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**DIVINE HEALING**

*Scripture Reading: Acts 19:11, 12; I Timothy 5:23*

“Do you believe God heals today?” We have been asked this question countless times, and our answer is always the same. “Yes, God heals today but not through the so-called divine healers.” We also like to point out that while God is fully capable of providing instantaneous, miraculous cures, these are the exception rather than the rule in this dispensation.

One of the promises God made to Israel was that if she would obey the covenant He made with them, the Lord would “take away from thee all sickness” (Deuteronomy 7:15). When Christ came to earth as “a minister of the circumcision (Jews)” (Romans 15:8a), He performed many healings to demonstrate His power and authority in Israel. All of this was done “to confirm the promises made unto the fathers” (Romans 15:8b).

When Israel rejected her Messiah, and refused the offer of the kingdom made through the twelve apostles (Acts 3:19-21), God raised up the apostle Paul to go to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). Paul was given the “signs of an apostle” (II Corinthians 2:12) to confirm that he was divinely sanctioned.

As God began phasing out Israel's covenant, Paul was able to work “special miracles...so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them” (Acts 19:11, 12). Yet only a few years later, Paul wrote to Timothy, “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities” (I Timothy 5:23). When God brought down the final curtain on Israel's stage (Acts 28:27, 28), Paul's gift to heal was withdrawn.

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## ISRAEL'S RISING AND FALLING

*Scripture Reading: Isaiah 60:3; Romans 11:11*

God has always desired the salvation of the Gentiles. Yet throughout history, He has chosen different methods to bring this about. Before the time of Abraham, God dealt directly with the nations, manifesting His glory "by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead..." (Romans 1:20); but the nations responded only with wickedness and rebellion. This rebellion was manifested in the building of the city and tower of Babel, and their proclamation, "let us make us a name" (Genesis 11:4).

God's response was to scatter the Gentiles and choose a family to be a witness to the rest of the earth. Abraham was told, "I will make of thee a great nation...and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:2, 3). God's design was to bless this nation (Israel) beyond measure to attract the interest of the nations around them. Therefore Isaiah wrote, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy *rising*" (Isaiah 60:3).

Unfortunately, as time went by, Israel failed to be the light to the nations. God tried to reach her through the prophets, through sending His own Son, and finally through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Israel would not repent. Therefore, God allowed her to fall; but here is where we see God's great wisdom and grace. God is not mocked and His plans are not thwarted. Paul writes, "I say then, Have they (Israel) stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their *fall* salvation is come to the Gentiles..." (Romans 11:11).

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## DIVINE HEALING (Continued)

*Scripture Reading: Isaiah 53:4, 5; Matthew 8:17;  
I Peter 2:24*

It is often claimed by "faith healers" that "there is healing in the atonement." This is supposedly based on Isaiah's prophecy where we read, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4, 5). Let us test this doctrine by the Scriptures.

Isaiah 53:4 is quoted by Matthew. After the Lord healed Peter's mother-in-law and many other sick folks, we are told this was done "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, [He] Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17). Notice carefully it says this portion of Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled *right there*, not two years later when He died on the cross.

But what about the second part of Isaiah's prophecy, which says "with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5b)? "His stripes" definitely point to the suffering He bore at the time of the cross. Again, Scripture interprets Scripture. Peter quotes this verse not in a context of physical healing but of spiritual healing. "Who [Jesus] his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto *righteousness*: by whose stripes ye were healed" (I Peter 2:24).

Physical health was never guaranteed to the believer of this dispensation. Indeed, "we ourselves groan within ourselves, *waiting* for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our *body*" (Romans 8:23b). If we should be called to suffer physically, let us claim the promise of II Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

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**MY GOSPEL***Scripture Reading: Romans 16:25*

In three places, the apostle Paul refers to the message committed to him as "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8). Why does Paul personalize the gospel in this way? It is surely not out of pride or egotism, for Paul's words were written by divine inspiration.

Paul called his message "my gospel" to set it apart from the message preached by the twelve apostles. For you see, none of these men could call their gospel "my gospel" because it was not just revealed to one of them but to all twelve. But when God unveiled His message for the new dispensation of grace, He chose to reveal it to and through only one man, the Apostle Paul. Someone will ask, "Didn't the Apostle Paul preach the same Lord Jesus Christ as the twelve apostles?" The answer is "Yes, but in a different way." In the words of our text, Paul preached Jesus Christ "according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25b).

The gospel preached by the twelve pertained to Christ's offer of the kingdom to Israel, and is called, appropriately, "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23). Paul's gospel pertains to God's gracious offer of salvation without works during this present dispensation of grace, and is called, appropriately, "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). The majority of churches seem intent on mixing these two messages, but the Word of God maintains a clear distinction between the two. By the grace of God, let us boldly proclaim the gospel of grace which Paul so passionately referred to as "my gospel."

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*Notes:***RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD***Scripture Reading: II Timothy 2:15*

Imagine sitting down to a fine meal at a friend's house. On the table before you are many delicious dishes: steaming roast beef, snow-white mashed potatoes, deep brown gravy, golden corn, fresh salads and delicious desserts. After the giving of thanks, you prepare to dish up a generous helping, but the host stops you and begins placing each item in a large blender. After thoroughly blending it, he places a large glass in front of you and fills it with this unappetizing mixture. Doesn't sound too good, does it? Yet this is exactly how many folks study the Bible.

The Bible is unique in that it not only tells us the truth about God, it also includes instructions on how to properly understand its contents. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). Unfortunately, these instructions are often ignored, and the result is confusion. The religious rituals of Israel are often mixed with the "no works" faith of the Body of Christ. The sign gifts of tongues, healings and miracles are attempted in this "no signs" age of grace.

The solution, of course, is to recognize that while all Scripture is for our learning (Romans 15:4), not all Scripture addresses us in this dispensation. (See Exodus 19:6; Matthew 10:5, 6; James 1:1.) We must come to acknowledge that Paul is our apostle (Romans 11:13; II Timothy 1:11), and that in his epistles alone we find the hope, calling and instructions for the church, the Body of Christ. Then, and only then, our Bible study becomes enjoyable and truly nourishing!

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**PROGRESSIVE REVELATION***Scripture Reading: Romans 3:21*

Two of the smallest words in the Bible actually carry the greatest impact of how we understand Scripture. These two words are "but now." While the Bible is the Word of God from cover to cover, it was not all given at once or to the same audience. What was spoken to one group of people in an earlier time may not directly apply to another group of people in later times. This is called the principle of "Progressive Revelation," and we find many examples of this in Scripture.

In Romans 3:21, the Apostle Paul writes, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." At one time, the law of Moses played an integral part in righteousness. Not that the law itself could bring righteousness, it could not; but before the dispensation of the grace of God was committed to Paul (See Ephesians 3:1, 2.), the law was God's prescribed method of demonstrating the righteousness which comes by faith. In other words, if a godly Jew under the law wanted to show that he believed God, there was only one way to do it: be in obedience to the law. Therefore, while the law did not bring righteousness, keeping the law went hand in hand with living a righteous life.

But according to Romans 3:21, God's righteousness is no longer associated with law-keeping. This is why Paul goes on to proclaim, "for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14b). Those who do not recognize the principle of progressive revelation continue to draw people back under the law with its sabbaths and ordinances; but let us rather move on in grace!

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**GREAT DIFFERENCE; NO DIFFERENCE***Scripture Reading: Exodus 11:7; Romans 10:12*

A popular slogan says, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross." This is a catchy way of saying what Paul proclaims in Romans 10:12, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." What a blessing that all can come to Christ in simple faith regardless of national or racial origin, but there are many who do not realize that things were not always this way.

When God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees to become the father of His chosen people Israel, He made a great difference between Jew and Gentile. This distinction is illustrated in Exodus 11:7. "But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a *difference* something, He is very thorough! He maintained the distinction between Israel and the Egyptians right down to keeping the dogs from barking at the Jews or their animals. This difference was maintained all the way through Israel's history, including the time of Christ and His apostles. When speaking to the woman at the well, the Lord affirmed that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). When sending out the twelve apostles, Christ "commanded them saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5, 6).

With the raising up of the Apostle Paul, however, God erased these distinctions and now offers salvation to all on the same basis: faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

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**THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY**

*Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:22, 23*

Many Christians believe that every time the word "church" appears in Scripture, it refers to the same thing. This is unfortunate, for this thinking has led to much error and confusion. The fact is, at least three churches can be distinguished in Scripture.

The first church we find in the Bible is "the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). This was the Old Testament congregation of Israel. Some would object to calling Israel a church, but this is exactly what the Holy Spirit calls her. In fact the Hebrew word for "congregation," found numerous times in the Old Testament, is equivalent to the Greek word for "church." (See Psalm 22:22 & Hebrews 2:12.) Yet, the Old Testament Israelite church is not the church of today.

The next church we read of in Scripture is yet future. Christ spoke of it in Matthew 16:18 where Christ told Peter, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell (Greek *hades*) shall not prevail against it." This church is still future, for it is begun with a resurrected people. The "gates of hades" is not a reference to Satan's forces, as many teach, but a reference to the entrance (and exit) of the place of the dead (confer with Isaiah 38:10 where "gates of the grave" is literally "the gates of sheol"— sheol being the Hebrew equivalent to the Greek *hades*).

The third church is the church of today. Paul calls it "the church which is his body" (Ephesians 1:22, 23). All true believers today are members of the Body of Christ, the one true church in this dispensation of grace. Are you a member of this church?

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