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Medicine and Healing: [part 3] Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

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were worn in containers around the neck; these are known as oracular amuletic decrees.

The study of non-medical texts, professional titles, mummies, skeletons, and other archaeological artifacts from Deir el Medine (Western Thebes, ca. 1550 to 1080 BC) has enabled scholars to reconstruct one of the oldest state-run healthcare systems, which provided for workers and their wives who were living there (Austin). The site's state-sponsored healthcare staff included physicians (*swmw*) and "scorpion charmers" (*hrp-srk.t*), professions that are already documented in Old Kingdom texts. Sometimes, one individual performed both roles (Känel). The "wise woman" (*t: rh.t*, literally "the knowing one") was probably not part of the state system. As a medium, she was able to communicate with the demonic or divine sources of an individual's illness (Austin).

Mesopotamian and Hittite rulers, and other members of the local elites, often solicited the services of Egyptian doctors and incantation-priests, and used Egyptian drugs. Evidence for this comes from the cuneiform archives in Amarna and Boğazköy (from the time of Akhenaten and Ramesses II, see Edel). Autobiographical inscriptions (among others, Udjahorresnet) and passages in Herodotus (2.84; 2.77; 3.1; 3.129–30) demonstrate the international reputation of Egyptian medicine during the Persian period (Burkhard).

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III. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Healing (MT *rāpā*; LXX *ἰάομαι*) has a broad meaning in Hebrew, as does disease. Indeed, healing means rather to restore, to make whole, to recover the original function, or social function in the case of a barren woman. This applies to the land (2 Chr 7:14), water (2 Kgs 2:21–22), an altar (1 Kgs 18:30), pottery (Jer 19:11), as well as a human body (2 Kgs 20:5).

The root *r-p-* appears in onomastics: Rephael "El has healed" (1 Chr 26:7), Rephaiah "YHWH has healed" (Neh 3:9; etc.), Raphu "Healed" (Num 13:9), Irpeel "El heals" (Josh 18:27). These names attest that the deities El and YHWH were linked to healing.

The LXX mainly translates the root *r-p-* by *ἰάομαι* but *ὑγιάζω* sometimes appears (Lev 13:18, 37; Ezek 47:8, 9, 11).

The HB/OT does not give details of medical techniques, surgical procedures, or remedies, unlike other ancient Near Eastern cultures. Indeed, most of the writers of the HB/OT show a great distrust of remedies and doctors. They thought only YHWH could give diseases and cure.

1. Places of Healing. The main place to heal is at home and usually in a bed. This is the case in various stories of illness and healing: Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam 13); David's child (2 Sam 12); Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20); David's excuse of being ill (1 Sam 19); Saul (1 Sam 16).

The temple is also related to healing. In the ancient Near East, it had three functions: petitionary, therapeutic, and thanksgiving (Avalos). The story of Hannah (1 Sam 1–2) is an example of petitionary function. The presence of a bronze serpent in the temple of Jerusalem may also have had the same petitionary function (Num 21:4–9; 2 Kgs 18:4). Thanksgiving in the temple is well attested (Lev 13–14; 2 Kgs 20; Isa 38:9–20; Pss 30; 32; 41; 103). However, the idea of the temple as a therapeutic place is absent from the HB/OT.

2. Healers. In several narratives, the prophets of YHWH are presented as healers. This is the case of Abraham described as a prophet when he heals Abimelech (Gen 20), Elijah and Elisha (2 Kgs 4; 5; 8), and Isaiah (2 Kgs 20). The diplomatic use of physicians is attested in 2 Kgs 5. In Exod 21:19, one who injured someone else should pay for his recovery. This implies some kind of medical care. In 1 Sam 16, music plays a role in the healing of Saul. Finally, the midwives also play a medical role (Gen 35; Exod 1; 1 Sam 4). All these texts present the healers positively. However, 2 Chr 16:12 denounces Asa for go-

ing to physicians instead of YHWH. Elijah condemns Ahaziah who inquires of Baal-zebul instead of YHWH in 2 Kgs 1:1–4. Job 13:4 and the book of Jeremiah have a cynical view of physicians. Indeed, the ineffectiveness of the healers is expressed in Jer 8:22; 46:11; 51:8–9. This critical view of human power as opposed to that of God appears in Jer 17:5–7.

In Deut 18:14–15 the soothsayers and diviners – whose exact role is not described – are opposed to prophets of YHWH. Thus, as prophets are healers, the same is probably true for diviners and soothsayers, but they are not legitimate in that role according to the deuteronomistic point of view.

Sirach 38 is the only text in ancient Hebrew literature which sees the physicians in a positive way as part of YHWH's healing.

3. Remedies and Procedures. In 2 Kgs 20:1–11, a lump of figs is used to heal Hezekiah whose illness is not clear. In addition, mandrakes are used in Gen 30 to help with conception. In contrast, Wis 16:12 denies the healing power of herbs and poultices. Ezekiel 30:21 attests the use of a bandage in the case of a broken arm and Isa 1:6 the use of a bandage and oil.

In 1 Kgs 1:1–4, the aged King David's inability to warm himself is remedied by a young virgin, who lies in his bosom. In the same way, Elisha resurrects a dead child by lying on him (2 Kgs 4:34).

4. YHWH as the Only Healer. Exodus 15:26 promotes the idea that the only healer is YHWH: "If you will listen carefully to the voice of YHWH your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am YHWH who heals you." As a result, some common means of healing in the ancient Near East are considered illegitimate in several passages of the HB/OT. Furthermore, this verse shows YHWH as a god who sends diseases and cures them (cf. Deut 32:39 "I wound and I heal"), as well as in instances of divine judgment and plagues that are sent by YHWH and stopped by him. Still in Exod 15:26, disease is seen as the consequence of the transgression of the commandments (see also Deut 28). However, the book of Job questions this cause-effect relationship.

In priestly texts (Lev 13–14), priests instead of prophets play a major role in healing. Isolation and even exclusion from the community after a diagnosis are recommended to avoid the spread of impurity. The sick were therefore not allowed in the temple, although they were expected to express their thanksgiving after their recovery.

In brief, the HB/OT develops a theology where YHWH is described as the only healer of Israel. This implies rejection of certain contemporary means of healing. Biblical authors chose either to reject medicine or to include it as a part of YHWH's plan to heal.

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IV. Greco-Roman Antiquity and New Testament

1. Medicine in Greco-Roman Antiquity and the New Testament. The clear distinction between philosophy and medicine, and between theoretical and empirical-practical implications, did not exist in antiquity. Thinkers of antiquity we know as philosophers, such as Plato (428/27–348/47 BCE) or Aristotle (384–322 BCE), often turned their attention to matters concerning the anatomy or physiology of the human body, whereas physicians, such as Hippocrates (around 5th cent. BCE) or Erasistratus (304–250 BCE), often acted as philosophers in the doxographic tradition (e.g. Aëtius). In Hellenistic times, naturalistic tendencies, like the theory of bodily fluids (that each part of the body has its own characteristic structure which more or less enables that part to take in and release bodily fluids or humors), became important.

There was even a classification of environmental factors which allegedly had an effect on the human body according to the system of the four elements or bodily fluids (dry and wet, and cold and warm). The same period also saw the emergence of the Empiricist school of medicine. This school argued that experience, the accumulation of clinical data, was more valuable than theory formation for therapeutic success.

Despite such naturalistic tendencies, it would be rash to conclude that religion disappeared from the practice of medicine. The physician Herophilus, for example, describes medicine and drugs as "the hands of the gods" (Marcellus Empiricus, *De medicamentis* 36 [CMLat 5]; Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 4.1.3; *Mor.* 663B–C), a notion we also find in Galen (*De compositione medicamentorum secundum locos* 6.8 [ed. Kühn: 12:965–66]). Similarly, in the Corpus Hippocraticum, several treatises reflect divine prophecies of the healing god Asclepius – in this perspective, dreaming becomes the reason and preparation for the medical doctor's diagnoses (Hippocrates, *Vict.* 4.86; the Hippocratic oath [Hippocrates, *Jusj.* 1]; Artemidorus [*Onir.* 4.22]). Galen, however, asserts that dreams should not be the exclusive source of medical findings (Galen, *De methodo medendi* 3.2 [ed. Kühn: 10:164]; *Introductio seu medicus* 3 [ed. Kühn: 14:679]). Although the treatises in which Galen reflects on early Christian healing stories are now lost, numerous sources report that he does so. The tradition can be found in Syrian, Arabian, and Latin translations (see, e.g., Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon*