

12. What about the centurion caused the Jewish elders to intercede so willingly to Jesus on his behalf?
13. It is usually assumed that this centurion was probably Roman, but certainly non-Jewish. What are the indications in the text that lead to this assumption?
14. Cite other incidents or texts that indicate that Jesus chose to be particularly unwilling to see the Jewish-Gentile distinction, and helped other Gentiles or praised them, directly or indirectly.
15. State in literal language the meaning of Jesus' metaphor regarding the Messianic feast "in the Kingdom" (v. 11)

Section 14

JESUS HEALS PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

(Parallels: Mark 1:21-34; Luke 4:31-41)

TEXT: 8:14-17

14. And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying sick of a fever.
15. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto him.
16. And when even was come, they brought unto him many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick:
17. that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Jesus came to Peter's house? Was this a friendly social visit or something more?
- b. What is Matthew's purpose in the quotation of the prophecy?
- c. How did Peter's mother-in-law "minister" unto Jesus? Why?
- d. Why does Matthew connect these cures of diseases and casting demons out that Jesus is doing with Isaiah's prophecy?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus arose from the seat in the Capernaum synagogue where He had been teaching and left the building and entered the home of Simon Peter and Andrew. Accompanying Him were James and John.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill and had been put to bed with a high fever. At once they told Him about her, seeking His help for her, and so Jesus came and saw her. As He stood beside the pallet on which she lay, He rebuked the fever. Taking her by the hand, He lifted her up, and as He did so the fever left her. At once she rose and began to wait on them.

That same evening, just as the sun was setting, everybody in that neighborhood who had any friends or kinfolk suffering from any sort of disease, brought them to Jesus—even those who were demon-possessed were brought. The whole town was crowded into the narrow street in front of Peter's house.

Jesus laid His hands on every one of them and healed the sick ones but the spirits He cast out with a word. The demons came out of many, screaming, "You are the Son of God!" But He spoke sternly to them and refused them permission to testify what they knew to be true: that He was truly the Christ.

This whole incident resulted in the fulfilment of Isaiah's inspired prediction (53:4), "He took our infirmities on Himself, and bore the burden of our diseases."

NOTES

With this section Matthew describes Jesus' incomparable love for another group of Israel's outcasts. But this time he does not choose those who by the Law are somehow proscribed or actually banned by the rabbis. Rather, he concentrates the reader's attention on God's interest in unknown, humble folk whom the rich, the elite, the higher circles, the religious aristocrats would rather have snubbed as "those provincial nobodies," sometimes sneeringly referred to as "this crowd, who do not know the law" (Jn. 7:49 cf. Lk. 7:29). Matthew now gives the specific examples he had promised earlier (See Notes on Mt. 4:23, 24).

The background and partial explanation of some of the expressions in this section find their origin in the events of the entire day on that "Great Day of Miracles in Capernaum" (study parallel texts, Mk. 1:21ff.; Lk. 4:31ff.). Jesus had returned to Capernaum from the seashore whence He had just called the four fishermen brothers and partners, Peter, Andrew, James and John, to become His close disciples, since Mark's sequence is apparently tighter than that of Luke who

places Jesus' return from Nazareth in that general time-context. With His newly committed disciples, Jesus goes to the regular synagogue meeting on a Sabbath, where His teaching had special impact equal in power to His forcefulness in the Sermon on the Mount. (Cf. Mt. 7:28, 29 with Mk. 1:22; Lk. 4:32) But Jesus was interrupted by a demoniac's raving, whereupon Jesus rebuked the demon, cast him out and freed the man. The onlookers were amazed that Jesus' authority lay not merely in forceful words but also on thrilling deeds. News of this event spread everywhere, a fact which explains what follows the conclusion of the Sabbath rest that day. Immediately Jesus arose, left the synagogue and, with James and John, joined Peter and Andrew as guests in the home of Peter.

8:14 Jesus was come into Peter's house. This simple house probably located in Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44), apparently also the home of Andrew also (Mk. 1:29) excites our intense curiosity about the lives of the men whom Jesus had just called to close discipleship. If these men are still living in Bethsaida, this fishing village must be so much a suburb of Capernaum as to remain nameless in our text, while Capernaum is the only city named in Mark (1:21, 29) as gathering about the door to Peter's house. (See *ISBE*, 451, 452, article "Bethsaida") However, the town, Bethsaida, remains distinct from Capernaum in Jesus' mind (see Mt. 11:20, 23) and Capernaum's sick might have been brought the short distance to Bethsaida. This strange silence about the passing from one city to another as our text has been interpreted by some as indicating the moving of Peter and Andrew to Capernaum.

Wherever this house was located, its very existence at this point in Peter's discipleship indicates that he did not regard his service to Jesus as requiring the selling of the house, dispersion of his household effects and ascetic life with the Lord. To the contrary, this very house proves Peter's intelligent regard for the central patient of our text, his mother-in-law, (See Notes on 4:18-22) since he maintained this house even in his absence in the service of Jesus.

He saw his wife's mother because the other members of the family told Him of her (Mk. 1:30) and requested His help on her behalf (Lk. 4:38). Does this mean that Peter's mother-in-law were lying in another room out of sight of the company in the front room? Not necessarily, for immediately upon their entering the house the family begins animatedly to describe her attack of fever, urging His help. His mother-in-law's very existence, plus a later reference in Christian history (I Co. 9:5), demonstrates several interesting facts:

1. That Peter, the first so-called Roman pope, was married.
2. That Peter did not necessarily leave his wife to enter Christ's service. She might have even accompanied Peter on some trips with Jesus, inasmuch as other women also followed Jesus and ministered to His needs and those of the group. (See Lk. 8:1-3; Mk. 15:41)
3. That having a wife was no apparent objection to Peter's apostleship, since this incident and Paul's remark certainly follow Peter's call.
4. That Peter's wife accompanied Peter in later journeys, as did the other apostles' wives work alongside their mates.

We know practically nothing about the wife of Peter herself except a notice or two in tradition. But her importance cannot be ignored, as she lends more flesh-and-blood reality to the person of her more illustrious husband. It is too easy emotionally to reject the apostles as somehow a motley collection of effeminate old bachelors quite out of touch with life problems.

Contrary to some opinion, a woman did not really count for very much in almost every society, except the Jewish in the world of that day. (See *ISBE*, article "Woman," 3100). In Judaism the woman's position was high, almost that of the man, although somewhat inferior. (See Edersheim, *Sketches*, Chap. IX) While this healing performed by Jesus is significant for its privacy, having been done in the home of a disciple, it is not necessarily significant in its being done for a woman, for whom the usual Jewish rabbi would have had less concern than for a man. (cf. Jn. 4:9, 27)

lying sick of a fever. Luke (4:38) notices that she had a "high fever" (*puretô megalo*). This may not be merely a thermometer reading but a specific medical term (Arndt-Gingrich, 738), possibly malaria due to the proximity of her home to the Jordan Valley and mosquito-infested marshes. Edersheim, (*Life*, I, 486) notes:

The Talmud gives this disease precisely the same name, . . . 'Burning fever', and prescribes for it a magical remedy, of which the principal part is to tie a knife wholly of iron by a braid of hair to a thornbush, and to repeat on successive days Exod. 3:2, 3, then ver. 4, finally ver. 5, after which the bush is to be cut down, while a certain magical formula is pronounced.

Contrast the then-current Jewish standpoint, then, with Jesus' approach to the problem:

8:15 And he touched her hand, and the fever left her.

The other Synoptic Evangelists describe Jesus also as "standing over her, He rebuked the fever" (Lk. 4:39) and "taking her by the hand, He lifted her up" (Mk. 1:31) Jesus used various methods of healing, as did His apostles after Him. (Ac. 3:7; 28:8; Jn. 4:50-52; Mk. 5:41; 9:27; Mt. 9:25) Luke's expression "Jesus *rebuked* the fever" must not be regarded as proof that Jesus shared popular superstitions which held diseases as malevolent personalities in the sufferers, somewhat like demons.

1. Jesus is merely addressing the impersonal fever in the same way He shouted at winds and waves. (8:26)
2. The Gospel writers themselves saw and recorded a clear distinction between sickness or disease and demon-possession.

The fever left her, not weak and exhausted from the illness, as we would expect to see after a recovery finally comes by natural means, after a slow convalescence. *Immediately*, says Luke, she was strong. All three Evangelists unite in emphasizing the intensity of her restored strength, evidenced by her immediately arising to serve Jesus. (Lk. 4:39) This stubborn immediacy is a fact which destroys the naturalistic explanations of this miracle that suggest that the magnetic personality of Jesus, the warmth of His personal touch or perhaps the psychological suggestion of His words caused people to think themselves well, (when really were not), whereby Jesus set in motion perfectly natural psychosomatic laws which later actually cured the sick.

And she arose and ministered unto him. *kai egerthe kai diekonei* Note the change of tense: "She got up and began serving and kept it up." Mark and Luke remember that she served everyone present too. It is not difficult to imagine how she so ministered: what would you do if you had just been a sick woman put to bed with high fever when a houseful of company walks in? Peter's wife was there too possibly, but this remarkable mother-in-law, fully conscious that all of God's power had just been expended in her humble case, has no time for hallelujahs that just bring Jesus more sick people and unwanted publicity. (contrast Mt. 8:1-4 Notes). Rather, being fully aware of the completeness of her cure, being lovingly grateful to Jesus who had miraculously brought her back to immediate vigor and yet, being sensitively aware of His unmentioned but obvious needs, she busied herself in practical service! What a wife Peter must have had, if she were anything like her mother!

In this two-verse vignette Matthew holds up, not Peter's mother-in-law for admiration, but Peter's Lord! In Peter's humble abode where

there was no admiring audience to keep Jesus at His best, Jesus could hear the call of human need and expend all His love, care and power in the service of humble, unknown, unheard-of folk whose only claim to fame was their contact with Jesus of Nazareth. It is this kind of close-up study of Jesus that convinced His disciples they had found the real Messiah: He was the same at home as before the cheering, admiring crowds. He deserved privacy, rest and relaxation as much as any other man, and they know it. Yet He never considered human need a nuisance nor was He too tired to help.

8:16 And when even was come. Matthew gives no reason why these folks should delay their coming until sunset (Mk. 1:32; Lk. 4:40). The two other Evangelists plainly declare the day to have been a Sabbath, a day on which stricter Jews considered bearing burdens to be illegal (cf. Jn. 5:10-18) as well as healing (cf. Lk. 13:14). The day legally ended at sunset (Lev. 23:32). These combined facts not only clear up otherwise obscure questions and render unnecessary ultimately unsatisfactory guessing about the delay, but also point up one of the undersigned coincidences among the Gospel writers that show they are independent. They did not contrive their story.

They brought unto him. Mark and Luke describe the scene as a spontaneous, almost-mass movement that began when the second star in the sky could be seen, which signalled the end of the Sabbath. Since Matthew had not described the demon-experience in the synagogue, in keeping with his simplicity of style, he omits also the size of the crowds, for since he had not mentioned them, he feels no obligation to explain their assemblage. Why was the whole city of Capernaum gathered at Simon's door? All day long since the synagogue service conversations in the homes kept running back to Jesus' power to heal and cast out demons. (Mk. 1:27, 28; Lk. 4:36, 37) Thus, what Matthew reports is all the more psychologically credible, because grounded in the exciting events in the synagogue earlier that day.

Many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word. Again, Mark and Luke are more explicit regarding Jesus' dealings with these sinister beings from the spirit world.

For special studies on DEMONS, EVIL SPIRITS, UNCLEAN SPIRITS, see standard Bible dictionary and encyclopedic articles; especially the Special Study "Notes on Demon Possession" by Seth Wilson, *THE GOSPEL of MARK*, Bible Study Textbook Series, p. 509ff.; Merrill Unger, *Biblical Demonology*.

He healed all that were sick. Note how carefully these supposedly "superstitious," hence, uncritical people of Jesus' generation, especially the Gospel writers, recognized a clear distinction between sicknesses, on the one hand, and demon possession, on the other. Jesus is pictured here by Luke (4:40) as patiently moving through the entire group laying His hands upon each and every one, (*heni hekasto*). Beware Capernaum: multiplied blessings brings multiplied responsibility for the quantity of the Light against which you sin! (See Notes on 11:20-24)

8:17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet. For general discussion of Matthew's use of prophecies, see Volume I, pp. 81-86. Matthew's citation of Isaiah 53:4 raises the important question: how does Matthew intend to apply this prophecy to Jesus' work? Does he mean to limit its application to the closing events of this one "great day of miracles in Capernaum," of which he does not actually narrate the exciting events in the synagogue (a fact which might not affect our conclusion)? Yet is it possible that our author should presume to apply so grand a prediction to such limited circumstances?

1. Why not? Matthew may merely be calling up one verse from the entire prophecy to suggest to the Jewish reader's mind, familiar with the Isaianic prophecy, the entire figure of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. Isa. 53:7, as context for this text used by Matthew, applies so fitly to Jesus, who carried more than our human affliction, by bearing away especially its ultimate cause, human sin. (See Jn. 1:29, 36; Heb. 2:14; 1 Pe. 2:24) Even though Matthew himself does not furnish the complete picture, the other Evangelists, who do record the synagogue scene, but not the prophecy, unintentionally provide the necessary pieces that complete the picture:
 - a. God's revelation through Jesus' preaching in the synagogue;
 - b. God's power over the evil spirit-world;
 - c. God's power at the humble hearth of common people;
 - d. God's mercy and help for unlimited varieties of diseased folk.

It might be objected that the most significant part of Isaiah's prophecy, the vicarious suffering and death of Jaweh's Servant, finds no parallel in Matthew's application. But to this objection, two answers are necessary:

- Of course not, because Jesus' death is yet a question for His future revelation to His disciples, even though He had given

veiled hints already. (cf. Jn. 2:13-21) It does not need to be mentioned that His suffering and death itself is yet wholly future.

- Further, Matthew is trying to teach us something in addition to, or something that goes beyond, our accustomed interest in Jesus' Last Week Passion. Levi wants us to see that Jesus' suffering really began with His incarnation and continued through His earthly preaching and healing ministry. His vicarious, sympathetic suffering not only culminated in His death and resurrection, but was His whole merciful life-work as He worked reasonably unhampered by hostile leaders too!
2. Matthew is deliberately understating his case, applying only that portion of the prophecy that is actually appropriate to the situation at hand, but at the same time suggesting to the thoughtful reader to begin to look for more applications of Isaiah's words in the life of this Jesus of Nazareth. For had Jesus significantly fulfilled these words of the prophet, but fallen dismally short of Isaiah's further description of the vicarious death of Jaweh's Servant, He would still be unworthy of further attention, in our search for the REAL Messiah.

Matthew is saying, "If you think, dear reader, that these events I have just mentioned are wonderful for their revelation of a supernatural God at a particular point of time and space in His creation, you must remember the ancient prophecy which prepared our minds to look for just this kind of miracles. While, in the days of Isaiah, the prophecy might have had less force with those who heard him utter these words, for whom the fulfilment were yet future, yet for us, who are living in this day of Jesus' ministry, this confirmation of God's ancient promise through the healings performed by Jesus, actually doubles the force of each miracle. Each sign performed by Jesus is but the echo of Isaiah's voice repeated over again. The ancient prophet's prophetic authority is vindicated in our day as his prediction comes true before our eyes; Jesus' authority is doubly demonstrated both by His wonderful signs, which prove that God is working through Him, as well as by His fulfilment of Isaiah's promise uttered 800 years ago!"

But, as even anyone reading the text can see, Matthew did not say all the above in so many words. This seems, however, to be his emphasis. It would perhaps seem strange to the modern apologist that Matthew should draw no more of a conclusion, adducing arguments

and further proof. Yet, our author merely submits one sentence out of the prophecy introducing it into the middle of two chapters of miracles (Mt. 8, 9, but it is not until Mt. 12 that he returns to similar prophetic applications) to alert the reader not only to the fulfilment of the prophecy involved in those miracles of that one day, but also to similar fulfilment by those miracles which follow.

Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases.

This phrase could have been translated into clearer English by rendering the first word, *autòs*, with a clearer English pronoun:

1. *Unemphatic* personal pronoun: "he", Isaiah's emphasis lying with the enormity of the deeds accomplished by Jaweh's Servant;
2. *Emphatic* personal pronoun: "he himself" Isaiah's emphasis being upon the enormity of the fact that this great, despised Servant actually identified himself so completely with OUR weakness, as actually to bear Himself what we alone deserved.

Autòs is capable of both emphases. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 122) Either emphasis carries the amazed wonderment of an Israel, which bears witness against its former blindness, having seen the actual fulfilment of Isaiah's words in the mediatorial suffering and humiliation endured by Jesus, who, it turns out historically, is the exact counterpart of the prophet's vicariously suffering Servant. Like Job's friends, Israel had thought Jesus to be suffering humiliation and punishment for His own great sins, if His sufferings might be used as the measure for His supposed sinfulness. Matthew's words merely suggest the shock the true Israelite would feel at the discovery that Isaiah's great Bearer took OUR human weaknesses as His own. He personally took upon Himself the whole crushing moral responsibility for the underlying cause for all our sin and sickness.

But, as Delitzsch (*Isa.*, II, 316) points out regarding this text cited by Matthew, "It is not really sin that is spoken of, but the evil which is consequent upon human sin, although not always the direct consequence of the sins of individuals (John 9:3)."

Matthew in citing this text so early in Jesus' ministry, quite out of connection with Jesus' mediation and vicarious bearing our sins in His own body on the cross, shows us that Jesus is already by His own powerful life taking sickness and infirmity away. He remained uncontaminated by personal sins, and presumably never sick a day in His life, but personally assumed and actually removed our burden from beginning to the end of His earthly incarnation.

But is there no sense in which Jesus took **OUR infirmities and bare OUR diseases**, i.e. from us who are Gentile Christians living today? Certainly, a comparatively few miracles in Palestine wrought over a three-year period do not exhaust either the meaning of Isaiah or the purpose of Jesus' identification with us in our sickness and infirmity. This should be clear from the observation that the very few He healed in comparison to the world's ill could again contact further diseases later and, presumably, the fewer still whom He raised from death died again. Matthew's use of this prophecy merely draws our attention to Jesus' perfect command over all human weakness which He can restore to perfect soundness. These few samples are convincing proof that His promises to remake us completely are based in historic fact, predicted by inspired prophecy and guaranteed valid for eternity. (cf. Phil. 3:20, 21; Rev. 21:3, 4; Ro. 8:18-25)

Matthew's deliberate use of a prophecy too big for the examples he cites as its fulfilment draws our attention to the broader general outline of what Jesus was actually doing. Certainly Jesus was working miracles of undoubtedly wonderful dimension, but we must also see beyond them to comprehend the conclusion that Jesus really intended us to draw: "Jesus can make us completely whole in soul and body, because He personally bore away what had destroyed us through disease or sin."

He took and bore our weaknesses and sicknesses. These two verbs (*élaben kai ebàstasen*) also preach Jesus' merciful understanding love for us: He can be touched with a feeling for our weaknesses! (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16) This one line of Gospel has more power in it to support suffering Christians than all the writings of all the philosophers that ever dealt with the problem of pain. To us, Jesus has conquered sickness and transformed our viewpoint regarding it, making it mere "little temporary troubles that illustrate once more that the outward man suffers wear and tear and decays, while their outcome is an eternal glory that far outweighs these shortlived difficulties." (cf. II Cor. 4:16—5:9)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where had Jesus just been, when He entered Peter's house?
2. What is the importance of where Jesus had been, previous to His coming to Peter's house, with regard to the events that follow?
3. Who was particularly sick in Peter's house? What was the specific symptom mentioned by Luke?
4. Describe the manner in which Jesus healed this sick person.

5. Give the evidence that the person was really healed.
6. State the time when the second series of events, included in this text, began to occur.
7. Explain the reason for the Capernaum citizens' waiting until just that moment to bring the sick to Jesus.
8. State the precise location where the sick were brought for healing.
9. Contrast the manner by which Jesus healed the sick with the manner in which He cast out demons, as seen in this text and its parallels.
10. What was the unusual cry of the demons as Jesus cast them out? By comparison with normal human comprehension of the ministry and Person of Jesus seen in the Jews of that period, what does that cry indicate about the demons?
11. Explain why Jesus would not permit the demons to speak "because they knew He was the Christ." Both Mark and Luke offer this quotation as the reason Jesus silenced the demons. Show how this reason is the proper explanation of Jesus' action.
12. What kind of connection does Matthew indicate between Jesus' activities and the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah?
13. How does Matthew mean the word "fulfil" in this connection indicated in the previous question?

Section 15

JESUS CALLS TO DISCIPLESHIP

(Possible parallel: Luke 9:57-62)

TEXT: 8:18-22

18. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.
19. And there came a scribe, and said unto him, Teacher, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.
20. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.
21. And another of the disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.
22. But Jesus saith unto him, Follow me; and leave the dead to bury their own dead.