

FOR WHAT DID CHRIST ATONE IN ISA 53:4-5?

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Isaiah 53:4-5 raises the question, "For what did Christ atone?" or more specifically, "Is physical healing in the atonement?" Outside Isaiah 53, Scriptures touching on Christ's atonement in Leviticus and Hebrews deal only with sin, not sickness. The context and language of Isa 53:3-12 address sin alone. A broad range of Scriptures teach that Christ died to deal with humankind's sin dilemma. Matthew 8:16-17 uses an illustration of physical healing to demonstrate a spiritual truth about the Christian's resurrection hope of being sinless and thus in perfect health. First Pet 2:24, studied in both broad context (2:18-25) and narrow (2:24-25), reasons that Christ atoned for sin, not sickness. Therefore, the conclusion is that physical healing is not in the atonement, but rather comes through the atonement after resurrection, because only then does the atonement eliminate the moral cause of physical infirmities, which is sin in one's personal experience.

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As I browsed through some commentaries at my favorite Christian bookstore in Columbus, Ohio, a dear lady whom I had recently visited in the hospital and prayed for entered and walked toward me. Greeting her, I remarked how well she looked. She responded, "By His stripes I have been healed. Praise God there is healing in Christ's atonement."

The bookstore was no place that day for a theology lesson. I did not want to dampen her joy, nor did I want to rob her confidence that

God had somehow been involved in her physical restoration (Deut 32:39). However, her understanding of Isa 53:5 and 1 Pet 2:24 did not relate biblically to what she had experienced.

I wondered where she had learned those proof texts. Perhaps she had read or listened to a faith healer's explanation of Isaiah 53.¹ A friend or neighbor may have told her. Possibly she heard this on Christian TV or radio. For certain, many explanations of Isa 53:4-5 at the popular level raise more questions than they answer and frequently prove to be less than precise biblical treatments of the subject at hand.

By a careful look at Isaiah 53 and related passages, the following discussion purposes to entertain biblically such questions as, "Is there healing in the atonement?" "If there is, what kind, how much, and when do I get it?" Perhaps it would be more accurate to inquire, "Was Christ punished for our diseases?"² Or "In what way is physical healing related to the atonement?" or even "For what did Christ atone?"³ Did Christ bear our diseases in His body the same way He bore our sins? Can we have freedom from sickness in this life as we have forgiveness of sins?

The search for biblical answers begins by looking not at healing, but rather at the atonement.

¹For brief historical summaries of the faith healing movement in the United States and Canada see Richard Mayhue, *The Healing Promise* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994) 27-39, and John Wilkinson, "Physical Healing and the Atonement," *EQ* 63/2 (April 1991):149-55. For more in-depth treatments consult J. Sidlow Baxter, *Divine Healing of the Body* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 29-105; Frank C. Darling, *Biblical Healing* (Boulder, CO: Vista, 1989); *Christian Healing in the Middle Ages and Beyond* (Boulder, CO: Vista, 1990); *The Restoration of Christian Healing* (Boulder, CO: Vista, 1992); David E. Harrell, Jr., *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1975); Michael G. Moriarity, *The New Charismatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 20-86; Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (reprint, Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 1972) 33-69.

²Alva J. McClain, *Was Christ Punished for Our Diseases?* (Winona Lake: BMH, n.d.).

³W. Kelly Bokovay, "The Relationship of Physical Healing to the Atonement," *Διδασκαλία* 3/2 (April 1991):26, 35.

The Atonement⁴

Mention of the atonement sacrifice (כִּפּוּר [kippūr, "pacify, atone"]) first appears in Scripture as a part of the Mosaic sacrificial system⁵ (cf. Exod 29:33, 36-37; 30:10, 15-16). On this one day of the year, Israel's high priest entered the Holy of Holies, approached the Ark of the covenant, and sprinkled blood to atone for the sins of Israel.

Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the very first high priest to enter the Holy Place with a bull for an offering (Lev 16:3). Was it for a sin or a sick offering? Unquestionably, it was a sin offering (Lev 16:11). Aaron offered a bull for a sin offering—first for himself and his household (16:5-6).

And he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel, and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins. . . (16:16, cf. v. 34).

Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel, and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins . . . (16:21).

Moses instituted the Day of Atonement by the authority of God about 1450-1400 B.C. Hundreds of years later (about 700-680 B.C.), Isaiah wrote prophetically concerning a coming servant who would be "the ultimate atonement." The Atonement ritual that Moses established and the atonement prophecy that Isaiah penned, Jesus Christ would later fulfill in reality when He died for sins—not sicknesses.

The book of Hebrews (the "Leviticus" of the NT) demonstrates

⁴The other significant question raised by Isa 53:4-5, "For whom did Christ atone?" is treated in such standard works as R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985) 513-35; R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976) 1:59-85; and George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Atonement According to the Apostles* (reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988).

⁵Read John V. Dahms, "Dying With Christ," *JETS* 36/1 (March 1993):15-23, which carefully relates the OT atonement to Christ's substitutionary death.

the unity of Scripture. When the final atonement that propitiated God's wrath occurred, Christ served as both the high priest and the sacrifice.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb 9:11-12).

Jesus Christ as God incarnate became the Lamb slain for the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36; 1 John 2:2).

Hebrews 10 addresses the atonement's fulfillment in Jesus Christ. For example, "Then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Thy will.' He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:9-10).

In the old economy, year after year the high priest had to make atonement first for himself and his family and then for the nation. But with the new covenant, Christ had to sacrifice only once for everyone else, but not for Himself. Isaiah 53 anticipated Christ's one time sacrifice: "But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God. . . . For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:12, 14).

Both Leviticus and Hebrews demonstrate that in God's mind the atonement dealt immediately with sin, not sickness. It had everything to do with humankind's sin problem and the redemption needed to remove sin and its penalty, so that true believers might stand eternally justified before a holy God. Christ's atonement paid the due penalty for sin when God poured out His wrath upon Jesus Christ while upon the cross.

Textual Comments on Isaiah 53

Isaiah 53 serves indispensably as the heart of anyone's healing

theology.⁶ One's biblical expectations for eventually restored health rest on this biblical bedrock. The "Magna Charta" of God's healing promise focuses on Christ's sacrificial death at Calvary. Clearly the emphasis of Isaiah 53 centers on spiritual salvation.⁷ Since sin is the moral cause of physical infirmities, it is not surprising (1) that sin and sickness are related and (2) that dealing with sin (the cause) eventually addresses sickness (the effect).

Isaiah 53 raises the question then, "What, if anything, does the prophet promise about physical restoration?"⁸ Or put another way, "Is Isa 53:4-5 limited to dealing only with sin and salvation?"

Surely our griefs He⁹ Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet

⁶I have been greatly surprised by the deficiency of attention given to Isaiah 53 by some of the most recent, highly visible volumes advocating a contemporary healing ministry. For instance, Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 169, devotes only one paragraph in a 299 page book on healing. John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) take less than four pages (152-56) out of 269 pages, but spend most of that space discussing what men have said rather than what the Scriptures teach. Benny Hinn, *Lord, I Need a Miracle* (Nashville: Nelson, 1993) provides less than two pages (55-56). Even Jeffrey Niehaus in *The Kingdom and the Power* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993) devotes less than 3 pages (48-50). For an excellent exegetical discussion of Isaiah 53 see Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 3:340-54.

⁷The New Testament consistently presents Christ as the Christian's substitutionary sin bearer in His atonement. See Matt 20:28; John 1:29; Rom 4:25; 5:6-8; 8:3; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4; 3:13; 4:4-5; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.

⁸This is a legitimate question in light of other passages in Isaiah which point to a time of physical healing, e.g. 29:18; 33:24; 35:5-6; 65:20.

⁹This writer has assumed the Messianic identification of Jehovah's servant in Isaiah 52-53. See detailed discussions of this issue in David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah* (reprint, Minneapolis: James Family, 1978) 3-47, and Kenneth D. Litwak, "The Use of Quotations from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in the New Testament," *JETS* 26/4 (December 1983):385-94. Litwak notes, "Though quotations from Isaiah 53 are not numerous in the New Testament, allusions to the passage are deeply imbedded in the work of all the principal New Testament writers as well as the early fathers, particularly Clement and Barnabas. From this fact it is certain that the interpretation of Isaiah 53 as referring to Jesus belongs to the earliest thought of the primitive church" (387). For a classic Jewish example of rejecting Messianic

we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed through for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (Isa 53:4-6).

The Hebrew words¹⁰ translated "griefs" (חֲלָוִי [hōllī, "sick, weak"]) and "sorrows" (מַכָּוֹת [makōḏb, "pain"])¹² in Isa 53:3, 4, 10 can legitimately refer to either physical infirmities, mental pain, or spiritual problems. Those who limit this language only to physical problems should more accurately say that the words "may" refer to physical problems, but not necessarily.¹³ Note also that none of the

implications see Gerald Sigal, *The Jew and the Christian Missionary: A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity* (New York: KTAV, 1981).

¹⁰The language of Isaiah 53 is decidedly that of the atonement in Leviticus 16, which points strongly to a primary, if not exclusive, focus on the atonement's relationship to sin, not sickness. Read Douglas Judisch, "Propitiation in the Language and Typology of the Old Testament," *CTQ* 48/4 (October 1984):221-43; "Propitiation in Old Testament Prophecy" *CTQ* 49/1 (January 1985):1-17; W. Kay, "Isaiah," in *The Bible Commentary*, ed. by F.C. Cook (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 5:266; F. Duane Lindsey, "The Career of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:12" *BSac* 139/556 (October-December 1982):312-29 and 140/557 (January-March 1983):21-39.

¹¹See Isa 1:5; Jer 6:7, 10:19; Hos 5:13 for examples other than actual sickness.

¹²See Ps 32:10; Jer 30:15; Lam 1:12, 18 for examples other than actual sickness.

¹³The terms "infirmities" and "sorrows," each of which should be identified as a metonymy of effect for cause, are used generally for all suffering which is viewed as the result of sin. This does not mean that Christ became sick or infirm in a substitutionary sense, nor that divine healing is guaranteed through the atonement (except in the ultimate sense of a resurrection body)" (Lindsey, "The Career" 23). See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech in the Bible* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968) 538, 560, for a discussion of metonymy in general and metonymy of effect in particular. Certainly, if metonymy is not the speech figure intended in 53:4-5, then metaphor easily explains the use of "healing" (רָפָא) in 53:5 (cf. J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, in vol. 49 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. by David A. Hubbard, et al. [Dallas: Word, 1988] 149, who opts for metaphor in both Isa 53:5 and 1 Pet 2:24). Heb. 12:12-13 provides a fine example.

primary translations—NASB, NIV, and NKJV—reflect the physical idea, but rather all translate with the spiritual in view.

Words should always be understood in a context and with a meaning intended by the author. Normally, the surrounding context indicates what the author meant by the words he used. A careful analysis of context frequently clarifies whatever definitional ambiguities may exist.

Contextually, Isaiah 53 uses three different Hebrew words for sin—translated "sin," "iniquity," and "transgression"—at least nine times in Isaiah 53 to identify decidedly the passage's intent. For example, in 53:5 Christ was "pierced through for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities"; so that, in 53:6, "the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." Further, He will "bear their iniquities" (53:11), and "He Himself bore the sins of many" (53:12). The obvious focus of Isaiah 53 is on sin, not on its immediate effects upon the body.¹⁴

Isaiah 53:4 reads that he "bore" (נָשָׂא, *nāsāʾ*) our griefs and "carried" (שָׂבַל, *sābal*) our sorrows. Isaiah used these same verbs in vv. 11 and 12. As one compares v. 3 with v. 4 and then v. 4 with v. 11 and v. 12, he can see that the emphasis relates to salvation. The more frequent use of redemption (vv. 3, 11-12) interprets the use in 53:4. Christ took upon Himself sin, not sickness. It is also no small consideration that the LXX rendered the first part of 53:4 as an interpretive translation, "He bore our sins."

Note additionally that "He would render Himself as a guilt offering" (53:10), that "He will bear their iniquities" (53:11), and that "He Himself bore the sin of many" (53:12). Hebrews 9:28 also comes to this grand conclusion: "So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many. . . ." Both Hebrews and Isaiah 53 focus on spiritual redemption.

The "scourging" or "wounds" (53:5) received by Christ, translated

¹⁴See also the parallel in 53:6 between "sheep going astray" and humans having turned to their own way and thus the Lord causing "the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." Christ was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgressions (53:8). He was numbered with the transgressors and interceded for the transgressors (53:12).

חַבְּרָה (*ḥābūrā*, "stripe, blow"), can speak of actual physical wounds (Gen 4:23; Exod 21:25) or the spiritual afflictions of sin (Ps 38:5; Isa 1:6). Although Christ was physically afflicted by man before and while upon the cross, it is most consistent with the remainder of Isaiah 53 to see this in the latter sense of Christ being afflicted by the Father for the sins He bore (53:10-12).

Further, note that Isaiah used רָפָא (*rāpā*^o, "heal, make healthful") six times in his prophetic book (6:10; 19:22; 30:26; 53:5; 57:18; 57:19). While *rāpā*^o can either be literal with regard to physical healing (Gen 20:17) or figurative in the OT, in each of Isaiah's five uses, other than 53:5, he employs it figuratively of healing from sin. In light of (1) this otherwise exclusive figurative use by Isaiah, (2) the previous discussion concerning metonymy of effect, and (3) the figurative use of "wounds," it is reasonable to conclude that Isaiah intended the use of *rāpā*^o in 53:5 to be figurative also.

Even though there might seem to be a veiled inference to the physical benefit that sin's removal can produce upon the body, the language of Isaiah 53 demands an understanding in terms of Christ's redemption of sinners. Isaiah intended to convey the thought that Christ atoned for sin.

Theological Comments Relating to Isaiah 53

Consider from other Scriptures some clarifying theological observations relating to sin and salvation.

First, the present body is corruptible; that is, it will degenerate until death (1 Cor 15:50-58; 2 Cor 5:1-4). The physical element in this life will ultimately separate from the spiritual (Jas 2:26). But the good news for believers is that one day they will put on the incorruptible—a form that will remain eternally constant, pure, and without sin.

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body (Rom 8:23).

Believers have only the firstfruits of the Spirit now and will not

begin to see what God will do in themselves until they leave this world and enter into His presence. Now they groan within themselves, eagerly awaiting their adoption as sons and the redemption of their bodies. The future will be fantastic by comparison. They will experience afflictions no more because the moral source of sickness—sin—will be no more.

Second, Christ died for sins. The gospel immediately becomes good news about the sin problem, but not necessarily so with physical problems. Read about this in such biblical texts as Matt 1:21, John 1:29; Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 15:1-3; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Heb 9:1-28; 1 John 3:5.

Disease is not sin, but a consequence of sin. Disease carries no penalty which must be atoned for as sin does. Disease does not interfere with a man's fellowship with God like sin does. A sick man can still enjoy fellowship with God in spite of suffering from disease, and his experience of sickness may even deepen that fellowship. Once we recognize that sin and disease belong to different categories we can readily see that the atonement will affect them in different ways. In the case of sin we can know forgiveness in this present life, but there is nothing corresponding to this experience of forgiveness in the case of disease. The only thing which could correspond to forgiveness would be an immunity to disease which would be as permanent as our forgiveness. Those who were healed by Jesus in the gospels were not given such an immunity for this would have meant that they would never have died. Even Lazarus who was raised from the dead eventually died again. What was true for them is also true for us today. When we receive forgiveness on putting our faith in Jesus Christ and His atonement on our behalf, we are not made perfect by having sin and its effects removed from us. Sin will only be finally removed at the resurrection. What applies to sin, also applies to its effects such as disease for these too will only be removed at the resurrection.¹⁵

Next, Christ was made sin and not sickness. Paul writes about the ministry of reconciliation. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2

¹⁵Wilkinson, *Physical Healing* 162-63

Cor 5:21). Christ was never made sickness.

Fourth, Christ forgave sins, not sicknesses. John notes, "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (1 John 2:12).

Fifth, Christ gave Himself for sins and not for sicknesses. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father . . ." (Gal 1:3-4).

Next, the Bible teaches that if a person is truly saved, he cannot lose his salvation (John 10:28-29; Rom 8:28-39; Phil 1:6; Jude 24). Now, carrying this thought out to its logical conclusion, assuming (for argument's sake) that physical healing is as much in the atonement for today as is redemption, yields an interesting conclusion. A truly saved person cannot lose his salvation (John 5:24) and God has given salvation through no human merit—through no price that human beings have paid. Since these two biblical facts are true, then if physical healing did share in the atonement as does spiritual healing, people ought not to lose their physical health and thus would never die.

But is that what really happens or what the Scriptures teach? No! The Scripture teaches that all must die (Heb 9:27)! The deaths of such godly examples as Abraham, Isaac, Daniel, Paul, and Timothy show that God's greatest saints were sick and eventually died. Therefore, it is biblical to conclude that though a related physical aspect may be in the atonement, it will not apply until after death and the redemption of Christians' bodies by resurrection (Rom 8:23).¹⁶

Seventh, genuine believers have assurance of their salvation, but have no guarantee concerning the quality of physical life or health.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes

¹⁶See Mayhue, *The Healing Promise* 85-116, for a detailed analysis of healing history in the OT, gospels, Acts, and the NT epistles.

away (Jas 4:13-14).

Believers have no certainty that any will be here tomorrow. But every biblical assurance is that placing faith in Jesus Christ will enable one to remain His son and daughter forever (Eph 1:5).

Next, if healing is in the atonement and if it applies physically today, those who ask by faith for physical healing and do not receive it have no logical right to assurance of their salvation. However, Scripture teaches that if one is saved, then that person has every right to believe in his or her eternal salvation (Rom 8:28-39; Phil 1:6). So, if physical healing were in the atonement and if someone asks to be healed and is not, not only does that one lose assurance of the physical restoration, but also assurance of spiritual redemption. Fortunately, one can reach these unbiblical conclusions only by first taking a wrong approach to what the atonement is really all about—the forgiveness of sins.

Ninth, assuming that physical healing in the atonement were to apply today, logic dictates that eternal life must also apply today with the acquisition of immortal bodies. But death is the great nemesis and stumbling block to this proposed truth. All are going to die (Heb 9:27). Death will not totally disappear in earthly human experience until the eternal state commences (1 Cor 15:25-26). Therefore, whatever physical benefits, if any, are found in the atonement, they will not begin until the resurrection. The Bible does not teach anywhere that sickness needs atonement, but it does teach everywhere that sinners require Christ's atonement for forgiveness of their sin.

If Christ paid the penalty for sin and if sin is the moral cause of sickness and is still continuing, what then ought to be the current experience in the physical realm? Total or impaired health? Just as believers have impaired *spiritual* health, so they will continue to have impaired *physical* health until sin is no more. Total health will not happen until death or until the Lord comes!

In reality, Christ paid the penalty for sin, but He did not remove sin from the life of the believer. Christ died for the moral *cause* of sickness, i.e., sin. But He did not remove sickness from the life experience of believers because He did not eliminate besetting sin.

Finally, if the conclusions reached in Isaiah 53 and elsewhere are true, then the NT should verify them. The Scriptures are marvelously unified and will not contradict themselves. As expected, Isaiah 53 is not without its New Testament witness.¹⁷

Philip encountered the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:28, 32-33). When the eunuch asked Philip for an explanation, he preached Jesus to him (8:35). Apparently, the eunuch embraced Christ as his personal Savior and Lord because he next asked about baptism (8:36). The point to note is this—both Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch understood Isaiah 53 to be dealing with sin, not sickness. That is as anticipated from the above inductive study of Isaiah 53.

Matthew On Isaiah 53

Matthew 8:14-17 presents another challenge in referring back to Isa. 53:4:

And when Jesus had come to Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and began to wait on Him. And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill; in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases."

The challenge is to understand what use of Isa 53:4 Matthew intended. A cursory reading of the English text does not provide that clarification. It is a very difficult passage, and without an understanding of original language, comprehending what Matthew taught is elusive.

The Greek words translated "took" (*λαμβάνω*, *lambanō*) and "carry" (*βαστάζω*, *bastazō*) in Matt 8:17 are different from the corresponding Greek word, "to bear," in the Greek translation (the Septuagint,

¹⁷The New Testament directly quotes Isaiah 53 six times. (1) Matt 8:17—Isa. 53:4; (2) Luke 22:37—Isa 53:12; (3) John 12:38—Isa 53:1; (4) Acts 8:32-33—Isa 53:7-8; (5) Rom 10:16—Isa 53:1; (6) 1 Pet 2:24—Isa 53:4.

also referred to by LXX of Isa 53:4, i.e., *φέρω* (*pherō*, "bear, carry"). They are never used in the NT with the sense of atonement or propitiation. The words in Matthew 8 (*lambanō* and *bastazō*) mean "to take away from" or "to remove." Matthew's dramatic word change indicates that he is *not* saying that Christ "bore" sickness, but rather He "removed" sickness. In contrast, the Hebrew words used in Isa 53:4 (*nāšāʿ* and *sābal*) mean "to bear sacrificially" as does *pherō* in the LXX. Thus, the idea in Isaiah is that "He took our sins upon Him." A good reason then accounts for the word change.

Matthew is saying that Christ "took away" (*lambanō*) their sicknesses. Christ did not "bear" (*pherō*) in a substitutionary sense the sickness of Peter's mother-in-law. He did not say, "Fever, move from her into Me." He just touched her and it was gone. He bore in His body neither the afflictions of those who were ill nor the spirits of those who were possessed (8:16). Later, He would "bear" sin on Calvary, but at this point in Matthew 8 He had only "taken away" their sicknesses.¹⁸

Matthew uses *θεραπεύω* (*therapeuō*, "heal, restore") in 8:16, whereas Isaiah (53:5) and Peter (2:24) use רָפָא (*rāpāʿ*, "heal") and *ἰάομαι* (*iaomai*, "heal, cure") respectively. *Therapeuō* always refers to real physical infirmities in the New Testament; on the other hand, *rāpāʿ* and its LXX/NT counterpart *iaomai* regularly indicate either actual physical healing (Matt 8:8, 15:28; Mark 5:29; Luke 5:17) or spiritual healing (cf. Isa 6:10; Matt 13:15; John 12:40; Acts 28:27). Contexts in Isaiah and 1 Peter point clearly to a figurative use of *iaomai* in the realm of salvation. However, Matthew's purposeful change to *therapeuō* signals his obvious intent to focus on the physical alone. From Christ's perspective, those healings provided Messianic credentials. From the perspective of the present time, they pointed to the resurrection hope that when sin disappears, human bodies will be free of physical infirmities.

Advocates of contemporary physical healing in the atonement

¹⁸Young, *Isaiah* 3:35, writes, "The reference in Matthew 8:17 is appropriate, for although the figure of sicknesses here used refers to sin itself, the verse also includes the thought of the removal of the consequences of sin. Disease is the inseparable companion of sin."

overlook the fact that what Christ did at Calvary actually occurred several years after His healing ministry at Capernaum.¹⁹ This means that there could be no effectual relationship between Christ's healings in Capernaum and His later atonement on the cross at Calvary. Rather, Matthew employed a normal illustration from the OT when commenting on Christ's healings. He found a point of continuity, a point of identity between Isaiah 53 and Christ's healing ministry in Capernaum. Matthew used Isaiah analogically.

Matthew 2:14-15 illustrates this principle when quoting Hos. 11:1:

And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod; that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Out of Egypt did I call My son."

Matthew writes in the context of the Lord's childhood and Herod's desire to put Him to death. Hosea, on the other hand, was writing about the historical exodus of Israel out of Egypt's bondage. So what relation is there between Israel and Christ? By analogy it is true that (1) they both were in Egypt, (2) they both are referred to as God's Son, and (3) God brought them both out from Egypt. These then are the points of analogy which explain why Matthew used the prophecy of Hos 11:1.

Consider this perspective: Matthew 8 is to Isaiah 53 (in terms of its analogy) as Matthew 17 (the transfiguration of Christ) is to Revelation 19 (the second coming of Christ). Matthew 17 is a preview, just as Matthew 8 is a foretaste of (1) resurrection life; (2) the coming millennial kingdom in which there will be healing; and (3) the ultimate

¹⁹Wilkinson, "Physical Healing" 157, provides another frequently overlooked point: "There is, however, one detail which is different from all the rest. All the injuries and their effects which are described of the servant were produced by external agents at the time of His suffering." Thus Christ did not bear sickness within as he did with sin.

eternal kingdom which will be free of sin and therefore of sickness too.²⁰

D. A. Carson has reasoned,

Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, Matthew 8:16-17 explicitly connects Jesus' miracles of healing and exorcism with the atonement that had not yet taken place. They serve as foretastes of and are predicated on the cross work that is their foundation and justification.²¹

The conclusion is there is no more basis for believing that because Christ cared for physical affliction at Calvary there is now no sickness in the believer's life experience, than there is to suggest that because Christ bore our sins at Calvary sin has now been fully eliminated from the believer's life. As long as sin exists, the moral basis for sickness and physical debilitation will continue.

Believers have the present potential for incurable physical distress and the promise of eventual physical death. What Christ did at either Capernaum or Calvary neither eliminated sickness nor dying from the life of the Christian.²² Matthew 8 is best understood as a preview of

²⁰Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, in vol. 33A of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. by David A. Hubbard, et al. (Dallas: Word, 1993) 211: "Properly perceived, these healings are most important as symbols of the much greater 'healing' that is at the heart of the gospel, the healing of the cross. At the same time, they foreshadow the fulfillment of the age to come when all suffering and sickness are finally removed (cf. Rev 21:1-4)."

²¹D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 156-57. Baron, *The Servant* 86, perceptively notes, "The miracles of healing not only served to certify Him as the Redeemer, and as 'signs' of the spiritual healing which He came to bring, but were, so to say, pledges also of the ultimate full deliverance of the redeemed, not only from sin but from every evil consequence of it in body as well as in soul."

²²Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* 211: ". . . Isa. 53:4 guarantees no one healing in the present age. What is guaranteed is that Christ's atoning death will in the eschaton provide healing. . . ." Baxter, *Divine Healing* 136, unequivocally states, "Therefore, that the healing is in the atonement should not be preached on the basis of

Christ's future messianic ministry which authenticated his claim to be the Son of God and an illustration of the resurrection hope of true believers that when sin is gone, sickness will be also. At Capernaum, He merely removed sickness; He did not become the believer's substitutionary sickness bearer.

Peter On Isaiah 53

Before some final conclusions, a consideration of Peter's use of Isaiah 53 is in order.

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and 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 (1 Pet 2:21-24).

Did Christ die for our sins or for our sicknesses? A wider reading from 2:18 to 2:25 shows that Peter is preparing his audience to endure more suffering, not to be relieved of it. Physical healing is not in Peter's thinking here. He teaches just the opposite. The context demands an understanding that Christ died for sins.

Now, consider the following, more narrow contextual analysis of 1 Pet 2:24-25:

1. The fact of salvation (2:24a)
". . . He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, . . ."
2. The purposes of salvation (2:24b)
". . . that we might die to sin and live to righteousness;"
3. The means of salvation (2:24c)
". . . for by His wounds you were healed."

Matthew 8:16-17 unless it is endorsed by Scripture statements elsewhere. But it is not taught elsewhere, and it certainly cannot be safely adduced solely from Matthew 8:16-17."

4. The need for salvation (2:25a)
 "For you were continually straying like sheep, . . ."
5. The result of salvation (2:25b)
 ". . . but now you have returned to the Shepherd and guardian of your souls."

Given the fact that elements 1, 2, 4, and 5 deal with sin, it would be surprising to find element 3, "for by His wounds you were healed," to deal with the physical. Since nothing in the context supports this kind of anomaly and since the previous discussion of Isa 53:5 (which Peter quotes here) pointed to Isaiah's use of metonymy in substituting effect for cause, the conclusion is that Peter intended to address Christ's atonement for sin alone.

Peter used ἀναφέρω (*anapherō*, "bring up, offer, bear") in 2:24 to indicate the sin bearing role of Christ (cf. Heb 7:27, 9:28, 13:15; 2 Pet 2:5).²³ This corresponds directly with Isaiah's use of *nāšāʿ*, *sābal*, and the LXX use of *pherō* in the sense of atonement sacrifice. This consistent use of sacrificial language stands in stark contrast to Matthew's use of *lambanō* and *bastazō*, meaning to "take away" in a spatial sense of disease being removed.

What does μῶλωπι (*mōlōpi*, "wound" or "by His stripes") mean (2:24)? Translated "stripes" in the KJV and "wounds" in the NASB and NIV, *mōlōpi* is best translated from הַבְּיָרָה (*hābūrâ*, "stripe, blow") in Isaiah 53:5 as "wounds from physical abuse." Peter quoted Isaiah exactly, using a physical illustration (sickness) to portray a spiritual cause (sin), i.e., Peter used the speech figure "metonymy of effect" as did Isaiah.

In context, it is questionable whether Peter refers to the scourging and crucifixion that Christ received at the hands of the soldiers. The beatings and afflictions that Jesus suffered before He was nailed to the cross were nothing in comparison with the agony He suffered when God the Father afflicted God the Son with His wrath for the sins of the world (cf. Ps 22:14-17). Christ did not propitiate God's wrath with His suffering at the hands of men, but rather by that which was inflicted by

²³Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 133-34.

His Heavenly Father (Isa 53:10).

Peter refers to healing in 2:24 with *iaomai* which corresponds to the LXX translation of the Hebrew text of Isa 53:5. Four other times (of 26 NT uses) *iaomai* is used in a spiritual sense.²⁴ Given the context of 1 Pet 2:18-25 and given the otherwise exclusive spiritual use of *iaomai* by NT writers when quoting Isaiah, it is most reasonable to conclude that this was Peter's intention when he quoted Isa 53:5 in 1 Pet 2:24. Oepke notes,

In 1 Pt. 2:24, Is. 53:5 is referred to the atoning work of Christ. In such passages *ἰᾶσθαι* denotes the restoration of divine fellowship through the forgiveness of sins, and all the saving benefits which accompany it.²⁵

The context and language in 1 Pet 2:24-25 consistently deal with spiritual healing and Christ's payment for sin, not for sickness.²⁶

Summing It Up

Isaiah 53 refers to the atonement and its redemptive features, not to its therapeutic effect in a physical sense. Five lines of evidence support this conclusion:

1. The idea of atonement in both Leviticus and Hebrews applies to salvation.
2. The context of Isaiah 53 focuses on Christ's atonement as provision for sin.
3. The theological context of Christ's death and salvation centers on

²⁴Matthew 13:15, John 12:40, and Acts 28:27 quote Isa 6:10 while Heb 12:12-13 alludes to Isa 35:3.

²⁵Albrecht Oepke, "*ἰᾶσθαι*, κ.τ.λ.," *TDNT* 3:214.

²⁶It is noteworthy that Wayne Grudem, who might be thought to reason otherwise because of his Vineyard Fellowship connection, understands 1 Pet 2:24 in reference to salvation (*The First Epistle of Peter* 132). Of this "healing" D. Edmond Hiebert concludes, "The verb 'healed' here does not denote physical healing . . ." (*1 Peter* [Chicago: Moody, 1992] 189).

sin.

4. Matthew used Isa 53:4-5 illustratively to indicate that what Christ did at Capernaum (8:14-17) with physical healing pictured the resurrection consequence of salvation, i.e., the end of sickness when sin has been eliminated.
5. Peter, the Ethiopian eunuch, and Philip understood Isaiah 53 in reference to sin.²⁷

Isaiah 53 deals with man's spiritual being, not his physical. Its emphasis is on sin, not sickness. It focuses on the moral cause of sickness, which is sin, and not on the immediate removal of one of sin's results—sickness.

Matthew 8 is a limited and localized preview of Christ's millennial rule and a believer's resurrection experience when sickness will be no more because sin will have been eliminated. Christ did not personally bear sickness at Capernaum in a substitutionary way, but instead He removed it, even though illness would later return and those whom He had healed would eventually die.

Matthew referred to Isaiah 53 for illustrative and anticipatory purposes, but by no means intended to teach that Christ ultimately fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53 two years before He went to Calvary.

First Peter 2:24 rehearses the redemptive implications of Isaiah 53. Christ's atoning death provided the basis for spiritual health and eternal life. Christ bore our iniquities to satisfy God's righteous demand against sin. Physical health and healing are in view only in the sense that once the cause of sickness (i.e., sin) disappears, then sickness (i.e., the effect of sin) will also be no more.

Recall the question raised at the beginning. "Is there healing in the atonement?" This writer's answer is, "No." However, there is healing "through" the atonement or "as a result" of the atonement, but

²⁷A sixth evidence, although not from Scripture, is the latter first-century and early second-century use of Isa 53:4-5 by the post-apostolic fathers. Neither 1 Clement 16 nor Barnabas 5 quotes Isaiah 53 as teaching a contemporary healing ministry or even that physical healing is in the atonement. Nor do the fathers teach such elsewhere (cf. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) 19-20, 140).

it is never promised to believers for the present time.²⁸ With the ultimate removal of sin, believers will receive physical healing in full; but only in the future, when our bodies have been redeemed by the power of God (Rom 8:23; Rev 21:4). Christ atoned for sin, not sickness.

No, healing for our mortal bodies is not in the atonement. This conclusion is supported at once by the fact that forgiveness of sins and cleansing from guilt are offered through the cross freely and certainly and at the present moment to all who sincerely "believe" whereas healing for all our infirmities and sicknesses is not offered freely and certainly at present to all who believe. Not one of those who have believed for forgiveness and cleansing has ever been denied, but thousands and thousands who have believed for physical healing have been denied. That cannot be gainsaid—for a very pertinent reason. Permitted sin in the present is never a part of God's plan or purpose for us, but permitted sickness often is, as we learn both from Scripture and from Christian testimony (more on this later). Both Scripture and experience, then, say no; bodily healing is not in the atonement.²⁹

By (1) looking at the original languages used, (2) understanding the context in which the above passages are found, (3) appreciating the complementing passages in Leviticus and Hebrews, and (4) realizing what the atonement actually involved, the conclusion is that the atonement dealt with sin and the need to satisfy the righteous wrath of a just and holy God. Not until sin is removed from our personal

²⁸It seems more biblically precise to say, "There *will* be physical healing *through* the atonement" rather than "There *is* physical healing *in* the atonement." I agree with Doug Moo ("Divine Healing in the Health and Wealth Gospel," *TrinJ* 9 [1988]:204): "We would prefer, then, to say that physical healing is one *effect* of the atoning death of Christ." See also Bokovay ("Physical Healing" 35): "It is misleading for anyone to suggest that healing is 'in' the atonement without major qualifications; sickness is only dealt with in the sense that it is an *effect* of sin and its eventual eradication is guaranteed because our sin has been atoned for."

²⁹Baxter, *Divine Healing* 136-37. Dr. Baxter, who believes in a contemporary healing ministry, minces no words here in utterly denying that the atonement provides any basis for present physical healing.

existence will Christians have any hope of guaranteed physical well-being.³⁰

J. I. Packer carefully captures the intent of Isaiah 53 with this insightful summary:

... We must observe that perfect physical health is promised, not for this life, but for heaven, as part of the resurrection glory that awaits us in the day when Christ "will change our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power which enables Him even to subject all things to Himself." Full bodily well-being is set forth as a future blessing of salvation rather than a present one. What God has promised, and when He will give it, are separate questions.³¹

³⁰Wimber and Springer, *Power Healing* 154, cite R. A. Torrey (*Divine Healing* [reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974] 53 [actually on page 43]) writing on Isaiah 53 as meaning "... that based on what Jesus experienced on the cross, we as a consequence may experience one hundred percent healing here on earth." At best, this is an overstatement of Torrey's discussion (43-46); at worst, a misrepresentation.

³¹James I. Packer, "Poor Health May Be the Best Remedy," *Christianity Today* 26/10 (May 21, 1982):15.



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