

Rise Up And Build

"So They said, 'Let us rise up and build,' Then they set their hands to do this good work," Neh. 2:18

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Does The Atonement Include Physical Healing?

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:4,5).

Isaiah has often been called "the Messianic Prophet." And for good reason. For no prophet said more about the coming Messiah (Christ) than was said by Isaiah. Moreover, the 53rd chapter of Isaiah is often referred to as "a Messianic chapter." Again for good reason. For this chapter, from beginning to end, said much about the coming Messiah — including facts pertaining to His lineage, His being rejected of men, facts pertaining to His death, burial, and the vicarious (substitutionary) nature of His death. Surely any honest, intelligent person who reads this chapter and then reads "the four gospels" (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and learns about the prophecies which were fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (some 750 years later!) has to conclude that the Bible is divinely inspired of God. The mathematical improbabilities of all these prophecies being accidentally and coincidentally fulfilled in the life and death of **one** person are simply too incredible for one to reach any other conclusion than the fact that the life and vicarious death of Jesus was divinely planned centuries in advance, and then divinely fulfilled in every particular!

There is simply no way to overstate the magnitude of the glorious life and vicarious death of Jesus. However, it is possible to mis-state the effects of Christ's atoning death. In fact, this is often done. Especially by those who believe in modern miraculous divine healing of the physical body. It is common for such people to read Isaiah 53:4,5, and then conclude that the effects of Christ's death were two-fold: (1) that He died to make atonement for our sins, and (2) that He died to heal our bodies. As documentation, please read the following statements: "But is Divine Healing in the Atonement? We believe it is. We do not believe it is merely accidental; but firmly believe it is part of the work of salvation which Christ died to bring" (**Does God Heal the Body today?**, by C.H. Jack Linn, p. 15). "Again all Christians should expect God to heal their bodies today, because Christ died to atone for our sickness, as well as for our sins"

(**Bodily Healing and the Atonement**, by T.J. McCrossen, p. 16).

So there you have it It is said tht “Christ died to atone for **our sickness** as well as for our sins,” and Isaiah 53:4,5, along with Matthew 8:16,17, are cited as proof. In fact, this constitutes one of the strongest arguments made by modern “faith healers” in support of their position and their practice. So we ask, did Jesus really die in order to “atone for our sickness as well as for our sins?” **If** the answer to this question is “yes,” **then** we must expect the body of every physically ill sinner to be made perfectly well the moment his soul is converted! Indeed, what a tremendous this-world incentive for physically sick sinners to be converted!

“Proof Text” Examination

First, let us consider the alleged proof as set forth in Isaiah 53:4,5: “*Surely he hath borne our griefs, and...with his stripes we are healed.*” “Faith Healers” say that the verb “borne” (from the Hebrew *nasa*) is used in a vicarious and substitutionary sense. They then turn to Mathew 8:16,17 wherein we read of those whom Jesus “healed” as being in fulfillment of that “*which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, he Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses*” And Presto! They conclude that **physical healing** is included in the atonement.

However, this argument (based upon their conclusions from Matthew 8:16,17) poses some insurmountable problems. For example, the atoning work of Jesus was accomplished in **His death**. “...While we were yet sinners, Christ **died** for us” (Romans 5:8). “...Christ died for **our sins** according to the Scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:3). Peter said you were “redeemed...with the precious **blood** of Christ...” (I Peter 1:18,19). However, the healing work of Jesus (recorded in Matthew 8:16,17) took place among Jewish people, while the Law of Moses was still in force, and some three years **before His death!** At the time when the miraculous healing of those mentioned in Matthew 8:16,17) occurred the atonement had not taken place, for Jesus was still alive. Of course, we would not minimize the significense of the miraculous works of Jesus (including His miracles of healing the sick) for these were the works which proved that He “*is the Christ, the Son of God*” (John 20:36,31), and that He had “*power on earth to forgive sins*” (Mark 2:11-12).

A Closer Look at Isaiah 53:5

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.”

You will please notice the vicarious nature of our Lord’s suffering. He was not wounded for **His** transgressions; He was not wounded for **His** iniquities, nor was He healed by His stripes. What He endured He endured **for us**. And you will please observe that He was not wounded for our cancer, heart disease, stomach problems, etc Rather, He was “wounded for **our transgressions**,” and “bruised for **our iniquities**.” In essence, Jesus bore the punishment which we deserved because of our sins. He, as a divine sacrifice, became our substitute, and bore the penalty in our stead. Moreover, in saying “*the chastisement of our peace was upon him*” the prophet referred to the chastisement

He received but which **we** deserve, and which He endured in order to procure “**our** peace” (with God, bw). Because of **our** sins **we** were alienated from God (Isaiah 59:1,2), but through Christ’s death He “*abolished...the enmity,*” and made it possible for both Jews and Gentiles to be reconciled unto “*God in one body*” (Eph. 2:15-16).

“But,” some will say, “*we are healed*” by “*His stripes,*” so this proves that the removal of physical diseases was included in the atonement.” Our first inclination in response to this statement is to simply ask, “why then do so many sick people remain ill after they obey the gospel?” They receive the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), but they are not relieved of their heart disease, diabetes, emphysema, etc. Moreover, they retain their pacemakers, they remain bald, they continue to wear glasses, they keep their false teeth, and (if they can afford it) they keep paying their health insurance premiums. Nevertheless, Isaiah said we are “*healed by his stripes.*” However, on closer scrutiny we learn that the word “*healed*” is sometimes used in a **spiritual** sense. For example, the Psalmist petitioned God, saying, “*Lord, be merciful to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against you*” (Psalm 41:4; cf. Psalm 147:3; Jeremiah 3:22). Furthermore, lest there be any doubt as to the nature of the healing involved, the Holy Spirit mentioned the sufferings of Christ and then referred to Isaiah’s prophecy, saying “*Who himself bore our sins in his own body to the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness...by whose stripes you were healed*” (I Peter 2:24). When we, through gospel obedience, “*died to sins*” (I Peter 2:24), we were “*made alive together with Christ*” (Eph. 2:5; cf. Romans 6:3,4), and thus were enabled to “*live for righteousness...*” And in that process we were “*healed.*” Peter, an inspired apostle, clearly showed that the healing provided by the death of Jesus Christ was **spiritual** in nature. Jesus, in His atoning death, bore our sins. He did not bear in His body our toothaches, our cancer, our heart diseases, etc

Conclusion:

The salvation of the soul is vastly more important than the well being of the body (cf Matthew 10:28). Hence, it is a grievous mistake to place our physical needs and our spiritual needs on the **same** level. Furthermore we can read of numerous faithful Christians who suffered physical illnesses (2 Cor. 12:7; Phil. 2:25; I Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20) but who were not miraculously healed. Of course, we **believe** in praying for the sick (2 Cor. 12:7-10; Jas. 5:14,15), and we **do** pray for the sick, that in the wonderful providence of God they may be made well. But we do not make outlandish (and unscriptural) claims concerning modern day miracles. Nor do we believe in perverting Old Testament prophecy so as to make hardened sinners believe that their lies and lusts are no worse in the sight of God than their bursitis and rheumatism. Jesus died for **our** sins. He did not die for our kidney stones. Consider ye well!
—Bobby Witherington

Thoughts From J.W. McGarvey

“It is hard for us to learn and apply the distinction between serving God as **God** wishes to be served, and serving Him according to **our** wishes and notions.”

“If we adhere strictly to the virtues to which Christ has enjoined, we shall find that the world has an evil name for everyone of them: Earnest contention for His truth is called bigotry; loyalty to His ordinances is dubbed narrowness; strict conformity to the laws of purity is named puritanism; liberality is looked upon as an effort to court praise; piety is scorned as hypocrisy and faith is regarded as fanaticism.” —Copied

True: “Others may destroy your reputation, but only you can destroy your character.”