

## Acts 5:12-16 (Part 2)

### Introduction

Last week, we began by recalling the disciples' prayer in chapter four:

- Acts 4:29–30 — “And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your slaves may speak Your **word [logos; message]** with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and **signs and wonders** happen through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”

We saw how the “signs and wonders” were always to be in service of the “word.” Specifically, they were authenticating the reality that this brand-new, never before heard announcement of salvation in Jesus was, in fact, the redemptive-historical fulfillment of all the covenants, and types, and shadows, and prophecies that had come before. The signs and wonders were necessary to authenticate and explain that specific redemptive-historical moment as the true fulfillment of all the previous steps and stages in redemptive history, while that specific redemptive-historical moment was also necessary to give the “signs and wonders” their “reason for being.” The “signs and wonders” and the redemptive-historical context are mutually authenticating and necessary to each other. This explains why we don't see signs and wonders today, and this also enables us to rejoice all the more in those signs and wonders that did happen 2000 years ago. Those signs and wonders are just as powerful a “proof” today as they were then. We see in them, by faith, the authentication of the message about Jesus and His assembly as the fulfillment of redemptive history. It's in light of all this that we can come to understand the specific emphasis on “healing.” Remember what the disciples prayed:

- Acts 4:29–30 — “And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your slaves may speak Your **word [logos; message]** with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to **heal [iasis]**, and **signs and wonders** happen through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”

And then remember how this prayer was answered:

- Acts 5:12–16 — Now through the hands of the apostles many **signs and wonders** were happening among the people, and they were all with one accord in Solomon's Portico. Now none of the rest dared to associate with them; but the people were holding them in high esteem. Yet more than ever believers in the Lord were added to their number, multitudes of men and women, to such an extent that they even carried the **sick [asthenes]** out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the multitude from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were **sick [asthenes]** or **afflicted [ochleo]** with unclean spirits, and they were all being **healed [thereapeuo]**.

Healing, we could say, was one specific *category* of “signs and wonders,” which means that this “healing” was always in the service of that redemptive-historically new “word” (message) about salvation in Jesus' name. In fact, the healing ministries that we see in the Gospels and Acts as well as the gifts of healings that we read about in 1 Corinthians 12 are themselves a redemptive-historically new *kind* (or *category*) of “sign” and “wonder.” Apart from one or two exceptions (2

Kings 5:1-14; 20:1-11; cf. Num. 21:6-9), miraculous healings (as “signs and wonders”) are unheard of in the Old Testament. There must be a reason, then, why we see signs and wonders of “healing” authenticating this “word” about Jesus as the true fulfillment of redemptive history. In order to understand what this reason is, we must think in terms of the covenantal context of redemptive history. We see the gradual unfolding of redemptive history in the successive covenants that God makes with man (Noahic, Abrahamic (two-fold), Mosaic, Davidic, New). This morning, we want to understand what the themes of sickness/disease and healing meant in a specific redemptive-historical and covenantal context—namely, that of the Mosaic or Old Covenant.

## **I. The COVENANTAL and REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL context for miraculous healings**

The Mosaic (Old) Covenant and the New Covenant are the only covenants that God makes with an entire community of people—or maybe we should say that they’re the only covenants which actually create, or birth, a covenant community. But, of course, the kind of covenant community that each creates is very different. The old covenant of circumcision (Acts 7:8; Jn. 7:22) created a community defined “according to the flesh.” The Old Covenant, which was inaugurated with the blood of bulls and goats, didn’t carry within itself the power of the new birth and regeneration, which means that the community created by the Old Covenant was not a regenerate, born again community (cf. Heb. 10:1-4). This means that the Old Covenant functioned at two levels.

For the individual believing member of the Old Covenant community, the Old Covenant law provided the means of living out his or her faith in the saving promises of God (cf. Ps. 19; 119). These Old Covenant believers were saved by grace through faith in the New Covenant provision of salvation as that salvation was typified, and pictured, and foreshadowed under the Old Covenant (temple/priesthood/sacrifice; etc.). These Old Covenant believers were members of the unregenerate Old Covenant community, but even more fundamentally they were “members-in-waiting” of the regenerate New Covenant community, which was not yet in existence. They lived in a kind of redemptive-historical tension that we no longer live in.

If this is how the Old Covenant functioned for the individual, believing member of the Old Covenant community (as a means of living out his or her faith in the saving promises of God), it functioned very differently for the community as a whole—for the nation of Israel defined according to the flesh. For the nation of Israel as a whole, the Old Covenant was a reminder of the original Covenant of Works in the Garden of Eden, when God graciously promised eternal life to Adam upon condition of perfect obedience but warned of death (and therefore of exile from the garden) if he disobeyed. In the garden, the condition for eternal life wasn’t “faith alone,” but perfect, perpetual, personal obedience. Similarly, in the case of the nation of Israel as His covenant community God graciously promised long life in the land (not eternal life, but a picture of eternal life) upon condition of obedience (not perfect obedience) but warned of death, and destruction, and exile from the land if Israel was disobedient. Just like in the Garden of Eden we see that the condition for Israel’s long life in the land was not “faith alone,” but national obedience.

For the individual member of the Old Covenant community, this national arrangement was a reminder that “law,” as a means of personal salvation (as a “covenant of works”), required an

obedience that they could never give. This is what Yahweh said to His Old Covenant people—the nation of Israel:

- Leviticus 18:5 — “So you [plural; all of you as a nation] shall keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man [singular] *does* them, he shall *live* by them.”

“Live” long in the land or “live” eternally in heaven? The answer is, in a sense, both. The individual believer who “does” Yahweh’s statutes and judgments not as a means of achieving his own self-made righteousness (“covenant of works”) but rather as a means of expressing his faith in the saving promises of God will live eternally (cf. Luke 10:25-37). However, for the unregenerate covenant community as a whole, what was promised was not eternal life in heaven upon condition of faith, but long life in the land upon condition of obedience. For the unregenerate Old Covenant community, the law was not at all of faith, but was a kind of “covenant of works.” The Apostle Paul says:

- Romans 10:5 — Moses writes about the righteousness which is *of law*: “The man who does these things shall live by them.”
- Galatians 3:12 — [T]he Law is not of faith; *rather*, “He who does them shall live by them.”

Again, it’s important for us to remember that what Israel as an unregenerate covenant community was promised in the Old Covenant upon condition of obedience was not eternal life in heaven but long life in the land of Canaan. This was essentially a covenant of works, which explains why it came with built-in covenant curses (for disobedience) and covenant blessings (for obedience). The covenant curses meant the *nation’s* death and exile from the land while the covenant blessings meant the *nation’s* long life in the land. But because the nation of Israel (the Old Covenant community) was by definition an unregenerate *people*, the triumph of the covenant curse—of death and destruction and exile from the land—was inevitable. So we read in Ezekiel:

- Ezekiel 20:11, 13 (cf. Neh. 9:28-29) — “I gave them My statutes and made them know My judgments, **which, if a man does them, he will live by them**... But *the house of Israel* rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes, and they rejected My judgments, **which, if a man does them, he will live by them**; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I said I would pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to completely destroy them.”

Once again, this national arrangement (this “covenant of works” with its built-in covenant curses and covenant blessings) was a powerful reminder to the individual believing member of the covenant community that eternal salvation could never be gained through the law (cf. Lk. 10:25-37), but only through faith in the promise of a coming Messiah. The Apostle Paul writes:

- Romans 7:9-10 — Now I was once alive apart from the Law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; and this commandment, **which was to lead to life**, was found to lead to death for me.

The temporal covenant curses that were poured out upon the Old Covenant community (upon the nation as a whole) pictured the eternal death and judgment that every human being deserves (the

curse of the original broken Covenant of Works in the Garden). The temporal covenant blessings that were forfeited by the Old Covenant community pictured the eternal life that they could not achieve. So what were the curses that were built in to the Old (Mosaic) Covenant? There were many (Lev. 26; Deut. 28), but this morning we'll focus on one specific category of "covenant curse." We read in Deuteronomy chapter 28:

## II. The Covenant Curse

- Deuteronomy 28:15, 22, 27, 58–61 (cf. 28:35; Lev. 26:16) — “But it will be, if you [plural; as a nation and covenant community] do not listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep and to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I am commanding you [pl.] today, that all these curses will come upon you [pl.] and overtake you... Yahweh will **strike** [*nakah*] you with **consumption** and with **fever** and with **inflammation** and with **fiery heat**... Yahweh will **strike** [*nakah*] you with the **boils** of Egypt and with **tumors** and with the **scab** and with the **itch**, from which you cannot be **healed** [LXX: *iaomai*]... If you are not careful to do all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this glorious and fearsome name, Yahweh your God, then Yahweh will bring wondrous **plagues** [LXX: *plege*] on you and **plagues** on those who are your seed, even great and enduring **plagues**, and miserable and enduring **sicknesses** [*holi*; LXX: *nosos*]. And He will bring back on you all the **diseases** [LXX: *odyne*] of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they will cling to you. Also every **sickness** [*holi*; LXX: *malakia*] and every **plague**, which is not written in the book of this law, Yahweh will bring on you until you [pl.] are destroyed.

At the purely national and typological level what we have here is a “covenant of works” with its built-in covenant curse for disobedience. And what is the covenant curse? Plague, sickness, and disease from which the people cannot be healed. It’s important for us to see, here, that this curse is poured out, specifically, not upon individual regenerate members of the Old Covenant community (though they often suffered along with the community; cf. Ezekiel and Daniel), but rather upon the unregenerate Old Covenant community as a whole. Of course, as long as there is death in the world, there will always be sickness and disease. There were numerous individual members of the Old Covenant community who experienced disease or who suffered with various sicknesses, but who were not, therefore, suffering the covenant curse (though they may, at times, have been suffering under God’s righteous displeasure for their sin; cf. Ps. 38:1-8). The covenant curse was something reserved for the disobedience of an entire unregenerate covenant people to destroy that people from off the land. This explains why the covenant curse of disease and plague and sickness was most often used symbolically in the Old Testament for the sickness of the nation as a whole—a sickness which was the result of God Himself “striking” His disobedient covenant people (cf. Deut. 28:22, 27).

- Isaiah 1:5–6 — Where will you be **stricken** [*nakah*] again, as you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is **sick** [*holi*], and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, **wounds** [*habburah*], and **raw wounds** [*nakah*], not pressed out, not bandaged, not softened with oil.
- Micah 6:12–13 — [T]he rich men of the city are full of violence, and her inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. So also I will make you **sick** [*holi*], **striking** [*nakah*] you down, desolating you because of your sins.

Immediately after the list of covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28, we read in chapter 29:

- Deuteronomy 29:14–15, 18, 20–23 — “Now not with you alone am I cutting this covenant and this oath, but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of Yahweh our God and with those who are not with us here today... lest there be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from Yahweh our God, to go to serve the gods of those nations... Yahweh shall not be willing to pardon him, but rather the anger of Yahweh and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and Yahweh will blot out his name from under heaven. Then Yahweh will separate him out for adversity from all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant which are written in this book of the law. And the generation to come, your sons who rise up after you and the foreigner who comes from a distant land, shall see **the plagues [nakah; LXX, plege] of the land and the diseases [sicknesses; holah/nosos] with which Yahweh has afflicted it**, and they will say, ‘All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and nothing sprouting, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which Yahweh overthrew in His anger and in His wrath.’”

We see here, again, how the covenant curse of disease and plague and sickness was used symbolically for the sick and diseased condition of the nation as a whole. And we see now why the replacement of the covenant curse for disobedience with covenant blessing for obedience would naturally be described in terms of “healing” and the absence of all sickness and disease.

- Deuteronomy 7:12, 15 (cf. Exod. 23:24-26) — “Then it will be, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that Yahweh your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your fathers... And Yahweh will take away from you all **sickness [holi; LXX: malakia; not ‘all sickness’ absolutely, but ‘all sickness’ as covenant curse];** and He will not put on you any of the harmful **diseases [LXX: nosos]** of Egypt...”
- Exodus 15:26 — “If you will earnestly listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the **diseases [LXX: nosos]** on you which I have put on the Egyptians [not ‘none of the diseases’ absolutely, but ‘none of the diseases’ as covenant curse]; for I, Yahweh, am your **healer [LXX: iaomai]**.”

We know that because of its constant sin and rebellion the Old Covenant community did not ultimately come to know Yahweh as its healer.

- Hosea 5:13 — Then Ephraim saw his **sickness [holi/nosos]**, and Judah his **sore [LXX: odyne]**, so Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb. But he is unable to **heal [LXX: iaomai]** you or to cure you of your **sore [LXX: odyne]**.
- Jeremiah 8:15, 21–22 (cf. 10:19) — [W]e have sinned against Yahweh. We waited for peace, but there was no good; for a time of **healing [LXX: iasis]**, but behold, terror! ... Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no **physician [LXX: iatros]** there? Why then has not the **healing [LXX: iasis]** of the daughter of my people gone up?

- Jeremiah 14:19–20 — Have You completely rejected Judah? Or have You loathed Zion? Why have You **stricken** [*nakah*] us so that there is no **healing** [LXX: *iasis*] for us? We hoped for peace, but there was no good; and for a time of **healing** [LXX: *iasis*], but behold, terror! We know our wickedness, O Yahweh, the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You.

God “struck” his rebellious Old Covenant people with disease and plague and sickness so that Israel was covered with bruises and wounds, and there was no healing. The Old Covenant community did not ultimately come to know Yahweh as its healer. This is because in order for there to be healing—in order for the covenant curse to be removed—the very nature of the covenant community would have to be transformed. The Covenant would have to be replaced with a New Covenant that was fundamentally “not like” the Old Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34)—a covenant with *no* built-in covenant curse because the people created by that covenant would be a regenerate people, born from above.

### III. The Covenant Curse Taken Away

One day, God said, He would heal His covenant people. One day, they would know Him not as the one who strikes them with sickness and disease and plague. One day they would know Him only as their healer.

- Jeremiah 30:12–13, 15–17 (cf. Mal. 4:1-2; Lam. 1:12, 18; Ps. 69:26) — “[T]hus says Yahweh, ‘Your injury is incurable, and your **wound** [LXX: *plege*] is desperately **sick** [*halah*]. There is no one to plead your cause; no **healing** for your sore, no **recovery** for you... Why do you cry out over your injury? Your **pain** [*makob*] is incurable. Because your iniquity is numerous and your sins are mighty, I have done these things to you. Therefore all who devour you will be devoured; and all your adversaries, every one of them, will go into captivity... For I will restore you to **health** [LXX: *iama*], and I will **heal** [LXX: *iatreuo*] you of your **wounds** [LXX: *plege*],’ declares Yahweh...”
- Isaiah 30:26 (LES) — [T]he light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold on the day when the Lord **heals** [*iaomai*] the injury of his people, and he will **heal** [*iaomai*] the **pain** [*odyne*] of your **wound** [*plege*].

In Deuteronomy 7, Moses said to the people that if they would listen to Yahweh’s judgments and keep and do them, then:

- Deuteronomy 7:15 — “[Yahweh] will not put on you any of the harmful diseases of Egypt which you have known, **but He will give them to all who hate you** [cf. Gen. 12:3a; Nah. 3:19].”

But God also promised that one day He would bring *healing* to the nations. One day even the Gentiles would know Yahweh as their healer.

- Isaiah 19:22–25 (cf. Gen. 12:3b) — Yahweh will smite Egypt, smiting but healing [“He will **heal** (LXX: *iaomai*) them with **healing** (LXX: *iasis*)”]; so they will return to Yahweh, and He will be moved by their entreaty and will **heal** [LXX: *iasis*] them... In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom Yahweh of

hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”

But how was this healing to be accomplished? How could any covenant carry within itself the power of regeneration and the new birth so that the community created by that covenant would be regenerate and born again? How could there be a covenant without any built-in covenant curses? Now we’re ready to truly understand the power and the beauty of Isaiah 53.

- Isaiah 53:3–5, 10 — He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of **pains** [*makob*; LXX: *plege/plague*; cf. Deut. 29:22; Isa. 30:26; Jer. 30:12-17] and acquainted with **sickness** [*holi/malakia*; cf. Isa. 1:5-6; Jer. 10:19; 30:12-17; Mic. 6:12-13; Exod. 23:24-26; Deut. 7:12, 15; 28:61]; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely OUR **sicknesses** [*holi*; cf. Deut. 7:15; 28:59, 61; Isa. 1:5; Hos. 5:13; Mic. 6:13; LXX: *hamartia/sin*] He Himself bore, and OUR **pains** [*makob/odynao*; cf. Deut. 28:59; Isa. 30:26; Hos. 5:13] He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, **smitten** [*nakah*; cf. Deut. 28:22, 27; Isa. 1:5-6; Jer. 14:19-20; Mic. 6:12-15] of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our peace fell upon Him, and by His **wounds** [*habburah*; cf. Isa. 1:6] we are **healed** [*rapa/iaomai*; cf. Exod. 15:26; Deut. 28:27; Isa. 19:22-25; 30:26; Jer. 8:14-15, 20-22; 14:19-20; Hos. 5:13; Mal. 4:1-2]... Yahweh was pleased to crush Him; He made Him **sick** [*halah*]; if You would place His soul as a guilt offering, He will see His seed, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of Yahweh will succeed in His hand.

One day the Messiah would come and take away the covenant curse forever by bearing the covenant curse Himself. In this way, the Messiah would make a new covenant with His people, a covenant that would have within itself the power of regeneration and the new birth, and therefore a covenant with no longer any covenant curses. No more plagues. No more wounds. No more diseases. No more pains. No more sickness. Only healing.

Isaiah described the Messiah’s suffering in terms of suffering the Old (Mosaic) Covenant curse, but that temporal curse was only picturing the eternal death and judgment that every human being deserves. The point, then, is not that Jesus literally suffered all manner of physical sicknesses and diseases and plagues (the curse of the Old Covenant as a “covenant of works”). The point is that He bore the curse of the original broken covenant of works in the garden so that we might be healed—so that we might not suffer the covenant curse of spiritual and eternal death (cf. Gen. 2:15-17) but live eternally in the presence of our Redeemer.

## Conclusion

What does it mean when the apostles pray that the Lord would grant that they might speak His word [*logos/message*] with all confidence, while He (God) extends His hand to heal (*iasis*) and signs and wonders happen through the name of His holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:29-30)? What does it mean when Luke tells us that “the multitude from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick [*asthenes*; used in connection with *nosos* in Lk. 4:40-41; 9:1-2, 6] or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being **healed** [*thereapeuo*; used in connection with *iaomai* in Lk. 6:17-19; 9:1-2, 6; cf. Acts 4:22]”? It means

that in the New Covenant that Jesus makes with His people—the covenant that even creates that people and brings that people into existence—there are no longer any covenant curses. It means that He Himself has borne the curse of the broken Covenant of Works in our place, so that we might be healed—so that we might know God only, ever, and always as our Healer in the Covenant of Grace. So we read in Matthew chapter 8:

- Matthew 8:16–17 — Now when evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and **healed** [*thereapeuo*] all who were ill in order to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, “He Himself took our **sicknesses** [*astheneia*; elsewhere the Hebrew *holi* is translated with the Greek *nosos* (Deut. 28:59; Hos. 5:13) and *malakia* (Deut. 7:15; 28:61)] and carried away our **diseases** [*nosos*].”

In the miracles of healing that happened 2000 years ago at that climactic redemptive-historical moment in time, we see pictured the removal of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant curse, which pictures in turn the removal of that ultimate covenant curse which we brought down upon ourselves in the Garden. As Christians, we’re not exempt from plagues, wounds, diseases, pains, and sicknesses in this life, or even from death itself. But we are exempt from all of these things as “covenant curse.” We’re not promised “healing” from all of these things in this life. That was never the point of the “signs and wonders.” But we have now been healed once and for all of that ultimate “sickness” with which God had struck us all. This is why we can sing and exult now with the words of the psalmist as even the psalmist himself never could:

- Psalm 103:1–4 — Bless Yahweh, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless Yahweh, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who **pardons** all your **iniquities**, who **heals** [LXX: *iaomai*] **ALL** your **diseases** [*halah*; LXX: *nosos*]; who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion.

We have come now to that eschatological city of which Isaiah prophesied:

- Isaiah 33:24 (cf. Mat. 9:1-7) — And *no one* who dwells there will say, “I am sick”; the people who inhabit there will be forgiven their iniquity.

For all those who are in Jesus—who have been saved by the blood of the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace—there is no more covenant curse. There is only covenant blessing. No longer are we a rebellious people who know God as the one who “strikes” us. Now we are a forgiven people who know God only as our Healer.

- Revelation 22:1–5 — Then he showed me a river of the water of life, bright as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the **healing** of the nations. And **there will no longer be any curse**; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His slaves will serve Him; and they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night, and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them, and they will reign forever and ever.