

HEALING

According to all four canonical Gospels, Jesus devoted a substantial portion of his ministry to performing miracles of healing for a wide variety of people. These miracles sometimes occurred in response to faith and sometimes to instill faith. They demonstrated Jesus' compassion and his concern to break down social barriers. They challenged the Jewish Sabbath Laws and exposed Israel's faithlessness. Above all, they supported his teaching that the kingdom of God was arriving with his ministry and that he himself was God's unique Son (*see* Abba; Son of God).

1. Classification
2. Meaning
3. Emphases of the Gospel Writers
4. Authenticity
5. Sociology
6. Significance for Today

1. Classification.

Three major kinds of healing miracles occur in the Gospels. Each requires slightly different interpretation, and some scholars would evaluate the historical reliability of the various categories differently as well.

1.1. Exorcisms. Frequently, Jesus casts one or more demons out of individuals who have been possessed by them (*see* Demon, Devil). The demons regularly demonstrate that they know who Jesus is, even when most or all of the human onlookers do not (e.g., Mk 1:24; 5:7). They use this knowledge to try to gain mastery over Jesus, since knowledge of one's adversary's name was a key component in exorcisms of that day. But in every instance they fail. Jesus proves his superiority over Satan.

The Gospel accounts differ from many other exorcism stories of antiquity in the immediacy of the exorcisms, the lack of a struggle or extreme violence by the demons and the lack of magical paraphernalia customarily used by the exorcist. Many modern scholars have assumed that what ancient people believed to be demon-possession was simply some severe psychological or physical affliction which today would be treated by medicine or therapy. But the Gospels themselves distinguish between the two (e.g., Mt 10:1; Mk 3:10–11), and contemporary experiences of possession and exorcism which science has been unable to explain are too numerous to support this reductionist approach.

1.2. Physical Healings. Jesus regularly helped blind people to see (e.g., Mt 9:27–31; Mk 8:22–26), the deaf to hear (e.g., Mt 11:5; Mk 7:32–37) and the lame to walk (e.g., Jn 5:1–15). He cleansed lepers (e.g., Lk 5:12–16; 17:11–19), cured fevers (e.g., Mk 1:29–31; Jn 4:43–53), stopped a hemorrhage (Mk 5:24–34), restored a withered hand (Mk 3:1–6), replaced a cut-off ear (Lk 22:51) and healed a wide variety of unspecified illnesses. He healed with a word (e.g., Mt 8:16), without praying to God or invoking his name (except in one instance when he specifically declares that it is for the crowd's benefit—Jn 11:41–42) and sometimes at a long distance from the one who was sick (e.g., Mt 8:5–13). On two occasions he used indirect means and two stages in the healing (Mk 8:22–26; Jn 9:1–7), but normally the cures were instantaneous and unmediated.

Many scholars are willing to grant that people were genuinely healed after their encounters with Jesus, but they attribute the healing to a psychosomatic power of suggestion. The Gospels, however, are clear that Jesus' healings were genuinely supernatural events. H. C. Kee has helpfully delineated the differences in ancient thought concerning medicine (building on the foundation of natural order), miracle (based on belief in divine intervention), and magic (manipulating mysterious forces for personal benefit). Kee demonstrates that Jesus' healings normally belong to the second of these three categories.

1.3 Resurrections. The Gospels report that on three occasions Jesus brought back to life an individual who had recently died (Mk 5:35–43; Lk 7:11–17; Jn 11:1–44). In the first two the death seems just to have occurred within a matter of hours; in the case of Lazarus four days have passed (Jn 11:39). Some writers prefer to speak of these as resuscitations or reanimations to distinguish them from the resurrection of Jesus and from the coming resurrection of all believers which is a restoration to life without death ever again intruding. But inasmuch as these terms suggest a non-miraculous procedure, they do not correspond to what the Gospels describe. For critics who are inclined to disbelieve the miraculous, the resurrections are the most incredible of all of Jesus' healing miracles. Ultimately their credibility depends on the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. If the latter is admitted, then the former, temporary resurrections follow as a natural corollary, a foretaste of the future, permanent resurrection of all God's people.

2. Meaning.

2.1. Teaching about Faith. Sometimes Jesus heals an individual in response to that person's faith. Both Jairus' daughter and the woman with the hemorrhage are explicitly declared to be healed as a result of their faith or of the faith of their loved ones (Mk 5:34, 36). Sometimes lack of faith prevents Jesus from healing, as at his hometown of Nazareth (Mt 13:58). Jesus similarly explains that his disciples were unable to exorcise a demon-possessed epileptic because of their lack of faith (Mt 17:20). Many Christians deduce from accounts like these that if a person could only generate enough faith, healing would always occur. But this does not follow. There is a balancing theme which pervades the Gospels as well. Frequently, healings occur where there is little or no faith in order to try to instill belief in Jesus as the Son of God. All of the healings in John have this as one purpose (Jn 20:31); sometimes it is pre-eminent (Jn 4:53–54). After Peter's mother-in-law is cured of her fever, she serves Jesus (Mt 8:15). Jesus upbraids several of the cities in which he has worked miracles because they did not repent (Mt 11:20–24). So it is clear that miracles may be designed to produce faith where there is none; once that faith has developed, healings may be less necessary (cf. Jesus' attitude to those who demanded signs to support their faith, Jn 4:48; 20:29).

2.2. Jesus' Compassion. Although it seems a natural inference that one of Jesus' main motives for healing would be his compassion for the sick, the Gospels state this explicitly only on rare occasions (e.g., Mt 14:14; 20:34). If compassion were a dominant motive, then presumably all sick people in his day (or in any other day) would have been healed, and this was patently not the case (cf. Jn 5:3–5 in which Jesus singles out only one of the many disabled people lying near the Bethesda pool). Jesus undoubtedly had compassion for all the sick, but the broader testimony of Scripture is that God's power may be demonstrated at least as dramatically through people's suffering as through their health. (In the Gospels the classic example is the passion and crucifixion of Christ; authentic discipleship also embraced the way of the cross [cf. Mk 8:31–35].)

2.3. Breaking Down Social Barriers. Frequently Jesus heals in such a way as to incur the anger of the Jewish leaders. He does not have to touch the leper to cleanse him, but does so deliberately to show that he is unconcerned with the ritual taboos that separated classes of people (Mk 1:41; see Clean and Unclean). He sends ten lepers (see Leprosy) to the priest for their cures to be confirmed, but only a Samaritan returns to give thanks; Jesus declares that one clean, leaving open the question of what happened to the other nine (Lk 17:11–19). The point is that the despised, outcast Samaritan is the hero; the social barriers Judaism had erected are being destroyed. Jesus praises a Syro-Phoenician woman for her faith and heals her daughter, demonstrating that his saving power is not to be limited to Israel (Mk 7:24–30; see Gentiles). In each of these instances Jesus is preparing the way for the establishment of a broadly inclusive religious movement not bounded by barriers of race, sex or nationality.

2.4. Challenging Israel's Law and Exposing the Nation's Faithlessness. Closely related to the previous category are those examples of Jesus breaking the Sabbath laws (e.g., Mk 3:1–6; Lk 13:10–17; 14:1–6). He does not have to heal on the Sabbath; not one of the maladies he cures on that day is said to be life-threatening. But he shows that the restrictions regularly attached to Jewish Sabbath law were of human rather than divine origin. He praises the Roman centurion for a quality of faith superior to that which he has found anywhere in Israel and predicts that many Gentiles will replace many Jews in God's kingdom (Mt 8:10–11). He laments the wickedness of the generation of Israelites in which he lives as contributing to the inability of his disciples to effect an exorcism (Mt 17:17). This is not a critique by a reformer but a condemnation by one who is in the process of inaugurating a new age in redemptive history, in which the laws of the Mosaic covenant cannot carry over unchanged (see Law).

2.5. Teaching about Sin. Two healings recorded in John juxtapose opposite perspectives on the relationship between sickness and sin. After healing the man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years, Jesus tells him, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (Jn 5:14). Here Jesus presumes the common Jewish view that illness was a punishment for sin. But later, when his disciples ask him why a certain man had been born blind, he denies that it had anything to do with the sin of either that man or his parents (Jn 9:3). Instead, it was to manifest God's glory. Thus, sometimes healings undo a punishment for sin; other times there is no relation between health and obedience, or between sin and sickness, beyond the general observation that all evil came into the world through original sin.

2.6. Signs of the Kingdom and of the Messiah. The Gospels nowhere distinguish between the meaning of Jesus' miracles of healing and other kinds of miracles. When one studies all of the miracles of the Gospels, it becomes clear that their predominant purpose is to demonstrate the inauguration of the kingdom of God in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah (cf. esp. Betz and Grimm, Wenham and Blomberg; see Christ). But an analysis of the healing miracles alone makes this point evident.

Several passages in the Gospels give an explicit rationale for Jesus' healings. Jesus declares that his exorcisms prove that the "kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12:28). He sends the messengers from John the Baptist back to their imprisoned leader to tell him that the healing of the blind, lame, deaf and lepers (*see* Leprosy) and the resurrections from the dead answer John's question about whether or not Jesus was "the one to come" (Mt 11:4–6). He heals the paralytic who was lowered through the roof, so demonstrating that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins (*see* Forgiveness of Sins), a prerogative reserved for God alone (Mk 2:10–11). Giving sight to the blind leads to Jesus' claim to be "the light of the world" (Jn 9:5) just as raising Lazarus reinforces his pronouncement that he is "the resurrection and the life" (Mt 11:25). Numerous summary statements throughout the Gospel link his healing with his preaching as the two major foci of his ministry (e.g., Mt 4:23; 9:35; 21:14), summed up under the call to repentance "for the kingdom of God is near" (Mk 1:15).

In addition to these specific statements, several healing miracles point to the arrival of the messianic age more indirectly. When Jesus heals a deaf-mute, Mark describes the man as one who could "hardly talk" (Mk 7:32), an expression found in the LXX only in Isaiah 35:6, in which the prophet is describing the wonders of the age to come, including the fact that the "mute tongue" will "shout for joy." The resurrection of the widow of Nain's son (Lk 7:11–17) strikingly resembles Elisha's raising the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:8–37), especially since Nain was located on approximately the same site as ancient Shunem. Even the crowds pick up on the resemblance as they marvel at the "great prophet" (Lk 7:16) who has arisen among them (probably implying the ultimate, eschatological prophet, fulfilling Deut 18:18). The nature of Jesus' messianic mission is clarified, in ways not particularly pleasing to his followers, when he heals Malchus' ear which Peter has cut off (Jn 18:10–11). His will be the way of the cross, not resisting the suffering which God has ordained for him.

3. Emphases of the Gospel Writers.

3.1. Mark. Of all the Evangelists, Mark devotes the largest percentage of his Gospel to the miracles and healings of Jesus (approx. thirty-one percent). For Mark they demonstrate the establishment of God's reign and the need for repentance (6:7–12). Mark focuses on the power of Jesus and on his dramatic confrontations with the forces of Satan. Jesus conquers disease, demons and death (5:1–43). Mark stresses the immediacy of the miracles (1:29, 42; 2:8). His stories of Jesus' exorcisms contain more demonstrations of combat and violence than is common elsewhere in the Gospels (1:25; 5:6–13). Jesus discloses his emotions and even his anger at the work of the devil (3:5; 9:19).

As throughout his Gospel, Mark stresses what has come to be called the "messianic secret" (*see* Christ; Mark, Gospel of). Repeatedly, after various healings, Jesus commands those healed not to tell others who he is or what has happened (e.g., 1:34; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36). There have been numerous explanations of this motif. The most popular in critical circles is that associated with W. Wrede: Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah but later was confessed as such by his followers. To account for the silence of the earlier tradition, they alleged that Jesus at first forbade them to tell others of his messianic works and words. Many scholars have backed away from parts of Wrede's hypothesis and affirmed a core of genuinely messianic Jesus material, but most agree that Mark has substantially embellished and emphasized this theme, along with the motifs of misunderstanding and secrecy. More convincing are two less radical explanations: (1) Jesus recognized that most of his contemporaries were looking for a political Messiah which did not correspond to his mission (*see* esp. Jn 6:15); and (2) Only after his suffering, death and resurrection could the nature of his messianic ministry be fully understood (*see* esp. Mk 9:9).

On two occasions Mark deliberately contrasts the unbelief of both the disciples and the crowds with Jesus' ability to heal and the belief generated in those healed (8:14–21, 22–26; 9:1–13, 14–32). Yet at the same time the disciples are commissioned and empowered to carry out healings identical to those Jesus himself performed (6:7–12). Mark further uses healings to frame his first main section of stories about Jesus' controversies with the Jewish leaders (2:1–12; 3:1–6), and elsewhere sees healing as a kind of teaching itself (1:27). His is also the only Gospel to refer to the use of anointing oil in conjunction with healing (6:13).

Mark's emphasis on Jesus' miracles has often been linked with a divine man christology—a portrayal of Jesus in terms of other Hellenistic wonder-workers of his day. But Jesus' exasperation with those who demanded of him signs as they did of others (8:11–13) and his warning against false prophets who would perform miracles (13:21–23) call this interpretation into question. Other scholars have suggested that Mark was trying to counter a divine man christology by emphasizing Jesus' suffering and servanthood. But surely then he would not have needed to include nearly as many miracles as he did. Better than either of these approaches is one which sees Mark's

purposes as more pastoral than polemical. Mark expected miracles, especially healings, to continue to occur in the church of his day (9:28–29), hence the emphasis on signs and wonders in 1:1–8:26. But Mark's church is also undergoing suffering and persecution, frequently without supernatural alleviation. So it needs to learn to follow Jesus on the way to the cross (8:34), hence the emphasis on humility and servanthood in 8:27–16:7 (see Best).

3.2. Matthew. Matthew's largest group of healing miracles occurs in chapters 8–9. Here Matthew presents Jesus as one mighty in deed, while sharply focusing on his sovereignty and authority. Matthew regularly abbreviates the healing stories, eliminating distracting detail and dialog in order to focus more exclusively on christology (e.g., 8:28–34; 9:1–8). At times this compression or telescoping of narrative is so drastic as to border on contradiction with his sources (9:18–26; cf. Mk 5:21–43). For Matthew, Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah, the Son of David, and several of those whom Jesus heals confess him as such (9:27–31; 20:29–34). Several who are healed further acknowledge him as Lord (8:2; 15:22; 17:15). The healings fulfill OT Scripture (11:4–5; cf. Is 61:1; 35:6), especially those connected with Isaiah's Suffering Servant (8:17; cf. Is 53:4; *see* Servant of Yahweh). Twice Matthew depicts Jesus as healing two blind men (9:27–31; 20:29–34), where the parallel accounts mention only one. Perhaps Matthew is concerned to apply the Deuteronomic criterion that a matter is confirmed by the testimony of two or more witnesses (Deut 19:15).

Matthew's Gospel is at one and the same time the most particularist and the most universalist. He includes statements in conjunction with his healings and those of his disciples which reserve their miracle-working power for Israel (10:5–6; 15:24). In reserving his healing ministry for the crowds who are not yet his disciples, he can be seen as presenting himself as the healer of Israel, where the nation's leaders have failed (see Gerhardsson). Yet, upon seeing the Canaanite woman's faith, he is persuaded to heal her daughter (15:28). The best resolution of this apparent tension is to recognize Matthew's view of salvation history. God's call for repentance comes to the Jews first, but after they have had a chance to respond it must go forth into all the world.

In his summary statements of key stages of Jesus' ministry, Matthew regularly refers to the role of Jesus' healing with distinctive emphasis (e.g., 4:23–24; 9:35). These summaries consistently juxtapose Jesus' healing with his preaching and teaching to give both aspects of his ministry equal weight. Matthew's larger outline mirrors this balance (cf. chaps. 5–7 with 8–9). Similarly, Matthew diminishes the miraculous and heightens the controversy in a series of healing stories so as to give both elements equal attention (e.g., 9:1–8; 12:1–14). So too, healing as well as teaching leads to Jesus' rejection, arrest and crucifixion (21:10–17, 23–27; 26:57–66).

But after the resurrection the Great Commission does not repeat Jesus' earlier commands to the disciples to heal the sick as they evangelize (28:18–20; cf. 10:7–8). Arguably, Matthew expects his community to continue to experience both physical and spiritual salvation in Jesus. But he does not expect them to be able to reproduce such miracles with the frequency that the twelve disciples once did (see Heil).

3.3. Luke. Luke's Gospel is most concerned with Jesus' true humanity and his compassion for the outcasts of society. Only in Luke does Jesus cleanse the Samaritan leper (17:11–19). He is also most interested in portraying Jesus as Savior (*see* Salvation) of the world (2:11). Part of the holistic salvation which Jesus brings includes physical healing. Jesus' programmatic manifesto of liberation (*see* Jubilee) combines preaching good news (*see* Gospel [Good News]) to the poor (*see* Rich and Poor) with providing sight for the blind (4:18). The same combination recurs later (7:21–22) in a Q passage which Luke has redacted to stress the role of healings in testifying to Jesus as the promised "coming one."

In Luke's Gospel the lines are more blurred between healing and exorcism. Disease and demon-possession may both be attributed to Satan (5:35 and 39 employ the identical word for a "rebuke"), and a crippled woman's malady is ascribed to a "spirit" of infirmity (13:11–12)—an expression otherwise unparalleled in the NT. At the same time, the demons regularly recognize Jesus as the Son of God (4:41; 8:28) who is victorious over them. Occasionally, Jesus' ability to heal and vanquish demons borders on the magical—e.g., power goes out from a mere touch of his robe (8:44). Yet Luke makes it clear that it is faith and not magic which saves (8:48). In fact, many writers believe that it is Luke, of the four Evangelists, who makes most clear the possibility of miracles serving as a basis of faith (cf. esp. Achtemeier). Despite the influential view of H. Conzelmann to the contrary, it is obvious that Luke does not envision the interval between Jesus' temptation and Gethsemane as a "Satan-free" period. Rather, Luke pictures Jesus embroiled in an eschatological battle with Satan, whose powers he is decisively vanquishing as he ushers in the age of the new covenant (see esp. 10:17–18).

Luke does not portray the Jews in so uncompromising terms as does Matthew. He is more concerned with the worthiness of the Gentiles than with the faithlessness of Israel (7:1–10; cf. Mt 8:5–13). But while he uses different texts and typologies (*see* Typology), most notably parallels with Elijah and Elisha (e.g., 7:1–28) to depict Jesus as the eschatological prophet (7:16), he is equally concerned to portray Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish hopes (4:16–

21; 24:44). In fact he is most interested in tracing Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and his ministry under the shadow of the cross (9:51). His healings and other miracles are but a prelude to suffering which has been ordained by the Scriptures (13:32). Thus like Mark and Matthew, Luke expects that healings will continue in the apostolic age and beyond (see section 6.1.), but he recognizes their limited value in creating faith (16:31) and subordinates them to conversion and salvation in importance (10:20).

3.4. John. John offers the most contrast in his view of Jesus' healings. For him they are pre-eminently signs designed to bring people to faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (4:54). Many commentators find this in flat contradiction with the Synoptic accounts, which portray Jesus as refusing to work miracles in response to the demand for a sign (Mt 12:38–42; Mk 8:11–13). But there is an important difference. Neither in John nor in the Synoptics will Jesus produce a sign on demand, especially when the request comes from one who is skeptical of Jesus' power or hostile to his preaching (cf. Jn 6:30–59). God's power cannot be commanded by human whim, and Jesus will not coerce anyone to believe. Even his own family members coming to him with legitimate requests cannot dictate what he will do. He may grant their requests but only at the precise time he chooses (2:3–7; 7:3–10).

At the same time, fair-minded assessment of Jesus' powers should elicit a confession of faith (20:31). Yet John recognizes this will not always occur. Even as he is the Evangelist most concerned to appropriate the apologetic value of Jesus' miracles, he is also the one who consistently praises those who do not need such crutches for their faith (4:48; 20:29). With maturity comes less dependence on the miraculous. So too, when healings plant the seeds of belief, they must grow into a deeper faith which better understands who Jesus is (9:35–38).

For John healings are not only signs but works (5:36). They show that the miracles are not independent actions but part of God's total activity, or "work," in Jesus (4:34; 5:17). The signs inevitably lead to explanatory discourses which invest them with symbolic and christological significance. Healing the blind man and raising Lazarus reinforce Jesus' claims to be the light of the world (9:5) and the resurrection and the life (11:25). These two healings demonstrate God's glory (11:40; 9:3), a key motif throughout John's Gospel. Healings in John further provoke controversies with the Jews as polemical as those found in Matthew (9:13–41)—including disputes over Sabbath laws (5:16–47)—and issuing in death threats (11:45–57; 12:10–11). But ultimately these debates focus more on the christological questions; many of the Jewish leaders reject Jesus' claims, but many others are more favorably impressed (9:16; 11:45).

Overall there are fewer miracles in John than in any of the Synoptics, and only a handful of healings, none of which is an exorcism. But those which are presented are given more explicitly theological interpretation, in keeping with John's more generally complex interplay of history and theology. Fundamentally, they function as signs of God's glory and a testimony (see Witness) of the Father to the Son through the works which he enables him to perform (see Fortna).

4. Authenticity.

4.1. Challenges. In the modern western world many people do not believe in the miraculous healings of the Gospels because they think that science has disproved the possibility of miracles. Biblical miracles, however, by definition involve a supernatural God; if such a God exists, it is only logical to conceive of him as occasionally choosing to transcend the laws of medicine and physics which normally govern the universe. Even today, after fervent prayer or the involvement of faith healers, many people recover from illness in ways which physicians cannot explain.

Other skeptics argue on philosophical grounds that the evidence or testimony for a miraculous healing could never outweigh the evidence in favor of some naturalistic explanation. But it is not obvious why this should be so; such logic actually requires excluding a much larger category of unusual events which human experience has nevertheless proved real (see Brown).

Still other critics argue on historical grounds that the picture of Jesus as healer must be understood as the vestige of a primitive world view which permitted many ancient teachers and leaders to have miracles ascribed to them. Unless one is prepared to accept the equally good testimony of other ancient writers to the thaumaturgic powers of various rabbis (e.g., Hanina ben Dosa and Honi the Rain-maker), Greek philosophers and divine men (e.g., Apollonius of Tyana and Asclepius; see *Divine Man*), and occasionally even a Roman emperor (e.g., Vespasian), one has no reason for believing the Gospels. This argument holds up to a point; there may well be other genuinely supernatural miracles in many periods of world history. God may well use unbelievers to serve his purposes, and the devil certainly employs counterfeit signs to serve his (see Richards). There may be extra-canonical, non-Christian accounts of healings which are true, but for the most part it is inaccurate to say that

numerous other accounts have as much evidence in support of them as do the Gospel healings. And A. E. Harvey's helpful survey of miracle stories in ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman sources demonstrates just how unique the Gospel accounts are both in style and significance.

4.2. Corroboration. Once antisupernatural bias is removed, the Gospel healing miracles actually satisfy the various historical criteria of authenticity quite well. There is good external evidence supporting them. Other portions of the New Testament refer back to Christ's wonder-working powers (e.g., Acts 10:38; 1 Cor 15:4–8; Heb 2:4), and apocryphal Christian texts, while fancifully embellishing the accounts of Jesus' ministry, nevertheless bear indirect testimony to his power to heal by focusing so much attention on this aspect of his career (see esp. the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and the *Acts of Pilate*). Non-Christian Jewish sources also recognize that Jesus was a healer. Both Josephus (*Ant.* 18.63–64) and the Talmud (*b. Sanh.* 107b) refer to his extraordinary powers, although the latter source attributes them to a demonic rather than a divine origin.

Internal evidence proves even more supportive. The miracles pass the dissimilarity test (see Form Criticism); although earlier Jews and later Christians apparently healed some people miraculously, with prayer to God and invocation of the name of Christ regularly featured in their attempts. While individual parallels can be identified for specific Gospel healings (cf. esp. Lk 7:11–17 with Philostratus *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.45), the overall directness, authority, simplicity and restraint of the accounts of Jesus' healings are unique.

The healings satisfy the criterion of multiple attestation (see Form Criticism); they recur in all layers or sources of the Gospel tradition (Mark, John, Q, M and L), and references to them appear in multiple forms as well (summary statements [e.g., Mk 3:7–12], dialogs [e.g., Mt. 11:1–6], controversy stories [e.g., Mk 2:1–12] as well as the numerous narrative accounts of the healings themselves).

They correspond to the Palestinian environment of the early first century; features like the use of spittle (Jn 9:6; Mk 8:23) in a therapeutic context, or the types of illnesses prevalent, all fit in well with the times and customs. Even as specific a detail as the description of the pool of Bethesda near the Sheep Gate having five porticoes (Jn 5:2), where Jesus healed a long-term invalid, has been corroborated by archeology.

Most importantly, the meaning of the healings, as already noted, is closely bound up with Jesus' teaching about the presence of the kingdom of God. They thereby satisfy the criterion of coherence, fitting well with that body of sayings of Jesus most commonly held to be authentic.

5. Sociology.

A major new development in the past decade of NT scholarship centers on sociological analysis. Jesus' healings, no less than other portions of the Gospels, have been scrutinized not so much from a historical perspective, asking "What really happened?" as from a social-scientific perspective, asking "How did the stories of these events function in first-century society?" The work of H. C. Kee and G. Theissen has proved seminal here. They compare the Gospel accounts with stories of healings in other Greco-Roman contexts (e.g., of Isis or Asklepios) which were not necessarily ever viewed as entirely historical. Rather, the stories of healings functioned symbolically to affirm meaning, order and integration of reality in a world filled with conflict and suffering. Similarly, the Gospel healings should be viewed as symbolic accounts which affirm, from a primarily rural, poor and uncultured perspective, the possibility of rescue, salvation and redemption in this life in a world of rapidly overturning geographical, economic and cultural norms.

The sociological method offers important insights into the function of miracle stories in the early Christian world. It is less clear that this method stands as strictly opposed to traditional historical methods as it alleges. The Gospel accounts remain tied to history in a way not entirely identical to various Greco-Roman parallels. If substantial portions of the Evangelist's narratives, including stories of the miraculous, did not occur as described, the claims of Christianity to be built on a unique space-time incarnation of God would be undermined. But granted that Jesus did perform miracles, sociology can prove very beneficial in explaining why people continued to talk and write about them.

6. Significance for Today.

The question of whether or not people living after NT times can expect miraculous healing has often polarized Christianity. At one end of the spectrum many argue that the miracles are unique and not to be repeated following

the close of the apostolic age. Others expect them to be common in every age for those filled with the Holy Spirit and sufficient faith. In fact, the data of the NT supports neither of these extremes. Evidence reinforces both the claim that miraculous healings will appear in almost every age of church history and the observation that such healings will still be more the exception than the norm (see Sabourin).

6.1. Evidence for Continuation. As he sent them out to minister in the cities of Israel, Jesus commanded his disciples to carry on exactly the same kind of healing ministry which he had been performing, and he gave them the power to execute his commands (Mt 10:1–10). Some of the injunctions he gave the disciples on these early missions were later rescinded (Lk 22:35–38), but not the command to heal.

The book of Acts includes close parallels between the types of healings wrought by Christ and those performed by the disciples, proving that the crucifixion, resurrection and coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost did not alter the disciples' ability or need to effect miraculous cures. They are able to heal the lame (Acts 3:1–10; 14:8–10), to cast out demons (16:16–18; 5:16) and to raise the dead (9:36–41; probably 20:7–12). The almost magical powers attached to Christ's robe reappear in conjunction with Peter's shadow (5:15) and Paul's handkerchiefs (19:11–12). The wording of the account of Peter's healing of Aeneas (9:32–35) and of the resurrection of Dorcas (9:36–41) so closely parallels the wording of similar stories in the Gospels (Lk 5:17–26; 8:49–56) that Luke almost certainly was trying to make clear that the apostles had received exactly the same healing power which Jesus himself had. Nor is this power limited to apostles. For example, Luke describes the deacons Stephen and Philip as equally endowed with the ability to work signs and wonders (Acts 6:8; 8:13).

6.2. Evidence of Exceptionality. Though some would argue that there is healing in the atonement (Mt 8:17), clearly no one receives full physical healing until the life to come, since all die. There is good evidence, therefore, that supernatural, physical healing should be viewed as the exception rather than the rule in this life. Healings, like other miracles, are not uniformly spread throughout the pages of Scripture or periods of church history. They tend to be clustered around the initial stages of key advances in the knowledge of God's Word and will—Moses with Pharaoh, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the next two centuries of church history, and sporadically throughout the Christian era until a substantial outpouring of the Holy Spirit has once again made healings well known in the twentieth century.

On the pages of the Gospels there is no indication that Jesus healed all or even a majority of the sick people in his day. He warns against those who would work counterfeit signs and wonders in his name (Mt 7:21–23), especially as the last days unfold (Mt 24:5). He refuses to work signs on demand and warns against an inappropriate dependence on the spectacular (Mt 12:38–42; Jn 4:48; 20:29). Even the most well-authenticated signs do not necessarily prove their divine origin (Mt 9:32–33; 12:22–24); Christian faith should therefore be based on a more solid foundation.

Some of the devil's strongest temptations involved his encouraging Christ to rely on his miraculous power to avoid the way of suffering and the road to the cross (Lk 4:1–12; see Temptation of Jesus). Gethsemane is the most powerful testimony in all of Scripture to the divinely ordained necessity of not always receiving protection from suffering (Lk 22:39–46). In his epistles Paul echoes this theology (esp. 2 Cor 4:7–18; 6:3–10). Not all receive or benefit from gifts of healing, and Paul personally and agonizingly learns the lesson that God's grace is sufficient for him and that God's power is made perfect in Paul's weakness (2 Cor 12:8).

6.3. Conclusion.

Miraculous healings can and do occur today. They are perhaps most prevalent in areas into which the kingdom of God is advancing for the first time, or for the first time in a long while. Exorcisms tend to occur most in conjunction with the preaching of the gospel in lands and areas in which Satan has long held sway and in which Christianity has not flourished. To the extent that Western societies continue to become more paganized, one may expect a continued revival of healings and exorcisms there as well. As Christian individuals and congregations mature, it may well be that the need for such miracles, as a testimony to a non-Christian culture of the truth and power of the gospel, will diminish. But Christians of all theological persuasions must scrupulously avoid dictating to God what he must do or what he cannot do. Ultimately, God's Spirit blows where it wills, and no one can unerringly predict where his gifts of healing will break out (see Smedes).

See also DEMON, DEVIL, SATAN.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. P. J. Achtemeier, "The Lukan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch," in *Perspectives in Luke-Acts*, ed. C. H. Talbert (Danville, IL: AABPR, 1978) 153–67; E. Best, "The Miracles in Mark," *RevExp* 75 (1978) 539–54; O. Betz and W. Grimm, *Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Wunder Jesu* (Frankfurt a. M.: P.

Lang, 1977); C. Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); R. T. Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); B. Gerhardsson, *The Mighty Acts of Jesus according to Matthew* (Lund: Gleer up, 1979); J. B. Green, "Jesus and a Daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:10–17): Test Case for a Lucan Perspective on Jesus' Miracles," *CBQ* 51 (1989) 643–54; A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982); J. P. Heil, "Significant Aspects of the Healing Miracles in Matthew," *CBQ* 41 (1979) 274–87; H. C. Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World* (New Haven: Yale, 1983); idem, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge: University Press, 1986); R. Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles* (New York: Paulist, 1988); J. Richards, *Deliver Us from Evil* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974); L. Sabourin, *The Divine Miracles Discussed and Defended* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1977); L. B. Smedes, ed., *Ministry and the Miraculous* (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1987); G. Theissen, *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983); H. van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1965); D. Wenham and C. Blomberg, eds., *Gospel Perspectives 6: The Miracles of Jesus* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986).

C. L. Blomberg¹

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN. Heb. *tāhōrltāmē'*. Gk. *katharosi akathartosi akatharsia*. According to Lv. 10:10-11 it was the duty of the priests 'to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean' and to teach the people about the differences. These fundamental categories of biblical thought are then expounded in the following chapters of Leviticus.

God is the supremely holy being, and anyone who wishes to come into his presence must be holy too. But uncleanness is a bar to holiness: indeed if any unholy person comes into contact with the holy, he will die (*e.g.* 2 Sa. 6:6-7). Uncleanness has a variety of causes and cures.

Lv. 11 classifies living creatures into clean and unclean. Clean may be eaten, and some of the clean creatures may be sacrificed, but unclean may not. Cud-chewing animals with split hooves (*e.g.* cattle, sheep), are clean and may be eaten, but others (*e.g.* pigs) are unclean. Birds, except birds of prey, are clean and edible. Ordinary fish with fins and scales are also clean, but other aquatic creatures (*e.g.* shellfish) are unclean (Lv. 11:9-12).

All animals, whether clean or unclean when alive, when dead will make those who touch them unclean (Lv. 11:28, 31, 39). Even more polluting are human corpses. So holy people, like priests and Nazirites, are forbidden to mourn for the dead, in case they make themselves unclean (Lv. 21:1-12; Nu. 6:1-12). Laitly who become unclean by touching a corpse remain so for a week.

Some bodily discharges also make people unclean. Mothers are polluted by the puerperal discharge for forty days after giving birth to a son, and for eighty days after bearing a daughter (Lv. 12). Sexual intercourse pollutes both parties for a day and menstruation makes a woman unclean for a week (Lv. 15:18-19). Long-term discharges from the sexual organs make people unclean for as long as the discharge continues. Skin diseases of various sorts may also make a person unclean. Lv. 13 distinguishes between unclean complaints (*e.g.* active, sore, peeling conditions) and stable conditions (*e.g.* baldness) classed as clean. Anyone suffering from a polluting skin condition remains unclean until it clears up. In general, short-term human unclean-ness may be cleared by waiting a day and washing in water. When a condition causing long-term uncleanness clears up (*e.g.* skin disease), the sufferer has also to offer a sacrifice so as to become ritually clean again (Lv. 14).

Some sins pollute not just the sinner but the land and even the sanctuary itself. For example, sexual sins such as incest, adultery, homosexuality and bestiality, pollute those involved and the land (Lv. 18). They may lead to the

CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly

JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament

C. L. Blomberg Blomberg, Craig L, Ph.D. Associate Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, Denver, Colorado, USA.

¹Green, Joel B. ; McKnight, Scot ; Marshall, I. Howard: Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels. Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1992, S. 299

loss of the land or the 'cutting-off', *i.e.* death by supernatural causes, of the offender (Lv. 18:25, 28-29). Idols and idolatry are also polluting. Worship of other gods, consulting the dead or possession of idols makes the perpetrators, the land and the sanctuary unclean (Lv. 18:21; 20:2-5; Ezk. 20:7, 18). Homicide is another sin that pollutes the land (Nu. 35:33-34). The uncleanness caused by these sins is so serious that only the death of the sinner suffices to cleanse it.

I. Theology of uncleanness

Modern readers tend to dismiss the uncleanness rules as unintelligible or irrelevant. Yet notions of uncleanness are found in most societies, including our own, and the biblical rules express one of its central theological convictions and served to teach it to Israel. Since Mary Douglas (1966) first looked at these rules from an anthropological perspective, there has emerged a broad consensus among biblical scholars about their significance.

Fundamental is the contrast between holiness and uncleanness. God is perfectly holy, whereas the unclean are those opposed to God, or who fall short of his perfection. But divine holiness does not merely demand total religious and moral commitment, it means life. God himself is full and perfect life, so that death is the very antithesis of holiness. Thus uncleanness is very often associated with death.

God	sin
life	death
holiness	uncleanness

Israel, the people of God, is called to be holy, 'because I the Lord am holy' (Lv. 20:26). This means shunning idolatry, murder and sexual immorality, but also avoiding the other conditions associated with death.

If the quintessence of uncleanness is death, it becomes clear why corpses are regarded as so polluting. Similarly, the loss of life liquids, such as blood or semen, means that the person has less life within and therefore may be moving towards death. So, too, people suffering from serious skin diseases are not enjoying the fullness of life, and they are therefore classified as unclean. Only the pure and clean may approach God. Handicapped priests may not officiate at the altar and blemished animals may not be sacrificed there (Lv. 21:17-23; 22:18-25). Lay people affected by uncleanness are barred from worship and sometimes forced to live outside the community until they recover (Nu. 5:1-4; 2 Ki. 7:3-4).

There are degrees of uncleanness in biblical thinking. So rather than regard holy and unclean, life and death, as mutually exclusive categories, it is better to see a spectrum of conditions ranging from the very holy to the very unclean.

holy (<i>cf.</i> God, life)	priests sacrificial animals
nearly holy	handicapped priests blemished sacrificals animals
clean	clean laity clean (edible) animals
unclean	unclean people unclean animals
very unclean (<i>cf.</i> death)	human corpses dead animals

These harsh regulations declared very loudly one aspect of God's character: he is life, perfect life, both morally and physically. He is opposed to death: those who embrace actions that lead to death separate themselves from God.

II. The food laws

The food laws (Lv. 11; Dt. 14) do not immediately seem to fit this understanding of uncleanness. Why are pigs, camels and crabs unclean and somehow closer to death than sheep, goats or salmon, which are clean? (However, that birds of prey are classified as unclean is suggestive, for they kill other creatures or live on carrion.)

The standard Jewish explanation is that the classification is arbitrary: they test obedience. Will you obey God, even if you cannot understand his reasons? Or is the aim to promote health? Pork, shellfish, and so on, often carry disease. There is nothing in the laws to suggest it. Some items classified as unclean are healthy foods, and *vice versa*. Nor does this explanation warrant Jesus' abolition of the food laws. Would he have wanted his disciples to eat unhealthy foods? Another scholarly explanation is that some of the unclean animals (*e.g.* pigs) were used in pagan worship. But the premier clean sacrificial beast in Israel, the bull, was also highly valued in Egyptian and Canaanite religion, so reaction to foreign practice does not explain these rules.

Once again Mary Douglas has put forward the most plausible type of explanation. She noted that the cleanness rules structure the bird, animal and human realms in a similar way (see above).

The realms of birds and beasts both contain a mixture of clean and unclean species. The clean may be eaten, the unclean may not. Within the clean group there is a subgroup of animals or birds that may also be sacrificed (*e.g.* sheep, pigeons). This threefold division of the bird and animal kingdoms corresponds to the divisions among human beings. Mankind falls into two main groups, Israel and the Gentiles. Within Israel only one group, the priests may approach the altar to offer sacrifice. This matches the law's understanding of sacred space. Outside the camp is the abode of Gentiles and unclean Israelites. Ordinary Israelites dwell inside the camp, but only priests may approach the altar or enter the tabernacle tent.

These distinctions served to remind Israel of her special status as God's chosen people. The food laws not only reminded Israel of her distinctiveness, but they also served to enforce it. Jews faithful to these laws would tend to avoid Gentile company, in case they were offered unclean food to eat (*cf.* Dn. 1:8-16).

God is identified with life and holiness, and uncleanness is associated with death and opposition to God. The food laws symbolize that Israel is God's people, called to enjoy his life, while Gentile idolaters are by and large opposed to him and his people, and face death. The food laws also underline respect for life directly as well as symbolically. Eating meat is described as a concession in Gn. 9:1-4. And it may only be eaten if the blood is drained out first, 'for the life is ... the blood' (Lv. 17:11). Therefore, consumption of the life liquid is banned. Wanton slaughter of living creatures is also discouraged by the limited number of animals classified as clean. In both ways, these food laws tended to promote respect for life.

III. Clean and unclean in the prophets

The prophets (*e.g.* Is. 6:3-5) focus on the worst types of uncleanness attributable to human sin, not only natural types of uncleanness. Thus Ho. 5:3 accuses Israel of contracting uncleanness (NIV corruption) through unfaithfulness to the Lord, which he calls spiritual harlotry. Ho. 6:7-10 associates uncleanness with murder and infidelity to the covenant. Is. 30:22 and Je. 2:7; 7:30 declare that idolatry defiles the land and the sanctuary.

But it is the priest/prophet Ezekiel, brought up strictly to avoid uncleanness (4:14), who makes most of the concept in his condemnation of Israel. Though he knows the laws on naturally occurring uncleanness (44:25; *cf.* 22:26 alluding to Lv. 10:10-11), he repeatedly focuses on the uncleanness caused by Israel's moral and spiritual apostasy, particularly bloodshed and idolatry, which he terms harlotry (*e.g.* 22:3-4, 11, 27; 33:25-26; 36:17-18).

IV. Clean and unclean in the NT

Like the prophets, the NT writers are most concerned with those sins which cause grave uncleanness, *e.g.* idolatry, sexual immorality and murder. According to Jesus, 'What comes out of a man makes him unclean ... evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, ...' (Mk. 7:16, 21-22). Frequently the demons cast out by Jesus are termed 'unclean spirits' (*e.g.* Mk. 1:23, 26-27). The essence of uncleanness is opposition to God. In the epistles, uncleanness is sometimes sandwiched between sexual immorality and greed, which is idolatry (*e.g.* Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5), again reflecting the OT. However, as in the prophets, Mk. 7:21 and Mt. 15:19, uncleanness is most often

associated with sexual sin (e.g. Rom. 1:24; Gal. 5:19; 1 Thes. 4:7), so that impurity is virtually identified with misuse of sex.

In these respects the NT teaching fully underlines the OT view of uncleanness, but in one important respect it transforms it. The natural types of uncleanness are either healed by Jesus or abolished by him. Thus he touches lepers, a woman suffering from a flow of blood, and even corpses, healing the former and bringing the dead back to life (e.g. Mk. 1:40-41; 5:21-43). The OT rarely offered healing for the unclean (e.g. 2 Ki. 5:14). But, in Christ, God drew near to the sufferers and healed them personally. His life-giving character is thus displayed even more vividly in the life of Jesus than in the OT era.

The OT food laws reminded the Jews of their special status as the one people chosen by God. The clean (edible) creatures symbolized Israel, whereas the unclean (prohibited) foods symbolized the Gentile nations. But the church is open to people of all nations, not just Jews, so it is inappropriate for the food laws to be maintained. In Mt. 15:16-17 and Mk. 7:18-19, Jesus' critique of the food laws is immediately followed by the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (describing herself as a dog, *i.e.* unclean), whose daughter, possessed by an unclean spirit, was healed by Jesus (Mt. 15:21-28; Mk. 7:24-30).

Jesus' ministry and teaching thus laid the foundation for outreach to the Gentiles and the abolition of the food laws, but in Acts 10 the decisive step is taken. Peter has a vision in which a heavenly voice commands him to kill and eat unclean animals. He responds: 'Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.' Men sent by Cornelius, a Roman centurion, come asking for Peter to visit him. When he arrives at the house of Cornelius, Peter explains why he has come: 'It is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean' (Acts 10:14, 28). The significance of this Cornelius episode is underlined by Luke recounting it three times in Acts 10, 11 and 15. The Jerusalem council confirmed that it was right to include Gentiles within the church and simultaneously to abrogate the main food laws. The only uncleanness regulations they imposed concerned idolatry, sexual immorality and blood, which were the worst types of uncleanness in the OT (Acts 15:20). Paul takes it for granted that the other food laws no longer apply to Christians (e.g. 1 Cor. 8:8; 1 Tim. 4:3-5).

BIBLIOGRAPHY. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 1966; *idem*. *Implicit Meanings*, 1975; G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 1979; P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 1992; W. Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 1993; D. P. Wright, 'Unclean and Clean (OT), *ABD* 6, pp. 729-41. G.J.W²

idem idem (Lat.), the same author

ABD The Anchor Bible Dictionary

G.J.W G. J. Wenham, M.A., Ph.D., Professor of Old Testament, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education

²Wood, D. R. W. ; Marshall, I. Howard: *New Bible Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1996, S. 209