

# The vision of the Hebrew Bible

## Does Jesus Heal Today?

Exodus 15:26  
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It was prayer time at the little church I was leading. Worship was informal. When prayer time arrived, people talked. Some asked for prayer. Others gave thanks for answered prayer. Still others stood and gave a mini-sermon. I never knew how much time would be left for preaching. This particular morning 40-year-old Chuck stood up. “Wes,” he began, “I injured my back and can’t go back to work until its better. Pray for my healing.” I prayed for his healing, and nothing happened like usual. Yet during my prayer a thought invaded the mind of a man in the congregation. The thought was “Go pray for Chuck’s healing.” That man had received thoughts like that before and believed it was God talking to him. At the end of worship, he caught Chuck and said, “God told me to pray for you. Is that okay?” Chuck didn’t think it could hurt. He said “yes!” The man put both his hands on Chuck’s shoulder, and before he prayed a word, energy shot through Chuck’s back. The hot pain left. Not even an ache remained. The next day Chuck was back to work, and to my knowledge he suffered no further back problems.

After incidents like this, my views about divine healing began to change. Until then, I had believed that Jesus healed today primarily through natural processes and medical knowledge, and on rare occasion he would heal supernaturally. I prayed in hope,

but not with the expectations I found in these parishioners. There were six sources to the skepticism that crippled my trust in God's ability and desire to heal in supernatural ways. (Read about it at our website or contact the church office for a copy of last week's sermon.) Those same six things cripple most American Christians. However, what I experienced in that tiny church drove me to reexamine the Bible's treatment of healing.

The Bible for Jesus and his first followers was the Old Testament. That name reminds us of the covenants God made with people before Jesus of Nazareth. In fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture Jesus made a new covenant or testament with his own blood. Yet, calling the Hebrew Bible the Old Testament suggests to some that it is irrelevant now. Jesus did not believe that. Neither did his disciples. Their Hebrew Bible revealed the same God who visited us in Jesus and inspired the apostles. To understand what Jesus and his apostles taught, we need to read and understand their Bible.

Critical truths about healing are found in Exodus 15. In Exodus 15, Moses and the people of Israel leave the scene of their deliverance at the Red Sea and enter the desert. For three days they find no water. Fear sweeps through the camp. When they find water, it is bitter and no one can drink it. Devastated, Moses cries out in prayer and God shows Moses a piece of wood. When he throws it in the pool, the water turns sweet. The people can drink. God then gave this promise to Moses and the people:

***If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.*** (Exodus 15:26,NIV)

After healing their water and saving their lives, God gave the Israelites an "I am." He gave them a name. Nothing is more significant in a relationship than the name by which a person is known. For example, if you want to be known to some folks as Doctor,

you want your relationship with them defined by the body of knowledge you acquired in receiving that title. If you want to be addressed as Judge or officer, you want your relationship to be defined by the authority in those names. If you choose to be known by your first name, you invite a relationship that is informal and peer-oriented and that eventually might become a peer-friendship. If you want to be known to some individuals as Dad, you want them to embrace the protection and provision that goes with that name. God said to Moses and the Israelites, “Know me as Yahweh Rapha.” The English translation I quoted says, “I am the Lord, who heals you.” Your Pew Bible (RSV) translates it, “I am the Lord, your healer.” God was saying I’m Yahweh, your Doctor. In our idiom, it would be “I’m Doctor God, your physician.”

The Hebrew Bible sees God as the key to our health. It emphasizes this for at least four reasons. *First, the Bible addressed people who feared many spirits and gods.* They feared sun gods, sea gods, mountain gods and valley gods. They would turn anywhere and everywhere for help. However, the Hebrew Bible emphasized that *the beginning of knowledge and the beginning of understanding* was the fear of God only. *Second, God wanted his people to know that health was a blessing from him.* When God gave the law to Moses, he had Moses say:

***Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.*** (Exodus 23:25-26)

God was key to the lifespan and health of the people. Health was his blessing. Health was his gift. The Psalmist wrote:

***Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies***

*your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.* (Ps 103:2-5)

God was their life source. Third, the Hebrew Bible emphasized that *trust in God and obedience to God was critical to health*. God said, ***“I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians.”*** Ill health was attributed to God’s judgment because God is the only person and power humanity needs to fear. God would not reinforce with protection and healing destructive acts that alienated people from their source of life. People need to depend on the source of life. Judgment was not only a consequence of being separated. It was also a teacher chastening the obstinate pupil in hope of repentance and restoration. Fourth, *God’s favor was key for groups of people*. The Egyptians suffered judgment together. The Israelites suffered judgment together or enjoyed blessing together. No one was immune from his or her people’s lot.

Have you contemplated the number of innocent people affected by sexually transmitted diseases since the sexual revolution took hold on American soil? Birth defects, AIDS, and many mental illnesses have descended on so many innocent people. Many victims were not promiscuous. Yet they suffered in a society that is not innocent. How many have been poisoned by the greed of others? How many were buried in mines, injured in accidents, or sickened with coal dust or chemical exposure because of shortcuts taken in the quest for riches? In some cases these problems may have come not with malevolent motives but with blind ignorance. Yet did it have to be that way? Alienation from the source of life is dangerous not merely for transgressors but for all people living within an estranged society.

The life of Job revealed that the link between ill health and sin was not absolute. Some illness and misfortune would resist human understanding. It would make no sense.

The call, then as always, is to trust God. Despite what happens, his love and power do not change. We need to fear only him.

The Hebrew Bible revealed a single God as physician for the world. Naaman, a leprous leader, left his foreign land to travel to Israel for healing. A foreign mother, devastated when her young son died from a brain aneurysm, waited for the prophet from Israel to come. Both received the supernatural healing they sought. These were signs of something coming. God, our physician or more aptly Dr. God, was affecting a cure that would heal our hearts, minds and bodies.

***Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:4-5***

God would send a servant who would stand in the way between our sin and our suffering. He would carry our infirmities and sorrows. By his wounds we would be healed. That servant is Jesus. With him healing has arrived. One day healing will rule. We live in the time between healing's arrival and its consummation. All who Jesus healed, later died. Yet Jesus' healing was not in vain. His touch revealed the true doctor. His touch revealed the mercy of God and that God truly loves us. His touch revealed that so much of what we experience is not God's desire, that truly God's want us whole. His touch calls us to experience now a taste of the love and power that will define our future in Christ.

That's the vision of the Hebrew Bible. God is the doctor for you, me and the entire world. His healing has arrived? Do you believe that? Will you seek it?