

The LORD is Healer (*Jehovah-Repheka*)

by Lester Sumrall

The following excerpt is taken with permission from the excellent book, *The Names of God: God's Character Revealed Through His Names*, by Lester Sumrall (Whitaker House Publishers, New Kensington, PA: 2006), pp. 106-116.

This classic book has been on the Christian Book Association's "Best Seller List" a number of times, the latest being in 2004 when it was number five! It may be purchased for \$6.99 plus shipping from Dr. Sumrall's Bookstore by calling 800-621-8885 or online at <http://ccb.lesea.com>.

Anne's note: This book was highly influential in my life in the fall of 2006, when I was first diagnosed with Addison's disease. I wondered whether God would still heal today, and specifically, I wondered if He would heal *me*. God used this book to convince me that God is happy to heal when I follow the conditions set forth in His Word, when I will use that healing to serve Him with my life, and when I simply accept His healing and act upon it. While I still have the official diagnosis of Addison's disease and occasionally feel its effects in my health, God has graciously given me amazing strength to continue to serve Him day by day. I praise Him for His healing!

My prayer is that this excerpt will bless you as well. "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD" (Psalm 118:17).

God made our bodies, and God is able to heal them and keep them healthy when we meet His conditions by obeying His instructions. God demonstrated this to the children of Israel as Moses led them out of bondage in Egypt.

Exodus chapter 15 tells how the Israelites rejoiced to see God deliver them from the Egyptians. You'll remember that God parted the Red Sea so they could cross over on dry ground, then He let the waters come flooding in upon the pursuing Egyptian hordes. What a day of victory that was! And the Israelites celebrated with singing and dancing, with Moses' sister Miriam leading the festivities (see Ex. 15:20, 21). But three days later, when they were unable to find good drinking water, the Israelites started grumbling (see vv. 22-24).

Isn't that just like fickle human nature? We forget God's goodness so easily. But in this moment of distress, God spoke to His people through Moses and revealed another name for Himself, a name that would encourage them for years to come:

...There he proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee [*Jehovah-Repheka*] (Ex. 15:25, 26).

Notice that God said, "I am the Lord who heals you *if* you'll do what I've told you to do." His promise came with a requirement, a condition that the Israelites had to meet if they wanted Him to heal them.

The “Why” Question

Many people come to my study and ask such questions as these: “Brother Sumrall, why haven’t I been healed?” “Why did my mother die?” “Why was my baby born retarded?”

We all have a lot of “why” questions. I have plenty of my own. Not all of them will be answered in this life. They will have to wait until we join the Lord in heaven. But Exodus 15:26 gives some insight into many of the questions we have about healing.

So many of our “why” questions would be answered if we only looked at the way we live, and compared it with the standard of living required by the Word of God. Then we would realize that we are not living up to God’s conditions.

Most people read the *benefits* promised in God’s Word, but they fail to read the *conditions* attached to them. And that’s usually the reason they can’t figure out why no healing has come.

If an insurance salesman comes to your house and offers you a policy for a million dollars, he won’t start his sales pitch by telling you how much you’ll have to pay to get such coverage. He’ll start by selling you on how much you’ll get *from* it. That’s his job. He will say, “If you ever get sick, we’ll pay you so much money every day; we’ll take care of all your hospital bills; we’ll pay the doctor everything you owe. If you get laid off work, we’ll pay you so much workman’s compensation.” And so on and so on. Only when you get excited enough to “sign on the dotted line” will he tell you about the premiums you have to pay. He knows you’d much think about the benefits.

Most people read the *benefits* promised in God’s Word, but they fail to read the *conditions* attached to them.

That’s what the children of Israel were doing. They must have thought, “Isn’t it fantastic to have all these benefits that the Lord is going to give us?” But they would rather pay no attention to the requirements He gave them; they would rather not think about doing “that which is right in his sight,” or “giving ear to all his commandments,” or “keeping all his statutes.”

We are the same way, of course. We are so eager to get God’s benefits that we forget what He requires of us. So we go a couple of steps forward in our Christian life, then slide back a step. We get saved and start testifying like a zealot, then fizzle when the first bit of trouble comes along. If we would just stick to the Word of God and obey what He tells us to do in it, God would bless us.

God intended for all His children to be healthy. Adam and Eve were created perfect, without ailments. Even though we rejected God’s goodness and rejected the health He offers (through the Fall), He was merciful and gave us healing instead.

Someone is bound to say, “What about the faithful Christians who keep on suffering? What about people who are serving the Lord with all their hearts, but still don’t get healed?”

People like Joni Eareckson have struggled with this question deeply. Her only answer is that God knows what He is doing. She is being made Christlike, and God is being glorified in her infirmities, more than He would be glorified in her physical healing. The same was true for Paul (see 2 Cor. 12:7-9). We may not fully understand how this is to our benefit or how God can be glorified in this way, but He is. There are special cases in which God demonstrates His love through giving patience and strength instead of healing. God wants His people to be healthy – spiritually and physically. So sometimes He is healing (perfecting) our spiritual lives first. He wants His ailing people to be healed. The overarching will of God is to heal us of *all* our diseases, that He may be glorified by our healing.

Looking to Christ

Numbers 21 describes a situation in which God proved His healing mercy to the children of Israel. They had been wandering in the wilderness for a long time without getting into the Promised Land, and they started to grumble again. They said to Moses, "...Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread" (Num. 21:5).

God was giving them manna from heaven. In their rebelliousness, however, they said, "We don't care for it." They were saying, "Thanks for the meat, Lord, but we want filet mignon." They forgot that God was supplying their needs; they started complaining and begging for some of their wants.

So the Lord allowed fiery serpents to attack their camp. Many Israelites were bitten and died. Suddenly the survivors realized how well-off they had been before. They came to Moses and said, "...We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee..." (v. 7).

So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD instructed him to make a serpent of brass and set it upon a pole in the midst of their camp, promising that anyone who was bitten by a snake could look upon that snake, and live. The Lord would heal the victims of the snake bites.

The notes to the Scofield Bible indicate that the serpents represented sin, while brass represented divine judgment (as in the brazen altar). Therefore, according to Scofield, the brass serpent represented Christ – God who became sin on our behalf. Jesus Himself pointed out this connection when He said to Nicodemus:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:
That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14, 15).

The Israelites were to look at the brass serpent and receive healing; we are to look unto Christ and receive healing. All of our healing – physical or spiritual – comes from the Lord.

Sin is the cause of all our suffering. Sometimes suffering comes to us because of Adam's sin; sometimes it comes because of some more immediate transgression. But sin is *always* the cause of suffering.

It's so hard to get people to understand this. They travel all over the country to faith-healing services; they listen to tapes about healing; they buy all the latest books about healing; they take herb cures and every other kind of treatment that promises healing. But there is no healing virtue in these things. There is no healing virtue

in an evangelist, in a church, in or a theory of any kind. There is healing virtue only in Christ; only He was made sin for us. Sin is the cause of all our suffering. Sometimes suffering comes to us because of Adam's sin; sometimes it comes because of some more immediate transgression. But sin is *always* the cause of suffering. And Christ took all of our sins to the cross. He suffered in our place, so that "...with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5).

Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). Maybe church attendance is sluggish because people seldom see Jesus lifted up in our churches. We read in the newspapers that a congregation is about to launch a two-million-dollar building program, or that a certain preacher has just started a new series of prophecy lectures, or that a musical group is about to have a spectacular concert. But we seldom see Jesus lifted up. We seldom hear testimonies of how He has cast demons out of someone. We seldom hear about other ways He has worked in people's lives. Is it any wonder, then, that people are so indifferent to the church?

God's Word is true. God does heal people today. God does save sinful souls today. God does cast out evil spirits today. I know He does because I see Him doing it!

Denying God's Promise

I recall an article in one of our leading evangelical magazines a couple of years ago, debating whether God still grants the gifts of the Spirit today. (The gifts of the Spirit, of course, are listed several times in Paul's letters; they include such things as preaching, teaching, prophecy, and healing. See the list in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, for example.) On the "pro" side of the debate was an Episcopal priest. He believed that God still gives Holy Spirit gifts to His people today, including the gift of healing. On the "con" side of the argument was a well-known evangelist. He felt that God stopped giving these gifts to His people long ago, because we don't need them anymore.

I wonder what a person like this evangelist does when he gets sick? Does he say, "I know this sickness must come from you, Lord, so I'm going to pray for more sickness"? Does he say, "Please don't make me well, Lord, because that would be a bad testimony"? I doubt it. Even the people who deny God's promise of healing will turn to Him for healing when they get ill.

Others deny that God will heal *certain kinds* of illness. For example, if they have an emotional problem they don't go to the church for prayer; they go to a mental health clinic or a psychiatrist. If a friend or relative goes insane, they would never call a pastor to pray for that person. They seem to think that God can ease pain or heal a broken family, but mental disorders are too big for Him! So they cut themselves off from God's blessings.

Or how about the people who think God can't cure a common cold? They testify about what God can do for serious illnesses, then turn around and say, "Guess I'd better not send my children to school this week. They'll catch the flu from everybody else." Or they may say, "I'll probably come down with a cold, like everybody at work. It's that time of year." They talk like that all through the week, then come to church a couple of hours on Sunday and expect to have their faith lifted!

If we are the children of God, let's start acting like it. Let's not say what the rest of the world is saying; let's not buy the skepticism of everyone else. We don't need to expect a heart attack to strike us down, or a tumor to kill us. We worship *Jehovah-Rephaka*, the LORD who heals. So let's start taking Him at His Word.

Is Pain Your God?

Ill people become depressed very easily. They grow weary of the daily suffering. They tend to feel defeated by their illness; they fail to look to the LORD, who can conquer their illness. Visit the cancer ward in your local hospital, talk with some of the patients, and you'll see what I mean. It's not easy to struggle with pain for months, even years, without seeing some improvement. After awhile, the sufferer wants to give up.

In a case like that, healing can only begin when the sufferer shakes off the depression and begins expecting to be healed. Norman Cousins, former editor of *Saturday Review*, tells about an experience he had with a serious illness.¹ He was stricken with a rare disease that destroys the muscles and joints. His doctors said they couldn't cure him; only about five percent of the victims ever recovered, and no one knew why they did.

But Mr. Cousins didn't give up. He decided he was going to get better. He decided he was going to be one of the five percent who survived. He read all the medical articles he could find about his illness; in fact, he became an expert on it. He recommended that his doctor give him a treatment that had never been tried before, and it worked. He recovered.

So far as I know, Mr. Cousins doesn't claim to be a Christian. He didn't call on the Lord to be healed, though I'm sure his healing came from the Lord ("Every good gift and every perfect gift is from... the Father..." [James 1:17]). The important thing we can learn from his experience is this: *He did not surrender to his illness*. He decided that he was going to get well, and he never let go of that goal.

¹ Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1979).

So often I've heard Christians say from their hospital beds, "I guess it's just the Lord's will for me to die." Yet they are young, gifted, capable people who could give many more years to the Lord's work. They give up so easily. They surrender to the pain. They let their illness become the master of their lives.

Either pain is your God, or God is your God. Either circumstance is your God, or God is your God. Which is it?

Either pain is your God, or God is your God. Either circumstance is your God, or God is your God. Which is it?

God made us free moral agents, with the power to choose what we will do with our lives. But I'm amazed at the choices most people make! We can choose to believe in God, but most people choose not to. We can choose to be saved from our sins, but most people choose not to. We can choose to be healed of our illnesses, but most people choose not to. I'm afraid that, for most people, the freedom to choose a miracle is so scary that they choose to suffer and die without it.

When you surrender to your circumstances, or you give in to your disease, it means you're afraid to live on the front lines of the spiritual battlefield. You head for the rear to patch yourself up after you've been beaten. That's where too many Christians spend their time – getting "patched up" from what the Devil has done to them all week long. People come to me and say, "Pastor, pray for me. The Devil's really been after me this week."

How about it? Is the Devil influencing your life, or is God in charge of it? Is the Tormentor in control, or is the Healer in control? You must decide. The depression, sorrow, and confusion which Satan gives will come upon you only if you let them come upon you.

Praise God for being *Jehovah-Repheka*. Thank Him for being the One who "healeth all thy diseases." Then claim His healing for *your* life today!