

**MIRACLE,  
MAGIC,  
and  
MEDICINE**  
Healing and Cure in the Bible

Test Case

Psalm 6

“O Lord, heal me...”  
Psalm 6

- <sup>1</sup> O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,  
or discipline me in your wrath.  
<sup>2</sup> Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;  
O LORD, heal [ἰασάι / אָפַרַי] me,  
for my bones are shaking with terror.  
<sup>3</sup> My soul also is struck with terror,  
while you, O LORD—**how long?**

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**PLEA and LAMENT**

- *What kind of illness or suffering do you think the psalmist had?*
- *What is the relationship between human guilt, divine wrath, and physical suffering?*
- *How can some sickness be a helpful “discipline”?*

“O Lord, heal me...”  
Psalm 6

- <sup>4</sup> Turn, O LORD, save [ῥῦσαι] my life;  
deliver [σωσόν / יָשָׁא] me  
for the sake of your steadfast love.  
<sup>5</sup> For in death there is no remembrance of you;  
in Sheol who can give you praise?

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**PLEA and PERSUASION**

- *What is the relationship between being forgiven, being healed / cured, being saved / delivered?*

“O Lord, heal me...”  
Psalm 6

- <sup>6</sup> I am weary with my moaning;  
every night I flood my bed with tears;  
I drench my couch with my weeping.  
<sup>7</sup> My eyes waste away because of grief;  
they grow weak because of all my foes.

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**LAMENT**

- *What is the purpose of weeping and crying? Can they be a healthy part of the recovery process?*
- *Who or what are the “foes”?*

“O Lord, heal me...”  
Psalm 6

- <sup>8</sup> Depart from me, all you workers of evil,  
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.  
<sup>9</sup> The LORD has heard my supplication;  
the LORD accepts my prayer.  
<sup>10</sup> All my enemies shall be ashamed  
and struck with terror;  
they shall turn back,  
and in a moment be put to shame.

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**PRAISE**

*What do you think has helped the psalmist the most?*

- *That his foes are rebuked?*
- *That he is reconciled with God?*
- *That he recovers from his suffering?*

“O Lord, heal me...”

### Psalm 6

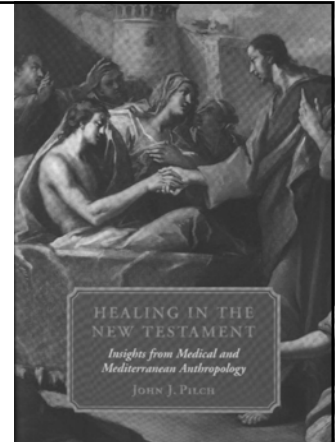
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#### PRAISE

- *Is the psalmist completely recovered from his suffering?*
- *If not, why can he be so jubilant?*
- *Has the psalmist been cured or healed?*

## Healing in the New Testament

John Pilch



## Terminology

Pilch, pages 24-25

- **HEALTH:** “State of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity” (World Health Organization)
- **SICKNESS:**
  - general term including both disease and illness
  - the *process* for socializing disease and illness (Alan Young)

## Terminology

- **DISEASE:** “Not a reality but rather an explanatory concept that describes abnormalities in the structure and/or function of human organs and organ systems”
- **ILLNESS:** “Not a reality but an explanatory concept that describes the human perception, experience, and interpretation of certain socially disvalued states including but not limited to disease” (**DIS-EASE**)

## Terminology

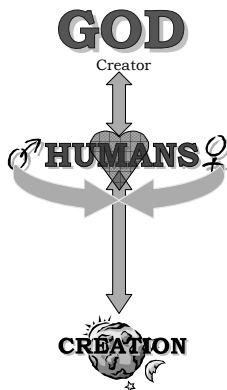
- **CURING:** “The anticipated outcome relative to *disease*, that is, the attempt to take effective control of disordered biological and/or psychological processes”
- **HEALING:** “The anticipated outcome relative to *illness*, that is the attempt to provide personal and social meaning for the life problems created by sickness”

What does it mean to be human?

To be healthy?

To be whole?

A wholistic understanding of health includes a spiritual, communal, and personal as well as physical dimension.



### Miracles, Magic, Medicine

There is a difference between

<b>CURING DISEASE</b>	<b>HEALING DIS-EASE</b>
Biomedical Model	Hermeneutic Model

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physical	<i>attention to:</i> spiritual, physical, social, personal
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<i>success if:</i> patient survives and regains functioning	patient feels better, experiences peace, has restored meaning

### Accomplishing Healing

Miracle

Magic

Medicine

*How would these be differentiated in the ancient world?*

## Accomplishing Healing

Miracle

*Intervention attributed to divinity*

Magic

*Manipulation of powers (good/evil)*

Medicine

*Reproducible application of technique*

## Accomplishing Healing

Miracle

*Prayer of R. Hanina b. Dosa*

*Mark 9 Healing of boy*

cf. Kee, *The Origins of Christianity*, p228

## Accomplishing Healing

Magic

*Magical Incantations*

**Matthew 12:24** But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons."

cf. Barrett, *The New Testament Background*, pp31f

## Accomplishing Healing

Medicine

*Cult of Asclepius*

*Salves*

*Jesus' spit (Mark 8.22f)*

*Jesus and mud (John 9)*

cf. Kee, *The Origins of Christianity*, p89

### Test Case: Mark 9.14-29



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<sup>14</sup>When they [Jesus, Peter, James, John] came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. <sup>15</sup>When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. <sup>16</sup>He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?"

### Test Case: Mark 9.14-29

<sup>17</sup>Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; <sup>18</sup>and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so." <sup>19</sup>He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." <sup>20</sup>And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. <sup>21</sup>Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. <sup>22</sup>It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him..."

### Test Case: Mark 9.14-29

- The boy's illness in Mark 9.14-29 is described as being possessed by an unclean spirit. (The "Hermeneutic" diagnosis)
- How would it be diagnosed today using a "Biomedical" approach?
- What would be the therapeutic goal with respect to each diagnosis?

### Test Case: Mark 9.14-29

... but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to him, "If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes." <sup>24</sup>Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" <sup>25</sup>When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" <sup>26</sup>After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." <sup>27</sup>But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand.

### Test Case: Mark 9.14-29

- What is the prayer?
- What kind of healing is offered?

### Test Case: Mark 9.14-29

<sup>28</sup> When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"  
<sup>29</sup> He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."