profanation of the name of the Lord, idolatry, bloodshed, and breaking of intimate family sex laws. Any others be it Sabbath, Yom Kippur, Passover laws, Kosher food, all can be abrogated in these circumstances and it is the physician's word that is final and not that of the Rabbi.³⁸ This then obviously verified that the physicians are highly regarded among the Jewish people since time immemorial. Lovesick is found in the pages of scripture too as in the Song of Songs (2:5, 5:8) and 2 Samuel 13:1-5. Sickness of the heart if not taken well like any other sickness can have devastating effects on both the sick person and others. The story of Amnon lovesick is a proof to this reality. Perhaps the story reveals that this type of sickness can have more devastating effects than other sickness.

Despite the agreement concerning the translation of 1 Kings 17:21a as 'he stretched himself upon the child three times, the precise nature of Elijah's action and its effect on the body remain enigmatic. Since the story lack agreement among the scholars on the condition of the body whether he was dead, almost dead, or just unconscious, the story remains quite complicated. Perhaps as Davis³⁹ assumed, the reason for Elijah's action was an attempt to diagnose the body's condition. According to him, the verb so used there must be taken not from 'to measure' but from 'to shake.' This conclusion he drew from comparing the Mesopotamian protocols for diagnosing comas. And hence his action is neither therapeutic nor magical but purely miracles wrought through the prayer of the man of God. Interestingly Elijah's disciple, Elisha some years later did something similar when he laid on top of the child's mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, and hands to hands (2 Kings. 4:34). The child in reference perhaps collapsed due to sunstroke or was affected by the coup de Soleil. It must be noted here too that Elisha by lying upon the child tried all-natural means in his capacity to restore him back while praying to the Author of life to bring about a miracle. He probably endeavored by blowing into the child's mouth to inflate the lungs and restore life back. The prophet's act of sending his staff through his servant Gehazi and commanding it to be laid on the child is something that was practiced by the Necromancers during the day. Though some opined that perhaps Elisha was entertaining similar ideas and hence was under the impression that the actual application of his staff would serve as well as the touch of his hand, such imputation dishonor the very character of the prophet. Hence, it was highly probable that he wishes to teach the Shunammite and the people of Israel at large of the superstitious notion of supposing a miraculous virtue residing in any person or staff.⁴⁰ And that miracle is only with the intervention of Jehovah.

Talmud, the authoritative body of Jewish tradition comprising of the Mishnah and the Gemara, advised that if any patient cannot get well, they are to wear an amulet or resort to magical formulae.⁴¹ Though not commanded in the scripture, there are not valid reasons why we cannot believed that amulets were used by Old Testament saints.⁴² This then, over the

³⁷ "2 Chronicles 16 Keil and Delitzsch OT Commentary," accessed December 30, 2020, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/kad/2_chronicles/16.htm.

³⁸ Eli Davis, "The Psalms in Hebrew Medical Amulets," *Vetus testamentum* 42, no. 2 (April 1992): 173.

³⁹ Andrew R Davis, "Rereading 1 Kings 17:21 in Light of Ancient Medical Texts," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 3 (2016): 466.

⁴⁰ "2 Kings 4 Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary," accessed January 1, 2021, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/jfb/2_kings/4.htm.

⁴¹ A. Rendle Short, *The Bible and Modern Medicine: A Survey of Health and Healing in the Old and New Testament* (London: The Paternoster Press, 1953). 30-31.

⁴² Yamauchi, "Magic in Biblical World."

years, like heathen nations probably was an age-old practice of the people of the Jews. And we have no reason to doubt why some Jews cannot be practicing certain sort of witchcraft as their neighboring countrymen practices the same in those days.⁴³ Josephus wrote how God in giving wisdom to Solomon also enabled him to learn the skill by which he can expels demons.⁴⁴ He went on to said that this was a science useful and sanative to men and that Solomon composed such incantations by which abnormal bodily states are alleviated. He also left behind how to use exorcisms to drive away demons. Josephus went on to say such practices were practiced among the Jews of his time making it clear it is not something new among the Jews since antiquities. The actions of people and prophets as mentioned above could be taken as a point of reference in this regard.

Ezekiel 47:12 tells us we can obtain medicine from the leaves, suggesting during Biblical times people were aware and used herbs for medicinal purposes. The sore boils Job suffered are debated among scholars. The suggestions include Elephantiasis (which is said to be an extreme form of leprosy), biles, scurvy, erysipelas, and even smallpox among others.⁴⁵ When Job was afflicted by boils he seemed to be aware of the principle that the draining sores⁴⁶ needed to dry out so he sat in ashes (Job 2:7-8). All these practices are nothing but what traditional healers would practice and recommend even today. The used of figs to heal Hezekiah's boil by Isaiah (2 Kings 20:7) could not be ascertained but nevertheless significant. Interestingly, Margaret believed Hezekiah's illness was bubonic plague. She quoted Michael Dols to support her claim saying Hezekiah's turning his face to the wall is perhaps a sign that he is intolerant towards the light which is one of the multiple observable signs of the plague.⁴⁷ Other evidences according to her include the strange story of the reversing shadow, the mass burials at Lachish and the Lachish Letters.⁴⁸ Saxey said the poultice made of figs was a treatment that very much resembles the one prescribed for horses in the Ras Shamra text, an Ugaritic text.⁴⁹ The treatment appears to have consisted of the local application of a poultice compounded of figs, probably over-ripe, pressed together to form a dressing. Perhaps this was a common remedy of the day since the word for 'poultice' is paralleled in Ugaritic literature of northern Syria by the term 'dbl't' with the idea of 'compassion' being seen in the corresponding Arabic root.⁵⁰ However, figs are known to have medicinal value since ancient days. Modern science has also verified this truth.⁵¹ The balm mentioned by Jeremiah could be of the nature of frankincense or some aromatic juice from shrub, containing benzoin used as medicine (Jeremiah 8:22, 46:11, 51:8).⁵²

Israel during Inter-Testamental Periods

No matter how Mosaic Laws' direction to priests made them look like health inspector, it must be clearly understood that Physicians and priests among the Jewish people for sure were separate groups. Apocryphal book, Ecclesiasticus (3:1-15)

⁴³ "Ancient Egypt: Medicine," accessed September 20, 2020, <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/timelines/topics/medicine.htm>.

⁴⁴ William Whiston, trans., *The Works of Josephus Complete and Upbridged: New Updated Edition* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 214.

⁴⁵ "Job 2:7 Commentaries: Then Satan Went out from the Presence of the LORD and Smote Job with Sore Boils from the Sole of His Foot to the Crown of His Head.," accessed January 1, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/job/2-7.htm>.

⁴⁶ Liubov Ben-Nun, *Medical Research in the Bible from the Viewpoint of Contemporary Perspective* (Negev: B.N Publications House Israel, 2015), 180. Nun thinks the boils Job and king Hezekiah were affected was Anthrax.

⁴⁷ Margaret Barker, "Hezekiah's Boil," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 26, no. 1 (September 1, 2001): 32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 41–44.

⁴⁹ Saxey, "A Physician's Reflections on Old Testament Medicine," 126–127.

⁵⁰ Harrison, "Disease, Bible and Spade," 92.

⁵¹ Ben-Nun, *Medical Research in the Bible from the Viewpoint of Contemporary Perspective*, 181.

⁵² Short, *The Bible and Modern Medicine: A Survey of Health and Healing in the Old and New Testament*. 71-72.

mentioned that physicians have high prestige in society. It also says in 38:1ff that physicians ought to be honored for their services because it is God who created them. Their very gift of healing comes from God and their very skill makes them very distinguished and hence greatly admired. Sirach no doubt reflects a very positive appraisal of physicians because he said, 'he who sins before his maker, may he fall into the care of a physician! (Sirach 38:15). It assumes then that if someone is sick it is because of his sin though this is debatable. It also assumes that the physician has the wisdom to bring about a cure for the sin patient. The writer also adds that any sensible man will not despise the medicine for the Lord created them out of the earth. It must be noted that Ben Sira's advice concerning physicians belongs to a series of poems about different professions including the potters and the farmers too. The whole passage can be divided into two where the first 8 verses reminded the readers that it is important to keep the physician in high regard as he had been appointed by God and, the remaining 7 verses advise the worshiper of the correct behavior in case of disease. Ben Sira went on to say if one is ill, it is important to pray, repent, and offer sacrifices. He also recommended consulting physicians as they are appointed by God and is possible that God will grant success to the physicians to treat you.⁵³ A good physician is in no way in opposition to God. Talmud protects physicians even if by mistake patient died when they are being treated (operated upon).

Uses of Medicine in the New Testament

If the OT described the symptoms of diseases, NT no longer described it. We find patients themselves or through others going to the physicians, Jesus, the Physician of physicians, and apostles for healing. It is fair to say that in OT we find people get treated for their physical body but in the NT we find people getting not just the physical wellbeing but also the more important thing-the spiritual body. So basically we see entirely two different scenarios in comparison. In the NT, Jesus and His apostles did not receive any medical training but did cure numerous people of a wide range of health problems they were suffering from, both physical and mental illnesses, demonic possession, chronic diseases and disability, congenital conditions, and several others. In several cases, the healing is not just physical but amounts to the restoration of the person's moral and social status and conversion in the individual's life.⁵⁴ Curing or healing received in the Bible, not just the NT alone is not through dietetic and surgical measures for which the Greek medicine was so well known. Since as mentioned above they did not receive any medical training or acquired any specific medical expertise, it is clear they were enabled to cure people by faith in God-sometimes the faith of the patient, or his parents, or by the power of the Holy Spirit. During the NT period, any wealthy Romans is said to have their own personal Greek physician. They are said to be the best of the day. While in the OT times it is the Egyptians who are well known and famous kings such as Cyrus and Darius are said to have Egyptian physicians as attendant.⁵⁵ Luke is the only known physician in the New Testament but sadly we do not see his medical practices being recorded though there are scholars who pointed out that over 400 medical terms are found in Luke's writings.⁵⁶ However, this finding seems an exaggeration. It must be pointed out here that physician in the antiquity was not licensed by the High Roman Empire though the service was offered in return for payment⁵⁷ however with the arrival of Greek physicians in the city of Rome to practice their trade in the second half of the third century BCE, Roman citizenship was reported to have been given to physicians. Thus, pointing to the good position they enjoyed in the state and society.

It is worth noting here that when Jesus Christ was born, the wise men who came seeking for the newborn King on finding the baby presented gold, frankincense, and myrrh as Matthew recorded (2:11). Many commentators correctly pointed out that these three gifts were befitting gifts: gold as to a King, frankincense as to a High Priest, and myrrh as One destined

⁵³ Cranz, "Advice for a Successful Doctor's Visit," 237-238.

⁵⁴ Philip van der Eijk, "Galen and Early Christians on the Role of the Divine in the Causation and Treatment of Health and Disease," *Early Christianity* 5, no. 3 (2014): 341.

⁵⁵ Appian Media, *A Spoon Full Of... What?! Medicine in the Bible - Digging Deeper Ep. 3*, 2020, accessed January 6, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_WPNM8FFfl.

⁵⁶ Henry Joel Cadbury, "Lexical Notes on Luke-Acts II Recent Arguments for Medical Language," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 45, no. 1-2 (1926): 190.

⁵⁷ Ido Israelowich, *Patients and Healers in the High Roman Empire* (USA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 1-2.

to die. Notably, Dr. Jose Axe, the author of the King's medicine cabinet believed they were actually being more practical by giving the baby Jesus these precious, costly items that could double as potential medical remedies. He said during those days frankincense was used to support the immune system and fight infection which could heal a sick child. Myrrh was known to help healing after pregnancy and support hormonal health.⁵⁸ If Dr. Jose is true, no doubt the gifts were very apt gifts indeed which can become handy for the family as a whole.

The problem of sickness and suffering according to Howard Clark Kee are related to three sets of phenomena that dealt with it namely medicine, miracle and magic.⁵⁹ None of them was a self-contained system; sufferers resorted to all three at the same time. This of course does not mean they are the same. According to Kee, "If a technique of itself is effective in overcoming a hostile force, then the action is magical. If it is viewed as the intervention of the god or the goddess, then it is miraculous. If it is the facilitation of the natural function of the body then it is medical."⁶⁰ Kee argues that during the NT times along with medicine and miracle, magic was common. He quoted Bavli where Rabbis were said to have taught three kinds of dropsy: thick, swollen and thin. The first one is a punishment of sin, the second is caused by hunger, and the third is by magic.⁶¹ However, the dominant one is that of the miracle and it is clearly evident from the pages of NT books especially the gospels. If the OT maintained that diseases are divine punishment, but the very response of Jesus when asked about someone born blind whether it was the sins of parents, His reply and actions point out clear that He was trying to dissociate punishment by God as the cause for sickness in the NT teaching. Jesus as the Physician of the physicians did not intrude carelessly in the lives of hurting people. He did not presume to help people! He was not afraid to be present in the most difficult situations. He was not presumptuous! He inspired faith in people's life. He understood that one's illness is more than symptoms to be treated, progress to be monitored, or demons to be expelled.

It may be noted here that the physicians during the NT periods were probably paid from the treasury of the king if the records of the Egyptian can be taken a standard of the day. However, they are paid just on par with that of any policemen and hence we cannot see so much prestige for a physician. Their salary is a little higher than that of a teacher, though a specialized and well-connected physician could perhaps have triple any general physician's salary, which would have made them on par with the salary of the chief of the police which they could have brought about some luxury and higher social standing. During the later NT periods, the status of physicians seems to have been improved by the king's decrees of which mention may be made of the decrees issued by Vespasian that doctors and their descendants for two generations were to be exempted from liturgies. This brought so much relief to the family of physicians. This decree was instrumental perhaps for turning the medical profession into a sort of hereditary matter.⁶² This then could have made the profession something to be desired by the people and with that comes prestige among the people too. The scientific method of medical practices were the ones the Roman Empire permitted while practicing exorcisms and incantations were never considered for appointment from the Emperor thus drawing a clear line to distinguish the two practices. Walaskay thought apostle Paul's word in I Corinthians 1:22 'the Jews demand a sign and the Greeks seek wisdom' summarizes well the two approaches to medicine in

⁵⁸ "The-Kings-Medicine-Cabinet.Pdf," n.d., accessed January 6, 2021, <https://draxe.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/The-Kings-Medicine-Cabinet.pdf>.

⁵⁹ As quoted by David E Garland, "'I Am the Lord Your Healer': Mark 1:21-2:12," *Review & Expositor* 85, no. 2 (1988): 327, accessed January 4, 2021, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0000803842&site=ehost-live>. This view is very much in concord with what Christopher D Stanley quoted in, "Paul and Asklepios: The Greco-Roman Quest for Healing and the Mission of Paul," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41, no. 3 (March 2019): 286, accessed December 3, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLAi9KZ190311000872&site=ehost-live>. Stanley used the terms, the religious, the medical and the magical

⁶⁰ Garland, "'I Am the Lord Your Healer,'" 328.

⁶¹ Ibid., 332.

⁶² Giovanni Battista Bazzana, "Early Christian Missionaries as Physicians: Healing and Its Cultural Value in the Greco-Roman Context," *Novum testamentum* 51, no. 3 (2009): 243-244, accessed December 24, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001731976&site=ehost-live>.

antiquity. This is because the Jew's only hope of healing would come in the form of a sign from heaven while the Greeks looked to nature for a cause and effect relationship in the progress of the disease.⁶³ Walaskay observation is doubtful if not at all false because in the first century of the Christian era it is fathomable that religion and medicine were intricately intertwined. Stanley wrote that Hippocratic physicians worshipped Asklepios as their patron deity and encouraged their patients to pray for healing and often gave due credit to the gods for their successes while the priests and the doctors worked for hand in hand at healing shrines across the Greco-Roman world.⁶⁴ Hence there is no doubt as in modern day; deities who were believed to have healing powers were especially popular all over the world. This concept is further strengthened by the fact that Paul is seen in the historical book of Acts of the apostle, as healer, exorcist and wonder worker whose action cause him to be feted as a god!

The Good Samaritan treated the wounds of the injured man with wine and oil (Luke 10:34). In ancient times as in modern days, wine was used for cleansing the wounds while oil is often used for soothing inflammation. It is possible that a traveler would be carrying along with him both oil and wine because they are very much an ordinary remedy in the case of wounds. Oil and wine were mingled together and often used to heal the sore occasioned by circumcision according to Gill's Exposition of the entire Bible.⁶⁵ Wine is an antiseptic and will tend to coagulate blood, thereby assisting healing. Oil soothes and forms a coating. The medicinal use of wine is also mentioned in 1 Timothy 5:23. It is clear from Luke 10 and 1 Timothy 5 that wine is used in antiquity externally as well as internally. To interpret 1 Timothy 5:23 as a corrective of asceticism by some scholars is questionable because abstaining from wine wasn't criticized by early Christian writers despite their critical stand against ascetics abstaining from marriage and meat! Pagan scholars were cited as saying that wine was used often for medicinal purposes. In fact, Hutson cited Dioscorides, Celsus, Pliny the Elder, Seneca as saying wine was used for internal purposes often along with some other ingredients.⁶⁶

It can be pointed here that despite the fact that he endured so much bodily suffering during the course of his ministry, Apostle Paul say little about health, medical care, or healing in his letters except in 1 Corinthians 12 where he rather vaguely speaks of the 'gifts of healings' as one of the gifts that the Spirit has distributed among the followers of Christ. Clear exceptions would include Galatians 4:13; Philippians 2: 26-27; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 1 Timothy 5:23 and 2 Timothy 4:20. Other verses where physical illness might conceivably be in view include Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 2:3, 4, 10; 2 Corinthians 10:10, 11, 29; 12:9-10 and 1 Thessalonians 5:14 though many interpreters understood these texts as referring to weakness, not an illness.⁶⁷ Stanley went on to point out that the only place where Paul speaks of a sick person being restored back to health was that of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:26-27 but he says nothing about how it was done whether supernatural or natural means. Despite the fact that during Paul's time there were widespread healing centers of the pagan people where testimonies of healing or cure are well attested in various forms, it is significant to ponder why Paul seems to be so silent. It is worth noting the eight possible reconstructions of Paul's beliefs and practices regarding healing provided by Stanley.⁶⁸

The healing of a woman with a flow of blood for twelve years is significant as both Mark and Luke record that she had clearly struggled so much trying to find a cure for her ailment. MacLaren expositors wrote, "The woman is a poor shrinking creature, broken down by long illness, made timider still by much-disappointed hope of cure, depressed by poverty to which her many doctors had brought her. She does not venture to stop this new Rabbi-physician, as He goes with the rich

⁶³ Walaskay, "Biblical and Classical Foundations of the Healing Ministries," 199.

⁶⁴ Christopher D Stanley, "Paul and Asklepios: The Greco-Roman Quest for Healing and the Mission of Paul," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41, no. 3 (March 2019): 280, accessed December 3, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLAI9KZ190311000872&site=ehost-live>.

⁶⁵ "Luke 10 Gill's Exposition," accessed January 4, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/gill/luke/10.htm>.

⁶⁶ Christopher Roy Hutson, "'A Little Wine': 1 Timothy 5:23 and Greco-Roman Youth," *Lexington Theological Quarterly (Online)* 45, no. 3-4 (2013): 83.

⁶⁷ Stanley, "Paul and Asklepios," 279-280.

⁶⁸ See Stanley, "Paul and Asklepios" 295-301 for the discussion he provides.

church dignitary to heal his daughter...⁶⁹ The expression that she had suffered many things of many physicians perhaps refers to many treatments which she underwent. Bavli, an encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge and monument to logical argument contains various procedures for the cure. The last suggests fetching a barley grain from the dung of a white mule eats it and holds it. If the patient can hold for a day, the discharge will cease for one day; if for two days, the discharge will cease for two days, and if they can hold it for three days, it will cease forever.⁷⁰ It is highly possible that this woman had done all available treatment of the day including this one! Interestingly many among the Jews pretended to the cure of fluxes in those days,⁷¹ to which the woman had fallen prey. Interestingly it is said in ancient times that if one can deal with females' blood one has dealt with a tremendous area of magic.⁷² It is possible to assume herewith that the healing ministry of Jesus and His Apostles was meant to be seen as complementary to what professional medicine could achieve rather than as a substitute for it.

Perhaps it would not be wrong to conclude that the church at Laodicea administering their locally produced eye salve was a case of traditional medicine during the NT period. The context of course was an admonishment to the church for their lack of spiritual vision (Revelation 3:18). So, as long as there is no incorporation of the use of herbs with occult practices, the scripture is absolutely fine. The healing performed by Jesus and his disciples is not the same as exorcists perform. In this light, it is safe to say that the healers are not condemned by the Bible unless it involves any black magic or occult practices. Interestingly all NT writers seem to believe that sickness was a punishment for sin. Paul clearly said to the Corinthians that they were sick and dying because of it (1 Corinthians 11:30; 2 Corinthians 12:7; Acts 5:1-11; 12:20-23). James believed it too when he says it is important to call upon the elders of the church to pray for the sick. However, people were also commanded to confess their sins to one another that they may be healed (James 5:14-16). It is clear when sins are forgiven, sicknesses caused by them are healed too.

Mark recorded the fever Peter's mother-in-law was suffering in 1:29-31. Fever was seen as punishment from God in Leviticus 26:16 and Deuteronomy 28:22 for violating the covenant. It is not very clear what fever Peter's mother-in-law was affected with. In Acts 28:8 Luke recorded about the fever and dysentery Publius's father was suffering. Even here it is not clear as to what fever he was down with. Some suggest it to be what was known as "Malta fever" but nevertheless as Luke's ideal audience is certainly not located on Malta it is better conceivable to take fever in general terms.⁷³ Malaria was the more general kind of recurrent fever in those days and it is reported to be widespread in the Mediterranean regions in antiquity and so it may be more plausible to conclude that the fever with which Publius's father was confined was malaria! It is interesting to observe that Luke used plural fevers in his description. Such usage is never seen in any other part of the scripture though it

⁶⁹ "Mark 5 MacLaren Expositions Of Holy Scripture," accessed January 4, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/macLaren/mark/5.htm>.

⁷⁰ Garland, "I Am the Lord Your Healer," 330-331.

⁷¹ "Mark 5 Gill's Exposition," accessed January 5, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/gill/mark/5.htm>. Vincent's Word Studies on Mark 5:26 elaborately provided how Talmud would give several prescriptions for the treatment of flux. If one prescription fails, the other were to be taken for the cure and if that too fails the next in the list was to be taken. The last in the list says, "Let them dig seven ditches, in which let them burn some cuttings of vines, not yet four years old. Let her take in her hand a cup of wine, and let them lead her away from this ditch, and make her sit down over that. And let them remove her from that, and make her sit down over another, saying to her at each remove, 'Arise from thy flux!'" "Mark 5 Vincent's Word Studies," accessed January 5, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/vws/mark/5.htm>.

⁷² J Duncan M Derrett, "Mark's Technique: The Haemorrhaging Woman and Jairus' Daughter," *Biblica* 63, no. 4 (1982): 475, accessed December 4, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0000797523&site=ehost-live>.

⁷³ Craig S Keener, "Fever and Dysentery in Acts 28:8 and Ancient Medicine," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19, no. 3 (2009): 394, accessed December 3, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001746642&site=ehost-live>.

appears in the medical writer of which Keener quoted several on them in his paper.⁷⁴ The patient would have sought the help of various medical resources available for the treatment of the day including treatment by warming the body for three or four days expecting sweat would relieve the fever, treating with more intakes of water or juice but reduced food, sponging to cool him, agaric mixed with hot water or siderite with oil and other alleged cures including deer flesh, wolf's salted right eye used as an amulet, cat feces with a horned owl's claw as amulet too and even sexual intercourse.⁷⁵ It is quite obvious that some of the prescriptions are so stupidly scary while others are more plausible but none were empirically verified. However, when someone recovered from following the treatment it is deemed effective for such fever.

Luke in the same passage talks of dysentery, to which we now turn our attention. Keener⁷⁶ listed various folk cures for dysentery that existed. The list included navew seed with some warm water, holly leaves mixed with wine, a tree fruit, veal broth, mallow, cultivated sorrel, and beeswax mixed with gruel, juice from pounded vine leaves, and a decoction of white myrtle in wine. As with fever sexual activity and traditional magicians include the list! Ancient writers also noted healing by means of prayer and specific religious remedies. In contrast to these practices, without sacrifices or charms or uses of any medicine prevalent during the day for the treatment of fever and dysentery, Lucian record of healing from God no doubt provides a greater appreciation for the miraculous cure while providing greater empathy for Publius's father too. This as Keener noted, "provides us increased appreciation for Luke's portrayal of healing signs demonstrating both the power and the benevolence of Paul's God."⁷⁷

In the NT accounts, it is noteworthy here that despite different means used in healing as far as Jesus was concerned during His earthly ministry, the result was always a success. We do not find any specific means or methods Jesus used for certain kinds of sickness or suffering. The technique has very little of a substantive nature to do with the healing. In the presentation of the NT, Jesus has no equal, He is not limited by space, time, or situation, and He was presented both as Healer and Exorcist. Some tried to argue that there were occasions where Jesus did not succeed in His attempt, however as Hill⁷⁸ pointed in his paper it is best to understand such passage in its own context as in some cases, Jesus was illustrating certain truth. He also added in his footnote that it is unfair to compare Mark's "many" with Matthew's "all" (Mark 1:34 cf. Matthew 8:16), explaining that it was likely to be found in the Aramaic mother-tongue of the writer (Matthew). The presentation of NT is clear: Jesus has no equal when it comes to making people well who are suffering. No obstacles that can be imagined are too great for Him to overcome for even death could not stand in the way of God's plan. Paul's writing and testimony have many to teach us concerning health and sickness! Paul affirms that everything in life is ultimately under the sovereignty of God and in it, He always acts for good, which is really comfortable for nothing happens in a believer's life outside the knowledge of God and in His sovereignty He is able to provide and meet every need of believers including the need for health. Paul's theology also reveals that the spiritual domain is of greater value to the physical domain. This is clear for nowhere do we find Paul praying specifically for the physical, financial, or material needs of the people to whom he wrote while he almost always includes prayers for the spiritual health of the recipients.⁷⁹ No doubt Paul understood healing as a demonstration of the power of God though he did not in any way encourage seeking the gifts of miracles (I Corinthians 1:22). Paul did seek physical relief from 'his thorn in the flesh' but as he understood, he taught that it was part of God's pedagogy for him. Other examples are there where God did not bring about physical healing though for sure Paul would have prayed for the same (II Timothy 4:20; Philippians 2:25-30; Galatians 4:13-15). It needs to be noted that Paul speaks in positive terms of Luke, the physician, never disparaging his co-worker's professional training. Paul would even suggest his spiritual son Timothy a medicinal remedy treat a chronic illness, rather than advising him to seek a miraculous cure (I

⁷⁴ Ibid., 395.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 397-400.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 400-401.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 402.

⁷⁸ Judith L Hill, "Heath, Sickness and Healing in the New Testament," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 26, no. 2 (2007): 168.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 174-175.

Timothy 5:23). In short, it is clear that healing is real and may come through either a miracle or the use of medicine.

Conclusion

Surely Bible is not a medical textbook nor were they written to provide medical details for an audience of doctors or medical students, but surely those who read and practice what it says are getting health benefits because the writers of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The call of God is to live holy lives and no doubt even the reference the Bible commands are given in view of the same. Biblical remedies and treatments which are accepted in the Scripture are all of a rational character and do not involve incantations or magic. We can fairly conclude that both the Old and New Testament does not condemn the herbal usage while condemning the incorporation of it in occult practice. This is clear from the teaching of Apocryphal books too which claimed that God raises healing herbs from the earth.⁸⁰ Many Old Testament texts clearly teach against the use of witchcraft, sorcery, medium, spiritist, magician or black magic (cf. Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26, 20:26-27, 31; Deuteronomy 18:10-12, 14; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Isaiah 8:19, 47:12-14; Micah 3:7, 5:11-12). This is because God was seen as the great physician of his people (Exodus 15:26) and it was their duty to look to him for relief and not to anything or anyone else. This reliance on God can be taken as indicators that the people had in the use of medicinal plants, God had created for their use. However, when people do not turn to God but to physicians, they are probably disapproved by both God and the people. This is implied as pointed earlier in Chroniclers disapproving King Asa when fallen into his illness for not turning to God, but to the physicians (2 Chronicles 16:12). Perhaps the king was expected to humble himself and turn to God in his sickness.

Ezekiel perhaps obtains medicine from the leaves while it is certain that Isaiah did use leaves of figs to heal Hezekiah's boil though could not be ascertained but nevertheless significant. Figs are known to have medicinal value since ancient days which the modern science has also verified this truth. The balm mentioned by Jeremiah is also a clear sign that all these OT saints did use medicine extracted from trees or leaves and others in their unadulterated form. No wonder we do not find any specific verse anywhere in any way that these herbal usages were harmful and hence condemned, while we can clearly find the occult practices were condemned in the Bible in various places. The Bible's contribution to medicine is thus much more than lists of diseases and dietary rules, stories of prophetic cures, and obsolete therapies. It embodies an affirmation of life and the importance of healthy bodies as mortals relate to God. It teaches a reason for compassionate service and reverence for life by recognizing the divine in human beings. The conclusion then is obvious, traditional medicinal usages of herbs, roots, barks, stems, flowers, fruits, seeds, or other are nowhere condemned in the Bible. Instead, it seems to encourage such usage for the good of humanity. The healing and cures Jesus Christ brought about in certain cases are typical of this truth.

⁸⁰ Sir 38:4a.