

CESSATIONISM, “THE GIFTS OF HEALINGS,” AND DIVINE HEALING

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The study of divine healing must include the tragic abundance of false teachers with false teachings and false practices, who claim biblical authority, but upon closer examination are clearly not of God. Do “gifts of healings” mentioned in 1 Cor 12:9, 28, 30 still operate today as in NT times? This sign-gift ceased with the close of the NT canon. Does God still heal as He did in both the OT and the NT? An inductive study of the biblical record (including the OT, Gospels, Acts, and NT Epistles) establishes unmistakable characteristics of genuine divine healing. The biblical standards become the measure by which alleged contemporary divine-healing claims should be judged, whether of God or not. Next, God’s ultimate healing promise of salvation in 1 Peter 2:24 deserves attention. In context, the passage speaks of spiritual healing (salvation), not physical healing. Finally, a series of theological observations lead to the practical conclusion that Christians should focus on the spiritual/eternal rather than the physical/temporal. When God does heal today, it will not be through human agency, and it will be characterized as were His healings recorded in Scripture.

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Regarding the idea of cessationism, a recent publication contained this remarkable comment. What is your reaction to it?

If you take a new convert, who prior to his conversion knew nothing about the history of Christianity or the New Testament, and you lock him in a room with a Bible for a week, he will come out believing that he is a member of a body that is passionately in love with the Lord Jesus Christ and a body that consistently experiences miracles and works miracles. It would take a clever theologian with no experience of the miraculous

to convince this young convert differently.¹

At first glance and without much thought, we might agree. But look at the statement again. For me, this quickly becomes an agree/disagree situation.

I agree that a new convert who is totally ignorant of history, who has no experience interpreting the Bible, and who has no study tools might conclude that the church today experiences miracles like the first-century church.

But I totally disagree, and I suspect you do, too, that the new convert would be correct. Since when do we ask a new convert with nothing but a Bible for the correct theological expression of a subject so complex as miracles? Further, why would the theologian have to be “experienced” in the miraculous to be credible if we believe that the Scriptures are sufficient to articulate clear doctrine (2 Tim 3:16-17)?

This raises an even bigger question: Why do trained theologians, who do have a knowledge of history and who do have the capabilities to use good Bible-study tools, come up with the same immature conclusion as a new believer who knows nothing? Could it be that they have used a combination of experience and a predetermined theology to override otherwise reasonable conclusions?

Cessationism involves the belief that the NT miraculous sign gifts (cf. Acts 2:22; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4) ceased with the apostles’ passing and the NT canon’s completion.² In general, noncessationists hold that all NT spiritual gifts have remained operative, even until today.³

This essay presents the cessationist perspective. The NT “gifts of healings” (1 Cor 12:9, 28, 30) in particular and biblical healing in general are addressed. The subject of healing is so vast that one article is quite insufficient in doing justice to the topic. Therefore, the reader should refer to this writer’s comprehensive work, *The Healing Promise*,⁴ for a more thorough coverage of this broad subject and for a background sufficient to understand how the parts relate to the whole.

¹Jack Deere, *Surprised By The Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 114. See Richard L. Mayhue, “Who Surprised Whom? The Holy Spirit or Jack Deere?,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 5:2 (Fall 1994):123-40, for a thorough review and critique of Deere’s noncessationist position.

²The following works, in whole or in part, develop the historical discussion, evidence, exegesis, and theological discourse that lead to the cessationist view. Walter J. Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles: Observations on Pentecostalism Old and New*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976); Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They For Today?* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1983); John F. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Richard Mayhue, *The Healing Promise* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1997) 175-85; Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999) 154-204; B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, 1918 reprint (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1972).

³For a representative presentation of the case for non-cessationism, read Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 1031-46.

⁴Richard Mayhue, *The Healing Promise* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1997).

PERSPECTIVE

With the issue of healing, the discussion and accompanying conclusions go far beyond mere theological debate and doctrinal purity. Whatever one believes on this topic dramatically influences his expectations when serious illness or injury affects a loved one or even oneself. Whatever theological position one takes on the subject, it is imperative that it be strongly substantiated by Scripture, lest he sincerely believe in promises that God never actually made. When this happens, tremendous discouragement, depression, and even disillusionment with Christianity can set in.

False Teacher

One of the most visible and vocal exponents of non-cessationism and an alleged practitioner of healing is Benny Hinn.⁵ His recent books have been bestsellers; he also appears as a regular guest on the Trinity Broadcasting Network. Hinn intimates that he has taken up where Kathryn Kuhlman left off.⁶

Because of his unusually widespread influence and because he has attempted to express a theology of healing in *Lord, I Need a Miracle*, it becomes particularly important to examine what Benny Hinn teaches. This brief analysis compares what Hinn believes about healing with what the Scriptures teach. You can then make up your own mind about Hinn’s teaching credibility (see Acts 17:11).

1. Benny Hinn does not pray “Lord, Thy will be done.”⁷ Jesus Christ did (Luke 22:42).
2. Hinn believes that God always intends for believers to be healed.⁸ In contrast, the Bible teaches that some of the greatest saints, including Jacob and Paul, had physical infirmities from which they were never healed.
3. Hinn teaches that believers should command God to heal.⁹ The Bible teaches them to ask (1 John 5:14-15).
4. Hinn suggests that miraculous healing from God is gradual.¹⁰ Healing by Christ and the apostles occurred instantly.
5. Hinn teaches that faith on the part of the sick person is essential to healing.¹¹ Lazarus and Jairus’ daughter could not have exercised faith

⁵For a well-documented summary of Hinn’s ministry and teachings, read Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1993) 33-34, 339-45. Also William Lolodell, “The Price of Healing,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine* (July 27, 2003):20, 30-32.

⁶Benny Hinn, *The Anointing* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992) 59-60.

⁷Benny Hinn, *Lord I Need a Miracle* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993) 63.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 74-75.

¹⁰Ibid., 79, 81, 83-84.

¹¹Ibid., 85-87.

- when they were raised from the dead.
6. Hinn writes that we must do our part before God can heal.¹² The Bible teaches that God is sovereign.
 7. Hinn believes that Christians should not be sick.¹³ The Bible teaches that Christians can be sick and will all eventually die.
 8. Benny Hinn implies that a person's healing can be lost and that the healed person must do certain things to keep the healing.¹⁴ The Bible nowhere teaches such.

Amazingly, Hinn not only contradicts Scripture on the subject of healing, but he also contradicts himself. In 1992 Hinn wrote,

This recalls the day years ago when I heard Kathryn Kuhlman prophesy in her own inimitable way that the day would arrive, before the coming of the Lord, when the power of God would be so great that everyone would be healed. "There will not be one sick saint in the body of Christ," she declared.

With her customary drama, pointing of finger, and hand on hip, she asked, "Could it be today?"

Of course, she never saw it come, but it will come. The Holy Spirit has convinced me of that.¹⁵

Later, in a 1993 interview, *Charisma* magazine asked Hinn, "You've mentioned some other changes in your theology. Have you changed your view of healing?" Compare his 1993 answer to what the Holy Spirit allegedly told him in 1992:

Huldah Buntain, the missionary to India, was in our church recently, and she talked about how her husband, Mark, died. The story broke me up because I realized some of the greatest saints on earth have gotten sick.

Jacob walked with a limp. Elisha died a sick man, though the power of God lingered in his bones. Even the apostle Paul had an infirmity—although we're not sure what it was. Why didn't God heal them?

You know, my father died of cancer. Sadly, in the past, I stated publicly: Had my father known then what I know now, he wouldn't have died. How cruel! I'm not going to say that about anyone again.

Yet I still believe that healing is promised to all of us as children of God. The Word of God is clear on that. Psalm 103 says: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases."

So I believe with all my heart that healing is a part of our inheritance as believers.

¹²Ibid., 58-62.

¹³Ibid., 67, 72.

¹⁴Ibid., 100-102.

¹⁵Benny Hinn, *The Anointing* 146-47.

It’s a provision of God’s covenant with us. But now I have come to realize that God is sovereign, and there are things I just don’t understand.”¹⁶

Either the Holy Spirit spoke correctly in 1992 and Hinn has chosen to correct the Spirit in 1993, or the Spirit didn’t speak what Hinn alleged in 1992 and he has resorted to damage control in 1993. All the evidence points to the latter conclusion.

False Teachings

False teachings about healing have taken various forms but almost always contain a mixture of truth and error. Half-truths about divine healing fuel the injurious errors of our day. Let me alert you to some of these more frequent half-truths so that you can be prepared to reject them.¹⁷

1. Because God wills that Christians enjoy His blessings, sickness shows that you are out of His will.
2. Sin is the root cause of sickness; therefore you must resist sickness as you would sin.
3. Since Christ died for your sickness and your sin, you can be freed from both.
4. If you had enough faith, you would be healed.
5. What you confess is what you possess; so talk sickness and you will get sick; talk health and you will get well.
6. All adversity comes from Satan; so sickness, like Satan, should be rebuked.
7. If you only knew the secret fact of God’s healing power, you could be healed.
8. Since Christ and the apostles healed in their day, Christians can heal today.
9. Since sickness is from Satan, nothing good can come from sickness.
10. Since God wants you well, never pray, “Thy will be done” in regard to healing.
11. Since sin is the cause of sickness, if you are sick, then you have a pattern of sin in your life.
12. God has healed you, but the devil is not letting the symptoms leave.

False Practices

Thousands of people could testify how painful these half-truths can be. Dr. C. Everett Koop recalls a particularly brutal episode.

We hired an investigative writer to look into some of the cults and into faith healers specifically. Our investigator traveled to a Southwestern city where a healing campaign

¹⁶Stephen Strang, “Benny Hinn Speaks Out,” *Charisma* (August, 1993):28.

¹⁷This discussion has been modeled after William C. Moore, “Nine Half-Truths on Healing,” *Eternity* (May, 1983):36-38.

had been advertised some weeks in advance....

Among those who applied for healing was an elderly Christian gentleman who lived out on the prairie. His vision was becoming dim, and he most likely was developing cataracts. The only lighting in the little cabin where he lived was a kerosene lamp. He was a devout Christian, read his Bible daily—or tried to—and had all the faith necessary for healing, if faith indeed does secure healing. His major complaint was that his sight had deteriorated to the point where he could no longer read his Bible.

On the night of his appearance before the healer, the old man was brought up in the atmosphere of a sideshow. The faith healer said, “Well, Pop, you can’t see anymore. You’ve gotten old, you can’t even see with your glasses. Your vision is failing.” Then he reached over and took off the old man’s spectacles, threw them on the platform, stamped on them, and broke them. He then handed the elderly gentleman a large-print Bible, which, under the lights necessary for television in those days, enabled the gentleman to read John 3:16 out loud, to the astonishment and applause of the audience.

The elderly gentleman praised God, the healer praised God, the audience praised God, and the old man went back to his dimly lit cabin and could not *find* his Bible, because his glasses were destroyed. The man went back to the healer but was told the most discouraging thing a godly man like that could possibly hear: “You didn’t have enough faith, or the healing would have stuck.”¹⁸

Tragically, all of the above examples involve people who are noncessationists. Neither their theology nor their ministries harmonize with what Scripture teaches in general about miraculous sign gifts designed to authenticate Christ and the apostles or what it teaches in particular about healing.

GIFTS OF HEALINGS

“Gifts of healings” is the most enigmatic phrase that deals with healing in the entire Bible. Why? Because that phrase occurs only three times in the NT, and all three instances appear in 1 Corinthians 12. The verses provide no further explanation of what the manifestations involved. Nor does the gift appear in other NT gift lists. That means there is very little biblical evidence to draw from.¹⁹

However, several biblical observations may help. First, both words in the expression are plural—“gifts of healings.” The plural surely does not require the gift to be manifest on more than one occasion by the same person, for that would mean “word of wisdom” in 1 Cor 12:8 was a one-time occurrence only. One must think further.

It could be that “gifts” refers to: (1) various methods of healing; (2) various occasions of healing; or (3) various bestowals of the gift. Because there are no other NT texts or contexts, no one knows for sure. “Healings” most likely refers to various

¹⁸C. Everett Koop, “Faith-Healing and the Sovereignty of God,” in *The Agony of Deceit*, ed. Michael Horton (Chicago: Moody, 1990) 179-80.

¹⁹See Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* 40-42, 82-83 for a complete discussion.

afflictions.

The parallel plurals, “effectings of miracles,” “distinguishings of spirits,” and “kinds of tongues,” could very well indicate that the manifestations were temporary (one-time only) and had to be renewed by God at His will.²⁰ For instance, Paul healed multitudes (Acts 19:11-12), but couldn’t heal himself (Gal 4:13), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-30), or Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20). That would also explain why Paul did not direct Timothy (1 Tim 5:23) to a person with this gift. Someone who had exercised it on one occasion would have no reason to suspect that it would be manifested again. James 5:13-18 can be similarly understood; this early epistle (about A.D. 50) exhorted sick individuals to call for the elders rather than for a person who manifested “gifts of healings.”

Other than their association with the apostles, the “gifts of healings” appear rarely. Only Philip is mentioned specifically (Acts 8:6-7). Stephen (Acts 6:8) and Barnabas (Acts 14:3) might also have exercised this sign gift. That would explain why Barnabas, who may have healed others with Paul in Iconium (Acts 14:3), did not himself heal Paul when he was nearly stoned to death in Lystra (Acts 14:19-20).

The “gifts of healings” seems to be a sign that was given to authenticate the apostles (Heb 2:4). Therefore, it is not surprising to discover its absence from the gifts list of Romans 12, which was written later than 1 Corinthians. Once the apostles were authenticated and the early church established, the apostolic signs gradually disappeared, for they had served their God-intended purpose.

Neither are we surprised to see the absence of sign gifts from the Pastoral Epistles written by Paul to Timothy and Titus. If those gifts were to be perpetuated, certainly Paul would have mentioned it, especially since Timothy suffered from stomach problems and other frequent afflictions (1 Tim 5:23).

If God intended “gifts of healings” to function as something other than a miraculous sign gift, we would expect to see it manifested in the lives of Paul’s numerous associates. But there is not the slightest hint of its appearance after A.D. 59. An argument from silence alone is not conclusive, but it is one more piece of evidence that needs to be seriously considered, because it is consistent with the other indications mentioned above.

Most likely, “gifts of healings” involved a temporary sign gift which was used by God to authenticate the apostles, was evidenced sparingly apart from Peter and Paul, was bestowed on a one-time-only basis, and was to be renewed by God’s sovereign will. Therefore, the “gifts of healings” in 1 Cor 12:9, 28, 30 were not intended by God to be operative today.

The temporary nature of the “gifts of healings” does not mean that God is not healing today. This essay distinguishes between the actual human “divine healing” of the OT and the NT, as compared to the possibility of God’s direct

²⁰J. Sidlow Baxter reached essentially this same conclusion in *Divine Healing of the Body* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 281-83, as has D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 39-40.

“divine healing” today. Because the sparse number of healings in the OT and the innumerable healings of Christ did not depend on the “gifts of healings,” neither would divine healing be dependent on that sign gift today.

Because the term “gifts of healings” and its context remain so ambiguous, a person should not build a theological superstructure on this paper-thin foundation. Those who develop their healing theology for the church today from this passage do so by reading their conclusions into the text rather than by finding any clear direction from other NT letters.

First Corinthians 12 appears to be a haven of rescue for healing advocates who understand how perilous their case would be if it rested alone on the healing pattern of Christ and the apostles. J. Sidlow Baxter correctly concludes that the healing miracles of neither Christ nor the apostles continued past the apostolic age.

Neither from our Lord’s miracle healings nor from those of the apostles can we safely deduce that such are meant to continue today, nor should we presume so. If such healings were divinely intended to continue in the same way today, then all who come for healing today would be healed without exception, as was the case in the days of our Lord and the apostles. But thousands who come for healing today are not healed. Therefore, by that simple, practical text we know that healings today are not on the same basis as in those days of long ago.²¹

However, Baxter then turns to the NT epistles and develops the idea—primarily from Rom 8:11, 1 Corinthians 12, and Jas 5:13-16—that bodily healing has been promised by Scripture for today.²² He does it, however, with this honest caveat:

Those seem to be all there is in the Epistles by way of clear promise or statement concerning divine healing or renewal of the human body in this present age. What is the first thought which leaps to mind? Is it not the *very small space* given to physical healing? In a way, it seems disappointingly small. Let it tell us the comparatively small importance which *God* puts upon it. Let it indicate its comparatively minor place over against the major emphases of the New Testament letters to Christian believers.²³

Jack Deere also looks to 1 Corinthians 12 as a major biblical text to explain healing for today.²⁴ He reasons that since (1) the apostles were the most gifted of all people in the church, (2) spiritual gifts range in strength and intensity, and (3) miraculous gifts were not limited to the apostles but distributed throughout the church, then (1) there is a distinction between signs/wonders and “gifts of healings,” and (2) it is wrong to insist that apostolic miracles set the standard by which to

²¹Ibid., 123.

²²Ibid., 155-80.

²³Ibid., 157.

²⁴Jack Deere, *Surprised* 64-68.

measure today’s healings. He concludes: (1) that healings today will not be as spectacular as Paul’s or Peter’s, (2) that healings might not be as abundant as in the apostolic era, and (3) that this allows for some failure in attempted healings.

My response would be that Dr. Deere has developed a theory more from what Scripture *doesn’t* say than what it *clearly* says. His theory fails, in my opinion, for several reasons.

1. The phrase “gifts of healings” is so ambiguous in its contexts that no one can really know for sure what it means. Certainly something as important as a theology of physical healing should not be built on such a shallow foundation.
2. His theory does not explain the decline in quality and quantity of even the apostolic healings as the apostolic age drew to a conclusion.
3. His theory does not adequately account for “gifts of healings” appearing only in the 1 Corinthians 12 gift list.
4. His theory does not anticipate the total lack of instruction in the epistles on the matter of healing (with the exception of what is found in James 5). I would suggest that James 5 and 1 Corinthians 12 are not connected.
5. His theory assumes throughout that if Scripture does not prohibit healing or does not speak directly about the cessation of apostolic healing, then implicitly the Scriptures teach healing for today.²⁵
6. Dr. Deere seems to contradict his own theory when he writes, “I believe that God is doing NT-quality miracles in the church today, and I believe He has done them throughout the history of the church.”²⁶ The only quality of miracles we know of from Acts are those done by the apostles. Yet Dr. Deere elsewhere theorized that the miracles of the church were substandard compared to those of the apostles. Both cannot be true.

THE BIBLICAL RECORD

Since “gifts of healing” are not operative today, as they were in NT times, how is the church to distinguish between the true and the false of alleged divine healing? What follows is an inductive study of healings in both the OT and NT, which will help to answer the above question. What characterized divine healing then would validate divine healing today, if the nature of the healing was of the same biblical quality.

The Christian community must come to grips with the fact that it is extremely rare when a reported healing begins to match up with the biblical model. When God miraculously healed through the prophets, Christ, or the apostles, these qualities, among others, characterized the healing:

²⁵Ibid., 18-19, 99-115.

²⁶Ibid., 58.

1. It was immediate.
2. It was public.
3. It took place on ordinary, unplanned occasions.
4. It included illnesses that were untreatable by the medical community.
5. It was complete and irreversible.
6. It was undeniable, even to detractors.

Taking contemporary healing a step further, most of today's reported healings look little different than reported healings from the cults and other world religions. The following biblical pattern separates the true from the false.²⁷

THE OLD TESTAMENT'S HEALING RECORD

The OT bridges time from creation to Christ. It would be naïve to assume that every instance of illness or healing has been recorded. However, it does seem reasonable that God included the majority of special cases in the divine record. Moses wrote the central statement on divine healing in Deut 32:39 (cf. Job 5:18):

See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal; and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.

The testimony rings clear: *God shoulders ultimate responsibility for life or death and health or sickness.*

God Afflicted

God physically afflicted more people, more often than He physically healed. For example,

- Gen 12:17 – The household of Pharaoh
- Gen 16:2 – Sarah
- Gen 20:18 – The household of Abimelech
- Gen 30:2 – Rachel
- Gen 32:22-32 – Jacob
- Exod 4:6-7 – Moses
- Exod 12:29-30 – Firstborn of Egypt
- Lev 10:1-2 – Abihu and Nadab
- Num 12:1-15 – Miriam
- Num 16:41-50 – Israel
- Num 21:4-9 – Israel
- Num 25:1-9 – Israel

²⁷The following data has been taken from Richard L. Mayhue, *The Biblical Pattern for Divine Healing* (Sun Valley, Calif.: Grace Books Int'l., 2002).

- 1 Sam 1:5-6 – Hannah
- 1 Sam 5:6,9,12 – Philistines
- 2 Sam 12:1-23 – Infant son of David
- 2 Sam 24:1-17 – Israel
- 1 Kgs 13:4 – Jeroboam
- 1 Kgs 14:12,17 – Jeroboam’s son
- 2 Kgs 5:20-27 – Gehazi
- 2 Kgs 19:35 – Sennacherib’s army
- 2 Chr 21:16-20 – Jehoram
- 2 Chr 26:16-21 – Uzziah
- Ezek 24:16 – Ezekiel’s wife
- Dan 4:28-37 – Nebuchadnezzar

Healing Methods Varied

God honored and, at times, personally used various techniques to heal physically.

1. **Prayer**
 - Gen 20:1-18 – Abraham
 - Num 12:1-15 – Moses
 - 1 Sam 1:19-20 – Hannah
 - 1 Kgs 13:6 – A man of God
 - 1 Kgs 17:17-24 – Elijah
2. **Hand into his bosom**
 - Exod 4:6-7 – Moses
3. **God’s predetermined time limit**
 - Dan 4:28-37 – Seven years
4. **Dipping seven times in the Jordan River**
 - 2 Kgs 5:1-14 – Naaman
5. **Unexplained actions**
 - 1 Kgs 17:17-24 – Elijah
 - 2 Kgs 4:18-37 – Elisha
6. **Without anything**
 - Gen 21:1-2 – Sarah
 - Gen 29:31 – Leah
 - Gen 30:22 – Rachel
7. **Combination of events**
 - 1 Kgs 17:17-24 – Prayer and unexplained actions
 - 2 Kgs 4:18-37 – Prayer and unexplained actions
 - 2 Kgs 20:1-11 – Prayer and medicine
8. **Looking at an elevated serpent**
 - Num 21:4-9 – Israel
9. **Plague checked, but no physical healing**
 - Num 16:41-50 – Incense offered

Num 25:1-9 – Two people killed
1 Sam 5:6,9,12 – Obedience
2 Sam 24:1-17 – Predetermined time limit

10. **Unknown means**

Job 42:1-17 – Job

Sin-related Sickness

God directly caused physical affliction at times because of personal sin, although the person physically affected was not always the sinner.

1. **The sinner went unpunished**

Exod 32:22-32 – Aaron
Num 12:1-15 – Aaron

2. **The sinner was punished**

Lev 10:1-2 – Nadab and Abihu
Num 12:1-15 – Miriam
Num 16:1-50 – Korah
1 Kgs 13:4 – Jeroboam
Dan 4:28-37 – Nebuchadnezzar

3. **Someone other than the sinner was punished**

Gen 12:17 – Household of Pharaoh
Gen 20:1-18 – Household of Abimelech
2 Sam 12:1-23 – Child of David and Bathsheba
2 Sam 24:1-17 – House of Israel
1 Kgs 14:12,17 – Jeroboam's son

Unexplainable Sickness

Gen 27:1 – Isaac
Gen 32:22-32 – Jacob
2 Sam 4:4 – Mephibosheth
1 Kgs 17:17-24 – Widow's son
2 Kgs 4:18-37 – Shunammite's son
Dan 7:28; 8:27 – Daniel

God Healed Unbelievers

Gen 12:10-20 – Pharaoh's household
Gen 20:1-18 – Abimelech's household
1 Kgs 13:6 – Jeroboam
2 Kgs 5:1-14 – Naaman
2 Chr 30:20 – Israel
Dan 4:34-37 – Nebuchadnezzar

God Restored Life

In the OT, only three people experienced resuscitation.

- 1 Kgs 17:17-24 – Son of the Zarephath widow
- 2 Kgs 4:18-37 – Son of the Shunammite woman
- 2 Kgs 13:21 – Unnamed man whose body touched the bones of Elisha

Satan Caused Sickness

God used Satan as an agent for sickness *only once*.
Job 1–2

Saints Were Sick

Some of the greatest OT saints were ill, but not directly because of personal sin.

- Gen 27:1 – Isaac (uncured)
- Gen 32:25 – Jacob (uncured)
- Gen 48:1 – Jacob (uncured)
- Exod 4:6-7 – Moses (cured)
- 1 Kgs 14:4 – Ahijah (uncured)
- 2 Kgs 13:14 – Elisha (uncured)
- Job 1–2; 42:10 – Job (cured)
- Dan 8:27 – Daniel (cured)

Though this might seem like a large number of healing incidents, remember that they occurred over a period of time that exceeds two thousand years. Significantly, far fewer healings occurred over thousands of years in the OT than were experienced during just a few decades in the NT.

THE GOSPELS’ HEALING RECORD

Never in human history have so many people been healed from such a multitude of diseases in so short a time as during Christ’s three-year public ministry. This outburst of healings has never been repeated. Christ’s healing ministry stands truly unique because it remains unequalled.

Purposes For Healing

Christ’s healing ministry served various purposes; all of them primarily contributed to authenticate the person of Jesus as the true Messiah. The healing miracles were never performed *merely* for their physical benefit.

Matt 8:17 – A fulfillment of the messianic prophecy in Isa 53:4

Matt 9:6 (also Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24) – So people would know that Christ had the authority to forgive sins

Matt 11:2-19 (also Luke 7:18-23) – To authenticate the messianic ministry for the imprisoned John

Matt 12:15-21 – To fulfill the messianic prophecy in Isa 42:1-4

John 9:3 – That the works of God might be displayed in Christ

John 20:30-31 – That men might believe that Jesus is Christ

Acts 2:22 – God's authentication of Christ

Healing Had Direction

Although Jesus' miracles abounded, He did not perform them indiscriminately, nor did He always heal everyone who needed healing (see John 5:3-5); neither did He perform signs upon request (see Matt 12:38-40); nor would He use His powers to avoid the cross (see Matt 26:52-53). God always directed miracles toward the purposes previously documented.

Matt 4:1-11	Matt 16:1-4	Matt 27:40	Luke 11:16
Matt 12:38-40	Matt 26:52-53	Mark 6:5	John 5:3-5

Immediate Healing

With three exceptions, all of Jesus' healings occurred instantaneously. They required absolutely no recuperative period because the afflicted immediately returned to complete health. No relapses or misunderstandings about being healed marked Christ's healings.

Matt 8:3	Matt 9:22	Matt 17:18	Luke 13:13
Matt 8:13	Matt 9:29-30	Matt 20:34	John 4:53
Matt 8:15	Matt 15:28	Mark 3:1-6	John 5:8-9
Matt 9:6-7	Matt 15:30-31	Mark 7:33-35	

Several Healings Time-Delayed

The only three delays in total healing involved mere *minutes* and no longer. The men involved received total healing.

Mark 8:22-26	Luke 17:11-19	John 9:1-7
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Abundant Healings

Jesus' miracles abounded; He healed in unlimited number and scope.

Matt 4:23-25	Matt 14:35-36	Luke 6:17-19	John 7:31
Matt 8:16	Matt 15:30-31	Luke 7:21	John 12:37
Matt 9:35	Mark 1:32-34	Luke 9:11	John 20:30
Matt 12:15	Mark 3:7-11	John 6:2	John 21:25

Healing In Absentia

Healing occurred without Jesus’ physical presence.

Matt 8:5-13	Matt 15:21-28	Luke 7:1-10	John 4:46-54
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Healing Methods Varied

As with OT healings, Jesus used a variety of methods to heal. Remember, the power of God healed! Nothing magical or cure-producing in the method caused the healing.

1. Christ touched

Matt 8:15	Matt 20:34	Luke 13:13
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2. Christ spoke

Matt 9:6-7	Mark 10:52	John 5:8-9
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3. The afflicted touched Christ’s cloak

Matt 9:20-22	Matt 14:36	Luke 8:44
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4. Christ used spittle

Mark 8:22-26

5. Christ plugged a man’s ears with His fingers and placed spittle on his tongue.

Mark 7:33-35

6. Christ anointed with clay

John 9:6

Christ Approved Doctors

Jesus recognized the normal means of physical healing—a doctor and medicine.

Matt 9:12 – “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are ill.”

Luke 10:30-37 – The Samaritan used oil, wine, and bandages to help the abandoned Jew.

Healing For God's Glory

Although sickness can result directly from personal sin, as evidenced in the OT, nowhere in the Gospel accounts does Jesus attribute sickness directly to personal sin. However, Scripture states twice that sickness occurred in order that God could be glorified.

- John 9:1-41 – Man with congenital blindness
- John 11:1-53 – Lazarus

Christ's Healing Ministry Is Unique

Another healing ministry like Christ's ministry has never happened.

Matt 9:32-33	Mark 2:12	Luke 10:24	John 9:32
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Christ Shunned Acclaim

Jesus went out of His way to avoid public approval or reward for His healing miracles. In Luke 10:20, Jesus explicitly told the disciples not to rejoice in the power they had been given, but rather to rejoice over the fact that their names were recorded in heaven.

Matt 8:4	Mark 1:44	Mark 8:26
Matt 9:30	Mark 5:43	Luke 5:14
Matt 12:16	Mark 7:36	Luke 8:56

Undeniable Healings

Christ's healings generated phenomenal spectator reaction. Everyone, including His enemies, walked away amazed, astounded, and unable to deny or discredit the miracles.

Matt 9:1-8	Mark 3:6	Luke 18:43
Matt 9:33	Mark 3:10	John 9:1-41
Matt 12:23	Mark 5:20	John 11:47-48
Matt 15:31	Mark 7:37	
Mark 2:12	Luke 11:14	

National Reactions

The geographic range of personal reaction reached nationwide proportions. Mark 1:45 describes the fact that the news of Christ's healing ministry spread to such an extent that He could no longer enter a city. Even though He remained in unpopulated areas, people came to Him from everywhere.

Matt 4:23-25	Matt 9:31	Matt 15:30	Mark 1:45
Matt 9:26	Matt 14:35	Matt 19:2	Mark 6:2

Healing Did Not Save

While Christ’s miracles could not be denied, they did not necessarily lead to faith.

1. They were undeniable

John 3:2	John 7:25-46	John 11:47-48
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2. They did not lead to faith

Matt 11:21-23	Luke 10:12-15	John 12:37-43
Matt 12:38-45	John 6:26-36	

Christ Healed Unbelievers

Wherever He healed the multitudes, it can be assumed that most, if not all, were unbelievers.

Matt 8:1-4 – A leper

Luke 17:11-19 – Ten lepers

John 5:1-9 – A lame man by the pool

Faith Not Necessary

Jesus did not require personal faith to be healed. In addition to the following examples, it is obvious that Lazarus, Jairus’ daughter, and the widow’s son were incapable of displaying faith. Yet, they all were resuscitated from the dead.

Matt 8:14	Matt 12:22	Mark 8:22	Luke 22:51
Matt 9:32	Matt 20:30	Luke 14:4	John 5:8
Matt 12:13	Mark 7:35	Luke 17:14	John 9:1

Another’s Faith Honored

At times, Christ healed when faith was displayed by someone other than the one afflicted. Note especially Matt 17:19-20. The disciples had been unable to cast out a demon and came to Jesus privately for further instruction. He informed them that it was because of their lack of faith. The parallel passage in Mark adds that prayer would have provided success (9:29). Those who claim that a person is not healed because of his or her own lack of faith need to be alerted and corrected.

Matt 8:10-11	Matt 15:28	Mark 9:23-24	John 4:50
Matt 9:2	Mark 2:1-5	Luke 8:50	

Faith Of The Afflicted Honored

Occasionally, Christ commended the faith of the afflicted one.

Matt 9:22	Matt 9:29	Mark 10:52
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Healings Were Not Prearranged

1. He healed from the beginning of His ministry (Matt 4:23-25) to the end.
John 11:1-44

2. Often Jesus approached the person.

Luke 13:10-17	John 5:1-9
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3. Jesus always healed during the normal course of His ministry.

Matt 9:27-31	Matt 12:10-14	Luke 13:10-17	John 5:1-9
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Satan And Demons Caused Sickness

Not all sickness is directly caused by Satan or demons, but people possessed by demons were liable to have physical infirmities. Luke 13:10-17 serves as the classic example—where a lady bound by Satan (most likely through a demon) had been doubled over for eighteen years.

Matt 4:24	Matt 12:22	Mark 1:32-34	Luke 13:10-17
Matt 8:16-17	Matt 15:21-28	Mark 9:25	Acts 10:38
Matt 9:32-33	Matt 17:14-18	Luke 8:2	

Heavenly Healing Power

Because Christ had temporarily and voluntarily set aside the *independent* exercise of His divine attributes, His healing power came from God the Father.

Matt 12:28 – He cast out demons by the Spirit of God.

Luke 5:17 – “And the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing.”

Luke 11:20 – He cast out demons by the finger of God.

John 5:19 – “...the Son can do nothing of Himself...”

Acts 2:22 – “...signs which God performed through Him...”

Acts 10:38 – Christ healed because God was with Him.

Healing By The Disciples

People other than Christ healed in the Gospel accounts.

Matt 10:1-15 – Going only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (see 10:6), all the disciples’ needs were to be met supernaturally by God. They were to take nothing on their preaching and healing excursions.

Luke 10:1-16 – Seventy others were commissioned similarly to the twelve.

As spectacular as the early chapters in Acts read with regard to healing, they seem like nothing when compared to the endless healings by Jesus. The Gospel healing record unquestionably stands in a league all its own. Christ’s healings far outdistanced, in quantity, all the other healings in the Bible put together.

THE ACTS’ HEALING RECORD

The healing ministry in Acts reads with far less intensity when compared to that of Christ, although Acts covers about thirty years. However, on a time comparison basis, Acts had far more healings than the entire OT. The NT epistles seem almost barren of healing when compared to Acts.

Healing Techniques Varied

The healing techniques varied in Acts, as they also did in the OT and the Gospels.

1. By command

Acts 3:6

Acts 9:32-35

Acts 14:8-10

2. By being in the healer’s shadow

Acts 5:15

3. By touching a cloth from the healer’s body

Acts 19:11-12

4. By prayer and laying on of hands

Acts 28:8-9

5. By speaking

Acts 9:17-18

Immediate Healing

All the healings in Acts occurred instantaneously; they required no recuperative period. The afflicted experienced immediate restoration to full health.

Acts 3:7-8		Acts 14:8-10		Acts 14:19-20		Acts 20:9-12
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Unbelievers Healed

Acts 5:16		Acts 8:6-7		Acts 19:11-12		Acts 28:8-9
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Faith Of The Afflicted Honored

At times the faith of the afflicted was commended.

Acts 3:16		Acts 14:8-10
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Faith Not Necessary

Apostolic healers did not necessarily require personal faith of the afflicted.

Acts 5:16		Acts 19:11-12		Acts 28:8-9
Acts 9:36-43		Acts 20:9-12		

Healings Undeniable

The miracles of healing could not be denied—even by the Sanhedrin.

Acts 2:43		Acts 4:15-17		Acts 14:3
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Demons Caused Sickness

Acts 8:7		Acts 10:38
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Sin-Related Sickness

Sometimes God afflicted because of personal sin.

Acts 5:1-11		Acts 9:8		Acts 12:23		Acts 13:4-12
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Life Restored

Two resuscitations occurred.

Acts 9:36-43 – Dorcas (by Peter)		Acts 20:9-12 – Eutychus (by Paul)
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Illness Prevented

Acts 28:1-6

Heavenly Healing Power

Acts 4:30

Saints Were Ill

Acts 9:36-43 – Dorcas

Acts 14:19 – Paul

Healing In Absentia

Acts 19:11-12

Everyone Was Healed

Acts 28:9

As expected, the quality characteristics of these healings matched those of Christ. However, the quantity did not even begin to approximate the too-numerous-to-count healings by Jesus.

THE EPISTLES’ HEALING RECORD

God used signs, miracles, and wonders to authenticate the apostles and their ministry (Rom 15:18-19; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4). Certification of the apostles primarily explains the miraculous actions of men, not the mere healing of the saints.

Spectacular supernatural healings were among the signs displayed by the apostles and those with whom they personally ministered. Whether the apostles themselves or those with whom they ministered did the signs, the signs were designed to attest the authority of the apostles as revealers of truth (see Acts 2:42-43).

If all Christians are supposed to perform such deeds, those deeds could not have served as signs of apostleship (see 2 Cor 12:12). The signs attested the apostles’ words as of equal authority with those of Jesus Himself, for He had chosen them as His spokesmen (see Matt 10:11-15, 20, 40; 1 Cor 14:37).

Medicine Approved

Paul recognized and recommended medicine.

1 Tim 5:23

Sin-Related Sickness

James 5:14-20 outlines the biblical response to severe or untimely physical infirmities that probably, but not necessarily, have their source in God’s chastisement for personal sin.

Healing Declined

Paul's frequency of healing declined with the passing of time.

Gal 4:13-15 – Paul was ill

Phil 2:25-30 – Epaphroditus was ill

1 Tim 5:23 – Timothy was ill

2 Tim 4:20 – Trophimus was ill

Neither John nor Peter mention historical instances of first-century healing in their epistles and Revelation.

Healing is noticeable in the OT (over 4,000 years), overwhelming in the Gospels (about three years), occasional in Acts (about thirty years), and negligible in the epistles (about forty years). The apostolic age ended, and miraculous healing by direct human intervention ceased. The subsequent alleged healings recorded by early church historians do not match the biblical record in regard to the miraculous quality of instant, total, and undeniable healing.

PROPHETIC EXPECTATIONS OF HEALING

When John the Baptist questioned whether Jesus truly was the Messiah or whether he should look to someone else, John sent his disciples to Jesus for an answer (Matt 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-23). In reply, Christ first healed, and then he told John's men to report these miraculous events back to John, remembering Isa 35:5-6.

On another occasion, Jesus healed in order to fulfill Isa 42:1-4 (Matt 12:15-21). Healing in Mark 7:31-37 alludes to Isa 35:5-6. On those occasions, Jesus healed to preview His kingdom power as an appropriate credential in order to be rightly recognized as the King of Israel.

These brief bursts of power in the Gospels pointed to something yet future which the OT (especially Isaiah) had predicted. The Bible anticipates two future periods when human health will be dramatically improved—The Millennium and Eternity Future.

The Millennium

Isa 29:18-19	Isa 33:24	Isa 42:7-16	Mic 4:6-7
Isa 32:3-4	Isa 35:5-6	Isa 65:19-20, 22	Zeph 3:19

Eternity Future

Isa 25:8	1 Cor 15:54	Rev 21:4	Rev 22:2
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GOD’S HEALING PROMISE

While this study might not decide every issue conclusively, there is one thing for certain—the Bible does contain a healing promise. Many have misunderstood it. Look at 1 Pet 2:24 carefully:

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

Can you see it? “*By His wounds you were healed.*”²⁸ What does Peter mean? How does this apply to you and me in this life? If it applies physically, then why aren’t all Christians healed? Has God’s Word failed? Has God lost His healing touch? Are the Scriptures mistaken?

Two foundational truths help get us off to a right start in understanding Peter and divine healing. First, every human being, when conceived, possesses a congenital spiritual defect—a sin disability that needs to be healed. Second, Peter addresses our need for spiritual restoration in 1 Pet 2:24 with his discussion of Christ’s provision of salvation’s healing.

With those two thoughts in mind, look closely at the parts of 1 Pet 2:24-25. Then, when reassembled, you will be able to understand the whole because the parts have been identified. Our text explains five elements of salvation:

1. The *fact* of salvation (verse 24a):
“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross....”
2. The *purposes* of salvation (verse 24b):
“...that we might die to sin and live to righteousness....”
3. The *means* of salvation (verse 24c):
“...for by His wounds you were healed.”
4. The *need* for salvation (verse 25a):
“For you were continually straying like sheep....”
5. The *result* of salvation (verse 25b):
“...but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”

First Pet 2:24 has everything to do with spiritual healing, which the Bible calls salvation. In fact, 1 Pet 2:18-25 means just the opposite of what most healing advocates teach. Peter argues that since Christ physically and spiritually suffered for our spiritual healing (vv. 21-24), then we should be willing to suffer physically in this life at the hands of men (vv. 18-21), because we have already received God’s healing promise for eternal salvation (vv. 24-25). *Peter actually validates the divine purpose in human suffering rather than eliminating it.*

²⁸See Richard L. Mayhue, “For What Did Christ Atone in Isaiah 53:4-5?” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 6:2 (Fall 1995): 121-41 for a fuller treatment of the OT text from which 1 Pet 2:24 is quoted.

Unless we begin with this eternal perspective, we will never understand biblically how God works in the physical affairs of mankind in this life. The good news is that true Christians are securely saved. The other important-to-know news is that not all of salvation's benefits will be received until our bodies have been raised from the grave (1 Cor 15:42-44, 52-54). After God initiates our salvation, all Christians still sin, still suffer ill health, and eventually will die. However, in the end, divinely perfected believers will dwell forever in the presence of a holy God (Rev 21:1-8).

CONCLUSION

After all has been studied and written, I believe the Bible teaches that God can sovereignly choose to heal whomever and whenever, *but it will not be a frequent occurrence nor will it be done through human healers* because:

1. The gospel is good news about our sin problem, not our sicknesses (Rom 3:23; 6:23).
2. Christ's atonement focuses primarily on our sins (iniquities), not our sicknesses (Lev 16:1-34; Isa 53:5-6, 11-12; 1 Pet 2:24).
3. Christ died for our sins, not our sicknesses (1 Cor 15:3).
4. Christ was made sin, not sickness (2 Cor 5:21).
5. Christ forgave our sins, not our sicknesses (1 John 2:12).
6. Christ gave Himself for our sins, not our sicknesses (Gal 1:4).
7. Our bodies are corruptible and, thus, subject to sickness (1 Cor 15:42-44).
8. We will all die physically (Heb 9:27).
9. The NT "healing promise" refers to salvation, not physical healing (1 Pet 2:24).
10. Our hope while on earth is heaven, not healing (Rom 8:24-25).

Though the NT sign/authenticating "gifts of healings" have ceased, the possibility of God healing without human healers is certainly possible today. However, when He does heal, it will be characterized in a manner similar to His healings recorded in Scripture.